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THE THEME OF REALISM IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S THE 3 MISTAKES OF MY LIFE

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**Abstract**

Chetan Bhagat has been acclaimed as one of the best-selling novelists of the Indian fiction. He has written about modern Indian youths and their need in his novels. He says that novels are entertainment tools through which one can express his views and opinions about society and the youth. In the modern India human behavior changed into lust, greed, hypocrisy, and hatred and these are the major themes of Bhagat's novels. His novels are incomplete without realistic touch. The background in which Chetan Bhagat has written novels is predominantly of the society in the post globalization era. His novels are based on day-to-day happenings in the Indian society so ultimately he has written the problems of Indian society. He has handled the modern situation in proper manner. One cannot deny the possibility of family conflicts in which Bhagat has described. His characters easily get involved in friendship and love and suffer a lot. He takes upon the sensitive issues which concern to the society in his novels ranging from romantic love story to a shocking condition of the Indian multiculturalism. Chetan Bhagat describes here about the communal hatred and harmony in Indian society. This paper aims to study the realistic views of Chetan

Bhagat about the religious and political views of Indian people and aims of Indian younger generation.

**Keywords:** Communal harmony, Political and religious conflict, Godhara riot

**Introduction**

Chetan Bhagat is an Indian author, columnist, and speaker. He is the author of eight blockbuster novels, *Five Point Someone-What not to do at IIT* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *2 States* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), *Half Girlfriend* (2014), *One Indian Girl* (2016) and *The Girl In Room 105* (2018) and two non-fictions, *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*, *2 States* and *Half Girlfriend* took inspiration from these novels. Chetan Bhagat is seen more as a youth icon than just an author. This IIT and

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IIM-A graduate is making India read like never before.

Realism in conventional sense presents stories, characters and background that are similar to anything that is found in the contemporary world. This requires incidents to have happened in the past and events are normally organized in a chronological sequence. The desire to paint contemporary day-to-day life entails and requires social details. In realistic writing, the author writes according to objective point of view. He gives place to his own feelings, interpretation and emotions. He tries to give real happening from the society. The writers of this movement painted the everyday situations and conflicts in an accurate manner. Realistic movement began in England in 18<sup>th</sup> century by Richardson, Fielding and Smollett. Introduction of realism into fiction proved to be a boon to the upcoming writers.

Indian literature has got worldwide popularity with the publication of *Midnight Children* by Salman Rushdie during the eighth decade of twentieth century. Writing skill of Indian writers was praised all over the world. During this period, many socially realistic novels were written. They include Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Ruth Pravar Jhabwalla's *To who she will* and *Heat and Dust*, Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins*. Social conditions and sex life are predominantly described here. People's life in metropolitan cities and their involvement in sex are depicted in Shobha de's *Socialite*

*Evenings*. Other work of Indian writers, which contributed in the field of realism, are Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, Rani Dharker's *The Virgin Syndrome*, Meena Alexander's *Nampally House*. The characters in fiction take birth in the writer's imagination, but they imitate uniqueness and reality in actual life. Chetan Bhagat is well known for his outstanding ability to join artistically social, political and personal events and incidents. Therefore, characters in Chetan Bhagat's novels represent the actual men and women in real life. We find in his writing a fusion of emotional and fictional autobiography. In a realistic novel, one sees characters that appear real and the reader visualizes so many things through the character's eyes. Chetan Bhagat portrays the life of men and women in totality. It is not just a piece of life, but also the whole life itself. He depicts character's life through its entire fortune, social, emotional, moral, intellectual aspects.

Chetan Bhagat's *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, is based on the real events, which happen in Gujarat, India. The novelist intermingles the story of characters with the past events like the Bhuj earthquake and the Godhara riot in Gujarat. He takes us to the period of the first decade of twenty first century. The novel is about three friends who open a cricket materials shop in the Swamibhakti temple's premises in Ahmedabad. The author beautifully describes the contemporary happenings in India through these characters' life. The political turmoil, Ayodhya issue, the

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Gujarat earthquake all contours the background of the plot whilst turning the dream of Govind, Ishaan and Omi into nightmare. Yet to cherish the dream, to reach the goal, to attain everything that they desire, they have to face it all - religious politics, the earthquake, riots and most importantly forbidden love and above all, their own mistakes which life throws as if a challenge to them. With his typical style, Chetan Bhagat weaves the tale of three friends, the tale of shattered dreams and the realistic account of joining those dots of broken dreams and then dreaming again. Moving from humour to wit and then from fun to seriousness and ultimately to the dark problems of life, this novel has almost everything from passion to laughter, from emotion to romance and from friendship to revulsion.

The story opens quite unexpectedly. The writer receives an email. The email is from a boy (Govind) in Ahmedabad. The mail reads that the boy has committed three mistakes in his life and therefore is failing to find the reasons to carry on his life any further and therefore he pops sleeping pills. The story gains the pace as the writer catches the flight and rushes to meet this young man lying at the government hospital bed. *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* is thus the tale of this young man who thought to finish off his life because of the mistakes he committed. The novel is the saga of friendship. The tale of dreaming dreams, the story of chasing the dream. The story revolves round three friends, Ish,

Govind and Omi. Ish is cricket lover, Omi the son of a priest and Govind, the protagonist. Govind is a Math lover and the dreamer. He dreams of floating his own business. He wants to forget all his worries, fear, tears and agony and just wants to start his own business to survive in the harsh world where dream shatters almost every now and then. The three friends start a sports goods shop and it works. Things seem to be a lot better. Govind experiences for the first time the taste of being the businessman. The story moves from one event to the other. Ish finds Ali, a young cricketer with lots of talent and decides to coach him. Govind besides, being the businessman and math lover, falls in love with Ishaan's sister and here on starts committing his famous "three mistakes".

The major characters in the novel are Govind, the main protagonist and maths tutor; Ishaan, a cricket freak; Omi, a religious boy; Vidya, Ishaan's younger sister and Govind's girlfriend, Ali, a Muslim boy and a good cricketer; Parekh-ji, a Hindu leader; Bittoo mama, Omi's maternal uncle and Dhiraj, Bittoo mama's son. It is a story of three friends who are interested in business, cricket and religion. Govind is very much interested in Business and being a topper in Maths subject in the board exam, takes maths tuition. Ishaan loves cricket so much that he leaves his NDA and returns home. Omi is confused about his passion as he follows Parekh-ji's politics and his father's religion. Talking about their passion, Govind says:

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I wasn't sure if Omi really believed in what he said, or if he was revising lessons given by Parekh-ji. He never spoke about this to Ish and somewhere, but, me deep down, did he also feel like Bittoo mama? If Ish's passion was cricket and my passion was business, was Omi's passion religion? Or maybe, like most people he was confused and trying to find his passion.(3MML, 69)

Govind convinces his friends for a business. They open a shop in the premises of the Swamibhakti temple. Govind takes maths tuition. Ishaan forces him to take his sister, Vidya's maths classes. Govind teaches her and falls in her love. He invests saved money in the shopping mall, which collapses in an earthquake. To recover the lost money, they work hard day and night. Govind for the sake of Ishaan is ready to go to Goa and Australia and for Omi, to attend the meeting of political parties. In the end of the novel, they have to face the anger of Bittoo mama and his team to save Ali from them. Bhagat lived in Ahmedabad for his MBA. He, through the eyes of Govind, realistically describes the city, Ahmedabad. He says.

Yes, Ahmedabad is my city. It is strange, but if you have had happy times in a city for a long time, you consider it the best city in the world. I feel the same about Ahmedabad. I know it is not one of those hip cities like Delhi, Bombay and Bangalore. I know people in these cities think of Ahmedabad as a small town, though that is not really the case. (3MML, 46)

Gopal represents those modern Gujarati youths who are fascinated for the business. Bhagat depicts the real passion of Gujarati for business through the character of Govind. He says:

There is something about Gujaratis we love business. And Ambabadis love it more than anything else. Gujarat is the only state in India where people tend to respect you more if you have a business than if you are in service. The rest of the country dreams about a cushy job that gives a steady salary and provides stability. In Ahmedabad, service is for the weak. That was why I dreamt my biggest dream- to be a big businessman one day. (3MML, 12)

Govind lives with his mother as his father abandons them. His mother, to earn money, sells *khaman* and *khakra* and takes orders of parties. Govind after completing his post matriculation is not selected for an engineering course. He helps his mother to earn money by taking maths tuition. His books a shop at Navrangpura mall which collapses in the earthquake. He mournfully says, "Two years of scrimping and saving twenty years of dreams-all wiped away in twenty seconds. The Navrangpura Mall's neon sign, once placed at the top of the six floor building, now licked the ground"(3MML, 108). He could not tolerate the loss and is admitted in the hospital where he stays for more than a week. He cries for losing money but doctor advises and tells him an example that "Navaldharis is a hardcore entrepreneur community in Gujarat. Everyone there does business. And they say, a true Navaldhari businessman is

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one who can rise after being razed to the ground nine times”(3MML, 110). Doctor shows sympathy for him by saying:

There is no businessman in this world who has never lost money. There is no one who has learnt to ride a bicycle without falling off. There is no one who has loved without getting hurt. It's all part of game. (3MML, 111)

Govind shows his scientific attitude by saying he is agnostic when Bittoo mama asks him about his religion. He takes part in political and religious activities of Parekh-ji and Bittoo mama but never likes his participation. Ishaan forces him to take maths tuition classes of his younger sister, Vidya. Govind while teaching her, falls in love and does what one cannot expect from a good friend. He makes sex with her and commits the second mistake of his life. Omi's cousin, Dhiraj is killed at the Godhara railway station while returning from Ayodhya in Sabarmati express. Hindus blame Muslims and start killing them. On that fateful night Ali, a Muslim boy is with these friends at the bank building. Bittoo mama attacks the bank building where Govind and his friends hide Ali. Govind while saving Ali from the trishul of Bittoo mama makes one-second delay, which allows trishul to pierce its angle into Ali's wrist. Here Govind makes third mistake of his life.

Love story between Govind and Vidya has a realistic touch. Initially, Govind concentrates on his teaching but it is Vidya who incites him to do what any

good friend doesn't want to do with his best friend's sister. She starts liking him and goes to see him in the hospital when he is admitted. She gives him a letter in which she calls him a passion guide and shows her love for him. She writes:

*To my maths tutor/passion guide/sort-of-friend,  
I cannot fully understand your loss, but I can try.*

*Sometimes life throws curve balls and you question why.*

*There may be no answers, but I assure time will heal the wound.*

*Here is wishing you a heartfelt 'get well soon'*

*Your poorest performing student,*

*Vidya. (3MML, 112)*

She is the first one to kiss and makes sex with him on her birthday. Bhagat gives Vidya's character a modern girl's attitude, as she wants to go away from the constraint of the four walls of her house. She wishes to take her education at Mumbai. Being a motivational speaker and alumni of IIT, the author describes the fear among the students for maths through the character of Vidya. She says:

I have lived, compromised, struggled with it. It is a troubled relationship we have shared for years. From classes one to twelve, this subject does not go away. People have nightmares about monsters. I have nightmares about surprise maths tests. I know you scored a hundred and you are in love with it. But remember in most part of the world maths means only one thing to students. (3MML, 46)

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Bhagat reveals the mentality of Indian people how they look at a beautiful girl. Govind and Vidya go to the shop to purchase the chemistry book where shopkeeper and other buyers look at her. On being asked, he tells her, "He (shopkeeper) was asking me about the girl. See this is the reason why people think Ahmedabad is small town despites the multiplexes. It is the mentality of the people"(3MML, 85).

People in India like cricket very much. The passion for cricket among the boys is shown through the character of Ishaan. He is a cricket freak and ready to do anything for it. He is the champion and plays district level matches for his school. Like many Indian cricket lovers, he sees all the matches of Indian team. After Govind's suggestion, he starts cricket coaching. He takes Ali's coaching free of cost and wants to see him in Indian team. He takes Govind and Omi to Goa to see cricket match and to test Ali by the Australian players. He doesn't care about money if it is related to cricket. He wants to use the profit of shop for the trip of Australia. Bhagat through his character presents the face of angry young man. Ishaan shows his anger by beating a young boy who used to come to see Vidya at his house. The author in the novel writes about the real cricket matches played between India and South Africa at Vadodara on 17 March 2000 and India and Australia on 11-15 March 2001 at Eden garden, Kolkata. Ishaan watches every cricket match and wastes important years of

his life. Like many Indian parents, his parents are not happy with their son's nature and behavior.

Omi represents the religious boy. He, like many young people, is not able to decide his main aim in life. He half concentrates on religious things and other half on his maternal uncle, Bittoo mama, who is a political worker of Parekh-ji. He is influenced by Parekh-ji and Bittoo mama and attends their every meeting. Bhagat here tells about Hindu-Muslim conflict, related to Ram temple, Ayodhya. Omi defends his religion when he quarrels with Ali's father. An excerpt from the novel throws a light on Ayodhya's disputed land:

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

*'Because there is masque there already'.*

*'But there was a temple there before'.*

*'That is not proven'.*

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

*'Incorrect'.*

*'Whatever. It is not an ordinary place. We believe it is the birthplace for our lord. We said, "Give us that site and we will move the mosque respectfully next door" But you can't even do that. And we, the majority, can't have that one little request fulfilled. Parekh-ji is right, what hope does a Hindu have in this country?'* (3MML, 69)

Bhagat writes about the social aspects, which take place in the first decade of the twenty first century. He correlates the

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fiction with realism. In February 2002, at the Godhara station, Muslim people burnt Sabarmati express where kar sevaks were returning from the Ayodhya. Dhiraj, Bittoo mama's son dies in it. Bittoo mama to take the revenge of his son decides to teach a lesson to Muslims. He along with his political workers starts killing the Muslims and burns their houses. The writer here writes about the contemporary political and religious conditions of Gujarat. In the novel, he also gives a realistic account of the earthquake, which takes many lives in Gujarat in 2001. Bhuj city is ninety percent destroyed. Govind books a shop at the shopping mall but unluckily it also collapses on the ground.

The religious politics is at extreme level in Gujarat. Bittoo mama and Parekh-ji represent Hindu religion and Naseer, Ali's father represents Muslim religion. In their political meeting, they blame on each other. Parekh-ji, being Hindu, is a great supporter of Ram temple at Ayodhya. He motivates Bittoo mama and other party members to organize trips to Ayodhya. Bittoo mama decides to bring the soil from Ram's birthplace, distributes it among the Hindu family and convinces them for vote to Hindu party. He is a blind follower of Parekh-ji and invites Omi and his friends to attend their political meetings. On the other hand, Ali's father, Naseer calls his party a secular. He opposes Ram temple at Ayodhya, as he believes that the place belongs to the mosque. Hindu-Muslim conflict is shown here. The author gives a

suggestion to those who fight with each other. He says.

Male chimpanzees of the same pack fight violently with each other- for food, females, whatever. However, after the fight, they go through a strange ritual. They kiss each other, on the lips. (3MML, 71)

The writer tells the causes of conflict between Hindu and Muslim and suggests the ways, which can solve their problem. Omi being the God Ram's follower does not eat at Ali's house but later he eats a banana. The Godhara riot gives a historical and realistic touch to the novel.

The author also describes the condition of government schools. In India, government schools lag behind the private schools and colleges. Ishaan tells the budget of cricket materials to the Principal of Kendriya Vidyalaya. Principal after hearing to Ishaan says that their school cannot afford cricket materials, as they do not get enough funds for school and sports. She depicts the pitiful condition of the school and says, "Do you know half our classrooms leak in the rain. Should we get shiny balls or fix the leaks"(3MML,131). As per the title *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, Govind makes three mistakes in his life. The first mistake is that the shop which he books at Navrangpura by giving advance money, collapses due to the earthquake. The second mistake is manmade and caused by the passion and lust for sex. He makes sex with his best friend's sister. The third mistake is related with Ali. During the

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Godhara riot, Hindus start killing Muslims. Bittoo mama wants to take the revenge of his son, Dhiraj by killing Ali, a Muslim boy and for that, he attacks Ali with a trishul. Govind makes a second delay while saving Ali and one of the trishul's angles pierces into Ali's wrist.

The novelist's main concern in the novel is to depict the aims of modern Indian youths and to study the effects of religious politics on the society and after effects of the Godhara riot in Gujarat. The author is well acquainted with the political and social conditions of Gujarat state as he stayed there. He delineates different incidents in credible manner such as an earthquake, which shakes the whole Gujarat in 2001, love story between tutor and student, religious politics, the Godhara riot and it's after effects, three friends' journey to Goa and Australia. The narrative technique is quite interesting. The characters seem real with respect to the society. The ways of describing the situations and the words use for it are of day-to-day spoken language. Conversation between mother and son, tutor and student, havoc caused by the earthquake and after effects of the Godhara riot, Pandit-ji, the bat seller are described in a realistic manner. Conversation between Govind and Vidya about maths' fear seems realistic:

Let me make myself clear. I positively hate maths. For me it occupies a place right up there with cockroaches and lizards. I get disgusted, nauseated and depressed by it. Between an electric shock or a maths test, I will choose the

former. I heard some people have to walk two miles to get water in Rajasthan. I would trade my maths problems for that walk, everyday. Maths is the worst thing ever invented by maths. What were they thinking? Language is too easy, so let's make up some creepy symbols and manipulate them to haunt every generation of kids who care if sin theta is different from cos theta? Who wants to know the expansion of the sum of cubes? (3MML, 45)

Conclusion

Thus, Chetan Bhagat in his novel, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* has tried to present the realistic situations happening in Indian day-to-day life. In the novel the author has given stress on realistic things like family conflict, Communal harmony, Political and religious crisis, Hindu-Muslim relation and before and after effects of Godhara riot. Govind, Ishaan, Omi and Vidya speak like real people not like merely bookish characters. Bhagat is successful in bringing realistic look to the novel by describing the Godhara riot and Hindu-Muslim relations. New readers who don't know the literary language can also enjoy the writing style of Chetan Bhagat. Bhagat has succeeded here in describing all the things in beautiful manner. He has also succeeded in keeping the readers stick to novel up to at the end.

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