



Representation of Urban Youth in the Works of Chetan Bhagat

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Abstract

The immense focus on contemporary issues in India has led to Chetan Bhagat being considered a postmodern writer, the novels focus on several challenges which the youth of the country have to face due to the cultural transition and the Western influence on the people. The article has primarily focused on the novel "Revolution 2020" as the novel accurately depicts the problems with the educational system and corruption within society. The other works of Bhagat have also been assessed within this research to show how the youth chase their ambition and material success, they are ready to sacrifice their morals to meet their needs. Urbanization has led to many young adults having to move into corporate spaces and big cities, hampering both their commitments and relationships. The challenges which the changing times pose to traditional Indian values have also been shown, due to a lack of morals, both men and women actively cheat and partake in socially unacceptable relationships. The disillusionment of the educational system and the loss of identity are some of the significant challenges that have been addressed in the work. The study is also significant as Bhagat shows that modernity promises success and growth to an individual, yet the social challenges and expectations lead to many failing to achieve them.

Keywords: Chetan Bhagat, Revolution 2020, culture, transition, tradition, modernity, postmodern challenges.

1. Introduction

Chetan Bhagat is a contemporary Indian writer who focuses on the social evils present within India, the novels showcase the academic pressure, fierce competition and corruption which the youth have to face. The Western influence on the urban youth has led to

a cultural transition where they are forced to question their own identity and ambitions. In this turmoil, they are in a clash between personal desires and societal norms. In the present research, the postmodern challenges which the youth within Bhagat's novels have been presented to depict the multifaceted socio-

cultural aspects. It has been found that the works of Bhagat essentially focus on the middle-class people of the society, and in doing so, the author can show the sociocultural aspects of the urban youth.

2. Cultural Transition as Depicted in Chetan Bhagat's Works

Chetan Bhagat through his novels has continued to provide social commentary on the changing cultures in India and the struggles which the Indian youth have to face in navigating through the traditional expectations and modern ambitions. The novel "Revolution 2020" is a good example in this context as the novel reflects on the societal norms in India and the challenges and transformations that the country and the youth face. The novel shows the intricate connection between corruption, love and ambition, the story takes place in Varanasi, one of the oldest cities struck in traditionalism and religious beliefs. The character Gopal is shown as a foil to the character of Raghav, from being pressured by his father to pursue a career he never liked to fall into corruption, Gopal represents everything that is wrong with society. Raghav on the other hand, is treated as the mouthpiece of Bhagat and shares his beliefs and ideals, he works hard to save the city and the educational system from corruption. Kurupati and Nagarjuna (4) have argued in their research that Bhagat has shown that although the educational system is considered the key to the success of society, it has become a place for malpractice and corruption.

The cultural problems that are taking place in the country have been shown in a more direct approach by Bhagat, the novels are grounded in the Indian socio-political contexts to emphasise contemporary Indian society. The theme of the novel is individuals colliding with prevalent systems in society. In many of Bhagat's novels, the youth can be seen prioritizing ambition and material success over their morals, this shows the transition which is slowly taking place in society. The problems

with the educational system can be seen in Bhagat's first novel "Five Point Someone" which explores students who are oppressed by exams and can go to any extent to get admitted to the Indian Institute of Technology. Not being able to qualify causes them guilt and disappointment, causing some to commit suicide. The novel "2 States: The Story of My Marriage" narrates the social division which continues to exist in modern-day India and the problems which the youth faces with inter-caste marriages (Chatterjee, 71). Much like the other novels, "Revolution 2020" also focuses on the middle-class population and the problems they face.

The novel depicts how the socio-economic scenario within the country has been changing, the book has been inspired by A.P J Abdul Kalam's "India Vision 2020", and Bhagat has constantly tried to break the social barriers and helped the characters raise their voice against evil. Aarti can be seen working late night shifts, something which was unthinkable in India until a few years ago. The economic circumstances of the country continue to change and this has also contributed towards changing the lives of middle class families (Chatterjee, 77). The protagonists who are from middle class families have a hunger to establish themselves and acquire a life of security and prosperity. While Aarti and Raghav come from upper middle class and rich families, Gopal represents the lower middle class (Chaudhari, 107). Gopal's father was a retired teacher and therefore he spent all his money and forced Gopal to pursue an engineering career against his will because it is safer than taking a bachelor's degree from a state college. The desperation and the need to survive and prosper can be seen through these examples.

Another example of the cultural transitions can be seen through the character of Esha in *One Night @ the Call Center*, like many young Indian women, she is inspired by the Bollywood culture and leaves her family behind. She works at the call centre not because

she likes the job but because she needs to support herself while fulfilling her dream of becoming a model, material wealth and hunger for success lead to her acting this way (NM and Merin, 25). Esha represents the young, fearless and aggressive women of the country, who are a product of the cultural transition that has been taking place.

Urbanization of India has led to many young Indians having to migrate, when Gopal fails to enter an engineering college in Varanasi, he is forced by his father to move to Kota for tuition classes (Das, 75). Gopal says "What I really want is not in Kota, I am leaving it behind in Varanasi", the need to move to urban spaces for economic liberalization leaves a toll on the people as seen through the character of Gopal and it also puts a strain on the friendships and relationships that they share. The impact which cultural transitions have on women has also been shown through Aarti, she cheats on Raghav to satisfy her selfish needs. Later she is shown to be filled with grief for the fatal error in judgment (Das, 76). Bhagat has presented Aarti's liberal outlook on life and love to show the younger generation of women want to live their lives to the fullest.

3. Postmodern Challenges Faced by the Characters in Chetan Bhagat's Novels

Chetan Bhagat is a symbol of post-modern writers in India, all of his novels discuss critical social issues in India which impact the life of the youth in different ways. Right from his first novel "Five Point Someone", Bhagat has criticised the educational system and the rampant corruption in all sectors of society, the grading system which is used to judge a student's potential only cares about the marks they have obtained and not the skill which they possess (Rao, 307). According to the author, every student has special skills and therefore they should not entirely be judged by the GPA that they have received, this restricts other potential students from measuring their skills. The disillusionment and fragmented ideas of

postmodernism are also visible in the novel *One Night @ the Call Center*, Esha dreams of being a model despite being stuck working at the call centre. Varun has a fondness for vehicles and merely does the job to maintain his social status. The military uncle and Radhika have familial issues, each of the challenges being post-modern, the non-public nature of these problems leads to them having to suffer alone.

"What Young India Wants" is the first non-fictional work of Bhagat and in the book, Bhagat has discussed these post-modern problems in more detail. The book discusses problems with poverty, joblessness, violence and religious fundamentalism, Bhagat suggests the younger generation to sacrifice pride and pleasure for values to navigate their way in these changing times (Rao, 313). Corruption within the sphere of private education is so common in India that people have accepted it to be the norm. The novel "Revolution 2020" shows how it is for private players to open engineering colleges with the help of corrupt politicians. The pitiful conditions of these colleges are shown by Bhagat, these colleges are created to provide education to the students who cannot enter state-owned colleges, but instead charge large sums of money from the families (Radha, 194). Middle-class families of post-modern India are disillusioned as they consider having a good education will help them with a successful career (Gayathridevi and Deivasigamani, 93). Yet through the characters of Gopal and MLA Shukla, Bhagat shows that education is not needed to become successful and powerful in India.

Chetan Bhagat through his novels has also shown that the youth are constantly struggling to find their own identity, the burden of becoming successful under the Western influence of post-modernism and having to balance traditionalism makes it particularly hard for the youth of the country. Gopal is seen to always be in a state of anguish as in the early parts of the novel, as he is burdened to meet his father's desire to become an engineer and

establish his own identity (Das, 76). The novel shows the unfair nature of society, the youth are constantly struggling to belong somewhere and to fulfil their ambition. The characters within the novels are constantly involved in their battles (Games, 9), Gopal is seen fighting a losing battle against getting into an engineering college, and later Raghav is seen fighting against the social conditions when he exposes MLA Shukla for his corruption. The modern Indian youth as shown through the character of Gopal are ready to go to any extent for money, they sacrifice their ethical value in this pursuit.

4. Representation of Indian Modernity and Postmodern Challenges in Bhagat's Works

In the works of Bhagat, modernism shows the fading of tradition, community and collective identity aspects from the Indian society. Chetan Bhagat is treated as a youth icon in India and therefore his novel's satire on the effects of modernism and the postmodern challenges of it on Indian values. The novels show that the population are exposed to Western values and ideals and this alienates them from their traditional values. The values of love, respect and kindness have been replaced with personal desire and greed. The novel "Five Point Someone" has shown the changing dynamics in society, a wide gulf exists between the family members, the father of the protagonist Hari is short-tempered and this strains the relationship with his wife and son. Marriage was once considered a sacred union, yet the relationship between Hari and his girlfriend Neha breaks all traditional conventions (Tantry, 694). They are constantly involved in illegal activities and in doing so they consider themselves to be open-minded. The family of Alok also stray away from traditional roles, they ignore their responsibilities as parents, leave their children alone and spend most of their time outside the country.

The ideas of modernity promise success and growth, however, Bhagat has shown that these ideas are mere disillusionment. Gopal's

father forced him to take up engineering to secure a future for Gopal, but this only pushed him towards defeat and corruption. Modern India and family conflicts are both inseparable, Gopal's father and Ghanshyam-ji are brothers yet are fighting court cases against each other, and the conflict between the two brothers spills over the larger narrative of the novel (Chaudhari, 108). Bhagat has accurately depicted the survival needs of the modern Indian youth, the changing approach of their parents and the need to enrol in private coaching classes to get a chance at joining the government educational institutions (Raviya, 1193). Therefore both the novels "Revolution 2020" and "What Young India Wants" are representations of the postmodern realities of Indian society (Sathyarani and Bharathi, 31). Modernistic ideas do not allow people to express their own choices. "Revolution 2020" shows the inner world of the consciousness of the youth and how without proper guidance and the absence of definitive ideologies and values, they fall victim to fragmentation and corruption.

However, Bhagat has also shown the other side of modernity, the protagonists generally avoid choosing rigid career paths and do not have unquestioned political loyalty. Unlike Gopal, Raghav gets into an engineering college and gets a degree, yet he leaves it behind to become a journalist, a less conventional career choice. Through Raghav, Bhagat has shown the Indian youth do not follow rigid social orders and are capable of making their own decisions. Choosing this career and wanting to expose the truth leads to Raghav facing many troubles from political parties, yet he stays firm and even opens his daily newspaper named "Revolution 2020" to expose the rampant corruption within the educational sector (RAJEST and SURESH, 60). Likewise, the circumstances of Gopal lead to him falling victim to corruption, yet he does not have loyalty towards MLA Shukla. Gopal helps Raghav in his journey of exposing the truth. The changing ideas of modernity have brought in

fluid and fragmented ideas among the youth of the country, Bhagat believes that providing them with proper values and guidance can help the urban youth establish themselves against the postmodern challenges.

5. Bhagat's Vision for the Modern Indian Youth

Bhagat understands the problems of post-modern India better than most other contemporary Indian writers and therefore through the novel he wishes to construct the inner consciousness of the youth. Through the example of Gopal, it can be seen that although his circumstances have led to bad decisions, he ultimately decides to do the right thing by fixing the relationship between Raghav and Aarti. The absence of ideologies and proper values has made him stray away initially but the choices made by Gopal near the end of the novel show that all hope is not lost. "Revolution 2020" is used by Bhagat to show that the youth of the country is a beacon of hope and a symbol of change (Sathyarani, 303). Through the books "What Young India Wants" and "Making India Awesome", Bhagat stresses the need to empower the women of the country, the youth are a valuable asset for the country as well, the country therefore should look after their well-being and developing values that incorporates both traditional and modern components.

"What Young India Wants" discusses the great Indian dream of the author, Bhagat dreams of a nation which is not constantly divided by caste, creed and colour. Bhagat through these works has acknowledged that politics, terrorism and problems with the educational system are raging issues within the Indian society, yet he remains hopeful that the conditions will improve. The youth are key to transforming the country, they can force the political parties to be more accountable for their actions (Sathyarani and A. R. Bharathi, 29). Bhagat further says that the corporate political nexus is what's responsible for keeping the country poor, milking the unfair system and

using the opportunities for personal needs. The purpose of the works is therefore to improve the Indian psyche to annihilate the injustice and divisiveness present within the society.

6. Conclusion

The article has explored some of the main themes that are observed in the works of Chetan Bhagat, the society, politics and youth of the country are undergoing a massive shift under the waves of modernism. This has raised significant post-modern challenges within the society, of Bhagat, through several depictions showing that the youth are constantly stuck between traditional and personal morality. The present research showcases many of these problems and solutions proposed by Bhagat to improve these challenges. The need to introduce new values for the Indian youth has been discussed in detail within the study making each person responsible and accountable.

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