"Arthvishwa" International Journal
Multidisciplinary, Peer Reviewed, Indexed, Refereed, International Journal ISSN: 2319-6289
Published Month and Year: January 2024 (Ref. No.: NSL/ISSN/INF/2012/2476 Dated: October 19, 2012)

"GENDER ROLES AND CHANGING SOCIAL VALUES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN CAMPUS FICTION"

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Abstract

The Indian student fiction from today's era conveys the attitudes, relationships and the social expectations of the youth of the present era in India. College and university environments offer a significant opportunity to examine gender roles and discover what is acceptable with regard to personal freedoms as well as identity and the role of traditional values. This paper looks into gender relationships of the millennial generation in the contemporary Indian campus fiction and the emerging notion of equality and independence of the young men and women. It delves into the portrayal of female characters, evolving conceptions of manhood, romantic relationships, family values, and the struggle between traditional gender views and contemporary lifestyles. Additionally, the role of education, urban culture and social interaction on the attitude and decision-making of young people are taken into account in the study. It also emphasizes, by means of literary analysis and thematic presentation, the role of campus fiction as a way of presenting the experiences of one generation of students becoming uneasy with the cross currents of culture and shifting social attitudes. It states that by depicting contemporary Indian campus life, the aforementioned trend of Indian campus fiction conveys Indian social changes.

Keywords: Gender Roles, Campus Fiction, Social Values, Indian English Literature, Gender Identity, Modernity.

Introduction

The themes in Indian English literature have changed over the years along with the characters who play in them and the methods by which these literatures are told. Modern writers more and more emphasize the daily life of youth, youth relationships, youths' hope, problems of character, and new attitudes towards society. Campus fiction is one of the newer types of writing genres that has sprung to the forefront because of its account of college and university life. The themes of these stories are friendship, love, school, career aspirations, family life and self-discovery. Campus fiction, too, offers a valuable literature venue for comprehending college youth reaction to novelized social values, especially attitude toward gender roles and personal freedoms.

Traditionally gender roles are playing an important role in the Indian social life. For a long time, men and women have been taught to behave differently according to the culture, obligations of the family and the social framework. Traditionally, gender roles have been linked to male financial independence, male authority and decision making, and female family responsibilities, emotional adjustment and social respectability. These expectations are still prevalent in many parts of India but have been slowly evolving due to education, urbanisation, economic development and evolving attitude of the society. The literature of today's India also reflects these changes in the form of characters who challenge the status quo of traditional gender roles and have an active say in areas concerning life and work beyond their widowhood.

The college and university sector is especially significant in this process as it is a place where young people from diverse social, economic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds come together. Pupils meet new people and ideas, make some friends, fall in with romantic partners and start making choices for the future themselves. These experiences frequently put into question the values developed in the family and the communities. This dichotomy of expectations and new thoughts of freedom, equality and choices for individuals is echoed in contemporary Indian campus fiction. Campus is envisioned as a social space rather than a learning environment in which entrenched values and norms are problematized and new identities are created.

The depiction of women, particularly for the

present-day campus fiction, is especially significant. Increasingly, the portrayal of female characters in terms of education, work, needs, emotions and opinions. They tend to discover challenges in their lives of balancing independence with family expectations and social judgment. Questions of love and freedom, friendship, clothing, career paths and personal relationships have their place in their narratives. Meanwhile, the stories reveal that social change does not eradicate gender inequalities altogether. Even in modern and progressive educational institutions, where it seems women have gained ground, women might still be restricted, stereotyped and treated differently than men.

Chetan Bhagat and Ravinder Singh are among Indian English Fiction writers whose stories about education, relationships, aspiration and social pressures, popular in urban India, have helped to make fiction extremely popular with young Indians. A variety of books, including those authored by Bhagat, provide valuable insights into the lives of students, relationships with romantic partners, the role of family, and cultural norms. While these novels vary in their approach to the experience of campus life, they do show how education spaces and youthful relationships can be significant occasions for there to be discussion around broader social issues. Their popularity also gleans the audience's appetite for narratives that bring literature in the measure of a daily everyday experience of young Indians, which is hardly a new phenomenon.

Social values like they appear in story fiction of campus cannot be read as a transition from tradition toward modernity. Indian society has different culture, economic status and disparities in its social attitude which affect the perception of change of the citizens. Youth can have an understanding of equality for men and women while retaining some family practices. Likewise, social pressure on marriage and romantic relationships and behaviors that are congruent with gender roles can co-exist with educational and career autonomy. Modern campus fiction simply embodies these paradoxes, for the characters make decisions influenced by their individual aspirations and social duties.

The contemporary Indian campus fiction is analysed in the present work regarding the depiction of women, reconfiguration of masculinity, portrayal of love relationships and family responsibilities, and the struggle for freedom individuality. It tries to analyze literary imagery of activities scribbled in the periphery of the college campus and how the young characters deal with the conflict between tradition and modernity of their society. The themes explored indicate the importance of the literature of campus fiction, which emphasizes not only student experiences but also the evolving cultural and social landscape in modern India.

Review of Literature

Carvalho (2021) has studied the connection of romance and changing social values and gender identity in the chick lit narratives of present times in India. The paper focused on the dilemma of young women concerning their own choices and cultural expectations and traditional beliefs. It talked about how technology is impacting women's independence, relationship and their decisions. The study gives a clear knowledge of the individuality and personal liberty expressed in the contemporary Indian popular fiction in the context of the changed attitude towards gender.

In Five Point Someone and 2 States, Karthik and Murugan (2023) have explored gender inequality within two of Bhagat's novels. They studied the contrasting expectations placed on male and female characters and how traditional roles value and influenced characters' choices. The study touched upon the experiences of restrictions on women despite being saddled with the task of imparting modern education and having personal aspirations. It pointed to the persistence of gender stereotyping and the fact that equality has assumed a greater significance in the realm of Indian fiction in the modern era.

Kaushik, Singh and Roy (2021) explored social and psychological experiences of a female protagonist in Chetan Bhagat's One Indian Girl. They investigated how educated and independent females cope with the

dilemmas of pursuing aspirations of their professional, romantic and family lives. It talked about the roles of social judgement and traditional expectations in the emotional condition and personal choices of women. The study suggested that the aspect of female independence as a part of changing of gender has importance in the modern society of India. Lone (2019) did a study on the educational atmosphere in Chetan Bhagat's Five Point Someone. The study addressed the educational stress faced by students and how the expectations of the learning institution affect the personal development of students. It explored the influence of examination success, the competitive setting and parental opinions on the confidence of students and their own decision making. The study has identified the challenges posed to the personal identity of youth in a very competitive educational system.

The question that Medha, (2022) raised is whether Chetan Bhagat's fictional literature has the potential to alter the attitude of the society or perpetuate traditional gender role. The study reviewed the portrayal and representation of male and female in terms of education, marriage, relationships and career aspirations. Nurtured a sense of distinction between the familiar social norms and contemporary living. As a result of the research, important questions emerged which gave rise to the desire to explore the degree of transgression of traditional gender roles in the popular fiction of the contemporary Indian context.

For the book, 2 States, by Chetan Bhagat, Nagle and Parray (2023) examine cultural differences and social norms. Their study explored the effect of the regional culture, cultural traditions, and cultural beliefs on the interaction between the central characters. It covered the problems young people faced in deciding on partners for marriage, who come from different cultural traditions. Concurrently, the study pointed to the pervasive independent role of family values in a world of modern education that promotes liberalism and autonomy in making decisions. To study the portrayal of women empowerment in Chetan Bhagat's Revolution 2020 and 2 States: The story of my marriage, Rajaprabu and Keerthi were given the task of studying these novels. Rajaprabu and Keerthi (2019) analysed these novels and studied the portrayal of women empowerment in Chetan Bhagat's Revolution 2020 and 2 States: The story of my marriage. They concentrate on women characters whose voice is represented in their own opinions and indegree decision making on life. It spoke about marriage, expectations of marriage and aspirations of women. The study emphasized the concept of independence of women and showed its application in the changing gender roles in the Indian fiction in modern times.

Ramasamy (2019) examined how the Indian women were depicted and gender stereotypes in the book 'One Indian Girl' by Chetan Bhagat. The study centered on the problems engaged in by ladies who are seeking to be a professional and free lifestyle in their lives. It addressed the way in which traditional expectations continue to shape women's social identities, attitudes around careers and women's relationships to each other and to others. The research reflected the shift in status of women in present day socio-economic condition and the need to challenge the prevailing notions of 'femininity'.

In their article, Rao (2018) unravelled the concepts of caste, masculinity and the role of English language in the public portrayal of Chetan Bhagat and his literary identity. The study addressed the social privilege, cultural influence, and the dominant representation of masculinity. It took into account the role of language and social background in the process of creating identity in the Indian popular culture now. The study provided valuable insight into the relationship of gender and caste with the social power in the domain of literary discourse in English literature which includes literature in India.

Sabeena, Parthiban (2023) described the Conception of Love & Marriage in Chetan Bhagat's 2 States. Their analysis explored the ambivalent ties between romance freedom, cultural ideals, and familial obligations. It discussed the way adolescents try to please their families and yet keep their own opinions. The research underlined the role of emotional

comprehension and adaptation in relationships and also demonstrated the persisting link between our personal decisions and broader social traditions through marriage.

According to Shaikh (2018) in his research he has examined the portrayal of how a traditional male writer, Chetan Bhagat, depicts modern female characters in his novel 'Five Point Pain'. The research focused on a group of women that are breaking away from traditional female roles and embarking on more independent and autonomous life and work. It explained how preference shifts in way of life and social outlook affect women's conception of freedom, relationship and identity. The study underscored the conflict between contemporary expectations and notions of femininity and the aforementioned conventional gender values.

Singh and Kaushik (2021) discussed the depiction of women's empowerment and independence in the modern Indian chick lit. Their research examined how women's roles cope with work, love, and life in an evolving society. It addressed self-confidence and choice in the depiction of contemporary women in India. The act of researching helped to gain an understanding of the evolution of popular ideas about feminism, gender equality and female identity in popular fiction.

Gender Roles in Contemporary Indian Campus Fiction

The role of the male and the female student is an important theme in the modern Indian campus story, which shows how young girls' and boys' roles are different. Rural Indian society has traditionally been male dominated in terms of autonomy, leadership and economic responsibility and women are expected to uphold social boundaries and family traditions. Today, campus fiction calls into doubt these traditional notions, presenting characters whose search for freedom in education, relationships and career has largely been revolutionized. Women characters are now more depicted as assertive characters who can speak their views and take their choices. Meanwhile, boys face pressure to obtain educational achievements, jobs, and meet family expectations.

The characters in Chetan Bhagat's book, Five Point Someone describe the lives of students in an engineering college and the role played by academic competition, parental expectations and relationships. An opportunity to explore how Neha's character has to negotiate emotions in an authority and expectation driven family context. Gender representations such as this Position of Power imply neither that roles are immutable nor that they are invariably defined by professional status. The Campus fiction hence shows how gender identity is an ongoing part of the lives of young people.

Campus Fiction as a Reflection of Youth Culture

Campus fiction has a noteworthy place in modern Indian English literature as it reflects the normal experiences of the students in the school/college environment. Young people can find alternate perspectives and make new friends, fall in love and challenge social conventions on college campuses. The theme of the stories is frequently academic pressure, emotional issues, competition/jealousy, friendship, and wanting to be independent. In these experiences, writers offer a realistic view of the opportunities and challenges that exist in the life of student.

Bhagat's Five Point Someone is about the challenges encountered by the engineering students who have aspirations but cannot withstand studying with their hobbies. The friendship between Ryan, Hari and Alok shows how others react to being disciplined institutionally and to family pressures. Another theme of the novel is a criticism of the emphasis placed on exam marks as the basis for evaluating students. Campus fiction therefore transcends its entertainment purpose, and looks at the educational system's impact on individual behaviours, relationships and social attitudes.

Changing Social Values in Indian Society

The gradual change in social values towards the family, education, marriage, relationship, and personal freedom is seen in the contemporary Indian campus fiction. Traditional values still affect the decisions that people make for when they are young, but

modern education and social interaction has affected and encouraged a questioning of certain traditional practices. Youngsters tend to want to keep up the respect of family traditions, and work towards their own ambitions and emotional independence.

In Chetan Bhagat's novel 2 States he delves into the theme of an individual's decision making and the expectations he has to face from his family, as he and Krish meet in the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad. They form a relationship in a schooling setting in which students of diverse cultures interact. When they decide to marry though, they find themselves facing a conflict of family expectation as well as the differences in regions. This book shows how educational freedom does not preclude traditional social pressures. However, young people must, at times, trade off their own wishes and those of their families. The present conflict is indicative of the changing values in Indian society in present times.

Gender Identity and Individual Freedom

The present-day Indian campus fiction is inextricably linked to a sense of freedom, recognition of society and one's own aspirations in terms of gender identity. Young characters try to a find their identity in a manner unrelated to the one given to them by their families and communities. Almost every pedagogical institution offers students the chance to express themselves and exchange ideas; students have the chance to think again about the definition of masculinity and femininity.

It is important to note that those mentioned changes have been conveyed mainly through the depiction of female characters. In Ananya in 2 States, the notion of education and career are presented as a woman who is empowered, active and professionally ambitious, making decisions in her future. Her romance with Krish is an expectation of equality and choice in terms of emotion. But her independence still is tied up in cultural expectations of both of the families. That is the idea of modern female identity is often fashioned by the interplay of individual wishes and social duties.

These stories are also in the process of transforming men's identity. Nervousness, emotional frailty, and thin margins for success often occur for male characters. Thoughtful struggles - different from confidence and authority being just the definition of manhood. Contemporary campus fiction thus uncovers that men as well as women struggle during their search for identity in a shifting society.

Modernity and Traditional Cultural Expectations

Being modern has become a constant theme in modern campus novel, especially in the depiction of lifestyle and education, love and work among young people in modern India. The educational system, as a whole, has been developed in the “modern” period in which students are engaged with various cultures and are promoted to interact with people who are not within the mainstream social system. Youth are now more and more connected to the world in which they can be independent, make choices, and enjoy more freedom in their relationships. But, deeply embedded cultural norms do sometimes coexist with these attitudes.

In 2 States, the clash between modernism and traditionalism is evident as Krish and Ananya's love story meets with the moulds that are expected by the region and their family. Despite their respective settings having an academic background, the family of the both dwarfs are unable to accept their liaison to begin with. Because what the novel demonstrates is that educational practices and professional improvement are not necessarily consequence of changes in social attitudes today. The decision-making process continues to be influenced by cultural differences and family honour codes and marriage traditions.

The tension here indicates that "modernity" is not seen as a blanket rejection of the old. Instead, it's about adapting old thoughts to new situations and conditions. Young characters often try to find solutions by communicating and compromising and by understanding the emotions of the other.

Representation of Women and Gender Equality

In the current Indian campus scenario, the

image of girls in fiction has evolved in terms of their education, job prospects, and their freedom to make their own choices for their education and careers. Often the female characters are portrayed in school-related conversations, in professional aspirations, and in making romantic choices. These roles is a throwback to the norm, where women's role is confined to only domestic and family life.

But equal social freedom is not necessarily accompanied by more participation in education. There could still be limitations on relationships, marriage, dress and actions that apply to women. Patriarchal attitudes still hold sway in seemingly modern settings, as men and women are not free.

In two States the educational achievements and confidence that Ananya feels create in the eyes of the next public casts a picture of a young woman who expects to participate on an equal footing in decisions about her future. However, family members still have an impact on her relationship. This contrast moves from an individual empowerment to a total sociality acceptance. In modern campus fiction, then, the notion of gender equality is not a state of being but a process.

Romantic Relationships and Changing Attitudes Towards Marriage

Romantic relationships play a crucial role in modern Indian campus fiction, documenting shifts in thought on freedom from emotion, the notion of gender relations, and marriage. When young men and women are a part of a college setting, they can have social interactions with each other that revolve around friendship, shared interests, and understanding. The types of relationships that might emerge can question conventional values about arranged marriage, parental consent, caste, religion, and geographic divisions.

In 2 States, the dynamic of Krish and Ananya depicts how important choice in selecting a life partner is becoming. They marry on their own will and not under an agreement from their families. However, both of them understand the need for parental acceptance and try to reconcile their parents. The narrative highlights the difficulties involved in balancing emotional independence with family responsibilities.

Campus fiction also reveals modification in the anticipation in love relationship. The portrayal of women as active partners whose choices are not ignored or disregarded. Representation of women as active partners, making their own choices and not merely acquiescing to what their male partners might decide. Meanwhile, romantic stories can reproduce traditional practices and assumptions regarding gender roles and emotional responsibility. As can be seen from these contrasting images, there is a complex relationship between social change and already held cultural beliefs.

Influence of Education on Social Attitudes

Educational system is the main protagonist in the Indian Campus Fiction of Today as it affects the formation of personal values, social awareness and individual identification. Colleges and universities offer an environment for students to meet and compare other people and their ideas to what they might have learned by their families which might be different. These can contribute to the development of awareness about gender equality, personal rights and social responsibilities.

But social pressures are also transmitted to students by competition in the academic world, expectations in the working world and preconceptions of what success look like. Following the lives of three protagonists namely Ryan, Hari and Alok, Five Point Someone explores how academic success relates to family expectations and social recognition. Their adversities make it clear that education can open doors to independence but also one denied freedom for personal growth.

Educational change of gender attitudes is of special importance. Favored opportunities to higher education allows for female participation in decision making and employment while fostering their independence and careers. But inequalities in education can't be reversed with schooling. Campus fiction mimics this by creating characters that may have some freedom and interpersonal boundaries in the setting of a school or college.

Final Conclusion

Its present study finds that modern Indian campus fiction plays a significant part in the acceptance of the modern Indian society and its altered gender roles. It was in the eyes of these young characters that the literary masterpieces took account of how expectations and ideas of independence, equality, and personal freedom were changing. In college and university, students have the opportunity to build their identity and challenge the dominant understanding and go through different social relations. The study emphasizes the role of education, friendship, romantic relationships and family responsibilities in the attitudes of youth and its effect on decisions they make.

Both Chetan Bhagat's Five Point Someone and Two States emphasize gender issues, other culture differentiations, academic-stress, and personal choice all important topics of the modern campus fiction contemporary. Ambitions of females are being more heavily expressed and expectations for independence are raising, as is the case with males as well, which have shifting expectations on relationships, career and family issues. Indeed, the experiences of traditional gender stereotype and social limitation still affect their experiences there. As can be seen on these stories, not even every change in social attitude has resulted in total gender equality.

Additionally, the study notes that modernity and tradition are intricately linked with the Indian campus fiction in the present scenario. They often want to find their personal freedom, but at the same time have emotional and cultural ties with the family. The journey they take stresses the gradual shift in Indian society that has many Indians going to school for education and living modern lives while also retaining some of their traditional customs and beliefs. In fact, dealing with personal choices and family wishes in romantic relationships and marriage displays the dynamics of these things.

Generally, it is a fair statement to make that contemporary Indian campus fiction offers some insight into the shifting identities, aspirations and social experiences of the youth of the country. It demonstrates that the issue of gender equality, education and individual option is becoming, and has become, important and that but traditional values have an impact. The study finds that campus fiction is not confined to depicting the lives of students, it is an important literary genre which provides a glimpse into social change, shifting gender relations and the evolving values of today's society in India.

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