

## Original Article

### Relevance of Chetan Bhagat in understanding the issues of Youth in Post Modern Indian Society

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#### Abstract

*Chetan Bhagat's fiction represents the voice of postmodern Indian youth navigating the complexities of globalization, cultural change, and identity formation. His novels mirror the socio-cultural realities of twenty-first-century India, portraying middle-class aspirations, educational pressures, interpersonal relationships, and moral dilemmas. Through relatable characters, simple language, and accessible narratives, Bhagat captures the cathartic experiences of a generation influenced by consumerism and digital transformation. His works such as Five Point Someone, One Night @ the Call Center, The 3 Mistakes of My Life, 2 States, Revolution 2020, and Half Girlfriend explore themes of love, career, social mobility, and cultural conflict. While critics question the depth of his characters and moral stance, Bhagat's storytelling continues to resonate with young readers, offering insight into the changing values and aspirations of postmodern Indian society.*

**Keywords:** Chetan Bhagat, Social change, Socio-cultural realities, Themes, Religion, Women's portrayal

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#### Introduction

The popularity of Chetan Bhagat in the first two decades of the twenty-first century is phenomenal. The success of his novels almost created a league for himself, as a result when we have a critical look at the Indian literary scenes of this era, we find him a poignant subject of study for critics and readers. The commercial success of his novels also suggests that the majority of the themes and the messages associated with the themes were universal. The present article is an attempt to understand his success and penetration into the heart of the Indian masses with the help of some literary tools. His novels are entertaining, informative, titillating, and inspiring. A generation of readers like them because his tales somehow cover the life and times of these people hailing from the postmodern era. His depiction of various aspects of life and times makes him a master storyteller, creating surreal situations strongly rooted in real-life events and practices (Ali, 2013). Literature Mirrors Society," is a parameter that sets the contemporary relevance of any work of art. The success and the effectiveness of this mirror created by an artistic work can be adjudged on the scale of a catharsis enforced by the narrative or the tale. Catharsis refers to a state of mind where a reader feels a close connection with the happenings that took place in a tale. The condition of catharsis occurs at a point when a reader or a viewer gets engrossed in a tale and starts feeling that this tale belongs to them and they are a part of that universe. On the parameters of success catharsis can be considered as a zenith of success.

An effective tale capturing the hard-core emotions of the protagonist while covering various aspects of their life can become a source of information for historians, sociologists, and anthropologists. In the same vein, it can also be stated that a catharsis enforced by any given tale can also act as a reason for the success and acceptance of the work of art in various fragments of society (Chetan Bhagat's writing Style, 2018).

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The current article examines various aspects of the postmodern life of the Indian youth portrayed in the selected novels of Chetan Bhagat. He indeed is among the most popular contemporary Indian writers who understood the actual thought process of youth studying in colleges and aspiring to play meaningful roles in their families and society at large (Ali, 2013). This article is an attempt to figure out the realistic portrayal of contemporary Indian society in his novels, and how these novels are capturing the aspirations, dreams, hardships, and challenges faced by young Indians.

### **Chetan Bhagat created a showcase depicting the thought process of Indian youngsters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

To showcase the thought process of the youth, the novels selected for this study go as follows. "Five Point Someone," "2 States," "One Night @ the Call Center," "The 3 Mistakes of My Life," "Revolution 2020," and "Half Girlfriend."

To capture this much-coveted thought process factors like poignant themes in the novels, principal characters as they appear, use of vernacular language, and effective narrative techniques to engage the audience are key parameters. A cumulative impact of these parameters finally gives way to the state of catharsis (Chetan Bhagat's writing Style, 2018). Many critics who administer psychological analysis of the text as primary criteria often suggest that Chetan Bhagat's writings can be considered a giant leap in the scene of Indian Fiction. To substantiate this broad statement, they often resort to the fact that he succeeded in catching the attention of Indian youth because his depiction of the youth sensibilities was post-modern in many ways. Broadly it can be stated that themes, characters, and techniques developed by him reflect the socio-cultural norms and realities of postmodern India (Dhruvita, 2023).

While casting a glance upon the works of Chetan Bhagat it can be stated that the novels explore a wide range of sub-topics or themes such as romantic love, friendship as a tool of survival, family ties amidst the chaos, and pertinence of the education system, utility of education in finding a career, role of religion, impacts of politics, presence of corruption, and various other social issues. He adopted a lens-view which was post-modern, his characters were responding to the economic pressures. Their dilemmas were an outcome of the paradoxes caused by the exotic cultures (Dhruvita, 2023). Any study about Chetan Bhagat's effectiveness on the minds of the reader is incomplete without mentioning his special abilities to deal with the complexities of interpersonal relationships and the dynamics of social change caused by this complexity. To understand his source of inspiration in the creation of this amazing literature, a reader needs to understand the crux of his style and rendering of various tales.

### **A brief Introduction of the Author in terms of style and commercial success**

Chetan Bhagat is a renowned "Indian fiction" author and an esteemed columnist who believes in rendering strong social commentary on micro-issues of society. With the help of his novels, he captured the hearts of millions of young readers worldwide, at the same time his columns in newspapers raised some serious and poignant issues related to history, marketing, Government Policies, social issues, and Geo-political issues (E.Anushree, 2020). Youngsters readily accepted him as a fiction writer because most of his novels are adorned with some highly relatable characters. He also won the moniker of being a style icon because of the simple language and gripping plots of his novels. To top the list, he addressed some pertinent social issues in the backdrop and made his novels a masterpiece capturing glimpses of a society from a fresh outlook and a diverse viewpoint. A synoptic overview of the themes and motifs used by the author underlines issues such as love, relationships, education, career, family, and social and cultural conflicts. A qualitative research approach employed for the analysis of these novels should be based on content, character development, plot progression, and writing style. A deeper understanding of simple narratives can surprise us and show us that he has an amazing knack for simply raising complex questions (E.Anushree, 2020).

Instead of coming up with big problems and heavy situations, as a storyteller, Chetan Bhagat relied on smaller problems. None of his characters cribbled about disparity or miseries in big words or heavy-weight Jargons. Most of them are ordinary people chasing petty things in life. The pursuit of happiness in his novels is very realistic; most of the tales are not about great people, and none of the tales follow the stereotypical formula set by the "some are great, some achieve greatness" dictum. He always came up with simple and relatable quests of life, with the help of these simple quests faced by the generation of millennials, he created a universe that can bring catharsis to the mind of a reader. Many critics also second this opinion they feel that most of his works are a shining yet subtle reflection on modern-day issues (Karthik, 2023).

### **Right kind of Catharsis for the "Veja-vu" generation**

At the turn of this century and during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it was difficult to write for this new generation because their observation point was distorted, and their reception of necessary data fields was not organic, it was blocked and confined. As a writer, it was a challenging time for any novel writer because digital distractions were killing the attention spans of the present generation. Chetan Bhagat's writing, particularly his simple presentation and simple yet complex narratives emerged as a harbinger of a new writing style. Under this writing style, he came up with crisp and simple sentences, linear story-telling, and smaller incidences to grab the attention (Karthik, 2023).

"Veja-Vu" is a term coined by Western world linguistics to define the dependence on digital or virtual mediums to realize an "experience." It can also be considered as a derivative of the term "Deja-vu." "Deja vu" refers to a state of mind where a person thinks that whatever he is doing at present is a repetition of the past. Under a "Deja-vu" state of

mind, a person gets the impression that a particular event or happening taking place in his or her life is a repetition of the past. The right parameter to judge a “Déjà-vu” is based on the feelings and experiences associated with the event. “Veja-vu” is similar to “Deja-vu,” however, in the case of “Veja-vu” a person compares the feelings and experiences with a set of feelings that he observed on a virtual medium. Based on this new term psychologists across the world identified a new generation who is dependent on virtual mediums to corroborate life experiences (Botamo, 2024). Even during the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when digital mediums have already overpowered print mediums Chetan Bhagat’s novels are pertinent. The reading experience of the present generation has changed drastically, now they are reading on mobile screens. Some of them are preferring audio-books over conventional books. Even during this era, his writings are pertinent because of their unique connection with the young age readers. Three of his novels have already been converted into full-feature films. Most of these movies met with commercial success as well. This also shows how pertinent he is. Adaption to a film certainly describes that characters and moments depicted in these novels always have the power to create a life-like experience in the mind of a reader .

### **Setting up a keen eye on the socio-cultural norms of the society**

Different aspects of life in modern India were dependent upon the political and economic order that was prevailing at the turn of this century. The emergence of Chetan Bhagan can be attributed to an era where the digital revolution was announcing the arrival of the “digital economy” across the world. It was also the time when some unconventional professions like “Call Centers,” were emerging. The emergence of this new class in India was giving rise to a new set of socio-cultural norms and setting up a tone for the changes that may take up in postmodern society (Bhattacharyaji, 2018). Many sociologists believe that the concept of “Post-Feminism” and “Postmodern India” was an outcome of this call-center boom. To understand this boom, one has to understand some critical factors as well. It is a common belief that to work in a call center, a person is required to learn the phonetics and foreign accent. However, most of them are not aware that call-center training is equally about “learning an exotic culture” as well (Karthik, 2023).

Marketing forces planning to launch Western-world products in India also did the same thing. They also added a cultural superiority with their products. When Chetan Bhagat was presenting his novels he was also witnessing these changes in Indian society. A strong reflection of these changes is visible in his writings as well. Narratives weaved by Chetan Bhagat brought an aspirational value in the life of this new emerging class where he broke some norms of English writing as well. As a general introduction, we can also say that Chetan Bhagat is a popular contemporary Indian author who has written several bestselling novels. His novels often address various societal issues and reflect the reality of postmodern India (S.Kalita, 2008 ).

### **Exploration of Cultural and Social Norms of Postmodern India**

Chetan Bhagat's novels often explore the cultural and social norms of postmodern India. These novels present a strong commentary upon the customs related to arranged marriages, inter-caste relationships, and gender roles. For instance, in his novel “Five Point Someone” we find the character of an IIT professor who believes that his son should carry his legacy and crack IIT exams. His daughter can deliver his dreams by becoming a part of IIT but he is unsatisfied because his son failed in achieving that honour. This characterization comments upon the mindset of Indian society about gender roles. An in-depth study of the character of the father suggests that he was a victim of gender roles. He was not able to see beyond the roadblocks caused by a glass ceiling enforced on the females seeking a career in IIT. At the same time in his novel, One Night @ Call Center, he breaks this myth by creating a female character acting as a breadwinner for her family, that too at a tender age. Both these characters indicate a contrasting reality of post-modern India, a highly educated man is not able to figure out an achiever in his daughter, whereas at the same time, a young girl can win the life for her family simply by the virtue of education. Here it would be pertinent to mention that Education and career aspirations can be considered as central themes in the majority of Chetan Bhagat's novels. He explores the challenges faced by young people in pursuing their dreams and imbibes them as the crux issue in their lives. It was a first-of-its-kind attempt in an Indian fiction scenario where career and problems related to livelihood were imbibed as a key problem in any plot. Before that career career-related problems or class wars presented as a backdrop for various love stories. However, Chetan Bhagat brought them to the forefront, and love stories took a back seat in many cases (Botamo,2024).

It is important to understand that during the last two decades of the previous century, the battle for winning respectful and stable employment became a tough battle for Indians. Liberalization enforced in the year 1991 added fuel to this equation even further. While introducing open skies and liberalization in India, it was believed that liberalization would open more job-related opportunities for youngsters. Liberalization indeed changed this scenario a great deal. However, at the same time, it also raised the bar of aspirations. It introduced Indian youths to a new world where consumerism was holding the keys. The themes of the novels written by Chetan Bhagat also deal with many such situations ( Botamo,2024). The principal characters of “Three Mistakes of My Life” are chasing such types of dreams where they are keen to make it big because they want to live a luxurious life. Complexities related to love life are secondary in their life. The same novel also creates a social commentary when it criticizes the political system. This novel comments heavily on a political system that is taking advantage of social norms to create unrest in society by

twisting the essence of many decisions taken by previous generations of politicians. Chetan Bhagat created a lens view where he commented upon the malpractices of society differently. His protagonists are white-collar criminals, they are not harming society, but at the same time, they are successful because they are a part of a caucus formed by corrupt but successful people.

### **The allegation of “lack of depth in the characters”**

Many critics believe that “literature has this added responsibility of preaching the society.” A writer can take the support of various types of tools about “poetic liberty” and set an ideal tone for the readers. Any writer, mainly writing to entertain and appeal to youngsters should always keep this in mind. Cinema and other mediums also feel the same type of moral obligation. One such example can be seen in recent times when a Punjabi Singer Diljeet Dosanjh received a notice from a state government that he cannot sing songs “praising the consumption of Alcohol” in a particular state. Authorities presented reasoning behind this order by restating the fact that “the state in question is a “dry state” and Alcohol cannot be promoted (S.Kalita, 2008 ). Diljeet Dosanjh took a stand on it and later on made a statement that said that music is universal, and the thought processes of a writer, singer, and reader are universal. Consumption of alcohol should be banned everywhere, only then writers and singers will stop writing songs in praise of intoxication. Chetan Bhagat also faced similar allegations with some of his novels. Some critics that the characters developed him lack depth, the majority of them are serving short-term goals and they are not aware of the long-term consequences of some of the goals. The moral compass of these characters is very narrow and they are least worried about the means and the damages caused by those means. Chetan Bhagat never explained the choices made by some of his characters. The bold behavior patterns of characters inspired other critics to consider his writings as a depiction of “postmodern young India.”

Some critics even said that his literature fails to balance the “moral compass” and idealism. He was blamed for the negative portrayal of Muslims in his novel “Three Mistakes of My Life.” It was said that the tale he presented in this novel was biased in the favour of the Hindus. The same set of critics considered it a convenient depiction of political events, where a particular party was shown in positive light. The tone of the critics was harsh, but readers particularly the youngsters liked the theme and felt a surge of thrill while reading the novel. Many among them even suggested that it is the thrill imbibed in the events that rob their logical thinking pattern for the time being. Amidst all this criticism, Chetan Bhagat also published a unique tale under the title of “2 States: The Story of My Marriage.” Set on the background of a cultural conflict, this novel follows the love story of a couple from different Indian states, and their struggle to overcome their families' cultural differences. In precise terms, it can also be stated that this novel deals with the proverbial theme of “North Indian Culture versus South Indian Culture” in India. Many critics considered it a fresh take on the issue, the story of this novel received praise for its portrayal of inter-cultural relationships and its exploration of themes related to family, tradition, and modernity. However, despite the inclusion of intellectual characters, this novel was criticized because many critics believed that it shows an extreme depiction of South Indian Characters and confined them to funny caricatures (S.Kalita, 2008 ). Cultural differences and failure in breaking the stereotypes. It means that the concept of “Good Muslim ”versus“ Bad Muslim comes into the foray but it fails in painting an equivalent by painting “Good Hindus Versus Bad Hindus.” Critics believed that in his novels, Hindus are soft villains and Muslims are hard-core criminals if they are villains by any chance.

### **Chetan Bhagat is an influencer for the most influential generation in the country.**

To explain the above-mentioned sub-heading it is important to understand the findings of a study conducted by Ms. Ushma Pandya in the year 2020. She conducted a study on, the” exploration of youth in the novels of Chetan Bhagat.” The preface of this study establishes “Youth as one of the most influential generation in any nation, particularly India. After this establishment, Ms. Ushma Pandya stated that youth want transparency and rationality in social order. According to her Chetan Bhagat’s characters can also be judged for the same quality, most of the characters created by him are upfront these characters seldom live in uncertainty. They are clear in the choices that they are making. These characters strike a chord with the youngsters because they are also living in a similar world (S.Kalita, 2008 ). This thought process can be further extended with the help of Mr.Brijesh S. Deshmukh’s study under the title of “Depiction of Youth and Culture in Chetan Bhagat’s Selected Novels.” This study suggests that Chetan Bhagat is not simply a symbol of the new India, but also an enduring figure in postmodern literature. This study suggests that despite addressing the hard facts of life, Chetan’s novel manages to maintain a feeling of pure humor in his writings. This entertainment value associated with the writings makes him a special author and secures his presence in “bestseller spots” of various bookstores.

### **Conclusion**

Chetan Bhagat always wrote for the masses, sometimes he echoed the voice of upper and middle-class people when he denounced the class war in favor of these subjects. His command of creating a commentary between class war-related equations is amazing. However, at the same time, his depiction of certain characters upset some of the readers and won criticism for him. However, the popularity of his novels always states that the majority of people like this type of depiction where characters show a progressive mindset and make wiser and more practical choices in life. Bhagat's



2014 novel "Half Girlfriend" is one such poignant example. This novel explores the relationship between a boy from Bihar and a girl from Delhi. This couple struggles to reconcile their different backgrounds and aspirations in life when they are in love. The novel has been praised for its exploration of themes related to class, education, and language. Chetan Bhagat introduced a "comedy of manners" in some scenes and generated pathos for the readers. However, many progressive women critics criticized this novel for its portrayal of women, they criticized the reliance on clichés, where certain women characters were presented as mere "gold-diggers." Calling someone a gold-digger is certainly an old-school thought process because the current generation identifies as "situationship" where both males and females enjoy this choice of moving in or out of a relationship. It can be stated that Chetan Bhagat defined characters in a different way, which carries the sensibilities and moral compass of the postmodern world. This depiction can be attributed to a strong catharsis that took place among the readers and made him an iconic storyteller of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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