

**CULTURAL NUANCES IN RAVINDER SINGH'S
*I TOO HAD A LOVE STORY***

M. Moovendhan

Assistant Professor & Head
Department of English,
Ayya Nadar Janaki Ammal College,
Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu 626 124.

Introduction

It is a healthy sign that many IT professionals like Chetan Bhagat and Ravinder Singh have taken up writing and have been contributing for the growth of Indian writing in English. Ravinder Singh's debut novel, *I Too Had A Love Story* clearly states its main theme from its very title. In spite of the theme "love" being over-explored by many writers especially by novelists *I Too Had A Love Story* is not just yet another love story. The unique treatment given by Ravinder Singh to the universal theme of love and the moving narrative style, have made this novel highly readable and compelling. In this autobiographic novel the novelist is able to portray the lover's personal feelings of loss of his lady love realistically in a simple yet powerful narrative style. Through his novel he has reflected the cultural nuances of two Indian families and their psychological perspectives.

Setting

Before the story begins, the novelist presents two highly philosophical poetic lines about love.

*"Not everyone in this world has the fate to cherish the fullest form of love.
Some are born just to experience the abbreviation of it".*

Followed by these two lines, the writer dedicates his work to his lady love whom he could not marry and acknowledges that she is the one who has brought out another in him. Then he has also written a beautiful romantic poem on love which talks of the pains he has been undergoing due to the loss of his lady love. These poetic lines are filled with strong personal pangs of a lover. All these lines beautifully set the backdrop for an autobiographical novel. Right from the word 'had' in the title the philosophical lines of love, his note of dedication and his poem, all forms the prologue for the romantic story. The readers are mentally prepared to witness a tragedy eventually. But the suspense lingers till they come across the tragedy.

The novelist has split the novel into 9 chapters starting at the past and ending at the present. The story starts in March 2006 and ends in July 2008. The backdrop of the novel provides details about the protagonist's family background, his education, his career and his three close friends. The opening chapter "Reunion" literally diverts our melancholic mood to a happy one by presenting the happy moments of Ravin the protagonist enjoying his reunion with his best friends. Happy, Maanpreet (MP), and Amardeep (Ramji). All these four characters are very life-like as they represent a typical, upper-middle class background. All of them are engineers and are working as IT professionals with high salaries. Like many other IT professionals they booze and ride their vehicles and return to their hours at late nights.

Prophetically Ravin's friend Happy foretells that Ravin would get married first when the discussion turns towards marriage.

Critical Summary

In the first chapter, we are introduced to the protagonist-narrator Ravin a software engineer from Orissa having a reunion with his friends. The roam, booze, eat, crack jokes and return late to their house. The chapter ends with serious discussions about marriage. In the second chapter Ravin registers himself in a matrimonial site and one evening receives an sms on his mobile from a girl called Khushi. They start texting and he comes to know that she too is a software engineer in Delhi and she is interested in him for his hobby of playing Tabla. Soon they find common interests in each other and start calling each other using pet names. They both spend a lot of time carousing each other and indulge in all kinds of sweet nothings, silly fights and quick reconciliations. In the chapter 'Face to Face' Ravin travels to Delhi to meet Khushi for the first time. Ravin is overwhelmed by her beauty and Khushi is also very much fond of him. They both get emotionally attached to each other and she also takes him to her home. Khushi introduces him to her family members.

Ravin gets an US onsite project for 45 days and the lovers find it very difficult to part each other. They decided to meet before leaving to US. Khushi lies to her mother that she is going for an entrance coaching centre but goes out with Ravin to Delhi to be with him in his hotel room. They cuddle each other and Ravin whispers in her ears that he will not cross his limit. Khushi has to leave but they get stuck in huge traffic jam due to heavy rain thunderstorm. During the horrible and adventurous journey, Khushi discloses the truth to her worried mother and Ravin also asks for an apology. Ravin rushes all the way back to Delhi and catches his flight to US in the last minute.

Ravin desperately looks forward for his return to Delhi and again they meet in Delhi after 45 days. Both their families have given their consent for their marriage and they decide to have the Ring Ceremony on February 14, 2007 on the eve of Valentine's Day. Then the Unexpected thing happens which brings a serious twist to the story. Khushi meets with an accident and is fatally injured. Ravin rushes to Delhi and finds Khushi in a very serious condition. They have to constantly infuse blood and she remains in coma. When the doctors lose hope, she is moved to another big hospital where she dies after a few days.

The last two chapters 'Without Her' and 'The Present' painfully describe the desperate loss and the aftershock of Ravin. He cannot return to the normalcy as he has been undergoing great deal of emotional stress. Finally, after two years, when Ravin's parents discuss about his marriage, he strictly rejects their proposal. The novel ends with Ravin meeting a beautiful a six year old girl in a park playing See-saw. When she falls down her mother and Ravin rush to the spot to help her. She smiles at him and in a cute voice she reveals her name as Khushi.

Narrative Techniques

Ravinder Singh has aptly chosen the role of first person author-narrator which best suits his autobiographical theme. The theme 'love' appears to be an over-explored one but the way Ravin narrates his love story makes its enjoyable to read from the beginning till the end. The story is narrated using the flashback technique in nine chapters. Through the authenticity and closeness of narration we get deeply involved and nourish the minute details he describes. In the first chapter 'Reunion', we feel really involved in the reunion party and the feeling of nostalgia automatically occupies our minds.

The closeness among the four friends seems to be very intact but once when Ravin falls in love with Khushi, right in the second chapter, the friends are totally sidelined and they do not reappear till the end. The first person narrator authentically and sincerely records his personal feelings and emotions when he chats with a young girl for the first time. He feels very shy at the same he enjoys the internal conflict between his head Vs heart that goes inside the young bachelor's mind. The protagonist enjoys the long romantic conversations and yet he is also aware of the futility of such talks. He genuinely admits, even he confesses that he cannot resist talking to her. *"I don't know why, but I felt like calling her up again and it was hard to curb that urge."* (P: 19)

The natural ego of a male pops up when he expects the girl to make the call and recollects his friend Happy's advice.

*"Don't make them feel that you are going crazy after them;
 just give some and they will come to you"*

*"Call it my weakness or my effort to curb my ego-a little later
 I did what my heart told me to do and I dialled her number"* (P: 20)

Ravin immediately gets attracted towards Khushi by her sweet voice and her pictures in the internet. Since it his first-love; he becomes totally obsessed and pre-occupied by her thoughts. He cannot even focus on his preparations for the M.B.A entrance examination. When he slowly opens up his love story to his parents, he is overjoyed by their immediate approval without much questions or fuss. When both the families give their consent, the lovers feel like crossing over a big milestone. The cry and laugh together. They constantly exchange kisses, have constant quarrels over trivial issues and of course they immediately reconcile with each other. When Ravin decides to meet his dream girl Khushi for the first time, so many questions pop-up both in his mind as well as in our minds. He says,

*"What if she isn't as beautiful as she appears in her pictures?
 What if she laughs in a very weird way?
 What if she limps?"*

"Holy Shit! Of course it is too late to be asking this!" (P:50)

Even when the couple had total privacy, they do not cross their limits and they make the readers enjoy the romantic scenes decently. The rain image comes throughout the novel, during happy moments, during the horrible adventurous trip in a cab and also during the saddest of all occasions i.e. Khushi's death. Ravinder Singh is able to insert a sudden twist in the middle of the story when the couple get stuck in a cab with sewage water rising to their knees. While Khushi and Ravin are returning back to her home after a secret meeting with Ravin in his hotel room, they got stuck in a traffic jam in the late hours and the tension increases further when Ravin is running short of time to catch a flight to U.S. He admits,

"To be honest, I had no hopes of making it to the airport in the morning."

Khushi initially lies to her mother, but eventually when it becomes too late she reveals the truth and Ravin also asks for an apology.

But once everything moves along fine with their plans for the Ring ceremony, marriage, honeymoon and so on the peripeteia occurs when Khushi meets with a fatal accident. She loses her consciousness and struggles for her life. The shocking news evokes tension and a huge flutter in both Ravin's mind as well as in our minds. He prays sincerely to God, avoids food, gets lost in series of thoughts, and experiences nervousness and anxiety. The narration is filled with tension when it reaches the climax. As Khushi dies, Ravin completely gets shattered and cannot recover from the shock. The story could have very well ended right with the death of

Khushi, but it continues for two more chapters vividly portraying the painful emotions of Ravin. Even after two years Ravin cannot recover from his loss and still he thinks about his ladylove Khushi.

Conclusion

What makes this romantic novel stand apart from the other conventional love stories is the honest narrative style and truthful recording of emotions. Ravin proves to be a typical prototype of modern IT professionals as he casually uses rude expressions such as ‘Holy Shit’ and the despicable four letter word very often. Throughout the novel we come across lots of Hindi sentences which non-Hindi readers find it very difficult to understand. We have to also admit that it is quite natural for a writer to express extremely sensitive expressions in one’s mother tongue. But apart from that, the narration is quite simple, lucid and easy to comprehend. But unlike the 21st century modern IT professionals, the couple genuinely love each other. They make promises and many sacrifices for each other. Theirs is a genuine love story. Ravin agrees to quit his drinking habit even though he drinks very rarely for his friends company. They cry and laugh together and both are very truthful and sincere to each other. They value and respect the consent of their parents much and show mutual respect to their future in-laws. Another important thing to be noted is that they uphold the values of their cultures. They do not cross their limits even though they have lots of opportunities to do so. When Khushi dies Ravin cannot stomach it easily. He says,

*“She died, I survived. Because I survived, I died every day.
I was bound by my stars to live a lonely life.”* (P: 192)

He continues to live as a bachelor and avoids discussions about his marriage. The feelings of loss are very sincere as he says

*“At times I felt like a drug addict who badly needs his next hit.
But at least an addict has his drugs....
I feel suffocated as if something was stopping my breath.
As if something was chocking my soul”* (P: 193)

When his father asks him.

“Why can’t you think of a different girl ?

Even two years after her death, when Ravin’s parents compel him to think of getting married, he bluntly says,

“Because to think of another girl, I feel like a whore.” (P: 197)

All the characters reflect the cultural nuances especially the novel focuses on the emergence of a new hybrid software IT industry culture through the hero and heroine. Still the hero is able to uphold Indian cultural values such as getting the approval and consent from both the families and avoiding premarital sex. The strong will and sincerity of Ravin thus makes it not just yet another love story.

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