

“IDENTIFYING RELATIONSHIP RED FLAGS AND PERSONALITY DISORDERS THROUGH AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE INDIAN MOVIE *THE GIRLFRIEND*”

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Abstract :

Society influences media content to a large extent. Mass media like television, films, OTT platforms and social media convey the pulse of the society. The Indian movie The Girlfriend is such a film which revolves round the concept of relationship red flags and personality disorders. It is a coming-of-age drama of a young girl Bhooma who lands into a rushed-up relationship with batchmate Vicky through love-bombing. She could not identify the warning signals and fell into the trap of a toxic relationship. The present study explores the victimization of a college girl at the hands of a dominating lover. He shows all negative traits, like manipulation, belittling behavior, constant criticism, micromanagement, gaslighting, distrust, disrespect, aggression, verbal abuse, conditional love, paranoid behavior, isolation, intimidation, breadcrumbing and stonewalling. The plot progresses with a struggling Bhooma in the shackles of emotional abuse and constant fear. The study analyses the Indian patriarchal mindset as the abuser pushes the victim towards slavery. The climax provides a ray of hope as the heroine raises her voice against the controlling behavior. She decides to move on in life and cuts off all ties with her partner after much psychological damage. The present study aims at educating young girls and boys to identify relationship red flags by noticing negative personality traits minutely.

Keywords : love bombing, gaslighting; bread crumbing, paranoid behavior, stonewalling

1. Introduction :

Films are a mirror of society. They are shaped by the happenings in society. Mass media like television, films, OTT platforms and social media heap out a huge amount of content which shows a slice of life. Whatever is depicted on screens or splashed on web pages is influenced by society. Indian films have a special affinity for themes based on reality. The recent Indian movie in Telugu language released in November 2025, ‘The Girlfriend’ has a powerful theme of relationship red flags (*The Girlfriend*, Directed by Ravindran, 2025). The journey of a young girl Bhooma, through love, loyalty and a toxic relationship forms the core of the movie. The movie highlights the negative personality traits which one should look out for before committing in a relationship, as they are suggestive of an underlying personality disorder of the other person.

1.1 ‘The Girlfriend’ Movie Cast :

This is a coming-of-age drama of a modern girl stuck up in a bad relationship, and is a



grim reminder for the youth to enter into relationships with great caution. This Telugu film is directed by Rahul Ravindran in November 2025. The female lead is Bhooma played by Rashmika Mandanna and the male lead Vicky by Dheekshith Shetty. A stellar performance by Rashmika made the film garner positive reception from critics. This eye-opening film is about the right choice of partners and how haste in entering relationships sometimes becomes a nightmare. Bhooma, the naive college girl falls for a good-looking and bold batchmate who woos her passionately through constant attention and love bombing. Motherless Bhooma had a difficult childhood receiving little love from her father so she easily falls for the lavish love of the hero Vicky. According to the review of Sangeeta Devi Dundoo in The Hindu- " 'The Girlfriend' is an important, brave film that asks uncomfortable questions and tells both girls and boys that relationships should not be claustrophobic (Dundoo,7 Nov. 2025)."

1.2 Main Characters :

The characters in the movie *The Girlfriend* are part of the college where the plot is set. A few characters are related to the lead pair. After initial misunderstandings love blooms between the lead characters Bhooma and Vicky as the latter pursues Bhooma fervently within a few days of meeting her. Bhooma is taken aback at this sudden surge of emotions in Vicky. Vicky openly declares his love for Bhooma and uses 'honeymoon techniques'-period of unusual harmony especially following the establishment of a new relationship and love bombing to win her over . According to Oxford Languages, love-bombing is quickness in declaring love. The receivers of such lavish love feel overwhelmed with the sudden attention and care. They blindly enter into the relationship without understanding the true nature of the lover.

Vicky, Bhooma's lover is shown as a strong, impulsive and good-looking college student who rescues Bhooma during an accident. Out of gratitude, Bhooma goes to meet him in his hostel room after he is beaten by police because of her. She befriends him and doesn't realize that she is falling into a trap of a dominating, toxic relationship. According to Divya Shree of The Times of India who gave a rating of 3.5/5 to the film- "This film mirrors the realities of many young women by exposing affection disguised as control with parents and romantic partners and unveiling raw human emotions (Divya Shree,7 Nov. 2025)."

1.3 Other Characters :

Other than the lead characters, the movie *The Girlfriend* shows some strong characters. Prof. Sudheer, the HoD of Arts Stream of the college is shown as a constant motivation for Bhooma. He guides her through her ups and downs. The movie teaches a lesson to youngsters to seek advice from elders and teachers who can help them in difficult situations. Prof Sudheer motivates Bhooma to fight for her rights and self-identity. The director of the movie Rahul Ravindran plays the role of Prof. Sudheer. His suave and sophisticated look makes his character look appealing. He even accompanies her to her hostel when she appears anxious and apprehensive.

Rao Ramesh as Bhooma's father is another negative character having a patriarchal mindset. He is an unsupportive father who fails to console Bhooma in her difficult times. Instead of helping her deal with the controlling behaviour of her lover, he calls her a



characterless girl. The characters Vicky and Bhooma's father are of similar temperament and both exhibit toxic traits.

Vicky's mother was a victim of domestic violence in her youth and as a result even after her husband's death, she has a deep-rooted fear of men. She is scared of her son and keeps her eyes down all the time, never making eye contact with anyone. Vicky has seen his mother like this always and so he assumes that all women can be subdued. He tries to control Bhooma the same way.

According to Balakrishna Ganeshan of The News Minute- "If you are looking for a movie that might comfort you, *The Girlfriend* is definitely not it. It makes men question their privilege, their biases, their attitude towards women, their conditioning" (Ganeshan 8 November 2025).

2. Plot Progression :

The present study explores the victimization of the female lead Bhooma at the hands of an exploiter in the Indian Movie *The Girlfriend*. He shows negative personality traits like manipulation, coercion, belittling behavior, constant criticism, micromanagement, gaslighting, distrust, disrespect, aggression, intimidation, paranoid behavior, verbal abuse, bad mouthing, spying, impulsivity, psychological abuse, and breadcrumbing. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, micromanagement is to manage especially with excessive control or attention to small matters that is wanted or causes problems. All these signs point towards borderline or paranoid personality disorder.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, personality disorders are a group of 10 mental health conditions that involve long-lasting, disruptive patterns of thinking, behavior, mood and relating to others (APA, 2022). People with personality disorders often don't realize their thoughts and behaviors are problematic. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), which is the standard reference publication for recognized mental illnesses, names the 10 types as Paranoid, Schizoid, Schizotypal, Antisocial, Borderline, Histrionic, Narcissistic, Avoidant, Dependent and Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder (Cleveland Clinic/Personality Disorders). Bhooma could not identify these negative traits because of lack of knowledge about these personality disorders. She is a naive girl who has stepped out into the world from her home for the first time. She had no experience, no proper guidance regarding identifying relationship red flags and hence she succumbed to the charms of the manipulator Vicky. Her tribulations through the stressful relationship bear testimony to the futility of such relationships.

Bhooma failed to understand Vicky's anger issues in spite of witnessing his angry outburst with the police officer during their first meeting in a road mishap. She had noticed his criticism after her drama event but kept mum. Slowly he isolated her from her friends under some or the other pretext. He went to the extent of beating up one of her friends. She did odd jobs like tidying up his room, feeding him, waiting for him for lunch and dinner. She didn't realize that slowly she was becoming his slave who could manipulate her in any way. Soon she became a victim of circumstances having no space for her preferences, friends, or self-identity. She experienced a loss of self-worth and an unknown fear and uncertainty about his moody behavior. She felt like she was walking on eggshells, not knowing when she might do



something wrong. She felt compelled to please her partner so that he would not hurt her. Vicky even tried to convince her to give up studies and marry him and never asked for her opinion. He had no value about her goals, opinions and accomplishments. He wanted to change and subdue her so that she could become like his mother who had a slave mentality because of her husband's narcissistic behavior.

3. Discussion :

The typical patriarchal mindset is still prevalent in Indian men. Many have the "Man of the House" mindset. They assume ownership over their partners and push them towards a life of slavery through domination and intimidation. The film *The Girlfriend* explores various negative and toxic traits in abusive relationships.

3.1 Love-bombing :

Some people move too fast in love leading to a rapid escalation in the intensity of love. The real motive is to gain quick control and power over the partner. It is actually a gimmick of control which is misunderstood as lavish love. In the movie, Vicky showers love and attention on Bhooma, drops in anytime, spends money on her and takes her out on dates. Bhooma is overwhelmed with his love. Love-bombing is quickness in declaring love. "Love bombing is an emotional manipulation that involves giving someone excessive compliments, attention, or affection to eventually control them...often points to the beginning of a toxic, or abusive relationship (Fischer K., June 09, 2024). The receivers of such sudden love are flattered and feel overwhelmed with the attention and care. They blindly enter into the relationship without understanding the true nature of the lover.

3.2 Emotional manipulation :

Those who have controlling behavior exhibit unreasonable possessiveness; in this movie a personality trait of the lead male character Vicky. He invades the privacy of his girlfriend, spies on her, makes all decisions for her, belittles her actions, criticises her friends, monitors her movements, badmouths everyone associated with her and disrespects her often. His orthodox conditioning is evident in his actions. His father used to control his mother through verbal and physical abuse. Vicky stops Bhooma from acting in dramas and restrains her from spending time with friends. He has unrealistic expectations from her. He has the last word in all arguments, makes all decisions for Bhooma and has no respect for boundaries.

Emotional manipulation is a result of a set of biases and bad mental conditioning. Perpetrators feign overprotectiveness which is actually dictating behavior. They diminish the goals and ambitions of their partners, making them settle for less in life. They don't value the goals and accomplishments of their partners. They don't want equality in love; they actually want a slave.

3.3 Gaslighting :

According to Oxford languages, gaslighting is the practice of psychologically manipulating someone into questioning their own sanity, memory, or or powers of sanity. It typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and low self-esteem, uncertainty of one's emotional or mental stability, and a dependency on the perpetrator (www.merriam-



webster.com).

In the movie Vicky gaslights Bhooma. He blames her for everything. He makes her believe that her friends are not good enough and coerces her to leave acting on stage. He wants to change her so that she can become a 'good woman' like his mother. These unrealistic goals in the relationship confuses Bhooma and she feels worthless. Vicky's inconsistent emotions and mood swings make Bhooma nervous and anxious all the time.

Gaslighting can cause ample psychological damage as the victim feels she is the one who is wrong and feels compelled to please the other person all the time. The perpetrator offers conditional love which exists only if the victim acts according to his preferences. Through guilt-tripping and blaming the victim for everything, perpetrators slowly obtain grip over their victims. They justify their mistakes by putting the blame on the victims who begin to doubt themselves. Thus the perpetrators push the victims towards nervous breakdown.

3.4 Isolation and Stonewalling :

It is a common pattern in a toxic relationship that the abuser isolates the victim from her family and friends so that he can control her. Vicky isolates Bhooma from her friends through intimidation and anger outbursts. He assures her that he would be enough for her and she won't need friends. He goes to the extent of beating up Bhooma's friend. Slowly all her friends start to stay away from her. Vicky insults Bhooma's father too who is shocked to see his aggressive behavior and abandons his daughter. When she spends time with her new group of friends , Vicky gets angry and avoids her. Bhooma is given the silent treatment which is called stonewalling.

This pattern of isolation first and then stonewalling can frustrate a person who can't understand the reason for the silent treatment. The victim is at her wit's end on how to please her partner. She cannot confide in anybody as she has no friends left. This cycle is repeated as new situations are created.

3.5Breadcrumbing :

According to Wikipedia, breadcrumbing also called Hansel and Gretelling is the practice of sporadically feigning interest in another person, in order to keep them interested. Vicky ignores Bhooma and makes her wait for a long time when she comes back from a fun-outing. He is angry that she has spent time with her friends. His inconsistent emotions make Bhooma anxious and claustrophobic. After overwhelming love, this sudden decrease in the amount of love can wreck the nerves of a person.

Breadcrumbing is a clear way of showing that the perpetrator will care for the victim only if she acts according to his orders. The inconsistent emotions make the other person anxious and uncertain. The motive for the conditional love is clear. The perpetrator wants to have the last word in all situations and wants to control the victim.

3.6 Aggression :

Vicky shows aggressive behavior which Bhooma could not identify. His strong negative opinions about everyone, holding grudges against her, his paranoid behavior, severe



anger issues all point to borderline personality disorder which is masked. On the exterior he is a loving, caring, popular, talented man but a hidden side shows traits of personality disorder. He threatens everyone including his friends. He is shown beating up a policeman, a friend of Bhooma as well as his close friend. He is unable to control his emotions and exhibits impulsive behavior. He has bad memories from childhood including his father beating his mother with a belt. With passing years he too became just like his father.

3.7 Personality Disorders :

According to the American Psychiatry Association, there are ten types of personality disorders; The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), which is the standard reference publication for recognized mental illnesses, namely Paranoid, Schizoid, Schizotypal, Antisocial, Borderline, Histrionic, Narcissistic, Avoidant, Dependent and Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder (Cleveland Clinic/Personality Disorders (myclevelandclinic.org). Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is marked by difficulty with emotional regulation, resulting in low self-esteem, mood swings, impulsive behaviors and subsequent relationship difficulties. Vicky never noticed Bhooma's dilemma and sadness. Lack of empathy for her hurt pointed towards narcissistic personality disorder in which the perpetrator derives pleasure from the pain of the victim. The act of beating up friends showed the antisocial behaviour of Vicky.

Conclusion :

Bhooma's ordeal came to an end only when she gathered courage and raised her voice against the abuser and the abusive relationship. She declared in front of the whole college that she was in the wrong relationship and that Vicky had exploited her. Her mental frame was so shaken that she picked up a guitar and went to beat Vicky. Thus she fought for her lost self-dignity. She rebuilt her life by cutting all ties with the toxic lover. She moved on, took up a job and became a writer. She managed to escape from the clutches of an exploiter by igniting her inner strength. The story is an example for all young girls that timidity is a huge flaw. Sometimes it becomes mandatory to fight for our rights to lead a good life which is a fundamental right for all. Also right against exploitation has been added in the Indian Constitution but still many citizens fail to fight for it.

This study aimed at educating boys and girls to make good choices in life by knowing relationship red flags. The study concluded that various types of personality disorders can be identified through minute observation in behavior over a period of months. Youngsters should never be in haste of committing to a new relationship. They should observe and analyse the behavior of the other person for a few months and find out whether it is healthy, unhealthy or toxic behavior.

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