



“Problems and Aspirations of Youth” As Highlighted in the Novels of Chetan Bhagat

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ABSTRACT: Chetan Bhagat is an immortal name when it comes to writing of fiction as he has been known as the role model of the youth in India. He has written about 5 fictions and one non-fiction and almost in every novel he has highlighted his deep concern about the youth today i.e. what are the problems, hopes and aspirations of the youth. His novels give us a clear picture of his concern and the present paper is based on those issues only. May it be through Ryan’s voice or Vroom’s, through Govind or Krish, through Gopal or simply by means of certain articles in the leading newspapers.

I. INTRODUCTION

Trying hands on contemporary writing and then reigning over hearts of millions is not that easy as has been proved by one of the prominent writers of the day – Chetan Bhagat. Very few authors have managed to reach out to such a wide audience as Chetan Bhagat. There is originality of content in his writings and when he writes people feel as if it is their story. He is a phenomenon that has affected everybody, touched everybody’s life. Indian Publishing shall now be divided into pre and post Chetan Bhagat. He has created those kinds of landmarks. Chetan Bhagat projects his readers’ viewpoint in his writings. According to him, “A writer’s first job is to strike a chord, and not to please elitist circles,” He does it by caring for his readers and listening to them,” It can’t be just the language, as it is simply the common language of the people. It is more about what is being said and communicated that strikes a chord.” Chetan strongly believes that the language should be colloquial- a popular fiction has to be a dialogue with the people on the streets.

CHEATAN BHAGAT:- A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Chetan Bhagat (born on 22 April,1974) is a contemporary Indian author who has written four novels namely :- “Five Point Someone- What not to do at IIT”, “One Night @ The Call Center”, “The 3 Mistakes of My Life” and “2 States: The Story of My Marriage”, respectively. He grew up in Delhi in a Punjabi family in an uncertain home environment where his parents used to fight a lot. His father, an army officer, was very strict and he wasn’t allowed to watch television or films. So, Chetan and his brother used to make up movie stories and perhaps that’s where this tact of writing all sprang up.

Bhagat attended Army Public School (1978-1991), Dhaula Kuan, New Delhi. He studied Mechanical Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi (1991-1995), and then studied at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmadabad (1995-1997), where he was named “The Best Outgoing Student”

He fell in love with his IIM Ahmadabad classmate Anusha and they eventually got married. His novel “2 States: The Story of My Marriage”, is a fictional version of his love story. After graduating from IIT and IIM, he joined Peregrine, a financial service company in Hong-Kong. It shut down in six months but Chetan stayed on in Hong-Kong for eleven years, moving to Goldman Sachs. It was to spite his boss that he started writing his first novel. No doubt it was a great moment for Bhagat but he was in a bank and dissatisfied. His boss was very bad. So to take revenge on him. He started writing in office.

CHEATAN BHAGAT’S WRITING STYLE AND CHARACTERS

The secret to Chetan Bhagat’s success is he writes in ordinary English - and it is reassuring for young people to know someone knows what they are going through. In other words, Bhagat’s writing style tends to be simple with linear narratives and vivid storytelling. His protagonists tend to be named after avatars of Hindu deity Vishnu, like

Hari, Shyam, Govind or Krishna. All his books have a number in the title (e.g. 'five' in the first, 'one' in the second, 'three' in the third and 'two' in the fourth book.) When asked about this, Bhagat replied that he is a banker and he can't get numbers out of his head.

Bhagat, 35, is the first to admit that he is no Arundhati Roy, the Indian Booker Prize winning author and says he knows critics feel his books are shallow. But Bhagat, who enjoys a rock-star like popularity among his readers, aged mainly 13 to 30, said he has the ultimate riposte—"My books sell." Bhagat says that he writes for 'ordinary young people' who feel suffocated by their parents' desire for them to become doctors, lawyers, or engineers.

According to Bhagat- Indian youngsters live under pressure-cooker conditions to succeed. There is cut-throat competition to win places in India's elite universities with youngsters compelled to score highly from primary to high school. Entrance to top universities often requires ninety percent- plus averages and most children have after-school tutoring to attain such marks. A paragon of this philosophy can be seen in his novel "One Night @ The Call Center", where the hero, who answers the phone calls from clueless Americans about their cooking appliances, remarks, "Every cousin of mine is becoming a doctor or engineer,.....You can say I am the black sheep of my family."

Bhagat believes that India tends to have an academic and social revolution to prevent young people simply regurgitating what they learn without thinking. He wants to convey this message across to the Indian youth- even if they don't get stratospheric marks, they are still entitled to a happy life; and it's not the end of the world if they fail. He generally talks about youngsters' worries, their anxieties and all those things which preoccupy them, by means of his writings. His writing subjects include parental academic pressure along with pre-marital sex, drinking and other topics taboo in socially conservative India.

CHETAN BHAGAT'S NOVELS

1. FIVE POINT SOMEONE- WHAT NOT TO DO AT IIT!

"Five Point Someone...." was his first book which adopted a breezy, ironic tone to explore the lives of exam-oppressed students who cram to get into the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi and then rebel against the stultifying atmosphere of academic competition. It features soft-drugs, binge- drinking, and an affair between a student and his professor's daughter.

To be clear, the story of "Five Point Someone..." revolves around three students- Hari, Ryan and Alok who come from three different backgrounds. The book is about their years in IIT Delhi and how they cope with the pressure of studies, family and relationships. The book was well received by the public, especially among the younger generation, and brought Bhagat a large following. It was adapted into a play by the theatre group 'Madras Players' and also by 'Evam'. This book was adapted into a movie called '3 Idiots', though Bhagat has stated that he was not involved in the scriptwriting in anyway, and was involved in a controversy with the director and the producer of the movie over crediting his contribution to the script. Directed by Raj Kumar Hirani, and starring Aamir Khan, R. Madhvan, Sharman Joshi, Kareena Kapoor, and Boman Irani in pivotal roles, it was released on 25 December, 2009.

About a week after the release of the movie, '3 Idiots', Chetan Bhagat claimed for the credit for the story and this credit row became a national issue. On January 1, 2010, Star News channel got Chetan Bhagat, Aamir Khan and Abhijat Joshi- the so-called script writer, switched to each other at their respective places through Star News correspondents.

During this programme, Chetan Bhagat claimed that before the release of the movie '3 Idiots', neither he had been shown the preview of the movie nor given any participation in the script writing. At that time he was told that the adaptation of 'Five Point Someone....' to '3 Idiots', was just two to three percent or at the most just five percent and rest of the plot was different, but when the movie released and hit the Box Office as the biggest hit of the time, Chetan felt bad, because the story was not just five percent from his book rather it was seventy to eighty percent of his book. He kept mum for a week but when his fans and readers kept on asking him why he didn't take any action or show any reaction against the makers, at that point of time Bhagat sought the shelter of the media and came into the lime-light with his credit claim.

On the other hand Aamir Khan in one of his interviews made it clear that there was no similarity between the movie and 'Five Point Someone....' and also as Aamir had not read Bhagat's novel, Bhagat prohibited him to go through 'Five Point Someone', saying that both the movie and the novel were quite different from each other in story as well as plot. And now after the release of the movie, seeing it to be a big hit Chetan Bhagat is claiming for credit? It is quite wrong on his part because he wants to snatch the credit of Abhijat Joshi- the actual script writer of '3 Idiots', who worked on the story along with Raj Kumar Hirani – the director. Aamir also interrogated Chetan Bhagat saying that Raju Hirani had directed 'Munna Bhai MBBS' and its sequel 'Lage Raho Munna Bhai', so Chetan Bhagat would claim that these two movies were also his creations! Aamir labeled Chetan Bhagat as publicity hungry writer.

Chetan Bhagat defended himself by saying that the producer Vidhu Vinod Chopra had told him that there was hardly any similarity between the movie and the novel apart from the five percent of loose inspiration. He added that he relied upon Vidhu and said so to Aamir prohibiting him going through 'Five Point Someone'. It was only after the release of '3 Idiots' that Chetan Bhagat realized that he had been duped as Vidhu kept him in dark by lying and that was why he claimed for credit. He said that as per contract signed between him and Vidhu, he had been promised full justice by displaying his name among the main star-cast, but his name was given towards the end among assistants' names in the rolling cast. This really pinched him.

At one occasion during the promotion of the movie '3 Idiots', interacting with the media persons in a press conference when a press reporter asked Raju Hirani, Aamir and Vidhu Vinod about the authenticity of the story whether it was an original one or taken from Chetan Bhagat's 'Five Point Someone....', Vidhu Vinod lost his temper. He raised his finger at that press reporter and asked him to shut up. This act of Vidhu further added oil to fire and the matter turned from bad to worst. All the news channels repeatedly telecasted Vidhu raising finger and saying 'SHUT UP'. No doubt, the next day, somehow, Vidhu realized his mistake and openly apologized labeling himself a 'BEAST' and his action of raising finger and saying 'shut up'- an insane or uncivilized act. When asked about Vidhu's ill-mannerism from Chetan Bhagat, the later showed his gratitude to the media for bringing forth Vidhu's real personality, as it would have been quite difficult for him to do so at his own level.

A few days after this incident another interview with Chetan Bhagat was telecasted on news channel where he disclosed that Abhijat Joshi had threatened him to send a legal notice in his name if he ever claimed for the credit for the story again. Chetan Bhagat subsided for some time. It was a great shock to the fan-readers of Bhagat when a video clip of Bhagat's interview on 24-12-2009 was telecasted on another news channel. It showed Bhagat in very high spirits saying that he had given his book 'Five Point Someone....' to the makers of '3 Idiots' just like a daughter and after watching the premier of the movie '3 Idiots', it seemed to him that his simple daughter turned into a bridal-look, so he would definitely give five out of five points to the movie.

Chetan Bhagat also appreciated the adaptation of 'Five Point Someone....' to '3 Idiots' and confessed that he couldn't have done this if asked for as Raju and Vidhu have done and added that his family is quite happy over this. Bollywood News channel Lehren depicted this incident of credit claim row and Vidhu's misbehavior mere a pre-planned drama to benefit both the movie as well as the book.

2. ONE NIGHT @ THE CALL CENTER

It was released in India in October 2005 also to popular demand. This book was about six people who work at a call center and about a night when they receive a call from God. Noted Bollywood film director Rohan Sippy bought the rights from Bhagat, but later Sippy let the rights pass on to director Atul Agnihotri, brother-in-law of Arbaaz Khan. The movie version of the novel is titled as 'HELLO' starring Salman Khan, Sohail Khan, Amrita Arora, Esha Koppikar, Gul Panag, and Sharman Joshi. Bhagat worked directly on the script of the movie, moulding it to fit the silver screen. However, the film did not succeed commercially.

'One Night @ The Call Center' is a romantic comedy set in an office where bored young Indians try to resolve the mindless inquiries of Midwestern American Technophobes. The story is a comedy of romance and crossed lines. There are three main themes: - ex-girlfriend, bad-boss, and God. The story revolves around six friends who are selling home appliances to the US from a call

center in India. Each one has an issue with love. Call agent Sam works right beside the girl who has just duped him. He is dating someone he can't stand just to get over her. Esha is just short of becoming a model. Two inches, to be precise. Vroom wants to change the world. Radhika is trying to manage her mother-in-law, and hold down her job. Tonight is Thanksgiving in America, and customers are queuing up to complain about white goods going wrong. On this night of a thousand phone calls, when life couldn't look more dismal, one unique caller got on the line- God: and that call is going to change everything....A romantic comedy of six friends kicking against the system, against their boss, and against each other.

The fact that 'One Night @ The Call Center', was an enormous success in India is very strange or unusual and troubling. Although it may seem a feel-good story about Indian empowerment in a globalized world, but Bhagat finds no other way to reach a happy end but through a ridiculous and an unexpected event saving a seemingly hopeless situation and a series of morally reprehensible acts. One might be able to forgive him invoking God- the ultimate fall-back guy when nothing else works: but the mean-spirited and outrageous means he chooses for his characters to find happiness and satisfaction is beyond contempt.

In the opening page, we are asked to do a task- think about something you fear, that makes you angry and one thing you don't like about yourself. After a deep pondering, one may come up with an idea and plod on with the reading. When you reach the end of the novel you find yourself thinking about what you said in the beginning and viewing it in a different way- clever stuff, actually Bhagat's writing style is so easy that you are soon swept along with the narrative.

The novel has a prologue, in which author- Chetan Bhagat encounters a beautiful woman on a train-trip. She offers to tell him a story- but will do so only on one condition that he uses it for his next book. It is set at a call center, describing the events of a single night shift....and she warns him (as well as the readers) to expect at least one unusual occurrence: "it was the night....it was the night there was a phone call from God."

That's a lot of pressure to put on a book- and since the phone call comes on page241, that's also an awful lot of suspense to leave the reader in for a very long time. The story is narrated by Shyam Mehra, who works at the Connections Call Center. Here Indians man the phones all night, fielding calls from American consumers who are having troubles with their electronic goods. The company is kept afloat by its account with Western Computers and Appliances, but isn't doing spectacularly well ("call volumes are at an all time low....Connections is doomed") and there is talk of "rightsizing" i.e. downsizing. Shyam works in the WASG bay which stands for the Western Appliances Strategic Group, handling home appliance issues i.e. people having trouble with their refrigerators, ovens, and vacuum cleaners.

The novel focuses on Shyam and handful of his colleagues- a motley crew of Indians who, for a variety of reasons, have wound up in the same job. For quite a while 'One Night @ The Call Center' is fairly predictable; the characters and their personal stories are introduced, the bad boss is shown being bad, the American callers are unlucky. Bhagat does not do any of this particularly well, but it's modestly engaging and there seem to be some possibilities. Priyanka's sudden engagement to a Microsoft-man she has never seen, stirs the things up, and each of the characters has his or her own story which Bhagat at least offers a glimpse of. He is at his best in describing the workplace- silliness, dealing with customers and bosses, though not particularly creative or imaginative.

Bhagat has a self-righteous and important streak that undermines much of his possibly valid social criticism. Claims of intellectual superiority hardly mask the pathetic inferiority complex they all seem to suffer from. At Connections they are taught: - "the brain and IQ of a thirty-five-year-old American is the same as the brain of a ten-year-old Indian. This will help you understand your clients. You need to be as patient with them as you are when dealing with a child. Americans are stupid, just accept it."

It was quite surprising that the novel 'One Night @ The Call Center' was getting an American release, as Americans aren't exactly shown in a flattering light here. The thirty five is equal to ten rule just makes one stunned. The Indian call center teaches all the agents that a thirty five year old American is as intelligent as a ten year old Indian child!! One would wonder how Americans will

take this saying. Perhaps one sort of has to insult the people who call all night long to complain about idiotic problems now and then to stay sane and not end up screaming at them after one stupid question too many. The author does acknowledge that in spite of the vast intelligence Indians have, the country is plagued by corruption and thus very behind America.

In a nutshell, it can be said that Bhagat raises valid issues and concerns- but does not take them in the least seriously, offering neither reasonable descriptions of the issues, nor any sensible way of dealing with them. The characters one finds working in these places like call-centers, the cross-cultural issues (some of which he even manages to begin to convey), the different faces of modernizing India, the family pressures especially on women; Bhagat even lays a decent foundation. But in going completely overboard like God! Operation Yankee fears! ; He undoes all of the promise of the book, and with his morally defective happy end, sends such a wrong message that one has to condemn the whole exercise.

3. THE THREE MISTAKES OF MY LIFE

It is Bhagat's third book, about cricket, religious politics and rebellious love. About how three friends get caught in a tangle to earn some money and fame, and how they sort it out. The book was published in May 2008 and had an initial print –run of 200,000 copies. The novel follows the story of three friends and is based in the city of Ahmadabad in western India where the author had begun his independent life and so this city is quite close to his heart. Farhan Akhtar's Excel Entertainment has bought the rights for making a movie based on this, and it will be directed by Abhishek Kapoor of 'ROCK ON!' fame.

The book has fiction: - sentiment, romance, social message, business, life, relations, religion and of course cricket. It's the story about three friends Omi, Govind and Ish who are struggling to decide their goal. The story is presented through Govind's eye; he is a brilliant student of mathematics. He has an aptitude and penchant for business and it's his three mistakes of life that are presented along. Govind is a true Gujarati, interested in coming up on his own in life through business. Ishaan or Ish- a failure in studies but a great cricketer (obviously great in the local school team), has a passion in playing, teaching and watching cricket. Omi comes from a family of priests with no inclination of becoming a priest and just moves along with his two friends.

The journey of these simple people in life, how their lives get affected by the worst disasters in Gujarat's history is portrayed in a simple yet efficient way by Chetan Bhagat. This book also teaches you how your dreams crash into pieces by unexpected events but how with the support from people around, you get back on track, focus and rebuild your dreams.

Vidya, Ishaan's sister, a teenager with her eyes on Govind, represents typically homely Indian girls trying to lose their virginity and so-called boys feeling shy and guilty after having sex with them.... as Neha in 'Five Point Someone' and here Vidya in this novel. Ali, a gifted batsman and son of a local Muslim politician, plays a prominent role in the story. It's the story of how Govind, Ishaan and Omi come up with a sports store in their area and how they achieve success in it by clubbing it with Math's tuitions and cricket coaching classes. The writer has thrown in the angle of Ali a gifted batsman who is in need of coaching and as Ishaan is an avid cricket player whose passion lies in playing, teaching and watching cricket, comes in as Ali's savior because he does not want a brilliant talent to be wasted. Then there is a love angle of Vidya and Govind thrown in. And to top it all Chetan Bhagat has placed the novel in the era when Ahmadabad suffered with a nightmare of an earthquake and riots. The book traces the lives of these characters and their trials and tribulations.

This novel especially comes at a time when people only want to come up with excuses to show or feel how different they are rather than see the common aspects and bring oneness which can keep us together and achieve our common goal of growth, peace and prosperity. The language is simple, it connects well with the youth of India and the narration has improved as compared to the earlier novels. Chetan Bhagat has again proved that to be best novelist you don't need fabulous vocabulary or you don't need awesome critics review, all you need is a thread to connect to the plain minds of people. Truly this novel teaches you- life will have many setbacks. People close to you will hurt you, but you don't break it off, you don't hurt them more. You try to heal it. It is a lesson not only you, but our country needs to learn.

The story involves some of the major headlines of early 2000 like the Gujarat earthquake, India-Australia test series, the 9/11 WTC attack and not to forget the Godhra train mishap. Apart from cricket, business and religion it also has the mesmerizing love story between Govind and Vidya the story is good, since the events are from recent past and it's easy to connect with it. It can be completed in one sitting. But there are not many surprises as it has not gone away from Bhagat's typical style of writing. It is less on humor content as well. Chetan has been very clever by stating '3 mistakes' and you keep flipping the pages for knowing the other two mistakes as the first mistake you will come to know quite soon. It is a book with nice ingredients of real events and fiction perfectly cooked for a delicious dish. No mistake in giving it a read.

4. 2 STATES: THE STORY OF MY MARRIAGE

This book is about how love marriages work in India and is again typical of him in the first person. It is like his first book 'Five Point Someone', expected to be inspired by his own life. The book is funny and completely different from his previous novels; perhaps this time Bhagat did not want to write about friends any more. '2 States....' is about Krish and Ananya, who are from two different states of India. They are deeply in love and want to get married. But their parents do not agree. To convert a love story into a wedding, the couple has a tough fight ahead of them.

Perhaps it is no secret that Chetan, a Punjabi and Anusha, a Tamilian, had to work hard to have both sets of parents agree to their relationship and subsequently their marriage. To provide a further glimpse into their personal story, Chetan decided to take up penning this book after leaving his banking job and having decided to become a full-time writer. While Anusha emphasizes that when Chetan announced to her for the first time this book would heavily lean on their life story, she indeed was a little wary. In fact Anusha also stresses that before writing the book, both Chetan and she spoke to their parents assuring them that it was not about them.

While Chetan accepts that a lot of portions of the book have been dramatized at the insistence of his wife, he credits his fans for conceptualizing this book. When Anusha read the book, she loved the female lead, who is modern, liberated and educated. India is opening up and parents are learning to accept love marriages despite prejudices about caste. Bhagat has dedicated this book to his in-laws and it would be for the first time any Indian writer has dedicated a book to his in-laws. In fact Chetan Bhagat admits that one of the biggest challenges would be to make sure that his in-laws still want to talk to him after reading this book. He surprises us by saying that he hopes that his wife's parents will still be his in-laws. But, interestingly, Anusha's parents had actually flown down from Kolkata to attend the launch of the book '2 States....'

There is no second opinion about this that Indian love marriages are not easy. It's just the boy and the girl who fall in love, but everyone- i.e. both their clans, have to fall in love too. In the end, the boy and the girl start questioning whether there's anything more left to it and even fight. But it's important to know what parents think of your marriage. Parents still have the remote control when it comes to emotions. According to Bhagat- however independent you are, getting married without parents' approval is not good for the relationship. No doubt parents' protesting against children marrying outside caste or religion is archaic today, still there are some honour-killing incidents in the recent times. Bhagat inspires by saying that if all else fails, the parents should do it for the sake of country.

'2 States....' we all know well, is the story of Bhagat's own love marriage to a Tamil Brahmin. Bhagat found that his own marriage had scope for humor because this Punjabi-Tamil is a continuous thing and a lot of Indians can relate to it. The story is fictionalized but the feelings that Bhagat had gone through, are the same as what the characters experience. And of course it was difficult for him to convince his own parents to accept his Tamilian wife – Anusha, who was also a banker. So, there are jokes about Punjabis and Tamilians in this book. More importantly, Bhagat used it to address to his strained relationship with his father.

Speaking about '2 States....', Bhagat says that the story is not a memoir, it was nice, the feeling of suspension of disbelief, but as it involves his own family, so he wants to make it clear that it is a work of fiction. That is why there are character changes and the dramatization is higher. Calling it

a fluffy novel, Bhagat says that it is personal and treats the complex issue of inter-community marriages, the fun way. And sends home a bigger message of homogeneous society. According to Bhagat, homogeneity is important for a country to move forward. Today's youth are traveling to different cities for studies and work, and they will meet someone; but parents are still rooted in prejudices that have to be addressed. To take his stand point firmly, Bhagat cites the success stories of Korea, Taiwan and China that have seen progress from a developing country by adopting homogeneity.

Chetan Bhagat believes to do what your heart says. Knowing what you want and sticking to your decision is most important. And he himself did just that. He fell in love, knew what he was doing and followed his heart. And so, a book happened. Bhagat feels that his best stories are those drawn from his own life and experiences. The more personal the book, the more unusual and funny it becomes for him. People relate to it better because they know him, his wife and his twin sons. He strongly believes that the function of literature is to reflect society and by means of his novels he is causing some change in a large part of India, which is far more satisfying.

AS A COLUMNIST

Bhagat has an open-ended column in Dainik Bhaskar, a large Hindi newspaper and another at The Times of India, English daily. He says, "the main purpose of the books and films is to entertain, but the columns allow me to give my views on how the nation should be run." His articles are written in simple English to achieve mass appeal. He also visits Educational Institutions in India to give motivational talks.

ON TELEVISION

Bhagat was a judge on a reality show by Star News called 'Star Anchor Hunt'

AWARDS

Chetan Bhagat has been honoured with 'Society Young Achiever's Award' in 2004 and 'Publisher's Recognition Award' in 2005.