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**Social Issues and Urban Youth in Chetan Bhagat's Novels: A Critical Exploration**

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**Abstract**

Social criticism has been a part of English literature for a long time; social institutions such as family, education, and economy are the different components that are constantly changing under urbanization. Chetan Bhagat is well known for positioning reality within contemporary Indian society. Providing commentary on social issues is not something new as it has been carried out by Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao in their works as well; Chetan Bhagat's success in this domain is mainly because he deals with problems that youth of the country experiences. As seen within the present study, the works of Bhagat deal with critical social issues such as inter-caste marriages, humiliation and grief, student suicides, unfulfilled ambition among students, and the overwhelming corruption that exists within Indian society. The focus of the study has been on the grim sides of society and how successful Bhagat has been in depicting the country's urban youth.

**Keywords:** Chetan Bhagat, literature, social issues, caste, gender, youth, students

**Introduction**

Chetan Bhagat is one of the most successful authors in India; the subject matter of his novels is focused on the youth of contemporary India. Bhagat has successfully captured the creative mind of modern Indian society and the Western influence that has impacted the country. Most of the characters in his novels come from middle-class backgrounds (Patel, 2016). Throughout the novel, the different issues that the characters face in their aspiration for a better life, love, sex, and marriage are fleshed out to showcase the ugly sides of society. The novels' protagonists are sensitive yet willing to challenge the social stigma and not compromise for their middle-class upbringing. Chetan Bhagat previously worked as a banker, which he quit in the year 2009, and since then, he has dedicated his life to bringing changes to society through his novels (Finance Asia, 2010). Bhagat's works have brought unique trends within Indian society that have encouraged the youth to read books in an age where digitalization has taken over everything. The novels touch an emotional chord among the country's youth and make their battles towards establishing themselves within the society more real. Both children and young adults in the country can relate to the novels and be inspired by the words of Bhagat.

Accordingly, the present research focuses on the depiction of social issues and urban youth in Bhagat's novels.

### **Indian Social Milieu in Chetan Bhagat's Novel**

Chetan Bhagat's novels explore the different social issues prevalent within the country. Bhagat achieves this by exhibiting the reality of Indian society in his novels. The novels are a perfect blend of social issues and fantasy. Bhagat stated that the primary intention behind writing the novels is to entertain the readers. With the correct dose of humor, the author can show the issues of the youth and how their actions within the novel are dictated by multiculturalism, love, and friendship. The characters Bhagat has given life try to negotiate their social class and contemporary situations by gaining immediate success (Kumar, 2013). The social issues within the country have been shown in his novels right from his debut, "Five Point Someone: What not to do at IIT!" The novel is immensely successful among IIT students and scholars and has even been turned into film adaptations. The novel deals with three students at IIT Delhi, each dealing with their struggles and finding it hard to cope with the educational system at the university (Partap, 2016). Bhagat shows the issue of ragging, which is common even in the most reputed colleges in the country.

In all of Bhagat's works, the characters struggle to gain liberty; the three friends, Ryan, Hari, and Alok, in the novel go through the same process as they try to break free from the social shackles that limit a person's capability to mark and be grade-centered. Bhagat has carefully portrayed the students' struggle in an educational system in which a person is only as valuable as the grade they have achieved. All three characters are considered to be underperformers as they have acquired low GPAs; the dilemma that the students face in finding their own identity within the system is shown in the novel (Rao, 2021). The characters realize the helplessness of their condition and try to search for alternative methods to study. The attempted suicide of Alok shows the identity crisis that the students go through; this brings into perspective the ongoing problems within Indian society, as parents force their children to take courses that they are not comfortable with. Unable to cope with the stress and pressure, these students face numerous problems and eventually commit suicide.

The appeal of Bhagat comes from his deep understanding of human life and the wide range of cultural issues that shape the harsh reality of modern India. The novels of Bhagat have been seen to represent the local realities which are constantly changing under the new economic globalization. In the novel "Two States: The Story of My Marriage", Bhagat has shown the dominance of the caste system in India. The novel deals with the complex love that exists between Krish and Ananya; both characters belong to different states and cultural practices. When the parents from both families do not support their relationship and intention of getting married, they try several things to gain their support. Bhagat has deeply criticized the corrupt practices of Indian society. The author has adopted an autobiographical plot structure for the novel; Krish is a Punjabi Boy from Delhi, whereas Ananya is of Tamil descent and comes from the state of Chennai. Both the characters become romantically

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involved after meeting at the IIM Ahmadabad mess ball; Krish makes the first move by trying to gain support from Ananya's parents by doing several chores he gains their support (Arunraj & Viduthalai, 2018). When the couple tries to persuade Krish's mother, the inherent racism that exists in Indian society is shown. They, however, end up acknowledging Ananya after she successfully marries one of Krish's cousins. The family trip to Goa goes horribly due to the complicated relationship that Krish shares with his father; in the end, the couple successfully convinces their parents and gets married (Mandal, 2023). The novel shows the convergence of the two states and is symbolic of the intricate cultural differences within the Indian subcontinent.

The novel "One Night @ the Call Center" presents the story of six teenagers who work at the Connexion Call Centre. The characters "Military Uncle, Radika, Esha, Varoom, Priyanka, Shayam, and Mr. Bakshi" live far away from their home (KUMAR, 2020). Each of these characters has their backstory and reasoning for joining the call center; the materialistic aspect of life is shown as all these characters struggle to make ends meet. Military Uncle, as the name suggests, is a retired military veteran and works at the center to supplement his monthly pension. After Varoom's father left his mother, he was forced to take up this job to support his mother (Babu, 2021). Esha had aspirations of becoming a model and, despite working at the call center, constantly tried to get modeling assignments. Shyam comes from a wealthy family; however, he suffers from depression as all his cousins have much more successful careers. Priyanka and Radhika both joined due to family issues. The commercialization of education has been presented thoroughly in the novel. The important role that money plays in materialistic life is highlighted in the novel. The constant struggle that the youth of India face in deciding between their life and careers is shown in the novel.

### **Social, Political, and Educational Criticism in the Novels of Chetan Bhagat**

The main themes in the novels of Bhagat are the socio-political background of the characters, the encounters between East and Western cultures, conflict, relationships, and the personal sense of identity. Each of the novels depicts a particular social issue, as shown in the novel "Five Point Someone-What not to do at IIT," which puts into perspective the monotonous nature of the Indian educational system and the stress and anxiety that it causes the students. India's ongoing problem with unemployment has been showcased through the novel "One Night @ Call Centre," the novel also shows unfulfilled ambitions and aspirations among the youth, an effect that generational trauma can have. Similarly, "The 3 Mistakes of My Life" is a social commentary on the desire of modern Indians to become rich and successful, the political effects that riots have, and their social effects (Chaudhari, 2016). The novel "2 States- The Story of My Marriage" shows the broken picture and divide that exists in Indian society, the taboo surrounding intercaste marriages. In the novel "Revolution 2020: Love, Corruption, Ambition", Bhagat presents an authentic picture of the country's education policy. Hence, as can be seen, the novels of Bhagat are not

only influential for the youth but are also concerned with the present decadence of India.

"Revolution 2020: Love, Corruption, Ambition" is the fifth novel written by Bhagat, and it spreads the message of goodness over corruption. The story revolves around childhood friends, namely Gopal, Raghav, and Aarti. Each of the characters belongs to a different social background; Gopal comes from a poor family, Raghav is from a middle-class one, whereas Aarti hails from a family of bureaucrats and politicians. After failing to pass IIT-JEE and AIEEE multiple times, Gopal had to sell his father's lands in a deal with an MLA (Baral, 2014). During this time, Raghav and Aarti grew closer and developed an intimate relationship. Shukla is a foil character to Raghav and a corrupt politician. After becoming a reporter, Raghav brings to light all of Shukla's corruption and the Ganga Action Plan. This leads to Raghav getting sacked and starting his own company. During this turmoil, Gopal has been successful in making quick money, a recurring theme in the novels of Bhagat. In the end, he is successful in making money and getting Aarti to fall in love with him (Kumar, 2013). Through the novel, Bhagat again addresses the issues with education and politics in India. The story of Gopal rising to power without any education shows that the educational system is used as a profit to generate money.

The novel "The 3 Mistakes of My Life" is written from a realistic point of view of the Indian social setting; the husband and wife conflict within the society, the fascination of youth with cricket, businesses, and religion have all been touched through the novel. The protagonist of the novel is Govind, who, with friends, opens a cricket shop after his father leaves to spend time with his second wife. The business was going well initially, and they paid for a shop within a shopping mall that was destroyed completely after the Bhuj earthquake. After the disaster, Govind was forced by his friend Ishaan to take his sister's maths tuition. On her eighteenth birthday, she incites Govind to have sex with her; the modern society of India and its twisted beliefs and practices have been skilfully shown by Bhagat (Mishra, 2013). Dissatisfaction and disappointment are shown through Ali's character, who fails after trying to get selected for the Indian cricket team. Unfulfilled dreams and ambitions are a constant recurring theme within Bhagat's novels. The religious population of India is presented through the character of Omi; the religious divide that exists in India is shown through his arguments with Ali's father about building a Ram temple in Ayodhya. The use of religion in dirty politics is shown with Bittoo Mama and Parekh-ji, as they want to separate the Hindus and Muslims in society and create a divide; these problems eventually escalate into the Godhara Riots (Chaudhari, 2016). In the end, Bhagat is successful in showing the national integrity that still exists in the country today as the characters join together to save Ali from Bittoo Mama.

### **Representation of Modern Culture and Youth of India in Chetan Bhagat's Novels**

Chetan Bhagat is highly sympathetic towards the youth of the country; his novels are compelling and try to dive into the issues of the generation gap, education,

joblessness, and the overwhelming impact of globalization in the country. The struggle that the youth face in a society that is crumbling under the value system is represented through his novels, and the need to redefine social values and language is carried out creatively through his works. Bhagat has stated that the youth want a good job and romance before supporting or investing their energy in a certain cause. The novel "Three Mistakes of My Life" is an accurate representation of modern culture and people. The three central characters within the novel have unique lifestyles: Govind is more obsessed with his business, his friend Ishaan has a strong passion for cricket, and their third friend Omi has a deep fondness for religion (Mishra, 2013). The portrayal of these characters is highly realistic because real-world counterparts of these characters can be found within the society. The novel is a story of survival and how these characters go through with their lives despite facing setbacks with their goals, therefore becoming a symbol of modern society.

The modern culture of India cannot be discussed without inter-caste marriages, which has been well represented in "Two States: The Story of My Marriage". The love affair between the two characters, Krish and Ananya, and the troubles that they face in finding love are very real. The novel has a humorous undertone that occasionally pokes fun at both Tamil and Punjabi cultures. At the end of the novel, Ananya gives birth to two twin boys who are said to be babies that belong to a state called India; through the novel, Bhagat spreads his views on inequality. The grim reality of the Indian marriage system is revealed: the racism and prejudice that still exists within the society about different cultures that also belong to India (Mishra, 2013). The problems that the youth of the country face and their modern college life are depicted accurately within the novel. The middle-class struggles and problems that young adults face in securing a job are shown in the novel in great detail.

Bhagat's very first novel, "Five Point Someone", speaks for the youth of the country, and it depicts the harsh reality of parents forcing their children to chase careers against their will and the consequences that come with it. Bhagat brilliantly captures the campus life, bullying, and ragging that the students have to go through (Ahuja, 2015). There is an ultra-competitive environment and competition among the youth of the country, combined with the highly complex and difficult curriculum of engineering, often leading to poor academic performance among the youth. The novel provides a voice to the students and discusses issues with cultural hybridity and colonial hangover. Bhagat has a unique way of understanding the youth and their struggles, ambitions, motivations, and aspirations. The frustration experienced by Hari, Ryan, and Alok with the country's GPA system exposes the lousiness of Indian universities and colleges (Joshi, 2015).

His second novel, "One Night @ Call Centre," also highlights the issue with education and the lack of employment opportunities within the country. In all "Business Process Outsourcing (BPO)" industries, there is a 24/7 culture that pays employees double for working thrice as hard (Velmani, 2020). The pressure and

social conditions change people, as can be seen through the characters within the novel; the characters morph into different characters, live pseudo lives, and deal with immense stress. The novel is about the dreams and aspirations of the students, the hallucinations, and the technical nightmares that they have to go through at the call centers (Sailaja, 2015). The reason for choosing the call center within the novel is because it is a key player in the world's economy and has a contribution of 40 billion to 45 billion towards the economy. The fashionable youth culture and their aspiration of being successful and leaving behind the call center to pursue better goals in life are shown with great depth. The youth of the country spending their nights at the call center in Gurgaon shows the multicultural nature of society. The personal relationships, conflicts, depression, and anxiety that come with this crisis are shown within the novel.

Similar to these novels, all of the other works of Bhagat have a motivational message underneath; the author has become a messiah for the youth of the country as he provides practical remedies for the complex problems faced by the youth of the country. The landscape of India is colossal and inhabited by people belonging to many different cultures and races. Through his representation of youth and their issues, Bhagat has tried to rejuvenate their culture (Velmani, 2020). The author believes one of India's strengths is its vibrant youth. Post-colonial India is showcased as a land stricken with poverty and uncivilized and unhygienic people who live on train platforms. Bhagat attempts to change this narrative by highlighting the positive aspects of the country and inspiring the youth to focus on their life as they self-advance themselves to the present.

### **Conclusion**

As concluding remarks for the present research, the study has been successful in highlighting different pieces of works written by Chetan Bhagat. All of the novels have a moral message behind them; they portray the social and psychological problems encountered by the young kin trying to fit in with the post-globalized India. The novels, as shown, depict real issues such as problems with love marriage, education, politics, and corruption within Indian society. Each of the novels focuses on one specific or multiple social issues that show the problems faced by the urban youth. Bhagat also discusses many of the lesser acknowledged social issues, such as premarital sex and pregnancy, and challenges faced by the youth in navigating their life in the ever-changing society. Through the act of acknowledgment of the different problems, Bhagat motivates the youth to follow their heart and make decisions that best suit them.

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