

SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS IN THE NOVELS OF CHETAN BHAGAT

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Abstract

Chetan Bhagat is the biggest selling English language novelist in India's history and acclaimed as the most popular novelist. He in his fictional and non-fictional works has depicted the social, political, and educational aspects. The social background as depicted in the novels of Chetan Bhagat is predominantly of the society in the post globalization era. He has written about the present condition of Indian society, education, and politics. He has tried to find out the social evils from the modern Indian society. He has recorded the regret among the Indian educated students. Through his sugar coated novels he has started the eradication of social evils from the traditional and typical oriented Indian society. He has handled the sensitive issues with care. This paper aims to study the social evils like corruption, dowry system, ragging, racism, and casteism that Chetan Bhagat has presented in his novels

Key words: Corruption, dowry system, ragging, racism, Indian educational system, lack of employment, religion, typical Indian society, Hindu-Muslim riot, conflict between mother and daughter-in-law

Introduction

Chetan Bhagat is responsible for a seismic shift in Indian writing in English¹. He is a modern Indian English writer in the twenty first century. He was born in Delhi and educated in IIT Delhi and IIM-Ahmedabad. This IIT and IIM-A graduate is making India read like never before. He has written six famous novels and two non-fiction books. His novels are *Five Point Someone- What not to do at IIT* (2004), *One Night @ Call Centre* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *2 States-The Story of My Marriage* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011),and *Half Girlfriend* (2014). His non-fiction works are *What Young India Wants* (2012) and *Making India Awesome* (2015). All these books have best-seller

since their release and some bollywood films like *3 idiots*, *Hello*, *Kai Po Che*, and *2 States* took inspiration from these novels. Chetan Bhagat is seen more as a youth icon than just an author. He writes columns for leading Indian newspapers.

The major themes in Chetan Bhagat's novels are socio-political background of the country, student-teacher conflicts, East-west encounter, husband-wife relationship, and man's quest for identity. His all the fictions narrate sexual freedom. His first novel, '*Five Point Someone-What not to do at IIT*', presents the monotonous educational conditions and teacher's attitude towards research at India's top most college, IIT Delhi. '*One Night @ Call Centre*' presents unemployment problem of younger generation of Indian youths, generation gap, and young people's high aim in life. '*The 3 Mistakes of My Life*' presents the desire of modern Indians to become a successful businessperson, teacher-students relationship, and political and social effects of Godhara riots in Gujrat. His fourth novel, '*2 States- The story of My Marriage*' is an autobiographical in nature where author presents the traditional views and culture of old and typical Indians for marriages. Bhagat has given an authentic picture of education policy at India's top most colleges like IIT and interference of politics in educational field. He has also given the problems of employment among today's youths. His novels are concerned with the present decadence of India, and how creative use can be made of its past. He used the recent themes in his novels.

Chetan Bhagat wrote two non-fiction books, '*What Young India Wants*' and '*Making India Awesome*' in the recent past. Here he wrote about the Society, politics, and youths. Besides, he is a good orator. He is a main contributor in many Indian newspapers. He writes columns. In one of his columns, he writes an article on corruption at Commonwealth games he says:

The commonwealth Games scam was easily one of the biggest scam in Independent India's history. Yet the government in it smug arrogance pretended as if nothing had happened. It was then that I took a big risk. I wrote an essay for the Times of India in which I asked people to boycott the commonwealth games²

He also writes blog and directs Indian government on many current issues. He is the main contributor of editorial page of Times of India and Dainik Bhaskar newspapers. In his latest non-fiction book, *Making India Awesome* he gives his suggestions to Indian government on many aspects of Indian culture and policies. The book is simply a collection of essays and columns from newspapers written by him. It is a book about Indian politics, society, and culture in which he finds out the root causes, which hinders the development of our country and increases the corruption.

Chetan Bhagat in his first novel, *Five point Someone-What not to do at IIT*, reveals the social aspects like ragging in top most colleges, Dowry system, Lack of teacher's interest in creative teaching-learning process, parents demands for particular education and importance to grades. In the beginning of the novel, author introduces us with ragging. Hari, Alok, and Ryan become friends after taking admission in IIT, Delhi. Among these friends, Ryan is bold and opposes seniors to do what they wanted to do. He becomes furious and does what juniors had not done earlier:

As Baku put the bottles in position, Ryan abandoned his pin-up pose and jumped. Catching him unawares, he grabbed the two bottles and stamped hard on Baku's feet. Baku released his hands and the bottles were with Ryan, James Bond style³

Indian government in 1991 made the Anti-ragging act in higher education to check the ragging all over the India. In spite of the act, ragging was going on and many students committed suicide. Again, on 7 June 2009 UGC interfered and restricted the students from doing it⁴. Among these friends, Ryan represents upper class family, Hari represents middle class family, and Alok represents lower middle class family. Ryan is a clever student though he scores less GPA in the exam. He believes in creative teaching-learning process. He always thinks different from other students. The head of the department rejects his project on lubricant without reading it as it belongs to such a student whose GPA is five points something. Teachers in IIT force their students to score maximum marks. Alok is from poor family and looks at IIT as a job-giving machine. His parents dream their girl's wedding by paying dowry from Alok's salary. Alok's mother lives tensionally for her daughter. She is not in position to pay dowry. She says to Alok, "they wanted a portion of the dowry right now to lock in the boy"⁵. Prof Veera represents those professors in IIT who encourages students for research work. He identifies the talent of Ryan and motivates him for the project. Prof Cherian, the head of Mechanical Engineering department, wants his only son, Samir to become an engineer from one of the top most colleges in India. Samir wants to become a lawyer. To fulfill his father's wish he tries three times the entrance exam of engineering but fails and ends his life by committing suicide. Professor Cherian also warns his daughter, Neha not to keep any contact with friends. She expresses her father's terror while talking to Hari. She says, "My dad is really strict about me talking to boys and he will totally flip out if he hears I am friend with a student"(F P S p.43). Here, Bhagat has told about the mentality of Indian parents who want their ward to choose a profession of their parent's choice. Professor Vohra represents those Indian professors who do not have any interest in new teaching methods. He does not like Ryan's new and modified screw jack diagram.

Bhagat, in *2 States* depicts the problems of unemployment in India, fear among the temporary employed servants, dowry system, conflict between mother and daughter-in-law, attraction for materialism, over active to achieve aims, stickiness to traditional culture and values, and love affairs. Bhagat, in the novel tells a story of six people who work at Connexion call centre Gurgaon nearby Delhi. Protagonist Shyam loves Priyanka and wants to marry with her. She follows her mother's advice and deserts Shyam. Priyanka's mother wants her daughter to marry with Ganesh who is software engineer in America. Priyanka, for the sake of Ganesh get ready to discard her first love. Vroom is a sufferer in his family due to his parent's daily quarrel. His parents represent modern quarreling couple in the metropolitan cities. He takes cigarette and drinks beer to keep tension away. He proposes Esha three times but always gets rejected. Mother and daughter-in-law's conflict is described through the character of Radhika and her mother-in-law. Radhika respects her in-laws, but they being ultra traditional want more service from their educated and modern daughter-in-law. She is loyal and loves her husband, Anuj, who is disloyal to her. He despite having made love marriage keeps a girlfriend in the same city. Esha represents those modern girls who spend money on cloths and perfumes, and waste their times to achieve an unachievable thing. She to become a model leaves her house at Chandigarh and comes to Delhi. She does everything to achieve it but is always got rejected due to her short height. To get a chance in modeling she even sleeps a whole night with a designer, who later send her refusal letter along with ten thousand rupees. Author describes the typical and traditional nature of Indian senior citizens through the character of Military uncle. Military uncle is an ultra traditional in nature. He says:

I used to live with them. But my daughter-in-law did things I didn't like – she went for parties, got a job when I wanted her to stay at home.... I

fought with them and moved out. But I was wrong. It is their life, and I have no right to judge them by my outdated values⁶.

He was living with his son and daughter-in-law in USA. He does not like his daughter-in-law's coming late home at night and doing job. He quarrels with her. Both, his son and daughter-in-law also do not like his behavior. He fights with them and comes back to India. Since then he is very much eager to meet his grandson.

All these people work at the call centre but they are uncertain regarding their job. Their job is totally in the hand of the chairperson of the company who lives in foreign country. In India Bakshi is the head of Connexion call centre. He is selfish by nature. He deceives Shyam and Vroom by submitting their website to head office, Bermuda by his name. He evokes fear among the call centre employees of losing jobs.

The author again describes dowry system here. He puts here the real social condition in India. Priyanka was enjoying her second meeting with Shyam at Havemore restaurant. She saw an old woman who was cursing her daughter-in-law for not bringing dowry from her parent's house. An old woman says:

Since the day this woman came to our house, our family's fortunes have been ruined...look at her now, sitting there with stiff face. Go, go to hell now. Not only did you not bring anything, now you have dumped these two girls like two curses on me⁷.

Bhagat through the character of Vroom, throws a light on the character of politician in India. Indian government system is lagging behind because of such people who do not have any feelings to run India. Vroom wrote an article in the newspaper in which he says:

Why don't Politician Ever Commit Suicide?"....people do suicide because they are really hurt. This means they feel something. But politicians don't. So, basically, this country run by people who don't feel anything⁸.

Chetan Bhagat's third novel, *The 3 Mistakes of My life* presents realistic social aspects of Indian society. Theme of the novel takes us to historical background of India. Author here describes husband-wife's conflict in modern India, younger's love for cricket, business, and religion, after effects of Bhuj earthquake and Godhara riots, and religious politics in India.

Protagonist, Govind stays with his mother as his father left them and stays with his second wife. Govind is from Gujarat state and business is in his blood. Gujarati people love business more than service. Govind says:

There is something about Gujaratis, we love business. Amdavadis love it more than anything else. Gujarat is the state in India where people tend to respect you more if you have business than if you are in a service. The rest of the country dreams about a cushy job that gives a steady salary and provides stability. In Ahmedabad, service is for weak. That was why I dreamt the biggest dream – be a big businessman one day⁹.

Govind and his friends, open a cricket shop in the Swamibhakti temple's area. Govind takes maths tuition, Ishaan gives cricket coaching, and Omi takes exercise of the student. Govind books a shop at shopping mall and pays advance money. Bhuj earthquake comes and shatters their hope of becoming a big businessman. Ishaan forces Govind to take his younger sister, Vidya's maths tuition. While teaching her he falls in her love and crosses the limit by making sex on her birthday. Bhagat through these characters shows what happening in the modern period. Vidya wants to live a free life away from her home. Idea of becoming a mature girl by attaining

the age of eighteen makes her happy. She is darer, proposes Govind, and incites him for sex. Ishaan madly loves cricket and left everything for it. He wastes his time by watching cricket matches. He is not selected in any national cricket team but he wants Ali to play at Indian cricket team. Omi is a religious boy and represents those Indians who are interested in religion. He attends every meeting of Bittoo mama and Parekh-ji. He is a keen follower of God, Ram and argues with Ali's father on Ram temple. An excerpt from the novel shows his strong desire to have a temple at Ayodhya:

'Why can't you let us make a temple in Ayodhya?' Omi said.

'Because there is a mosque there already.'

'But there was a temple there before.'

'That is not proven.'

'It has. The government keeps hiding those reports.'

Bittoo mama and Parekh-ji play religious politics. They are in favour of Ram temple at Ayodhya. They want Hindu people to favour the Ram temple and for that, they send kar sevak to Ayodhya and arrange religious-political meetings. Parekh-ji gives Bittoo mama the idea of distributing the soil from Ram's birthplace to each house in Ahmedabad. Bittoo mama along with his party members kills many innocent Muslims and burns their houses.

Novel takes us to the last decade of twentieth century when clouds of conflict on Ram temple were moving on the Indian society. Even today, religious politics in India takes place during the time of election. Indian political parties use casteism and religion in their election portfolio for getting vote support. Nasser, Ali's father is a leader of secular party. He wants to join all the people from every community in his party. Bhagat reveals the truth and put the situation of Godhara riot. Godhara riot decreases the belief of Indian people in integrity. India-Pakistan relations are also depicted here through the character of pandit-ji. He is a salesman of cricket materials and was from Kashmir states but now he lives in Gujarat. He was forced to flee from Kashmir.

National integrity in the novel is shown through the characters of Govind, Ishaan and Omi when they save Ali, a Muslim boy from the clutches of Bittoo mama. These three friends though they are Hindu by religion save a Muslim boy. Omi, though he is a strong zealot of Hinduism, gives his life to save a Muslim boy.

Chetan Bhagat's fourth novel, 2 States is an autobiographical in nature. Its main theme is national integration. He combines traditional and modern culture of Indian society. Novel narrates the story of a boy and a girl who want to marry in spite of their different caste and culture but their ultra traditional parents are stick to old values. In this work, Chetan Bhagat has fictionalized his own bitter-sweet experiences when he a Punjabi, fell in love with Tamil girls while studying at the IIM Ahmedabad, and wanted to marry her. Talking about the story of the novel, Bhagat says, "This book draws a lot of inspiration from my own life. I am Punjabi and my wife is Tamilian, similar to the protagonists in the story"¹⁰. India is a land of many cultures and languages, where inter caste, and inter-state marriages are considered as rebellious acts. How depressing and frightening was the protagonists revolt against social restrictions remains the central theme of the novel.

Bhagat here depicts social aspects like the obstacles in getting married outside the caste, dowry system, racism, husband- wife, and father-son relations. Protagonist Krish, a Punjabi boy wants to marry Ananya, a Tamilian Brahmin girl. His parents are not ready for it as they are proud of being a Punjabi. Ananya's parents are Brahmin so they do not give permission to her for outcaste marriage. Highly educated Indian parents are very low and narrow in their thinking.

They who are living in the twenty first century do not want to come out of their caste and culture. In India for an arrange marriage boy has to love girl, girl has to love boy, boy's family has to love girl's family, girl's family has to love boy's family, both families love each other and then only marriages can take place. Krish and Ananya take such efforts to get married.

Dowry system is also described here. Krish and Ananya go to attend the marriage of Krish's cousin, Minty. Bhagat has described the pitiful condition of bride's parents when they are unable to give the said thing as a dowry. Duke, a groom is not ready for the marriage, as he feels insulted when bride's parents give him Santro car instead of Hyundai Accent. Minty's father folds his hand in front of Duke's father and assures him of giving required car. Ananya somehow handles the situation and makes Duke ready for the marriage.

Krish's parents represent husband- wife relationship in the modern Indian society. His father most of the time stays away from the house with his military retired friends. He always fights with his wife, breaks the glasses, and beats her. Sometimes he beats Krish also. Krish due to tempered nature of his father does not talk to him. However, in the end of the novel his father proves himself as a caring father by adjusting the disturbed relation between his and Ananya's families. On the other hand, Ananya's parents are silent in nature.

Bhagat has described the culture and racism in the novel. One of the South Indian characters comments on North Indian: "Why do they send North-Indians here?"¹¹ North Indian character, Anil Mathur, MD of City Bank, comments on South Indian character: "What do you mean waitlisted for business class? I am not coming back like I did this morning sitting cramped with these 'Madrasis',¹² Ananya's father is a deputy manager in the Baroda Bank. He was restricted on becoming a GM. He tells Krish his anger for North Indian:

Off course, sorry this whisky...Anyway, Krish I had offers. Ten years back I had offers from multinational banks. But I stayed loyal to my bank. And I was patient to get my turn to be GM. Now, I have five years to retire and they send this rascal North- Indian¹³

Krish's mother in Goa does not like the attitude of Ananya and her parents. She tells Krish her disfavor for them. She wants respect from Ananya's parents. She decides to teach Ananya a lesson after her marriage with Krish.

Conclusion

Chetan Bhagat in his novels has depicted the social, political, and educational aspects of Indian society. In his first novel, he has depicted the educational conditions at India's top most colleges. He throws light on ragging, dowry system, traditional methods of teaching-learning process, lack of interest in research work. In his second novel, author has depicted the problems faces by Indian in the twenty first century. Besides, he also tells the solution of it through the character of God. The third novel is about the ambition of business, passion for cricket and zealot for religion. Author has revealed the effects of Godhara riot and an earthquake of 2001. The fourth novel, 2 States tells the typical tradition of marriage in India. Besides, he also tells about the dowry system and racism in India.

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