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Social Conceptualization in the Novels of Anita Nair, Chetan Bhagat and Arvind Adiga

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The aim of the research paper is to highlight how cultural changes are the part and parcel of our society. Our social institutions such as family, education and economy are the base of our society but the components of these institutions are being challenged by the expansion of the Urbanisation, advancement of technology, Globalisation, Liberalisation, intermixing of culture are pushing our culture on the anarchical path as suggested by Matthew Arnold in his *Culture and Anarchy* (1865).

Social criticism has been a part and parcel of Indian English literature. The basic trend of social criticism was propagated by Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, for example, Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) projects the plight of the untouchable and their poverty, and *Coolie* (1936) deals with the problem of exploitation of the poor. These great novelists have been paid attention by great critics like K. R. Srinivas Iyengar, M. K. Naik and Meenakshi Mukherji because they wrote about society. They were committed writers and their work holds the mirror of the contemporary period.

Social criticism has remained very significant in Indian English literature. There are many novelists who take up social problems such as Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, V. S. Naipaul, Nayantara Sahgal, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, etc. They follow the trend set by Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao who highlighted the dark side of Indian society. Khushwant Singh in his *Train to Pakistan* (1956) shows how the partition in 1947 affected the society. Manohar Malgonkar, in his novel *The Princes* (1963), lashes against the arrogant and haughty behaviour of the upper caste Hindu. In *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), he highlights how the partition affected the society socially, economically, mentally and geographically. Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* (1997) focuses on the plight of Velutha who is untouchable, exploited by the upper class socially, economically and physically. Kiran Desai in her novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), deals with migration, living between two worlds and between past and present. In this way, these novelists take up the social problems and social criticism becomes an integral part of their novels. It has been asserted that most great works of literature take up social problems. Man as a social being, lives in society. Being a part of it, all his activities, directly or indirectly, are related to society. Literature is created by man and cannot exist without society. Society is the environment in which literature breathes. On this ground, this can be said that the sole purpose of literature is to serve the society.

Literary history is divided into different ages because literature of every age has some special characteristics. So, by studying the literature of different ages, some common characteristics of the concerned age can be found and by interpreting those characteristics, a fairly complete picture of the concerned age can be drawn. Literature shows both the good and bad sides of the society, criticises and appreciates them and this pattern may be termed as social criticism. The raw material for the novelist comes from the actual world in which he lives, people he meets, social customs, traditions, beliefs and superstitions, etc. When he recreates his fictional world, they swarm into his memory and find a place in his fiction. According to Chakarvarty,

Literature is said to be a reflection of the society in which it was born. Different periods and styles of literature reflect the changes that took place in that particular society at

various points in time. Political and economic changes affect the psychology of the people and since literature is created by human beings, it cannot help being influenced by such changes.

So the novelist writes what he feels. Fiction transforms the actual world into the imaginary world. The novelist's interpretation of the social scene around him conveys, nevertheless, his conviction and purpose. Literature deals with the period and its problems, hopes and fears. A novel is not merely a photographic picture of society but a reflection of social facts and conditions of the particular moment in which it is written. The sufferings and problems of people are the sufferings and problems of the characters.

There are five major social institutions; family, economy, religion, education and state. All these institutions are made up of many components. Various components of these institutions are linked in a varied and complex manner. For example, divorce, monogamy, polygamy, polyandry, etc. are some of the component of marriage and related to property rights, education, political set up, etc. (components of other social institutions). These institutions keep our society alive. Social practices are born and die with the civilization. New institutional norms may replace the old norms, but the institution goes on. For example, the modern nuclear family has replaced the patriarchal joint and extended family, yet family as an institution continues; likewise in modern times the forms of marriage have changed, yet marriage as an institution is still in practice. In the earlier times, when feudalism died, government did not end. The government and economy kept on progressing, although according to changed norms. All the primary social institutions are thousands of years old, only the institutional norms keep on attaining new forms. The functions of these institutions may be manifest or latent.

No institution works in a vacuum. Religion, education, family, government and business all are related with another. Education creates attitudes which influence the acceptance or rejection of religious dogmas. Religion may exalt education because it enables one to know the revelations of God or denounce it because it threatens the faith. Business conditions may influence the family life. An unemployed person may postpone his marriage till he gets employed in a suitable job. Postponement of marriage may affect the birth rate. The state influences the functions of institutions. All social institutions are closely related to each other. The inter-relationship of the various institutions can be likened to a wheel. The family is the hub while education, religion, government and economics are the spokes of the wheel. The rim would be the community within which various institutions operate.

All institutions face the problem of continuously adjusting themselves to a changing society. A slight change in the social environment may transform all the institutions. Inflation may have a great influence on marriage, death, crime and education. Breakdown of economy may have radical effects upon political institutions. Any change in one institution may lead to a change in other institutions. There may also happen a shifting of functions from one institution to another. Child care, formerly a function of family, is now shifting to the state. When one institution fails to meet a human need, another institution often assumes the function. No institution can avoid affecting other institutions or avoid being affected by others.

Out of these five social institutions, only three major institutions have been taken up for an in-depth analysis of the selected novels. Family, being the primary unit of society, is the base of these two. All values are generated in the family but later on may change due to social and economic forces. In present times, education is meant for job and job for economic purpose. This process influences family, the basic unit of society. In the present scenario, only education is a way to upward mobility. We, initially, imbibe the values from the family. Social institutions are cultural products themselves, they may even be called cultural industry and literature as a cultural product itself is closely related to them. Culture is a way of life of

the society in question. A close reading of these novelists shows that contemporary society is passing through a crucial period of social change. Old social order is being challenged by the new way of life. This mode of writing makes them serious novelists. Education, in the present times, is merely a source of fulfillment. Education is not a way of all round perfection but a source which leads to the materialistic fulfillment. So, these novels are a complete life in themselves which are directly linked to the contemporary society and project the mode of changing society. All these novels have been written in the first decade of this century and depict the explicit impact of the aforementioned institutions. Social and economic forces with scientific temper have driven our society on the path of that Arnold termed 'anarchy'.

Culture is a complex word. It means the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country and group. Matthew Arnold propelled the same concept in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). This essay was written during a time of social, moral and economic changes of the Victorian era. England, during this age, underwent a radical social transformation, leaving behind its agricultural past in the wake of the new industrial economy. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, Britain was particularly turbulent and in disorder. At that time, old social and moral values were fast declining and new ones were yet to come out. Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* divides the society into three classes; Barbarian stands for the aristocracy, Philistine for the middle class and populace for the working class. Arnold endorses the way of development through culture than 'anarchy'. Culture, in Arnoldian point of view is the study of perfection that leads us "to conceive of true human perfection as a *harmonious* perfection, developing all sides of our humanity; and as a *general* perfection, developing all parts of our society" (Arnold xi). It is an endless process which is based on a particular system. Development through culture indicates towards the Utopian society. "The whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold viii). While Anarchy means disorder or unsystematic growth, indicates towards the same which lacks proper intelligence and idea to guide. It leads to disharmonious perfection which prevents one from general perfection. Our stock notions and habits "the want of sensitiveness of intellectual conscience, the disbelief in right reason, the dislike of authority" (Arnold x) take to the path of anarchy and cause lopsided development of society.

When the present project is looked at in the light of these two concepts, *Culture and Anarchy*, it is found that this concept of culture is unsuitable to the contemporary society. It does not project any kind of harmonious development or all sides' perfection. But 'anarchy' in today's world does exist. It leads to narrow-minded method of moral conduct and self-control does not allow visualizing a utopian future of belonging to an enlightened community. 'Anarchy' plays a major role in the novels of Anita Nair, Chetan Bhagat and Arvind Adiga. The novels of these novelists project that social and moral values are the things of past. Everybody in contemporary society is running after money and wants to grab it by hook or by crook. Issues remain the same at the beginning of the twenty-first century in India; therefore these same issues are becoming the cause of 'anarchy' in contemporary Indian society also.

If an assessment is made of the last three decades, it can be seen that industrialization, demographic changes, social mobility, modernization, advancement of information technology, globalization, capitalist production, consumerism, extent of urbanization, etc. are the factors which cause 'anarchy' in the present times. Their impact is tangible on literature also. But literary products for these novelists are a source of money and, hence, are considered non-serious writers. Though, their novels are deep-rooted in the contemporary

society. They take up the lives, incidents and psyche of the new generation. Their novels sell like anything.

These novelists take up the problems of the masses which have been directly affecting the Popular Culture, so it is highly important to know what is meant by Popular Culture. It, literally, is the culture of the people often not made by them, but made for them and identified as theirs by the cultural industry. In humanist literary criticism, it is generally a pejorative term used to denote inferior kinds of work. Now-a-days, it is consumed and liked by many people. In other words, it can be said that popular culture means the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of the masses. This culture is commercially viable and free from cultural elitism. Popular Culture is a public-interest based culture. Popular culture may be understood in terms of ideological struggle and as a central element in any cultural politics. Popular cultural artifacts serve to articulate the differentiation of society in terms of gender, age or race and to continue the self understanding. Popular culture continues to depend upon the resources of industrial capitalism for its production and distribution, a tension remains in the selection of popular cultural products between the interests of capitalism and the cultural and political interests of the consumers.

Popular literature or Para literature originates from popular culture. It is also known as non-serious literature. Popular literature is the ideas, beliefs and opinion which is shared or liked by a large number of people. It is mostly related to taste and knowledge of the ordinary people. This type of literature is related to the ordinary people which suits to their taste. It is the literature which deals with the masses and opposes the elite.

The gothic novel is also considered to be in the category of popular literature which is based upon romance and sensation. Such novels offered escapism to their readers. It throws light upon the middle class, how they think and feel, their attitudes and values and the way they look at life. Hence, the study of popular literature has become an important area of study. Popular literature falls in the category of cheap or non-serious literature. Popular stories mostly have a happy ending. These writings are read only for the sake of pleasure or passing time. In this type of literature the characters manipulate, escape and negotiate with situations.

By taking up the problem of the marginal section, Anita Nair, Chetan Bhagat and Arvind Adiga project the angularities of the contemporary Indian society. By using simple language, they deal with the lives, incidents and psyche of the man of new generation. Anita Nair in her novels focuses only on the marginal section of society. Her characters revolt against the social set up of society. They manipulate and negotiate for propagating the middle class values. During the course of this journey, a subtle cultural transformation has been captured. In Anita Nair's second novel *Ladies Coupe* (2001) Akhilandeshwari alias Akhila is the protagonist. She is a forty five year old spinster. She, after the death of her father, is appointed as an income tax clerk. She belongs to a conservative Tamil Brahmin family. Now she takes up the burden of the entire family on her young shoulders and plays the roles of a daughter, sister, aunt and the bread runner. After some time, she decides to get a one way train ticket to the seaside town of Kanyakumari. On way to Kanyakumari, she meets five other women, listens to their stories in the compartment and tells her too.

With the help of the description of six women, the novelist highlights how patriarchy affects the course of a woman's life. Our social and cultural values keep them within the enclosure of traditional social set up. They face injustice and inequality in all walks of life. On the one hand, discussions are carried out about women empowerment; while on the other hand, the novel puts a question mark on the existing education system and social set up of contemporary India.

Anita Nair's third novel, *Mistress* (2005), is set in a riverside resort in Kerala, and the action is spread over ninety years. The novelist skillfully mixes up two stories. Christopher

Stewart alias Chris arrives at a riverside resort in Kerala to meet Koman. The novel depicts the love affair between Chris and Radha, who is the wife of Shyam. The subplot of the novel focuses on the life of a dancer in the Kathakali tradition. In their first meeting, both Radha and her uncle are drawn to Chris. Shyam is a small businessman, running a resort and is very happy being married to Radha. Shyam loves her very much but she looks down upon him and develops extra-marital relations with Chris. Though Shyam is aware of this attraction, he does not do anything. He watches helplessly when his wife Radha embraces Chris passionately. The true richness of the story belongs to Koman and his pursuit of excellence as a Kathakali performer. His protector is Malini, who watches over him like a jealous lover in the old age, while he is sexually involved with his own student, Angela.

The novelist highlights the problem of disloyalty. Here the novelist portrays how the sacred institution of marriage has lost its significance by highlighting the fact that gone are the days of loyalty when couples used to remain satisfied within themselves. Emotions and feelings are no more significant in the present scenario. So the writer depicts how the cultural values have changed.

Chetan Bhagat's characters try to negotiate the contemporary situations by gaining immediate success. They propagate the middle class and capitalistic values with a purpose to refine them. His second novel, *One Night @ the Call Center*, deals with the story of six teenagers, who work at the Connexion Call Centre. Military Uncle, Radika, Esha, Varoom, Priyanka, Shayam and Mr. Bakshi. Military Uncle lives away from his family. He is a retired army man and gets pension monthly. Despite being so, he, by joining Call Center, tries to supplement his monthly income. Varoom's father is a businessman, who leaves his wife for a younger lady. Now Varoom lives with his mother. He joins the Call Centre for the sake of livelihood. Esha wants to become a model so she comes to Delhi from Chandigarh, against her parents' wishes. During the daytime, she approaches agencies and tries to get modelling assignments. Shyam Mehra is the narrator of this novel who belongs to a well-to-do family. He feels embarrassed to imagine that his cousins are becoming doctor, engineer, etc. Due to this, he feels degraded and inferior. To avoid his inferiority and degradation, he joins the Call Centre. Priyanka is a fresh graduate. Her mother promotes her to join the Call Centre. By ignoring her own career, she follows her mother's guidance. It is clear that she joins the Call Centre to keep her mother happy. Radika joins this job to save her married life. Her husband, Anuj, already has a good job. She married him three years ago after a whirlwind courtship in college.

Bhagat depicts how materialistic approach affects our life. It causes disintegration of families, alienation, frustration, etc. Due to this approach, they find themselves entrapped everywhere. The novel projects the commercialization of education. The novel highlights the middle class teenagers who live in their own world. In the present time, the importance of money has gone up and the novel compels us to think of the role of money in our lives and seeks an answer whether money should be for life or life should be for money. The novel is set against the background of the economic scenario of the past two decades.

Revolution 2020 (2011) is the story of three childhood friends namely Gopal, Raghav and Aarti. Gopal and Raghav are childhood friends, while Aarti is Gopal's friend. Gopal is from a poor family, Raghav, belongs to a middle class family and Aarti is from a family of bureaucrats and highly placed politicians.

After failing in both the IIT-JEE and AIEEE Examinations, Gopal is forced to move to Kota to undertake them again. However, Raghav scores highly in these tests and joins the IT-BHU. Gopal is completely surprised when he comes to know that Aarti and Raghav have formed a romantic bond. Gopal again fails to pass the AIEEE. His father cannot bear his son's repeated failure and eventually dies. Due to past debt totalling nearly two lakh, Gopal makes a deal with an MLA to start an engineering college on his father's disputed land.

Gopal becomes director of the new college and proceeds to learn about the corrupt educational system. Meanwhile, Raghav completes his engineering studies and becomes a trainee reporter for a popular newspaper. He starts publishing all the wrongdoings of Shukla like the Ganga Action Plan scam worth twenty crore rupees which gives a bad reputation to Gopal's college and land controversy causes some demolition to Ganga Tech College. Shukla gets Raghav sacked but Raghav starts his own paper called *Revolution 2020*. He publishes an article about the Ganga Treatment Scam and proves that Shukla is a corrupt man. Shukla is forced to resign. Aarti develops a deeper friendship with Gopal and starts spending time with him as Raghav has no time for her. She acquires the job of a Guest Relationship Manager at the newly constructed Ramada Hotel. She invites Gopal there and reveals her love for him. Gopal finally succeeds in winning her over. He goes to Raghav's office to tell him that Aarti is no longer his and he has become a more successful man in spite of being uneducated.

Revolution 2020 takes up the issue of education again. Bhagat explores the commercial aspect of education in this novel. The story of Gopal obliquely becomes a scathing attack on education being increasingly used as a profit making business venture. In the course of this commercial venture the intervention of a wily politician is only too real and hence lays bare the infatuation of the government and the public with technical education in the era of liberalization. The finer sentiments like love, friendship and sacrifice have been used by Bhagat as an alternative to this crass commercialization of life. *Revolution 2020* becomes a vehicle for Bhagat to portray seamier side of contemporary Indian culture. Though, it falls short of being a comprehensive and a direct serious portrayal and critic of the same.

Arvind Adiga's first novel, *The White Tiger*, came out in 2008. Balram Halwai alias Munna is the protagonist of this novel. He is completely money-minded. He murders his own master only for the sake of economic purpose and lives anonymously. It reflects that gone are the days of loyalty. Economic forces undermine the importance of human values and lead to the separation of humanitarian values. Here, Balram Halwai stands for the philistine. This puts a question mark on his integrity. He is unmarried and lives away from his father. He lives anonymously and lives in emptiness despite being a rich man. A serious reading of the novel suggests that it reflects 'anarchy' which exists in contemporary society. Issues remain the same like nineteenth century; it is creating problems at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty first century. This marks the mode of contemporary society. Social and economic forces lead on the path of 'anarchy'. Because the contemporary social values are based on materialistic approach completely and have become a reason of the crass materialistic and fractured values of the new generation.

The novelist depicts how the materialistic approach affects the psyche of the man of the twenty first century. It drives him to commit heinous crimes. The novel projects the movement from feudal to the contemporary globalized capitalistic way of life. It is the materialistic approach which sets aside morality, humanity and all cultural values and invites immorality, corruption, disloyalty, etc.

Adiga's second novel *Last Man in Tower* was published in 2011. The novel revolves around two characters named Yogesh Murthy alias Masterji and Dharman Shah. Masterji is a retired school teacher and a respected man in the apartment building where he lives. He is generous with books, passionate about education and a role model to his society. His wife is dead and his only son lives no more with him. Dharman Shah is a builder by profession. The Vishram Co-operative Housing Society is purchased by Dharman Shah, who wants to transform the Vishram Society into a luxury apartment Complex. He convinces all residents of the Vishram Society to vacate the apartment except Masterji. Masterji is a man of moral values and sound principles. When he does not vacate his flat, he is harassed by his co-residents and men of builder. Shah is a dangerous man. As the demolition deadline looms,

Masterji's neighbours and friends become his enemies. During night, he is scared so that he may vacate the apartment. When he does not vacate the apartment, he is murdered brutally.

The novel highlights the clash between the ideologies of the old and the new generations. Yogesh Murthy is the embodiment of older generation who believes in the traditional set up of society. Dharman Shah, Masterji's son and his neighbours represent the new generation. The writer depicts how the cultural and moral values are changing.

Thus, the novels of these three novelists are of wide range and highlight different aspects of the new generation. They write on different issues but have something in common which makes them the novelists of new generation. These novelists have not been studied so far from the perspective of social criticism. By using simple language, they deal with the lives, incidents and psyche of the new generation. These novelists belong to the middle class and write about the same. This makes them popular in the masses. They are read by non-elite groups and consequently make their work an integral part of Popular Culture. In popular culture worldviews, attitudes, thoughts, opinions and lifestyles of the middle class society are studied. It reflects a wide range of talent, depth and complexity. When the dominant society disenfranchises or oppresses people, they start expressing themselves in informal popular culture. It connotes creative expression of ordinary people and opposes elite group.

Social change, a consequence of human action, is conditioned by the challenges faced by a society from time to time. Being a dynamic process, with the changing conditions, it further gives rise to many issues of vital sociological concern. The relationship between challenges, human action and change represents a dialectical process and this has been continuing since ancient times.

For the present study, the concept of social change is meant to include those alterations in the institutions of society which affect its social system, including values, attitudes and pattern of behavior of individuals and groups. There are numerous dimensions of social change such as social, political, economic, etc. If a deeper probing is made of the status of social change, it can include education, women's place in Indian society, tradition, religion, Science and technology, marriage and economic development.

All these novelists use contemporary conversational English. Anita Nair uses a small number of Indian words as compared to Arvind Adiga who uses them profusely, Chetan Bhagat falls between them. This Indianisation of English in Anita Nair is coupled with interspersing third person and first person narratives. It enables her to delve into the psyche of various characters and brings out a broader range of characters particularly women characters. Analogous situation in Chetan Bhagat and Arvind Adiga performs the same function for male characters. This strategy, with variation and focus peculiar to these writers, reveals the attitudes of different characters about social contexts in which they are located. The socio-cultural context of the narratives - late twentieth century or early twenty first century - provides us an opportunity to view the implied social criticism from the point of view of the young generation characters' responding, reacting and striving to transform the age old social institutions. The transformation occurs not only in the morphology of the social institutions but also, perhaps more importantly, in the contemporary socio-cultural value system. The resolution of the plots in most cases follows the pattern of popular literature, i.e. all the problems of the lead characters/protagonists are solved to their satisfaction.

The way different characters and situations are developed by novelists against complex socio-cultural practices offers the readers an opportunity to see people and social institutions in an interactive mode. Whether it is the characters that bring in even a shade of change in the social practices or the social practices which facilitate or thwart the free growth of human personality avenues for social criticism are opened. The novels selected for study can be located in the tradition of popular literature. Popular literature itself is located in the popular culture which "emerged following industrialization and urbanization" (Storey13). It is usually

“defined, implicitly or explicitly, in contrast to other conceptual categories; folk culture, mass culture, dominant culture, working-class culture, etc.” (Storey1).The analysis of popular culture and also of popular literature is “informed by theoretical insights from post structuralism, feminism, Marxism, queer studies and post colonialism” (Nayar15). Because popular culture keeps the person from engagement with ‘real’ culture and holds them in the manipulations of the culture industries, so it is imperative that popular literature as a manifestation and product of popular culture is studied seriously. It enables us to look at the implied social criticism in terms of the creation of images or validation of images which may have angularities from the point of view of ‘real culture’.

The proposed research plans to highlight how the cultural patterns dealt with by these novelists affect our society. Anita Nair in her novels highlights the problem of disloyalty, status and problems of woman, adultery and social injustice. She, by projecting the characters of the middle class, shows the real picture of contemporary Indian society. Secondly, Bhagat writes about the existing education system and projects the impact of materialistic approach which causes disintegration of family, alienation and frustration. He also deals with religious politics, concept of marriage, corruption and commercialization of education. While Adiga highlights the impact of rapid economic growth on society that undermines the values of the old generation. These three novelists project the changing picture of contemporary society. Nair’s characters revolt against the traditional set up of society. Bhagat’s characters negotiate the contemporary world by becoming successful; while Adiga’s characters overstep all social and moral values for becoming successful in their lives. Hence the present research is likely to help one to have an understanding of Anita Nair, Chetan Bhagat and Arvind Adiga as social critics.

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