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INDIAN SOCIAL MILIEU IN THE NOVELS OF CHETAN BHAGAT

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ABSTRACT

Chetan Bhagat, who is a famous Indian author, is not only a symbol of new India but also a concerned writer who has captured his deep concern about the youth today i.e. the problems and despairs, hopes and aspirations of youth. In spite of dealing with the harsh realities of life, his works manage to retain the sense of pure humor. His works have striking similarities with parable in offering moral messages, spiritual guidance and technical suggestions. Chetan Bhagat's writings have created a new philosophy for a modernized young India. The secret of his success lies in his thought provoking ideas, and in depth analyses of the effects of globalization on Indian Society. He has authored six – Five Point someone: what not to do at IIT (2004), One Night @ the Call Center (2005), The 3 Mistakes of my life. A story about Business, Cricket and Religion (2008) 2 states: *The Story of my Marriage* (2009), *Revolution 2020: Love, Corruption, Ambition* (2011), *what Young India wants: Selected essays and columns* (2012) and *Half Girlfriend* (2014) – Literary pieces and each of his writing discusses both the constructive and destructive nature of globalization in India. Chetan Bhagat might not be another Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy, but he has authentic claims to be one of the voices of a generation of middle class Indian.

Keywords: Concerned, aspirations, spiritual, provoking, constructive, destructive, globalization, corruption, authentic, philosophy.

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Indian Social Milieu in the Novels of Chetan Bhagat

In a burst of innovation, a new generation of young, iconoclastic and cosmopolitan writers is rapidly expanding India's literary horizons in novels and short stories. With the writings in English, these authors are able to present their disarmingly, intimate and often unconventional images of India to readers beyond their nation's borders¹. One can easily notice a remarkable change in contemporary discourses on Indian English novel. Today an author has learnt to address himself to the fundamental issues intrinsic to creative and critical

activity in the Indian English situation. Now issues like post-colonialism, multiculturalists, nativism, the social and political agendas of criticism and the likes are being treated with great importance in preference to a variety of relatively inconsequential issues². By and large, the Indian English novelists have attempted to face the reality around them with greater courage and responsibility.

As is well written, "The novel is essentially a social form; it explores the condition of human beings through the mental struggle and body language quite before they get into action." Social issues directly or indirectly affect the members of the society³.

Taking this legacy forward is Chetan Bhagat, who is a prominent writer of his age and has sprinkled his views and opinions on the youth and society. Chetan Bhagat is one of the prominent contemporary novelists who have earned a very significant place in the hearts of the youth today. He is an active and alert writer who keeps a note of very minute things taking place in the surroundings his novels are replete with fictitious stories followed by some of the relevant and burning issues of our society. Bhagat is the author of the following bestselling novels⁴⁻¹⁰:

- (i) *Five Point Someone* (2004)
- (ii) *One night at the Call Centre* (2005)
- (iii) *The Three mistakes of my Life* (2008)
- (iv) *2 States: The story of my marriage* (2009)
- (v) *Revolution 2020* (2011)
- (vi) *What Young India Wants* (2012)
- (vii) *Half Girlfriend* (2014).

The wing literature is to represent the society as it is and as the novel readership in India is on an all-time high in the present times. The circulation of novels is gradually increasing by leaps and bounds across the length and breadth of the country. The major credit of this remarkable inclination towards English language novels can be attributed to the popularity and prominence of the cult of campus novels. Although the popularity of campus novels dates back to the *Inscrutable Americans* by Anurag Mathur, it is the phenomenal success of Chetan Bhagat's debut novel; *Five point someone* that is credited with the revival of popular readership in India. The success of Chetan Bhagat's debut novel paved way for an era of popular English literature dominated by campus based novel.

Chetan Bhagat has merged both highbrow and lowbrow genes into one, which is now approved as best-seller genera of the Indian English literature. Bhagat is in favor of realism in art. His artistic truth lies within sensory perception. It guides his readers to obtain rely enlightenment. Character is the soul of Bhagat's novels. The plot i.e. story is the second important ingredient. Therefore character is prior to the plot. His characters are social rebels who remind us the Angry Youngman that dominated English novel in the 1950's. His female protagonists remind us the female character of GB Shaw for their vitality natural female instinct. Place of action of his novel is set in the hustle and bustle of metropolitan Indian cities where life moves at fast speed.

Chetan's style of writing is simple, lucid and vivid with graphic descriptions and linear narratives. Most of the protagonists in his novels are named after Lord Krishna such as Shyam, Krishna, Han, Govind and Madhav. Bhagat is considered a youth icon rather than as just an author. With his vigorous and humorous way of depicting stories, he has encouraged the habit of reading in many young Indians. According to him, novels are perfect devices for both inspiration and entertainment and through which he disseminates his views and opinion about society and youth.

Chetan Bhagat wrote the novel 'Five Point Someone' in a mild note and in some areas it has given an alarming call for the pedagogues to come out of their traditional text book theories and meet up the challenges posed by the intelligent students. Another most striking feature is that whole background is set in an engineering institution where an engineering student should be encouraged to present his/her concepts in a creative way so that he can have hands-on experience only then a country can advance both technically and economically. Each and every student is bestowed with unique qualities and CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point

Average) should not be the criteria to ascertain their future prospects. One who is a five pointer in college may reach the pinnacle of his career and set an example for all those who are striving to achieve success.¹¹

His novel *Five Point Someone* endeavors to illuminate on the aspects of postmodernist thought process where the engineering youth tries to thwart the conventional pattern of imparting technical education and traditional way of evaluating the cognitive abilities of a student on the basis of Grade Points Average; that our structure of technical education has become a lifeless system, and needs revitalization and massive reformation is strikingly evident in this novel. Every student is bestowed with unique talent and GPA should not be the only parameter to measure their intelligence. Chetan Bhagat through his novel *Five Point Someone* has indirectly conveyed a serious moral in a humorous tone that it is a wakeup call for the elite technical institutes to replace the traditional teaching technique of I teach, you listen. With an innovative and systematic approach that nurtures and develops the latent abilities of the students to collect and assimilate information and to evaluate that information for appropriateness, accuracy, currency and reliability; that inspires their innate creativity by sharpening their soft skills and active abilities; and that teaches students how to learn efficiently and effectively. The emphasis should be laid on learning methods instead of knowledge accumulation and on the postmodern project of incorporating a tactful technique called —learning by doing.

Chetan Bhagat's second fictional work *One Night @ the Call Center*, published in the year 2005, revolves around a group of six call center employees working at the Connexions call center in Gurgaon, Haryana, India. The themes involve the anxieties and insecurities of the rising Indian middle class, including questions about career, inadequacy, marriage, family conflicts in postmodern India, and the relationship of the young Indian middle class to both executives and ordinary clients whom they serve in the United State The novel has a prologue, in which the author- Chetan Bhagat comes across a beautiful woman on a train-trip. She offers to tell him a story but she will do so only on one condition that he uses it for his next book. It is set at a call center, describing the events of a single night shift and she warns him (as well as the readers) to expect at least one unusual occurrence: . it was the night... it was the night there was a phone call from God. *One Night @ the Call Center* is a romantic comedy set in an office where bored young Indians try to resolve the mindless inquiries of Midwestern American Technophobes. The story is a comedy of romance and crossed lines. There are three main themes: ex-girlfriend, bad-boss, and God. The story deals with six friends who are selling home appliances to the US from a call center in India. Each one has an issue with love.

'*One Night @ the Call Center*' novel is entirely different from the likes of those written by the big three i.e Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. . In their denial of the typical Indian value system, the emergence of a new India can be located which is poles apart from the Indian reality excessively found in the writings of the great triumvirate. Chetan Bhagat talks about the unsecured generation of cosmopolitan urban city and introduces the technique of 'deuse-xmachina' in the form of telephone call from God to save the people from the disaster they are facing. Bhagat's novel becomes a part of the global Post Modernist Literature-traversing a long way from the age of Rao-Anand-Narayan Triumvirate.¹²

Bhagat seems to intensify the same passionate zeal in delineating hopes and aspiration as well as failure and frustration of his generation in a remarkable manner in his third novel *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*. The novel ironically unfolds some of the bitter truths of human life which is now more influenced by passion rather than emotion and ambition. Chetan Bhagat is more vibrant in this novel because of his magnetic maturity and sharpening sensibility. *The 3 mistakes of My Life* delineates the passionate ambition of three growing boys- Govind Patel, Ishaan and Omi. The narrator of this sensational story is Govind himself. Govind has an aptitude and penchant for business. Ishaan has passion for cricket while Omi is more concerned with religion because of his parents' attachment with city temple. So, business, cricket and religion seem to govern the life of these growing people. Bhagat studies the characters of these three with ironic detachment because he never takes the sides of anyone. His characters are young, ambitious and passionate and have the same moral, social and religious dilemmas as many of the young Indians. The book is based on real life events. It begins in a dramatic mode with Bhagat receiving an e-mail from Govind who had taken many sleeping pills and was writing to him while waiting to embrace the deadly sleep. Chetan was shaken enough by the incident to

track the boy down to an Ahmedabad hospital. Fortunately he was still alive to tell the tale. The book is loosely based on the three mistakes Govind made in his life. The earthquake of Gujarat ruining Govind's over one lakh investment for a shop in a newly built mall is his first mistake. Govind falls in love with Vidya when Isha discovers this and declares Govind as a traitor, their friendship collapses and this is his second mistake. A split second delay by Govind in making a specific move which could have saved Ali from a hit is his third mistake.

In the *Three mistakes of my Life*, Chetan Bhagat emphasizes on introspection of every decision we make be it personal or professional and the art of contemplating over it. Whereas some sections throw light on the guilt developed due to the known unknown mistakes committed, the author also emphasizes that self-realization of those mistakes is the next action to curb the problems. It brings to the fore, the fact that tough India is no longer a colony but centuries of colonization has left many imprints of colonialism evident in the absence of the Imperial power.¹³

In *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*, published in 2009 Bhagat disapproves the social and linguistic differences in the people belonging to different states and also their discrimination on the basis of their color, face, dress, language and manners. Loosely based on Bhagat's own life, it is the story about a couple coming from two different states in India, who faces hardships in convincing their parents to approve of their marriage. The story begins in the IIM Ahmedabad mess hall, where Krish, a Punjabi boy from Delhi catches sight of a beautiful girl, Ananya, a Tamilian from Chennai. They become friends within a few days and get romantically involved. After their employment they make serious plans for their engagement. At first Krish tries to convince Ananya's parents by helping Ananya's father to do his first PowerPoint Presentation, her brother, Manju, by giving him IIT tuition and later convinces her mom by asking her to sing in a concert organized by Krish's office, i.e. Citi Bank. She is convinced as her biggest dream of singing at a big concert comes true; she sings along with S. P. Balasubrahmaniam and Hariharan. Then they try to convince Krish's mom. But the problem appears when his mother's relatives reject the idea of their engagement. They opine that Krish should not marry a Tamilian but end up agreeing with them when Ananya tries to help one of Krish's cousins to get married and succeeds to do so. Krish has had a strong hatred for his father. He neither shares his feelings nor keeps a harmonious bonding with him. Now as they have convinced both their parents they now try to introduce each other's parents. They go to Goa. But this dream of theirs shatters as Ananya's parents smell something suspicious between Krish's mom and him. Ananya's family ends up deciding that Krish and Ananya will not marry each other. But, at last, Krish's father, who was like an enemy for Krish, helps Krish and Ananya to get married as he convinces Ananya's family successfully. Now Krish realizes his father's love for him, the novel is narrated in a first person point of view in a humorous tone, often taking digs at both Tamil and Punjabi cultures. The novel ends with Ananya giving birth to twin boys. He says that the babies belong to a state called 'India'; Bhagat makes it clear that his children will be identified only as Indians not by the tag of any religion or state. He comments:

"They will be Indian. They will be above all this nonsense. If all young people marry outside their community is good for the country. This is the greater purpose." (P-103)

Bhagat in his novel '*Two States: The story of my marriage*', is able to highlight two important contemporary concerns, viz., the need to adopt a multicultural perspective and to constantly work to strengthen the cultural integration. In the recent years a debate is going on in the middle class in particular and the whole society in general about the impact of a liberalized economy on the typical Indian value system, joint family, place of parents, endogamous caste matrimony, crass consumerism, pre-emptive place of money in life, and so on. In short there is a clash between the middle class values and value system put in place by the TNC culture.

Y. L. Shrinivas, in the *Intra-family Communication in Two States: The story of my marriage*, emphasized on the importance of healthy intra family communication through Bhagat's novel in which there is hardly any communication between parents and their children which is the major cause of distance between them.¹⁴⁻¹⁵

Revolution 2020: Love, Corruption, Ambition is a 2011 novel by Bhagat. Its story is concerned with a love triangle, corruption and a journey of self-discovery. The novel has addressed the issue of how private coaching institutions for courses like IIT JEE exploit aspiring engineering students. How parents put everything they have on stake for these coaching so that their children can crack engineering and other professional tests and change the fortune of the family. While a few accomplishes their dreams others sink into disaster. The book unfolds the stark reality of this coaching industry which thrives on scams, corruption and all kinds of criminal activities. This book narrates the story of two friends alienated by their ambitions and passions yet attached by their love for the same while Gopal, who has experienced the harsh realities of life due to poverty, aspires to come rich; his friend Raghav is a boy from a well-off yet simple Indian family who desires to revolutionize India by fighting corruption. As they grow older, they get estranged from each other and are busy with their individual lives. But Aarti somehow ties them together being their mutual friend, Both of them are in love with the same girl and this lends the book an aspect of romance.

As a realistic piece of composing, 'Revolution 2020' offers nothing unusual or novel in rivalry between two friends fighting for the affection of a girl. The fiery out of the way activism of Raghav who wants to bring about a change in society through journalism, despite having graduated as an engineer, is a diversion from the despondency of Gopal's story, who is stronger and more rooted in real life. The character of Raghav can be described as the rarest of the rare ideal characters from the novels of Chetan Bhagat, as almost all his characters do not show the idealism of traditional kind. Though a resident of a holy city, Varanasi who follows the path of an ideal social activist Raghav does not mind to have a girlfriend with whom he may have casual sexual relationship. Chetan Bhagat never paints a guy with noble attributes with character intact as if satisfaction of physical need has become the top most priority of young generations.¹⁶

Chetan Bhagat's Half Girlfriend, published in 2014, reveals the sentiments and linguistic struggles of a backward rural Bhojpuri-laced Hindi speaking boy from Bihar as he enrolls himself at the prestigious English-medium St. Stephen's College, New Delhi, and falls in love with a high class English speaking rich Delhi girl, Riya Somani. The girl, not really interested in a relationship, agrees to be his. Half-Girlfriend. Chetan Bhagat comments. Half-Girlfriend, to me, is a unique Indian phenomenon, where boys and girls are not clear about their relationship status with each other. A boy may think he is more than friends with the girl, but the girl is still not his girlfriend. Hence, I thought we needed a term like 'Half girlfriend'. Because, in India, that is what most men get. The story begins with Madhav Jha, a boy from Dumraon, Bihar, as he comes to meet the author Chetan Bhagat and leaves behind a few journals from his half-girlfriend whom he believes has died.

Half Girlfriend is an interesting novel which can not only motivate the youths to achieve success but also to encourage them to be confident and rational during the pressing problems of time. For Chetan Bhagat, temporary failure in life has also a meaning because it hides the secrets of success. Madhav's advice to his son, "Don't quit. It will happen one day? (P-260) bears the suggestion that failures are the pillars of success.

Apart from the six novels Chetan Bhagat has two non-fictional works to his credit. What Young India Wants published in 2012 analyses in clear, simple prose and with great insight some of the complex issues facing postmodern India, as well as offers solutions to make our country better. In his latest non-fictional work, Making India Awesome, published in 2015 he analyses using simple language and concepts, and provides inspired solutions to the country's most intractable problems—poverty, unemployment, corruption, violence against women, communal violence, religious fundamentalism, illiteracy and more.

Bhagat's advice to the nation regarding the preservation of the power of youth is admirable. According to him, the creative potential of the youth coupled with their zeal, enthusiasm, energy, vitality and versatility can work wonders for the betterment of the nation. The youth of any nation are its constructive energy; they are the powerhouse and storehouse of infinite energy. Bhagat also puts emphasis on the empowerment of women, His woman characters believe in an absolute freedom, pure liberty and self.

Conclusion:

Chetan Bhagat is not only a symbol of new India but also an imperishable name in the arena of postmodern fiction. He has written six fictions and two non- fictions and almost in every work he has captured

his deep concern about the youth today i.e the problem and despairs, hopes and aspirations of the youth. In spite of dealing with the harsh realities of life his works manage to retain the sense of pure humor. His works have striking similarities with parables in offering moral messages, spiritual guidance and technical suggestions, his works can better be defined as postmodern projection of parables. The victories and defeats of the youth are the staple of Chetan's stories.

A parable is a simple narrative that illustrates and elaborates a universal truth .A parable often involves a character a moral dilemma or one who makes a wrong decision and then suffers the unintended consequences. The salient feature of the parable is the presence of a subtext suggesting how a person should behave or what he should believe. Apart from providing guidance and suggestions for proper conduct in one's life parables frequently use metaphorical language which allows people to discuss difficult or complex ideas in an easier way. Parables manifest an abstract argument by means of employing a concrete narrative which is easy to understand. Chetan Bhagat's fictions and nonfictions notably justify the above narrated explanation of a parable.

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