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Chetan Bhagat's *Revolution 2020*: A Quest for Incompleteness

Dashrath Gatt

Assistant Professor of English,
Govt. College, Bhattu Kalan (Fatehabad)
Haryana- India

Abstract:

Chetan Bhagat remains one of the widely read authors of today's India, particularly among the youths. His *Revolution 2020* also is an extension of his other previous body of works so far as the delineation of setting and characters are concerned but with a more serious and somber theme. Along with a scathing attack on rampant corruption in the political as well as educational arena, the author discusses the issues of heart and head which affect the future course of the lives of his characters who seem to have developed some sort of an affinity with failures and frustrations in life. The juxtaposition of the personal and professional journey of Chetan's characters depicts the interrelationship between these two aspects of life, influencing each-other. Inconsistency and fickleness in their behavior make them drifters who, instead of availing the opportunities coming their way in realizing their goals, opt for disenchantment and disappointments in life, rather a pursuit which will take them nowhere. The present paper is an attempt to analyse *Revolution 2020* from the perspective of human relations where the individual seems to be in a quest for incompleteness.

Keywords: quest, inclination, incompleteness, commitment, absurdity

Introduction

Chetan Bhagat's knack in feeling the pulse of his readers again gets exemplified in his masterpiece *Revolution 2020*, a work which the author claims is more sober in delineation of theme than his earlier ones. Once again, the writer remains true to his reputation of having a firm grip on the psyche of young readership by catering to them the issues of love, campus life, morality and deep-entrenched corruption in polity as well as system of education and journalism. The story revolving around the three school-time buddies—Gopal, Aarti and Raghav— touches on the issues of love, longings and lust on the one hand while success in career on the other where money and the muscle power reign. It starts with their school days when the two boys play pranksters with Aarti and a petty incident involving accusations and excuses eventually sets the tone for a roller-coaster relationship in the years to come among the three. Gopal, the son of a retired teacher whose physical as well as financial health is deteriorating with every passing day, wants to secure a seat in an IIT by cracking the entrance just only to fulfil the dream of his ailing father; Aarti, the daughter of the DM of the city and the grand-daughter of a former MLA is a very carefree and bubbly girl who wants to become an air-hostess while the focused and serious looking Raghav dreams of making to a renowned college on the basis of his ranking in JEE test. As the incident of stealing chocolate and then revelations associated with it mainly happens between Gopal and Aarti, they become inclined towards one- another, more at the initiation of kindhearted Aarti, and this inclination gradually takes the shape of a cozy romantic relationship. During the course of action in the story, the relationship takes many twists and turns, and as in a love course a lot many things remain unsaid.

The lofty aspirations of every small town young Indian find true expression in Chetan's three protagonists Gopal, Aarti and Raghav who despite having varied inclination in careers find themselves crossing one-another's path upto the end. The nicer things related to head and heart like commitment, loyalty and honesty stand ignored and the result is pain and emptiness in life. The author in a very subtle manner tends to express the feelings of incompleteness and disenchantment in man's life on account of the void created by his irrationalities and his love for crash materialism. In an interview Chetan shares how he conceived the idea of the present book:

When I traveled for my talks as a speaker, I got a chance to see what's happening at the private colleges in the country. I saw corruption at almost every level. If you have corruption in education, you end up with a whole everybody makes money, but the moment you enter into a corrupt mindset, it has dangerous consequences...So I felt that it was the need of the hour. I wanted to bring the issue out but in a very accessible way. So I had to overlay a very exciting love story on it. That's what led to "Revolution 2020." (Sahni)

The novel reminds us of numerous classic examples of yore where unfulfillment in love weighs above all other worldly achievements, but with a difference as here the protagonists themselves opt for drifting away from their heartthrob for no tangible reason, and their journey leads them to disillusionment in life. Binu Thomas remarks about the wide variety of themes Chetan discusses: "...The author has come up with a complete package of relationships (love, emotions, boy-girl relationships turning into man-woman relationships, jealousy), systemic loopholes (corruption, power-misuse), education system (importance of IIT's, coaching classes industry)." (The Viewer) He portrays a world where the over-lapping in the personal and professional aspects of man's life, alongwith his own oddity in his preference for sobs and tears to laughter and happiness, presents him an enigma, a riddle. Contrary to a saner head, he prefers a life which leads him to nowhere; he is running after, not fulfillment but incompleteness and becomes infatuated with this quest for incompleteness.

Discussion

Revolution 2020 stands for all that goes in a love-saga—obsession, betrayal, jealousy, ego-clash, sex, success, chase and rejection. It describes how the various characters, particularly Gopal and Aarti, are in search not for happiness but for sorrows. For the most part the novel is set in a religious city Varanasi; though for a brief period action shifts to Kota in Rajasthan, a place known for its IIT and PMT coaching institutes. Chetan while speaking about the theme of the book says: "The theme of the book is a love story ... But love can create so much heartache, so much competition and insecurity. That I felt I hadn't done in any of my books." (Sahni) The story unfolds through the narration of Gopal, the Director of Ganga Tech College, Varanasi, who tells his rags-to-riches story to the motivational speaker and author Chetan Bhagat in the 'Prologue'. Three main characters in the novel Gopal, his heart-throb Aarti and their friend Raghav are different not only in their economic background but also in their perspective of life. Gopal's and Aarti's liking for each-other's company and at the same time Aarti's casual laughing away of the insinuations with regard to proposal from Gopal confuses and mystifies many and this puzzle remains unresolved to the end.

From the very beginning, Gopal and Aarti appear destined to be a couple. Gopal cannot think of life without her while Aarti keeps on sending confusing signals and refuses to accept what Gopal intends, but neither does she reject him in no uncertain terms so far as

their marriage is concerned. But their liking for each-other's company and their rendezvous at the Varanasi Ghats and spending ample time together sends encouraging signals to Gopal about Aarti's inclination towards him. This mystifying behaviour of Aarti unsettles Gopal as he feels head above heel in love with Aarti. JEE becomes secondary to his pursuits of Aarti; he feels so possessive about her that he does not want to leave for Kota for coaching at the insistence of his father because he fears losing Aarti. Though he is not candid enough in expressing his feelings for Aarti, yet he feels that Aarti understands what he feels for her and in the deep recesses of his heart he wants her to be his life partner. Women have the power to unsettle men by remaining mute or changing the topic or giggling and smiling to their proposals and they willfully maintain this ambiguity in their behaviour to keep the course of discourse in their favour at every point of time in life. Gopal ponders:

Why do girls send confusing signals? She [Aarti] had rebuffed me on the boat the other day. Yet she comes to shop with me for boring clothes hangers and doesn't let me pay. She calls me three times a day to check if I've had my meals. Does she care for me or not? (p., 44)

Gopal's desperation in getting the hand of Aarti is writ large on everything he does; he wants a commitment from her about their future course of life before he leaves for Kota but she refuses to commit herself to any such prospect.. The very thought of separation from Aarti perturbs him; his every move can be viewed in terms of his planning in coming close to Aarti. His mental state is an apt example of what W.B. Yeats asks in his *The Tower*:

Does the imagination dwell the most
Upon a woman won or a woman lost?
If on the lost, admit you turned aside
From a great labyrinth out of pride, (W. B. Yeats)

Throughout the development of action in the story, Gopal and Aarti appear inching toward their goal of marriage but it is towards the end that their relationship takes a turn and it starts heading for separation, and their heart-rending separation, though a Gopal's design, leaves behind the readers baffled as well as sad. Chetan here contrives to show that human beings themselves develop a liking for loneliness and this attitude plays havoc with their life. No doubt, for considerable period of time, there is a tug of war between Gopal and Raghav for Aarti; while Raghav is not so vocal and desperate about Aarti, Gopal is an over-obsessed, jealous lover who cannot forget Aarti. It is Gopal who considers Raghav his rival and thus becomes ill-disposed towards him. He tries to divert his attention from Aarti to his studies, but in the depth of his heart he craves for her. Gopal's absence from the scene brings Raghav and Aarti close and appear to be heading for man and wife. Even the approval of Aarti's parents seems obvious to their marriage. Similarly, when Raghav becomes completely engrossed in his journalistic career, and Gopal is back in Varanasi, Aarti, feeling somewhat lonely and ignored, again starts cozying up to Gopal. When Aarti feels depressed and unhappy, then she starts searching for emotional support:

Raghav has no time. My parents can't see why I want to work. They can't understand why the DM's daughter has to slog. All my girlfriends are getting married, planning kids and I am not. I am weird. (p., 220)

It is very surprising that the girl who is full of vitality and energy in life, who exudes self-confidence and will-power, is independent, bold and beautiful and comes of a renowned

family, becomes very distraught and distressed. When one feels devoid of love and compassion, the very feeling of being alone sets in and this happens with Aarti. Philosophically, she tells Gopal: “Gopal, in every relationship, there is a weaker person and there is a stronger person. The weaker person is the one who needs the other person more.” (p., 226) The spark in their relationship can be spotted again and their frozen love rekindles which somehow cooled off due to the arrival of Raghav in the life of Aarti when Gopal was in Kota. There are numerous forward-backward movements in their relations but these movements entirely depend on the initiation of Aarti. She always needs someone and both of her suitors work as gap-fillers. Gopal remarks:

I couldn't figure out why I'd started to hang out with her. I had become a buffer until her boyfriend got free from work. I guess I wanted a break from work too. And, of course, when it came to Aarti, my reasons went for a toss. 'So, Raghav has no idea we meet?' I asked her one day. She shook her head, and wiped her coffee moustache. (p., 190)

Raghav and his parents are always pre-occupied with the career prospects of the former and all three are very confident of their progeny getting into a very good institute. But Raghav has other ideas; he is unorthodox and a class apart from his peer group as he wants to do something concrete in his life, to play his part in cleansing the dirt in the corrupt system. All three—Gopal, Aarti and Raghav—form a close knit group where a casual Gopal and happy-go-lucky Aarti appear more leaning towards each-other. But the course of relationship changes when the results of JEE are declared; Raghav becomes the darling of Varanasi while Gopal's very low rank brings frustration not only for his father but also for Gopal. The patronizing attitude of Raghav's parents further hurts Gopal. He feels more devastated due to the fear of losing Aarti, though she regularly joins him on clandestine boat-rides in the holy river Ganga and supports and cheers him up; she is very positive and her caring concerns for Gopal find expression on numerous occasions. But Gopal has developed a very strong obsession for Aarti and has started dreaming of spending his whole life with her while she keeps Gopal on tenterhooks by calling their relationship merely a 'friendship'.

Love consumes everything—abstract or concrete, youth and beauty, money and mind, body and soul, space and time—and the plight of lovers is a testimony to this fact. Aarti cannot leave Gopal's thoughts; her presence, her words, even her voice fill his life with happiness and vigour. The very feeling of hers being with him boosts his confidence and works as an oxygen for him; his performance improves when Aarti talks to him and when Gopal feels that she is with him: “Career Path would never know why I made it to the most-improved list once again. Aarti had me go back to studies in a big way. May be it was simple 'how was your day?' in our chats.” (86) Even while in Kota he remains intensely preoccupied with the thoughts of her and in a sense of insecurity tries to keep a tab on everything she does in his absence. Like a typical lover who always lives in fears of losing his beloved, Gopal's sixth sense senses rightly and much to his inward fears the void caused by the physical distance between Aarti and Gopal is gradually filled up by the arrival of Raghav in the life of Aarti. The very thought of Aarti being snatched away by Raghav fills him with jealousy and a sense of defeatism. He can not come to terms with the news of Aarti cozying up to Raghav and in pain and desperation he falls victim to bad habits in Kota. Every moment he craves for Aarti and as it happens in love-lost relationships, he tries or pretends to remain nonchalant about her but deep down in his heart he is dying to be with her. That's why when there is phone call from her; he can't desist from talking to her despite his displeasure at her

hobnobbing with Raghav. On Aarti's birthday, Gopal wants to be the first one to wish her heart flame but much to his disappointment her phone was busy. It could have been the mind of a jealous lover only that could have feared Aarti being busy with Raghav at this odd hour and his fears were true. He feels devastated and destroyed:

I tried Raghav's and Aarti's numbers in quick succession. I could not get through to either. My good wishes for Aarti vanished as my excitement gave way to anger.

Why did Raghav have to wish her at midnight? And do birthday wishes take so long? (p., 69)

What is more painful for a lover than loosening his grip over his beloved and seeing her going away with his rival? In love-course, as well as in other things in life, one feels cornered and just a mute spectator who can helplessly watch things happening around him but can do nothing. Such is the fate of Gopal. When he finally connects with Aarti around 1.00 am, the suspicious and enquiring attitude of Gopal gets a reply purely bathed in a lie. His dependence on Aarti or rather one-sided love for her becomes evident when despite being aware of her lying to him, he doesn't have the courage to tell her flatly about her betrayal:

She is a liar, ditcher, and heartless person, I told myself fifty times.

She also happened to be someone I couldn't stop thinking about. Love, officially, is nothing but a bitch. (p., 73)

His heart sinks and his mind is completely disturbed at what he foresees in future about Aarti. But the passionate one-sided lover in Gopal never takes his mind away from Aarti and he remains clung to the hopes of winning Aarti:

My head hurt as the two morons inside would not stop arguing. Girls have no idea what effect their wavering has on boys. I had to talk to Aarti. I wanted to shake her and make her talk. (p., 73)

Aarti is an epitome of cheerfulness and happiness throughout the story; even in dealings with Raghav and Gopal, she plays a balancing act and wants them happy. She offers all kinds of support to Gopal and talks to him and spends time with him when he is depressed. She equally relishes the company of Gopal but as it happens with beautiful girls, she keeps Gopal on tenterhooks till Gopal pushes her to tie the nuptial knot with Raghav.

Bhagat emphasises that emotional sway in human relations can be dangerous, because afterwards sobs and silent tears are left only. Tress-passing arrests the healthy ties and life becomes murkier and bitterer. Pathos awaits the drifters in life as it happens with Gopal; but much more than that one's actions can also fill other's life with agony and subsequent incompleteness. But the characters of Bhagat seem to be in love with such perversions which lead them to a world where commitment is an alien world. They themselves don't want coherence in their life; rather they keep on flirting very casually with the serious issues of life, love and marriage. When Aarti joins the hotel in the hospitality department, they start dating clandestinely. Both are aware of the perversions and the back stabbing they are involved in but passions overrule them. During the second phase of Aarti and Gopal's cozying up, initially Aarti looks upto Gopal as her good friend, someone with whom she can beat her lonely hours on account of the utterly busy schedule of Raghav. At this point of time she was visualizing her future with Raghav and not with Gopal. But with the passage of time and repeated emotions-loaded requests of Gopal, she being left emotionally drained

wilts and starts giving in to the advances of Gopal, though not ostensibly. The gap between the first and the sexual escapade underlines their moving ahead of their relationship in their mind. When they spend the night together in the hotel-room, Aarti was aware of the wrongdoing and tells the advancing Gopal : “This is wrong...This isn’t right, Gopal.” (pp., 220-221) Though she feels guilty at their crossing the line of morality because at that point of time she was dreaming about her future with Raghav but still she becomes the consenting partner in the act.

Revolution 2020 also affirms the point that moral transgressions become the cause of man’s downfall because the moment guilt sets in the thought process of the individual, he becomes a neurotic, a moron. Aarti’s infidelity to Raghav starts weighing too much in her mind; amid questions of turpitude arising in her mind, she finds herself in a mess and wants to come clean on the issue of her prospective married life. She becomes a split personality and feels bad for Raghav because she knows he is a nice, committed person and her being infidel to him upsets her. Her weak defence leading to her consent in the sexual act gives positive signals to Gopal and he feels emboldened so far as his future with her is concerned:

She obviously cares for me, for no girl will do what she did otherwise. Yet, why was she acting distant? Does she expect me to tell her I will be there for her now? Or is she regretting it? Is this going to bring us closer or take us further apart? (p., 222)

But during their second encounter in Gopal’s college, Aarti was complicit and very much in know of the developments. There was not a shred of guilt; rather she was playing a naughty girl with Gopal even when he was expecting a commitment from her; but first time she was giving indication of siding with him in no uncertain terms. That’s why, she doesn’t face any inward questions or awkward moments while surrendering herself to Gopal:

‘Mr. Director,’ she smiled, ‘I thought you said you didn’t want to have me until he [Raghav] was out of my system.’

‘Isn’t he?’ I said.

‘Almost,’ she said, closing her eyes.

‘Well, may be this will help get the remaining bits out,’ I said and brought her lips to mine again. (p., 250)

Now, she was feeling more close to Gopal than Raghav, a comparison not needed earlier, and their discourse betrays that Aarti was now dreaming about her future with Gopal, rather than with Raghav. She was constantly urging him to discuss and sort out the issue with Raghav in this regard otherwise she herself will have to discuss the issue with Raghav:

‘You met Raghav?’ she asked impatiently.

‘Yeah,’ I sighed.

‘So?’

‘He had people in his office. I couldn’t bring it up,’ I said.

‘Gopal, I hope you realise that until I break up with him, I am cheating on him with you. Should I talk to him?’

‘No, no, wait. I will meet him in private. (p., 264)

The story takes a decisive turn after Gopal’s visit to Raghav’s office; he went there to apprise him of the decision taken by him and Aarti with regard to their marriage. But Raghav’s unflinching commitment for bringing about a change in the corrupt system, the

system which helped Gopal in thriving in business and perhaps in elbowing out Raghav out of Aarti's life, moves Gopal and sends him into a brooding mood over his approach in his personal as well as professional life. At both levels, he finds himself engrossed in unethical activities and designs and becomes somewhat guilt ridden. He, first time, starts feeling that whatever Raghav is doing for the society, for this country deserves not only respect and appreciation but also Aarti. The writer is also aware of his responsibilities as a writer and he wants to underline the implications arising out of the corrupt system prevailing in the Indian society: "I try to aware people of social and political issues. So I do have a lot on my plate. That is more important to me than bothering to brood over these criticisms." (Bhavesh Bhimani)

Gopal knows that Aarti likes Raghav for his uprightness as well as for his nonconformist approach in life. Though she feels more inclined towards Gopal, still her noble soul will never approve of the corrupt practices of Gopal in making money. Gopal knows that in this regard she is more close to Raghav who has harboured no personal ill-will for Gopal and is only after cleansing the system. Before leaving the place of Raghav, Gopal has already taken a decision, a decision which alters the very destiny of his as well as Aarti's life. He has decided to go away from Aarti but in a manner so that Aarti willfully goes into the arms of Raghav. But in doing so he forgets that issues concerning one's heart are so complex that more one tries to get out of the mess in the affairs related to heart, one further goes deeper and deeper into the labyrinth of life. Gopal's action of hiring prostitutes just to dissuade Aarti from him shatters not only her but also Gopal himself. The marriage scene in the story which should have presented the moments of happiness and reunion leaves ironically everybody somber and grieving. The inarticulation of both Gopal and Aarti sends shiver to the bone as both are heading for emptiness in life and all this solely due the decision of Gopal. Aarti being not aware of the ploy adopted by Gopal appears dumbfound and somewhat lost. She develops a dislike for Gopal for his intended betrayal which he played to the perfection. But shockwaves are felt both sides; even Gopal appears to have been ruing for long over his lost opportunity of winning over Aarti. His guarded revelations about his love life to the writer tell how much the very name of Aarti weighs on his mind. Despite becoming rich, he is still an orphan, a pauper without Aarti who has possessed every bit of his mind. The pain mixed with the feelings of betrayal leaves a void, a feeling of emptiness not only in the heart of Aarti but also of Gopal.

The book is a classical example of Bollywood love triangle where Raghav appears a committed person and is least rankled by developments, because he is not aware of the seriousness and intensity of the relationship between Aarti and Gopal, leave aside their cuckolding of Raghav. He even does not know what transpired behind the scene before the culmination of their marriage. Aarti's drifting attitude and Gopal's self-inflicting decision which causes turmoil in the life of Aarti as well become their sore-spots. Left agape at Gopal's behavior, Chetan attempts to convey, it would be very difficult for a shattered Aarti to reconcile with Raghav and have an emotional bonding him. In the 'Prologue', Chetan sets the tempo for the ensuing sob story when Gopal unburdens his painful feelings to him:

'You loved her?' I smiled.

'Imagine every sadhu and priest in Varanasi. More than all their devotion put together, that's how much I loved her.'

'She loved you too?'

'She didn't just love me, she owned me. (p., 7)

The intensity with which Gopal loves Aarti is stamped on every word he speaks about her; every minuscule space of his mind is occupied by his heart throb but now as he cannot revisit his past and get his love back, he is left lonely and pained. He craves for her company but of no use, and all this is his own doing, not only to himself but also to his lady love.

Conclusion

Chetan conceives a world full of pleasures and pains, cheerfulness and cries, victories and defeats but his inhabitants have a unique infatuation with meaninglessness in life; they search for love and still prefer to live without love; they want a sense of belonging and then willingly prefer aloofness; they intend to march forward but not towards their destination but rather in the opposite direction; they are running after something not to get, but let the life slip away. The author underlines the point that human beings tend to flirt with failures and frustrations even when there are moments to remain happy and contented. His characters willingly thrust themselves in a world of sorrow and sadness. The personal and the professional aspects of life overlap each other, and the difficulty in drawing a line between the two results in disappointment. The success or failure at the personal level will automatically have bearing on the professional front and vice-a-versa as it happens with the protagonists in the story. Weaving a homogeneous pattern between the two opposite forces—personal and professional—poses an uphill task and this culminates in futility in the life of Chetan's characters. Imperfections in the form of moral turpitude lead Aarti and Gopal to astray in their life and it has a bearing on the life of Raghav as well. Man, feeling the pulls of private longings and professional ambitions riddled with jealousy, behaves like a novice and this paves the way for his disenchantment in life and subsequently his emotional collapse, and all this is his own doing.

The author aims to portray the human beings' love for absurdities in life; even when life is full of happiness and heading for completeness, the human being's love for cynicism, for dispossession makes him do the things contrary to what the common sense demands, and Chetan wants to underline this predicament faced by man which is self-invoked. Gopal feels utter emptiness and the emotional vacuum in his life without Aarti; but he has also left the latter devoid of happiness and fulfillment in her life. The self-afflicted pain of Gopal on account of his willed separation from Aarti also leaves the latter incomplete. Her robotic behavior just before and during her marriage with Raghav exemplifies the bitterness in her heart, giving enough indications of her being emotionally drained and this leaves many questions in the mind of the readers so far as a healthy, happy and compatible married life for the couple is concerned. Chetan in his work tends to convey the message that his characters seem to be in a quest, but not for happiness, for realizing their goal, for completeness but for disappointment and disenchantment, for emptiness and incompleteness in life.

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