

## **Depiction Of Female Characters In Chetan Bhagat's Novel *Half Girlfriend* And Its Visual Re-Presentation**

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### **Abstract**

Chetan Bhagat's all female characters have some qualities such as determination, candidness and potency. Now and then they rebel against the conservative society and sometimes they are blamed or punished for the wrong deeds of others. His female characters urged for their rights to live as a respected person in the society. They fight bravely and get their rights and respect firmly in the male dominated society and making their career. The present paper focus on depict of female characters in Chetan Bhagat's novel *Half Girlfriend* and its visual-representation. The movie *Half Girlfriend* is the cinematic adaptation of the novel of the same name. Literature and Cinema are two different roads that lead to the same path. The

same goals behind their creation are to provide knowledge along with entertainment. Cinema plays a vital role to spread literature. The relationship between books and film is as old as the art of film making. The paper concludes with a comparative study of novel and its visual representation.

**Key Words-** Female characters, Qualities, Society, Literature, Visual re-presentation.

Chetan Bhagat has depicted a wide variety of characters in his novels. The characters are quite realistic and convincing. Especially the female characters represent one strata of the society or the other of contemporary India. In his novel *Half Girlfriend* the female characters are depicted with variety and vividness. Bhagat has fully presented the femininity of his female characters. Sometimes his female characters treat men with hypocrisy or sometimes realistically. But they never reveal their reality or real happenings of their mind. His heroines give the priority to their feelings along with their career. They don't want to be dependent on others. They live in modern age so they have independent on their own terms. So sometimes they seem very obstinate, but they are very yielding and emotional as well.

Chetan Bhagat's novel *Half Girlfriend* was published in the year 2014. The main female character of the novel Riya Somani represents the women of the society who are not dependent on men in the society rather they live their lives on their own way by being self dependent. Another female character of the novel, Madhav's mother Rani Sahiba Durga Jha, has emerged as a strong and self dependent woman, although she also follows the customs of the society whereas Riya's mother represents women who are narrow minded towards women. The main characteristic of Chetan Bhagat's female protagonists is different from other girls in the society. They have some extraordinary qualities such as strength, bravery and beauty. Most of his heroines are beautiful and capable especially to attract boys. So Riya

Somani was the same. When Madhav Jha from Dumraon, Bihar, admitted through the sports quota in the same Stephen's College in Delhi, saw her at first time on the ground while playing basketball, he fell in her love. He thought that he should speak to her at least once in his life.

Chetan Bhagat is one such writer in today's society who has emerged as the voice of youth. He has shown the problems of youth in his novels. He also succeeds to show the realities of Indian society. These realities and issues as taken up by Chetan Bhagat have attracted many filmmakers. His novel *Half Girlfriend* was adapted into a Hindi film same title which was released in 2017. The movie was made by the director Mohit Suri. The star castes of the movie were Arjun Kapoor as Madhav, has given a good performance. Shraddha Kapoor as Riya Somani has done complete justice with her role, Seema Biswas as Rani Sahiba Durga Jha has got lesser chance but she does her job perfectly. All the other characters do their job very well.

In the novel *Half Girlfriend* Riya Somani is the main female protagonist who gets admission in St. Stephen's College Delhi under sports quota. She is extremely modern English speaking girl from a super-rich Marwari family of Delhi. The filmmaker also presents Riya as a modern globalised and modern girl when she answered Madhav's question that she was able to speak Hindi. She said, a language was common for her, but the matter or message was important for her. This tendency shows her modesty. In the novel Riya is an advanced girl from an ultra rich Marwari family of Delhi. Her deep desire is to become a singer one day. In the movie Riya's character was almost same in comparison with the novel. Her father was a famous business man and a wealthy person. She was coming by BMW car in the college. She enjoyed everything which a rich girl can

do, but she does not give much importance to money, rather she believes that richness of mind is more important than richness of wealth. This thing shown through the text when Madhav asked her:

You are rich? I said... She laughed at my direct question, Rich in money, or rich in mind? Two different things. Huh? Rich, like wealthy? Unfortunately, yes. What unfortunate? Everyone wants to be rich. Yeah, I guess. It just embarrasses me. Plus, all the obsession with money and how it defines you, I just don't get it. (25)

Riya is always quiet. In the film, the filmmaker has shown frequent fight of her parents the reason behind Riya's silence, which is completely different from the novel. The reason for her silence in the novel is a dark secret of her life which is revealed later, when Madhav reads the journals written by Riya.

The author has presented Riya like other youth. Every youth has a dream. Riya had also a dream like every youth. She wants to play music and wants to sing in a bar in New York. Despite being rich, she wants to be happy. When Madhav asked her about her dream, she said:

I have this dream. I want to play music and sing... in a bar in New York. I don't want to be a famous singer or rock star. I don't want to marry a billionaire. I just want to sing in peace, surrounded by passionate people. I want to own a

house in Manhattan, my house, filled with books and music CDs. I want to play basketball on weekends. I don't want to check out a dozen lehengas for my engagement.

(33)

Bhagat shows Riya as a modern girl. Although she lives in a high profile family but she is not happy despite living in a high profile family of modern society. She feels uncomfortable in her own family. Film and text both present Riya as a very ambitious girl and she is not interested in the traditional way of life to get married and have only children. She wants to be something different than others as a modern girl. She wants to be independent to make her own career. But the conversation between Madhav and her reveals that she has doubts whether she will do it or not:

'In fact, I took up basketball because I saw an NBA game live at Madison Square Garden in New York.'

'You have seen an NBA game live?' I said.

'Yeah, the atmosphere... it's electric, you should see one sometime, Madhav.' I shrugged. Anyway, I like your dream Riya,' I said. 'It's doable, not unreal.'

'Unreal, like?' she said. 'Like becoming a top actress or the prime minister. You just want something simple.' She smiled,' 'Nothing is simple for a girl in a family like mine,' she said. (33-34)

Through this conversation of Riya with Madhav, we come to know that though the modern girls live in modern world but they don't feel secure and at last they have to follow the advice of their family or parents. It was shown in the movie and the text both that Riya's family is only fascinated by money. They have nothing to do with relationships; they do not have time to think about their family members. So when Riya's marriage was decided with Rohan who is a big businessman in London, she did not react. Though she has no wish to marry, she becomes agree. Why? Because they told her only that he is Rich, handsome and ambitious. So Bhagat presents here the issue of Indian marriage system. Girls have to marry sometimes without their consent. They have to obey their parents.

Riya leaved her college in middle for her marriage. No one thought about her career. Rohan told Riya that she can study in any reputed college in London. But after marriage he forgot everything. Riya sacrificed her career for him but in front of richness and busy schedule, he forgot all. He was not paying attention towards her because of his busy schedule, he was drinking and slapping her even her mother-in-law supports him:

He slapped me in front of his mother, thrice. She didn't stop him. She kind of liked it. He even pulled my hair... Mother and son lectured me on how lucky I was, that Rohan was at least twenty times richer than my dad, and if I didn't behave there would be consequences. (201-202)

When Riya comes to know her husband's illicit relationship with another woman, she did not feel bad rather she felt lightheaded as she was free to take drastic decisions to leave him. Here Bhagat reflects the feminist view. If a husband expects his wife to be loyal to him, he should also show loyalty to his wife. Riya also expected something similar from her

husband. But her husband Rohan was not loyal to her. but it didn't happen. She was his wife and she was equal with him in everything. When she tells her parents about Rohan, her parents also blame her, not Rohan. They didn't react anything. Opposite they told Rohan is right:

'He seemed so nice,' Dad said at dinner without looking at me. I explained Rohan to them, Rohan liked to conquer. Whether it is a Hotel property or his wife, he liked the thrill of chasing more than he chased. (202)

In the novel, Riya's mother is depicted as a woman who does not support her daughter against domestic violence because of social fear. She advised Riya to learn adjust in Rohan's family. She says to Riya:

'Women have to learn to adjust, beta,' my mother said.  
'Adjust? How does one adjust to violence?' I lifted my left hand to show her the swelling. Rohan had pushed me and I had broken my Wrist. 'What will people say?' Mom blurted out. (202)

There is a divergence in cinematic version of *Half Girlfriend*, Riya's mother had been insulted, neglected, dominated by her husband in the film. She tolerated her husband's violence. These things were not in the text. Many women in the society face domestic violence daily. Riya's mother is also one of those women. Filmmaker has tried to affirm this

through these incidents related to women class to encounter the social reality of contemporary Indian society.

In the book and in its visual re-presentation Riya gets the divorce from her husband because of the domestic violence from her husband and her mother-in-law and came back India but her parents support them instead of her, she comes to know the reality of the real world. She leaves her parents house also and finds the job in a Company in Patna to be independent. There she meets Madhav once again. She helped him to get fund from Bill Gates Foundation for his school. She teaches him English to give a speech. But when Madhav's mother comes to know about their relationship and that Riya is divorcee she tells Riya to stay away from her son. So unwillingly she leaves Madhav's home without giving any intimation to him. She protects her self-respect and to be independent and to make her career as a singer, she leaves for New York. She speaks lie to Madhav that she is suffering from a fake lungs cancer against her wish. She sacrifices her love for others but she never became a burden on any one. The filmmaker has shown Riya's dream fulfilling as shown by the author in the book. Her dream was to be a bar singer in New York and she fulfilled her dream. Chetan Bhagat has not presented feminism nor directly advocated for women's rights, but he has presented a feminist approach through Riya here. The movie also touched all these issues of social reality that have been depicted in textual form of the novel but the film maker gave full canvas to the prominent characters of the novel around whose life, the plot is revolving. Filmmaker also showed the same attitude of Riya in the movie. He also presents a feminist point of view in the film. Despite all the difficulties, Riya is not broken but moves forward facing the circumstances. In this way filmmaker presents Riya's exceptional qualities such as determination and will power.

Chetan Bhagat presents here the dominating nature of men over the women. They think women have no value, she has no feelings, and she is only useful commodity to satisfy the men's thirst. Author shows domestic violence in his book. This issue is easily found in its visual form also, but at what extent it is identical to the text, it is the matter of the basic difference. As a novelist has complete authority over his own novel to change in story before publication. In the same way, a filmmaker has power and an authority to adapt any variation in one's own so called creation has the same freedom, but one thing should always be remembered and kept in mind that the film is ultimately the creation of a group. "The film is akin to the theatre in its structure, but to the novel in its forms" (Clair 138). In the book, Madhav comes to know about the domestic violence with Riya when he reads Riya's journals. There is a fact according to the text that Madhav knows about domestic violence through Riya's journals. While in the movie, Riya herself tells Madhav about domestic violence. Riya's in-laws are not described so much in the film as in the book though the intention of both the respective creators was ultimately the same.

When a reader of the text *Half Girlfriend* watches the movie based on the novel, he is compelled to pay attention to the difference between the two creations. There is no doubt in this statement that the adaptation needs enough editing but sometimes it happens that when the role of a character is shortened its importance and aesthetic depiction is belittled. There is a major divergence in the film. In the film Riya's family problems are shown as her parents' frequent fights and that is why she is a quiet girl and feels lonely in life. While in the novel she was sexually abused by her father when she was a child and that is what made her silent. In an interview the film director Mohit Suri told DNA, "While Riya has some dark family secrets, they are not related to sexual abuse. I have moved out of that dark, sexual zone

completely. I wanted it to be more of a love story and to deal with contemporary social issues relatable to women.” (www.hindustantimes.com)

. Another female character Madhav’s mother Ranisahiba Durga Jha, a gracious lady, and a former queen of the state of Dumraon. She has zeal to serve the society. In order to do so she runs a school in their small village. She is old fashioned and rigid about traditions. She feels uncomfortable to see that his son might marry a divorcee girl. Overall she is a good woman at heart. Bhagat has presented a strong willed lady who pursuits for her dream in a very inconvenient situation. She ran the Dumraon Royal School, which taught seven hundred kids from nearly villages. Bhagat has always tried to show that if any woman decides to do anything, she can do definitely. The rays of the arrival of feminism with positive attitude can also be observed and felt in the novel and in the movie *Half Girlfriend*. The filmmaker has given Madhav’s mother less chance, but he has portrayed Ranisahiba Durga Jha as a strong-willed woman. She has same power as the man has and she is equal to fight and struggle as the man. She runs her business as she runs her family. Because she is from a royal family so she has a reputation in the society and she does not want to lose her social status. She asks Riya about her marriage and when she comes to know about that she is divorcee, Rani Sahiba tells Riya to stay away from Madhav. She was not ready to accept Riya in that condition. Ranisahiba thinks about her status, her position in the society. However, at the end of the both the novel and the film she accepts Riya.

In the novel *Half Girlfriend*, Bhagat’s female characters have their own special characteristics which have been shown well through the visual re-presentation. Among the female characters, Riya breaks the orthodox thinking and moves forward in modern society, while Madhav’s mother Rani Sahiba goes ahead keeping in mind the old traditions. Riya’s

mother believes in accepting the circumstances, not in changing or fighting against them. Bhagat's heroines live in modern world but their modernness rooted in the past thoughts and traditions of society, because of it they have to suffer more and more, though they are innocent like the heroines of Shakespeare. The visual re-presentation of any fiction is impossible without the use of technology or tools in collective forms. The ending of the *Half Girlfriend* movie has been magnificently adopted in visuals. Movie becomes more beautiful and marvelous with the help of the unavoidable tools of cinema i.e. the camera and light. In few frames portrayal of a number of memories have been made possible very easily and intelligently. This is the positive point of visual representation, in which *Half girlfriend* filmmaker used it for proving socio- reality of the time. Cinema and fiction on *Half Girlfriend* both are good at their own places to depict female characters. If both are compared individually then both are good in their place. But it is necessary to evaluate, speculate the merits and demerits in them. As George Bluestone in his book *Novels into films* has contrasted and defined the limits of these two art forms in term of their *modes of consciousness* and in term of the problem of *time flux*. He quoted E.M. Foster for inwardness of the novel... "It is function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source."(46)

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