

REVOLUTIONIZING THE YOUTH: A STUDY OF CHETAN BHAGAT'S NOVELS

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Indian fiction in English at present emerges with its new traditions by means of process of negation and assimilation. The prime golden promise made by globalization is the creation of post-colonial world as a colourful melting pot of cultures – postcolonial world plagued by neo-colonial catastrophe like economic disorder, social corruption, cultural mongrelization. In this age of increasing interconnectedness, the homogenizing spirit of globalization and multiculturalism, different ethnic groups within the metropolis marginalize and ghettoize the high class potential professionals who are preoccupied with complexities, contradiction and cultural ambivalence.

India has embraced global capitalism via the acceptance of privatization and the dismantling of public corporations and protectionist policies. The principal narrative today, according to Gayatri Spivak is “that of producing plausible stories so business can go on as usual” (340). From post-colonial era, Indian English literature has journeyed into post-millennium era, rapidly and radically populated with capricious youth marching towards economic growth and prosperity, its dexterity in BPO activity. The narratives are about English speaking hi-fi young urban Indians, talented with academic proficiency and with diverse opportunities in the economic world. Human life in relation with globalization, commercialism and global modernity is the pivotal point focused by the modern Indian English novelists. Amitav Ghosh's ‘cultural pluralism’, Pankaj Mishra's concept of ‘traditional conflicts’, Vikram Seth's ‘cultural dualism’, Aravind Adiga's ‘cobweb of human struggle’, Chetan Bhagat's ‘easy going life disturbances’ are the popular concepts penned by the third generation of immigrant writers.

Chetan Bhagat has become a ‘voice’ that speaks for middle class India peppered with ‘youth speak’, guideline for the life of young technocrats working in multinational companies dwelling in the culture of malls and multiplexes in the IT Hub like Bangalore, Delhi and Ahmedabad. His five novels *Five Point Someone* (2004), *One Night at the Call Centre* (2005), *The Three Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *Two States of My Marriage* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011) and a collection of essays *Making India Awesome* (2015) have the power to influence the number of fans, as they expose the generation of middle class Indian youth facing the choices and frustrations that come with the prospect of growing wealth.

Chetan Bhagat's first novel *Five Point Someone* is an ironic protest against the depersonalization that characterizes many high ranging academic institutions. It is a quintessential rites-of- passage campus novel from the author, himself an alumni of IIT, Delhi, looking back with nostalgia and wit on the nitty-gritty of student life. In today's ultra-competitive environment, the competition among students, the difficulty of the high level of

rigour of engineering curriculum and the prevalence of curved grading system pose stress to the quality of their educational experience and academic performance. Relationship with friends becomes unhealthy as they are threatened by external sources of stress and the college students' eating habits also are unhealthy as they sacrifice sleep for extensive studying and social activity or consume alcohol and other substance as part of their regular activities.

According to Chetan Bhagat, the novels are entertainment tools to voice forth his views on society and youth. He has successfully attracted the country's youth through his writings as he is considered a youth icon rather than as just an author. Rather than on the cultural hybridity and the colonial hangover, he delves into the minds of the students, their motivations and aspirations in the competitive elite atmosphere of IIT. The frustrated feelings of Hari, Ryan and Alok about the irrelevant GPA system expose the lousy system that operates in Indian colleges and universities.

This system of relative grading and overburdening kills the best fun years of your life. But it kills something else. Where is the room for original thought? Where is the time for creativity...and this IIT system is nothing but a mice race. It is not a rat race, mind you, as rats sound somewhat shrewd and clever. (*Five Point Someone* 98)

Despite the harsh realities of bitter-sweet campus days, Chetan Bhagat connects to the young audience through the exuberance of youth, the misty days of friendship and love and students' bunking classes to go to the canteen or a movie hall.

His second novel *One Night at the Call Centre* is also very topical because of the burgeoning of BPO industry with its growing number of well paid 'cyber coolies' (a term popularized by the Delhi University academic Harish Trivedi). In all Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industries, there is 24/7 culture and 1+2+3 formula which means they pay double salary to a single person to get worked thrice. Everyone changes his own identity, lives pseudo-life with great patience and high stress. The novel is about the youth's dreams, their hallucinations, their nightmares with technical jargons and websites.

The call centre industry, a key player in the world's economy, contributes between 40 billion to 45 billion to a country's gross domestic product. The fashionable youth culture, right from change in attitude towards clothing-wearing light skirts and tops- is shown in their independence and individualism and socially-derived relationships. The youth, working the night shift at connections, a call centre in the Delhi. IT suburb Gurgaon, represent the multicultural society, its own fabric of personal relations, conflicts, depression, value crises and even the dilemma of existence.

In his next novel *The Three Mistakes of My Life* Bhagat unfolds the bitter truth of human life which is more influenced by passion rather than emotion and ambition. The novel revolves round the passionate ambition of three growing boys- Govind Patel, Ishaan, and Omi concerned more with business, cricket and religion which seem to govern the life of these growing people.

In a plural society such as ours, which is culturally as diverse as the European continent and a civilization that is as ancient as the world, what India needs is the courage to establish its syncretism in the face of global capitalism. Instead of knowledge accumulation, mark-oriented exams like IIT, JEE, AIMS or CLAT, what India requires is reformation in technical education- innovative ability and knowledge application required in profit creation. His novel *Revolution 2020: Love, Corruption, Ambition* is based on the 'rampant corruption' apparent in the Indian

educational system, centred on the ambitions and passions of Gopal who aspires to become rich and Raghav who desires to fight corruption and revolutionize India.

Abdul Kalam and Dr. Y.S.Rajan in their book *India 2020: A Vision for the New Millennium* envisions India attaining the status of fourth developed nation of the world in 2020 by uplifting the national economy, the strength of tomorrow in the hands of youth of today. Chetan Bhagat, too, portrays his protagonists struggling to bring the global political change by cleaning the corrupt rotten Indian education system. With the choice of Varanasi, the city get its name from two rivers Varuna and Asi, the writer sets up the issue of how private coaching institutions for courses like IIT, JEE exploit aspiring engineering students. “The complex vortex of tests, classes, selections and preparations is something every insignificant Indian student like me has to go through to have a shot of a decent life” (*Revolution 2020* 55).

In the city of Varnasi, also called the city of Learning, there is another engineering college the Ganga Tech college of Engineering set in a fifteen acre campus on the Lucknow highway. The revolution only begins at home, Bhagat affirms ‘society changes only when individual norms are challenged’ (149).

Che Guevara, the great revolutionary once said, ‘Power is not an apple that falls from a tree into your lap. Power has to be snatched from people who already have it. We have to start a revolution, a revolution that resists our corrupt system. A system that shifts power back into the hands of the people and treats politicians like workers, not kings. (205)

Chetan Bhagat’s recent work *Making India Awesome*, an exceptional non-fiction is the micro blueprint for the country at large a change to come together and make our country ‘irrefutably awesome’. A nation which respects individual freedom and appreciates diversity, creates a country that is infact awesome. In 189 pages, the country’s bestselling English fiction writer displays disillusionment experienced by urban, small town youth. He pens what is guideline for the country and its youth- for the ‘caring objective Indians, those young people who want to understand the country, its problems and its feeling but don’t really have anything that breaks it down for them.

In all other novels, Chetan Bhagat has assumed the role of motivational speaker to the youth but in his non-fiction, he plays a messiah’s role for India offering practical remedies to poignant issues of poverty, corruption, unemployment, violence against women, communal violence, religious fundamentalism and literacy. The IIT- IIM alumni, 41 year old author has made this book an attempt to spread positive thoughts about his country. He maintains , “one of the aspects of awesome India has to be awesome freedom and rights. Banning takes away those rights and such bans have no place in a democracy” (*Making India Awesome* 78).

Chetan Bhagat expresses strong definite ideas. He divides the country into ‘self-focused indifferent Indians’ ‘caring but Aligned Indians’ and ‘caring objective Indians’. He is more original in giving solution to the problems of corruption, inequality and sexual discrimination. A majority of the book is largely a list of directives, a sort of instruction manual for the country and its people. In his list of 17 commandments to the Prime Minister, Bhagat says, “Do something for the youth of this country” (98). Other pointers for Modi include dressing down and sending old fashioned party men abroad to learn about gender issues and majority rights. As a committed columnist, Chetan Bhagat discusses topics related to disruption in Parliament, a democratic deadlock.

In the global literary firmament, the young writers of the ‘call-centre generation’, assume themselves as India’s ‘cultural commissars’ project India as the land of illumination and

emancipation, the major Samson's strength lying in the hands of the youth by the boundless consumption of natural as well as human resources. The colossal Indian landscape, inhabiting nearly one hundred and twenty crores of people of mixed race, class, caste, religion socially but one tenth percent of the elite intelligentsia, rejuvenates its cultural identity, plurality and solidarity only through the weapon of education.

India's strength has always been its vibrant youth. The colonial India is painted as a land of rich resources from which the British robbed. The post colonial India is daubed as a land of poverty with the poor, uncivilized and unhygienic beggars living in platforms. But at present the millennium India is highlighted as the land of IIT companies, the corporate companies in the name of globalization. By outsourcing, the progress of India should be holistic, with the provision of good education, food, clean environment, agriculture, irrigation which can be India's steps towards the centre from the periphery. Chetan Bhagat makes his 'voice' heard to the specific class of young readers in the era of globalization and cybernetics, an investment banker-cum-successful bestselling novelist has inspired the bright young people by focusing on an existential angst about their future and instructing a comprehensive idiom of self-advancement in the present.

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