

Navigating Social Cohesion through Language in Chetan Bhagat's *Half Girlfriend*

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Abstract

Chetan Bhagat is a renowned writer known for his contemporary fiction novels and often explores the lives, aspirations and challenges faced by Indian youths. His novels had a significant impact on the literary and cultural landscapes of India. His role as a public figure includes his columns in newspapers, public speaker and involved in social and political discussions. Social Cohesion is a multifaceted concept encompassing trust, communication, inclusive policies, cultural diversity, shared experiences, and education. The paper entitled "Navigating Social Cohesion through Language in Chetan Bhagat's *Half Girlfriend*" focuses on the social differences and challenges in communication.

Keywords: Social Class Differences, Contemporary India, Language and Linguistic struggles and Social Fabric.

Introduction

India is a land of diversity by its cultural richness and intricate heritage that reflect country's history, traditions, and societal values but a complex web of social class differences that have persisted throughout the history. The stratification of society into various classes based on factors such as caste, economic status and education is deeply ingrained and plays a pivotal role in shaping individual lives and social structures. A cohesive society is characterized by a sense of community belonging and mutual support. The novel *Half Girlfriend* revolves around the central characters of Madhav Jha and Riya Somani, whose comes from different socio-economic backgrounds in India. Madhav, a young man from Bihar, secures admission to the prestigious St. Stephen's college in Delhi. He encounters Riya, an affluent and sophisticated girl. Madhav and Riya's friendship changed into a romantic relationship. The novel delves into Madhav's struggle with English, as it becomes a barrier in his communication with Riya. As the story progresses Riya's personal challenges and emotional baggage came to light, which added complexity to their relationship. The novel explores the themes of social class differences, communication barriers and personal aspirations. *Half Girlfriend* is a tale of love, ambition and Statuswhere the challenges posed by cultural and societal disparities.

The primary determinants of social class in India are the caste system, a hierarchical social order deeply rooted in the country's cultural and religious history. Economic another critical factor contributes to social class distinctions in India. Max Weber's Social Stratification Theory exposed the three dimensions of society namely economic class, social status, and political power. Dr. Kailash Pyakuryal in his article named *Weberian Model of Social Stratification- A Viewpoint* says that,

Social Stratification has been viewed by Weber in three dimensions: economic class, social status, and political power. Each of these dimensions has its own stratification. The economy is represented by income and the goods and services which an individual possesses. The social represented by the prestige and honor he enjoys and the political represented by the power he exercises. According to Weber's scheme, class based on the economic order, would be no more than one aspect of the social structure. (3)

The country experiences an economic divide with a significant portion of the population residing in rural areas facing economic challenges and the urban centers witness the concentration of wealth and affluence. The disparities in income and access to resources create a visible divide, impacting opportunities for education, health care and quality of life.

Contemporary India is characterized by a stark contrast between the affluent elite and marginalized poor. The urban centers experienced rapid economic growth and rural areas faced persistent poverty. The class differences are extensive, which affect individuals and communities. In the novel *Half Girlfriend*, Riya rejects Madhav because of his poor economic background. He says that,

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‘Isn’t that what high- class people call a date?’

‘No.’

‘What’s date then?’ ‘You want to see the movie with me or not?’ She had said, her hands on her hips.

The hands-on-hips pose meant no further questions. In the three months I had known her, I knew she hated being pushed. I thought maybe that was how rich people were- somewhat private. We overdid the familiarity in our villages anyway. (HGF 29)

Riya rejects Mahav’s proposal because of his poor economic class and he belongs to an urban area. Class differences in India are deeply rooted in historical legacies, exacerbated by modern economic structures.

Language is the vehicle of discretion, means the peculiar mode to transfer, transmit the intended message to the receiver. Language is a non instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of systems of voluntary produced symbols. The role of language is the learning process which cannot be overestimated. Language plays a key role in unifying a vast and complex notion and in providing individuals with outlets for developing diverse skills and abilities. It is organized, refined, and expressed. It helps in the formation of concepts, analysis of complex ideas and focus attention on ideas. English is considered as the global language. It helps to communicate with various sectors like business, education, and social interactions. It helps individuals to communicate with people from different countries and cultures, which are essential for personal and professional growth. In the novel *Half Girlfriend*, the character Madhav manages to score a seat in St. Stephen’s, a prestigious college in Delhi. During the interview section, one of the professors says that English is no longer a foreign language, Mr. Jha. It is a global language. I suggest you learn it” (HGF 13). This incident highlights the importance of English language in every sector especially in the field of education.

Linguistic struggles encompass a myriad of challenges faced by individuals and communities in the realm of language. It leads to misunderstandings, isolation, exclusion and exacerbating social divides. Language struggles lead to linguistic discrimination and prejudice. In the novel *Half Girlfriend* Madhav introduces himself to Riya as “Myself Madhav Jha” (HGF 19) and later he muses that, “That was my reflexive response. It was only later that I learnt that people who construct sentences like that sound low class” (HGF 19). In Chetan Bhagat’s novel *Half Girlfriend*, the characters grapple with various challenges which add depth and complexity to the narratives. Madhav, a boy from rural Bihar, faces the struggle of fitting into the Urban, sophisticated world that Riya inhabits. The contrast between their backgrounds creates a barrier, exemplifying the challenges arising from social class differences. Communication becomes a significant obstacle in the novel, as Madhav and Riya belong to distinct linguistic and cultural spheres. This challenge is exacerbated by Madhav’s limited proficiency in English, which becomes a symbol of the border issue of language and cultural barriers in relationships.

English language holds pronunciation as the important factor of effective communication. It serves as a bridge for individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds and facilitates a mutual understanding in the globalized world. An Irish playwright G B Shaw in his essay *How to Speak Correct English* says that,

And yet its members do not as to the pronunciation of some of the simplest and commonest words in the English language. The two simplest and most common words in any language are Yes and No. But no two members of the committee pronounce them exactly alike. All that can be said is that every member pronounces them in such a way that they would not only be intelligent in every English-speaking country, but would stamp the speaker as a cultivated person, as distinguished from an ignorant and illiterate one. (2)

English is considered as the global language, and it plays a pivotal role in the digital era. In the novel *Half Girlfriend*, the conversation between Madhav and Verma goes like this, “Say How,” Verma said, asking the class to repeat the word. How. The response came in ten different accents. The word sounded like ‘haw’ or ‘haau’ or ‘ho’ (HGF 131). Proficiency in English is a prerequisite for success in global level. English is the gateway for higher education and professional opportunities.

The challenges faced because of linguistic disparities and cultural differences resonate with real life scenarios where people from various backgrounds find it hard to express themselves effectively. To overcome communication barriers is to encourage a linguistically inclusive environment. Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam, the former president of India says that “to ignite the minds of people by saying that society should give special attention towards the issues related to youth because they are the future of Nation.” In this novel, education serves as a catalyst for change. Empowering individuals with education can break the shackles of social class differences.

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