

**YOUTH ICON CHETAN BHAGAT'S VIEWS ON YOUTH IN
*THE 3 MISTAKES OF MY LIFE***

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Youth is the condition or quality of being young. It is the period between childhood and adulthood, described as the period of physical and psychological development from the onset of puberty to maturity and early adulthood. Youth is an alternative word to the scientifically-oriented 'adolescent' and the common terms of 'teen' and 'teenager.' Another common title for youth is young person or young people.

No other stage in the life cycle provokes as much debate as the period between childhood and adulthood that embraces puberty. Definitions of the specific age range that constitutes youth vary. The age in which a person is considered a "youth," and thus eligible for special treatment under the law and throughout society varies around the world. According to the United Nations General Assembly, people between the ages of 15 and 24 are termed as youth. In the World Bank, the term youth in general refers to those who are between the ages of 15 and 25. Youth marks a time of life that abounds with potentials and problems.

The potential of youth ... if it is to be properly tapped requires understanding and support. Youth is a very special time with special challenges. This is the period when the body changes from that of a child to that of an adult. It is an age characterized by impatience as well as curiosity, and by strong desire to leave childhood behind and play an independent role.' (Mahler, Director-General, WHO quoted in Indian Youth: A Profile. 48-49)

Defining youth is always a challenge. Life stages are defined as much by psychological and biological processes as by the social standards that mark age, such as symbolic rites, life events, laws, standards and social roles. The definition of youth has always been somewhat ambiguous, as the boundaries from childhood to adolescence or from adolescence to adulthood depend on a multitude of such factors. These standards change according to macro (socio-economic conditions, rules of law or policy), meso (group or community values), and micro-social contexts (family and personal values).

Eisenstadt (1972) has defined period of youth as the period of transition from childhood to full adult status of full membership in the society. In this period the individual is no longer a child (especially from the physical and sexual point of view) but is ready to undertake many attributes of an adult and to fulfill adult roles. But he is not fully acknowledged as an

adult, a full member of the society. Rather he is being ‘prepared’ or is preparing himself for such adulthood. (Indian Youth: A Profile. 20)

The values of the young in the early modern world were not very distinctive from those of their elders because they lacked the peer relations, tastes or money to become independent. Severe constraints were also placed upon relations between the sexes. But today’s youth are more individualistic and possess wider perspectives.

Chetan Bhagat has portrayed young, dynamic and modern Indian youth trying hard to become successful in their lives in the novel *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*. The story seems a real life story and it unravels the minds of the contemporary youth especially in India. It is easily relatable and identifiable by the urban youth.

The book depicts Gujarat and Gujarati youth representing not only a particular region but making a youth represent a whole country and its enthusiastic folk through a simple plot with three average youths Govind, Ishaan and Omi. Unlike Chetan Bhagat’s earlier two novels *Five Point Someone* and *One Night @ the call centre*, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* covers the big canvass of life of three young men and it does not limit itself to the elite class in India or the IT persons like those working in the call centres.

Like the other books of Bhagat, his third novel *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* also begins with a flashback from a real life incident. One of the three friends in the novel, Govind Patel, e-mails Bhagat before his attempt to suicide and leaves him in a fuss, but finally the latter finds him at Ahmedabad in a hospital where he is on the verge of death and hears the young man’s story.

Friendship is the most important thing the youth of today believe in. They can do anything for the sake of friends. They grow with friends as well as fall with them. In *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, all the three friends Govind, Ishaan and Omi start their business and grow together in their career and together they face a downfall.

Modern young generation and its reaction to the political, social and personal issues are the main concern of the novelist. Youth is the important section of the society who is supposed to build the nation. Govind, Ish and Omi are three best friends who represent the developing part of Ahmedabad and have different passions in their life namely, business, cricket and religion respectively. To accommodate their passion, they open a cricket shop. However, each has a different motive.

Gujarat is the only state in India where people tend to respect a person more if the person is in business than if he is in service. Govind Patel is an ordinary guy in Gujarat with whom anybody can relate to. He has very few desires but he is obsessed with the desires he covets. His goal is to become a businessman and make money as he thinks that being a Gujarati business is in his blood. Even when his mother forced him to join engineering course he refused to do it because of his love for business and money.

‘I don’t want to be an engineer, mom. My heart is in business. Plus, I have already done two years of college. One more and I will be a graduate.’...

‘I am a businessman, mom. I can’t change that.’ (T3ML, 13)

He is also driven by the desire to prove something to himself and to others. As today’s youth are anxious about earning a lot, Govind also focuses more on earning more and more.

He topped the mathematics exam in his school by scoring a perfect hundred, but he had limited opportunities to study at a decent college as his father has abandoned him and his mother, who now runs a business of selling home-made food items. To support her financially, he takes mathematics tuitions. He continues these tuitions even after starting the cricket shop. He feels

that earning more increases a person's self respect. He also feels proud of earning money by himself without depending on anyone or without working under anyone.

And then there was the thrill— I was making money, not earning it under some boss or getting a handout. I could decide my fate, how many students to teach, how many hours per class – it was my decision (T3ML, 11).

The spirit of independence is very much evident here.

Govind is so anxious about money that he does not want to buy a colour television for his home as he considers it a dead asset, even when his mother insists on buying a television so that her son can watch the cricket matches at home itself. Instead he is interested in investing the money in business.

'If I have a good Diwali season, I will get you a colour TV,' mom vowed. 'No need,' I said. I removed my shoes to get ready for a shower, 'You need a bigger grinder urgently, the small one is all wobbly.' 'I will buy the TV if only the business makes extra money,' she said. 'No. if you make extra money, put it back in the business. Don't buy useless things. I can always see the match in colour in Ishaan's house.' (T3ML, 11)

Here we see the cautious and rational approach to life. Govind in his anxiousness to earn more hates any sympathy in business dealings. Even with Pandit-ji— the sports goods supplier in Ellis B1 ridge who lost everything as he was kicked out of Kashmir, his home town by militants—Govind bargains over the cost of the bats. After this business dealing he feels strong in the hope of becoming rich and successful in his business. 'I dealt in thousands now, but imagined that transacting in lakhs and crores wouldn't be that different.' (T3ML, 92)

Ishaan is a big cricket freak and also a patriot at heart. He is talented and well aware of his abilities. He never tries to negotiate with the kind of stuff he does not believe in and that is how he quits army and comes back home. He has been the best cricketer in his locality and school. He had also represented the district a number of times in cricket matches, yet he failed to make it big. That's where his dream gets shattered and he turns weird to his family and to the outside world too. Ishaan stands for the young immensely talented Indian youngsters who could not make it big in cricket, yet nurtures the dream of making it one of these days. He even buys a TV for his shop in order to watch the cricket matches on it.

Young people like to celebrate every moment or event and enjoy life. When the Indian cricket team wins a match against Australia, Ish offers to sponsor a trip to Goa for his friends. To Ish, against cricket even life is secondary. Whenever the Indian players hit a six or pick up a wicket he would jump and dance in front of the TV. Whenever India won,

Ish stood tall, his hands on his hips and looked the screen. I could see genuine love in his eyes... more than wanting to be them, he wanted them to win. He saw Harbhajan jump and jumped along. He clapped when Ganguly came to accept the trophy. (T3ML, 129)

In his country's victory he sees his own success dreams fulfilled.

Omi is the face of the confused Indian youth who does not know what to make out of his life and blindly follows others, falling an easy prey to the propaganda of religious fanaticism that political parties in India indulge in. Omi a priest's son, does not have any ambition of his own and just moves along with his two friends. He willingly accepts Govind's business proposal since he has nothing worthwhile to do.

The novel has some indirect comments on religion. Govind and Ish are not keen on the issue of religion like Omi and his Mama are. Omi is interested in religion only because of his family background. Bittoo Mama sees him as a prospective national leader. Promoting Hinduism or the politics revolving round Hinduism is the main part of Gujarat politics.

The novel clearly depicts how the religion based political events can affect the lives of common man especially the youth. The call for more young blood in the political party in the name of Hinduism with a touch of hatred for the Muslims is well portrayed by the writer. The best part is the reluctance shown by the youth to join them.

Mama even tries to persuade Ish and Govind to join his party. He keeps on pestering them to support their religion and fight against the secular party. But they don't show any liking for politics and stay hesitant. Ish feels that the present day youth think different, but they are being run by old fogeys who never did anything worthwhile in their primetime. He comments, 'The Doordarshan generation is running the Star TV generation.' (T3ML, 75)

Indian youth's love and craze for cricket is commented on through Ish who does not get any support from his family. Despite this discouraging atmosphere at home he dares to coach the students in the city. Cricket forms a part of their business because their shop sells cricket material.

Ish supports a Muslim boy Ali who has the talent to hit any ball for a six even in a dire situation. He shows great concern for Ali's cricket career as he wants Ali to play for the country. This feeling in Ish demonstrates his patriotism which is found among the Indian youth of the day. Average youth has nothing to do with race, religion and politics. Ish's support to Ali is regardless of all this. Govind and Omi also support Ali along with Ish.

Individual traits of youth like hard work, sense of responsibility, talent and clear insight into life are really seen in the youth of *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*. The three friends work hard to set up a sports goods shop. Then they manage to improve their business and go through its ups and downs. They open a cricket shop in the temple campus, quite an odd place to start with, but that is where they learn that innovation and hard work pay.

They show brilliant appetite for the business and make it to a level where they can dream big. They even manage to face the difficulties in business where they lose money by investing more than one lakh for a shop in a newly built air conditioned mall, which is ruined by an earthquake. These difficulties help them bond closer to each other and resurrect the business with even greater vigour. All three of them have their dream in life to fulfill. Govind is vocal about it whereas Ishaan and Omi hardly speak their mind in public.

The novel also has a subtle relation between Govind and Vidya, Ishaan's younger sister. She is a rebel at heart and dreams to break free from the constraints of a typical middle-class family and society. She is a bold young lady representing the woman folk of her age. She has her own identity and she's very keen in asserting her own feelings and opinions. She strongly advocates recognition of the rights of women to make their own choice in their lives.

Vidya also wants to go to Mumbai, do a course in PR and become independent. She however despises mathematics which is required for her medical entrance exams.

I want to get out of Ahmedabad. But mom and dad won't let me. Unless, of course, it is for a prestigious course like medicine or engineering. Engineering has maths, maths means vomit so that is ruled out. Medicine is the other choice and my exit pass. But they have this medical entrance exam and.... (T3ML, 47)

So, Ish asks Govind to take her mathematics tuition. However, in between their tuition they progress to friendship, over and more. Though Govind is her tutor in mathematics, she is quite enthusiastic and takes initiative in their romance. She represents the clan of today's modern girls who do not mind enjoying sex, coming out of the shell of conservatism. This shows nothing but how women are changing these days.

Girls are not 'choti wali' college going girls these days, but they are stylish modern girls with bobbed hair and wearing midi skirts. This change is not only in their outfits or grooming but it shows the change in their attitude, way of their thinking, the change in their whole personality and ultimately it shows their search for self identity.

Despite being a very talented young man Govind is hesitant and shy in this relationship because she is his friend's sister and he is her tutor. There is a great pressure on Govind's mind and he can't forget the trust that the family of Ish has in him and his friendship with Ishaan. Only Omi figures out the relationship Govind and Vidya share and also reminds Govind about the consequences of Ish getting to know about it. He also tells him:

'There is an unspoken rule among Indian men, and you broke it' 'What rule?' I said and slammed the menu on the table. 'You don't hit upon your best friend's sister. You just don't. It is against the protocol.' (T3ML, 172)

But love overtakes them both, finally getting caught by Ish resulting in the collapse of their friendship and Govind is branded as a traitor for violating an unwritten protocol and falling in love with his best friend's sister.

Today's youth are just being overtaken by consumerism. Drink and drug culture has become common among youngsters. In the novel, the three friends often indulge in drinking in the abandoned bank yard. Pleasure is considered the main concern among today's youth. They don't have any plans or savings for their future. They indulge in hedonistic pursuits. Omi and Ish are also in this category. They don't care about their future or family. They even arrange booze parties under the pretext of motivating themselves.

Youth of this generation lead a carefree life. They live their life only for the moment. They hang out with their friends and love to eat trendy food items like pizza in fashionable restaurants. They even like sharing a single plate because of their intimacy. Govind hangs out with Ishaan and Omi to eat out, while his mother prepares the same items at home.

'Want to eat anything?' my mother voiced her most quoted line from the kitchen. 'No, I am going out with Ish and Omi to Gopi.' 'Gopi? Why? I make the same things. What do you get at Gopi that I can't give you at home?' (T3ML, 12)

Young people also want to shop in swanky malls. That is why the three friends want to open their cricket shop in the air conditioned shopping mall in Navrangpura, a decision that results in their shop being destroyed in the earthquake. Govind becomes totally upset about this huge loss and falls sick owing to the pressure of debts and shattered dreams.

Govind, Ish and Omi are such young men who are whipped with political acts like Godhra mishap and communal riots. The novel makes quite clear that the young generation is against religion based politics and wants to think globally. Another important character is the Muslim boy Ali, whose presence in the story does touch the issues of religion and of course it tells something about cricket as well. With the character of Ali, Chetan Bhagat has brought alive the humanity amidst religious fanaticism. His protection by three Hindu youths from a mob trying to kill him because he is a Muslim shows the human side of these young men who never discriminate by caste or religion.

Chetan Bhagat's *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* is largely about the Indian youth brigade and their sentiments. Their thoughts, their actions and attitudes are what largely get reflected through the book. The secular and broad-minded Indian youth gets portrayed through Ish's character. Similarly, the flavor of the entrepreneurial spirit among the Indian youth gets reflected through Govind's character.

Lastly, it is Omi's character that paints the picture of those Indian youth who often get seduced by trivial temptations, but then at the end of the day, they continue to possess a heart of gold and fling themselves into action without worrying about their own lives, without remaining in the territory of selfishness.

Although Omi is found to endorse his Mama's religious and political sentiments, when it came to the life of an innocent adolescent, he erased all trivial issues off his mind and went on to make the supreme sacrifice as a human being.

Omi pushed the man blocking him. He ran between Mama and Ali. Mama screamed a chant and struck. 'Stop Mama,' Omi said. Even if Mama wanted to stop, he couldn't. The strike already had momentum. The trishul entered Omi's stomach with the dull thud. 'Oh... oh,' Omi said as he absorbed what happened first and felt the pain later. Within seconds, a pool of blood covered the floor. Mama and his men looked at each other, trying to make sense of what had occurred. 'Mama don't do it,' Omi said, still unaware that the trishul blades had penetrated five inches inside him. (T3ML, 243)

This shows his genuine love towards his fellow people. It is from the youth that one has to learn what is love. Omi is in complete contrast to his elderly uncle Bittoo Mama who tries to kill the small kid Ali who is innocent of all these communal and political issues.

The novel also has a variety of elements that make for a meaningful portrayal of the youth. There is emotion, there is die-hard friendship, there is romance, there is humor, there is ecstasy and agony as well. Patriotic sentiments are also echoed in the book, through the character of Ish and also by the little Ali.

One important aspect in *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* is the author inserting himself into the narrative. He plays Chetan Bhagat and his role is to trigger reconciliation, revive the dormant friendship between Ish and Govind, rekindle the love between Govind and Vidya, and above all, makes Govind love his own life once again and instill in him the desire to stay alive.

The book is largely loved by Indian youth since it is about them and echoes their emotions and concerns. It projects their thoughts on politics, religion and cricket. Above all, it salutes the never-say-die spirit of mankind and that's what should leave an indelible mark in the minds of today's youth.

Works cited

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