

Stream of Consciousness in *Half Girlfriend*

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Abstract:

Stream of consciousness is a unique narrative approach that features unstructured thoughts and imagery. The plot of a literary work using this narrative technique can be set in any time or location. Stream of consciousness writing emphasizes the emotional and psychological experiences of the character in question. Chetan Bhagat is an icon of the New India. This paper examines the ways stream of consciousness is employed by Bhagat in *Half Girlfriend*. Bhagat's use of the stream of consciousness lens of view in this fiction conveys both the male and female protagonists' impressions and feelings as well as it fails not to depicts the world they inhabit. Some notable tactics used in *Half Girlfriend* include time and space manipulation in Framework, as well as interior monologues. Some of the key issues explored using the stream of consciousness technique include the inferiority complex, women's empowerment, alienation, the educational system, and policy.

Keywords:Stream of Consciousness, Chetan Bhagat, *Half Girlfriend*

Introduction

Modernism In Indian Literature

In Indian literature, modernism stands for a revolutionary epoch marked by a rejection of conventional thinking and an absorption of Western literary trends. The multifaceted sociopolitical environment of post-colonial India gave rise to this phenomenon. From their inception in the 1920s and 1930s, modernist shifts in Indian literature shifted away from prevalent nationalist belonging idioms and idealized human ideals. Marxist writings also began to appear in the 1930s, emphasizing social

reality in an intense and critical manner. The Progressive Writers Association was established in 1936 in Lucknow, and other regional languages saw the emergence of similar organizations. Early progressive writing and early modernism were similar in that they rejected literary etiquette and valued reality harshly. Before they split up, Urdu modernists such as Sa'adat Hasan Manto and Ismat Chughtai were closely associated with the progressives. Bengali poets of the Kallol age drew criticism for their focus on "poverty and lust" in addition to their formal advances. (Ramakrishnan & Kumar, 2018)

Efforts to map modernism's trajectory in India are hampered by the bewildering range of languages, communities, and literary cultures; the survival of oral traditions and disparities in literacy rates; and the complexity of the socioeconomic and political realities in postcolonial India. Protean is an umbrella term itself, with various connotations and emphases in different places and situations. The Indian feminist movement flourished during the period of the Indian Freedom Struggle. Like the Romantic poets, Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley Bharathi, Bharathidasan, and Kavimani, the offspring of the Rebellion and the Reformation Movement, produced a number of revolutionary women figures who served as the movement's defenders and torchbearers and who, more forcefully and succinctly than their English counterparts, expressed their views on sexual equality. They never passed up the chance to share their deeply held beliefs and upbeat outlook on women's place in creating an exciting new age. (www.wisdomlib.org, 2022)

Stream of consciousness is a literary device used in nondramatic fiction to depict a succession of various impressions—auditory, visual, tactile, associative, and subliminal—that pierce a person's consciousness and influence their awareness as well as the direction of their logical thinking. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024) Man's thoughts rarely take the form of a language. The mind operates on concepts rather than words, allowing individuals to think without using words. According to William James, an American philosopher and psychologist, "Our thoughts flow like a river." The flow is generally simple and easy to follow. "But at intervals an obstruction, a set-back, a log-jam occurs, stops the current, creates an eddy, and makes things move the other way."

A novelist's point of view determines the reader's distance from the characters in their work. Initially, point of view storytelling relied on a narrator to convey characters' thoughts and emotions through action and dialogue. Stream of consciousness lets readers to experience the character's emotions, morals, and intellectual thinking without limitations. The characters' mind moves freely between the present, past, and future, from one thing or person to another. The limitations of time are removed, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the characters' emotions, thoughts, and memories. *Tristram Shandy* (1759) by Laurence Sterne employs stream-of-consciousness and is highly self-referential. It's an early example of a phenomenon. The narrator, Tristram Shandy, claims to tell his story throughout, but ends up explaining far more about the events that inspired his book, his literary views, and a wide range of other issues even more away from his promised plot. The text is full with digressions. In fact, the whole book is a digression. (*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* by Laurence Sterne, 2010)

The iconic and the most influential, the third book in F. Scott Fitzgerald's series, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), is considered his greatest work to date. In the novel the author provides the readers with the insights into the character's emotions and thoughts. The subjective experiences of the protagonists were portrayed through stream-of-consciousness techniques. ("Learning From Gatsby: Conveying Emotion #Amwriting")The most well-known example is James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), a sophisticated portrayal of the characters' interior moods. Some other noteworthy works encompass *Leutnant Gustl* (1901) by Arthur Schnitzler, an early use of stream of consciousness to reconstruct the ambiance of pre-World War I Vienna; William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), that documents the sporadic and abstract remarks in the mental processes of every member of the Compson household to occurrences that are right away encountered or events that are recalled Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) is an intricate piece in which six individuals relate their lives from birth to their golden years.

Stream of Consciousness in Indian Fiction

The White Tiger by Arvind Adiga is essentially a narrative that tackles injustice, inequality, and poverty. The protagonist is envisioning a parallel society in which he establishes a school for educating "white tigers" like him who additionally would act outside of moral, social, and legal constraints after moving from the rural area to the metropolis. (Ahlawat) He claims he can teach his students how to rise

above their socioeconomic circumstances, but at the expense of their humanity and morality. He wants to impart to youngsters that something as horrible as murder (directly or indirectly) can also be justified if it serves a purpose, given that he has no regrets and is not held accountable for his crimes.

These fantasies are essentially about an isolated and desperate man who imagines establishing a new social structure where he will not be judged.

Chetan Bhagat

One of the most renowned and well-known authors of the modern period is Chetan Bhagat. His birthday is April 24, 1974. His books have been credited as "bestsellers" ever since they were published. His writings consistently captured the truth and portrayed a realistic image of Indian life. Everyone can relate to him because of the simple, understandable way he articulated himself. Through his work, he addressed a wide range of topics, including corruption, inter community marriages, secularism, life at a contact center, and pressure in today's educational system. His novels deal with contemporary India from the point of the 'youth' and the English used is unostensible, unassuming and many a time ungrammatical. But at the same time, these novels still do what novels always do – that is to mirror the world or offer suggestions, or give directions. (Gopichand: 134-135)

Plot of Half Girlfriend

A girl who assumed she was unworthy of romance given that she had messed it up so badly made the decision to let go up on it. Since the situation seemed evidently hopeless, a man who adored her so much was ready to overlook her and search everywhere for a solution. The story seems quite realistic. (Tropicalgirlreads)

In her reading of the current Anglo-American critical discourse on Bhagat, Ragini paid close attention to the developments in post critical and post-postcolonial literary studies. It makes the case that Bhagat's emergence as a major Anglophone literary figure Chetan Bhagat is a well-known modern novelist who has gained a great position in the hearts of today's youth, so it is important to examine his writing techniques and subjects in his works. Chetan Bhagat gives young people the energy and inspiration to live their lives in accordance with their desires. We receive both a third-person preface and a first-person narrative that is present throughout the book, and Chetan Bhagat identifies himself in the book as the writer that Madhav speaks with in *Half Girlfriend*. Therefore, it would be appropriate to investigate whether his

most well-known piece, *Half-Girlfriend*, contains any instances of stream of consciousness techniques and if so what themes are reflected in the thoughts.

Literature Review

Siyuan investigated Woolf's contraction of episodic time and her utilization of only one character in *The Mark on the Wall*. He also proposed that the pictures and personal pronouns employed by Woolf reflected her desire of freedom and feminism. The research assets analyzing Woolf's initial stream-of-consciousness short tale *The Mark on the Wall* help us understand Woolf's early writing while also following her development as a writer. Th researcher proved Woolf's use of the stream-of-consciousness technique introduces a fresh way of expressing her desire for freedom. Siyuan added that Woolf's story uses irrational creative forms, including picture concatenation, free-flowing consciousness, and a single narrator. These strategies aim to challenge the rationality of the real world and provide new ways to express and understand.

Kumaraswamy analyzes the steam of technique in Deshpande's novels and asserts that her techniques were very authentic, and apt, which were very close to the reader as her novel techniques were a combo of first and third person narrative which reflected the consciousness of human mind in the process of introspection and so as retrospection. He added that the theme of realization by understanding one self, which was common in her novels, besides struggle for identity, assertion of individuality, and independence of woman.

Aldouri and Mohammad's paper focuses on the stream of consciousness as a fictional narrative style, as well as how and why William Faulkner used it in his novel *As I Lay Dying*. They discussed the psychological and literary definitions of stream of consciousness, as well as how they are applied from psychology to literature. Furthermore, they give insight on Faulkner's personal and literary life sketches, as well as how he uses stream of consciousness as a storytelling technique to thoroughly examine the impressions and actions of the characters in *As I Lay Dying*.

Vinitha, & Rajkumar's study examined Chetan Bhagat's presentation of multiculturalism in his book *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*. The novel's characters and happenings highlighted India's unique culture and traditions. Krish and Ananya, who came from different Indian states, struggled to convince their parents

to support their marriage due to generational, communication, and cultural differences. The present research analyses Bhagat's one of Bhagat's novels like Vinitha, & Rajkumar study but adheres to investigation of Stream of Conscience technique like Siyuan, Kumaraswamy, Aldouri and Mohammad.

Methodology

This qualitative research through content analysis examines whether there is the employment of Stream of consciousness technique, which modern novelists use in the select novel. Chetan Bhagat's novel Half Girlfriend (HGF) is the source. The interior monologues of the protagonists of this fiction are the data for this study. The devices used by the stream of consciousness and the themes that the stream of consciousness brings out are examined through descriptive method.

Results

Stream-of-consciousness writing has a polyphonic framework that connects various threads to form a cohesive narrative. This style in fiction provides a layered investigation of the characters' psychology, gradually revealing their personality. Half Girlfriend has a unique logic of thought based on the protagonist's evolving inner thoughts and conscious behaviors. This reasoning serves as the narrative backbone for the entire work of fiction. Manipulation of Time and Space in Framework, Interior Monologues are some of the noteworthy techniques handled in Half Girlfriend. Inferiority Complex, Women Empowerment, Alienation, Educational System and Policy are some of the main themes that are brought out through stream of consciousness technique.

The most important aspect of stream of consciousness technique is the manipulation of time and space within the framework. Madhav narrates approximately 44 of the 46+2 (Prologue and Epilogue) chapters. The author narrates the prologue, chapters 34–35, and the epilogue. He's one of the characters. The author informs the protagonist that Riya has not deceased. In Chapter 34, we learn about Riya's character through her journals. She additionally wrote letters to Madhav. Her Whatsapp texts are also present. Thus, Bhagat uses a combination of first- and third-person narratives of the events, as well as flashback elements. The prologue by Chetan Bhagat's narration depicts the lovelorn Madhav, who in the subsequent chapters describes his love tale, love failure, and what led him to his current situation. Thus, we travel from the present to the past. Again in chapters 34 and 35, we return to the present, when the protagonist is aware of Riya's betrayal and decides to journey

to New York in search of her. In Chapter 34, we are transported back in time to learn about Riya's dark secrets in addition to the reason for her second desertion of Madhav. Riya's account also tells why her marriage ended. In chapters 36–42, we are in the present. The epilogue tells us that “All's well that ends well”

Interior monologue is a typical storytelling device used in stream-of-consciousness novels. Both the male and female protagonists are given their chances to give the narrative. Riya's journals in chapter 34 and her letters are the interior monologues inside the story. Bhagat conveys each character's ideas, sentiments, and responses to one another by switching between their points of view. More than their words, the characters' thoughts convey the interactions between them. This presents the author the opportunity to reveal the mind of the protagonists, exposing their aspirations, fears and frustrations. The protagonists' comments are included in the text without being quoted directly, giving the impression that he prefers to ruminate in his thoughts rather than participate in the mundane discourse. Whether he's in the interview room, or on the tennis court, or talking with his college mates, or meeting Riya, or attending Riya's birthday party, or delivering a speech at Bill Gates' visit to his school, Madhav's monologues succeeds his as well as the Indian folks disability to speak English well.

Inferiority complex

Sabina Musthafa and Suhail examine the hardship of an Indian youth and write, "Bhagat contends that our country is divided into two categories of people - one elite English-speaking category and the other non-English speaking category..." According to Musthafa and Suhail (2015), young individuals in the second category often feel inferior while interacting with those who speak English fluently. Madhav's limited English proficiency and Bihari accent make him feel inadequate.

My accent. Back in 2004, my English was Bihari. I don't want to talk now like I did back then. It's embarrassing. It wasn't English. It was 90 per cent Bihari Hindi mixed with 10 per cent really bad English. For instance, this is what I had actually said: 'Cumty room...bat!aieyega zara? Hamara interview hai na wahan... Mera khel ka kota hai. Kis taraf hai?'(HGF.17)

On the first day at St. Stephen's, the so-called English category young men teased him, asking whether he had come to apply for a peon position. He was too

humble to admit that he didn't know enough English to realize that the boys were making a fool of him. He says,

I didn't know enough English back then to be offended(HGF.17)

Stephen's faculty disliked being asked or addressed to in Hindi. They were disrespectful to him during the interview. At the end of the interview, he expresses the usual non-English category youth's state of mind:

Without English, I felt naked. I started thinking about my return trip to Bihar. I didn't belong here—these English-speaking monsters would eat me alive.(HGF.19)

Why couldn't I think of clever lines like that?(HGF.67)

I think when rich guys say something, girls find it extra funny.(HGF.67)

Riya, though rich, speaks good English unlike Madhav suffers from inferiority complex too. The following metaphor makes one infer a lot instead of speaking volumes.

All I want to say is, if you crush a flower before it blooms, will it ever bloom as bright later? (HGF.217)

Her assessment of her own worth is also evident in her desire for Madhav to wed a lady who isn't hiding any sinister secrets.

However, he will get over it eventually and marry a princess sooner or later, who will come to him without a past, without deep dark secrets.(HGF.226)

She also reveals here that she's a woman with an ugly past, which can't be revealed to anyone. That's the reason she runs away from everyone even her beloved. She is scared of Ortega Y Gasset called "the terror of facing, single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence" (The Massachussts Review 1988, vol.29, no.3, 521-537)

Madhav becomes the mouth piece of the novelist who criticizes the flaws in the educational system, where undue importance is bestowed upon the acquisition of a foreign language, instead of giving merit to intelligence.

Alienation

Madhav feels isolated no matter where he is. At first, he felt inferior at Rudra, the college dormitory, because socioeconomic cultural distinctions were so stark in Stephen's that a poor rural guy couldn't fit in. Later, it was owing of his strong friendship with Riya.

He feels alienated because he is heartbroken and misses Riya. He admits to himself that he doesn't feel like he belongs in his own party.

I spoke to many of those present, but felt little connection with any of them.(HGF.268)

I didn't really belong in my own party.(HGF.269)

Madhav is aware that Riya is incredibly attractive, and she approaches him, requesting him to show her the images on his phone. However, a simple message on the phone could cause him to shun her, as he is so estranged from anything other than Riya. He feels alienated and he is looked upon as an eccentric since he refuses to speak about the kind of rot these people want him to speak. Riya feels alienated too. In several places, she expresses how marred and withdrawn she became as a result of her father's terrible conduct. When he dies, she claims she kept mute.

Women's Empowerment

She takes the money, that her father secretly gave her and mentions it as 'the hush money, money for me to go away from his mind'(HGF.225). But she herself claims that will cause her to forget and not forgive.

Also, maybe I was ready to forget and move on. Not forgive, but forget.(HGF.225)

Women are always thought to be mysterious. Riya ditches Madhav on two occasions. She misjudges Madhav due to her father's mistreatment, her inferiority complex, and her inability to deal with another mother-in-law who doesn't see her as valuable. Both are revealed through her own journals.

Then she decides as a typical feminist

No more dealing with another boy's mother. I don't want anyone's pity either. I am a divorcee. If that makes me tainted, so be it.(HGF225-226)

Riya quits Madhav for her own benefit too. She believes that tranquility, rather than love, is what she seeks, which she would not find if she marries Madhav.

To be loved and to love is nice. However, right now, more than love, I want peace.(HGF.226)

In short, Chetan Bhagat tells stories that appear to be true to life and unravels the brains of today's youth, particularly through Madhav's and Riya's opinions.

Discussion

The stream of consciousness technique has helped to highlight the challenges faced by Indian students seeking admission to "top" colleges. Despite efforts to improve literacy rates, many rural areas in India continue to confront challenges like not having basic facilities, such as lavatories and drinking water.

2 States highlights the traditional Indian mindset of rejecting inter-caste marriages and adhering to outdated ideas. The book explores the diverse nature of intercultural marriage and love in the "Unity in Diversity" nation.(Vinitha, & Rajkumar). In the same vein Madhav's mother Rani has spoilt the marriage of her son with Riya, for the sole reason that Riya is a divorcee and the dream of the lovers to get married shatters.

Madhav is humiliated in Delhi given that he cannot converse in English. Although times and lifestyles have changed, people's attitudes have stayed steadfast! This is evident in Rohan and his mother's aspirations for Riya. In many traditional households, a daughter-in-law is seen as a slave. Riya is required to prioritize her in-laws' shopping over her educational obligations.

Bhagat's novel explores various issues using the stream of consciousness technique. Bhagat's novel delves into the concept of half-girlfriend, as the title suggests. The reason Riya wishes to stay a half girlfriend is only disclosed in her journals, which she used to keep. Her past, or dark secrets as she defines them, is the sole reason. She gets cross by Madhav's desire to be closer to her because of her dark past. She is divided between her love for Madhav and her disdain for any physical contact with him, which reminds her of the anguish she endured as a result of her own father's unjust treatment to her.

Characters in conventional novels encounter rich worlds and intricate narratives, which heavily influence what they say. The way they behave are passive, not motivated by personal aspirations. Bhagat depicted characters in unique ways to emphasize human personality above sociability. "In the subconsciousness of the first person narrator, there is a pursuit for beautiful things, and this is the eternal human nature and a aspect of human existence".[Liu] Such a subconscious realm acts as a haven from the outside world. In contrast, modern people frequently feel estranged

not only from the outside world and others, but also from themselves. Alienation embodies the human experience's sensation of emptiness. Bhagat illustrates Riya's plight as an outsider who is out of harmony with her family and the rest of the world through her narration. Bhagat's protagonist explores her surroundings and influences her own life through her ideas and subconscious. This allows her to escape reality while also reviving her spirits. Modern civilization's alienation from individuals may hamper direct action to improve the social environment, but it also promotes introspection and critical study of human behavior and culture. [Huang] Also, Bhagat's probe in Riya's thoughts explores the postmodern tendency to pursue freedom while losing faith in family and social authority.

According to Sabirova and Nketiah, while a multilingual and multicultural landscape enriches people's lives, neglecting indigenous languages in favor of English proficiency may eventually lead to their extinction in Ghana, and language extinction results in the loss of a distinct culture as well as valuable wisdom. So, using the stream of consciousness technique, Chetan Bhagat makes the subtle satire on the an exorbitant of English., which is not an Indian national issue, but a Global one.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the novelist employs stream of consciousness techniques time and space manipulation as well as interior monologues to bring readers closer to the subconscious thinking of the protagonists. Also, Bhagat uses stream of consciousness to bridge the gap between characters and readers. Bhagat employs stream of consciousness to introduce people, develop action, and explore key concepts in *Half-Girlfriend*. The author detaches himself from the narrative, allowing the reader to fully engage with its content by the protagonists' narratives in all scenes other than the three scenes, where he meets, the protagonist and aids in the development of the plot.

The light conversations breaks up the perspective changes. Bhagat creates distinctive and unforgettable characters by fusing the innermost thoughts of his protagonists and minimizing their speeches. Bhagat's portrayal of Madhav and Riya through the stream of consciousness technique resonates with today's youth, which is why his works are popular among them. Moreover, Bhagat in *Half-Girlfriend* like his other novels like *2 States*, exposes complex sociocultural issues in India's multi-

cultural society. The author uses fiction to help people recognize their flaws and make amends in real life, rather than directly attacking them.

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