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Challenging Patriarchal Norms: Neha Cherian's Assertion of Autonomy in Five Point Someone

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Abstract

In Five Point Someone (2004), Chetan Bhagat introduces Neha Cherian, a character who challenges the traditional roles assigned to women in Indian literature and society. Neha's decision to pursue a relationship with Hari, a student from a lower socio-economic background, despite her father's disapproval, highlights her assertion of autonomy in a patriarchal family. This paper explores how Neha's actions reflect a broader societal shift towards personal independence among urban Indian women, challenging societal norms surrounding arranged marriages, family honour, and gender expectations. Through a feminist lens, the study examines Neha's defiance and the complexities of personal autonomy in the face of patriarchal and class-based control. Neha's defiance of her father's wishes also sheds light on the intersections of gender and class dynamics in Indian society. By choosing to prioritise her own happiness and desires over traditional expectations, Neha is not only challenging her family's authority but also disrupting ingrained power structures that have long dictated women's choices and freedoms. This study ultimately seeks to unpack the nuances of Neha's agency and the larger implications of her actions in a society grappling with changing attitudes towards gender, marriage, and individual autonomy.

Keywords: Neha Cherian, autonomy, patriarchy, feminist theory, Indian literature, Chetan Bhagat, arranged marriage, societal expectations, class dynamics

1. Introduction

Neha Cherian's character in Chetan Bhagat's Five Point Someone (2004) [11] offers a fresh perspective on the representation of women in Indian literature, where historically, female characters have often been portrayed as submissive, bound by familial and societal expectations (Kumar & Aggarwal, 2019) [6]. In contrast, Neha exemplifies a shift towards autonomy and self-assertion, challenging the patriarchal structures represented by her father, Professor Cherian. Neha's refusal to conform to her father's rigid expectations and her decision to pursue a romantic relationship with Hari, a student her father disapproves of, is a critical plotline that not only propels the narrative but also symbolises a break from traditional gender roles (Deshpande, 2016) [4]. Neha's defiance of her father's authority not only showcases her independence but also serves as a powerful commentary on the evolving role of women in Indian society. Through Neha's character, the film challenges long-held stereotypes and highlights the importance of female agency in shaping one's own destiny. This introduction situates Neha's character within the broader context of gender representation in Indian literature and societal norms. In a patriarchal society, where familial authority, especially paternal control, plays a dominant role in shaping women's choices, Neha's defiance marks an important narrative of individual freedom (Sarkar, 2020) [8]. Her relationship with Hari, a boy from a lower socioeconomic background, symbolises her rejection of not just parental authority but also the class hierarchies prevalent in Indian society. Neha's character challenges traditional gender roles and societal expectations, highlighting the complexities of navigating personal agency within a patriarchal framework. Through her actions, Neha embodies the struggle for autonomy and self-determination in a society that often restricts women's choices based on social norms and class distinctions.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how Neha's character in Five Point Someone disrupts conventional depictions of Indian women in literature by embracing autonomy and rejecting traditional societal expectations. Through a feminist lens, this study explores how Neha's actions reflect broader shifts in the perception of women's roles in Indian society, particularly in urban settings where young women increasingly assert their independence in matters of relationships and marriage (Chaudhary, 2017) [3]. This analysis will delve into Neha's defiance of patriarchal norms and her pursuit of personal fulfilment, shedding light on the evolving landscape of gender dynamics in contemporary Indian literature. By dissecting Neha's character development and choices, we aim to showcase how her narrative challenges entrenched stereotypes and empowers readers to rethink traditional gender roles in Indian society.

2. Literature Review

The portrayal of women in Indian literature has historically been rooted in patriarchal ideologies, where women are often depicted as passive, submissive, and dependent on male figures. In many cases, these portrayals reflect the societal norms of the time, where a woman's role was confined to domesticity and obedience (Thakur, 2020) [10]. However, in recent decades, there has been a significant shift in how female characters are represented, with many authors using their works to challenge these traditional norms and offer more complex, autonomous depictions of women (Mukherjee, 2018) [7]. This shift has been influenced by changing social attitudes towards gender equality and women's empowerment. As a result, contemporary Indian literature now showcases a diverse range of female characters who defy stereotypes and assert their agency in various aspects of life.

Several studies have examined the evolving role of women in Indian literature, particularly in contemporary works. Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* (2004) [11] is a significant text in this regard, as it presents a female character who defies the expectations placed upon her by both her family and society (Deshpande, 2016) [4]. Neha's character has been analysed through various lenses, including feminist literary theory, which highlights how her actions challenge the patriarchal structures that govern her life. This analysis sheds light on the ways in which female characters in Indian literature are breaking free from traditional gender roles and asserting their independence. By exploring the complexities of characters like Neha, scholars are able to showcase the changing dynamics of gender relations and societal expectations in contemporary Indian society.

Feminist theory, particularly the works of Judith Butler (1990) [1], provides a framework for understanding the ways in which gender is constructed and performed in literature. Butler's concept of gender performativity suggests that individuals actively construct their identities through repeated actions that conform to societal norms. In this context, Neha's decision to pursue a relationship with Hari can be seen as an act of defiance against the gender roles that have been imposed on her (Butler, 1990) [1]. Other scholars, such as Spivak (1988) [9], have also explored how literature can serve as a means of resistance to patriarchal structures, particularly in post-colonial societies like India. Through analysing Neha's actions in the context of gender performativity, we can see how literature can be a powerful tool for challenging and subverting traditional norms. By examining the ways in which characters like Neha navigate societal expectations, we gain insight into the complexities of gender construction and performance in literature.

This literature review will explore the historical context of women's representation in Indian literature, drawing on feminist literary criticism and contemporary analyses of Bhagat's work to examine how Neha's character challenges traditional norms and asserts her autonomy. Through this analysis, we can better understand the ways in which literature can serve as a platform for resistance and empowerment for marginalised groups. By deconstructing and reimagining gender roles through characters like Neha, authors have the opportunity to reshape societal perceptions and advocate for greater inclusivity and equality.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine Neha Cherian's character in *Five Point Someone* through a feminist lens. A qualitative methodology is appropriate for this research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of how literature reflects and challenges societal norms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) ^[5]. This approach focusses on textual analysis, particularly examining key passages in the novel where Neha asserts her independence and defies societal expectations. By analysing Neha's character in this way, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation surrounding gender roles and representation in literature. This research also seeks to highlight the importance of diverse and complex female characters in challenging traditional narratives.

The primary method of analysis will be a close reading of the text, with a focus on scenes where Neha interacts with her father and Hari. These interactions are critical to understanding how Neha's character navigates the tensions between familial expectations and personal desires. By analysing the language, narrative structure, and character development in these scenes, this study will explore how Bhagat uses Neha's character to critique patriarchal values. Additionally, the study will examine how Neha's relationships with her father and Hari shape her identity and influence her decisions throughout the novel. This analysis will provide insight into Bhagat's portrayal of gender dynamics and the impact of societal norms on individual agency.

Feminist literary theory will serve as the theoretical framework for this analysis. This theory examines how literature both reflects and constructs gender norms, and it is particularly useful for analysing characters who challenge traditional gender roles (Butler, 1990; Spivak, 1988) [1, 9]. The concept of gender performativity will be applied to Neha's character to explore how her actions represent a rejection of the passive, submissive role typically assigned to women in patriarchal societies (Butler, 1990) [1]. By analysing Neha's character through the lens of feminist literary theory, we can gain a deeper understanding of how Bhagat subverts traditional gender expectations in his novel. This analysis will shed light on the ways in which Neha's agency and defiance contribute to a larger critique of patriarchal values within the text.

Data for this study will be collected from the text of *Five Point Someone* as well as secondary sources, including academic articles, books, and interviews with Bhagat where he discusses his portrayal of female characters. This combination of primary and secondary sources will provide a comprehensive understanding of how Neha's character functions as a critique of patriarchal norms in contemporary Indian society. By examining Neha's actions and decisions

in the novel, we will be able to uncover the underlying messages Bhagat conveys about gender roles and expectations. This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of how literature can serve as a tool for challenging societal norms and promoting gender equality.

4. Results and Analysis

The results of this study indicate that Neha Cherian's character in *Five Point Someone* serves as a powerful critique of patriarchal control and societal expectations placed on women. Through a detailed analysis of the text, it becomes clear that Bhagat uses Neha's relationship with Hari as a vehicle to explore the tensions between individual desires and societal obligations (Chaudhary, 2017) [3]. Furthermore, the analysis reveals how Neha's character subverts traditional gender roles and empowers herself by making choices that prioritise her own happiness and autonomy. This study highlights the importance of literature in challenging oppressive structures and advocating for gender equality in society.

One of the key moments in the novel occurs when Neha defies her father's authority by choosing to date Hari, despite his disapproval. This act of rebellion is significant in the context of Indian societal norms, where arranged marriages and parental control over a daughter's life choices are deeply ingrained (Chakraborty, 2019) [2]. Neha's decision to pursue a relationship with Hari, a boy from a lower socio-economic background, reflects her rejection of these traditional expectations and her assertion of independence. This defiance not only challenges the patriarchal system within her own family but also symbolises a larger resistance against oppressive structures that limit women's autonomy. By choosing love over societal expectations, Neha embodies the struggle for gender equality and individual freedom in a society that often prioritises tradition and conformity.

The analysis also reveals that Neha's defiance is not without consequences. Her relationship with Hari leads to familial tension, particularly with her father, who represents the patriarchal authority in her life. This tension is a reflection of the broader societal conflict between tradition and modernity as young women like Neha increasingly assert their autonomy in matters of love and relationships (Sarkar, 2020) [8]. Ultimately, Neha's story serves as a powerful example of the ongoing battle for gender equality and individual agency in a society that is still deeply rooted in traditional values. Her defiance of societal expectations highlights the struggles faced by many young women in asserting their independence and making choices that go against the grain. Despite the challenges and consequences she faces, Neha's courage and determination to follow her heart pave the way for a more inclusive and progressive future for women in her community.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that Neha's character is a reflection of the changing attitudes among young Indian women, particularly in urban areas. As societal norms evolve, more women are asserting their independence and making choices that align with their personal desires rather than conforming to familial expectations (Kumar & Aggarwal, 2019) [6]. Bhagat's portrayal of Neha highlights this shift and challenges the traditional representations of women in Indian literature. Through Neha's unwavering

courage and resilience, Bhagat showcases a new archetype of female protagonist who defies societal expectations and forges her own path. By breaking free from the constraints of tradition, Neha becomes a symbol of empowerment for women across India, inspiring them to pursue their dreams and assert their agency. In doing so, Bhagat's portrayal of Neha not only challenges conventional gender roles but also paves the way for a more inclusive and progressive future for women in Indian literature.

5. Findings and Discussions

The findings of this study suggest that Neha Cherian's character in *Five Point Someone* represents a significant departure from the traditional portrayal of women in Indian literature. By asserting her independence and defying her father's expectations, Neha challenges the patriarchal norms that govern her life and, in doing so, becomes a symbol of the changing attitudes towards gender and autonomy in Indian society (Chaudhary, 2017) [3]. This shift in representation not only challenges the status quo of traditional gender roles but also opens up new possibilities for female characters in Indian literature to break free from stereotypes and assert their agency. The discussions surrounding Neha's character highlight the importance of diverse and multifaceted portrayals of women in literature to reflect evolving societal norms and values.

One of the key findings of this study is that Neha's rebellion is not purely an act of defiance but also a reflection of the broader socio-cultural changes taking place in India. As more women enter the workforce and gain access to education, they are increasingly challenging the traditional gender roles that have been imposed on them. Neha's character embodies this shift as she navigates the complexities of love, family, and societal expectations in a rapidly changing society (Sarkar, 2020) [8]. Through Neha's character, readers are able to witness the complexities and nuances of women's experiences in a changing society, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of female identity. This study highlights the importance of literature in capturing and reflecting the shifting dynamics of gender roles and societal expectations.

Another important finding is that while Neha's defiance is empowering, it also leads to significant personal conflict. Her relationship with Hari creates tension within her family, particularly with her father, who represents the traditional values she is rebelling against (Chakraborty, 2019) [2]. This conflict highlights the challenges that women face when they choose to defy societal norms, as they often have to navigate the delicate balance between personal desires and familial obligations. Overall, Neha's story serves as a poignant reminder of the complexities and struggles that come with challenging traditional gender roles. It sheds light on the internal and external conflicts that women like her may encounter in their pursuit of independence and self-fulfilment.

6. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into Neha Cherian's character and her role as a symbol of autonomy in *Five Point Someone*, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. One limitation is that the study focuses primarily on a literary analysis of a single character, which

may not fully capture the broader societal implications of her defiance. Further research could explore how Neha's character compares to other female characters in contemporary Indian literature, as well as how her defiance reflects the experiences of real women in India.

Another limitation is the lack of empirical data to support the analysis. While this study draws on existing literature and feminist theory to analyse Neha's character, it does not include interviews or surveys with Indian women to explore how their experiences align with those of Neha. Future research could address this limitation by conducting qualitative interviews with women who have faced similar struggles with autonomy and familial expectations.

Finally, the study is limited by its focus on a single novel by Chetan Bhagat. While *Five Point Someone* is a significant text in contemporary Indian literature, further research could explore how other works by Bhagat and other Indian authors portray women's defiance of patriarchal norms.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Neha Cherian's character in Five Point Someone represents a significant shift in the portrayal of women in Indian literature. By asserting her autonomy and challenging the patriarchal norms that govern her life, Neha becomes a symbol of the changing attitudes towards gender and independence in contemporary Indian society. Her defiance of her father's expectations and her decision to pursue a relationship with Hari reflect the broader societal changes that are taking place in urban India, where more women are asserting their independence and making choices that align with their personal desires (Sarkar, 2020) [8]. Through Neha's character, Chetan Bhagat highlights the importance of individual agency and the need for women to break free from traditional constraints. Neha's actions serve as a powerful commentary on the evolving role of women in Indian society and their increasing empowerment.

While Neha's rebellion is empowering, it is also fraught with personal conflict as she navigates the tension between her personal desires and familial obligations. This study highlights the complexities of autonomy in a patriarchal society and offers valuable insights into how literature can serve as a means of critiquing and challenging societal norms. Neha's story sheds light on the internal struggles faced by women who strive for independence while also grappling with societal expectations. By examining her journey, readers are prompted to reflect on the complexities of gender dynamics and the ongoing battle for equality in modern India.

Future research could build on this study by exploring how other female characters in Indian literature navigate the tension between autonomy and societal expectations, as well as how these portrayals reflect the real-world experiences of women in India. By delving deeper into the narratives of diverse female characters, researchers can uncover the nuances of the female experience in Indian society and how it intersects with broader cultural norms. This exploration could provide valuable insights into the ways in which women navigate the complexities of tradition and modernity, shedding light on the challenges and triumphs of those who dare to defy societal expectations. By amplifying these voices and stories, we can continue to push for greater gender equality and empower women to live authentically

and on their own terms. Through understanding and highlighting the experiences of women in India, we can work towards creating a more equitable society where women are able to thrive and fulfil their potential without being constrained by societal norms. By celebrating the resilience and courage of these women who challenge the status quo, we can inspire others to break free from traditional constraints and pave their own paths towards empowerment and self-determination. Ultimately, by valuing and amplifying the voices of women in India, we can contribute to a more inclusive and just society for all.

8. References

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