

## **Contemporariness in Selected Novels of Chetan Bhagat**

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### **Abstract:**

Literature is the device to project the human psyche in aesthetically realistic way. A good piece of literature soothes extra ability of the mind. Literature reflects the society as it is. This can be called the power of literature. Because nothing documents the trends in society better than literature. In a way, literature acts as a social reformer. It can be said that literature has so much to offer from the society to the society. The writers are the heralds of this noble practice presenting the true portrayal of the society. Talking about the writers of the modern age, Chetan Bhagat is the one who stands second to none when it comes to the portrayal of the modern age society. Through his fictions and non-fictions, Chetan Bhagat has catered the element of contemporariness to his readers. What he offers is true in present times whether it is about the communal riots, or the generation gap, or the cultural divide, or the corruption in education field. Chetan Bhagat has picked up a particular contemporary issue for each of his novels and has penned it down in a possible humorous manner.

**Key- Words:**Chetan Bhagat, Contemporariness, Literature, Society

### **Introduction:**

Literature is the device to project the human psyche in aesthetically realistic way. A good piece of literature soothes extra ability of the mind. Literature is capable to satisfy a person with ideal fulfilment. A person who fails to achieve a real goal of life, attains it in the ideal world of literature. Even though it is a kind of illusion, the literary striver finds composure and pleasure herein. It is rightly said that “literature is the mirror of the society.” Literature reflects the society as it is. This can be called the power of literature. Because nothing documents the trends in society better than literature. In a way, literature presents the issues prevailing in the society, be it poverty, corruption, inequality or the issues related to women and also gives possible solutions to them. Hence, literature acts as a social reformer. What literature offers to us is the reality of our society in terms of social, economic and political context. A writer performs his or her social duty by making the readers acquainted with the contemporary subjects prevailing in a particular society and a country during a particular timeframe. A writer observes the events around him or her and pens down these events in a certain manner that they touch the hearts of the readers. With sugar coated words, the writer manages to present the contemporary reality of the society be it the issues such as gender discrimination, the discord between the rich and the poor, crime, violence, dowry system and so on.

It has been mentioned in the Encyclopaedia Britannica that,

Like all other human activities, literature also reflects the contemporary social and economic conditions. Starting with class stratification in the beginning, the heroic saga and the national fervour in the middle of the century, the urban reality as well as the psychological issues in contemporary period, literature provides everything which is prevailing in the society (Britannica).

It can be said that literature has so much to offer from the society to the society. The writers are the heralds of this noble practice presenting the true portrayal of the society. They present the society of the ancient times, the medieval times and the modern times. Talking about the writers of the modern age, Chetan Bhagat is the one who stands second to none when it comes to the portrayal of the modern age society. Through his fictions and non-fictions, Chetan Bhagat has catered the element of contemporariness to his readers. What he offers is true in present times

whether it is about the communal riots, or the generation gap, or the cultural divide, or the corruption in education field. He is not only popular but is also a voice of 21<sup>st</sup> century India. Chetan Bhagat's popularity can be measured from the fact that five out of his eight novels have been converted into movies. The Time Magazine has named this young author as one of the most influential people in the world. Chetan Bhagat is the author of eight megahit novels. They are as under:

<i>Five Point Someone: What not to do at IIT</i>	(2004)
<i>One Night @ the Call Center</i>	(2005)
<i>The 3 Mistakes of My Life</i>	(2008)
<i>2 States: The Story of My Marriage</i>	(2009)
<i>Revolution 2020</i>	(2011)
<i>Half Girlfriend</i>	(2014)
<i>One Indian Girl</i>	(2016)
<i>The Girl in Room 105</i>	(2018)

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There is no doubt that Chetan Bhagat talks about the youth and its concerns. However, he has captured the real spirit of life as it is. Along with discussing the problems faced by today's youth, Chetan Bhagat has woven the contemporary issues existing in certain timeframe. To discuss the contemporariness in the novels of Chetan Bhagat, this research paper has selected three novels of the author namely *Five Point Someone*, *One Night @ the Call Center*, and *2 States: the Story of My Marriage*.

*Five Point Someone: What not to do at IIT!* is the maiden novel by the young and popular writer Chetan Bhagat. It was published in the year 2004 by Rupa Publications. The novel revolves around the three boys named Alok, Ryan and Hari who meet at the hostel of IIT in Delhi. The trio has enrolled to Mechanical Engineering. These three strangers become good friends in a few days and their academic journey begins. Ryan is a free minded person and is bored of education system at IIT. He involves Hari and Alok too for sports and hangouts. As a result, the

three of them receive a GPA (grade point average) of five point something right in the first semester end examination. Here appears the title of the novel. The trio is literally a Five Point Someone which is not even an average point. The love story between Neha, a daughter of the Dean and the Professor of the Mechanical Engineering Department, Mr Cherian and Hari goes simultaneously. Neha writes a letter to her dead Samir Bhaiyya and reveals her love for Hari. To help Hari to score well in Cherian's paper, Ryan plans to steal the examination papers from his office. However, the trio gets caught red handed and the Disciplinary Committee suspends them for one semester with 'F' grade to that particular course paper. Alok cannot bear this pathetic situation and tries to commit suicide by jumping off the ninth floor of the institution. After two months, Alok manages to return to the hostel with the signs of recovery. Professor Veera helps the trio to rework on Ryan's lube project and also convinces the Dean Shastri to continue their semester as a research work on an important project. Towards the end, Professor Cherian realizes that his son Sameer was not died of an accident, but he had committed suicide. The reason for his suicide was his inability to qualify the entrance exam for the Engineering at his own college. At the convocation ceremony, Cherian admits his pressure on his son to get into IIT and also admits that how his daughter trusted Hari, a Five Point Someone and not her father, a ten pointer throughout his academic life.

Through this novel, Chetan Bhagat has thrown light on the changed education system. The novel is located in the Indian Institute of Technology and it revolves around the IIT campus only. The author has written this novel in 2004 back in a year when getting an admission to such prestigious universities as IIM and IIT was the only aspiration of the students and the only dream of their parents. The title of the novel suggests a GPA (Grade Point Average) system used in IIT to give a rank to the students. The students who score nine or ten points are called the scholar students who certainly get good jobs with high salaries. Compared to this, the students who receive only five points are usually called the average performers. They are not offered good jobs as well. The central characters of this novel are just five point someone as they receive such poor grades consistently. Even if they have the capacity and are meticulous, the whole institution looks at them as just five pointers. It is also embarrassing to the students who just do not get good grades. They are considered as under performers or the ordinary students with such poor results. This type of grading system lacks a humanitarian approach towards the society. These grades have nothing to do with the students' behaviour and attitude. However, the higher institutions have changed the concept of real intelligence. One can achieve

the highest result and turn into a criminal. At the same time, one can get a minimum result and become a good person. To manufacture the toppers is the only maxim of such result-oriented institutions, no matter how poor these scholars are towards their responsibility to the society or how badly they have failed as good human beings.

Another contemporary topic which Chetan Bhagat has discussed in this novel is the parental ambitions on youth. Overstraining the youngsters with their family duties causes them fall in their life. The parents fail to understand the dreams of their children. Here, the hopes of Alok's family from Alok ruins his life. Although he was desirous to be a painter, the poor financial condition of his house makes him enrol to IIT as he realizes that a painter cannot make a living. He is overburden with his manifold family duties such as getting his elder sister married providing a good dowry, to get his father better treatment, to get his old house repaired and so on. Bhagat has also revealed the madness of parents for more marks for their children. Samir is the quite suitable example of this. In his parting note Samir, mentions his genuine reason for committing suicide. He had tried to qualify the entrance exam thrice to get admission to IIT. However, he was not able to crack it. Samir knew his limitation that he is not made for IIT. However, his father, the dominating dean and head of Mechanical Engineering, Prof. Cherian cannot realize this. Prof. Cherian has failed as a father as he cannot understand the simple reality that his son has meant for some other course or subject. As Samir cannot pass the entrance examination, Cherian has not spoken to him for two long months. Samir cannot encounter his father and he does not want to dishearten him anymore. As a result, he commits suicide leaving the suicide note to his younger sister. Samir found it easier to leave his life than to fail one more time at the IIT entrance examination. In this novel, Chetan Bhagat has covered the theme of parental aspirations along with the changed education system at the higher institutions. Here, parents make great expectations from their sons. Cherian strongly believes that his son should follow his path by entering to the IIT world. examination. At the same time, Alok qualifies the entrance and steps in to IIT, but his mother keeps pestering about his endless family duties which he should fulfil after getting a good result and a good placement.

*One Night @ the Call Center* is the second novel of Chetan Bhagat published by Roopa Publications in a year 2005. The novel revolves around a group of six call center employees namely Shyam, Priyanka, Varun, Esha, Radhika and Military Uncle who are working at the Connexions Call Center in Gurgaon, Hariyana. All the characters are not so happy with their

life. The narrator Shyam Mehra loves but has lost Priyanka as she wants to marry a rich man. He even loses his chance of getting promoted at the call center. Priyanka is now planning an arranged marriage with Ganesh who lives in Seattle, but she is not sure whether she loves him or not. Vroom belongs to separated parents and silently loves Esha. Esha wants to be a model and so keeps trying her luck with various advertisement agencies. However, she realizes the filth of fashion world by being a victim of sexual exploitation. Radhika is in an unhappy love marriage with her husband Anuj who is having an extra marital affair. Moreover, her rigid joint family and a demanding mother-in-law have made her habituated of anxiety pills. The military lives a lonely life as his son has cut his relation from him. His only dream is to talk to his grandson. Along with having certain difficulties in life, all these characters have one more thing in common. It is that they all hate Bakshi, their cruel and somehow sadist boss who keeps giving extra work to his employees, who takes the credit of their hard work and who gives false progress report of them to his high authorities. One such a night, these employees have a lesser number of calls as there is a technical problem on their line. Just to cheer up, they visit the nearest bar and on their way to the call center, Shyam receives a phone call from the God who speaks modern English and gives them suggestions to improve their life. The God also encourages the survivors to settle account with their boss. Two years later, the life of all the employees are thoroughly changed. Shyam and Vroom begins Black Sheep Web Design Company and make slow yet steady profit. Esha continues her call center job but leaves her modelling ambition. Rather, she joins an NGO and helps them for fundraising. Radhika is fighting a divorce case with Anuj. Priyanka continues her job but after six months, she pursue a one-year B.Ed. course.

Through this novel, Chetan Bhagat has revealed one major contemporary issue prevailing in the present scenario. Bhagat penned down this novel in 2005, when the concept of call center was newly introduced to the metropolitan cities. The mindset of people towards the youth working in a call center is pessimist. They have failed to see it as a promising job. Even in the Twenty-First century people have a notion that being a doctor or engineer or teacher is the only esteemed job in society. These are the only positions they can think of when it comes to getting employed. People have a negative mentality that being a call center agent, you can present yourself as a working man or a working woman and it can also earn you money. However, it cannot help you earn distinction in society. Their age-old mentality does not allow them to see the brighter sides of the job at call centers. They fail to realize that it is better to begin with at least some job, rather than remain at home waiting for a big opportunity. This new area of

employment offers the youth a convenience for travelling as well as the flexible work hours. One can continue this kind of job although being associated with any other employment. This kind of job is like a boon for the students who belong to the financially weak families. They can earn their own money and spend it on their better education. Moreover, the agent gets additional money for any extra hour given by the call center. These are the benefits which no so-called reputed jobs can provide to any employee. However, even after a couple of years to the introduction to the call center career, people have a cynic perception towards it. Here, as the protagonist as well as narrator Shyam is working as a call center agent, his family takes him as a 'black sheep' who has not succeeded in his life. Even though Shyam is supposed to get promoted as a team leader, his success can never attract his parents. In his family he is always a subject of comparison be it with one of his cousins who is a doctor or with another one who is an engineer. As a result, Shyam's job or his salary or even he himself is hardly given any attention. His parents hardly feel proud with their son's this kind of success. achievement. The reason why Shyam and Varun name their newly opened company "Black Sheep Web Design Company" lies here. The youth working as a call center agent is considered to be a black sheep to the family as well as to the society. They are looked at as failed persons who have made no achievement in their most energized and youthful days. In such a situation, the youth earn money, they also earn appreciation at their workplace. However, they are deprived of such appreciation and admiration from their own near and dear ones. As a result, the youth feels anxiety, insecurity and depression. Being neglected by their own family, they start losing confident and also consider themselves as useless fellows. As none in the family supports them for making a career in such a different field, the youth becomes a victim of uncertainty and nervousness which lead them to despair. In this novel, Varun hates it to be at his own house as none understands him. Likewise, Priyanka and Radhika have to fight at every stage with their mother and mother-in-law respectively, especially when it comes to working in night shifts. Shyam gains no respect at his house neither from his parents nor from his relatives. He is so neglected person in the family that when he bids them goodbye to go for his night shift, not a single person pays attention to Shyam and they all continue with their work. Military Uncle, who is a retired army man, has already been expelled from his own house by his son and his wife. To make a living, he joins the call center and performs his duty wonderfully well. Out of his age and esteemed career, his colleagues pay respect to him. However, he never receives a word of appreciation from his own son. He even stops him to communicate with his grandson.

*2 States: The Story of My Marriage* is the fourth novel by the popular and young author Chetan Bhagat. The novel was published in a year 2009 by Roopa Publications. The novel shares an autobiographical element as it is based on the real incidents of Chetan Bhagat falling in love with his classmate and finally marrying to the love of his life. Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi boy meets Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil Brahmin girl at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad mess for the first time and they soon fall in love. Being graduated, they both get good job offers at campus placement. They try to introduce their parents to each other at the Convocation Ceremony, but the first meeting does not go so well. On his first posting at Citibank in Chennai, Krish and Ananya plan to meet Ananya's parents. Ananya keeps rejecting the marriage proposals her parents offer to her. Meanwhile, Krish starts winning the hearts of every member in Ananya's family. He starts coaching Ananya's younger brother Manju for IIT entrance examination. Being a marketing person at HLL, Ananya travels a lot and sometime her mother joins her too. At one such a time, Krish assists her father significantly to make a power point presentation for his Bank of Baroda. He helps him making the presentation ready by visiting their home for five days after his working hours at bank. Being truly thankful, Ananya's father offers him dinner, whisky and clothes for a night stay and a daily lift to his bank in his car. Manju is also comfortable with Krish within two months of coaching. Krish also arranges a music concert of Ananya's mother who is a trained classical singer. Finally, the trio accepts Krish to be a part of their family. At Punjab, Ananya tries to mingle with Krish's family. She attends Krish's cousin's marriage and on asking for a big car in dowry, Ananya handles the situation. She makes the groom realize that he should marry the bride only and not the gifts. Impressed by Ananya's intelligence, confidence and a presence of mind, Krish's family accepts her as their daughter-in-law. However, some cultural clashes between both sets of parents make the duo separated. Later, Krish's father sets everything and the couple finally gets married and after a couple of years, they are blessed with twin boys. Here, Krish declares that their sons belong to just one state and that is India.

The cultural clash is the core contemporary idea of this novel. The response of the parents to inter caste and inter religion marriage is uncanny. For them, one should not marry a partner beyond his or her caste. To marry someone beyond his or her state is out of the question for them. In this novel, Kavita forces Krish to marry only a North Indian girl. She is so afraid of her son bringing a girl who is from South India. She has only one explanation that the girl

belongs to a totally different culture, language, and rituals. At the same time, Ananya's parents also suggest her to marry a boy from who is from the same community. They too have a fear that Krish, being a Punjabi boy is not a good match for her. Both sets of parents find a cultural clash as none is ready to accept a new and different culture. They are not even ready to accept the co-existence of any other religion. Kavita prefers North Indian bride only, while Ananya's parents prefer South Indian groom only. They are under the impression that they do it for the betterment of their children. However, they are the ones who are spoiling the happiness of their beloved children. They leave no chance to degrade each other's culture. They find it difficult to accept something new which they have never heard of. They fail to accept the beauty and uniqueness of some other culture. Each family has Punjabi first, Indian later and Tamilian first, Indian later kind of mindset. More than that, both the families even try their best to deteriorate both of them. That is the reason why Krish announces that their twin boys belong to the state called India. Because both Krish and Ananya have undergone a long and hard journey to get the consent of their parents for in inter caste, inter religion and inter-state love marriage.

The orthodox of mindset of the parents for love marriage is another contemporary idea which Chetan Bhagat has talked about in this novel. Being traditional, the parents fail to accept the choice of their children easily. For them, love marriage cannot last long as they all have been the witness of long lasting arranged marriage. This new concept of love marriage cannot be understood by the previous generation. The parents feel deprived of electing their children in law. Moreover, they have a doubt on their children's decision. They are afraid of separation soon after love marriage. Consequently, most of the love stories cannot get promoted to the love marriages. Here, Kavita does not accept the simple fact that her son is in love and so he cannot marry anyone else. However, she still keeps meeting the Punjabi girls living in Delhi. She also tries to convince Krish to marry a girl whose father runs a number of petrol pumps across Punjab. Kavita has no idea how intelligent and strong woman Krish has selected for himself. Rather, she wishes that Krish should change his mind and marry a girl whom she selects. Likewise, Ananya's parents also disagree to the idea of love marriage and they offer a highly intelligent and high salaried Tamil boy to her.

Conclusion:

The particular contemporariness which Chetan Bhagat has selected, is thoroughly seen in all his selected novels. In the first discussed novel, Bhagat has revealed the transformation of the education system and has conveyed the demerits of the monotonous teaching environment at such higher institutions. He has also shown the fatalness of the parental aspirations which can even take the life of a student. In the next discussed novel, Chetan Bhagat has presented the typical attitude of the parents and the society towards the youth working in the call centers. They neglect their own children just because they are not into high profile and high salaried workforce. In the last discussed novel, the major idea which Bhagat has offered is the cultural clashes. How the youngsters find it easy to fall in love; and when they genuinely want to marry each other, the parents spoil their all ideas. Just because they cannot accept the different culture, they are not ready to allow their children for love marriage. It can be concluded that Chetan Bhagat has picked up a particular contemporary issue for each of his novels and has penned it down in a possible humorous manner.

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