

## VIEWING ENGLISH AS A PERSPECTIVE OF MARGINALIZATION IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S *HALF GIRLFRIEND*

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### **Abstract:**

*At present, the persons who are aware of globalization have become English-maniac. No other language, except English has become the only source of communication for them. Those who do not know English are either overlooked or given a hurting-look. They are invisible like the protagonist in the novel Invisible Man by Ralf Ellison. They are known as “the non-English type” persons, as Bhagat worded it in his dedication of the present fiction. Their identity and presence is skillfully denied by the so called English-speakers. These speakers feel pride for their speaking-ability and so unconsciously create a circle in which they found themselves at the centre and “the non-English types” at the peripheral of it. This mentality has given birth to a new perspective to marginalize people. They are mostly affluent persons who reared up their offspring in English-medium schools and given lot of English exposure. Knowing English has become the standard for achieving high-class grade. Bhagat has stressed this division in the Indian communities. He also described how persons strive to be at the centre of the above circle. Once you get the centre, there are more chances of becoming egotistic and looking down upon other “non-English types” from where you had come. However, Madhav Jha, the protagonist of Half Girlfriend does not change even after becoming a good English-speaker.*

**Key Words:** marginalization, English speaking ability, acquisition of English,

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, “to marginalize” means “to make somebody feel as if they are not important and cannot influence decisions or events”. Chetan Bhagat, the novelist of popular fictions, has used two narrators to explain the plot of *Half Girlfriend*. He tries to make-feel fiction real. The voice of Madhav is his mouthpiece. The journey of Madhav from the village in Bihar called Dumraon to Delhi, to Patana, to New York is the dream-journey of every educated Indian. However, they cannot achieve it; not because they have less talent, but because they do not have so called fluent English-speaking ability. In the words of Chetan Bhagat the fiction “is also a story about a person who doesn't speak good English and how he copes in India. It also talks about the state of primary rural education in the country. Hopefully, the book will make people . . . more sensitive and less judgmental towards people who may not have the best language skills.” (<http://www.chetanbhagat.com/books/half-girlfriend/qa/>)

In the very first chapter of the novel, Madhav is shown a naive from a village to the most famous college in Delhi, St. Stephen's College, where students prefer English (to their mother-tongues) in the campus at least. They butt and look down upon others who are not comfortable with English. When Madhav comes across at the beginning with them, his English "was 90 per cent Bihari Hindi mixed with 10 per cent really bad English. . . . 'Comty room . . . batlaiega zara? Hamara interview hai na wahan . . . Mera khel ka kota hai. Kis taraf hai?'" (8, *Half Girlfriend*) Here he actually wants to ask for 'committee room' /kəmˌtɪ ru:m/, but cannot pronounce properly. In addition, he cannot construct even a small correct sentence in English. However, acquiring a language is the matter of exposure and practice of it. It can be acquired at any age, if proper surrounding and exposure created. The influence of mother-tongue on pronunciation is identifiable even in the speeches of so-called English scholars, though one can get rid of it to a certain extent by imitating proper models. However, this has become a new kind of marginalizing of persons on the basis of English-speaking ability.

The professors of St. Stephen's also prefer to speak in English. For them, using other language is like going against moral values or doing something debased work. In the interview of admissions from sport's quota, the dialogues and thoughts of Madhav go like this:

"Prof. Gupta smirked, 'that is some response. And why is St. Stephen's a good college?'

I switched to Hindi. Answering in English would require pauses make me come across as stupid. May be I was stupid, but I did not want them to know that.

'Your college has a big name. It is famous in Bihar also.' I said.

'Can you please answer in English?' Prof. Gupta said.

'Why? You don't know Hindi?' I said in reflex, and in Hindi.

I saw my blunder in their horrified faces. I had not said it in defiance; I really wanted to know why they had to interview me in English when I was more comfortable in Hindi. Of course, I did not know then that Stephen's professors didn't like being asked to speak in Hindi." (10, *Half Girlfriend*)

Madhav was comfortable in Hindi, but he was made to interact in English. This kind of marginalization is from professors of a higher institution provokes others to spread it in the society.

However, right from the beginning, Madhav, who is actually from a Maharaja-family of the pre-Independence India, strives to get rid of this new kind of marginalization. It is Hindi which is the only so-called standard language that he knows. So, it constantly interferes with his use of English at syntactic, semantic, phonetic and other levels. He tries his best to translate from Hindi, but failed at so many times, particularly, while composing complex structures. The difficulty and fear in pronunciation has already seen in above examples. His translation-habit also makes blunders at syntactic and semantic levels, for instance, in the campus interview Madhav greets "Good morning sir, sir and sir." (9, *Half Girlfriend*) and "Myself Madhav Jha." (19, *Half Girlfriend*)

Madhav struggled hard to overcome this marginalization by practicing various methods of acquiring the language. First, he had been the student of a reputed college where English is the exclusive medium of instructions. Later he had joined coaching-classes to learn it. He also purchased a bazar-book at railway station. He also practiced speeches. However, he acquired it only after spending few months in New York, America, a place where he gets real exposure to the language. Here, he had no alternative to express himself in. If such an atmosphere is created in the schools, the up-coming generation will not face the problem of marginalization in future. But for this, the schools need funds from government. The government of Maharashtra, likewise the government of Bihar in the fiction, is not able to provide it; and the persons like Mr. Bill Gates cannot come frequently to Indian rural schools to brighten their futures by showering funds.

Therefore, the condition of schools in rural India is worst as depicted in the fiction is one of the root cause of failure in acquiring English and consequently of marginalization. They do not have sufficient equipment to create the atmosphere of the target language. The buildings are not well-repaired but too old, 'grey-and-black'. The staff is not up-to-date prepared. The well-qualified persons do not accept the job of teaching. Let alone the language laboratory, the schools do not even have the CD / DVD and DVD Players. Students learn in such a clumsy atmosphere without any enthusiasm in them. The condition of government rural schools is like the condition of school in the fiction. It is:

“Tell him (MLA) to make one for the girls. One girls’ toilet, Tara ji,’ my mother said. ‘Don’t embarrass me, Rani Sahiba. I tried. We need money for so many other things too. We need to plaster the roofs, make more rooms and whitewash the building. SMDC said they have nothing.’ Noises came from the corridor. Kids had assembled outside.”(105, *Half Girlfriend*) In such condition how can one expect good output from the rural schools? However, the rich send their children to private English school by paying lot of money. There, they get every kind of facility available in the field of academics.

The persons from villages are also a kind of hindrance in the progress of the child-education. They rather send their children in the field for work and not in the school. They think what a person can do after learning upto eighth or tenth standards. If a child has to work in the field after completing tenth, then why the child did not work there since the beginning instead of going to school and wasting ten years there. They are so poor that they cannot live for a few days without work. Moreover, they are not aware of the small but essential benefits of education in their lives. And the educated ones are helpless to combat their logical refusing of the schooling and pursuing them for it. This is what the protagonist Madhav faces in the village when he tried his best to school village-children. (107, 108 *Half Girlfriend*)

Chetan Bhagat has given remedy to overcome the problem from the dialogues of Riya Somani, the central female character in the fiction. She tells to focus on three things: “English, public speaking and, the most important, the actual content of the speech.” (147, *Half Girlfriend*) Further she gives a full action plan to give a fluent speech. The same is applicable to learn fluent speaking of English. The action plan is:

“Objective: Ten-minute speech in fluent English to a live American audience.

10 minutes =approximately 600 words.

Focus Areas:

1. Delivery: confidence, style, accent, flow, pauses eye contact.
2. Content: rational points, emotional moments, call for aid. . . .

Top Ten Tools:

1. YouTube videos of famous speeches.
2. Watching English movies with subtitles.
3. English-only days – no Hindi conversation allowed.
4. Working on speech content in Hindi first.
5. Recording an English voice diary on the phone through the day.
6. Thinking in English.
7. Watching television news debates in English.
8. Calling call centres and choosing the English option.
9. Reading out English advertisements on street hoardings.
10. Reading simple English novels.”

The important thing of the marginalization is the superiority and the inferiority complexes in both the fluent-speakers and the amateur of English respectively. Former makes the latter to realize their disability to be fluent and accurate; while the latter, when realizes his disability, feels uncomfortable and ashamed of it. He rather avoids practicing the language. To avoid this marginalization, one must be sympathetic towards the new-speakers. He / she must be given chance to express more and more in the target language without realizing them their incapacity. Hindi is the mother-tongue of Riya Somani. She speaks Hindi at her home, but when in the college, she prefers English. When Madhav knows it, cannot stop from asking if he could use Hindi for their interaction. A beautiful reply over this is from Riya: “What you say matters, not the language.” (22, *Half Girlfriend*) Perhaps this is the medication to rid out the newly growing marginalization in the society.

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