

MAKING THE INCOMPLETE TO COMPLETE – AN ANALYSIS OF CHETAN BHAGAT’S HALF GIRLFRIEND

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Abstract

Chetan Bhagat, the youth icon in the arena of Indian English literature, has carved a unique platitude among the book lovers, especially youth. His simple and eloquent language used for the articulation of current issues in the society attracted the readers and it makes him the favourite writer among the readers of the present era. He explores the social and political issues of the contemporary young generation who passes through various challenges in their life. His writings prove that the language can make the people arouse with humanity and to build stable human relationships irrespective of culture and ethos. Bhagat explores the possibility of fictional writings and non-fiction writings to enter into the minds of the readers to make them think about the social issues and their solutions. Bhagat’s simple language easily creates interest in reading among youngsters and it creates awareness among people of all ages about the social and political issues that happen across the country. His popular fiction Half Girlfriend tells how the deficiency of a human relationship can be rectified and how the incomplete can be made complete. The ‘half’ in the title shows incompleteness and at the end of the story, it becomes complete and contented. It also reveals the importance of language proficiency in the globalized society and how its impact can make changes in the human relationships. This paper analyses Bhagat’s novel Half Girlfriend and explores how the human relationship can make changes in the life of an individual and what strategies are used by the author to make the incomplete to complete in every human relationship.

Keywords: Incompleteness, social issues, human relationship, Love, Marriage.

Introduction

Chetan Bhagat is one of the most popular writers of Indian English Literature who has proved his unique style in articulating various social issues in the life of the young generation of the contemporary Indian society. Bhagat acquired the topmost place in the list of popular writers in India because of his limitless usage of the words with simple language. He gives equal significance to male characters and female characters in his writings. His female characters are the women who give their preference to their career as well as their personal emotions. The female characters of

Chetan Bhagat have some extraordinary qualities and they are portrayed as strong, bold and beautiful. He expresses his ideas about the common issues of young people in the society with a realistic and humorous approach that leads to success. Alison Ross in the book *The Language of Humour* remarks about the usage of comic elements in a social aspect and states that,

“The most significant objective of humour is to induce laughter ... humour is defined as something that makes a person laugh or smile from the bottom of his heart” (Alison Ross 1998).

Half Girlfriend is the story of two young students at the same college, Riya Somani and Madhav Jha who are not able to understand each other at the beginning of their relationship and hence facing so many challenges in sustaining the relationship. They both are passionate to the basketball game and so Bhagat symbolizes their journey of life in the college and outside the college by using this game in the novel. Madhav struggles to speak in English in the campus as he has hailed from a rural Indian village. He is not able to convey his expressions in good English as he is lacking in the language, and hence he fails in capturing the heart of the heroine. He tries to make Riya as his girlfriend yet she was not ready to accept his proposal, instead she asks him to make her his half girlfriend. They both break up in the college itself and Madhav diverts his focus on the progress of his mother's school in his native village. Riya marries the rich businessman Rohan and moves to London but still she was passionate to travelling and music. She wants to concentrate more on music but she realizes that her hypocritical and uncultured husband Rohan can never be a support to her in achieving her dream. At this point of life, she again tries to connect with Madhav but Madhav's mother was not ready to accept a divorcee as his partner. In a desperate mood, Riya moves to New York with the help of a false reason of lung cancer and succeeds in the venture of becoming a popular singer, as her long term aspiration. At the end of the novel, the readers are contented with a happiness that Madhav succeeds in attaining the heart of Riya and finally he is able to give a new life to her. Chetan Bhagat delineates the human emotions in an extraordinary style with the realistic events that have been included in the novel. The man woman relationship and its ups and downs are portrayed in a realistic mode all through the novel by the author.

Incompleteness to Completeness – A Journey of Half to Full

Bhagat brings the characters of Half Girlfriend from a stage of incompleteness to attain completeness by realizing their own potentials and value of relationships. The importance of English language in establishing a relationship is depicted in a critical manner by Bhagat as the protagonist Madhav finds difficult to communicate with his girlfriend and

fails to capture her heart. The researchers Sabina Musthafa and Suhail observe this plight of an Indian youth and writes,

“Bhagat opines that our country is divided into two categories of people – one is the elite English-speaking category and the other is non-English speaking category... most of the young people in the second category feels inferior when they face people from the elite English-speaking category” (Musthafa & Suhail 2015).

Madhav's poor English proficiency with Bihari tone makes him feel inferior whenever he wants to communicate with Riya because she belongs to an educated urban family. This provokes him to learn English. Both Prof. Pareira and Prof. Fernandez who interviewed Madhav at the college have the same opinion about this and had an observation that,

“Madhav Jha's English looks awkward with Bihari Accent” (12).

On the very first day in the college Madhav gets attracted towards the charming beauty of Riya as she is a multifaceted talented student such as a good basketball player and literature student, with pretty eyebrows. At the first sight, Madhav falls love with her as he states,

“I wanted to take a snapshot of her sweaty face and store it in my mind's camera for life” (HGF 16).

Bhagat describes the beauty of Riya Somani through the words of the protagonist,

“Five feet, nine inches is tall for an Indian girl ... long neck, long legs held every guy's attention” (14).

Madhav wishes to befriend with her, but no students from a village outside Delhi was bold enough to talk to a girl like Riya who belongs to a high-class elite family. However, he tries to catch her attraction at the basketball court in the campus. They both start talking about basketball as they are interested in the game. He realizes the fact that,

“There is nothing else that can help me to impress her other than to become a coach” (18).

They share each other, their ideas to make their playing talent better. The presence of Riya makes Madhav play basketball even in

a different level. They share each other about their dreams. Riya reveals her objective of life that she does not want to get married rather to develop her professional talent and to find out a better job opening in any country. The novel *Half Girlfriend* throws light to the real aspirations of a typical Indian girl who wants to achieve heights in her career. Bhagat tries to delineate the dreams of an average Indian girl about her life and career through the character of Riya. Riya's words prove this,

"I have this dream. I want to play music and to become a singer ... I don't want to marry a millionaire ... but to be surrounded by passionate people ... music CDs" (32).

The interest they have towards the same game makes them come closer to develop an intimacy between them. They start spending time together to share the views on basketball and Madhav finds relaxation from his overloaded and stressed life whenever he is with Riya. Their relationship develops closer and closer as the days pass but Riya reminds Madhav now and then that they are only friends. One day Madhav visits Riya at her place when she was suffering from fever and he tries to kiss her. Madhav treats her as his girlfriend whereas Riya affirms that she is not a girlfriend rather only a half girlfriend. Madhav questions her for that and asks whether the friends can have affectionate kisses and hugs but Riya says that she is not interested with any physical attachment as she can be only a half girlfriend. Madhav fails to understand her and he becomes bewildered at her answer. He is not able to understand her psyche as she hugs him when they spend time together and she asks him to visit her place when she wears her night clothes. He thinks that the psyche of a woman can never be understood by even a genius when she is in private or public. Her psyche changes according to the situations and she treats men in different views at different times. Madhav is not able to define the relationship he has with Riya, whether it is a friendship or a romantic relationship. The researchers Parveen Aisha and Gupta Tanu opines,

"Bhagat novel reveals different shades of love through portraying the passion of Madhav Jha towards Riya Somani ... Madhav's passion arouses emotions and feelings of every reader as it stirs the

imagination bottom to top" (Aisha & Gupta 2015).

The misperception continues in Madhav and one day when Riya is sick, she comes to his room to take rest. This is the situation Madhav tries to make love with her and Riya gets annoyed with his behaviour. She shouts at him,

"What is your problem?"

Madhav forces her to have physical intimacy with him, and he utters in frustrated tone,

"Make love to me or leave me" (75).

Riya was not ready to accept his desire due to her personal predicaments and affirms that she is not able to make any physical intimacy with him. However, Madhav believes that the only way to obtain her love is through the physical relationship. This incident leads to a great misunderstanding between them and finally the break up. Later on, Madhav moves to his native hamlet in Bihar and takes part in the activities of his mother's school development programmes. He finds it difficult to forget Riya but wants to divert his mind from the memories. In the meanwhile, Riya gets married with Rohan who promised her with many adventures and travels. Rohan takes his wife with him abroad where they start the life with a new culture. In the beginning, Riya thinks that her life is secure with Rohan whereas day by day it becomes more complicated and their married life ends up with a divorce. Bhagat is not presenting feminism directly in the story of Riya yet he wants to present the feministic attitude through the character of Riya. Rohan is not a perfect husband to Riya as he does not pay attention to her and acting as he is always busy with his business and also harassed her physically because of his habit of consuming drugs. Her mother-in-law dominates her by giving order to wear only Indian clothes. She says,

"Wear only Indian Clothes. ... Rohan's mom said to me today"

"He slapped me in front of his mother thrice ... even pulled my hair" (201).

Rohan's illegal relationship with Kristin, made Riya strong enough to take the decision of leaving him at this point. Even her

parents do not support her but they supported Rohan by saying he is right.

“He seemed so nice’, Dad said at dinner without looking at me” (202).

Bhagat’s attempt is to present the dominating nature of men upon women in the male dominating society in India. Men treats women as an object that is used for satisfying his physical hunger. Riya has her own dreams and she wants to achieve her dream independently and hence she chooses the option of divorce from Rohan. She wants to rebuild the relationship with Madhav but his mother does not accept a divorcee and she wants Riya to get out Madhav’s life. So, she leaves from his place reluctantly without showing any affection to him. She moves to New York chasing her dream of becoming a popular singer giving the reason of a fake lung cancer. She sacrifices her love for someone else but does not want to become a burden to anyone else in this universe. Even after a long time, Madhav meets Riya as successful singer in New York. Madhav goes to New York in search of Riya pretending to undergo an internship with Bill Gates Foundation. Here, Bhagat depicts the heightened love of Madhav and Riya after the second meet in New York. Readers can feel the zealous reunification of the couple when the story ends with a function held in the school under Madhav, Riya and their family. The story of *Half Girlfriend* is a romance laced with struggles and fervent passion. It is the story of a transformation of concept of ‘half’ to the concept of ‘full’.

Conclusion

Bhagat deals with various subjects such as gender discrimination, male domination, corruption, wrong educational system in India and domestic violence. In the novel *Half Girlfriend*, he writes about the challenges in human relationships and also the challenges of education in the rural area schools without proper amenities. The word ‘Half’ in the title indicates incompleteness in the relationship and the external facilities as well. The half girlfriend of Madhav becomes the full hovered wife at the end of the novel. The incomplete half becomes complete full. Bhagat has dealt with the theme of incompleteness by giving the

innovative strategies to make it complete. The constant passion of the protagonist Madhav towards Riya leads him to the victory of making his half girlfriend his life partner. Similarly, Riya’s passion towards music finally takes her to the fulfilment of her dream to become a popular singer. Hence, she finds completeness at the end though she was in the incomplete stage before getting divorce from Rohan. The writer proves that the perseverance can bring success one day, through his enthusiastic characters of the novel *Half Girlfriend*.

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