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What Are ‘*The 3 Mistakes Of My Life*’ Committed In Business, Love And Cricket?

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Abstract: Chetan Bhagat is known for writing the culture and issues of the youth. In his third novel *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* he took up the plot of three youngsters – Govind, Ishaan and Omi – who strived to excel in business while fostering their interest in cricket. However they had to face the unexpected wraths of Bhuj earthquake and Godhra communal violences in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Further, the narrator Govind had to face another turmoil of love. Then the question comes as to what are the three mistakes that were committed by him in business, love and cricket. The novel answers all these questions and warns the youth not to commit those three mistakes in order to come up in life and career.

Key words: Youth aspires entrepreneurship, fostering interests, committing mistakes, striving to overcome the mistakes, business, love and cricket.

INTRODUCTION

The 3 Mistakes of My Life is the third novel of Chetan Bhagat. It was first published in 2008. The author described how the story of novel has originated: an email was sent to him from Ahd_businessman@gmail.com on 12/28/2005 at 11.40 p.m. under the subject caption “A final note” in which a businessman from Ahmedabad stated that “this email is a combined suicide note and a confession letter.” The businessman confessed: “I made three mistakes ... I waited over three years, watched Ish’s silent face everyday. But after he refused my offer yesterday, I had no choice left.”¹

Before he swallowed 19 sleeping pills to commit suicide he felt like telling it to someone and hence wrote this email to the author Chetan Bhagat. Bhagat was so popular among the youth by that time and the youth wanted to tell him their stories since he has already been doing the job.

By reading the email in the early morning of 29th December 2005, Chetan Bhagat got curious of the story and

located, with the help of Prof Basant, the businessman’s address where he was hospitalised – the Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad. Next day he fled from his place of working in Singapore and reached the young businessman Govind Patel. Fortunately he could survive. Almost all through the night the author explored the story behind the businessman’s suicide attempt.

Like many of the novels of Chetan Bhagat this was also made into a Bollywood film *Kai Po Che*.

CRICKET VS BUSINESS

The novel *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* portrays the story of three protagonists – Govind Patel, Ishaan and Omi – who are friends for the past 15 years in Berlampur area of Ahmedabad, Gujarat and opened a cricket sports shop as an attempt to settle in life. But they face many hurdles in course of expanding their business.

The three friends love cricket and make their careers around it. The three friends meet in the house of Ishaan to decide their future. That day a cricket match was going on in Vadodara, a town located at a distance of just two hours from Ahmedabad. Ishaan enjoys the match most and Omi nods to whatever Ishaan has to say about cricket, though Govind reminds of deciding the future of Ishaan. The following narration in the words of Govind indicates the importance of cricket in the life of Ishaan:

Ishaan had always avoided this topic ever since he ran away from NDA a year ago. His dad had already sarcastically commented, ‘Cut a cake today to celebrate one year of your uselessness.’

However, today I had a plan. I needed to sit them down to talk about our lives. Of course, against cricket, life is second priority.

‘Later,’ Ishaan said, staring avidly at a pimple cream Commercial.

¹ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2008). *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co. 80th impression. pp. xi-xii.

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'Later when Ishaan? I have an idea that works for all of us. We don't have a lot of choice, do we?'

'All of us? Me, too?' Omi quizzed, already excited. Idiots like him love to be part of something, anything. However, this time we needed Omi.

'Yes, you play a critical role Omi. But later when Ish? When?'

'Oh, stop it! Look, the match is starting. Ok, over dinner. Let's go to Gopi,' Ish said.

'Gopi? Who's paying?' I was interrupted as the match began.

Beep, beep, beep. The horn of a car broke our conversation. A car zoomed outside the pol.

'What the hell! I am going to teach this bastard a lesson,' Ish said, looking out the window.

'What's up?'

'Bloody son of a rich dad. Comes and circles around our house everyday.'

'Why?' I said.

'For Vidya. He used to be in coaching classes with her. She complained about him there too,' Ish said.

Beep, beep, beep, the car came near the house again.

'Damn, I don't want to miss this match,' Ish said as he saw India hit a four.²

In the above narration Ishaan appears to have taken many important things light for the sake of cricket. One, he avoids any topic for cricket. Two, he ran away from NDA a year ago. Three, he ignores his dad commenting sarcastically. Four, he neglects his career building plan. Five, he postpones discussion on his career plan and fixes it after the cricket match. Six, he stays in neglecting mood and says "I don't want to miss the match" even when a rich boy comes in Esteem car and circles around his house every day for his sister Vidya.

This madness for cricket made the three friends open a cricket shop *The Team India Cricket Shop* on 29 April 2000 in Nana Park in Berlampur colony of Ahmedabad.

Ishaan's madness for cricket is further revealed in his own words:

"I love this game, but have no gifts. I pushed myself – woke up at 4 a.m. everyday, training for hours, practice and more practice. I gave up studies, and now that I think of it, even my future. And then comes this marble player who has this freakish gift. I could never see the ball and whack it like Ali."³

In the above para it is evident that Ishaan found extraordinary talent in a gully boy Ali, a 12 year old student studying 7th class. He is gifted as far as the batting is concerned. When Ishaan asked Govind why Ali so gifted, Govind says:

"I don't know. God gives talent so that the ordinary person can become extraordinary. Talent is the only way that poor can become rich. Otherwise, in this world the rich would remain rich and the poor would remain poor. This unfair talent actually creates a balance, helps to make the world fair."⁴

However, Ishaan neglects his own career and foresees national pride in Ali and teaches him cricket. He does everything for Ali. Ish is supported by his two other friends also. First they take Ali to doctors. They confirm Ali having a problem but it works excellently in batting. Having confirmed with this, Ish and his friends take Ali to Goa to show Ali's talent to Australian cricketers. The Australian cricketer Fred Li offers them flight tickets to Australia / Sydney. The conversation between the three friends and Fred Li is important in view of importance to be given to the game cricket.

'... let me tell you boys, the whole legend bit is far-fetched. You take a bit of talent and mould it properly, and good stuff happens, In that sense, Australia can create legends.'

'And we can't' Ish asked,

'Well you could, though right now you rely on talent more than training. You have a big population, a tiny number of them are born excellent. Like Tendulkar, or maybe like Ali.'

³ Ibid, p. 97.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 97-98.

² Ibid, p. 3.

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'Yeah, but,' Ish boxed his left palm with his right, 'imagine what would happen if we could have this kind of training in India.'

'Cricket would be finished. India would dominate and teams like us would be nowhere. At least for now we can call ourselves "legend"'. Fred hooked his fingers around the last word.

.....
'You are big boys and tough players. You want to give it your all. But I can't emphasise it enough – respect your body's limits.'

'I do,' Ish said, feeling compelled to speak, 'but there was a single there. And that is what we Indians miss. We don't want to dive. We don't want to take risks.'

'The game is not about being macho. You can't get caught up in the moment so much that you forget.'

'Forget what?' I said.

'Forget that you got one fragile body. Lose it, and you are gone. You must safeguard it. And Ish, you must protect your student.'

Ish hung his head low.

'I had just started my career when my nasty back almost finished it, Fred said. I'd have been selling suits at a store for the rest of my life, as that is the only job I could get.'

He added, 'I made the same mistakes, wanting to kill myself for the game I played that day. But if you want a career, think long term. Yes, passion is important. But the head has to be clear during the match.'

Ish apologised to Fred later in the locker room. 'I'd never let Ali get hurt.'⁵

The above lines make it clear through the words of Ish that Indians are not ready to take risks and hence it is becoming hard for them to shine like Sachin Tendulkar and Ali who are born talented. But Fred emphasised the importance of training and overcoming hurdles to excel in our long aimed dream career.

And Australian cricketers want Ali to play on behalf of Australia but Ali says firmly that he is Indian and plays for

his mother country only. Then the three friends and Ali return to India. While putting up several efforts for fostering Ali, communal riots erupted in Ahmedabad. One of the three friends – Omi – and his Mama Bittoo lost their lives but the friends could save Ali since he is considered to be India's future (cricket) pride. To save Ali for future Ish put in his efforts for over three years together and Govind too was eager to contribute his entire business savings of three years for the medical expenses of Ali. When Ish refused to take his money Govind attempted to suicide.

Thus, all the three friends were ready to lose their lives for the sake of their friendship evolved, to foster their common interest cricket. Even the communal riots that erupted in Godhra / Ahmedabad did not turn the Hindu friends to stand by their religion but to protect a Muslim boy Ali by losing their Hindu lives. This shows their die-hard passion for cricket and its sportive spirit needed for the country.

Now, it is the time to understand the essence of the title of the novel – *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*. Since the story of the novel is narrated by one of the chief protagonists of the novel – Govind Patel – he is described as confessing the 3 mistakes of his life committed while building up his career, living / loving his life and cultivating his interest for cricket / friendship.

FIRST MISTAKE

Govind Patel hails from business community (Navaldharis) of Gujarat. Navaldharis use to say that they should rise to success even if they fall down nine times. Govind too feels the same. He doesn't get to depression even if his father left his mother. He got good score in maths in his studies. So he makes use of his knowledge in maths by taking maths tutorials to supplement his mother's income by selling snacks.

In order to build up his own career and of his best friends Ishaan and Omi Govind opens a sports shop in Berlampur colony of Ahmedabad to foster their common interest in cricket. They could do moderately well in running the shop on one side while cultivating their interested hobby through students like Ali. The friends among the three – Ish and Omi – were contented with the life and business going on. But Govind wanted to extend his business in a posh area Navrangpura by advancing rent for a stylish shop in a mall.

Unfortunately the mall fell down to the ground being affected by the tremors an earth quake that was centered around Bhuj. Govind's dreams and deposits went in vain.

⁵ Ibid, pp. 162-164.

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With that aghast incident which is beyond human control Govind realized the limitations of the human beings who alone can not do whatever they wish. External forces too exist showing impact on human endeavors leading sometimes to unexpected results. This made Govind to believe in God. Earlier he was agnostic. He argued with Bittoo Mama (relative of Omi) that he is not interested in religious matters.

But after the Bhuj earth quake Govind realized his mistake of being agnostic and ignorance of the limitations of human efforts and agnostic belief in God but strong belief in his own efforts to plan for desired results. Then he changed his opinion and started participating in the religious meetings conducted by Parekh ji and mobilised by Bittoo Mama.

Second Mistake

Though Govind has a calculative and business mind after all he is a young human being with all senses responding to their natures when congenial conditions are on the cards. Ishaan asks Govind to take private tuition classes to his sister Vidya. Vidya completed her XII class and wants to move out of her house to Mumbai to study medicine in graduation. She says,

*"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."*⁶

Govind is supposed to teach her physics, maths and other science subject so as to let Vidya clear her entrance examination. She is about to reach adulthood of 18 years of age in few months, being four years younger to Govind. The tutorial takes place in Vidya's private room. The privacy and proximity between the two youngsters could not help them stop them from becoming close physically. Further, Vidya hates to be confined to her house only. Her hatred hastens her to find ways to get out of her house with Govind. Vidya expresses her interest in her conversation with Govind and the latter narrates as the following:

'I like science. But the way they teach it, it sucks,' Vidya said. '...let's talk of biology. Think about this,' she said touched my arm. 'What is this?'

'What?' I said, taken aback by her contact. ... 'There are some good reference books outside your textbooks for science,' I told her.

'Are there?'

'Yes, you get them in the Law Garden book market. They go into concepts. I can get them for you if you want. Ask your parents if they will pay for them.'

'Of course, they will pay. If it is for studies, they spend like crazy. But can I come along with you?'

'No, you don't have to. I'll get the bill.'

'What?'

'In case you are thinking how much I will spend.'

*'You silly or what? It will be a nice break. We will go together.'*⁷

Thus they went out to Navrangpura in the name of purchasing books for her. There Vidya purchased books whatever Govind suggested and touched his hand while measuring a book purchased. After shopping Vidya converses with Govind and expresses her interest in him and the same is narrated by the latter as the following.

'Now what?' she said.

'Nothing, let's go home,' I said and looked for an auto.

'You are a big bore, aren't you?' she said.

'Excuse me?' I said.

*'Dairy Den is round the corner. I'm hungry,' she said.'*⁸

Then Govind took her to the last visible seat in the hotel Dairy Den and while eating pizza Vidya broke the silence saying,

'Are we allowed to talk about anything apart from science subjects?'

'Of course,' I said. I glared at the boys at the other table. They didn't notice me.

'We are not that far apart in age. We could be friends, you know,' she said.

'Well,' I said, 'tough, isn't it?'

'Tough? Give me one reason why?'

'I will give you four – (1) I am your teacher (2) you are my best friend's sister (3) you are younger than me, and (4) you are a girl.'

⁷ Ibid, pp. 81-82.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 86-87.

⁶ Ibid, p. 47.

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I felt stupid stating my reasons in bullet points. There is a reason why nerds can't impress girls. They don't know how to talk.

She laughed at me rather than with me.

'Sorry for the list. Can't get numbers out of my system,' I said.

She laughed. 'It tells me something. You have thought it out.

That means, you have considered a potential friendship.'

I remained silent.

'I am kidding,' she said and tapped my hand. She had this habit of soothing people by touching them. With normal people it would've been ok, but with sick people like me, female touches excite more than soothe. I felt the urge to look at her face again. I turned determinedly to the pizza instead.

'But seriously, you should have a backup friend,' she said.

'Backup what?'

'You, Ish and Omi are really close. Like you have known each other since you were sperm.'

My mouth fell open at her last word. Vidya was supposed to be Ish's little sister who played with dolls. Where did she learn to talk like that?

'Sorry, I meant Ish and Omi are your best friends. But if you have to bitch ... oops, rant about them, who do you do it with?'

'I don't need to rant about my friends,' I said.

'C'mon, are they perfect?'

'No one is perfect.'

'Like Garima and I are really close. We talk twice a day. But sometimes she ignores me, or talks to me like I am some naive small town girl. I hate it, but she is still my best friend?'

'And?' I said. Girls talk in circles. Like an algebra problem, it takes a few steps to get them to the point.

'And, talking about it to you, venting, like this, makes me feel better. And I can forgive her. So, even though she is a much closer friend of mine, you became a backup friend.'⁹

In the conversation that took place between Vidya and Govind the former is found to be expressive and assertive in initiating 'back up friendship' with the latter.

Vidya continues with her backup friendship with Govind and visits him when he is sick after Bhuj earthquake and leaves a greeting card wishing him 'get well soon' which he read eight times on that day.¹⁰

Vidya wants 'touch': she makes Govind oil her hair. She expects Govind's private time for her. When he couldn't do it she criticises him for ignoring her by saying sarcastically 'I did self-study as you don't have time for me.'¹¹

Vidya's progressive friendship affected Govind and he confessed to himself that the irrational part of him loved it. When he visited Australia he called her and brought for her matchbox full of sand putting some feelings in it, as desired by Vidya. He presented it to her after his return. Then the following conversation led them to commit the second mistake of Govind's life.

'Did you really miss me?' she said and put her palm on my hand.

I pulled it back in reflex. She looked surprised.

'I am sorry, Vidya. I shouldn't. I have my business to focus on and this is really not my thing, but...' I said and turned away. I couldn't talk when I looked at her. Or rather, I couldn't talk when she looked at me.

'It's ok, you don't have to be sorry,' she said.

'It's not ok. I don't have time for emotions,' I said in a firm voice, 'and this is not the place anyway. My best friend's sister? What the fuck ... oops, sorry?'

She giggled.

'Be serious, Vidya. This is not right. I am your teacher, your brother trusts me as a friend, I have responsibilities – loans, business and a mother. You are not even eighteen?'

'Two months,' she wiggled two fingers. 'Two months and I will turn eighteen. Time to bring me another nice gift. Anyway, please continue.'

'Well, whatever. The point is, significant reasons exist for me not to indulge in illogical emotions. And I want...'

She stood up and came to my side. She sat on the flimsy armrest of my plastic chair.

She put her finger on my mouth. She cupped my face in her palms.

'You don't shave that often eh? Ew,' she said. She threw a tiny spit ball in the air.

'What?' I said and looked at her.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 112 & 115.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 133-134.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 87-89.

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'I think a mosquito kissed me,' she said and spit again, 'is it still there in my mouth?'

She opened her mouth and brought it close. Her lips were eight millimetres apart from mine.

Soon the gap reduced to zero. I don't know if I came towards her or she came towards me. The tiny distance made it difficult to ascertain who took the initiative. I felt something warm on my lips and realised that we have come too close, or maybe too far.

We kissed again. The mosquitoes on our respective heads rejoined. ...

But when you are in the middle of a kiss, sound and sight get muted. I checked once to see if the other terraces were empty. Then I closed my eyes.

'Vidya, what are we doing,' I said, not letting her go. I couldn't stop. Probability, algebra, trigonometry and calculus – the passion held back in all those classes came blazing out.

'It's fine, it's fine,' she kept reassuring me and kissing me.

We broke away from each other because even passionate people need oxygen. She looked at me with a big grin.

I packed my pens and books. No maths tonight.

'Why aren't you making eye contact?' She remarked, mischief in her voice.

I kept silent.

'You are older than me and a hundred times better than me in maths. But, in some ways, I am way more mature than you!'

Oh, yeah?' I challenged weakly, collecting the textbooks.

She pulled my chin up.

'I am turning eighteen. I can do whatever I want,' she said....

'I can marry, I can...'¹²

Vidya then served coffee to Govind under roof top water tank, kissed his cheek and said, 'Thanks for the gift, the gift of true close friendship.'¹³

After some days Vidya sends an SMS to Govind inviting him to celebrate her 18th birthday. It says,¹⁴

*'when I study, I think kisses,
u and only u, v misses'*

Those SMSs instigate Govind and he reaches Vidya with a small cake hiding it not to anyone's attention. The conversation then takes place between them reveals the boldness of Vidya:

'Can I tell you something weird?'

'What?'

'When you talk hardcore maths'... 'It turns me on.'

'Vidya, your boldness....,' I said, shocked.

'Makes you blush, right?' she said and laughed.¹⁵

They celebrated her 18th birthday on 19 November 2001 and Govind described it in the following lines as to how he made the second mistake of his life.

"I... put a piece of cake in her mouth. ... She pushed me back on the cushions and brought her mouth close to mine for my share of the cake.

She kissed me like she never had before. It wasn't like she did anything different, but there seemed to be more feeling behind it. Her hands came to my shoulders and under my shirt.

The music continued.

I can't deny what I believe

I can't be what I'm not

I know that this love's forever

That's all that matters now

I don't know if it was the candlelight or the birthday mood or the cushions or what. But it was then that I made the second mistake of my life.

I opened the top button of her kurti and slid my fingers inside.

A voice inside stopped me, I took my hand out. But she continued to kiss me as she unbuttoned the rest of her top. She pulled my fingers towards her again.

... I followed her instruction instantly.

I went down, and came back up. We looked into each other's eyes as we became one.

'Wow, I am an adult and am no longer a virgin, so cool. Thank God.' She said and giggled. ... See I still have goose bumps. ... I am so glad this happened. Aren't you?'

I kept quiet.

'Stop freaking out' she said.

Vidya also says 'I love you,' from behind as Govind opens the terrace door.¹⁶

Vidya doesn't feel shy to express whatever she feels to do. At one context, to make Govind blush she tells him 'When you talk hardcore maths... It turns me on'. And in getting physical also she is equally assertive and feels glad of losing her virginity, as indicated in the above paras.

¹² Ibid, pp. 182-184.

¹³ Ibid, p. 186.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 187-189.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 198.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 198-202.

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But as Govind confessed his intimate relationship with Vidya proved to be fatal once known of it: Ish kicked Govind as he broke the trust between the friends. He did not talk to him for over three years running the shop being side by side too. He refused to take the money offered by Govind for the treatment Ali's wounded wrist. Finally the premarital affair led Govind to attempt suicide. Of course, then the seriousness of Govind's feelings was understood by Ish. But this is not the case; had Govind died of the overdose of sleeping pills the premarital affair would have been treated to be life-ending dangerous.

THIRD MISTAKE

The third mistake of Govind's life is related to the saving of the life of Ali from the communal riots that spread to Ahmedabad also from Godhra. In those riots a son of Bittoo Mama lost his life along with others. It was strongly believed by Bittoo Mama that the railway compartment his son Dhiraj was travelling was set on fire by Muslim fundamentalists and hence he and his followers wanted to take revenge by killing Muslims staying in their locality including Ali.

Ish, Govind and Omi protected Ali from that threat by hiding him in the left over Bank building, contiguous to their sports shop. The gang of Bittoo Mama searched it vigorously and finally found Ali and ran towards Ali. Here Govind confessed that he committed third mistake of his life in the following words.

"I knew I had to get out of the captor's grip, grab Ali and pull him to my side. I got ready to move. However, I looked at Mama. The sight of his huge frame and a sharp weapon sent a fear inside me. And I wasted precious time thinking when I should have acted. Ish and I exchanged another glance and he saw my fear mixed with self-interest. What if the trishul ends in my stomach? The what-ifs made me hesitant, but I snapped myself out of it and made a dive to my left. I grabbed Ali and pulled him towards me. Mama struck, but missed Ali's torso. One blade of the trishul jabbed Ali's wrist. Ali would have been completely unhurt only if I had dived a second earlier. And here it was, something I didn't realise then, the one second delay being the third mistake of my life.

*Of course, I didn't know I had made a mistake then."*¹⁷

However, with the support of Ish's bravery Ali retaliated the struck of Bittoo Mama by hitting a ball with a bat, before Mama struck him with the trishul. Mama fell down and Ali was saved.

This third mistake confessed by Govind reveals that the three friends gave more value to their friendship than to their own religion and lives too.

CONCLUSION

The novel recognizes the truth that youth aspires to excel in life and then indicates that the youth should avoid committing the three mistakes despite the natural compulsions prompt them to commit. The novel explains how the mistakes prove to be fatal and disastrous. Of course, since the author desires happy ending of the story Ishaan and Vidya get united with Govind. But the same happy ending of the story might not happen in all cases. Therefore, the youth is advised to foster their interests like cricket and aspirational entrepreneurs by planning to achieve their desired results in the long run, avoiding mistakes to be committed.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 246.

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