



Valid Issues and Concerns are Raised in the Novels of Chetan Bhagat (But No Sensible Solutions are Suggested)

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(Received 09 December, 2013 Accepted 14 December, 2013)

ABSTRACT: Chetan Bhagat- a name that youth recognises very well because of so called author- The Voice of Youth has gained name and fame in no time. He writes about the challenges being faced by the youth, but there is a complaint of many that he definitely raises quite genuine and valid issues but fails to suggest certain solutions or to say a way out of those issues. The present paper also focuses on the same topic where in the author has brought into the lime light the major issues related to the youth, politics, communalism and the like but has not opined any probable key to these issues.

I. INTRODUCTION

Chetan Bhagat is one of the prominent contemporary novelists who have earned a very significant place in the hearts of the youth today. He is an active and alert writer who keeps a note of very minute things taking place in the surroundings. His novels are replete with fictitious stories followed by some of the relevant and burning issues of our society. He has tried his level best to raise many issues in his writings so that the attention of the readers may be drawn to let them know that they are living with these problems and as has been very rightly said that one man can never bring about a revolution single handily as can be seen in case of Raghav in 'Revolution 2020'. But this thing can also not be neglected that Chetan Bhagat hardly suggests any sensible solution to the issues discussed. Here is a gist of the problems/issues discussed in his novels:-

II. ISSUES RAISED IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S NOVELS

❖ "FIVE POINT SOMEONE...":-

Chetan Bhagat's first novel 'Five Point Someone....' is not to help people who aspire to get into the IIT, or even help those who are already there to pass out successfully. Far from it, it discusses a very significant problem of the youth today – why do students at elite institutes sacrifice their youth for the sake of a successful adulthood. One may generally feel that graduates from India's prestigious technology universities get good jobs, make great money and are eagerly sought-after marriage partners. But according to Chetan Bhagat's charming debut novel 'Five Point Someone....' they end up in a Faustian bargain i.e. either they commit suicide or they spoil their career as well as their lives. 'Five Point Someone....' is about a guy, Hari, and his two friends, who consider themselves the underdogs because they have five point something, grade point averages (GPAs) and their (mis) adventures in the four years they spend at IIT. It is about their constant struggle to beat a system which judges everyone by their GPA, and which, they feel, suppresses the creativity of a person. So they set out to make the most of extra-curricular college life, by devising schemes which will help them maintain their five point something averages with just two or three hours of study a day. The resulting free time is spent in boyish adventures, be it playing squash, roaming the city or trying to woo the professor's daughter. In short, all that they should not do at IIT. But the one thought nagging them all is, will they make it?

The book, besides having a humorous appeal, also deals with the fears and insecurities of the students in one of the country's top institutions. Its description of the lives of the students in IIT or other higher-education institutions such as IIM or NID rings true. It could be Harvard, except for the desi flavour of the locales. IIT provides the backdrop against which the story unfolds, but it could just as well have been any other elite institution – elite in terms of the aspirations of its students but eclectic in terms of their social, cultural and economic backgrounds.

The author delves into the minds of the students, their motivations and aspirations in the competitive atmosphere of IIT. The personal lives of the characters are also beautifully interwoven into the narrative. The protagonist's involvement with his professor's daughter forms the love angle of the plot, and their love life accounts for more than a few laughs. The fact that her father is the kind of person no underperformer wants to meet, only adds to the drama. Sentimentality is left low-key, but not underplayed while portraying the warmth of friendship or bonds of attachment.

The book dispels the commonly held notion that IITians generally 'have it made'. The reader gets to know that life at IIT is totally performance-oriented, with never ending notes, assignments, lectures etc. it is also a subtle

take on the GPA system, which kills the students' originality. But, in the end, the characters realize that it is precisely this drudgery that makes IITians what they are. The narrative is interspersed with wonderfully funny incidents, like when Hari sneaks into the professor's house in the middle of the night to wish his daughter a happy birthday, or when he appears for a viva after downing half a bottle of vodka to "boost his confidence". The language used is original and the dialogue fresh and youthful. The casual, easy-flowing style makes for easy reading. To Bhagat goes the credit of removing the mask of intellectualism with which the IITs are associated. The everyday realities have been so well webbed that it does not take you to a wonderland, but rather moves you smoothly towards realities that are pleasant and fun-filled. Credit ought to be given to this young author for his grasp of the human psyche. He knew well enough that there would be a great readership for the book, if not for nothing else, simply because it breaks many myths.

❖ "ONE NIGHT @ THE CALL CENTER":-

In this novel we find that six friends work during nights at a call center in India, providing technical support for a major U.S. appliance corporation. Skilled in patience-and accent management-they help American consumers keep their lives running. Yet behind the headsets, everybody's heart is on the line. Shyam (Sam to his callers) has lost his self-confidence after being dumped by the girl who just so happens to be sitting next to him. Priyanka's domineering mother has arranged for her daughter's upscale marriage to an Indian man in Seattle. Esha longs to be a model but discovers it's a horizontal romp to the runway. Lost, dissatisfied Vroom has high ideals, but compromises them by talking on the phone to idiots each night. Traditional Radhika has just found out that her husband is sleeping with his secretary. And Military Uncle (nobody knows his real name) sits alone working the online chat.

They all try to make it through their shifts-and maintain their sanity-under the eagle eye of a boss whose ego rivals his incompetence. But tonight is no ordinary night. Tonight is Thanksgiving in America: Appliances are going haywire, and the phones are ringing off their hooks. Then one call, from one very special caller, changes everything. Chetan Bhagat's delicious romantic comedy takes us inside the world of the international call center, where cultural cross-wires come together with perfect pathos, hilarity, and spice. Bhagat's writing is all about offering inside views, via plots intricately tied to the novels' settings. The stories move quickly, the dialogue never stepping out of the colloquial.

Chetan manages to get so many topical issues raised in the due course laced with the humour. Example is the Vroom's assignment on previous job - "Why Don't Politicians ever commit suicide?" In our country actors, scientist, businessmen and commoner commit suicide but had we ever heard a politician committing suicide?" Chetan tries to make it a point that Politicians are not feeling anything and it is unfortunate that our country is being run with people who are apathetic or not feeling towards us. May be Chetan wants to make it a point that because of the apathy by the rulers, our country is unable to get on the tracks of being a model country for the world.

Chetan's intentions are in the right place in the novel, i.e. to make the Indian youth to harness their power, realise that there is much more beyond the "Spending Power" which the Pizzas, Colas and overpriced shoes are targeting at. Chetan wanted to make the alarming call to the Indian youths that they are being corrupted / spoiled by these BPO things with their potentials not being fully utilised. He also had elucidates the racism angle in handling the business calls. The call from the "GOD" makes some valid points to make the Indian youth realise their inner calling. Never mind whether getting a call from GOD is a rational thinking or not, but the questions put forward and the replies are thought provoking.

Throughout the novel, Chetan manages to poke at the women psyche at whatever the chance he gets in the story. Even in the time of distress "Only the women have the special area in the brain which tracks of what their friends worn in last fifty times", "When a girl calls a guy Teddy Bear, she may like that guy but not attracted to sleep with" are a couple to instances to quote for the example of Chetan's humorous take on girls. But through the Radhika's episode he manages to build a positive note for the young women. However when we think of what we had read, we should accept that this book is full of clichés and sometimes kiddish. The men in IT are either reckless or callous, whereas the women in IT are sex fiends. The episode of the WASG gang teaching a lesson to their boss Bakshi is really childish. I too wish that I can access my boss' PC as simple as that. Also the travel angle towards the end of the story is far removed from the reality. Above all the final pages where Chetan means to say that there was a divine intervention in writing this novel is really humorous.

The Bollywood-ish union of Priyanka & Shyam just takes away the magic/sway which Chetan managed to hold till then. To sum it up, One Night @ the Call Centre may not be a path breaking novel, but it reaches its target audiences - Indian youth, without intimidating with complicated vocabulary. Also Chetan had written in such a realistic manner that Indian youth can identify with the same.

❖ "THE THREE MISTAKES OF MY LIFE":-

This book is a good come back by Chetan Bhagat after "One Night @ the Call Centre". The story involves some of the major headlines of early 2000 like the Gujarat earthquake, India Australia test series, and the 9/11 and not to forget the

Godhra train mishap. Apart from cricket, business and religion it also has the mesmerizing love story between Govind and Vidya. A must read for all Chetan Bhagat fans. There are some good and bad points regarding this novel, good points are:-the story is good, since the events are from recent past it's easy to connect with it.

It can be completed in one sitting. And the negative points are: - there are not many surprises, Bhagat hasn't gone away from his typical style of writing, there is less on humour content. The book has fiction (if one thought that it's about Chetan's life, he/she is wrong), sentiment, romance, social message, business, life, relations, and religion and of course Cricket. The unique thing in this book is that Chetan has addressed a sensitive issue in the most sensible way possible. He has presented the facts, narrated a story in a neutral way.

It's the story about three friends Omi, Govind and Ish. The story is presented through Govind's eyes and it's his three mistakes of life that are presented along. Govind is a true Gujarati, interested in coming up on his own in life, through business. Ish is an avid cricket player whose passion lies in playing, teaching and watching cricket. Omi is a priest's son who doesn't have any ambition of his own and just moves along with his two friends. The journey of these simple people in life, how their lives get affected by the worst disasters in Gujarat's history is portrayed in a simple yet efficient way by Chetan. This book also teaches you how your dreams crash into pieces by unexpected events but how with support from people around, you get back on track, focus and rebuild your dreams.

This novel especially comes at a time when people only want to come up with excuses to show or feel how different they are rather than see the common aspects and bring oneness which can keep us together and achieve our common goal of growth, peace and prosperity. The language is simple, it connects well with the youth of India, the narration has improved, and all in all Chetan has improved in all the departments of writing a book. He has again proved that to be a best novelist you don't need fabulous vocabulary or you don't need awesome critics review, all you need is a thread to connect to the plain minds of people. Truly his best book ever.

To sum up it can be said here that this book too has the same type of narrative storytelling, the homely Indian girls trying to lose their virginity and the so called boys felling shy and guilty after having sex with them.....Neha in 'Five Point Someone' and Vidya in '3mistakes of my life'...., well there are many people out there and each person's life is a different best-seller on its own. But it's only a handful who actually sits down to write it boldly and get it published. No matter what the ulterior motives are. Chetan writes in his simple, charming vocabulary with the lingo of typical Indian youth- with his homework done he has again published a good book; and got his work out there in the market. No doubt the book is good, and induces curiosity. It can be said that Overall it's a good book. Chetan has been clever by stating 3mistakes and you keep flipping the pages for knowing the other two as the 1st mistake you'll come to know quite soon. It's a book with nice ingredients of real events and fiction perfectly cooked for a delicious dish. No mistake in giving it a read.

❖ . TWO STATES- THE STORY OF MY MARRIAGE :-

'Two states: The story of my marriage' is a novel written by Chetan Bhagat. Although the story is fictitious but it is related to each and everyone who is in love with a person who is not from their own religion or caste. It's a story of a Punjabi boy Krish who falls in love with a Tamil girl Ananya while pursuing his MBA at IIM Ahmadabad. As the two belong to extreme cultures (North - South) of India, what follows is tension and drama with happily married ending. Both of them knew very well that their respective families won't accept their love but they were determined enough to convince their parents. This is actually a good thing that first we convince our parents about our life partner and then get married. Parents must also understand their child's feelings. Of course we also want our parents' blessings and want them to be happy on our marriage day.

The novel tells us that how both Krish and Ananya had to work hard to get their parents ready for this marriage. Here, in this novel, Chetan Bhagat has tried his level best to raise two major issues; namely- the generation gap at first place and inter caste, rather interstate marriages as a second major issue. The first issue is confronted in the novel where we come across Krish and his father and get to know that both are not on very good terms with each other, reason being Krish's father is a very strict disciplinarian who never even hesitates to beat or maltreat his wife on certain occasions.

Then there is a burning issue of inter caste marriages. It is one of the prominent and serious problems of the day. Even today people are not in favour of marrying their wards in other caste or religion. Still the mentality of present day parents has not widened to that extent they may accept a boy/girl of another community as their son-in-law or daughter-in-law. We all are very much aware of the news regarding honour killings in various places/states which are being telecasted on many television news channels. So, in a way, Chetan Bhagat has tried to bring this problem of inter caste marriage into lime light.

To sum up it can be said that there is a mixed kind of reaction for this novel from the readers' side- The language of the book is as simple as 'Amar Chitra Katha', and the story as predictable as Anurag Basu's 'Kites'. Without commenting on the writing style of Chetan Bhagat, let us come directly to the story of 'two States...' the story seems to be an amalgamation of hit Bollywood films like 'Ek Duje Ke Liye', 'DDLJ' and even some B grade movies. The story begins from the IIMA where the protagonist Krish (- a filmy name), a Punjabi boy meets a Tamil Brahmin girl. It was a crush at first sight, love at second meeting and sex follows few weeks later.

So after all this love, sex and high Bollywood kind of campus affair, both passed out from college and planned to marry.

The big objection in the families, boy's mother wants a big fat Punjabi wedding and Punjabi match and girl's parents want to marry her with a person with truckloads of degrees; boy moved to Delhi and girl moved to Chennai, got job. Then there is again no twist in the tale. Boy comes to Chennai to win the heart of girl's parents. Between this there are some office part, a weak boss and load of sex....till now you might have seen the designer marriages on cinema but Chetan Bhagat has brought marriage alive on the print. At least more than twenty pages have been spent on

showing the Punjabi marriages. There is a part showing troubling father-son relationship, saucy parts where mamas, mausies, buas and some funny situations may entertain you. But overall it can be said that language, content and style of writing are not up to the mark.

❖ REVOLUTION 2020 :-

'Revolution 2020' is again typical Chetan Bhagat kind of story of three young persons - Gopal, Aarti and Raghav. As usual, this time as well the names of the main characters have been taken from Hindu mythology. The story is about Gopal's consistent failures to crack an entrance exam which would help him a clean entry in an IIT. He loves a girl Aarti, who considers him just as a best friend and is in love with Gopal's childhood friend Raghav. Gopal tries to propose Aarti on many occasions but every time Aarti forbids him to do so. Raghav is a great success to crack the entrance exam and then to be popular among his college students. Gopal- a loser, an utter failure in life, chooses unfair means to become rich, powerful and big man. Raghav, even after having taken admission to one of the renowned universities of our country, is much interested in journalism. And while at his university campus as well he keeps on bringing about awareness among his college students about the loop holes of the system- may it be the malfunctioning in the college mess kitchen or some other issues.

As is Chetan Bhagat's basic nature of raising some social issues in his writings, in this novel as well he has raised certain issues. He has chosen Varanasi or Banaras a sacred and most revered city of India, this time as a main place of action. Perhaps he wanted to show that the people of such a small and with a religious bent of mind can also have high hopes and aspirations. Then he has shown through Gopal and his father, how parents project their dreams on their children, do a hard labour for the sake of the settlement of their wards, even take loans on very high interests just for the sake of the betterment of their kids and the moment they come to know that their hard earned money has been wasted by their worthless children, how they lose hopes and many of them may die consequently as did Gopal's father.

On the other hand, through Gopal's character, Chetan Bhagat has tried to show how some dedicated children try to come up to the expectations of their parents but due to just one flaw in their personality, how they are very much prone to go off the right track and face failure and hence to become the reason for their parents' embarrassment or at times...death.

The natural instinct of youth to become rich and powerful, the corruption in the field of education by showing the business of opening private colleges or by showing the scene of a trade-fair by various private engineering colleges, where the losers like

Gopal or other students who could not prove their worth by cracking the entrance exam of JEE or AIEEE, can easily get an admission and that too at a good bargain with the deans or directors of those colleges, has been very well shown. Then the corrupt politicians who, on the basis of their social position and power get the things done in an objectionable manner have been shown.

To sum up, there is a mixed kind of feeling i.e. the story again revolves around IIT's, characters taken from Hindu mythology, a love story with a sacrifice towards the end, there hardly seems to be any revolution, because it is Raghav only who has been shown a bit active to raise his voice about all the oddities in the society. The language as per moral value grounds is not so good. This also has a resemblance with earlier novels, no novelty at all, and story is quite predictive. But one thing is sure that Chetan Bhagat is the favourite author of the youth. The reason being, he writes mostly in a simple, easily understandable and particularly the language of the youth- which is partly informal, abusive and trendy. He cannot lose his place in the minds of the young people and it would not be an easy task for another contemporary novelist to beat Chetan Bhagat. It's okay that there are some flaws in his writings, he is not a mature writer as Anita Desai, R.K.Narayan or Arundhati Roy- to name a few, but no one is perfect. Perhaps in the coming years he may learn a lot from his surroundings and try to come out of his confined walls of IIT or engineering and cheer his readers with a new issue and new style of writing.