

## **Chetan Bhagat's Half Girlfriend: A Story Of Contradictions With Special Reference To The Acquisition Of English Among Youngsters In India**

**Sabina K Musthafa**

*Assistant Professor (Ad hoc)*

*MES Keveeyam College, Valanchery , Kerala*

---

**ABSTRACT :** *Chetan Bhagat is an Indian English author who carved a niche himself among the readers. What makes him favourite among his readers is his language? As Ludwig Wittgenstein says, 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.' It was Chetan Bhagat who explored the limitless possibilities of the words with his simple language. His works asserted that language is not an abstract construction of the learned or dictionary makers, but it is something arising out of humanity and relationships. English is a global language which has become part and parcel of our life. From learned person to illiterate or the layman is using English as a part of their daily conversations. But there is disparity in the English used by elites and layman. Chetan Bhagat who is a youth icon among the authors of Indian pulp fiction has won the love of people as his intensions are to create awareness among the people about social issue through his simple language. His latest offering Half Girlfriend tells how language is important in determining one's future and to what extent it impacts relationships. Told in the background of Delhi, it's the love story which throws light to serious unnoticed issue of English proficiency among youngsters of India. How far knowing English is helpful in a country like India? Is it just a part of urban life or a necessary tool to survive in today's competitive world? In this article I venture to bring out these aspects as observed in his latest work **Half Girlfriend**.*

**KEYWORDS :** *Language, pulp fiction, English language, global status*

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Language is basically a medium for communication. It can be defined as a well defined set of signs that help us convey ideas. Therefore conveying ideas is the most important function of language. There are a number of languages across the world. However English acquired cult status among other languages. This is mainly due to its advantages- simple and easy to understand. The global status of English language has contributed to its wide growth in popular culture as well as in literature. Coming to English literature, it's a vast platform with plenty of versatility. Every writer in English has carved a niche for himself because of the uniqueness of his language. Yes, the way an author uses language or his selection of words to describe an event or sequence in a story plays a vital role in commanding readers' interest and attention. It may differ from genre to genre and from author to author. Basically works that belong to classical tradition have refined and complex expressions that might appeal only to masters of literature.

Unlike classical type, pulp fiction has been given least concern owing to its feeble literary quality. They are read just to derive pleasure and to kill time. Serious readers may not find time to read such stuff and they would often dump it or do not bother to read it owing to its poor literary character compared to classical novels. Being a storehouse of numerous myths and stories, India too has a rich tradition of literature. Indian English literature enjoys a premium status with its intense readership and patronage across the globe. Eminent writers like Nobel laureate Tagore, Salman Rushdie, Sasi Tharoor, Arundathi Roy etc. have made great contributions in elevating the status of Indian English literature internationally. However Indian English literature still remained in the hands of intelligent readers who put their heart and soul to serious reading. A major part of population didn't bother to read the ideas presented by those writers in an embellished style of writing. It was then Chetan Bhagat published his first title **Five Point Someone**. This novel created vibrant changes in the path of Indian pulp fiction. Bhagat's way of telling stories fascinated the readers, especially it seemed appealing to youngsters. Since the publication of **Five Point Someone**, Bhagat has so far released six books and all of them went on to become national best sellers. Actually his works emerged as signatures of change in Indian English literature. His writing style is easier with short and crisp sentences, yet it has the quality to grasp the attention of readers. When we read Chetan Bhagat's works, what we can see are the disillusionment and difficulties faced by youngsters and their love affairs. Renowned modern critics tagged his works as weird since they use everyday language.

However like Nathaniel Hawthorne said 'easy reading is damn hard writing,' Bhagat too delivers his notions in a language familiar to almost every person in the country. This earned him the status of the best selling author of our times. His latest release **Half Girlfriend** is a love story set in Delhi. It's a tale about a rural boy, Madhav Jha who falls in love with Riya, a rich urbane girl in Delhi St. Stephen's College. However, unlike his previous novels, the author not only tries to portray the financial conflicts between the chief characters, but also presents a novel theme that has never been said before- the difficulty of Indian students while speaking English. Well, superficially it doesn't seem like a serious matter, but a part of population in our country still finds it difficult to speak English rightly with correct pronunciation. Also it's for the first time in Indian English literature, an author is writing about a boy who doesn't know English well and this is indeed a fantastic plot. When a Frenchman or German speaks English with an accent, it is considered romantic. But when a guy from a rural village in Bihar speaks English in his native accent, it's called crude. What lifts **Half Girlfriend** beyond a typical love story is this crucial aspect. Bhagat deeply interprets this problem as a class conflict between the elite English speakers and non-English types in the country. The protagonist Madhav belongs to non-English and he finds it hard to survive in a college like St. Stephen's which is known for its rich English tradition. The fear of HMTs (Hindi Medium Types according to Chetan Bhagat) is portrayed realistically everywhere. A quite convincing instance is Madhav's interview with faculties at St. Stephen's during his admission. He wishes the interview panel which consists of three persons 'good morning, sir, sir and sir,' to which they laugh at him ridiculously. Here Chetan Bhagat further represents how low class people with poor English skills are treated in an urban culture and how important is English in such elite colleges. Right from the first day of college, what constantly shakes or rather disturbs Madhav's self is his inferiority complex arising out of his poor English language skills. Madhav's life changes drastically when he shifts to St. Stephen's Delhi, where speaking English rightly is a minimum quality expected from every student. His meeting with Riya pursues him to speak English with right pronunciation. For him, learning proper English is as important as winning Riya's love. This is for the reason that language plays a crucial role in defining his relationship with Riya. The x-factor he considers here is not his looks, but his language equals. Then only Madhav believes that it is possible to command the love of a girl like Riya. The novel can be viewed as the progressive stages of the protagonist. The tool with which he impresses his love is his language.

Chetan Bhagat has also devoted his time to educate the readers. His intention has been made clear right from the beginning of the novel- to make the readers understand about the crucial role of English in our daily life. According to him what lies in between the non-English types and English types is the inability to think in English. An instance is when Riya asks his name. Here the protagonist uses the expression 'Myself Madhav Jha,' which is considered unpolished by the elite English class in the country. He feels that such expressions are used by the low class. However, this particular sequence can be identified as one among many instances used by the author to scorn the people who believe only their culture and language are eclectic and refined. Most of the people from rural area find it difficult to speak English and they often switch to their mother tongue since they are comfort with it. In a certain sequence, Madhav says "My English isn't good," to which Riya replies "what you say matters, not the language."

The story develops through Madhav's appealing one-liners, thoughts and perceptions. He realizes the value of education and language during his tireless efforts to create a grasp over language. He finds out what is respected in Bihar deserves dustbin in Delhi. Chetan Bhagat further explores the poor condition of schools in rural India, especially in the sequences that take place in Bihar and he believes the change should start from the beginning. The need for proper infrastructure in schools and proper teaching are discussed seriously. What Riya has and Madhav lacks is the ability to think in English. This problem is solved by Madhav's effective strategies that are successfully carried out with help of Riya. The methods Bhagat has described are indeed helpful to develop one's communication skills. Thus the author here assumes the position of a teacher as well. This is the primary reason why Chetan Bhagat enjoys a cult status among his contemporaries. His language may not be impressive. But his language is good enough to create a positive impact on every reader irrespective of their age or ethnicity. Also this novel provides informative stuff that is even helpful for classroom teaching and language training. The sequences like Madhav choosing English language while talking to customer care centre over the phone, listening to great speeches on YouTube are indeed practical strategies to develop one's language. Also an instance that fits here is Madhav's efforts to watch English movies with subtitles.

Coming to the style of writing, Chetan Bhagat has used a mosaic of narrative techniques in the novel as the story is unravelled through Riya's journals, Madhav's story and is split into separate acts. In a country like India, where different cultures coexist, the importance of education has to be recognised. The author performs this formidable task quite easily as he presents the problems faced by rural schools in India.

The primary reason for poor quality of education is the lack of proper infrastructure and this leads to nationwide incompetence among rural students. Bhagat throws light to such basic issues that need immediate corruption, not through serious language, but in a light manner that can be understood by every student in the country. Madhav's fears and his lack of confidence can be identified with everyone who encounters difficulty while speaking English. Hence Chetan Bhagat chooses a problem of social relevance. Perhaps this problem might be one of the greatest challenges faced by Indian students. Though the author speaks of contradictions, he educates the reader. Madhav's efforts to improve his English speaking skills are quite practical for the readers too. This is the merit of Bhagat. He has the clear picture of his readers. Unlike renowned Indian English writers, he writes for change that is only possible through proper education. The best way to educate readers is to use common language and everyday situations. To present a new plot against the backdrop of ordinary circumstances isn't an easy thing as far as an author is concerned. This, Chetan Bhagat does convincingly, mixing all the interesting elements in right proportion. The title of the book itself shows a sense of uncertainty. And the uncertainty grows with Madhav's fears. One of the hindrances that come in the way of Madhav's love is the inability to speak English. Though initially Riya shows signs of affection, she isn't fully prepared to accept Madhav as her partner, because she is confused over life's choices. And finally she agrees to be his half girlfriend, a position in which she finds comfort.

The importance of English language has been portrayed clearly in the novel. The story of Madhav can be identified as the story of every rurally brought up boy who finds it difficult to cope with the demands required by the fast paced era of technology. What hurdles Madhav from Riya's life is his inability to convey his affection in its purest form. Here Madhav's thoughts and reflections are completely based on his English speaking skills. Madhav's speech at the function in the school is the most important part that reflects the author's opinion. An excerpt worth quoting goes like this, '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,' (page no: 183). To wrap up, the author is aiming for Madhavs among the readers as he quotes 'In a sense it is a book by Madhav written for the Madhavs. As the Varna system collapsed, a new class of English-speaking elite emerged.'

#### **REFERENCE:**

- [1] Bhagat, Chetan .**Half Girlfriend**. New Delhi: Rupa Publishing House, 2014.
- [2] "**Man of the Masses**" Literary Review: The Hindu Newspaper (07 December, 2014 )