

CHETAN BHAGAT'S NOVELS AS A REFLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN SOCIETY

Y. Suneetha

M.A., B. Ed.

Lecturer, V. S. R. Govt. Degree & P.G. College,

Movva-, A.P., India.

suneetha.yannam1@gmail.com

Abstract

The present paper aims to study how the Chetan Bhagat's novels mirror the social, economic and cultural changes in India. Known for his attractive storytelling and relatable characters, Chetan Bhagat has crafted the issues of the contemporary middle class young generation addressing passions and desires of the youth as a powerful tool to reflect the tongue of the contemporary society. This paper will study different themes employed in his writings such as Education and youth aspirations, interpersonal relationships, Social inequalities and corruption, youth culture and modernity, and contrast between the rural and urban cultures. It also examines the Chetan Bhagat's portrayal of bitter realities of the contemporary Indian society, highlighting his optimistic approach aimed at inspiring young minds to address and overcome life's challenges.

Keywords: Education, Youth aspirations, Corruption, Political conflict, cultural conflict.

1. Introduction

Chetan Bhagat, an IIM graduate, investment banker, has acquired a unique identity as a renowned Indian author and columnist, for his creative fictional writings in the contemporary Indian English literature, that have captured the hearts of millions of book readers across the globe. His works are distinguished by relatable characters, simple language, and engaging plots that tackle burning social issues. He penned seven fictions, *Five point Someone: What not to do at IIT* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), *The 3 mistakes of My life* (2008), *2 States: The story of My Marriage* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), *Half Girl friend* (2014) and *One Indian Girl* (2016). *What young India Wants* (2012), *Making India Awesome* (2015), *India*

Positive(2019) and *11 Rules for life : Secretes to level Up* (2024) are his non fictional works, which are collection of the speeches he has delivered as a motivational speaker and his news articles and columns written for various, leading newspapers. *The Girl in Room 105* (2018), *One arranged Murder*(2020), *400 days* (2021) series also written by him. Five of his fictional works have been adopted into Bollywood films. *One Night @ the Call Center* novel was adopted as the movie ‘Hello’ (2008), *Five Point Someone* became ‘3 Idiots’(2009), *The 3 mistakes of My life* was transformed in to ‘Kai Po Che!’ (2013), *2 states* was made in to ‘2 States’ (2014) and *Half Girlfriend* was brought to life as ‘Half Girlfriend’(2017). Chetan becomes fame as an overnight sensation in Indian English fiction with his debut novel, *Five point some one*. His literary success earned him prestigious accolades, including the Indo-American ‘Society’s Young Achiever’s Award -2004’ and ‘The publisher’s Recognition Award’ in 2005. He is honored with ‘Golden books Award-2022’ for the book- *400 days*

2. Aim of Present Study:

This study explores and analyzes the thematic aspects of selected novels addressing issues relevant to contemporary Indian society. The present research examines and understands the thematic aspects employed in his writings such as Education, youth aspirations, interpersonal relationships, Social inequalities, corruption, Feminism and gender dynamics. It also focuses on the influence of various themes identifying solutions to challenges affecting both individuals and society.

3. Education and Youth aspirations:

One of the persistent themes in Chetan Bhagat’s novels is the Indian education system and its impact on youth. His debut novel *Five Point Someone (FPS)*, [1] critiques the highly competitive and rigid academic structure of prestigious institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs). The novel depicts the IIT of Delhi during 1991 to 1995 through the lives of three friends struggling with grades and societal expectations, Bhagat underscores the need for a more holistic and creativity – driven approach to education. The novel *Five Point Someone* discusses the dilemma in the systems followed by the Indian education system and how students are psychologically affected from these practices. It critiques the deceptive façade of the system, uncovering its true intentions. Chetan Bhagat explores every aspect of life at an IIT, exposing the flaws in our education system and highlighting the challenges inherent in the traditional teaching-learning model. He addresses issues such as ragging, hostel life, strict deadlines,

pressure of assignments and examinations, rising suicide rates, and cases of depression. The narrative highlights, in the current set-up how students are misled by the illusion that education is the sole path to lead a lavish life. It portrays how the students are burdened with immense academic pressure, leaving them feeling oppressed and emotionally drained. This relentless strain often manifests as severe mental stress, which they struggle to articulate, even to their own parents. The narrative emotionally crafts the inner turmoil of these young minds, highlighting the isolation they undergo as they tackle with their challenges in silence. The three protagonists, despite being exceptionally intelligent and capable, find themselves unable to meet the rigorous and often rigid standards set by institute. This rigidity stifles the creativity and innovation of young individuals, preventing them from pursuing their true aspirations. Their inability to conform to the institutions expectations exacerbates their stress, as the system prioritizes grades and rote learning over creativity and individual expression. This critique is powerfully articulated by the author in *Five Point Someone*: “It suppresses talent and individual spirit. It extracts the best years of One’s life from the country’s brightest minds. It judges you with a draconian GPA system that destroys relationships. The Profs don’t care for the students.” (*FPS*, P. 107). Through this sharp observation the novel underscores the oppressive nature of the education system, which stifles individuality and prioritizes academic performance at the cost of emotional well-being and interpersonal connections. At the end of the novel the author discloses that the education should not be based on memorizing the curriculum, but it is to develop creative mind that can distinguish good and bad and to develop good character. It calls the attention to the urgent need for a more balanced and humane approach to education that values innovation, creativity, and emotional well-being alongside academic achievement.

In the novel *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* [2] Chetan Bhagat narrates contemporary Indian Society, reflecting the lifestyle, struggles, and youth aspirations of the lower middle class. He depicts the novel in Belrampur, a small town in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, which vividly captures the everyday situations and challenges faced by its characters. These characters are crafted as representations of the prevailing social and economic conditions, reflecting the issues and realities of their environment. The characters are with their lifestyles, thoughts, and attitudes, exploring how these are shaped by the social practices and norms of the society depicted in the novel. The writer selects 3 contemporary issues like business; cricket and religion crafted around 3 characters Govind, Ishaan, and Omi. The recurring theme in middle-class Indian society, the conflict between youth aspirations and parental ambitions is vividly depicted. Youth aspirations and mindset are addressed with characters of novel in a vibrant way, as detailed, Govind

aspiration to become businessmen in spite of her mother envisions him as an engineer, Ishaan aspiration to become cricketer in spite of his father desire for him to join Indian army, Omi, on the other hand, is pressurised to follow his parent's footsteps as a temple priest, though he lacks a defined passion and resents the imposed path. Vidya, Ishaan's sister whose father wishes her to become a doctor, due to her lack of interest in medicine and her desire for personal freedom highlight the generational disconnect between parents and children. Similarly Ali, a schoolboy with extraordinary talent for cricket at an international level, struggles against his father's insistence on prioritizing education over sports. All these characters resemble the youth aspirations ignoring the individual talents and interests represent the state of mind of society. The writer makes the present fiction more interesting by inter weaving some of real incidents like 9/11 terrorist attacks to WTC, the Godhra train sabotage and communal riots that followed in Gujarat. All these give a special flavor of realism to over all content of the story. The novel emphasizes the importance of youth having freedom to pursue their own choices, an idea that resonates throughout the narrative. Chetan Bhagat captures the aspirations of young individuals striving to break free from societal expectations and carve out their own identities. He critiques the middle class obsession with conventional success while advocating for a positive attitude, emotional balance, secular values, and ethical integrity among youth. His bold engagement with sensitive issues like religious riots, communal conflicts and political interference in sports and religion underscores his commitment in addressing the challenges faced by contemporary Indian society.

4. Interpersonal relationships:

Interpersonal relationships serve as the foundation of human existence, reflecting the intricate dynamics of connections forged within and across societal boundaries. Chetan bhagat's fourth novel *2 states* [3] is one that captures the nuance of interpersonal relationships against the back drop of India's deeply entrenched traditions and modern aspirations of young generation. On one hand it highlights the struggles of young generation to overcome societal barriers while on the other it underscores the transformative power of relationships. Beena Agarwal expresses "It ensures that Chetan perceives human conditions in totally and no longer celebrates the idealized images of life. He took forward to cultural synthesis and amicable survival of man beyond social prejudices." [4].

The *2 states* chronicles the love story of Krish malhotra, a Panjabi boy, and Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil girl. On the IIMA campus, their bond blossoms through shared academic

pursuits and personal moments, embodying a modern ethos of partnership. Yet, their families remain entrenched in traditional norms, highlighting the generational and cultural chasm that the couple must bridge. This interplay between personal prospect and societal prospect form the crux of the novel, offering a nuanced exploration of interpersonal relationships. For instance, Krish's strained relationship with his father and his close bond with his mother reflect the complexities of familial ties. Similarly the cultural clash between the Panjabi and Tamil families underscores the challenges of forging unity in diversity. The dowry system, food habits, and traditional customs become vehicles for examining broader sociological issues. Bhagat's narrative underscores the urgency of reorienting societal attitudes to foster mutual understanding and respect. By juxtaposing the orthodox views of the older generation with the aspirations of young, he highlights the transformative potential of interpersonal relationships in bridging divides. The novel's thematic exploration extends to the impact the globalization and modernization on traditional practices. Through the lens of Krish and Ananya's love story, Bhagat illuminates the transformative power of interpersonal relationships, inspiring a collective journey towards a more inclusive and harmonious future.

5. Social Inequalities and Corruption:

Addressing the darker facets of Indian society, Bhagat's works frequently highlight issues such as social inequalities, corruption and political inefficiencies. The novel *Revolution 2020* [5], the story of three friends, Gopal Mishra, Aarti Pratap Pradhan and Raghav Kashyap, is set against the backdrop of political and educational corruption in a small Indian town, Varanasi. Bhagat's exploration of the intersection between ambition, ethics and systemic challenges reflects his concern for the social inequalities and corruption of the country. He stresses the flaws in education system; privatization of education leading to degradation of moral and ethical values in the society.

The chief protagonist Gopal is an ordinary student and very ambitious to earn money, from a middle class family, his father Baba is a retired teacher. Though they have ancestral property, it is under dispute. Raghav another character also belongs to middle class society, but from a well-to-do family as his father is an employee in BHEL. He is an intelligent and hard working. He is passionate for journalism. Aarti is the only female protagonist of the story. She is from the rich family, her father is district magistrate. She is passionate to become air hostess. The novel seems to be a triangular love story on its appearance, but in fact it is a remarkable sign of Bhagat revolt on social inequalities and corruption in society. Bhagat critiques the

privatization of education, illustrating how it exacerbates inequalities and fosters corruption. Gopal's experiences at Kota coaching center, (he named it as 'Gopalkatafactory'), reflect the pressures faced by youth striving to meet societal and parental expectations. The novel realistically portrays how systemic failures compel individuals to compromise their values as seen through Gopal's establishment of an engineering college with the involvement of local MLA Shukla which exposes the pervasive misuse of power through political corruption. Bhagat critiques how such systems entrap individuals, stripping them for their ideals and perpetuating cycles of inequality. Bhagat also highlights another aspect of corruption in education system i.e getting fake degree certificates of their choice. It is clearly evident in Gopal's words to Aarti, how it becomes quite common and there is nothing hard enough to get a degree certificate; "I'll print you a degree if you want, you do not even to attend classes" (*Revolution 2020*, P.148). Thus, Bhagat's concern are revealed through different issues related with education and reflect on family problems, corruption in politics and philosophy of life as depicted through the real - life situations of the individuals of contemporary Indian society. Through characters like Raghav, Bhagat advocates for the restoration of moral values and the empowerment of youth as agents of change. In doing so, he presents a vision for a more equitable and just society.

6. Feminism and Gender Dynamics:

Bhagat has attempted to engage with themes of gender equality. *One Indian Girl* [6], written from a female protagonist's perspective, addresses issues such as Feminism and gender dynamics, societal judgments on women's choices, and the struggle for self acceptance. *One indian Girl* presented on the perspective of female protagonist Radika Mehta offering an insightful exploration of feminism and gender dynamics in contemporary Indian society. Bhagat in an interview with Anshu Pandey said that "Feminism is a very broad topic and I couldn't have dealt with every portion of it in alimited page frame. So I've covered the things I've seen in my life happening to determined, opinionated, independent women [7].

The story begins with marriage of Radhika Mehta, at Marriot hotel in Goa. As the CM of Goa arrived to hotel to attend an event, the hotel staff lowered the number of rooms booked by her family. So Radhika made a suggestion to relocate and the groom's side denied it and some relatives were ready to make compromise. Radhika Said "We need not utilize terms such as boy's side and girl's side logic as I hate it" [*One Indian Girl*, P.61]. Her assertion reflects the modern Indian women's desire to break free from outdated notations of gender hierarchy. Bhagat uses this moment to depict Radihka as a representative of the evolving identity of Indian women

– independent, self-aware, and unwilling to compromise on their principles. Radhika while living in New York in search of a groom, who suits according to her wishes, crosses the right age of marriage. Then she maintains a live-in relationship with her boy friend. However, Radhika's boyfriend refuses to marry her as "too professional" to be a good wife, while her married boss dismisses her potential for maternal qualities. These situations explore the deep-seated stereotypes that confine women to predefined roles, forcing them to choose between professional success and a fulfilling family life. The novel realistically portrays the feminist issues such as career versus domesticity, the decline of a woman's success in relationships, and also depicts a humanistic approach from the views of modern and traditional society.

7. Conclusion:

Chetan Bhagat's ability to connect with readers through relatable stories and contemporary issues reflecting Indian society has made him a valuable contributor to Indian literature. While critics often argue that his prose lacks literary sophistication, his simple writing style, colloquial tone, and conversational dialogue have resonated with a wide audience. This unique approach earned him a place on *Time* magazine's list of world's 100 most influential people in 2010 and confined his reputation as one of India's fastest book-selling authors. His contribution to Indian English literature lies in his ability to capture the pulse of contemporary Indian society. By addressing themes such as education, relationships, corruption, and feminism, he has given voice to a generation navigating the complexities of modern India. There is an urgent need for many writers like Chetan Bhagat who can use their storytelling to inspire and awaken society to the pressing issues of our time. Such works have the potential to provoke thought, spark discussions, and encourage change, ultimately guiding India towards a future defined by happiness, equality, and modern values.

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