

Globalization, Gender and Culture : A Study of the Novel "*half girlfriend*"

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Abstract

The present paper makes an attempt to analyse the depiction of globalization process and gender issues in one of the most popular fiction of Chetan Bhagat's, namely, half girlfriend. The fiction deals with various gender issues emerging in the context of globalizing Indian society, particularly among the youth exposed to new communication technologies like mobile phone, sms, facebook, whatsapp, twitter etc. resulting into compartmentalization of their life into two conflicting sets of values represented by conservatism of the parents on one hand and the aspirations of new generation in the emerging new world. The approach Bhagat follows in this fiction is not only post-modernist but to some extent it is post-colonialist. The canvas of the fiction is global. The main female character of the Novel Riya Somani, daughter of a rich, Delhi based Marwari Businessman, falls in love with Madhav Jha, a small town boy (of Bihar) aspirant of taking admission like her in St. Stephens College, in her very first encounter at a basketball court. But she could not be able to define this relationship because of issues related to her social background and insisted to be remained his half girlfriend, a new concept the author introduces here to redefine the notion of 'Girl Friend', found throughout the modern western literature in context of romantic love. The author also deconstruct existing literary tradition when he attempts to mix elements of drama in structuring his fiction and adopts a post-modernist strategy. The story of a fiction runs from a small town of Bihar to Delhi then to London and back to Delhi, Patna, Dumraon and then goes to New York and finally in Dumraon i.e. on a global canvas. The characters of the fiction are also drawn globally (Bill Gates, Rohan, Shailesh etc.) as well as locally. The most important female character Riya takes feminist stand on various socio-cultural issues in the entire fiction and exposes the duality of values in Indian socio-cultural milieu, when it is exposed to the forces of globalization.

Globalization is a process which has implications not only for social and cultural institutions of developing countries but also affects the institutions of the developed society (Singh 2007:1). It refers to the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life from cultural to criminal and financial to spiritual (Held et al 1999).

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Globalization incorporates many issues which have been crucial for post-modernist and feminist scholars in the recent past. Post Modernists (Lyotard 1979; Derrida 1974) see it as a process of deconstruction of the institutions established in the era of modernity while the feminists analyse it as a process which has opened new avenues for women in globalizing world (Desai 2009) as well as a process which has certain negative impact upon women, through their exclusion and role conflict between family and work. In India, globalization has brought new work opportunities for educated women in corporate sector and opened a new pathway of their occupational mobility in newly created job market like BPOs, and IT sector and so on. At the same time it has also changed the lifestyle and working condition of women in this sector. Globalization and Literature share some meeting points in their institutional and structural edifices. The notion of globalization can be linked with a theoretical tradition of Post Colonial theory of literary studies on the one hand and the Post Modernist Literature on the other hand (Gupta 2009).

The depiction of anti-globalization protests can be seen in the DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2005). DeLillo's belongs to the sphere of the imaginary, as it is constructed according to the exigencies of fictional structure which is sufficiently clear within that novel. Its characters as an anti-globalization (anti-capitalist) protest makes immediately sense only within artificial structure of the novel and its relationship to real protests and public gestures. Robert Newman's *The Fountain at the Centre of the World* (2003) is another example of such depictions. The novel gives description of local disenchantments and the formation of the desire for a new kind of more inclusive and wide-scale protest that lead first to the description of a protest march, a manifestation, in the town of Calderon. The novel then sweeps towards the 1999 Seattle protests, mentioning some of the other such local disaffections and search for redress that get incorporated and thus creating in its build up towards the climax concretized at Seattle. McEwan's *Saturday* (2006) and Baker's *Checkpoint* (2004) appear to convey, in the context of disquiet about the Iraq war in 2003, a sense of continuum between global politics and oppositional movements, their immediate collective manifestations in local context (in specific images of protest marches, for instance), and individual preoccupations with/engagements in these within the flow of ordinary individual lives. Gender issues and feminism are other important notions which have greatly influenced the contemporary English Literature apart from Post Modernist trends in the presentation and format of contemporary fictions. It is also important to know how the Gender issues and Feminist point of views are reflected in contemporary English Literature when the canvas and plot of the fiction is global. The contemporary English Literature depicts changes in the life style and values of Indian Middle class and presents a conflict between western and Indian cultures. This can be seen in the contemporary fictions of Indian writers like Salman Rushdie (1981), Chetan Bhagat (2014; 2016), Shashi Deshpanday (202) and others.

In the light of the above observations, the present paper makes an attempt to analyse the depiction of globalization and gender issues in one of the most popular fiction of Chetan Bhagat's, namely, *half girlfriend* (2014).

The story of a Novel deals with a Bihari boy called Madhav from a small town Dumraon, in Bihar. He has come to take admission in Sociology (Hons.) at St. Stephen's College of Delhi in sports quota. The other character, Riya Somani, the main female character of the novel, belongs to a rich Marwari, Delhi-based Businessman Family. She is also an admission seeker in English (Hons.) under sports quota. Their first encounter takes place at basketball court and they developed some sort of acquaintance with each other. Madhav didn't know English well whereas Riya did

speak fluent English. Under sports quota both of them had to show performance in the field through a basketball match. First match was between girls teams. Madhav's match was after this match. Therefore, he decided to sit there and wait for his chance. Riya, was one of the leading players of her team. She was playing very well but her teammates were performing very badly. As Madhav had been a state-level basketball player for six years, he felt disappointed with the bad performance of Riya's teammates. Then "in the seventh minute of the first half, would the college team captain overthrow the ball outside the court, where it hits my (Madhav's) head as he (Madhav) stood in the sidelines". Madhav grabbed the ball. Riya came over there to collect the ball from him. He threw the ball at her. She caught it with ease and looked at him. She could get from his throw that he (Madhav) knows the game. Madhav advised her to change her point shooter. In the remaining part of first half she was able to score one goal following his advice. In the halftime she came out to thank him and asked for some more tips. Madhav gave him some tips to reorganize her team. As a result the match ended 21-25. The newbies (Riya's team) had lost, but still kept pace with the college team- a considerable achievement. After the match Riya met him and they introduced each other. She stayed to watch his match. It was a very close match and the college team lost to newbies 25-28. Madhav scored 17 out of 28. Riya was highly impressed by his game. They departed with a hope that they would get admission in the college. Both of them got admission and from here the love story moves ahead. They met frequently on and off the court and a tension in the relationship began. Madhav treated her as a 'girlfriend' (a romantic relationship between a young boy and a young girl)

However, Riya could not able to define her relationship with Madhav because of her social background and her reputed background of family structure. So at this level, where Riya was in love with Madhav at one side but just wanted a friendship. Madhav didn't agree with this friendship. He continuously insisted to be her boyfriend in real sense but Riya always stopped him.

Finally she agreed to be his 'half girlfriend'. She actually loves Madhav but could not express her feeling due to her social background. In the meantime Riya's Parents decided to marry her with a London based young Businessman Rohan, whose father was having a long term friendship with Riya's family. Madhav is heartbroken after hearing the news of Riya's marriage, after this he stops playing Basketball. With the completion of his Graduation he gives interview, where he did not perform well but still gets a job in a 'multinational' Bank. He decides to leave Delhi and went back to Dumraon. He has decided to work with her mother at the village based school run by his mother. While working with her mother at school they both were in need of fund to build toilets for their school. As the government authorities were unable to help in any way regarding funds, so the only hope left to them is to wait for Bill Gates to visit their school and give them funds. As if luckily Bill Gates visits Bihar with his team. For this Madhav has to arrange some activities like: songs, dance and a speech in English. For this he joins English classes at Patna. Madhav now met here Riya who was now a divorcee and was working with Nestle. Madhav helped her in settling her Apartment and in return Riya helped him in preparing speech. She even asked him to read Chetan Bhagat's Novel, so as to improve his English. The function was very successful and Bill Gates agreed to give funds for school. Riya also came to know the fact that Madhav's mother won't accept her, so he disappeared from the scene hence she decided to tell him about her fake illness through a letter and vanish from his life forever. Three years later Riya's landlord from Patna finds some of her Journals from the Apartment and hands them to Madhav. Through the Journals Madhav learns about the problems which Riya faced, domestic violence by her husband and also how his mother had told her to stay away from her. Finally, he discovered that she is alive and he started his

mega search of her from Patna to New York, with the help of an aid of Bill Gate's organization and his Hostel Friend. He finally arrived at New York and searched her every where in Night clubs as once she told him that she wanted to become a dancer in New York. But he failed in all his efforts to search her, then he got information about her. He arrived there and they met in a very dramatic situation and finally married and settled in his native place.

The fiction deals with various gender issues emerging in the context of globalizing Indian society, particularly among the youth exposed to new communication technologies like mobile phone, sms, facebook, whatsapp, twitter etc. resulting into compartmentalization of their life into two conflicting sets of values represented by conservatism of the parents on one hand and the aspirations of new generation in the globalizing world. The approach Bhagat follows in this fiction is not only post-modernist but to some extent it is post-colonialist. He introduced in this fiction the notion of *half girlfriend*, a new concept used by the author introduces to redefine the notion of *Girl Friend*, found throughout the modern western literature in context of romantic love. The author also deconstruct existing literary tradition when he attempts to mix elements of drama in structuring his fiction and adopts a post-modernist strategy. The story of a fiction run from a small town of Bihar to Delhi then to London and back to Delhi, Patna, Dumraon and then to New York and finally in Dumraon i.e. on a global canvas. The characters of the fiction are also drawn globally (Bill Gates, Rohan, Shailesh etc.) as well as locally. The most important female character Riya takes feminist stand on various socio-cultural issues in the entire fiction and exposes the duality of values in Indian socio-cultural milieu, when it is exposed to the forces of globalization.

Thus Bhagat follows not only feminist approach in building the character of Riya throughout the novel but also follow post-modern approach. He himself is one of the important character of the story. He also experimented with the novel by dividing it like a drama into Prelouge, Act I, Act II, Act III and finally. Thus he mixes two different literary formats, namely drama and novel in one. In modern English literature these were mutually exclusive formats. Moreover, the author was not supposed to be a character of his novel. The process of de-differentiation and deconstruction of modernist formats are important characteristics of postmodernism in contrast to differentiation and specialization of modernity. In postmodern approach the fiction becomes a kind of autobiography. In this fiction the elements of autobiography and drama are mixed in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish between these formats. Thus cultural conflict can also be well seen in the novel. This cultural conflict between western and Indian changes the whole scenario of today's social structure and also exposes the duality of values in Indian socio cultural milieu.

The author of the fiction himself clarifies that this fiction is dedicated to "non English-types" and divulges the sentiments and linguistic struggles of a backward rural Bhojpuri-laced Hindi-speaking boy from Bihar as he enrolls himself at the prestigious English-medium St. Stephen's College, New Delhi, and falls in love with a "high class English-speaking rich Delhi girl" schooled at Modern School, New Delhi. The girl does not admit the relationship but agrees to be his "half girlfriend". Chetan Bhagat commented, "*Half-Girlfriend*, to me, is a unique Indian phenomenon, where boys and girls are not clear about their relationship status with each other. A boy may think he is more than friends with the girl, but the girl is still not his girlfriend. Hence, I thought we needed a term like 'Half girlfriend'. Because, in India, that is what most men get.

These observations of Bhagat are important to understand the process of transformation

taking place in Indian society in the era of globalization. The students of rural background are now inspired to study in delhi based educational institutions. However, due to lack of their command on English language they have to struggle at many fronts. Apart from linguistic problems, they have to adjust culturally as well. The rural society is caste based rigid society where a boy can't think of about the relationship like 'girl friend'. But, the urban Indian society is passing through a process of transformation and urban middle class families are crazy to admit their children in English medium missionaries and public schools in order to prepare them for the hard competition in job market. Most of these schools have not only impart education in english but also have been the promoter of the west oriented modern culture. The notion of 'boy friend' and 'girl friend' alien to Indian culture has emerged prominently in most of the urban centres of the country. This has given rise to the problem the novel under study depicted. The patriarchal structure of Indian society poses further problems here. In western culture 'girlfriend' means "*girlfriend is a girl or woman with whom a boy or man having a romantic or sexual relationship*". However, Indian culture does not permit sexual relationship before marriage in contrast to the western culture where such relationship is a very normal practice. In fact, this is a cultural dilemma faced by the Indian boys who wish to have a girlfriend in western sense but the girls generally avoid sexual relationship as it may not only defame them and their family in society as it is a taboo before marriage as per traditions and culture of Indian society. It is in this context, Bhagat introduces the notion of 'half girlfriend' in his fiction. Riya also faces the same dilemma with Madhav who wish to engaged into an intimate relationship with her but she is reluctant to it.

Madhav convinced her to come in his hostel room and attempted to have intimate relationship but she strongly refused.

Thus, we can see the feminist stand of Riya which was taken by her throughout the novel. The Post-Modern approach of Literature and the literary tradition. The act wise division of the novel which was earlier characteristics of literary approach but now we can find this mixed literary approach in Post-Modern Literature where the author is not bound with the tradition, more importantly we can find this de-differentiation and deconstruction of Post-Modernism in contrast to differentiation and specialization of Modernity, where the author himself become one of the character of the novel. Thus cultural conflict can also be well seen in the novel. This cultural conflict between western and Indian changes the whole scenario of today's social structure and also exposes the duality of values in Indian socio cultural milieu.

Note: The paper is a revised version of the paper presented at 41st All India Sociological Conference held at University of Tezpur, Tezpur in December 2016.

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