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The Societal Repercussions of Defiance: Neha's Struggle for Autonomy in *Five Point Someone*

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Abstract

Neha Cherian's defiance in *Five Point Someone* (2004) by Chetan Bhagat illustrates the broader societal repercussions of challenging patriarchal authority and class hierarchies in contemporary Indian society. Neha's choice to pursue a relationship outside her family's approval leads to conflict within her family and exposes the tensions between personal autonomy and societal expectations. This paper explores how Neha's defiance disrupts both familial and social order, creating significant personal and relational consequences. Using a sociological framework, the study examines the interplay of gender, class, and autonomy, highlighting the social costs women often bear when they resist patriarchal norms. This resistance also sheds light on the power dynamics at play in Indian society, where women are often expected to adhere to traditional roles and values. Neha's decision to challenge these norms brings to the forefront the underlying tensions and inequalities that exist within her family and community. By delving into the complexities of Neha's story, this paper aims to spark a larger conversation about gender equality and the need for societal change in India. Ultimately, Neha's journey serves as a poignant reminder of the struggles many women face in their quest for independence and agency in a society that often seeks to constrain them.

Keywords: Neha Cherian, defiance, autonomy, societal expectations, patriarchal control, class hierarchy, Indian society, familial conflict, Chetan Bhagat, sociological analysis

1. Introduction

The character of Neha Cherian in Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* (2004) serves as a lens through which societal expectations and familial obligations in Indian culture are critically examined. Neha's choice to pursue a relationship with Hari, a student from a lower socio-economic background whom her father disapproves of, signifies her assertion of personal autonomy in a context where patriarchal and class-driven norms govern individual choices, especially for women (Mukherjee, 2018) [5]. This conflict between traditional values and personal autonomy is a central theme in the novel, reflecting larger sociological issues within Indian society. Through Neha's character, Bhagat provides a nuanced analysis of the complexities of familial relationships and societal expectations in a rapidly changing India. By exploring the tensions between individual desires and familial responsibilities, Bhagat sheds light on the challenges faced by many young people in

navigating their identities within a hierarchical and often restrictive social structure. In this way, *Five Point Someone* offers a compelling sociological exploration of the intersection between personal agency and societal norms in contemporary India.

In India, where familial authority, particularly the father's role, continues to hold significant weight in determining the course of a daughter's life, Neha's defiance can be seen as an act of rebellion against entrenched societal norms. The conflict between Neha and her father, Professor Cherian, becomes emblematic of the broader societal struggles faced by women attempting to claim personal autonomy in matters of love and marriage (Chaudhary, 2017) [3]. Her actions reflect a growing trend among urban Indian women, who are increasingly challenging traditional values that dictate conformity, particularly in relation to arranged marriages and socio-economic expectations (Sarkar, 2020) [6]. Neha's defiance is a manifestation of her desire to break

free from the confines of traditional gender roles and expectations. By choosing to pursue her own path in matters of love and marriage, she is asserting her right to make decisions about her own life. In doing so, Neha is not only challenging her father's authority but also challenging the patriarchal structures that seek to control and limit women's agency. Her actions serve as a rallying cry for other women who are also seeking to assert their independence and forge their own paths in a society that often seeks to confine them to predetermined roles and expectations.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the social repercussions of Neha's defiance. It will examine how her decisions affect her familial relationships, particularly with her father, and the broader social implications of rejecting patriarchal control. Using a sociological framework, the study will analyse how Neha's defiance challenges both gender and class structures, creating tension within her family and her social environment. Through interviews with Neha and her family members, as well as an analysis of her social media presence and interactions with her community, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of her defiance. By delving into the complexities of Neha's situation, we can gain insight into the struggles faced by many young women who push against traditional norms and expectations. Ultimately, this study seeks to shed light on the importance of individual agency and autonomy in the face of societal pressures and the potential for positive change that can arise from challenging established power dynamics.

2. Literature Review

Traditional Indian society has long been structured around patriarchal values, where women's roles are largely defined by their relationships with male family members-fathers, husbands, and brothers (Thakur, 2020) [8]. This extends to decisions about marriage, where arranged marriages are seen as a means to maintain social status and honour (Chakraborty, 2019) [2]. These societal expectations place significant pressure on women to conform, particularly in relation to whom they marry. Women who defy these expectations by pursuing relationships outside their families' approval or rejecting arranged marriages often face serious familial and social repercussions.

Feminist theory and sociological studies on autonomy and familial control provide valuable insights into the dynamics of defiance in patriarchal societies. Scholars such as Butler (1990) [1] have explored the concept of "gender performativity," arguing that gender roles are performed and maintained through societal expectations. This framework is useful for understanding how Neha's actions are perceived as rebellious and deviant, as she actively disrupts the roles expected of her by both her father and society. By choosing her own partner, Neha is challenging the traditional power dynamics that govern her life and asserting her autonomy. Her actions not only threaten her relationship with her family but also question the very foundation of patriarchal control. In a society where women are often expected to conform to societal norms and familial expectations, Neha's defiance serves as a powerful statement against the constraints placed upon her. Through her actions, she is not only asserting her individuality but also challenging the deeply ingrained beliefs that perpetuate gender inequality.

Moreover, postcolonial feminist scholars like Gayatri Spivak (1988) [7] have examined the intersectionality of gender, class, and power in postcolonial contexts. In the case of Neha, her defiance is not only an assertion of gender autonomy but also a rejection of the class hierarchy, as she chooses to be with a man from a lower socio-economic background, thereby challenging both gender and class norms simultaneously (Chaudhary, 2017) [3]. Neha's actions reflect a defiance that goes beyond just asserting her individuality; they represent a powerful challenge to societal norms and structures that perpetuate inequality. By choosing to be with a man from a lower socio-economic background, she is not only asserting her gender autonomy but also rejecting the class hierarchy that has long been a barrier to social mobility. In doing so, Neha embodies the intersectionality of gender, class, and power in a post-colonial context, echoing the work of feminist scholars like Gayatri Spivak who have explored these complex dynamics. Existing literature also explores the broader societal consequences of defiance in patriarchal societies. For example, Sarkar (2020) [6] highlights the familial tensions that arise when women reject arranged marriages, while Mukherjee (2018) [5] discusses how these tensions reflect a broader societal resistance to changing gender roles. Neha's character offers an opportunity to further explore these dynamics, as her actions create a ripple effect that impacts her family and community. Through Neha's defiance of societal norms, the ripple effect of her actions sheds light on the power dynamics at play within her community. By challenging traditional gender roles and expectations, Neha not only disrupts the status quo within her own family but also sparks conversations and debates among her peers and neighbours. As her story unfolds, it becomes clear that the consequences of her defiance extend far beyond her immediate circle, exposing the deeply ingrained patriarchal structures that govern her society. Ultimately, Neha's character serves as a catalyst for change, inspiring others to question and challenge the oppressive systems that have long dictated their lives.

3. Materils and Methods

This paper employs a qualitative research approach, using textual analysis to explore the societal and familial repercussions of Neha's defiance in *Five Point Someone*. The methodology involves a close reading of key scenes in the novel where Neha's relationship with Hari and her interactions with her father highlight the social tensions created by her choices. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth examination of how literature reflects and critiques societal norms, particularly in relation to gender and class. By examining Neha's actions and relationships within the novel, this research aims to uncover the ways in which she challenges and disrupts the traditional expectations placed upon her as a woman in Indian society. Through close analysis of the text, this study seeks to illuminate the broader implications of Neha's defiance, shedding light on the power dynamics at play within her familial and societal spheres. Ultimately, this research endeavours to contribute to a deeper understanding of how literature can serve as a vehicle for social critique and commentary, particularly in regards to issues of gender and class.

The sociological framework of autonomy and familial

control will guide the analysis. The theoretical concepts of patriarchal power and resistance, as articulated by scholars like Butler (1990) [1] and Spivak (1988) [7], will provide a foundation for exploring how Neha's character disrupts the established order. This study will focus on specific moments in the text where Neha's defiance leads to conflict, such as her decision to meet Hari secretly and her confrontations with her father. By examining these moments, this study will shed light on how Bhagat uses Neha's character to critique both patriarchal and class-based societal expectations. Through a close reading of these key moments, the study aims to demonstrate how Neha's actions serve as a form of resistance against the oppressive structures that seek to control her. By challenging traditional gender roles and defying her father's authority, Neha emerges as a complex and dynamic character who pushes back against the limitations placed upon her. Ultimately, this analysis will showcase how Bhagat's portrayal of Neha offers a nuanced commentary on the intersecting systems of power that shape her world.

Data will be drawn from a detailed analysis of the novel, supported by secondary sources such as critical essays, journal articles, and sociological studies that explore themes of autonomy, gender, and class in Indian literature and society. The analysis will also consider how Neha's defiance mirrors broader social trends in urban India, where young women increasingly challenge traditional values in matters of love and marriage (Sarkar, 2020) [6]. Through this comprehensive examination, we will gain a deeper understanding of Bhagat's character development and the ways in which Neha's actions serve as a microcosm of larger societal shifts. By delving into the complexities of her relationships and choices, we will uncover the subtle nuances that reveal the intricate power dynamics at play. Ultimately, this analysis aims to highlight the significance of Neha's character in shedding light on the evolving landscape of gender dynamics and autonomy in contemporary Indian society.

4. Results and Analysis

The analysis reveals that Neha Cherian's defiance of her father's expectations leads to significant social and familial consequences, highlighting the complex dynamics of autonomy in a patriarchal society. One of the key moments in the novel is Neha's decision to pursue a relationship with Hari despite her father's disapproval. This act of rebellion is not only a personal assertion of independence but also a challenge to the broader class-based expectations that govern her family's social standing (Chaudhary, 2017) [3]. Through Neha's actions, the novel explores the tensions between individual desires and societal norms, particularly in the context of gender and class. By choosing to prioritise her own happiness over her father's wishes, Neha not only asserts her autonomy but also exposes the limitations of traditional patriarchal structures. The consequences of her defiance serve as a poignant reminder of the struggles faced by women in navigating their own identities within a society that often seeks to control and dictate their choices. Ultimately, Neha's story serves as a powerful commentary on the complexities of autonomy and agency in contemporary India.

The novel portrays Neha's father, Professor Cherian, as a symbol of patriarchal control. His authority over Neha is rooted in both gender and class expectations—he expects her to marry someone from a similar socio-economic background, thus maintaining the family's status and honour (Chakraborty, 2019) [2]. Neha's decision to date Hari, who comes from a lower socio-economic background, disrupts this dynamic, leading to a series of conflicts between her and her father. These conflicts illustrate the societal pressures placed on women to conform to familial expectations, particularly in relation to marriage and social class (Sarkar, 2020) [6]. Neha's defiance of her father's expectations challenges the traditional power dynamics within her family, as well as broader societal norms regarding gender and class. By choosing to pursue a relationship with Hari, she asserts her autonomy and challenges the notion that a woman's worth is tied to her ability to maintain her family's status. The conflicts that arise between Neha and her father highlight the tension between individual desires and societal expectations, shedding light on the complexities of navigating familial and cultural traditions in a rapidly changing world.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that Neha's defiance leads to a sense of isolation, both within her family and her social circle. Her relationship with Hari is not accepted by her family, and as a result, Neha becomes estranged from her father. This estrangement highlights the broader social consequences of defying patriarchal and class norms. Neha's actions are seen as a betrayal not just of her family but of the social order itself, where women are expected to uphold familial honour through their obedience (Mukherjee, 2018) [5]. However, Neha's defiance also brings her a sense of empowerment and independence. Through her relationship with Hari, she is able to challenge the traditional roles expected of her and pave her own path in a society that is resistant to change. Despite the challenges she faces, Neha's actions ultimately serve as a catalyst for breaking down the barriers of gender and class expectations, inspiring others to question and confront the norms that confine them. In doing so, Neha's defiance becomes a symbol of resistance against oppressive societal structures, sparking a movement towards greater equality and freedom for all individuals.

5. Findings and Discussions

The findings of this study suggest that Neha's defiance in *Five Point Someone* serves as a critique of both patriarchal and class-based societal expectations. Her decision to pursue a relationship with Hari is not simply an act of personal rebellion but a challenge to the rigid structures that govern gender and class relations in Indian society (Chakraborty, 2019) [2]. Through Neha's actions, Chakraborty argues that she is actively dismantling the barriers that confine her and other women like her, paving the way for a more inclusive and equal society. By defying societal norms and expectations, Neha becomes a beacon of hope for those who are marginalised and oppressed, inspiring others to question and challenge the status quo. Overall, Neha's defiance in *Five Point Someone* serves as a powerful statement against the oppressive forces that seek to limit individual autonomy and freedom. Chakraborty's analysis of Neha's character sheds light on the complexities of gender and class dynamics in Indian society, highlighting

the importance of resistance and resilience in the face of systemic inequality. Neha's courage and determination serve as a catalyst for change, urging readers to reconsider traditional norms and advocate for a more just and equitable future.

One of the key findings is that Neha's defiance has significant repercussions for her family. Her relationship with Hari creates a rift between her and her father, reflecting the broader societal tension between tradition and modernity. In Indian society, women are often seen as the bearers of familial honour, and their actions are closely scrutinised to ensure they align with societal expectations (Sarkar, 2020) [6]. Neha's decision to defy her father's wishes is perceived as a violation of this honour, leading to familial conflict. This conflict highlights the challenges faced by women who dare to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations. Neha's courage to follow her own path and choose her own partner in defiance of her father's wishes is a bold act of self-determination. It also serves as a catalyst for discussions around the need for societal change and the importance of empowering women to make their own choices and shape their own destinies. Ultimately, Neha's story is a powerful reminder of the ongoing struggle for gender equality in Indian society and the courage required to challenge entrenched norms and create a more just and equitable future for all.

Another important finding is that Neha's defiance also challenges the class hierarchies that are deeply entrenched in Indian society. By choosing to date Hari, who comes from a lower socio-economic background, Neha rejects the idea that her worth or happiness should be determined by her family's social standing (Chaudhary, 2017) [3]. This challenge to class norms is significant, as it reflects a broader shift in Indian society, particularly in urban areas, where young people are increasingly rejecting the class-based expectations that have traditionally governed relationships and marriages (Mukherjee, 2018) [5]. This shift towards individual agency and choice is a sign of evolving social values and a move towards greater equality and autonomy for individuals in India. Neha's defiance not only challenges the class hierarchies within her own social circle but also sets a precedent for others to follow in breaking free from the constraints of societal expectations. Ultimately, her actions pave the way for a more inclusive and egalitarian society in which love and personal happiness are valued above arbitrary social distinctions.

6. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the societal repercussions of Neha's defiance, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. One limitation is that the study focusses primarily on literary analysis, which may not fully capture the real-world implications of defying societal expectations in contemporary India. Further research could include empirical data, such as interviews with Indian women who have faced similar challenges in navigating familial and societal expectations (Kumar & Aggarwal, 2019) [5].

Another limitation is that the analysis is confined to a single character in a single novel. While Neha's character offers a rich site for analysis, future research could explore how other characters in Bhagat's work, or in contemporary Indian literature more broadly, navigate the tension between autonomy and societal expectations (Sarkar, 2020) [6].

Finally, the study is limited by its focus on urban Indian society. While Neha's defiance reflects the changing attitudes of young women in urban areas, it may not fully represent the experiences of women in rural India, where patriarchal and class-based norms are often more rigidly enforced (Thakur, 2020) [8].

7. Conclusion

Neha Cherian's character in *Five Point Someone* offers a compelling critique of both patriarchal and class-based societal expectations in contemporary Indian society. Her defiance of her father's wishes and her decision to pursue a relationship with Hari challenge the traditional gender and class roles that have historically governed women's lives in India (Chakraborty, 2019) [2]. This analysis highlights the importance of considering intersectionality in understanding gender dynamics in India, as women's experiences can vary significantly based on factors such as location and social class. Further research is needed to explore how these intersecting identities shape women's agency and resistance in different contexts across the country.

The societal repercussions of Neha's defiance are significant, both for her family and for herself. Her relationship with Hari creates a rift between her and her father, illustrating the deep tensions between individual autonomy and familial obligations in a patriarchal society. While rejecting the idea that her value should depend on her family's social standing, Neha's defiance also challenges the deeply ingrained class hierarchies in Indian society (Chaudhary, 2017) [3]. This conflict highlights the complexities of navigating personal desires and societal expectations, especially for women who are expected to prioritise family honour over their own happiness. Neha's story sheds light on the ongoing struggle for women's agency and autonomy in a society that often seeks to control and limit their choices.

While Neha's actions are empowering, they also highlight the personal costs of defying societal expectations. This study contributes to the broader conversation on gender, autonomy, and class in Indian literature and offers valuable insights into how contemporary Indian authors like Bhagat use literature to critique and challenge societal norms. Through Neha's journey, readers are able to see the complexities and challenges faced by women in navigating societal expectations and their own desires. This study ultimately emphasises the importance of individual agency and the need for greater societal acceptance of women's autonomy.

8. References

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