
“Modernization of Ethnicity”- in the Novels of Chetan Bhagat

Mrs. Ashvini Joshi

*Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Sri Satya Sai College of Engineering, Bhopal*

Abstract:

Campuses across the country have become a fertile ground for fiction. After the turn of the IITs and the IIMs, the trend is now catching up in JNU. The young alumni of various colleges around the country are in the race to write the greatest Indian campus novel. These novels are a huge success among the alumni fraternity, college goers and those who wish to set foot in those campuses. They give a sense of déjà vu and are selling like hot cakes.

Most college novels have simple narratives and are spun around study pressures, social integration and a romantic twist. They have a comic undertone and deal with issues that college goers have often faced. They make the reader relive his own experiences in a delightful way. At times events are exaggerated and not entirely factual. But it makes for a lighthearted read at the end of a tiring day, which is what most of us look for. In the next few months, novels revolving around the IIM, IIT, DU and the Law Campuses are expected to hit the market.

“Modernization of Ethnicity”- in the Novels of Chetan Bhagat

The trend of ‘Campus Novels’ as they are called, started with the phenomenal success of Chetan Bhagat’s **Five Point Someone**, which is claimed to be a bestseller having sold a million copies worldwide. This novel may not compare with F.Scott Fitzgerald’s **This Side of Paradise**, a great American novel about college life, but has created a whole new market for campus novels in India. It has also turned non-readers into ‘neo-readers’. The latest in campus novels include JNU: **Something Of A Mocktale** by Soma Das, a former post-grad student at the university. Her book takes a look at JNU politics and culture that is characterized by jeans, kurta and jhola. Harishdeep Jolly, an alumnus of IIM Bangalore is the author of **Everything You Desire: A Journey Through IIM**, a book, which deals with the

issues of career and relationships. **The Inscrutable Americans** by Anurag Mathur, published nearly a decade ago still remains hugely popular. Other novels creating a buzz on the campus include **The Funda of Mix-ology** by Mainak Dhar, **Mediocre But Arrogant (MBA)** by Abhijit Bhaduri **The White Tiger** by Arvind Adiga and **Above Average** by Amitabha Bagchi.

Publishers of these novels say that every month they are flooded with dozens of manuscripts of campus novels set in the countries famed colleges and universities. Those that get published are low priced and have catchy titles. An imaginative cover design and an effective PR drive help in making these novels bestsellers. Major publishers are encouraging young writers to come up with good manuscripts in the hope of getting a bestseller.

Literature is not only a soothing pill, which calms down anxiety of mind. It also works as a proactive pill, which stimulates the mind to bring innovative changes in the patriarch society. Bhagat considers literature as a provocative pill, which works as a strong stimulant to the human mind. Bhagat enthuses the youth to purge untainted obstinacy of the social system. Bhagat strives to portray the mental stirrings of his personnel. His characters read the words and foresee the action. Chetan Bhagat has merged both highbrow and lowbrow genres into one, which is now approved as best-seller genre of the Indian English literature. He has endowed the genre with healthy humour and sanguine approach to life. Bhagat writes about the youth and specifically for the youth. However, the people of all age groups love to read him. He writes so simple that everyone likes him. "...Bhagat has touched a nerve with young Indian readers and acquired almost cult status."¹

Bhagat's novel has the theme of present day outgoings. He writes on the present issues of modern society. His novels are not political or sociological in character but are engaged in exposing the labyrinth of the human mind and indicating the ways to psychological fulfillment. Thus his themes tend to wedge off the track of novelists. Each aspect merges with the other and sometimes one finds a number of themes woven together. Using these themes as a foundation the writer is able to build up his characters in to a significant whole.

Chetan Bhagat is straightforward in his approach to life. He listens to the voice of his soul, which he strongly believes in, is ever true. Chetan Bhagat's novels are thus increasingly bold attempt to discover the meaning of life. They try to devise ways and means for eliminating the discrepancy between the individual's pursuit and his fulfillment. Bhagat's heroes are

lovely misfits in the world in which they have to live and face the meaninglessness of life. His characters just want to enjoy the life to its fullest. Though they are not religious or saintly, they are humble enough to learn lessons taught to them by life's problem. While experiencing the normal claims of love and hatred, doubts and dilemmas, they try to face challenges of their meaningless life by outstripping the narrow confines of their distraught selves.

Bhagat advises the people to stop looking at pleasure and enjoyment as sin. Human life is limited and if we don't enjoy our time here, what is the point of it. In fact, many say, sex is against Indian culture, a bizarre notion for a country where the great sage, Vatsayan was born. It is shameful to ignore it (sex) in the country where the people worship Kamdev, the god of love and sex. The Lord Rama was learnt to take his wife into the exile and madly loiter in her search when she is missed, and the Lord Krishna was supposed to have played raasaleela with the beautiful young maidens on the banks of the river Yamuna. Bhagat believes in sanctity of sex, that he validates referring to the Holy Scriptures of Indian culture. He says, "Our ancient texts such as the Upanishads discuss sex in an explicit manner. The Mahabharata refers to Drupadi's polyandry. The temples in Khujarahoh leave little to the imagination".²

Bhagat seems sad over the man's attitude changed towards holiness of the creative force of life (sex) during the span. No other writer of the past but Bhagat sanctified sex. In almost all his novels he nicely portrays this physical bonding. In the novel **The 3 Mistakes of My Life** after getting engaged physically at the age of seventeen only, Vidya admits, "wow, I am an adult and am no longer a virgin, so cool."³ Teenage girls can be unbelievably evil. You won't believe the kind of things they can say.⁴

Bhagat has installed it in the willingness of the woman. Bhagat tries to show the actual position or condition of today's society. Society has been changed from normal to modern aspect. Bhagat has served it as the unifying force. His men and women perform it and break virginity knot without social rituals. At last, they either get married or committed to live together happily without any conditions and norms.

Bhagat has valued it with many accolades as 'spark', 'instinct', 'the inner voice', 'the higher power', 'the ultimate super power', 'the inner call' etc in his novels, blog and columns. It

seems that Bhagat does not believe in any deity personified by man. His protagonists are never spotted to go to temple. In **The 3 Mistakes of My Life**, Govind calls himself an ‘antagonist’. However, the man believes in the supreme force. Shaw never went to Church as he grew conscious of the hypocrisy of the shrine. Like Shaw, Bhagat has perceived the force working in woman, specifically in her natural instinct. He has frankly discussed woman’s dynamism in his all novels. He has focused mainly two characteristics of his men and women –daring and astonishment towards sex and life. These are the salient attributes of the life force also known as liveliness. Bhagat seems to believe that the youth bestowed with these virtues can bless the society with the world citizen i.e. the super human being. Bhagat’s men and women sincerely serve the ultimate purpose of the life force. The purpose goes here: “Woman must marry because the races must perish without her travail...”⁵

In Bhagat's writing the feelings of youths for friend, love, nuptials, and sex is not at all touching or emotional; on the contrary it is quite sporty. Love, as it is an emotion, the young age group feels the vibrations of it every now and then. In his debut novel **Five Point Someone**, the romanticism and the love affair of Hari and Neha, the daughter of Prof. Cherian is noteworthy. Hari gets ready to do anything for his lady love. Neha’s character is a sensitive portrayal of what it is like to be young and female in an overprotective, patriarchal world. Of course, just when Hari gains her trust and they both made love i.e. loses their virginity before marriage and feel content “Half an hour later we lay on the bed, spent but completely content.”⁶

Vroom in the novel **One Night @ the Call Centre** loved Esha, and proposed her three to four times, and she kept rejecting him all these times. Even though it is so, they work together and maintain quite a healthy friendship. Shyam and Priyanka had been in relation ever since their college time. When they thought that they should break up, they formally come together and put a break to their relationship. Ultimately after all said and done they come together, and decide to marry but the things that happen in between show us the changed relation equations of our time. Shyam as he says wanted to 'move on', a new terminology in the subject 'Love', develops a casual love relationship with another girl at the call center. A marriage proposal of an NRI working in Microsoft, entertains Priyanka's fiancée for the time being but when she learns about the baldness of the guy, her affection turns once again towards Shyam.⁷ The novel exposes filth of the modeling industry. Esha was assured with a

modeling contract if she sleeps with a designer for a night. She offers herself but she could not get the contract.

In **The 3 Mistakes of My Life** we see how Govind and Vidya fall in love with each other and indulge in sex every now and then and keep their accounts of physical relationship update for the ready reference. Krish and Ananya in **2 States The Story of My Marriage** fall in love with each other in a strange way. At IIM Ahmadabad, they started studying together in Ananya's room. Krish could not concentrate on his studies, as every time his attention would be caught by Ananya's looks. Out rightly he told her so and the relationship got started quite surprisingly. Particularly in this work, Love marriage and sex in case of Krish and Ananya come together in a more mature way. They love and want to marry each other because they share a mutual understanding, one of the major components in marriage. They look at sex as a but- obvious thing in love. That is why they indulge in sex every now and then, “Needless to say, one thing led to another and within two weeks we had sex”.⁸

In **Revolution 2020** both Aarti and Gopal comes closer to each other, crossed the limits of friendship and came too close and become one, at the hotel room. In spite of having fiancée, Aarti indulge in Physical relation with Gopal in spite of knowing that the happening is wrong. “This isn't right, Gopal, she panted biting my lower lip”⁹

Thus all the fictions depict an metropolitan reality that the young generation is more in favour of love marriages than in arranged ones. The attitude of this generation towards sex is not laden with guilt. They look at sex as a way of expressing their love for their partner.

Hence, Chetan Bhagat has deftly portrayed the element of Modernisation of Ethnicity in his all the novels. His women use all tactics to serve the female instinct. However, they do not serve it for their own benefit but for the welfare of the society. They incarnate the new woman, who chides the man for feminine behaviour. They come out as the icon of vitality and bravery for the young women. They always take initiative in the courtship. Thus, they break the social protocol –man ever chases woman. They are the chasers and the men are the chased. Bhagat is the first writer among his contemporaries who has delineated woman as the hunter and the man as the quarry under her blind fury, moreover for the higher purpose. No doubt that he writes according to the things keep in mind related to present circumstances of the society.

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