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ISSN 2278-9529
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Why Chetan Bhagat's Novels Acquired Cult Status besides Harsh Criticism in the Literary Circles?

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Chetan Bhagat's novels carved a niche for themselves in India. The Indian pulp fiction that had been in a sleeping state, acquired wide readership with the publishing of his works. Though elite critics accuse him of using high school English, his books remain best sellers. Chetan bhagat's works actually grasp readers' attention due to their teaching quality. Here, the author assumes the position of a teacher when he presents a story in everyday language. His selection of characters is another vital factor. Unlike his contemporaries Amish Tripathi or AshwinSanghi, Bhagat does not need a seriously constructed plot with intense and powerful characters. All of his characters evolve from a background that is familiar to every Indian, especially the youth. Therefore, here we venture into the facts that why his works are still commending wide readership than his contemporaries despite heaps of criticism and how they helped transform India's reading habit.

Chetan Bhagat is chiefly known for his simple and lucid style of writing which is often preferred by youngsters. Though coming from a background of corporate world, Bhagat struck gold in writing. His keen insight and understanding of the system he lives in helped him create stories that can be related to our lives easily. Until the publication of his first title *Five Point Someone* Indian pulp fiction was an isolated genre with no wide readership or dominant prolific writers. Though Indian English literature had already acquired rich patronage with the works of masters like Tagore, VikramSeth ,Arundati Roy and some elite writers, a vibrant young author's space remained vacant. Chetan Bhagat filled this void as his first novel swept away all the traditional methods of writing styles that had been in practice. The Indian pulp fiction found a place in literary spheres with the publication of his novels. His first novel *Five Point Someone*, as the name indicates, severely criticized the grade oriented education system in the country. Bhagat used the lighter tone to portray harsh realities of life. His works primarily focus on the youth of the country. He chooses characters with such precision that they never seem odd or awkwardor unnecessarily refined to the readers. Unlike his predecessorswho used fictitious places and serious literary techniques, Bhagat wrote in pure conversational language. This writing style helped him connect with his readers. An author should bridge the gap between his work and his readers and Bhagat uses his language to accomplish this bridging. The first novel of Chetan Bhagat itself earned him a place in Indian English literature. In a land like India where a mosaic of culture coexists, Bhagat performed the task of uniting the divided with his simple and powerful language. His novels brought Indian English literature into the hands of common people who never had deep knowledge about literature and language. The most fascinating feature of Chetan Bhagat is his writing style. More often, the critics ridicule that his works

deserve to rest in dustbins. A common accusation against him is the usage of 'high school' English which is considered completely out of context when it comes to literature. However, the response to his works was overwhelming as they took away the interest of Indian youngsters from late night parties to reading. As Nathaniel Hawthorne once quoted, 'easy reading is damn hard writing' Bhagat too takes immense efforts before producing a work that is capable of commending the interest of readers. Though it may seem very easy to the reader, Bhagat carefully selects his stories and creates his characters in such a way that they create a crucial first impression in readers, especially the youth. Nowadays there is a tendency to degrade his writings as an exclusive group of readers tag him as the Bollywood writer of India. In their opinion his writings lack class and they do nothing, but mislead the youth in the country. According to them his works are devoid of original idea and they are chiefly written for films. Some people who only prefer classic writers say that his works are not intellectually appealing. It's a fact that his works are completely different from that of classical writers and their literary quality is lesser. However, there are certain unique factors that take his novels to a higher level, not in terms of literary quality, but due to their function. This is the primary reason why an author who uses everyday language remains the favourite.

Chetan Bhagat's novels are chiefly noted, not only for the language, but also for the function they perform. The superior objective of his writing style is to develop interest in readers. No versatile writer can make a non-reader read his works like him. There will be difference between the linguistic knowledge of the reader and the author. Therefore, the meaning of the text will not be completely transferred to the reader. For instance the novels of Salman Rushdie seem appealing only to those who have profound knowledge over the language since Rushdie uses a lot of refined terms and literary devices in his writing. On the other hand Bhagat's novel teaches the reader the basics of story-telling and it adds to the reader's understanding of the language. Even a beginner reader could easily understand the major theme of his novels. For that a reader may not be proficient in English. Those who know the very basic details of English can bag a copy of Bhagat's novels and start reading it. The careful selection of words is good enough to grab the attention and curiosity of readers at first sight. As an author Bhagat often dismisses the use of complex sentences and multi layered connotations in his novels. This is to avoid ambiguity and confusion an Indian reader might have while reading an English novel. Every novel of Chetan Bhagat is written in straight, clear sentences with utmost precision. He keeps in mind his target readers who are primarily Indians. As we all know a part of our population still finds it difficult to grasp the language of elite English writers. This is mainly because lack of interest and language incompetency. The world of international literature is shut to them. It's in this context Bhagat's writings have significance.

His latest book *Half Girlfriend* is a convincing example of Bhagat's teaching process. In the novel he tells about the story of a rural boy, Madhav and an urbane girl, Riya. The protagonist of the story lacks proficiency in English language. In this work, Bhagat convinces his readers how far English language is important in India and the need to master it. Also the author talks about the effective methods to grasp the English language. A few instances are when Madhav, the chief character selects English option while talking to customer care, listening to speeches on YouTube and correcting pronunciation with continuous efforts. These practices can be successfully adapted by the readers as well. In this novel the author takes a different path as he showcases one of the most important problems the young people in India are facing- inability to

communicate in English. The author is of the opinion that the country is divided into two classes—the non-English types and the elite English speaking class. This class system according to Bhagat is a problem of profound gravity. A majority of population encounters problems of inferiority when they are in the middle of an elite community that speaks English well. The author used his popularity to expose this serious problem and the medium he chose is a novel. Apart from a regular love story, *Half Girlfriend* can be viewed as a novel with an additional purpose. It clearly guides the readers who are beginners in English language. For instance if a school student without deeper language skills chooses this book, he not only understands the theme of the book, but also learns how language skills can be sharpened. Here the author assumes the position of a teacher as well. He not only entertains the reader, but also instructs them. In *Half Girlfriend*, when the heroine says ‘what you say matters, not the language,’ Bhagat himself pronounces the purpose of his writing. It’s to change what is to be changed. This change includes the shift from complex writing style to the simple one. It’s with the publication of Bhagat’s novels, Indian pulp fiction flourished. The direct influence of Bhagat can be seen in writers like RavinderSingh(*I Too Had a Love Story*) and he inspired many young writers to publish their books. Until the entry of Chetan Bhagat Indian English literature was a vast ocean with big fishes like Salman Rushdie. However the essence of their work seems appealing only to those who are very much learned about literature and an excellent skill over English was a pre-requisite to enjoy such works. People who have limited vocabulary and language skills found it very difficult to grasp the meaning from those books. The inferiority problem of people has been honestly portrayed in *Half Girlfriend*. According to Chetan Bhagat, not just middle class, but the whole country suffers from inferiority. There's a line in the book, "My English is not that good. I have a Bihari accent." Bhagat says that French people have a French accent and it's considered very sexy. So why is it? There's an assumption of inferiority associated with the whole culture.

The novels of Chetan Bhagat brought people back to the habit of reading with their simple language. He used familiar backdrops to tell the stories of Indian youth. All of his protagonists are young people who struggle to make a fortune in life. The hurdles they face on their way arise from the socio-cultural context of the country. In *Five Point Someone*, it’s the education system while in *The Three Mistakes of My Life* it’s the brute religious sentiments. Bhagat, as a prolific writer, chooses the conditions that mainly affect the youth as the themes for his books. When he unravels the corruption in the current education system in *Revolution 2020*, Bhagat takes the issue to a larger audience. He makes them aware of the pathetic condition of educational institutions in India He openly criticizes the ethnic discrimination within India in *2 States* a novel written based on his love story. Here Bhagat talks about the need to stay together in India. He uses light humour to give a strong blow to those who blindly follow unwanted cultural norms. In *One Night at the Call Centre*, he further explores the working pressure and unhealthy competition in corporate life. Thus Bhagat portrays the problems of contemporary India in his novels. For this Bhagat molds his characters from the youngsters who are primarily affected by such problems. His characters represent the voice of young India. However some critics dismiss this fact by quoting that his novels portray the youth as day dreamers and lovers of masala stuff. At the surface level one might feel that this criticism is true, but Bhagat actually tells about their enthusiasm and hard work.

His politics often invites strong criticism. He is often accused of glorifying the corporate life. And to a certain extent it’s true. However, completely dismissing the developments caused by

corporate companies in India seems quite difficult for an author like him. This is because he is dealing with the young people of the country. He educates them of both the merits and demerits of corporate world.

People tend to make a distinction between popular literature and literature written for Western countries. In this context Bhagat's works remain a matter of concern. But he clearly states his objective when he says, 'I am writing to reach Indians.' Unlike his contemporaries, he feels he doesn't need immensely powerful characters set against the background of an overwhelming plot. He just wants people to read. Bhagat says his works have kept the young kids away from online games and that's what other writers couldn't do. To wrap up, Chetan Bhagat's novels challenge those who equate brightness or intelligence with being good in English. Instead his novels simply make everyone read books and encourage the reading habit. He may not be the pampered child of critics, but he is a man of masses.

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