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POTRAYAL OF SOCIAL AND URBAN REALITIES IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

India's youth icon, Chetan Bhagat portrays many problems that, Indians have been facing and are making the Indian youth wary and aware of some of the biggest problems that curse our society. Since from his debut novel, *Five Points Some One* (2004), he has been taking these problems into his perception and he draws his weapon; pen and tries to expose these follies of society through his novels, which reflect the society and influence the youth. In most of his works, Chetan Bhagat deals with such blazing problems like expensive education, lack of development in smaller towns, conservative mentality, fanaticism in politics, untruthful politicians, religious devotion, communalism, problems in small scale business, cricket craze, prejudice towards agnostics and atheists, poverty among the brighter lower-middle class youth, extreme competition in entrance exams for college admission, lack of sports education/infra-structure in schools, bookish knowledge at schools, risk in small-scale businesses, expensive coaching for the advanced higher education, rift between religions, castes and cultures, conservative mentality of parents, hypocrisy of politicians, narrow mentality of so-called religious people, lack of awareness, foresight and ideas due to lack of quality education, academic pressure on students, work pressure and exploitation of the employees in corporate sector, corruption in education system, the attitude of people towards love marriage, the difficulties youth face in inter-caste marriages, cultural conflicts in the globalized world so on and so forth.

**Key words:** exploitation, corruption, fanaticism, communalism, conservative mentality, castes and cultures

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Introduction

Chetan Bhagat, the name itself emerged as a youth icon of India, has created a history in the English fiction. He occupied a position as popular novelist through his bestselling and also shared place amongst the 100 most influential people in the world as stated in the Times magazine. "Literature is the mirror of the society" as the time being, the contemporary society also changes, so as the literature also reflects the society. The same change has come across in the Indian English fiction. With his deep sense of observation and

understandability of the society, Bhagat gratifies the societal changes: needs and necessities, aspirations and betterments etc., in his writings. He deliberately exposes the urban realities and their impacts in the lives of common people through his themes, techniques and modes of responsiveness according to the global changes.

Chetan Bhagat was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1974 in a middle class Punjabi family in New Delhi. His father was an Army officer and his mother, a government employee. He completed the major part of his education at Delhi. During the years 1978 to 1991 he studied in the Army Public School, Dhaula Kuan, New Delhi. Later he entered in Mechanical Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi. After pursuing engineering, he did the management course in the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmadabad. There, his first “best” achievement journey started: as his outstanding performance undoubtedly brought him recognition as the "Best Outgoing Student" of his batch in IIM, Ahmadabad. It is the place, where he has taken a new turn of his life. He married Anusha Suryanarayanan in 1998; an ex-classmate at IIM, Ahmadabad. The couple has twin sons *Ishaan* and *Shyam*. Chetan started his career initially as an investment banker with Goldman Sachs in Hong Kong for eleven years and then shifted to Mumbai to transform himself as a professional novelist.

To his credit, Chetan Bhagat penned seven novels: *Five Points Some One* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *2 States: The story of my marriage* (2009), *Revolution 2020: Love. Corruption. Ambition* (2011), *Half Girlfriend* (2014), and *One Indian Girl* (2016) and two non – fictional works, essays and columns: *What Young India Wants* (2012) and *Making India Awesome* (2015). For his debut novel, *Five Points Some One* (2004) he achieved Society Young Achiever’s award in 2004. It is a mile stone who ever secured with the debut novel, but Chetan Bhagat with his success inspired many young writers who are seeking a path to travel in this genre.

Impressed with his works, narrating style and variation in the exposure of social problems, Donald Greenless claimed “Chetan Bhagat might not be another Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy, but he has authentic claims to being one of the voices of a generation of middle class Indian (New York Times)”.

### **Discussion**

Chetan Bhagat, in his novels, portrays different aspects of contemporary Indian society. Each novel reveals a particular dark area of the society. His debut novel, *Five Point Someone* attacks the Indian Education System revealing the flaws of grading system. *One Night at the Call Center* exposes the exploitation of youth in the call centers and BPOs. *Three Mistakes of My Life* deals with four aspects of Indian society i.e. Cricket, Business, Politics and Religion. *2 States* describes the mentality of Indians towards inter-caste and inter-state marriage. *Revolution 2020* exposes the rampant corruption in the Indian education system. *Half Girl Friend* interprets the problem as a class conflict between elite English speakers and non - English types in the country. In his latest novel, *One Indian Girl*, revealed the only reason for prevailing of patriarchy thrives in India is that, women internalize the social rules and restrictions on their own, but not the men forcefully imposed on them. While discussing these major issues in Indian society, Bhagat finds scope of discussing many other minor issues of the Indian society. This paper discusses the “Portrayal of social and urban realities in Chetan Bhagat’s novels”. Chetan Bhagat’s novels comprise the reflection of revolutionary nature of youth and the manifestation of modern society.

Chetan Bhagat’s debut novel *Five Point Someone - What Not to Do at IIT*, deals with the lives of - Hari, Ryan and Alok - exam-oppressed students who compete to get into the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi and then rebel against the stultifying ambience of academic procedures of “Continuous mugging, testing and assignments. Where is the time to try out new ideas...?” (FPS 25) He questions, the Indian educational system of relative grading and overburdening the students “...where is the room for original thought? Where is the time for creativity? It is not fair.” (Ibid 35)

“And this IIT system is nothing but a mice race. It is not a rat race, mind you, as rats sound somewhat shrewd and clever. So it is not about that. It is about mindlessly running a race for four years, in every class, every assignment and every test. It is a race where profs judge you every ten steps, with a GPA stamped on

you every semester...what have IITs given to this country? Name one invention in the last three decades (Ibid, 101)".

This novel is an attack on both the darker sides of the emergence of Technology in India and the problems of young generation, also sternly criticises the mechanical life style of Indians in the globalised nation.

The story of *One Night @ the Call Center* revolves around six characters, who are working for "Connexions" Call Centre - Shyam, Esha, Vroom, Radhika, Priyanka; Bad-boss: Bakshi, the employer and Military Uncle. They are striving for betterment, satisfaction, contentment and settlement. But their efforts, struggle and hard work for survival go in vain as there is panic and chaos everywhere. The night shift of their job also implies bewilderment, restlessness and timeless in their life.

The inclusion of the spiritual interlude in the novel is noteworthy. During that particular night the God's call surprises the receivers. The phone call encourages the survivors to settle account with their boss and to risk their job for the welfare of the thousands of the employees. Here, Bhagat by using a new twist that God speaking in English over phone to advise his devotees symbolically refers to the call from the within their will to do or live. The divine voice advises the survivors to ponder over two things-one, "Think about what you really want" and two, "what you need to change in your life to get it". It motivates the six to such an extent that they get ready to face their problems with utmost determination and motivation.

The real life situations and incidents in the lives of the three friends Ish, Omi, and Govind are carried out through voice of Govind, the protagonist and the mistakes he did, so as the consequences he faced are portrayed in his third fictional work, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life: A Story about Business, Cricket and Religion*. The story involves some of the major headlines of early 2000 like the Gujarat earthquake, India-Australia test series, the 9/11 WTC attack and not to forget the Godhra train mishap.

In *The 3 Mistakes of my Life* the author depicts many problems which Indians have been facing and which are making the Indian youth vigilant and aware of some of the biggest problems that curse our society. Chetan Bhagat deals with such burning problems like expensive education, lack of development in smaller towns, conservative mentality, extremism in politics, dishonest politicians, religious extremism, communalism, problems in small scale business, cricket craze, prejudice towards agnostics and atheists. Through his narrative he defends that the youth of today are equally conscious for their responsibility for the vital national issues.

Semi-autobiographical novel of Bhagat *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* unfurls multicultural realities that affect the modern generation of the new millennium. The novel emphasizes the importance of inter-caste, inter-religious marriages in reaching unity in diversity. This is the story of Bhagat's Love and marriage with Anusha. Bhagat found that his own marriage had scope for integrating the Indian minds. And he suggests the multiple ways of convincing the parents to accept one's spouse from different caste, religion, and culture.

*Revolution 2020: Love. Corruption. Ambition*, deals with the most prevailing social turmoil such as corruption in education, politics, business, economy etc. In this novel, Bhagat frankly opposes the inherent corruption rooted in India's education system and to bring out the incongruity of non-profit organizations and commercialization of education, through the character, Shuklaji, the MLA.

### **Conclusion**

Indian English novelists have vividly portrayed the Indian society in their works. His understanding of the time about which he wrote, his portrayal of youth's predicaments, his ability to capture the imagination of the readers, his simple and unassuming language about everyday life, bringing hope into people's lives through what he wrote make him different from the earlier writers. Chetan Bhagat has his own realistic views through which he depicted the characters especially the youth in the urbanized society with ambitions and passions in their life. To fulfill their ambitions and desires, they travel in different paths and find some of the solutions for the societal problems which create fuss and disharmony among the people from regional to national and beyond it. Of course which in turn reflects the national integrity and national socio economical growth, more over they compartmentalize the people based on the social strata; sociological, economical, religious, political, caste, creed, culture etc., which are more dangerous than the geographical boundaries. Chetan Bhagat with his exposure of urban follies and human predicaments also depicts the significance of the moral and ethical values

in his novels to sustain the relationships among the people with peace and harmony by inculcating the spiritual values in the youth which guide their lives at the juncture of the crucial situation in their life. The social realities as depicted in the novels of Chetan Bhagat are predominantly of the society in the post globalization era. The social scenario is alarming with the crumbling of the value system and utter confusion due to lack of clarification of values with context to the new challenges. The astounding communication technology which today encircles the globe seldom uses its tremendous potential to spread global values and foster a more caring compassionate consciousness. Chetan Bhagat stresses the importance of redefining the social values and portrayed changing urban realities in India in this globalized world. Bhagat has interwoven subtly the relationships; father-son, mother-daughter, friends etc., which reflects the post modern society; authority, passion of the two generations: orthodox and modern people. To draw the attention and create an interest among the readers Bhagat narrates the story in a dramatic way and in first person narration; by choosing the protagonist as his mouth piece, who is also a victim of any of these socio urban follies of the contemporary society.

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