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## Assiduousness in Love with English-based Class System: the Unvarnished Reality in Chetan Bhagat's 'Half Girlfriend'

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### ABSTRACT

*What India Today says that Bhagat is a symbol of New India. He is really a torch bearer for an unafraid generation. This youth icon of India deals mainly with the life of youth, their problems, and some constructive thoughts that run into their mind, their love and also their suffering. In all his fictions love is seen as an important theme and in this context his latest offering 'Half Girlfriend' (2014) is no more exception. But here he shows the protagonist's love not as a sub theme but as main theme. Apart from love, his Half Girlfriend also focuses on English based class system where language plays an important role to determine the future of someone and also its impact on relationship. Is it necessary to know English to survive in this modern world? This paper attempts to highlight this issue along with protagonist's perseverance in love as observed in 'Half Girlfriend'.*

**KEYWORDS:** Love, Assiduousness, Society, English, Class.

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### INTRODUCTION

In the genre of fiction, few Indian authors flourish out their thoughts and talents and Chetan Bhagat is one of them. He is the trendsetter and role model of all the youth. He starts to create a new trend and style in Postmodern Indian English fiction with his own way of writing about the contemporary issues related to Indian youth. And here he wins the attention of all section of youth. What Wikipedia says that he is the author of best selling novels Five Point Someone (2004), One Night @ the Call Centre (2005), The Three Mistakes of My Life (2008), 2 States (2009), Revolution 2020 (2011), What Young India Wants (2012) and Half Girlfriend (2014). In every novel, he deals with different issues, segment and his deep insight about the youth. Moreover, he has raised some problems that the youth are facing today. Some major problems that are shown in his novels are – career, work pressure, love, stress, ambition, corruption, language problem and so on.

The road is hit once again by India's one of the most famous pen-pusher with his much awaited sixth novel, Half Girlfriend. Before starting the discussion let's take a look at the simple story of this novel. Half Girlfriend introduces us with the protagonist Madhav Jha who is not particularly poor. Rather he is the prince from Dumraon. He is well over six feet and plays basket-ball well enough to play from Bihar. In spite of his inability to speak English, he gets admission to St. Stephen's College through sports quota. There he meets Riya Somani, a rich, slim, pretty and tall girl who speaks English fluently with the right accent. Riya also plays basket-ball and admitted in the same college through sports quota. Soon they become friends and Madhav falls in love with Riya and develops feelings. He proposes Riya but she rejects him as she thinks there lies a big communication gap between them because Madhav can't speak English properly and Riya speaks fluently. Riya offers to be Madhav's half girlfriend.

Riya leaves Madhav when he tries to make a physical move towards Riya. He tells something in Hindi to Riya when he is not allowed to do any physical relation with Riya. Madhav's comment 'Det Hai toh De, Warna Kadle' makes Riya furious and she leaves him. Riya decides never to befriend with Madhav. She marries a rich English type guy, Rohan Chandak. She shifts to London and Madhav is now heartbroken and also stops playing basketball. Madhav realizes his fault and finds Delhi unbearable place for him to stay. So he decides to return to Dumrao to help his mother Rani Sahiba's rural school. There he feels the

need to develop the infrastructure of the school particularly to build toilets. He visits the local MLA Ojha but seems like that the government officials are not in a position to help him. And when the opportunity came in the form of Bill Gates's visit to schools in Bihar, he plans to convince Bill Gates to fund the school. But for that he needs a speech written in English.

Madhav even decides to join an English speaking class in Patna in order to improve his ability to speak or write in English. And during his struggling days, accidentally he meets with Riya who came back to Patna from London. Now she has been divorced due to harassment and domestic violence from her husband and father-in-law. The story here prepares for a happy ending as Madhav and Riya become good friends and Riya teaches him to prepare a good speech which he delivers before Bill Gates and got a lot of money. But the climax is yet to discuss. One day Riya disappears again and Madhav comes to know from a letter that Riya has lung cancer and three months are in her hand to live. She leaves no clue to find her in India. But it was known from her journals that she was still alive and Madhav went to New York in search of her and with the help of Shailesh, Madhav found her in a bar after three months of rigorous search. At the end, both of them married to each other and Shyam was the outcome of their love.

From the above story it is very much clear that the story tell us the perseverance in love in case of Madhav and the division between English and non-English types. Before going to discussion about the English speaking issues lets skim over the assiduousness in love that are found in this story. Half Girlfriend tells Madhav's love for Riya, his love for his motherland and for the society. But he has to do a lot of things rather has to cross hurdles to achieve his goal. So this is a story of a boy's perseverance to achieve all these things. And several instances are shown in the story.

In the time of entrance interview Madhav meets with Riya and soon they become friends. Riya becomes his half girlfriend and perseverance is shown when Madhav has to struggle hard to convince Riya for a movie. Madhav says, "Riya finally agreed to see a movie with me. She had lost a basketball bet-she has challenged me to score a basket from half-court in one try-I had given a try and failed the first week...In the fourth week, I put in all the focus I had and made my shot. The ball hit the ring, circled around it twice and fell into the basket." (HG, 29) Madhav has to face so many obstacles in his love. He loves Riya so much but she thinks that Madhav does not know what is called love. She says, "Okay, fine, Madhav, I will be serious. I laughed because I don't think you are in love with me...We are both too young, inexperienced but curious. Sure, we like each other. But love? Please." (HG,63) It gives him immense pain when she does not allow him to kiss or to do any physical relation. Rather she accepts herself in a half girlfriend position which throws Madhav in a dilemma.

After Madhav's completion of degree, he rejects the job offered by multinational bank and decides to help his mother and to improve the condition of his school. And here also he faces challenges when he has to deliver a speech in English before the members of Bill Gates Foundation. He is very weak in English and he has overcome it with the help of Riya and his own assiduousness in love for his school. In fact his family does not know the word quit and perseverance is shown by his mother also when she says, "We don't quit Madhav. It's not in the Jha family's genes...We may lose everything, but we don't quit. That's what your uncles did, at the gambling table or in business. Being bankrupt is okay, but quitting is not." (HG, 126)

Madhav's love for Riya is enduring and he has waited a long time and shows his perseverance in love. When Riya again leaves him he is in terrible depression and says "Two years. Not a single day when I didn't think of her...When she left, I almost needed to be treated for depression." (HG,207) But he does not play a waiting game. He guesses that Riya may be in New York to fulfill her dream to be a singer in a small night bar. And when the author asks him about his search, he replies "I can't quit, sir. It's not in my genres to do so." (HG,208) In the US he is not in a relax mood and searches her constantly to almost every night bars. He shows his patience, desperateness, earnestness and eagerness for her. Even when his friends wants him to introduce with another girl Priya , he rejects her. He has chooses Riya a long time ago and no one can take her place. And finally one day he finds Riya Somani and for this he has to run six kilometers in twenty minutes and the temperature was minus six degree Celsius. Really without this kind of assiduousness nothing can be achieved. Life is very hard and cruel and will not offer anyone in a smooth way. And something is wanted with utmost feeling and efforts then there is a great possibility to achieve the goal.

But apart from Madhav's love for Riya and society, he has to experience a lot of things because of his disability to speak in English. So importance is here also given to one's communicative skill and to do so English is the prime language that one has to adopt and acquire. Actually English is considered as an international and global language. It is very much the past and parcel of mankind. Almost every class of people uses it. But there remains a difference in using this language among these classes of people. In this novel Bhagat wants to throw light in this issue as his novel always gives message and raises social issues.

Language is basically a set of signs that help to convey ideas and among all other languages, English language is considered a prime one for its simplicity, adaptability and acceptability. It is easy to understand. Besides it helps a lot to develop popular culture and due to its plurality and versatility, almost every writer has adopted this language to convey their thoughts. And Chetan Bhagat is no more exception in this case.

In his *Half Girlfriend*, he raises an issue and wants to show rural non-English type people who find it difficult to use English properly. He shows the division in the society between English and non-English type people. The snobbish, elitists and snooty English types will never try to understand the rural types. They just mock at them and here Bhagat gives a very controversial message to read his books which will teach one how to speak English because one's dream to read Chetan will be able the person to fit into the world of English. Here through his protagonist Madhav Jha he shows how people find it difficult to speak English. When foreigners use it it seems fantastic and romantic, but when the rural people try to use it then it is considered crude. And here lies the class conflict that also shown in this story between Madhav and Riya.

Madhav finds it almost impossible to stay at St. Stephen's college because the college is famous for its English culture and tradition. Hindi medium boys always are in fear because of this and this is shown when Madhav gives interview during his admission. He greets the interviewer 'Good morning, sir, sir, sir' as there are three persons and they laugh at him hearing this greeting. So English is very much important for the rural people to survive in such urban high standard college. Madhav is always feeling low because of his disability to use English. This also affects his character, mind and personality. He wants some source or strength to survive. And when he meets with Riya, he finds it necessary to learn English to win the heart of Riya who belongs to English group. So language can be a very important tool to win the ladylove also.

Madhav is the representative of the non-elite class. His use of language always creates laughter. When Riya asks his name, he says 'Myself Madhav Jha'. This sentence according to the English class is considered low level and unpolished.

So Chetan Bhagat uses a lot of sentences to show how the elite group feels themselves superior, polished and refined than the non-English group. And it is very much true that where one finds himself uncomfortable in speaking English then one turns to his mother tongue to seek comfort and Madhav is no more exception in this case. He says 'My English isn't good' and Riya then replies by saying that 'What you say matters, not the language.'

Bhagat wants to show this particular youth section who suffers in this way. He wants to polish the youths who think themselves unsuitable in metropolitan cities like Delhi. Madhav realizes the value of English and through him Bhagat wants to show the education system prevailing in the rural schools in the state like Bihar. The education standard should be equal to all and the pupils from rural areas need proper guidance to be independent enough to compete in metropolitan cities. They need to improve their English. Schools in those areas also need proper infrastructure and proper teaching learning materials, teacher and atmosphere. And what steps Madhav took with the help of Riya can be a path through which one can speak English. Bhagat with his use of language, method, technique and strategies tries to be a good teacher to improve the communicative skills of youth India and here he leaves the other pulp fiction writers far behind. Here Bhagat gives us clues by which one can improve his communicative skills. These clues are Madhav's listening of speeches on You Tube, watches English movies and talks to the customer care section with choosing English language.

## CONCLUSION

Perseverance in love and importance of English language are the two issues that Bhagat here wants to show. Youth of rural areas are facing the problems due to their lack of communicative skills. And for this reason they are feeling low and unable to compete with others despite their talent and ability of man management. Even they can't express their thoughts and emotions properly. But this problem can also be wiped out with one's own will power, proper infrastructure and proper way. This novel is all about for the people like Madhav. And the condition of the youths are reflected in the following lines that Madhav says in a function of his school and this speech is not only of Madhav's but also of Bhagat's and all other youths facing this problem, "Today, I speak to you in English. I didn't know this language well. I was scared and ashamed. People made fun of me. I spent my whole college life with a complex. I don't want that to happen to these kids. I don't want anyone to tell them they are not good enough." (Bhagat, 183)

So in the concluding lines it can be said that *Half Girlfriend* is not only shows Madhav's love for Riya but also his love for his rural people, his mother and moreover for his society. He has seen his failures but never rely on it. Rather he tries to change his fate, his communicative skills and moreover he also tries to

prove before Riya that he knows the meaning of love and perhaps Riya has to learn how to make love from Madhav. In every case he has to show his assiduousness and perseverance and the happy ending of the novel confirms the old saying that where there is a will, there is a way. But through the story Bhagat also warns the youth about their speaking and writing skills.

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