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**RIYA SOMANI: A VOICE OF PRESENT DAY WOMAN IN *HALF GIRLFRIEND***

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**Abstract:**

*Being an aristocratic family member, Riya has her own identity devoid of other members of family unlike her mother, father and a half-time husband, Rohan Chandak and his mother. She, at the very initial stage of her love when she goes closer to Madhav, he demands her physical contact as he calls “making Bihar proud” kind of thing, refutes and gains her consciousness about his love. She often becomes upset with traditional useless family values and complains “sucks being a girl in this country, I tell you, sucks”. (32). At beginning, Madhav roams into the romantic imagination of love based on his friends’ ideas but after break-up or “half break-up”, he realizes the real meaning of love and emotional attachment to Riya. He strives a lot but has got no way to re-tie with her. He seems more mature than ever. She did not give him whatever he asks but after understanding his personality and nature, she prefers to be his “half-girlfriend” as she feels more comfortable with him being a half-girlfriend.*

**Keywords:** *Half-Girlfriend, Half-Boyfriend, Voice of Present Day Woman, Love, True Love, Young Generation, Contemporary Age, Male-Female Protagonist, etc.*

One of the bestselling novelists of present time and very popular among young India, Chetan Bhagat, an international investment banker turned into full-time writer has six novels and one non-fiction book on his name—all block buster. Simple and routine English is an attraction and strength of his writing with a current story mostly relating to the youths. His all novels are centered on youngsters, among them some are filmed into successful Bollywood movies most popular is *3 Idiots* based on *Five Point Someone* (2004). He is, in this sense, the first glamorous author of India as a Bollywood actor. Representing the youth of nation, he often peeps into the mind of young generation and reveals their wills, emotions, actions and specific point of views through his characters. He masterly expresses a theme, thread or a point he wish to in the course of his writing. Here we have a few opinions about him:

“Many writers are successful at expressing what’s in their hearts or articulating a particular point of view. Chetan Bhagat’s books do both and more.” (Rahman ii).

“The voice of India’s rising entrepreneurial class.” (*Fast Company Magazine*ii).

“India’s paperback king.” (*The Guardian* ii).

“The biggest-selling English-language novelist in India’s history.” (*New York Times* ii).

“A rock star of Indian publishing.” (*The Times of India* ii).

“Bhagat has touched a nerve with young Indian readers and acquired almost cult-status.” (*International Herald Tribune* ii).

All reviews place the author to a literary height and he deserves for that but often criticized for lack of literary values in his fiction, a mass-producer, he is Paulo Coelho of India, a public writer especially with his English—no one finds difficult to read him. Such an emerging contemporary author whose acquaintances with literary values are rare need to be explored on the level of literary credibility. Hence present is an attempt to explore the character of Riya Somani among many

characters of his fiction. The present article is a type of review placing Riya Somani as the specimen of current day woman. She has emerged as a real, complete half-protagonist, counterpart to Madhav Jha, male protagonist in *Half Girlfriend*. She is a girl and woman of the contemporary age representing, in a real sense, present day woman though born and brought up in an aristocratic family. She belongs to all those girls who have their own ideals, way of living, notions of love and moreover their power of decision making. But she also becomes a victim of newly formed modern orthodox family system, its hypocritical status-values which affect her decisions making her more conscious. Madhav falls in her love, she responds him but with a very thoughtful mind and has very clear ideas of love. She always dominated the conversations with Madhav and has a point to offer on various topics:

“Okay, so, I have this dream. I want to play music and sing....in a bar in New York.... Yes, that’s it. I don’t want to be a famous singer or a rock star. I don’t marry to 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” (Bhagat 33).

Riya is a different girl with different mindset to all those reserved girls who have typical dreams of love and marriage. She has something to offer as her own and she is willing to strive to achieve it. And she has got success in pursuing the dream of singing in a bar in New York on her own without anybody’s help. She breaks the traditional depiction of a woman portrayed in the fiction.

Being an aristocratic family member, Riya has her own identity devoid of other members of family unlike her mother, father and a half-time husband, Rohan Chandak and his mother. She, at the very initial stage of her love when she goes closer to Madhav, he demands her physical contact as he calls “making Bihar proud” kind of thing, refutes and gains her consciousness about his love. She often becomes upset with traditional useless family values and complains “sucks being a girl in this country, I tell you, sucks” (Bhagat, 32). At the beginning, Madhav roams into the romantic imagination of love based on his friends’ ideas but after break-up or “half break-up”, he realizes the real meaning of love and emotional attachment to Riya. He strives a lot but has got no way to re-tie with her. He seems more mature than ever. She did not give him whatever he asks but after understanding his personality and nature, she prefers to be his “half-girlfriend” as she feels more comfortable with him being a half-girlfriend:

“Well, are you my girlfriend?

No.

What are we then?

Friends?

You allow friends to hold you like this?

Okay, I’m your half-girlfriend.” (Bhagat, 67).

Her decision to remain half-girlfriend was firm which helped her later to be more stout while breaking-up with him. Actually she wished to impart an opportunity to continue their relationship but Madhav could not reach her heart and mind and didn’t understand her well. The break-up has brought about a crumbling ache in the heart of Madhav, at the same time she also was not happy with that she has taken the decision to marry Rohan Chandak, an emerging business tycoon had close relations to her family. She says, “I’m sorry. It’s fine. Madhav, it is my choice. Nobody is forcing me. I want to leave” (Bhagat, 87). But it was indirect force of her family and the society she lived in. She could not utter a word about her relation with Madhav even to a single member of her family because she did not feel very sure about the relation with Madhav. It pained Madhav extremely and he turned into a restless person:

“Sometimes I lurked in the college corridors, waiting for her class to end. I stood far away and avoided eye contact. I would watch her come out of her class, only to disappear into a crowd of friends. Once she did see me. She didn’t smile or turn away. She didn’t look even angry. She didn’t react at all. It killed me. If she had been come forward and slapped me or yelled, I would have been okay. However, she looked right through me, as if didn’t exit” (Bhagat, 79).

She didn’t fall for the continuous persuasion of Madhav and stood firm upon her determination which unfortunately resulted into her suffering. She never loses her confidence whatever happens. After three years, suddenly she re-enters into the life of Madhav, but this time, again with great



maturity as it has been evidenced by their first meeting after break-up. Much of the life of both had been moved in this three years' span. She had married to Rohan and settled in abroad. But now she had astonishingly re-appeared in Patna and Madhav could catch her. She did not force her what is now she possessed upon Madhav rather very playfully narrates her (miserable) story of last three years without a single word of sorrow. Here she gains a complete voice of present day woman and (proudly) tells that she was working on her own with a company in Patna. She leaves her husband Rohan Chandak rejecting the expectations of a traditional wife. Her intense voice can be notable here: "I have changed, Madhav, she said. In college I was immature, over-protected, idiotic eighteen year-old with no clue about life" (Bhagat, 141). In fact, what she has admitted, she was more mature to Madhav in college days, the only thing was she could not judge the things and it was true that she hadn't clue about life in the then situation. She has become more experienced in the last three years and it has affected her life on a greater scale; without blaming to anybody or circumstances, she accepts what has come to her way and endeavors to overcome them as she could. Still she had a sting of love for Madhav and again she decides to re-enter into the life of Madhav but only after with his acceptance. She became happy accompanying Madhav but soon she has been rejected by Madhav's mother with a very strict advocates and she has to decide to leave Madhav again never to interfere in his smooth running life. She leaves a letter for Madhav admitting her love for him but unable to continue with him for some inextricable reason, she wrote,

"A good thing has come of my decision to leave here. I feel free enough to tell you everything. I don't have hold back or say the right thing anymore. For instance, it isn't just you who had a sleepless night at my place. I never slept either. I thought of how hard it was going to be to leave you. Funny, I have never felt that way about leaving this world. But leaving you, yes, that is difficult.

So, no crying. No looking for me. No being a Devdas. You are such a good looking and caring guy, you'll find a lovely girl. Someone who isn't a mess like me. Someone who will love you like you deserve to be loved" (Bhagat, 190).

It was her acceptance of Madhav but for the reason of his mother's intimation and her own thought of it's too late to be a part of Madhav, she determines not to ruin the life of Madhav and leaves him for forever. Madhav loved her intensely and could learn the real sense and meaning of love; he loved her by heart, again became restless as he read the letter.

"My eyes welled up. Tears rolled down my cheeks. My limbs felt weak. I struggled to stand. The letter fell from my hands. I picked it up and read it again. Memories of me sitting in Riya's car came to me. Images flashed in my head –her fancy wedding-car box, the glucose biscuits and her driving off. She had disappeared to get married then. She had disappeared to die now. In both cases, she had taken, to use a tough English word, unilateral decisions" (Bhagat, 191).

The emotions of Madhav towards Riya are more real and pained him the most. This time Riya leaved him for his mother but it's her own decision. Actually, she has pretended that she has Lung carcinoma and going to die soon. But she set off for New York to fulfil her dream of becoming a singer. She has accepted whatever came to her life without any complaint and hence she becomes the child of present day. Then it was the turn of Madhav to find her in New York. He manages to go to New York and tried hardest to locate her and it was his true love that he could stress her in a bar:

"The bright spotlight on the stage contrasted with the dark room. It took a few seconds to spot the singer. It was her. Riya. The water bottle fall from my hand. She sang with her eyes closed, completely engrossed in the song. In a full-length, sequined black gown she looked more beautiful than what even God would define as beautiful. *Yes, Riya Somani, I found you*" (Bhagat, 254).

It is the story of a girl bold enough to take decisions and to stand by their side without spending much time on thinking that what would happen next. Here she differs to traditional women, no repentance on what has happened. She comes to us as the creation of our time and never bothered by critical moments in her life. She thinks ahead rather emphasizing the negativity, even it has never touched her mind all she did to continue to walk on the path of stern life. She feels overjoy and becomes complete when Madhav embraces her in the bar at midnight. Their true love greets. Madhav grows a great lover by accepting her as she is after many alterations in her life. Both Madhav and Riya are the representation of today's generation who have their own dictums and the way to deal things in the life. Her relation entitled half-girlfriend has her own invention for not to fall or turn victim of insecure love and she made it what she wished. At the end, a half-girlfriend transforms into full-girlfriend for the passion of her half-boyfriend, now full-boyfriend.

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