

A DILLEMA OF A POST-FEMINIST WOMAN: A STUDY CASE OF ONE INDIAN GIRL

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ABSTRACT

*After post-feminism period, women still have to struggle to be “perfect human being” as her own ideal. It is not only the case for women having no power, intellectualism, and money, but also for ladies with authority and prosperity enabling her own to be an single individual with financial and time freedom. This can be seen in a contemporary literary work, *One Indian Girl* (Bhagat: 2016), in which an Indian girl having a prestigious position in an American investment bank could not achieve her ideal life. This paper is aimed to reveal the dilemma of a feminist woman in her relation to men and to her family norms and her defeat to the true reality she failed to mediate. Using post-feminist approach, this paper investigated the fictional facts to prove that source of the problems is actually her female being. It is indicated that the problems she had in her life coming from her female feminist. From the very first, it was depicted that she was viewed negatively by her own mother for being a female baby. Her intellectual is not worthy for boys and her mother. In her study, she was blamed for having her master, rather than early marriage. Finally, she was being accused of earning a lot of money, which normally becomes a prestigious achievement for men, by her boyfriend and her mother. She was in dilemma to choose between her dreamed profession or her marriage. The girl is a character who highly likely to represent other girls or women who are still defeated by the inequities of positioning a man-woman parallelism.*

Key words: *One Indian Girl*, post-feminist, dilemma

Introduction

Women in their authenticity can never stand independent. In vice versa, men are the same. Power, money, and position do not make a woman or a man complete, unless he/she has partner in his/her life. However, the demands of someone else's existence, spouse, seem to be harder directed at women. Without husbands, women who are rich, intelligent, and powerful culturally, become strange in society. While men with a similar property, without a wife, will

transform into an ideal person's dream personality, even for other men.

As it is seen in the novel *One Indian Girl* (which latter be referred to as *OIG*) written by Indian novelist Chetan Bhagat (2016). Through his novel, Bhagat wanted to criticize what happened to the community in his neighborhood, India, by interviewing about 100 women (Vijayan, 2016). Through the main character in the novel, Radhika, he wants to criticize how a family (country) does not understand what to do with

successful women. Women are often regarded as second class citizens, so that whatever achievement she achieves she must still be under men.

As it is discussed by Turaeni (2010), which highlights the depiction of some women in the novel *Seroja* by SunaryonoBasuki. Despite the resistance of women in *Seroja's* novel, it still seems that women will not be a perfect human being when she is not married although she is maltreated by her husband and her husband's family who are of higher caste than her, who belong to the Sudra caste. Marrying becomes a norm to be obeyed otherwise a negative label will be embedded. In line with Turaeni, Gordan&Almutairi (2013: 240-247) reveals on how women's positions of post-feminism era. How women with the burqah should behave in accordance with the expectations of society and their families, as illustrated in Khaled's novel, *a Thousand Splendid Suns*. It describes how Maryam and Laila as culturally second-class elements in Afghan society try to rebel as individual women by their communities, beliefs and religious goals. It is affirmed that there is a gap between the identification of women by the public and women's view of her. It is this gap that triggers feelings of isolation and ends in resistance.

Medina (2014) explains how Muslim women in America absorb conflicting information about the use of veil. They are not just subjects of discourse about their bodies, and they are not simply dictated by the views of others. They have studied the discourse throughout their lives until it comes to the conclusions they believe in the

truth about how their bodies should be treated. Apart from the muddling discourses about themselves, many of them are active agents and participants of their religion. They choose to be purified in pursuit of the rules of religion that they believe, not because of the coercion or persuasion of anyone. In addition, some others have a pride to show their identity in the midst of different US populations. Veil is also used as a means of teaching and invitation to dialogue, not just a silent symbol; veil is the way to solve the wrong stereotype. A similar spirit actually appears in Radhika when she enjoys herself to appear and be free with her own body. Although, on the other hand, it is not easy to let go that the freedom she enjoys becomes a source of guilt.

In the end, Radhika chose not to marry anyone, despite staying a few hours to the wedding planned by his family. The spirit of post-feminism that Bhagat attempted to rise was prominent when Radhika tried to make sense of the life she was going to live. She did not at all fight for equality between women and men, because in reality her position is higher (vice president of investment bank and big salary) than the man who would marry her. Similarly, Prasetyo, (2010:136-137) said post-feminism is no longer a pursuit of equality because the word equivalent means still taking into account the existence of men, but the movement seeks to make women more meaningful, both to themselves and to their environment in relation and not the man who interpreted its existence. He further explained that post-feminism is a reversal movement (deconstruction) that has been prevailing in the community. For example in

Madonna's case, when there was so much criticism of her exploitation of her body, she said that she was showing her power. She was not a victim, in fact her body was able to exploit the media and men who want to pay dearly for the dreams she offered.

From the above description, the post-feminist movement no longer abides about the demands of equality between women and men, but rather how equity can be achieved with the "differences" between women and men themselves. Because basically men are created different from women so why should be equated. Celebrate the differences into the keywords of the post-feminist movement. According to this movement, marriage is also seen as an institution that perpetuates the oppression of women so it needs to be resisted. Society has been established with all things made by the patriarchal. Binary opposition, in fact, places women in a marginal position.

This paper tries to reveal what happened and experienced by modern women represented by the main character, Radhika Mehta. She experienced a dilemma, when she was forced to marry by her mother because she was 27 years old, who, according to tradition, was an old maid. Her position as vice-president in an investment bank with a very big salary, and all the achievements she has made even put her in a difficult position, no men wanted to marry her, while she should get married soon. Getting married is the only way to perfection of life for a woman. Not the same as men. Increasing age, big salaries, a classy position actually makes men desirable.

Method

Using the post-feminism approach, this study is written to answer the question of what dilemma experienced by the female character in the novel and its relation to other figures, family, men and the environment around her.

Results and Discussion

As has been pointed out in the introduction, this study will reveal the dilemma of the female character in the *OIG* novel, Radhika. The figure of modern women, intelligent, and independent in fact still have to deal with the tradition that put women as second class citizens who must always be adaptive to all things outside of her. To answer the dilemma of what Radhika experienced, the analysis focused on four things: A Woman: Get Married Soon, Earn a Little More, Boy Comes First, and Rules are for Woman. The four discussions will be analyzed one by one with the post-feminism approach to see whether Radikha is a figure just like the "norm" or a person who is resistant to all things outside of himself that defines her happiness.

A Woman: Get Married Soon

Radhika Mehta who is described as a very intelligent woman, working in an investment bank and earns very big money, on the other hand, does not make her parents proud. It makes her mother very worried and dislikes, "Who wants to marry a girl who earns so much?" (*OIG*, p.6) For her mother there is nothing more important for a woman than to marry. Working and having a greater income than men would make men terrified. The

culture and tradition in which Radhika's mother lives is a reason for fear for the mother, so that she forced Radhika to get married to any man who would marry her. She, then, manipulate the data about her daughter. Hiding her achievements and her salary are done to get men. The image of a woman who is different from her environment, intelligent, and independent must finally succumb to the figure who must obey the norm, get married before the age of 30 years, as the hope of mother and family. Otherwise, the negative label of an old maid must be accepted. Although Radhika feels happy of being single but her age and her position in the investment bank make her have to get married.

'You should also get married soon,' did had told me. 'There's a right time for a girl to marry. Don't delay it.'

'I am twenty-one,' I said.' I haven't even done my master's yet.'

'The younger the better. Especially for someone like you,' she said.

'What do you mean especially for someone like me?'' (OIG, p.5)

Radikha's age and her big salary become her concern since these two just hinder him to get men. According to her mother, men will be afraid of her and nobody will marry her. As Beauvoir defined female body in *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". The story of how female body functions changes over the years and society influences (patriarchy) presented female body both positive and negative definition includes issues of age (Prabasmoro, 2016: 153). This, then, places

the male body as the self and the female body as the other. The female body is then defined in terms of its function as a maternal body. Radikha's body is in fact not a neutral body. Her age which is above 20 and not married is considered a threat to the female body with old maid labels.

'There is an age, beta. You get the best matches then. After that, a girl's appeal declines. You are twenty-six already.' (OIG, p.158)

Nevertheless, the author's resistance to the tradition of placing women with bodies of norms; beautiful face, no need to be smart reversed with the character of Radhika who is smart, independent, financially well established and not married at an early age for the shake of her happiness. Radhika created her own happiness standard that isto be a successful banker without worrying with negative label as an old maid.

'So I am like a car model? Depreciating over the years.'

'You are impossible! I am not talking to you.'

'You will be thirty. How do you expect me to find a good guy for you?'

'I will also be an even more successful banker.' (OIG, p.158)

Earn a little is More

Helene Cixous, a post-modern feminist figure from France, said that the world order has been made in such a way based on binary opposition (male / female, day / night, high / low) makes women with her body unfairly defined. So,she suggested that women must be able to write about themselves, with the concept of feminine

writing practice (l'écriture feminine) which states that women should be included in writing. This means that a woman must put herself in a text, in a world, and history by using the path and locus that her own creation is not defined by the world outside of her. But then the problem then arises when women write about her world, audiences find it as a taboo and gray world. It is something that is unclear or out of line/norms especially when it occurs in an environment that holds tight to tradition (patriarchal). (Rodiah, 2016) Likewise experienced by Radhika, big salary and all the achievements it has just make her mother worried.

‘Forty-eight lakh rupees a year, four lakhs a month, mom, ‘I told her on the phone.

I heard nothing in response. Most likely she had fainted. My father had never crossed a third of this amount in his twenty-five-year career with the State Bank of India.

‘Are you there, mom?’

‘How will I ever find a boy for you/’ she said.

That was her prime concern. Her twenty-three-year-old daughter, who grew up in middle-class West Delhi, had cracked a job at one of the biggest investment banks in the world and all she cared about was its impact on her groom-hunt.

‘Stop it, mom. What boy?’

‘Who wants to marry a girl who earns so much? If the boy earns less, he won’t consider you. If he earns more, why would he marry working girl?’ (OIG, p.6)

The discussion between Radhika and her mother shows how the world shapes that women should be underpaid, or no need to work. For a woman, the greatest achievement is getting married soon, not a big salary nor a prestigious position in the public sphere. Public space is a men's business. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* says that when there is an oppression of a group of people on the basis of economy, class, race, and women remain a "cohesive" group even when they are superior to those three things (Prabasmoro, 2006: 32). Fear of superior women against men being established with the reluctance of men to marry them. As expressed by Radhika's lover, Debu, who then seeks reasons not to marry a future wife who has a salary 3 times more than himself minus a bonus.

‘Will you leave your job?’

‘Exactly. Where did your feminism go?’

‘My feminism didn’t go anywhere. My masculinity did. I told you, I felt insecure. How can my girl make three times as much as I do?’

‘So what/I work in a bank. It pays better. You chose your passion, advertising. Why did you have to compare? Wasn’t it all our money. (OIG, p.93)

From the explanation above, we can see how women existence is reduced when she must marry, because the fear of the men against women who are paid more than himself. Insecurity experienced by Debu, put Radhika to choose and can not both. Become a housewife with all her domestic

role, or not married. Meanwhile, men can get both.

I am being calm, okay? But 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 housewife.'

'What?' I said. My fork almost fell out of my hands.

'It's what I have seen growing up. I go to work, make the money. Wife takes care of the home. Simple needs happy family.'

'What are you talking about, Debu? Didn't you say women could achieve anything today? Didn't you encourage me when I had to apply for distressed debt?'

'I did. I still admire you. I respect all women who achieve big things. I think it is great.'

'But you can't be with them?'

'I don't know. Maybe not. Maybe I could. But you made me think about marriage and I did. I visualized a future home. I would like my life to be there for me and my kids.'

'And I can't be with them?'

(OIG, p.75)

As mentioned by Kate Millet above, marriage / family is the main instrument of patriarchy governing the attitude and behavior of its members (husband, wife, children) so that there will be legitimacy of patriarchy ideology to be lasting. Prabasmoro further explains that legitimacy is itself a subset of rules to ensure that the overall structure of society goes according to ideology.

Boy Comes First

Nirmalawati (2008: 17) said that the construction of the female body, as well as the dualism of the body / soul, had a pretty gloomy beginning, because her existence was interpreted by the existence of different bodies, men. Starting with the mythology of human creation as listed in several scriptures about the creation of Eve, the first female born, narrated to be a source of disaster for Adam. Likewise, in Greek mythology (Synott, 2007: 64) there was Pandora, the first female, who was created to deceive men. With such a mesmerizing beauty, she was used as a means by Zeus to avenge the theft of the sacred fire from the sun. From two stories about the creation of women, both have the same core that women are present as a source of disaster for men thus discrediting the female figure. Likewise with the birth of Radhika, her mother tried to abort the fetus as she knew it is a female. A negative stigma about women led her to do that, though it failed.

I am also a bit of a nerd. My sister, Aditi, and I went to school together in Delhi at Springdales, Pusa Road. She is just a year older than me. My parents wanted a son for their firstborn. When Aditi came, they had to undo the damage as soon as possible. Hence, my father, SBI Naraina Yihar Branch Manager Sudarshan Mehta, decided to have another child with his homemaker wife, Aparna Mehta. Sadly for them, the second was also a girl, which was me. It is rumoured that they tried again twice; both times my mother

had an abortion because it was a girl. I confronted her in this topic years ago, but she brushed it off. (OIG, p.4)

Rules are for Woman

In the beginning of the story of *OIG* novel seen how the author tries to incorporate the traditions and cultures in which the novel setting is written, India, so that the reader understands the overall narrative of the main character in the *OIG* novel. Begin with the rush of the Radikha family to prepare rooms at the hotel where they will hold a wedding ceremony. Incidentally, the hotel room is not enough to accommodate a number of guests who will attend the event because it was rented out by other guests. When Radhika recorded his family first to get a room at the hotel, Radhika's mother reminded herself to put the groom's family ahead of her family first.

'Beta, these are norms. You don't understand. We have to keep them comfortable. Girl's side is expected to adjust,' he said. (OIG, p. 2)

Hi, I am a young, slim, quite fair, Punjabi Khatri girl aged 26, 5'4" tall. I am currently working in London, but flexible to move anywhere with my husband. I am family-minded and don't mind staying in a joint family. (OIG, p.168)

From the above quote it can be concluded how the female family in India should prioritize the comfort of male families first. It is affirmed by the words of her mother

that it is the norm. Prioritize the male family is a rule that must be obeyed whenever a girl marries to a man. Women are assigned to succumb and follow all the will of their husbands, even when they have to live with their husbands' families when they marry someday. Marriage has reduced the position of the female family to adapt to the male family as it is stated by Kate Millet above, that marriage is a main patriarchy instrument to perpetuate patriarchal ideology. It is also apply in other aspects of a marriage without much arguing, since it is the norm.

Not only have to be nice and behave, women also have to be under men when she is in the public space (work) because the position of women is in the domestic sphere which is related to its function as a maternal body. So she will be accepted in the public space if her position is under the men. Women should not get achievements beyond men, either in economics, or class as Prasetyo analyzes the novel *Perempuan di Titik Nol* by Nawal El Saadawi.

'You will never be fully ready. It is already hard to get a boy for you. You are too successful, beta.'

'Is there such a thing? Too successful?'

'For girls there is. What to do?'

'let's not start again, I am only here for four days.' (OIG, p.157)

'Mom, can you hear yourself? You are hiding your child's achievement?'

'I am hiding my daughter's achievements. So we get more boys to choose from. That's all. I am not taking away your achievements.'

‘So if I were a son?’

‘Obviously, we would put your salary first. But now we have to be careful (OIG, p. 170)

Thus, the woman with the body and everything attached to her is not a neutral human being. The dilemma experienced by Radhikais due to her entity as a woman and her relationship to the construction of a society as expressed by Gayle Rubin which is referred to as sex / gender. In this concept, sex is interpreted as something natural and gender is the construction of society which then put the body of women to "must" have the same gender with the maternal body. Gender for women subject is feminine and this is not natural because it can vary from one culture to another. And Radhika's living culture is to require women to be gender-like. (Prabasmoro, 2006: 43)

Conclusion

OIG's novel can be said to be a novel resistant to the traditional order in India that puts woman in a marginal position. Conversations, arguments and narrations of the main character Radhika show the deconstruction of the established tradition through a marriage. With such an intelligent, financially security, and physically unattractive person has created a new icon of how a woman is meaningful. Her happiness is coming from herself, not for sticking with something or someone outside herself. Deciding not to marry anyone shows that a woman can also be happy and that marriage is not a primary goal in a woman's life as it

is echoed by a Disney fairy tale that ends with a marriage and lives happily ever after.

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