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Chetan Bhagat's Half Girlfriend – an analysis in the aspect of Indian Movies

Abstract

The paper **Chetan Bhagat's Half Girlfriend - an analysis in the aspect of Indian Movies** tries to project that the novel is almost a film. It is trying to throw light on how the cinematic techniques have been used in the novel. It justifies that the novel has adhered too much of a Bollywood or Kollywood movie. It has many predictable scenes and unwanted twists. The story doesn't agree with real-life things. Moreover, it has all the usual scenes of a bollywood or kollywood movie which we witness now. The paper projects that Chetan Bhagat somewhat never allows the audience to mingle with the story. Whenever there is a twist in the story, the readers take it very usual as they are used to such kind of scenes from the regional movies. They even rightly guess the twist and find the next scene well in advance. It is not good for a good novel. The cinematic techniques have become very popular in novels considering how comfortable readers are with the types of quick cuts and multiple story lines that can be found on TV and in movies. However, it is not possible for a novel to be too cinematic.

Keywords: cinematic technique, movie, novel, bollywood.

The cinematic techniques have become very popular in novels considering how comfortable readers are with the types of quick cuts and multiple story lines that can be found on TV and in movies. However, it is not possible for a novel to be too cinematic. Using cinematic techniques means the writers can throw readers into the action and jump around from scene to scene, giving just enough detail to place the readers in the action. However, the danger of this kind of approach is that it can keep readers from investing in the characters. In this kind, instead of being allowed to experience the story, the readers are being told. In using such kind of story moving, Chetan Bhagat has also joined the row by his latest novel **Half**

Girlfriend. Unlike his other novels, Chetan Bhagat's *Half Girlfriend* has been an example for having many predictable scenes that makes the readers losing their interests in following the story. The strength of a novel lies in its unpredictable movements. But, Chetan Bhagat has failed to do so. As we have come across so many Bollywood and Kollywood movies, the writer might not be able to think beyond the limits of a movie. In this novel, we could have a lot of twists in the story which are very common in Indian movies especially in the movies of south Indian. Let us look in to the novel along with its summary. This is a story of Madhav, a Hindi speaking Bihari who falls in love with Riya, an elite Delhi girl at the prestigious St. Stephen's College. As per the wordings given by Chetan Bhagat, the readers might think that the story would revolve around the travails of a person who is not able to speak English fluently. In fact, it is a story of a man who has been trying to trap a woman who denies him throughout the story. The author has named it true love. When the readers are eagerly expecting a different kind of story, they are disappointed with the very usual story of a movie i.e., a hero and a heroine; hero loves heroine; heroine denies him for some reasons; hero stalks her throughout the story despite many hurdles; hero even travels abroad for her and finally wins her; heroine also loves him in fact; heroine has some other story to justify her denial. The readers can have all these things in the novel *Half Girlfriend*. Like a movie, here also, a common thing is needed to make a bond between Madhav and Riya. Here, it is the game basketball. Both of them are basketball players at the prestigious St. Stephen's College. After many proposals, Riya agrees to have a half girlfriendship, which is understood to be a relationship more than friendship but excludes the physical-whimsical.

'Well, are you my girlfriend?'

'No.'

'What are we then?'

'Friends?'

'You allow friends to hold you like this?'

I had not let her go. She gently moved away.

'Okay, I'm your half-girlfriend.'

'What?'

'Yeah. I'm close to you. We spend time together. We can have affectionate hugs. But nothing more.'

'Nothing more? What is more?'

'Well, you what know constitutes more?' (67)

However, Madhav tries to have that physical-whimsical with Riya frequently. But, being an Indian woman Riya disapproves all his play. Scenes like this come at regular intervals like an item song or a masala clipping in a movie to satisfy all kinds of audience.

She didn't respond, as if asleep. I lifted the quilt covering her. Her tiny shorts had bunched up even further. I couldn't help but stare at her legs. She pulled the quilt back over her as a reflex. A girl knows she is being stared at, even in her sleep. I lay down next to her. I took care to have the least amount of body contact. I shared some of the quilt and shut my eyes.

We lay still for two minutes. She turned to her side. Her nose poked into my right shoulder. Her hand touched my elbow. Even with my eyes closed, I felt her warmth next to me. I turned...

... I resisted the urge to kiss her. I let my hand slide further down her back. As I reached her lower back, her voice startled me. (73)

Throughout the novel, Madhav admires Riya's physique not her soul. He wants her to be his bedmate not a soul mate. But, the author projects it as if it were a spiritual one. After many months passed, despite their gentleman agreement, Madhav proposes her again. But this time, she hands a wedding invitation at him. Moreover, the marriage is with a rich guy who is abroad and well-settled. All this resembles a South-Indian movie. Then, Madhav comes to know that there is no point at all to be in Delhi. He decides to go back to his village Dumraon to help his mother in running her rural school where he is to be enthroned as the king of a crumbling, rural town. But before he leaves, he sits for placements for HSBC and makes the panel realize that the interviewers themselves are facing a mid-life crisis. They offer him a job because all it requires to land a job is to go all mean girls. Madhav declines the job offer and leaves for Bihar because it makes a good scene for a Bollywood movie- idealistic. Now, he is with his mother helping in running the school where they need funds to build toilets. They are not able to run the school due to financial crisis. The government also never helps them. Now, they get a chance of winning a lottery in the name of Gates Foundation funded by Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft. The readers are left with no clue how the preloaded-fate helps the protagonists in the movies as well as in this novel to dissolve a problem. These kinds of unreal things can happen only in movies. When a novel is read, the readers should feel some kind of real things that are very practical in real life. Here, it is missing. Before moving further, the readers come automatically to know that the protagonist is definitely going to win over the Gates fund. To get Bill to pay their bills, Madhav has to organize a

little song and dance performance for the delegation and deliver a speech in English. And this is when the audience realize why he being poor at English is the central theme of the story. Moreover, this is when the audience fails to understand what he was doing at St. Stephen's for three years.

Jha (Madhav) soon enrolls himself for some English classes at Patna, the city where he also runs into Riya *coincidentally*. Again, it reminds us movies where the director makes deliberate incidents to make the separated-central figures meet again. Like the director does in movies, the author does it here. Riya is now a divorcee and is working with Nestle. Madhav helps her to find a fine apartment and she helps him in return by teaching English. The readers may think that Riya is teaching English. But, the thing is she just prepares a two page essay which is to be mugged up by Madhav and presented in front of Bill Gates. For the next few scenes, Riya acts as an English teacher for the rehearsals made by Madhav.

Meanwhile ,Madhav gets his passion about Riya renewed. He learns more Riya than English. Very close to the day of the big speech, he takes her to his home. His mother gives a dirty look at the girl. It seems that she doesn't like the girl. It is exactly the same scenes what we Indians have been watching in our regional movies for decades. The protagonist manages the situation. At last, the day comes. Madhav delivers his mugged up speech in front of Bill Gates. The writer says he speaks from heart. As per the audience's prediction, he wins over the fund. Immediately after the grand event, Riya goes missing. When he is in search of his lady love, he receives a letter from her. In the letter, she tells that she has a lung cancer and she doesn't want him to be with her during her last days. She also wants to die alone. After three years, Riya's landlord from Patna gets some of her articles from her shelves and gives them to Madhav. He thinks that it will be embarrassing for him to read them because her painful memories will come rushing back. So, he must have kept them safe in the attic or thrown them away or burnt them. But, instead of all these, he takes them to Chetan Bhagat. Apparently, Mr. Bhagat is also confused to see the journals which said that Madhav was asked to read Bhagat's novels by Riya, That's how he thought it would be best to take the journals to the author. He hands them at Chetan Bhagat. But, Chetan is not willing to read that. Madhav bhai compels Bhagat, keeps all the materials on the table, and leaves the place. While Chetan was taking rest, accidentally he gets a piece of letter. This is a great twist in the story. Bhagat gets inspired by reading that one piece of letter. And he spends the whole night with the letters to find out that Riya is alive.

With the help of Riya's personal diary, Madhav learns about the domestic violence his lady had to go through in her marriage, about how she was sexually abused as a child and about how Madhav's mother had told her to stay away from him because of which she had to make up the cancer story and leave Mr. Madhav Jha to his own misery. If it were a film, here we could have some flash-backs. Accidentally, Chetan, the director of this screenplay, never did this. He might have thought to differ it from a movie. The director of this story has tried his best to make so many plots like in the movies. The hero remembers that Riya always spoke about wanting to be a singer at a bar in New York and therefore, she must be in New York. Here, the hero's seventh sense works. He requests a few of his friends at the Gates Foundation to get him a three-month internship in Manhattan. Of course, as per the audiences' guess, he gets it and goes to New York in search of the heroine. No way at all. This shows the author has finished all his plots and twists. The audiences are not able to understand how the Gates foundation gave him the internship. They are also left with no clue that how a person will travel abroad in search of his ladylove in real life. They wonder what a wonderful love-story it is. He has many commitments there. Whenever he is free, he searches Riya throughout New York almost in every bar. Somebody helps him like Hanuman in the story of Ramayana. It seems like junior artists helping the hero in movies. The readers clearly know that he will succeed in getting her. On his last night in America, he finds out where the crazy woman could be singing, runs seven miles in the snow to reach her and stands in front of her while she sings it her eyes closed. They both understand each other and joins together without worrying the sentiments his mother made. The story ends with Mr. Chetan Bhagat being shown around the rural school by Madhav and Riya, who are now married and have a son. The author has failed to say how the mother accepted Riya.

The full novel gives the impression of a South-Indian movie. No deviation at all. The cinematic techniques can be there, but in a limited level. Chetan might have thought to make this also like his previous novels ie., Five Point Someone, 2 States etc., Instead of writing this, he could have directed it as a film. It is fair to say that the author has touched all the possible social evils that he can, including but not limited to domestic violence, illiteracy, casteism, corruption and sexual abuse. There is also a hint of cancer and hygiene. Yet, the author is trying to focus on two important social evils of all – attempting to adapt the book into star in the movie, and importantly stupidity. Both, not necessarily mutually exclusive. Everything would have been fine if it never had adhered too much of a film. The novel has full of unreal things and predictable scenes. There are no practical scenes at all. It does not

travel along with the readers. Therefore, the readers are not able to travel along with the characters of the novel.

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