

Behavioral Dynamics of Women Characters: A study of Assertiveness with reference to selected novels of Chetan Bhagat

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Abstract: In this fast paced world, we come across variety of people with different attitudes, personalities, vices, virtues, and behaviors. Some of these are appreciated at large while some invite dislike, hatred and other negative responses. Amongst the list of appreciated ones come the Assertive behavior at the top and it is one of the most sought after behavior. Assertive behavior is the one where an individual has his own set of values, beliefs, ideology, and mindset etc. with the firm faith in what he believes is right or wrong. Interesting thing about such individual's is that they don't impose their view point on others and give due respect and consideration to others thought process as well. But the moment there emerges a confrontation or conflict of ideology; assertive individuals take a quiet call without losing temperament and part ways amicably with such individuals. This particular behavior has been a challenge for many to develop as well as to understand. In this paper, researcher has tried to explore the possible causes as well as develop understanding of it through the detailed reading of contemporary work of Chetan Bhagat. The study is restricted to women characters of Bhagat's selected novels.

Biography: Sandhya Sharma, Research Scholar, Shri Venkateshwara University. I have completed my UG Eng (Hons) from Delhi University followed by MA (Eng), IGNOU. I have 15 years of experience in teaching at college level; have attended many workshops, Faculty Development Programs etc.

Introduction

Human has evolved over years multi-folds in terms of physical and mental growth. From the development of brain coupled with ability to use all limbs individually to transformation from the life of a nomad with dependency over trees, animals and other natural resources, human has created a life of comfort, luxuries and his dream. With this advancement, life has thrown various challenges as well. Advent of growth has resulted into complexities at all level including the basic behavior of human. To understand challenging human behavior, separate area of studies has also emerged namely Psychology. Psychology is defined as, "Psychology is the science of behavior and mind."¹ This field focuses on conscious as well subconscious phenomena coupled with feeling and thoughts of the individuals. The word psychology derives from "Greek roots meaning study of the psyche, or soul (ψυχή psychē, "breath, spirit, soul" and -λογία -logia, "study of" or "research")."² As per the field of Psychology, human behavior is broadly categorized into 5 categories as – Passive,

¹ "Neuroscience". *Psychology Today*.

² Online Etymology Dictionary. (2001). "Psychology"

Aggressive, Passive-Aggressive, Alternator, and Assertive. Individual showcasing passive behavior are generally everybody's friend, saying yes to all and everything around, annoying no one and pleasing all. Aggressive behavior is most dreaded of all behaviors where person showcasing it causes numerous damages to his prey i.e. financial, physical, or emotional. In fact it can be self-damaging as well where individual goes to the extent of self-harming oneself to avenge others. Human with passive-aggressive behavior are confused lot by unable to control themselves and showcasing both the behaviors at the same time. Individuals with alternator behavior have more of self control and display either the passive side or aggressive side of their personality in a given situation. The best of the traits i.e. Assertiveness is in the armory of hardy few individuals.

Assertive Behavior

To be assertive is a personal trait which makes an individual to self-advocate one's position, stand, view point, or ideology on a matter but without causing any conflict with other. Individual must possess a sense of self-control and cool temperament to be assertive. An Assertive individual is defined as "Someone who is assertive behaves confidently and is not frightened to say what they want or believe."³ Popular Oxford dictionary defines it as, "the quality of expressing opinions or desires in a strong and confident way, so that people take notice."⁴ In the medical world, assertiveness is, "A form of behavior characterized by a confident declaration or affirmation of a statement without need of proof; this affirms the person's rights or point of view without either aggressively threatening the rights of another (assuming a position of dominance) or submissively permitting another to ignore or deny one's rights or point of view."⁵ As per a famous study, assertiveness is "the one that enhance one's esteem, self-confidence, interpersonal relationships, personal fulfillments, and internal locus of control."⁶ It was in the 20th century that the concept of assertiveness came to fore in the clinical practice. A major credit goes to American psychologist Andrew Salter on realizing the importance of attaining assertiveness.

With time, no field remained insulated from one another thus drawing inspiration from one another. One such field which majorly imbibed from the field of psychology is the world of English Literature. "In fact it is Shakespeare who gives us the map to the mind. It is Shakespeare who invents Freudian Psychology. Freud finds ways of translating it into supposedly analytical vocabulary."⁷ As time progressed, there emerged amalgamation of the world of literature and psychology with many writers intertwining psychological aspects in the portrayal of their characters. "The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious. What I discovered was the scientific method by which it could be studied."⁸ There have many eminent authors, writers, and

³ (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/assertive>)

⁴ (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/assertiveness>)

⁵ (Dorland, 1890)

⁶ (Williams, 1984)

⁷ (Bloom, 1998)

⁸ (Freud, 2005)

poets who have beautifully crafted masterpieces of their work with magnificently interwoven elements of psychology and other aspects of life. In the words of Milligan: “Making a character is a complex process involving work which must be done by author, character, and reader. The author creates the character, but he presents him with many hints about how he is to be taken. If he does not do so overtly, the reader must be all the more vigilant to look for clues which will suggest how the character is to be understood. Sometimes an author may spring a surprise on the reader.”⁹ One such renowned author is Chetan Bhagat whose female characters in the novels “2 State” published in 2009, “Half-girlfriend” in 2014 and “One Indian Girl” in 2016 display assertiveness marvelously.

Bhagat and his work

The female protagonist Ananya Swaminathan is one of the finest portrayals of Assertive behavior. While going through this novel of Bhagat, she is introduced to the readers as a new student in the mess of prestigious Indian Institute of Management. Being a south Indian herself, she is unable to take the quality of south Indian food being served there and shows her annoyance clearly.

“That’s not rasam. Whatever it is, it’s definitely not rasam. And what’s that, the dark yellow stuff?”

‘Sambhar’ the mess worker growled.

‘Eew, looks disgusting! How did you make it?’ she asked.

‘You want or not?’ the mess worker said, more interesting in wrapping up lunch than discussing recipes.

... ‘What you want?’ the mess worker said in a heavy South Indian accent. ‘You calling rasam not rasam. You make face when you see my sambhar. I feed hundred people. They no complain.

‘And that is why you don’t improve. May be they should complain,’ she said.”¹⁰

Later, when she comes to Delhi at her boyfriend’s place, she does not lie to her future mother-in-law on her inability to prepare any kind of food. *“No, aunty I can’t make dosas,” Ananya said. ‘And I cant make a roti either. In fact, I am terrible at cooking anything.”¹¹* She is very clear on her stand that she remained focused and occupied in her studies thus excelling in it. Being an assertive person,

⁹ (Forster, 1990)

¹⁰ Bhagat, C. (2009). 2 STATES (1st ed., p. 10). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

¹¹ Bhagat, C. (2009). 2 STATES (1st ed., p. 145). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

she is brave enough to express herself freely. When she happens to visit a wedding where she comes across a dowry demand, she audaciously confronts the groom and make him realize this demand as unlawful.

..”Still can you tell me what have you done to deserve a wedding like this? What have you done to deserve a car to be gifted to you? ‘

...’If you had to woo her, can you even in your dreams have a girlfriend like her?’

...’Listen all brothers and sisters of Duke, there isn’t going to be any Accent.

...now it is down to Duke and all of you.

...’If he wants to take Minti with Respect, he should say so. If he doesn’t, then he is just a schumak and we don’t want the wedding.

Duke went to his mother

’Mummy, I want to marry Minti.”¹²

All instances portray Ananya as a highly assertive person who speaks her mind, and does not fear anyone.

In another novel, “Half-girlfriend”, Riya Somani is another female lead with assertive behavior. She belongs to a very well off family and gets admitted to a prestigious college in sports quota and happens to meet another fellow mate Madhav admitted through same. She develops friendship with him which he mistakes for feelings of love. She makes it clear on a very first instance only that she sees only a friend in him and does not have any sort of affinity for him. “I am sorry, okay?” I said and blocked her way. ‘I thought you like me.’ Madhav, please understand, I’m not comfortable with all this.’ ‘So appreciate what we have. Don’t spoil it.”¹³ Later when he again attempts to force himself upon her, she rebukes him boldly and severs her relationship with him completely.

...”Control yourself , Madhav,’ she said.

...’What is your problem? I’m not a release for your horniness.’

...’Madhav, I haven’t seen this side of you. You are using physical force on me.’

¹² Bhagat, C. (2009). 2 STATES (1st ed., p. 176). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

¹³ Bhagat, C. (2014). HALF GIRLFRIEND (1st ed., p. 123). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

Riya Somani had collected her belongings and left.”¹⁴

Bhagat’s another work released in the year 2016, named “One Indian Girl” again has a strong female protagonist who is very average to look at. *“I was the girl who started to wear spectacles in class six...I am what they call wheatish in matrimonial ads...In school, people either didn’t notice me or made fun of me.”¹⁵* She is always compelled by her family to get married.

“‘You should also get married soon,’ didi had told me. ‘There’s a right time for a girl to marry. Don’t delay it.’

‘I am twenty one,’ I said. ‘I haven’t even done my master’s yet.’

‘The younger the better. Especially for someone like you,’ she said.

... ‘Start looking at boys at least. Anil’s circle has many good, rich guys.’

‘I am not going to marry a man from the circle of sanitary ware shop owners, mom.’

‘Why?’ my mother said, genuinely confused.

‘You know what, I am not getting married for several years anyway. Forget it. I have class now. Bye.’¹⁶

After clearing her MBA from prestigious institution, she gets an opportunity to move New York and join Goldman Sachs. When she shares these plans with her parents, they strongly denies it to which she clearly voice her opinion. She makes it clear that she is any way going to take this opportunity.

“I got an offer to be an associate at Goldman Sachs, New York. The job paid an annual compensation of 120,000 dollars.

‘How will I ever find a boy for you?’ she said.

‘Stop it mom. What boy?’

¹⁴ Bhagat, C. (2014). HALF GIRLFRIEND (1st ed., p. 156). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

¹⁵ Bhagat, C. (2016). ONE INDIAN GIRL (1st ed., p. 27). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

¹⁶ Bhagat, C. (2016). ONE INDIAN GIRL (1st ed., p. 30). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

'Who wants to marry a girl who earns so much? ...

'I have no idea what are you talking about. But I am moving to America. I have a great job. Can you save your melodrama for another time?'¹⁷

In New York, she develops love relationship with Debeet and starts imagining married life with him. However her huge professional success keeps her too occupied and drifts Debeet away who insists upon her quitting job if she needs to settle down with him.

'I have a morning meeting. I am presenting a deal. I told you.'

'But I am discussing something important. Leave the meeting today.'

'I can't. I have to present the China deal.'

'This is what I fear. Even as mother this is what you will do. Then what?' he said.

I didn't respond. I stared at him for five seconds. He cowered a little, nervous at what I would do next. I reached the entrance door and opened it. I stepped out of the house. I glared at him one more time and slammed the door shut. "¹⁸

Initially, she refuses to consider this but being an assertive person she realizes that Debu has right to have a life partner of his choice so she should consider his requirement as well.

"I could quit this job. Sure, that's what Debu wanted.

I decided to quit my job.

No deal or company was worth it.

I only enjoyed all this when I had Debu.

I needed love."¹⁹

Bhagat, C. (2016). ONE INDIAN GIRL (1st ed., p. 45). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

¹⁸ Bhagat, C. (2016). ONE INDIAN GIRL (1st ed., p. 90). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

¹⁹ Bhagat, C. (2016). ONE INDIAN GIRL (1st ed., p. 107). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

However things do not turn out as expected, they break up and she moves to Hong Kong where she gets into relationship with his senior Neel. Being heartbroken, she starts seeing future with Neel but gets shattered when he tells her that being married he does not intend to marry her and wants to keep relationship this way only i.e. without marriage. Her again, she takes a call to break this relationship and move away from such illegitimate and unlawful situation.

... "I allowed myself to get involved with a married man. Not just a one-night stand. A long and full-blown affair. Hell, I allowed myself to fall in love with you. When there is no future."

... 'Radhika you are getting carried away. You saw Kusum the other day and you are getting competitive over me.'

... 'It's just I never thought of you as the maternal type. I don't know if you were ever meant to be a mother.'

... 'Please leave my apartment, Neel. Get out now.'

... Slap! I gave him a tight one across his face. I didn't care who the fuck he was."²⁰

Even towards the end of the novel, when Radhika is getting married with the boy of his parent's choice, both her ex-lovers turn up at the wedding, proposing marriage. She not only turn them away but being in confused state, she calls off her marriage without fearing the reaction of other around.

"Good. So Brijesh, I thought about it all night. This just doesn't seem right. I can't get married to you today."

'Can I ask why?' Brijesh said, his voice under control again.

'Those guys who you saw leave. They are my past. My exes.'

'Good. Then what's the issue? Your past is gone.'

'But I am not in the present either. I am nowhere, really. I need to find myself.'

'Find yourself?' he said, a bit of sarcasm in his voice. "You have told me you had two relationships. As long as they are in the past, I don't care."

'No, Brijesh. This wedding stands cancelled. I am sorry,' I said and stood up."²¹

²⁰ Bhagat, C. (2016). ONE INDIAN GIRL (1st ed., p. 124). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

Conclusion

A detailed reading of Bhagat's work introduces the readers to numerous female protagonists who are highly assertive by nature. Interestingly they all are strong, from good families and most importantly academically strong. They have their own vision, mindset, thought process, beliefs, and ideology. They don't mind resisting conflicting views of their own families or loved ones and are audacious enough to even bear a heart-break. We should not get confuse them with as being arrogant or inconsiderate of others around. It is simply that they don't deter from their set plans or value system. Being assertive they listen patiently others at many times and try to accommodate their concern as well but with a clear demarcation. The moment things go beyond the set parameters, they take their own course of action. Reading of Bhagat's these characters incite the interest of readers who start relating themselves or others around them with these characters. Readers may develop a feeling of love, hatred, annoyance, or compassion for these characters. In fact reading of Bhagat's work and understanding of these characters would contribute in improving their relationships with others around.

²¹Bhagat, C. (2016). ONE INDIAN GIRL (1st ed., p. 204). New Delhi, IN: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.