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Chetan Bhagat's Vision of Life and His Youth Calling Approach

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Abstract:

Chetan Bhagat is one of the most celebrated fiction writers in Indian Writing in English. His writings are considered as representative of issues disturbing young generation. He highlights the confusion, troubles and dilemmas that the youth is facing in modern society. Chetan Bhagat has merged both highbrow and lowbrow genres into one, which is now accepted as the best-seller genre of Indian English literature. He takes the people from the real-life metropolis. His novels go around the lives of the youth. Bhagat writes about the youth and specifically for the youth. Everyone feels as if Bhagat writes to him. He is in true sense the author of today's generation because of his description on the topics which have a great relevance in today's life. This paper is a distinct study of Chetan Bhagat's novels. As a writer, he is gifted with an extraordinary ability to deal with various facets of human life. His popularity as a writer rests basically on his intimate understanding of human nature. This study examines various aspects of life portrayed in his selected novels. The novels selected for this study are *Five Point Someone*, *2 States*, *One Night @ the Call Center*, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, *Revolution 2020*, and *Half Girlfriend*. This study reveals that Bhagat's novels provide a realistic portrayal of contemporary Indian society, capturing the aspirations, dreams, struggles, and challenges faced by young Indians.

Keywords: Chetan Bhagat, Indian youth, human life, Indian society, social change.

Introduction

Chetan Bhagat has always tried to touch upon something new in his writings. His writings have always been close to reality and presented a true picture of life in Indian society. He has always expressed himself in a way that every generation can connect itself to it. He has

started a crusade against eradicating the evils of the society by his 'sugar coated' novels. Chetan Bhagat, in almost all his novels, highlights the problems faced by the youth and society. It has been one of the major reasons why his writings have seized the minds of the younger generation. Though he has written a handful of books, he has touched upon a variety of subjects from life at call center, secularism, present education system, inter- community marriages, corruption and many more. His fictional art, a fine synthesis of contradictions, has opened new windows to present the realities that were earlier hidden in invisible terrains.

Bhagat as a writer of Modern sensibility

Ever since the time India opted to go global, extensive socio- economic, political and technological changes have shaped the face of India. The generations before 1991 who could look around and make sense of the world are lucky to see two different times. One quite stagnant and the other one full of vibrantly globalizing activities. Globalization has become the buzz word after 1991 and has touched all the spheres of Indian life and experience. Bhagat very comfortably depicts this atmosphere in his works. He vividly shows his understanding of the pain and passion of changing urban realities in India in this globalized world. The shifting paradigms of life conditions prepare the fabric of new modes of social behaviors, personal relations, value systems and the commitments of social order.

With the appearance of his debut novel *Five Point Someone* (2004) Chetan Bhagat catapulted to spectacular fame in Indian fiction world. It opens the lives of exam oppressed students who cram to get into Indian Institute of Technology and then rebel against the stultifying atmosphere of academic competition. The novelist has, from his first hand experience, clearly portrayed ragging, hostel life, increasing suicide cases and the eccentric elitist world of India's most prestigious institutes. The very next year came Bhagat's second novel, *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005) which depicts the aspirations and plights of the workers surviving in the oppressive work culture of the call centers. His third novel *The Three Mistakes of My Life* (2008) reveals the condition of aspiring businessmen in India, failing to pursue economic gains, the ups and downs of middle class to keep the body and soul together. Gujarat earthquake, religious politics and Godhara riots are some of the current issues of the time raised by the novelist. With his fourth novel *Two States of My Marriage* (2009) Bhagat reflects on the issue of inter racial marriages. This novel portrays how the culture can create differences in the matrimonial alliances. Chetan Bhagat's latest novel *Revolution 2020* (2011) is again a criticism of the creeping of the virus of corruption ruining the sanctity of educations

system. Therefore, Bhagat, through his writings, takes upon the sensitive issues which concern to the society ranging from romantic love story to a deplorable condition of present educations system.

Chetan Bhagat has a realization that education plays a significant role in the formation of the psyche of the youths of India and it subsequently sets the fabric of the socio-political life of the country. The students are obsessed with the passion for seeking admission in the most prestigious institutions of India. The anxiety of admission is creating havoc in the life of the youth of India.

Traditional teaching methodology:

Chetan Bhagat through this novel indirectly conveys a serious message in a humorous tone that it is a wakeup call for the elite technical institutes to replace the traditional teaching style of 'I teach; you listen' with an approach that develops students' own abilities to collect, select, filter and assimilate information; that inspires students' creativity by developing their life-long abilities; and that teacher students how to learn efficiently and actively. The emphasis should be placed on learning methods instead of knowledge accumulation; and we need to help students turn their knowledge into innovate ability. *Five Point Someone* in a mild tone points out that our technical education has become a lifeless system and needs reformation. The limitation of IIT system was intricately brought out by the remarks of Ryan Oberoi in a get together party:

You know guys, this whole IIT system is sick. Because, tell me how many great engineers or scientists have come out of IIT? I mean that is supposed to be the best college in India, the best technology institute for a country of a billion. But has IIT ever invented anything? Or made any technical contribution to India? Over thirty years of IITs, yet, all it does is train some bright kids to work in multinationals. I mean look at MIT in USA... what is wrong in the system... where is the room for original thought? Where is the time for creativity? It is not fair (34-35).

Ryan, Alok and Hari emerge as a voice of collective criticism against a system that is providing no opportunity for the expression of independent knowledge rather sacrificing their talent in securing jobs. It induces greater anxiety and loneliness He therefore, advises his students who are standing on the threshold of their future: "believe in yourself, and don't let a

GPA, performance review or promotion in job define you. There is more to life than these things..." (261)

Thus, Bhagat puts a lot of emphasis on observational teaching and hints towards off-quoted phrase "Human Resource Development" which is one of the objectives of technical institutes. The technical institutes should develop the technical skills, key competencies and enhance the organizational performance of an individual. These technical institutes should motivate the budding technocrats to think beyond the textbooks.

Indian Education system

Chetan Bhagat's latest novel *Revolution 2020* stands for the revolutionary spirit of the author. It addresses some burning issues of India today, like the rotten education system and corruption in public life. This novel is the story about three friends Gopal, Arti and Raghav. In this novel Bhagat describes about the corruption apparent in the Indian educational system where Gopal is the "most uneducated director" (Chetan Bhagat: 03) of Ganga Tech college of Engg. & MBA. These institutes are approved through corruption, link of corruption from top to bottom. He also describes that our education system is a good business for politicians to invest their black money into the private colleges or institute to make it white "You want me to open a college? I haven't even been to college". (120) "Most people who own college in India haven't. Stupid people go to college. Smart People own them." (120). This is the condition of our educational institutes.

The three friends cherish their own ambitions in life. Gopal selects financial wealth and comfort in life, Raghav wants to bring social and political change in the country and Arti aspires to become air-hostess. Raghav disregards the suggestion of his father to get admission in IIT, even though he was eligible for it. He listens to his heart and emerges as a successful journalist. After being unsuccessful in both the IIT-JEE and AIEEE, Gopal is forced by his father to move to Kota, 'the capital of coaching classes', to join a coaching center as a repeater. Gopal records the sentiments of millions of engineering students:

The AIEEE attracted ten thousand students annually for thirty thousand seats in the National Institutes of Technology across the country. Every engineering aspirant took these exams. I don't want to be an engineer. Baba wished to see me at once. (23)

Commercialization of Education: Root of Corruption

The novel can be seen as an attempt to bring the fore the anomaly of Non-Profit Organizations and commercialization of education. The role of politicians who are not very literate but still holds the courage of opening an institute of higher education has been comically depicted by the author. Shuklaji, the MLA said:

If we had straight forward and clean system, these professors would open their own colleges, blue chip companies and software firms could open college. The system is twisted; they don't want to touch it that is where we come in. (*Revolution 2020*: 166)

Raghav and Gopal in *Revolution 2020*, suggest the two dimensions the corrupt education system. At every stage Raghav is apprehensive of Gopal's ambitious plan of Ganga Tech College. He enquires, "What will be the faculty ratio?" and in the same breathe admits, "I can't be a part of a corrupt enterprise." (164) Shuklaji the MLA has clear plan in his mind how to use his art for manipulating these directors of the college. Chetan Bhagat asserts that such private colleges have provided a safer shelter to all mafias and corrupt persons of society. Money is being produced in these colleges but blood is being sucked. Sunil, with contempt goes on elaborating the creation of the corrupt system in education:

It scares me to even think of studying at these places. Liquor barons are running colleges? Politicians, builders, beedi makers. Anybody with experience in a shady business does really well in education. (116)

This exposure of the picture of corruption marks on the relationship of Shuklaj and Gopal. On the realization of the consequences, Gopal is almost petrified. Bhagat organizes the events to enhance the impact of the situation, "What is it, Gopal? I had to call CM. These stupid articles are the biggest headaches." "Sir we have bulldozers here." (192)

In the novel Raghav becomes a mouthpiece of the novelist, to expose the evils rampant in education system. Shuklaji, is busy in publicity in media and newspaper to secure more and more recognition for his institution. As a foil to his ambition Reghav in the newspaper publishes an article, with the headline, "New Engineering College opens in city – with corruption money?"(175) This single article becomes a challenge to the reputation of Gange Teeh to Gopal and to Shuklaji. Through Raghav, Chetan Bhagat communicates his prophetic vision to ensure peace and justice in India. One side of Indian society is represented by Rahav, the social activist

and the other by Shuklaji, the MLA- the image of corruption and human apathy. In his newspaper entitled "Revolution 2020" Raghav clarifies about his dreams of a society:

Revolution 2020: That's his goal. The India must have a full blown revolution by 202. Power will be with the youth. We will dismantle the old corrupt systems and put a new one in its place. (197)

Chetan Bhagat's *Revolution 2020* is not a fantasy but a prophetic vision of life free from the horrible shadows of corruption and filthy passion. With the publication of this novel, Chetan Bhagat has taken a new stride in the realm of Indian fiction. His idea of revolution is the synthesis of the idea of evaluation of human spirit and the image of a corruption free nation imparts a timeless popularity to the novel. In a true postmodern sense, Bhagat acts as a social critic, highlighting the biggest problem of the Indian society.

Anxieties and Insecurities of Young Generation

In the fictional world of Chetan Bhagat personal relationship is a part of the total system and not an isolated romantic activity. In his first dating with Priyanka, instead of making reflections on any romantic idealism Hari makes serious discussions on some serious problem of life. He criticizes the psyche of politicians who remain indifferent to the sentiments of public. The fabric of life lacks morality and religious faiths. Life is being governed and guided by consumer choice. In the following conversation of Priyanka and Shyam, there are serious reflections on the deplorable conditions of the country. In context of one of the article entitled "Why Don't Politicians suicide", Vroom reveals:

The article said all kinds of people – Students, housewives, businessmen, employees and even film stars – commit suicide. But politicians never do. That tells you something. Well, Vroom's point was that suicide is a horrible thing and people do it only because they are really hurt. This means they feel something. But politicians don't. So, basically, this country is run by people who don't feel anything. (Chetan Bhagat: *One Night @ the Call Center*, 47)

A Clash of two System- The Old and the New

With the coming of globalization and cosmopolitanism, the youth today is transcending the pulls of differences and comparisons. They have imbibed the new ethos. The protagonists of the novel – Krish and Ananya are highly educated, independent and live according to the

new set of mores while the parents are still rooted in traditions. *2 States* very well presents what can be termed as a clash between "New India and "Old India." Chetan Bhagat, very admirably delineates a series of cultural features or markers of Tamil Brahmin and Punjabi micro communities which are in sharp contrast to each other. There are frequent references to the food habits of Punjab community and Chetan Bhagat takes a dig at their obsession with food through his memorable one liner; "Nothing soothes an upset Punjabi like dairy products." (44) For Punjabis, food triggers an emotional response." (222) He also makes fun of the Punjabi community's trait of giving importance to show, splendor, lavish spending and fashion. Krish's mother even for ordinary guests, tells her maid to "get cashews and those Dubai dates."(61) For special guests, there is a "gigantic tray with samosas, jalebis, Chhole bhature, and milk cake... twenty thousand calories plunked on the table." (64) This kind of hospitality is in contrast to the Tamilian style of welcoming guests.

Conclusion

Chetan Bhagat promotes a rational attitude to visualize and to settle down the rumpus rooted in the system of Indian economy and political ideology. In absence of an organized system, national solidarity will be a dream. He expresses his resentment against government mal-factional politics. The revolution is to be in the streets. The voice of the common man is the highest voice to turn down the defective system of the government.

Hence Chetan Bhagat stresses the importance of redefining the social values. He writes about India as an Indian. He writes about each aspect of India like its culture, its problems, its language and depicts the life of young generation. In his book *What Young India Wants* Bhagat discusses about the mentality of people about rich. He says,

Becoming rich by unfair means is bad but you can also create wealth by hard work, innovation by creativity that should be celebrated, that is my ethos and I think young India wants that kind of message. The answer is very simple and that is good. (Chetan Bhagat: 15)

According to Bhagat, today's young India wants a good life, a good job and romance – "Meri naukri, meri Chokri". (15) He says,

The youth want to fulfill their own needs and only after that they are willing to support certain cause. Today youth wants a good well-paying job (naukri) and nice girl friend (Chokri) in a decent urban city. I don't

think there is anything wrong in that but what is important is to earn that living honestly, with integrity and excellence without compromising the core values that build our society. (15)

The traditional Indian society is in a state of metamorphosis. The old practices and customs have not given a way to new and hence creates conflict in the life of the characters.

Literature is not soothing pill, which calms down anxiety of mind. It also works as proactive pills which stimulates the mind to bring innovative changes in the patriarch society. Bhagat considers literature as a proactive pill, which works as a strong stimulant to the human mind. Bhagat entuses the youth to purge untainted obstinacy of the social system. He has merged both highbrow and lowbrow genres into one, which is now approved as best- seller genre of the Indian English fiction. He has endowed the genre with healthy humor and sanguine approach to life.

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Note:

All successive references to the novels are given parenthetically with concerned page number.