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A Human not a Woman: Radhika in Bhagat's *One Indian Girl*

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Abstract

A girl though born and bred as a female whether remains a woman or challenges the socially assigned stereotypical sexual identity and becomes a human, is the matter of her choice. Chetan Bhagat's One Indian Girl best illustrates this issue with a suggestive note for the latter. The central character Radhika Mehata, the Indian girl, is his mouthpiece in the novel. This paper analyzes the socio-cultural making of a woman across cultures with critical insights envisioned by Simone De Beauvoir in her seminal book The Second Sex and Sturt Hall's notion of 'being' and 'becoming' regarding one's identity. The researcher argues that Radhika though a born female denies her socially given sexual identity of a woman, the second sex, to enjoy her life by becoming a fully-fledged human being. This article examines how she asserts a self constructed identity for herself as well as exerts independence and freedom that are taken as a male prerogative in patriarchal societies like ours. In doing so, the article imparts voice to the voiceless women who in the course of aspiring to be free and self-sufficient but are undergoing a tougher struggle in their lives at contemporary times. It also discusses how the stereotypically demeaning treatment by male chauvinists can be overcome by the females who want to pioneer their own unfettered being and live a life of their own choice.

Keywords: Denial, identity, independence, patriarchy, socio-cultural stereotype.

Introduction

Whether a girl born and bred as a female remains ever a woman in a patriarchal society or challenges her socially assigned stereotypical sexual identity to reclaim her rights as a human, depends upon her choice and determination. Chetan Bhagat's *One Indian Girl* among his novels, best illustrates this theme through the central character Radhika Mehata, the Indian girl who also is his mouthpiece in the novel. The author is acclaimed for the subtle depiction of such individual and socio-cultural themes for discussions through his novels.

This paper analyzes the socio-cultural making of a woman across patriarchal cultures with critical insights envisaged by Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* primarily, along with

Hall's notion of 'being' and 'becoming' regarding one's identity, as its reference. With the insights borrowed from the aforementioned scholars and some others, the researcher argues that Radhika though a born female denies her socially given sexual identity of a woman for becoming a human being. What impediments did she have to face, how does she overcome and construct an identity for herself as well as exerts independence in a patriarchal society she lives in, are the issues it discusses. In doing so, the article imparts ideas to the females for overcoming the stereotypical, belittling treatment by males, and conceiving of as well as conducting unfettered lives of their own choice.

Radhika Mehta, in the novel *One Indian Girl*, as the title implies, is an Indian girl who migrated to the United States with a dream of her career and future. She is an employee at the Distressed Debt group of Goldman Sachs, a promising investment bank (Bhagat 37). As the story unfolds Radhika is making arrangements regarding her marriage with Brijesh Gulati who works in the Facebook company in San Francisco. However, she cancels the marriage, rejects both of her ex-boy friends who had come to the wedding destination to her surprise, and sets off on a journey for self-discovery. In her talk with the ex-boyfriends that unfolds in a flashback revelations is where the author suggests some ways for women to deal with the cases of domination and devaluation.

Literature Review

Various scholars and critics have examined *One Indian Girl* (*OIG* henceforward) from different perspectives and hence have explored a range of issues in their studies. Ashwani Rana and Ritika Rana regarding the treatment to Indian values opine that "this novel crosses the limits, values and decency" (Rana 3). SP. M. Kanimozhi states that as the reciprocation of modernity "modern girls do not have the appropriate qualities or attitude they once had which impressed our society and made them look holy and great" (552). He also suggests girls should play the roles with more care and dedication; there should be a balance between modern and traditional values (553). Likewise, Kausik et al. feel that it "shows radical transformation in Indian women, contemporary Indian women are not emotionally weak, dependent, indecisive, and irresolute but tenacious, assertive, determined, aggressive, unconquerable and least concerned about any social norms and ethos (2765). They add: "It's a tale that raises social issues and highlights the ways how the people around affect the psychological status of an individual which creates a lot of suffering and confusion due to dissatisfied desires" (2773). Javed Ahmed Tantry and Jaoolkar hold that the novel is "a faithful record of individualism and it is reflected how the protagonist Radhika is in search of the fulfillment of her true self and she succeeds in her quest" (683). Besides, Ashakiran A.S. perceives it as "a woman's journey towards confidence and self-respect...it also exposes hypocrisy of the Indian male and sexist attitudes ingrained in cultures" (352). He pinpoints that Brijesh only purportedly supports 'humanism', he, in his own quiet way. Not only this he also shields her from the wrath of his

clan and respects her decision to speak her mind...their symbiotic relationship is an illustration of what Brijesh defines as 'humanism' and is representative of Bhagat's prescription for the success of feminism. Society squeezes females into stereotypes (Ashakiran 355). Thus, the critics and scholars have explored the different themes; they have not only hurled dire criticism at the novel for the denial of traditional Indian values but also have noted the depiction of humanism in their papers. However, it has not been amply analyzed from the perspective of humanism that is the basic existential mode of feminism. Informed of these critiques, this paper focuses on the protagonist's denying of her being a woman and aspiring to become as well as attain and assert a human's position for herself in the society she lived in.

Methodology

The article is a library research based on printed as well as online texts and materials. It presents an analysis of the novel within the paradigm of qualitative research model using interpretative design during scrutiny. Qualitative research model claims that it can provide a "deeper understanding of social phenomena" (Silverman 125). It is necessary for this article for comprehending and analyzing the depicted social issues, themes and their implications in the novel.

To render its interpretation authentic it draws primarily from existential feminism propounded by Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal book *The Second Sex* which focuses on how right from her birth a woman gets relegated to a second category being in relation to man by a patriarchal culture and society. The article also draws ideas of "identity as becoming" as explained by Stuart Hall, and the ideas of humanism and human from scholars like J. Elders and Sartre in reference. Besides these constructs and concepts, it also uses the method of textual as well as narrative analysis through the characters' dialogues and expressions crafted by the author. Tools like close reading and interpretation are applied for the analysis of the discourse in the novel.

Moreover, the researcher uses the term "human" with a functional meaning to refer to a human being with right to one's free will, autonomy and agency borrowing it from the ideas of William of Ockham (1287-1347) one of the major figures of medieval thoughts who had the vision of the existence of a free individual, with an innate power to make choices and with his faith create his own system of life and law, opposed to a supra-individual of human abstraction (qtd. in Freeman 20).

The Basics of Feminism: Idea of Self, Individuality and Identity

The essence of feminism emanated from women's consciousness about the existence of their individual self and their responsibility for equality and justice to it. The campaign for women's awareness about patriarchal prejudice, importance of education, and recognition of their self was started formally through the writing of Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of

The Rights of Women.” This work was unique in suggesting that the betterment of women's status be effected through political changes as the radical reform of national education system (792). It challenged the idea that women exist only to please men and proposed that women should receive the same opportunities as men in education.

Likewise, K.K. Ruthven in *Feminist Literary Studies* quotes Ferdinand de Saussure's similar opinions about the existence of females:

Linguistically, ‘woman’ is a sign, not essence, and hence whatever meaning that word happens to have does not inhere in it ‘naturally’ but is conferred upon it by the society which uses it: its meaning is determined by custom or convention. The key to ‘woman’ is therefore not biology but semiotics, that so-called science of signs which studies what David Saunders calls ‘the process of production and recognition of meaning in society’. (37)

As Saussure states, ‘women’ and ‘men’ have not any natural meaning to identify them as superior and inferior. The meaning of men and women is created by the society they live in. Linguistically, woman is a sign not an essence. And there is not any fix literary connection with the figure of ‘woman’ and the word ‘woman.’ It is traditionally accepted but not naturally.

Simone de Beauvoir takes this nature vs. culture idea to the trailblazing level as she describes the socio-cultural becoming of a woman from the infantile age of a female child with a focus on a person's individuality irrespective of sex let alone gender. Beauvoir states: “Surely woman is, like man, a human being; but such a declaration is abstract. The fact is that every concrete human being is always a singular, separate individual” (14). However it is the society that makes a woman to define herself as what man is not (15). A man is in the right in being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong. She is proven wrong after being viewed from a male's gaze and is relegated to the defective level when it comes to undertaking any profession too (15). The whole female body is culturally presented as a hindrance to professional and intellectual progress. To this dire situation Beauvoir aptly adds: “Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being” (16).

Further elaborating her emotional dependence it is presumed that a “man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without a man”(16). In this way a woman is degraded to the level of nullity to which women should take a subjective attitude to be able to change her own position: “If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change. They do not authentically assume a subjective attitude” (19). Though there is no discrimination in the legal papers, it exists in practice through customs and mores. The same scenario prevails not only in legal sphere but also in economic sphere, Beauvoir adds:

In the economic sphere men and women almost be said to make up two castes; other things being equal, the former hold the better jobs, get higher wages, and have more opportunity for success than their new competitors. In industry and politics men have a great many more position and they monopolize the most important post. (20)

Men monopolize better positions and jobs so they have their say in politics as well, therefore the possibility for them to succeed remains strong; it has remained the same for ages (21). Though men have been winning in this situation, things have changed and are constantly in the process of transformation. With an acknowledgement to this Beauvoir questions - will the change bring real equality between man and woman? Bhagat in *One Indian Girl* brings about these issues and shows the predicted situation by the philosophers and scholars alike.

According to Beauvoir, the conservative bourgeoisie still see in the emancipation of women as a menace to their mortality and their interests. Some men dread feminine competition. Similarly, the most mediocre of males feels himself a demigod as compared with women (24). Likewise, she presents the ways men benefit from relegating women to a subordinate position:

But men profit in many more subtle ways from the otherness, the alterity of woman. Here is a miraculous balm for those afflicted with an inferiority complex, and indeed no one is more arrogant towards women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility. (25)

The men who feel inferior to their kinds will further develop inferiority complex provided that they have to face a more capable woman and as a result turn more aggressive or scornful to them. Only those men, who are as confident as other peers, would be able to see a fellow being in women. Bhagat in the novel makes Radhika, his protagonist articulate the similar things that almost reach the level of existentialist ethics.

As Beauvoir elaborated, viewed from 'existentialist' ethics "every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence, he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out towards other liberties" (28). The existential question does not limit to only the existential issues but expands even to the levels of immanence and transcendence:

Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the 'en-soi' – the brutish life of subjection to given conditions—and of liberty into constraint and contingency. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil. Every individual concerned to justify his existence feels that his existence involves an undefined need to transcend himself, to engage in freely chosen projects. (29)

For an existentially aware individual stagnation would equal degradation. Instead, s/he will have an urge to transcend himself or herself to be able to practice free will and choice. This is applicable to the modern women like Radhika who are in the process of reinventing themselves stepping above and beyond domestic roles dumped upon them by patriarchy:

Now, what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego (conscience) which is essential and sovereign. The drama of woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego)—who always regards the self as the essential. How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfillment? (29)

In sum, what women want at our time is to be a free and autonomous being like all human creatures. They reject the male practice and proposal of stabilizing her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence and establish her own existence which is essential and sovereign. In doing so they are “endeavoring to make their escape from the sphere hitherto assigned them, they aspire to full membership in the human race” (Beauvoir 29). Beauvoir's ideas best authenticate the issues and situations depicted in the novel. Radhika from her feeling of “being not a human” moves towards becoming one which also echoes Stuart Hall's notion of identity construction within the given culture.

Hall argues that instead of considering cultural identity as a finished product we should think of it as a production which is never complete, but is always in process. To explain the process of identity formation; Hall uses Derrida's theory of “difference” as support, and sees the temporary positioning of identity as “strategic” and “arbitrary.” Finally, he defines the Caribbean identity as diaspora identity (225-234). Thus, diaspora identity is always on its becoming or dynamic, further marked by continuation, this can be applied to women's situation as they can be viewed as the diasporas displaced from their natural human position to a culturally attributed position of a woman against which they continuously struggle for the attainment of their primary position not above men but just as men exactly as a human being not split by the notion of gender that speaks of humanism—a philosophical stance which holds that human beings are free individuals with potency and agency, individual as well as social, with which they can transform their lives.

Tony Davies in his book *Humanism: the New Critical Idiom* writes: “Humanism was a word of recent coinage; but already the complex of ideas to which it referred was associated with the renaissance in 15th century Europe” (4). The root is derived from Latin, *humus* that is “earth” or “ground” from which all roots start, hence *homo*, “earth-being”, and *humanus*,

“earthly human” (126). In the age of the Enlightenment the religious dimension of man’s life had become shallower, it was then the idea of humanism also changed; it was understood as the total autonomy of man (Elders 2).

Humanism is also used for a movement which originated in the first part of the 20th century that emphasized the “production of empathetic human beings in opposition to humans only obsessed with and led by dire reasons and experiments” (Elders 2).

The existentialists philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre in his manifesto *L’existentialisme est un humanisme* claimed that “existentialism is a humanism, it defines man by his existence, by what he does and to what he has made himself. Man is a pure subjectivity” (qtd. in Elders 3). Thus, Sartre’s version of human like Elder’s is also an individual who has autonomy and free will.

The novel will be scrutinized with the above mentioned ideas and constructs with a focus on Radhika’s disposition, the events that she encounters and the actions she take, to illustrate how a human being gets relegated to a secondary position of a “woman” and how she struggles to regain her identity as a human.

Radhika’s Journey from Being a Woman to Becoming a Human

Bhagat in *One Indian Girl* augments at which stages of her life a woman is liable to encounter and experience gender differences and prejudices on the way to becoming a human. He shows that the violation of her rights as a human being is possible anytime. However it seems most rampant at specifically half a dozen of situations, such as intimate personal events, during the process of her career development, at work, with regards to the notion of beauty, relationships with fe/male members in the society, and her rights to choose regarding the course and quality of her life, as the novel depicts.

Radhika when plans a date with Debu realizes the need to adorn herself for being a woman and finds it problematic even at the level of dress up. She compares the simplicity a man can present himself with, contrary to a woman indoctrinated by culture. Radhika needs “to define herself as a woman” through make-up and dress as Beauvoir perceives (15). To this issue Radhika says, “Some problems in the world seem to exist solely for women, like “not having anything to wear” (Bhagat 33). It seems to her that as if the whole responsibility of impressing the other sex is conferred upon the shoulders of women. In her conversation with the shopkeeper she replicates her mother’s words sarcastically for herself, “who will marry me with this skin colour? Radhika says she had “no clue for any other things except for textbooks; the things like waxing, short dress, boys and relations unlike other girls” (33-34). First thing she displays as the problem is the way women are supposed to dress and taunted for the color of their skin. As Beauvoir opines “Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being” (16).

Later, she meets Neel when he comes for presentation, she feels low about her Delhi accents. However, is impressed by his powerful presentation so much so that she nearly forgets her date with Debu (38-40). In this regard she seems to be a *sapio-sexual*, a person who is attracted to the intelligence in males rather than their physical appearance. She puts brain over beauty or handsomeness.

Though the humanity decrees certain code of personal and bodily conduct to a woman, she shuns all these norms when it comes to her personal relationships with the males. Her mental make-up is very parallel to a man's; a man who is a free, confident being in his own skin not the one who is injected by patriarchal societal norms to platter her body at its best to a man to cater his desires.

Radhika ever keeps herself on equal footing to a male and also takes responsibilities be it economic or social. For instance, when it comes to making the payment at the restaurant during her date with Debu, she thinks of and asks about a "payments split". She thinks "if boys are to pay at dates, where is Gender equality?" (44). The kind of quality Radhika holds is of equal rights and responsibilities.

Patriarchy sees women inferior to men when it comes to jobs. Therefore, they are entitled to so called regular or easy jobs which again marginalizes women in a disguise by depriving them of the challenges and hence the growth. However Radhika shows courage like a human being and accepts the challenge for her growth in the area and level of profession and she defies the glass ceiling posed upon women at jobs in patriarchal job markets. "She is proven wrong after being viewed from a male's gaze and is relegated to the defective level when it comes to undertaking any profession" as Beauvoir explicated she was not expected to take up tough jobs (15). When she applies and is selected for Distressed Debt Group which was a tough challenge; she gathers confidence "boys have" (Bhagat 47). For it was "not a regular banker's job on a desk and there were hardly any woman in the team. It was taken to be a man's job" (49). Akin to what Beauvoir conceives of women at workplace as discussed above, Bhagat makes Debu accept this truth for his kind that "it's all this bullshit men spread. To scare women out of a role or position. Fact is— men are shit-scared of talented women like you" (49). Also, he adds that she "was an inspiration to her younger cousins, for them to see and be like her" (51). Radhika then feels that Debu was a man who counts on women; she thinks he "acknowledges women's smartness" (51). Though she deserves and likes being recognized Debu no longer can stick to his words.

In this novel, Bhagat also raises the issue of beauty that is defined from males' gaze but by no means is subservient to women's benefit. When Debu compliments her she ironically says within: "Please keep praising me. The shallower the better; make it only about clothes, looks and legs" (52). However, her true self raises a question i.e. "why do we girls have to

follow so many rules? If he likes my whole personality, why can't I be fully me?" (53). When she iterates that she has been a nerdy studious girl (54), Debu confirms that the beauty definitions laid down upon women by cultures and societies are of no value and authenticity. He mentions to her *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf as a landmark feminist book and asks if she has heard about or read it? Later, he explains that the book talks about "how women are culturally bullied into feeling conscious about their looks all the time" (55).

Radhika always reflects and rationally seeks for if there are any flaws in her own character that hold her back. In this sense she is a progress pursuing person. As Beauvoir warns women, "If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change," (19). Radhika realizes that a bit of feminine habit "is present in her too especially when it comes to comparing her to her sister. She questions if "men compare their physicality with their siblings so much?" (Bhagat 55). It is a realization on her part to overcome any depreciating remark upon her own self. She develops resistance to it for after that she seldom makes such comparison, rather she denies it and says I am not Aditi didi. This move is her step towards her success in the path of bringing a change in her life.

Radhika too asserts her true self at the level of sexuality unlike other women. She articulates her curiosity and desire though inwardly in conversation with her 'mini-me': "Why haven't we kissed yet? (49). She wanted to be kissed but could not say. She reasons it as "a lifetime of brainwashing to be a good Indian girl would never allow me to do that" (51). After the first experience of sex she murmurs: "Wow, why didn't anyone tell me sex feels so damn good? (57). Not only that she also demands more satisfaction with Debu without hesitation which surprises him: "Can you make me spent and finished too? Please? Huh? He turned to me, surprised. That going down things you did. Can you do it a bit more?" (59). She asserts her sexual rights as she says: "not a shy and coy girl all Indian girls should be...however, I would rather be a spent and finished slut than a good but frustrated Indian girl" (59). This way she takes the subject position with regards to sexuality.

Likewise, as a professional, Radhika trains herself to be the most industrious, practical woman. She "authentically assumes a subjective attitude" (Beauvoir 19). As an employee she prioritizes professional meetings over dating and "keeps working until midnight"; she dismantles the man vs. woman commitment to work showing her aptitude and dedication to hard work (61).

However, the pretentious mask of the patriarchal male casts off as she makes her progress in leap and bounds at her job. When he really finds her excelling him, Debu himself becomes the major hindrance for Radhika for her growth. Akin to Beauvoir's prediction in *The Second Sex*, "the men who feel inferior to their kinds will further develop inferiority complex provided that they have to face a more capable woman and as a result turn more aggressive or

scornful to them” (25). Her boyfriend starts being sarcastic to Radhika and passes biting remarks: “You are real asset to the group...they seem to be dumping all their work on you...” (63). His sarcasm proves to be the inception of a challenge to her for she was in need of more support which her mother was unable to give due to her traditional mind set especially at things related to her career. As envisioned by Beauvoir, the conservative Debu sees the economic emancipation of Radhika as a menace to his interests. “Some men dread feminine competition. Similarly, the most mediocre of males feels himself a demigod as compared with women”; Debu does the same (24).

Radhika’s mother is juxtaposed to Radhika for making the clash between not only the men but also the women having traditional mind sets. One year later, as Radhika wants to focus on job, her mum asks her to marry (Bhagat 65). For her mother job is not that important but household work is. Radhika “could hear sounds of her making tea in her kitchen when she called her and she was with her dad’s tea”—mean to say her duty was to serve a man and keep his home intact. They have at least a blow-out per week about her marriage (69). Radhika shares it to Debu with whom she had been living-in almost for two years. Debu describes it as her mother being regressive and old-fashioned. However, he fails to understand the implication or Radhika’s expectation from him of being asked for marriage (69). Debu fails to meet her emotional expectations or intentionally ignores them to break her.

She desires to be treated as a human being not a feeble woman, the second category. As Beauvoir saying that “every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence, he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out towards other liberties,” (28) Radhika demands human sensitivity and responsibility, practical care, to be shown by Debu. She detests being “babied” (Bhagat 69). It was her to initiate talking about their future: “Debu where are we going? Where is this relationship going? But do we have a future? Or are we just sharing rent and having sex?”(70). She has and shows concerns for their future, though then he gives a damn-deaf ear to it.

Owing to her hard work and skills, Radhika “had the highest bonus among the associates”. She becomes a big shot financially (82) for which her dad gets proud of her. Back in the office she organizes a treat for her colleagues namely Jonathan, Amanda, Craig and many others. It was a pair party which she wants Debu also to attend. She wants to make Debu public to her team (83). But to her expectation, Debu can’t come to her drink party (85-6), she had the crowd frittered away. As she reaches home, she finds him home ten minutes before her (87). It upsets her somehow. This incident reconfirms that the males go jealous and inferior when a woman excels them at work: “They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence” as Beauvoir puts it, Radika’s boyfriend also exerts the same as the representative of patriarchy for her “transcendence is to be overshadowed” with his counter ego (24).

Irrespective of this all, Radhika achieves success, one after the other but Debu goes humiliated so she even had to “hide success” from him. When she says she’d a good day at work he goes cynical and says “managed to make more money?” She “ignores his barb” (90). Yet, she consoles herself telling that “he could be in the kitchen doing his thing. I could sip my tea and work” (91-2). As time passes by, they have some disagreement on money matters, nor Debu can accept her advancement and success at her career.

Debu deeply articulates his latent objection and he says, “I don’t know. Just doesn’t feel right. I hope the job doesn’t harden you.” In this way Radhika finds herself in a double bind of a relationship in which she was expected to excel her male counterpart and at the same time was not even imparted the commendation when she accomplishes it. As Beauvoir presents there is no easy way out for a woman in patriarchy. Her dependence is taken as a burden and her weakness whereas her independence is also not accepted with respect.

It is true that women are ever in the double bind i.e. if they remain less empowered the males dominate them as weaker and similarly if they excel they would be vilified. Radhika’s independence and empowered self to choose what to do and accept as well as like what she does is taken as a “hard stuff” against her stereotypical soft and submissive image that a patriarchal male has in his mind for his would-be wife, “You were this sweet, innocent girl when I met you. You had a soft side” (93-4). To Debu’s insecurity about it Radhika says that she “still does have a soft side, and she was the same person”. She clarifies to him that she is hard at job but she is more than that” (93-4). Radhika denies being only the soft wife stuff but shows her aptitude towards becoming her authentic self, a practical work preferring person.

In patriarchy, a woman’s career or economic independence is liable to be used as a weapon to emotionally destabilize or harm her. Debu presents her career as a problem for their relationship, demanding that she left her work once she had kids (Bhagat 95). She confirms that her job will have nothing to do with her commitment as a mother” (96). However, as Beauvoir has explained the social male in Debu creates a situation of clash between her career and family responsibilities, perhaps Debu as a traditional male wants to hold on to the monopoly in the career sector though he’s low potentials compared to hers. Debu, the representative male of a patriarchal society, reveals his double standards about women that though he’s “living in” with a professional lady like Radhika. He says, “I have an image of the wife I want. The mother of the kids I want. I am not judging you, but I think I want a house wife... Will you leave your job? What about the home? Radhika “what about the home?” (99). Home is what a woman expects support from to struggle in her life. At times it also can be deployed to deter and regress women as Debu does. However, Radhika believes that home is made of hearts and there can be a balance between a women’s career and home if male and female both are to bear its responsibility.

Radhika expresses her desire and possibility of equality as she snaps, “You are going to work too right? Why can’t I?” (99). She mentions compromise—“Nobody needs to quit if they don’t want to...women can still have a good happy family...” (99). However, as her denial to leave her job she “glared at him one more time and slammed the door shut”; to counter it, Debu leaves a note and moves out of the apartment. What she had wanted is understanding, compromise not Debu’s leaving home. As per Beauvoir, Radhika is “endeavoring to make her escape from the sphere hitherto assigned to her” as a woman for attaining the “full membership in the human race” (29).

Due to Debu’s rejection and insult, she could not stay in New York, therefore sends resignation to the concerned persons at her job (109). To her luck her colleague John persuades her not to throw her career over a boy, but have a transfer to Hong Kong where GS had a branch and Neel is one of the partners (110-111). She realizes its authenticity and leaves New York for Hong Kong.

Irrespective of all the derogation and hard times Debu creates for Radhika, she keeps her courage intact rejects being just a woman a level below a man on psychological as well as social strata and elevates herself to the level of a human being she deserves to be. She goes to Hong Kong, gets into a relationship with Neel who’s a married man with kids. They had sex. But Radhika becomes hardened as with her experiences of sex. Bhagat implies that woman should not exaggerate or confer too much importance to sexual encounters or occasional flirts as males do not seem to bother about them in their lives.

With Debu’s regret for hurting Radhika, Bhagat reiterates the points he wants to make through this novel on behalf of women. In Goa Debu with “seriousness” confesses that he made the biggest mistake of his life and that Radhika was “the best thing that happened to him”. Emphasizing the double standards that a patriarchal society wounds a woman Radhika snaps: “That is also why you dumped me” (118). She shows her determination and maturity staying on the side of her self-worth and identity. She was not moved even an inch by Debu’s sympathy winning drama, yet searching forgiveness and soft corner in her heart. He admits that he’d made a mistake by being insecure and insulting her other many ways like dumping her and jumping into another relationship instantly. She could throw back his abuse to him in the form of words she used to vent out her feeling that he was not worthy of her at all. She asks him “where did his feminism go when he reacted to her first bonus and how did he react when she got it?”. He apologetically accepts, “my feminism didn’t go anywhere. My masculinity did...I felt insecure...how can my girl make three times as much as I do?” Hence, Bhagat in line with Beauvoir’s notions is confirming that a man who cannot accept and respect a woman who excels her in runs of life is not a masculine man but an emasculated one. Also, Radhika’s realization and assertion makes her a human being with her autonomy and agency. This is how she regains the lost position of a free being.

On one hand, Debu was apologetic; on the other, Neel was also doing a mistake but of a different kind according to Radhika (120). He was ready to leave his wife for Radhika i.e. a would-be woman in Radhika; she sees her future image in Neel's wife. Debu insulted her in the past, Neel was liable to insult her in the future as he was insulting his wife, a middle-aged woman, for Radhika now. She shows farsightedness, rationality and responsibility which are often spoken of as 'male' characteristics and goes beyond the patriarchal definition of a woman.

Likewise, Radhika finds her being unable to giving into patriarchal social norms too easily. "To make others feel better, women lie about their feelings all the time. It's amazing how easily it comes to us" (122). But once she realizes it, she resolves to live her life for herself and her way first. She rejects both of them. Cancels the wedding and sets off on a journey with her own self as an autonomous being.

I am not coming with you, or with you. There are fundamental things about both of you that won't change. Debu, you say you will be supportive, but the fact that you couldn't handle even a bit of my success means it's an intrinsic part of you. You can't change that. And I plan to be a lot more successful than what you saw. So, sorry, no . . . And Neel, you are amazing, no doubt. The chartered plane, tempting, of course. Now with the divorce and everything I know you love me too. But you know what, you love only half of me. My other half is Kusum, the woman you left. You want a party girl. Someone young, who allows you to cling on to your youth. The same youth you work so hard in the gym for. Well, I won't be this young girl forever. I don't know what Neel Gupta will do with me then. He likes Radhika, his young vice president, but will he like Radhika, the diaper-changing wife and mom? (122-23)

Radhika makes a meticulous assessment in the lines above with her rational without being emotional and rejects both the men who do not respect women one way or the other. Just two minutes after this, as Neel and Debu leave, Brijesh enters the coffee shop. And Radhika then tells him that she wants to cancel the wedding as well. She wants to be not a woman equal to man but also a step ahead of it a conscious rational human who knows her choices and its consequences well and can fulfill her dreams on her own. As in the age of the Enlightenment the religious dimension of man's life had become shallower, it was then the idea of humanism also changed into the notion of "total autonomy of man" Radhika also steadily walks towards her autonomy at emotional as well as spiritual levels (Elders 2). For her from the beginning, the need of another human being was for only emotional support not economic. All in all, in the novel, Radhika by denying her socially given sexual identity portrays her real being and her becoming a full-fledged free human being in a patriarchal society, the society in which she is not allowed to be her true self; it is minimized which she ironically refers as "mini me" (Bhagat

23). It was necessary for Radhika first to challenge and then defy these stereotypical roles that fettered her from becoming a sovereign self.

For the next few months, Radhika travels around the world to find out what she really likes. Eventually, she contacts Brijesh while on the route to San Francisco. The two meet for a coffee and reconnect. "Brijesh, would you like to come to the Arijit Singh concert with me?," Radhika asks. In response, he says yes. And then they start laughing.

Her meeting Brijesh Gulati at the end suggests she is for a man who accepts who she is, respects and understands her as a human being. She finds him to be a genuine and "empathetic human being" (Elders 2). He let her have her own time, waited for her to come back to him when she felt like even if she cancelled the marriage. He had the patience and strength to wait without being offensive and controlling to her. He was the one who did not derogate her nor compelled but understood her aptitude of being an individual human being first, beyond any culture and gender stereotypes.

Conclusion

Radhika had to rebel against patriarchal people, norms and values that consider(ed) females as inferior and males as superior to regain the status of a human being from her relegated status of a woman in the society she belonged. She dismantles stereotypical practices related to education, job, emotion, economy, and her life as a whole. As Wollstonecraft and Beauvoir had envisioned i.e. by educating oneself, empowering through various employment opportunities and making a decision about one's sexuality and marriage a woman can transform her identity from being a weak, fragile, emotional being to a rational, authentic and responsible human. Besides, acting in line with Hall's idea about identity that it is a constant in the process of its making, she continuously upgrades her educational, social and economic status by emotionally toughening herself. She rejects inapt marriage proposals and focuses more on her self-actualization and eventually emerges as a dignified human being casting off her former identity as a woman whom patriarchy nearly crushed.

In this light, *OIG* is a novel of transformation in relation to women, as it upholds the notion that if there is the availability or possession of material resources, of which one is money, it makes a big difference in a woman's status in the society. To conclude, the protagonist's struggle against patriarchy to live a life as a human not as a woman was the focus of this article which drew ideas from feminist scholars such as Mary Wollstonecraft, K.K. Ruthvan, Simone de Beauvoir, and Sturt Hall to authenticate the issues presented in the novel. It will pave comparatively an unexplored path to view Bhagat's works through the lenses of existential feminism and beyond.

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