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Contemporary Issues in the Novels of Chetan Bhagat: A Study

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Abstract: *This study explores contemporary issues in the novels of Chetan Bhagat. Chetan Bhagat's novels received wide attention in contemporary Indian English literature. He is an icon of youth. This research aimed to investigate various issues of Indian youth and society in terms of caste, gender, corruption, and modern culture. To investigate contemporary issues some of the novels of Chetan Bhagat have been analysed. A quality content analysis is carried out through descriptive methods. The results have revealed that contemporary problems in Indian society especially youths originated from the age-old socio-political, religious, cultural, and educational structure and gender differences.*

Keywords: *contemporary issues, religion, gender, Indian society, etc.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature and language are essential features to understanding the real nature of any society in the world. Both help and provide deep insight. It is found that the human nature is as complex as the external nature. The natural world is fascinating, challenging, mysterious, lively, and appealing so is human nature. There is a close relationship and association between humans and the natural world like literature and language. Both are inseparable. It is well-known that Indian society is one of the oldest societies in the world. It evolved through the centuries. The contemporary Indian society has its nature and significance. There are distinct cultures and sub-cultures in India. "Unity in Diversity" is a unique feature of Indian society. One could find vivid descriptions of this phenomenon in Indian English literature. Many Indian English writers have depicted Indian ethos in their writings. Chetan Bhagat, a contemporary Indian novelist, has given a new dimension to Indian English. He not only raised contemporary Indian issues in his novels but also provided solutions to face modern challenges. The present research paper is an attempt to study Chetan Bhagat's novels in the light of contemporary issues focusing on Indian youth.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many convulsions in the social, cultural, political, and religious history of India. It has been observed that caste-ridden Indian society has its own merits and demerits. Many writers, critics, social thinkers, philosophers, and scholars have highlighted the significant issues of Indian society. Through their work, we can understand that Indian society has many important issues in the past as well as in the present.

In the Ancient Period the language of Vedas, Sanskrit dominated the sphere of knowledge and social life in India. Brahmins solely to be the custodian of Sanskrit whereas Pali and Prakrit languages were used by common people. There were many differences in ancient India such as racial, cultural, and social. Chopra and his co-authors, in their *Social, Cultural and Economic History of India, vol. I*, write:

India—with its vast collection of people differing from one another in physical characteristics, in language and in their way of life—represents primarily all the ethnographical divisions of mankind. (4)

Besides the differences in social, political, religious, language, and other fields both the Vedic and the non-Vedic traditions contributed to and shaped Indian society.

In the Medieval Period, a new social order was established. The feudal society arose and it changed the social structure of India. This period is primarily dominated by foreign invaders and indigenous rulers like Turks, Mughals, Arabs, Mongols, Palas, Harsha, the Guptas, the Pratiharas, the Rashtrakutas, and the Cholas, etc. In this period foreign invaders brought their cultures and they assimilated with Indian culture. Medieval saints, poets, and writers vividly depicted the peace and turmoil of the period.

The Modern Period begins with new scientific inventions and the Industrial Revolution. British came to India and brought their language which is English. They changed the ruling pattern. They started a new political order in India. They opened doors of education for one and all. Earlier it was only for the upper classes. Through English Indians also peeped out the world. It proved valuable for them. From Anglo-Indian literature to Indian English literature a giant leap has been taken by Indian authors. A drastic change could be seen in Indian society as well as in literature.

One could easily find that many changes are happening in the contemporary period all over the world. Information and nano-technology have brought the world literally to the fingertips. New technology also created new issues in society. Indian society is no exception to this. Chetan Bhagat as a contemporary writer observed these changes and issues in society and raised various contemporary problems in his novels.

III. BACKGROUND OF THE PAPER

This paper tries to understand the social, cultural, and other contemporary issues of Indian society. Different cultures are deeply rooted in India. India's social, economic, political, and religious set is different from the West. In India, multi-layered and multi-faceted culture poses social, religious, economic, educational, political, and psychological issues. This paper highlighted contemporary issues and focused on the novels of Chetan Bhagat.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The primary and secondary sources have been used to understand the various issues in Indian society. It has used an analytical and descriptive approach to interpret some of the novels of Chetan Bhagat.

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis and discussion of the paper emphasize the two points. Firstly, it discusses various issues in Indian society. Secondly, it analyzes Chetan Bhagat's novels in the light of contemporary issues focusing on youth and Indian society.

There is a social stratification in Indian society. Moreover, it is an unequal one. Ram Ahuja in his book *Society in India: Concepts, Theories and Recent Trends* states:

In India, both caste and class are used as basis of hierarchical ranking and exist side by side. However, caste, which is rooted in religious belief, is considered a more important basis of social stratification of social, economic, and religious

purposes. 'Caste' is a hereditary social group which does not permit social mobility to its members. It involves rankings according to birth which affects one's occupation, marriage, and social relationships (35).

From the ancient period to modern times, caste dominated all the spheres of Indian society. Many adverse effects could be seen in religious, educational, political, and social fields. The caste system created issues of equality and social justice for the lower castes. It weakened and disintegrated Indian society.

There are more challenges in contemporary society regarding family, marriage, and kinship. Status of women in Indian society is also a big challenge. Women are dominated and suppressed. They are considered as subordinators to men. Poverty, inflation, corruption, and economic inequality are the major issues in India.

One could find a tremendous educational gulf between the rich and the poor. There are so many problems of education in India. Women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes do not get good quality free education. Upper castes and the rich only enjoy the fruits of education.

There is secularism in the Indian Constitution but the right-wing fundamentalists spread hatred in India. Polarization based on religion is a serious issue in India.

Besides the above issues tribal, rural, black money, smuggling, drug addiction, urbanization, sexual exploitation, and many more issues are prevalent in contemporary Indian society.

Chetan Bhagat (b. 22 April 1974) is a contemporary Indian writer and columnist. His fiction and non-fiction have created a stir and craze among youth. He is known for his modern style of writing and unique storytelling technique. His major novels include- *Five Point Someone: What not to do at IIT!* (2004); *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005); *The Story of My Marriage*; *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008); *2 States* (2009); *Revolution 2020* (2011); *Half Girlfriend* (2014); *One Indian Girl* (2016); *The Girl in Room* (2018). His non-fiction includes- *What Young India Wants* (2012); *Making India Awesome* (2015) and *India Positive* (2019).

In Chetan Bhagat's novels, contemporary Indian society and youth culture have a central place. He not only depicted the desires, dreams, and aspirations of youth but raised social, educational, political, religious, cultural, and many more issues of Indian society. Love, sex, romance, power, wealth, life of metropolitan and village youth are the recurrent themes in his novels. He also presented global issues like unemployment, corruption, and women's place in society. In the online platform of Java, the writer states about Chetan Bhagat:

To express his thoughts and opinions about society and young people, he claims that he utilizes literature as an amusement. Both domestic and foreign issues are covered in articles. Chetan's works make the difficulties facing our country very evident, and they regularly even start discussions in the parliament. He has delivered motivational talks at numerous institutions, organizations, and businesses. He is not only a skilled writer but also a skilled, motivational speaker. (Five Point Someone by Chetan Bhagat Summary)

In *Five Point Someone: What not to do at IIT!* Chetan Bhagat tries to bring out a ghastly social structure of Indian society. One could observe the clear-cut division between rich and poor in this novel. The story is about IIT students and their lives which are full of ups and downs. Hari is the narrator of the story. Neha Cherian is Hari's girlfriend. Ryan is from a rich family. Hari and Alok are Ryan's friends. All the protagonists of the novel, have unique personalities. They are all young and represent their generation. They love one another. They study engineering. They have passion for their dreams. Some are losers like Alok and Hari. In this novel family problems play a significant role. Ryan is from a rich family but he thinks that his parents do not love him. It is a major contemporary issue, especially in wealthy families.

While summarizing the essence of the story the writer of the article *Five Point Someone by Chetan Bhagat Summary* writes:

Five Point Someone reveals the negative aspects of our educational system. The Indian educational system emphasizes memorizing facts more than comprehending their meaning. Even if the Indian educational system has many positive aspects, it has some serious flaws. This book's narrative centers on the pupils' anxieties and vulnerabilities. This kind of setup has affected author Chetan Bhagat personally. He has thus made an effort to raise awareness of the important youth-related issues and his main educational philosophy. (Five Point Someone by Chetan Bhagat Summary)

It shows that the contemporary educational system has changed its focus. It is more commercial and private. Youth from poor economic backgrounds do not have any place in this system. It is a serious issue in contemporary Indian society.

The novel, *Half Girlfriend* is a story of Madhav, a Bihari boy who fell in love with a girl called Riya. Madhav is not very good at English whereas Riya speaks English well. Madhav wanted to be in a relationship with Riya but Riya didn't want. She wanted only friendship. Madhav didn't. Riya suggested a compromise. She agreed to be his half-girlfriend. The novel pinpointed the subtle nuances of the young generation. It throws light on love, physical relationships, envy, the psychology of rural and urban people, political, economic, and social conditions, possessiveness, male dominance, women's position and role in the family, bad habits, family relationships, pride, and old and modern lifestyle. A vivid description from the novel can provide a clear picture of this:

My ancestors were landlords and from the royal family of Dumraon, the oldest princely state in British India. When India became independent, the government took away our family estate and left us with an annual pension that declined with every generation. My great-grand-uncles squandered their money, especially since they all felt they could gamble better than anyone else in the world. Several near-bankruptcies later, the women of the house took charge as the men had all turned into alcoholics. Somehow, the women saved the family pride and the haveli. All my cousins had moved abroad, and vowed never to return. My father, the only one to remain in Bihar, held the last title of Raja Sahib of Dumraon. Ten years ago, he had succumbed to a cardiac arrest. My mother, Rani Sahiba Durga Jha, was the only strong-willed person left in the family. She brought me up and maintained the few farms left. She also ran the Dumraon Royal School, which taught seven hundred kids from nearby villages (25-26).

This indicates that there are so many issues related to family, economic conditions, education, and others that are prevalent in Indian society.

The novel *One Night @ the Call Centre* is about six call center employees who work in Gurgaon, Haryana, India. The themes involve the worries, anxieties, and insecurities of the young Indian middle class, such as career, inadequacy, marriage, and family conflicts. The writer of the article "One Night at the Call Centre by Chetan Bhagat Book Review" points out:

It was, perhaps, the very first title written by any Indian novelist that tried to bring forth the issues related to youths in India to the mainstream writings in the 21st-century. Here, *One Night at the Call Centre* takes up the issues related to the young Indians who earn, who learn, who dwell in the metropolitan cities and who dream. (Indian Book Critics)

We can understand the stark reality of Indian youth through the description of the protagonist of the novel. At one incident he asserts:

I'm tired of job hunting. There is nothing good out there. And I'm tired of rejections. Moreover, what is the point of joining another call center? I'll just have to start as a junior agent all over again-without you, without my friends. And let me tell you this, I may not be team leader, but I am happy. I am content. You realize that? And tell your drama

queen mom to come say it to my face that I am a loser. And she can send you off with whichever fucking settled annuity income earner she likes. I am what I am...'I said, my face beetroot-red. (109)

It shows that Indian youth has to face numerous challenges in contemporary society. Youth has no job and financial security. Youth suffers psychologically, physically, and socially.

VI. FINDINGS

This paper has looked into the major issues and challenges of youth in Indian society. This paper has discussed social, political, religious, educational, cultural, gender, and other issues in the context of contemporary India. It thoroughly studied the novels of Chetan Bhagat. In this way, the paper seems significant from the viewpoints of cultural, social, economic, political, historical, and religious.

VII. RECOMMENDATION

The present-day problems and challenges should be addressed at various social, cultural, educational, and political platforms. Other forms of literature like poetry and drama could be studied to understand contemporary issues. To understand the major contemporary issues in Indian society interdisciplinary approach could be used. There is a great need to train more and more scholars in contemporary studies for a deep understanding of emerging social issues and problems.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has given deeper accounts of social, cultural, educational, religious, political, historical, and other issues in Indian society. It has drawn the major issues and challenges that youth face in contemporary India. It discussed and analyzed the novels of Chetan Bhagat who is himself a contemporary observer and creative writer of the modern generation. Indian society is more complex in nature due to its heterogeneous nature. Contemporary research helps us to understand that complex society in a more scientific way. Therefore, such a deep understanding of various issues could be more significant in contemporary Indian society.

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