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Major Characters in Chetan Bhagat's Early Novels

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Abstract

The characters of a novel speak about the mind of the author. Chetan Bhagat has left no space to reveal the circumstances of today's India through his characters. He has been acclaimed as one of the best-selling novelists of the Indian fiction. He has written about modern Indian youths, Indian society, and realism in his novels. He says that novels are entertainment tools through which one can express his views and opinions about society and the youth. In the modern India human behavior changed into lust, greed, hypocrisy, and hatred and these are the major themes of Bhagat's novels. His novels are incomplete without realistic touch. The background in which Chetan Bhagat has written novels is predominantly of the society in the post globalization era. His novels are based on day-to-day happenings in the Indian society so ultimately he has written the problems of Indian society. He has handled the modern situation in proper manner. One cannot deny the possibility of family conflicts in which Bhagat has described. His characters easily get involved in friendship and love and suffer a lot. He takes upon the sensitive issues which concern to the society in his novels ranging from romantic love story to a shocking condition of the Indian multiculturalism. Chetan Bhagat describes here about the characters from different background and society. This paper aims to study the different characters which play important roles in shaping the structure of the novels.

Keywords: Ryan, Hari, Neha, Shyam, Priyanka, Govind, Vidya, Krish and Ananya

Introduction

Chetan Bhagat is an Indian author, columnist, and speaker. He is the author of ten blockbuster novels, *Five Point Someone-What not to do at IIT* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center*

(2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *2 States* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), *Half Girlfriend* (2014), *One Indian Girl* (2016), *The Girl In Room 105* (2018), *One Arranged Murder* (2020) and *400 Days* (2021) and three non-fictions, *What Young India Wants* (2012), *Making India Awesome* (2015) and *India Positive : New Essays and Selected Columns* (2019). All these books have best-seller since their release and some bollywood films like *3 Idiots*, *Hello*, *Kai Po Che*, *2 States* and *Half Girlfriend* took inspiration from these novels. Chetan Bhagat is seen more as a youth icon than just an author. This IIT and IIM-A graduate is making India read like never before.

Face is the index of the mind. This proverb can be compared to the author and his characters. The characters of a novel speak about the mind of the author. That means the thoughts and feelings of the author are conveyed through the characters present in the novel. The characters form the face of the author and the author speaks through his characters. Author thus makes the readers understand his views and thoughts by creating so many characters in many aspects. Characterization is a significant constituent of the novel, besides plot. The description of a person includes the notion that life may here be imitating the life of man on earth and that of a person described is larger than life. As Walter Allen says, "A novelist, like any other artist is a maker. He is making an imitation of life of man on earth. He is making, it might be said, a working model of life as he sees and feels it, his conclusions about it being expressed in the characters he invents, the situations in which he places them and in the very words he chooses for those purposes"(Allen, 14)

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While imitating, a novelist behaves like a small child who arranges his toys at a play in a manner, which includes his touching relation to the world. Just as a child's play expresses his personal myth, the novel expresses this myth through his characters and actions. Characters are instrumental to convey message of any real situation to the people in society. They are responsible to revolt against the uneven situation. All the major characters of literary works deal with certain problems that today's young generation faces in their day-to-day life. Today's writers are aware of the mentality of today's young generation. In this world, the youths are the worst sufferers in education system, in job, in business, in love and in corrupt practices.

The writer of a novel or a short story relies on characters for the development of his theme. There are novels in which the theme is predominant and characters are relegated to a place of secondary significance. In Chetan Bhagat, theme and characters are equally important as they are in the novel of Charles Dickens. In the case of the latter, we remember the character before we can recollect the name of the novel. Making a character is a complex process involving work which must be done by author, character and reader. According to Milligan the author creates the character, but he presents him with many hints about how he is to be taken. If he does not do so overtly, the reader must be all the more vigilant to look for clues which will suggest how the character is to be understood. Sometimes an author may spring a surprise on the reader.

All the novels of Chetan Bhagat point out the problems of the young generation in conflicting manner. The Indian English writers also try to show the problems of young generation and their contemporary condition. Some Indian English novelists like Arvind Adiga, Pankaj Kumar Jha and Chetan Bhagat in the 21st century are more interested in the presentation of modern life. Characters shape the context and plot of the novel according to the individual role that they assume. In the novels, the characters play major or minor roles having their

specific significance. As far as the characters of the novels, plays and short stories are concerned, they present the picture of entire society in the form of Heroes and Heroines. Characters are the most important persons in any form of the literature. It is the characters that represent the existing situation in the society all over the world.

Bhagat's art of characterization and realization of a person differs from the tradition. His characters are not flat, they change and grow under the stress of circumstances and become different from what they were in the beginning. They are real, living, breathing human beings, full of vitality with human desires and weaknesses. He has an edge over other Indian novelists in English because most of his characters succeed in establishing socio cultural aspects of the era that he is trying to create in his novels.

Ryan

Ryan is the real hero of the novel. He is very handsome, tall, lean and intelligent. Besides, he is a carefree by nature. He is the center of attraction of this novel and has innovative brain. He is the representative of young generation who reveals the bitter truth of campus life. In the opening of the book, he appears with a beautiful T-shirt in which the word "Gap" is printed. The dress shows that he is from a rich family. He is good at sports. During his school days, he had been squash captain. In the beginning of the novel, we are told about his daring against ragging. Seniors order him to take out his cloths but instead of that, he jumps and grabs two coke bottles and stamps hard on senior's feet and saves other new students from being humiliated.

Sometimes the characters have great impact on the society as Ryan is the master mind of all the plans at the institution and such character is found in the present day society. Bhagat shows Ryan as multitalented character in the novel. Ryan has enough courage to break the rules. He does not like to mug. He says to Alok, "Yes sir, let us mug and cram. Otherwise, how will we become great engineer

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of this great country". These words of Ryan are the words of the today's generation because today's new generation always tries to criticize their study by making the sarcastic comments on it. Ryan is helpful in nature. He is creative and thinks that one should always have original ideas rather than becoming bookish. Professor Vohra in the class asks the students to draw a diagram of screw-jack. All the students draw simple screw-jack but Ryan is the one who draws modified diagram of screw-jack. Ryan tears sheet into pieces as Professor does not like it. He hates education system at IIT. He says, "Continuous mugging, testing and assignments. Where is the time to try out new ideas? Just sit all day and get fat like Hari". Besides, he also hates the Professors who teach them. He says, "Professors who have no idea what science and learning are about. Yes, that is what I think of the Professors, I mean, what have IITs given to this country? Name one invention in the last three decades". He takes care of his friend's health and takes them to morning jogging around the campus. He is more interested in watching movies and eating at restaurants. He takes his friends to Priya talkies on his scooter. He is helpful in nature and always ready to help anyone. After the first semester, Alok separates from Ryan and Hari and goes with Venkat to study hard. Ryan saves him from being humiliated by Venkat.

Ryan is interested in innovative teaching learning process. He, besides his study does an experimental of efficiency of lubricant on scooter's engine. He prepares a project of eighty pages and works on it under the guidance of Professor Veera who gives importance to creativity. He is a favorite student of Professor Veera for whom he is ready to do anything. He submits the project to Professor Cherian, Head of Mechanical Engineering Department, who on seeing the low GPA, rejects the project without reading it. Ryan does not want to waste his time on taking notes and writing. So he invents the theory, C2D (Cooperate to Dominate) where one will attend the class and others will simply copy it. In this way, they will save their time and will utilize it for playing and enjoying. They are habitual

of drinking and prefer institution's roof for it. Hari due to lack of money is unable to buy good gift for Neha on her birthday. Ryan suggests him to wish her personally at her home at night for which Ryan and Alok give him company on bitterly cold night and help him to climb on the terrace.

Neha

Neha, the female character in the novel *Five Point Someone* is very important. Bhagat shows her character as one who does not live their life according to their wish. She cannot enjoy her life despite having all the facilities available in her house. She does fashion-designing course. Harikumar, the protagonist of the novel, loves her at the first sight itself. Neha is impulsive, pretty, has a round face and attractive toes. Hari describes her beauty as: Bare female skin on metal is enormously sexy. There as a dark red nail polish on her toe-nail, with one or two toes encircled in weird squiggly ringlets that only girls can justify wearing. I just wanted to keep looking at her feet.

Neha is the daughter of Professor Cherian, Head of Mechanical Engineering Department. The students at IIT fear him as he has tough and serious face. Professor Cherian is methodical and systematic and insists students to follow his principles so that they become first class IITian and should grab the job of excellence with high salary. Neha comes as a breath of fresh air in Hari's life -- which chiefly consists of studies, ragging and butter chicken.

Shyam

Shyam Mehra is the narrator of the novel *One Night @ the Call Center*. He is the hero of the novel too. Everyone in the office calls him Sam Marcy instead of calling him Shyam Mehra especially American customers. He says, "Americans have trouble saying my real name and prefer Sam". The novelist, through the character of Shyam, tells the real condition of today's employees who work at call center for foreign companies. Shyam is one among the six persons working at the call center named Connexions. He is duty conscious and even

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without attending his cousin's marriage he attends his duty at the call center. Vroom is his best friend. Priyanka, who is his girl friend, is also very important to him. He is an ad-hoc group leader and is in the hope of becoming a full time group leader. He is a person without any self-confidence and he is pessimistic in his views. He is punctual and sincere in his work. He works under a strict boss who is very selfish and terrific too. He does the works given by the boss. Besides, he hates Bakshi and says, "Bakshi was sucking me into several hours outside my shift".

Frustration can be seen in Shyam's character. After being failed in love relationship with Priyanka, he gets frustrated. Shyam's attitude changes after receiving God's call. He is able to solve his problems with a lot of self-confidence. He along with Vroom saves the job of millions who work at call center all over the India. Though Shyam takes break up from Priyanka, still he loves her and wants her to be his future wife. Vroom helps him in this matter. He, with the help of internet, finds the photos of Ganesh, Priyanka's fiancé who has a bald spot on his head. Vroom shows it to Priyanka who gets distracted from Ganesh and wishes to marry Shyam. At last, both unite and decide to get married.

Priyanka

She is the prime woman character of the novel. She is as beautiful as a rose and the hero Shyam loves her. She has tiny nose and one can see two dimples on her chin when she smiles. Shyam and Priyanka are college mates and are now colleagues in the same BPO Connexions. She works at call center, as she wants to save money to fulfill her dream of opening the nursery school. She is interested in education and teaching field and also wishes to do B.Ed. course. Her mother is a traditional woman and wants her daughter to choose such a man as husband who is having a permanent job. She quarrels and makes arguments with her mother many times about the selection of life partner. She is rebellious by nature as she says, "You know Vroom my mom and her obsession for an NRI match for her rebellious daughter". Priyanka is an Indian girl, so for her

mother's happiness, she sacrifice her own happiness. She listens to her mother and gets ready to marry Ganesh, a NRI who works at Microsoft office at Seattle in USA. She is happy and serves milk cakes to all the group members.

Bhagat shows Priyanka as an opportunist. She represents the character from Indian society who can discard her love for the sake of her parent. Before the proposal of marriage with Ganesh, she along with Shyam visits many places in Delhi. She is a daring woman. In their second meeting at Havemore Restaurant, Pandara Road she teaches a lesson to a woman who curses her daughter-in-law for giving birth to two girls and demands more dowry from her parents. She asks job to old woman who says young girls don't know how to speak with elders. Priyanka says: The young girls know how to talk and behave. It is you old ones who need to be taught a lesson. These are your granddaughters and you are calling them curse? She shows them her call center's identity card and says that she is from CBI, women cell and if they harass her anymore then they will be put in a jail for three years. In their third meeting at 32nd Milestone Gurgaon Highway, she shows her boldness and makes sex with Shyam in the Qualis. She is health conscious and eats only those things, which are suitable for her life style. She says: Pizzas are not healthy. I gain weight so fast if I have a lot of it, especially with my lifestyle. I hardly get time to exercise. On top of that, I just sit and work in a confined space. Priyanka represents Chetan Bhagat's modern type female character who wants to enjoy her life before marriage and is not ready for marriage without properly knowing her future husband and for this, she makes argument with her mother. She gets disturbed and throws a ball at her monitor. She says to her group members: Can you believe this? She wants me to get married next month. Next month!' They bought me up for twenty-five years and now they can't wait more than twenty-five days to get rid of me. What is with these people-am I such burden?

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Priyanka along with her group members goes on long break in the Qualis. While returning their Qualis falls on the rod of construction site from where they cannot call anyone for help, as there is no range of mobile phones. Later, there comes a call from God on Shyam's mobile. When the God asks her a question about her aim in her life, she says she wants to satisfy her parents and acts like a good daughter. In her words: I want my mother to be happy. But I cannot kill myself for it. My mother needs to realize a family is a great support to have, but ultimately, she is responsible for her own happiness. My focus should be on my own life and what I want.

Govind

Govind Patel is the narrator of the novel *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*. Chetan Bhagat, in the novel, tells about some of the real incidents happened in the history of India. Govind is an ordinary guy with whom anybody can relate. He has very few desires and is obsessed with the desires he possesses. As he thinks that being Gujarati, business is in his blood, and his main ambition is to become a big businessman. He lives with his mother as his father leaves them and goes to stay with a woman. His mother sells homemade things for the smooth running of family. Govind has two good friends, Ishaan and Omi. He is the poorest among three friends. He says, "I am easily the poorest of the three, even though Ishaan and Omi aren't particularly wealthy".

Govind is good at maths and scores hundred marks in board exam. People say, "I (Govind) was gifted when I hit a hundred in maths in class X". He does not want to waste his time by preparing for engineering entrance exams. His mind wants him to do business. He lives in poor area and helps his mother by taking maths tuition. He says: Along with Khaman and Khakra, trigonometry and Algebra became sources of income in the Patel household. Of course, it was poor neighborhood, so people could not pay much. Still another thousand bucks a month was a lifestyle changing events for us. From fan, we

graduated to cooler. From chairs, we went to a secondhand sofa. Life became good.

His love for business increases when he first starts tuition classes. He says, "My love for business began when I first started tuitions. It was amazing to see money build up. With money came not only things like coolers and sofas but also the most important stuff-respect. Shopkeeper no longer avoided us, relative re-invited us to wedding....I could decide my fate, how many students to teach, how many hours per class- it was my decision". Govind wants to be a big businessman. He does not want to study and do government job. People in Gujarat like business more than government service. Bhagat through the character of Govind tells the realistic condition about business in Gujarat. We can find his dream to become a good businessman when he says: We (Gujarati) love business. Gujrat is the only state in India where people tend to respect you more if you have a business than if you are in service. The rest of the country dreams about cushy jobs that gives a steady salary and provides stability. In Ahmadabad, service is for the weak. That was why I dreamt my biggest dream- to be a big businessman one day. Govind used to say that talent is the only way the poor can become rich. Otherwise, in this world, the rich would remain rich and the poor would remain poor. This unfair talent actually creates a balance, helps to make the world fair.

Vidya

Vidya is the younger sister of Ishaan. She is very much loved by her brother who always tries to protect her. She is smart and fair. Govind, on seeing her beauty, says: I noticed her thin arm. It was so fair you could see three veins running across. Her hand had deep lines, with an exceptionally long lifeline. Her fingers seemed long as they were so thin. She had applied a glittery silver-white nail polish only on the outer edge of the nail. She takes a lot of care of her room. She always puts the materials and books in proper way. On seeing her room, Govind Says: Her room had the typical girlie look-extra clean, extra cute and extra pink. Stuffed toys and posters with

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cheesy messages like ‘I am the boss’ adorned the walls of the room.

Vidya is weak in mathematics, so Ishaan tells her to take tuition from his friend, Govind. As she is younger to Ishaan, she always obeys his orders. On the first day of tuition class, Govind asks her, “Which areas of maths are you strong in?” She says, “I don’t like maths much”. Her frightfulness for maths can be seen from the following lines: Between an electric shock or a maths test, I will choose the former. I heard some people have to walk two miles to get water in Rajasthan. I would trade my maths problems for that walk, everyday. Maths is the worst thing ever invented by man. What were they thinking? Language is too easy, so let’s make up some creepy symbols and manipulate them to haunt every generation of kids. Who cares if $\sin \theta$ is different from $\cos \theta$? Who wants to know the expansion of the sum of cubes? She hates maths since her childhood. Govind tells her that maths is fun. Anybody can solve the problems if interest is created for it. She hates maths because she approaches it in wrong way. She reacts differently and says: It is troubled relationship we have shared for years. From classes one to twelve, this subject does not go away. People have nightmares about monsters. I have nightmares about surprise maths tests. I know you scored a hundred and you are in love with it. But, remember, in most parts of the world maths means only one thing to student.

Vidya is a rebel by heart and always dreams of getting free from the constraints of a typical middle-class family. She does not want to listen to the society and hates the attitude and system of middle-class family. She has an ambition to go to Mumbai, as she wants to do a course in PR (medicine). She always wants to become independent. She is a talkative in nature. She asks Govind many questions when he returns from Australia. She puts her palm on his hand and wants to kiss him but he denies. She tells him not to worry about her age as she is going to complete eighteen years after two months only. In her words, “Two

months and I will turn eighteen. Time to bring me another nice gift”. She wants to kiss him at any cost. She puts her fingers on his mouth and cups his face in her palm. She disguises as if mosquito kissed her. She opens her mouth and brings close to him. Her lips are eight millimeters apart from him and soon the gap reduces to zero. She is more interested in kissing and wants to progress more. Govind in his day-to-day life becomes busy, as he has to give time to his business. They daily send SMS to each other. She always recalls her past, which she spent with Govind. She cannot concentrate on her study and sends many SMS to him. One of her SMS says,

“When I study, I think kisses
U and only u, v

misses”(3MML, 189).

Govind brings small cake and celebrates her birthday on the terrace. After the celebration, she starts kissing him. They slid under the water tank and sit on the floor. Here he makes his life’s second mistake by sleeping with his best friend’s sister, Vidya. They make love for half an hour on the terrace. She is rebellious by nature and wants to do different things after completing the age of eighteen. She is very glad and happy. An excerpt from the novel depicts her happiness:

‘I am so glad this happened. Aren’t you?’ she said.

I kept quite.

‘Say something’.

‘I should get going’.

‘Don’t you like it here?’

‘Here? You realize we are on top of your dad and mom and brother?’

‘Stop freaking out’ she said

‘I am sorry. I am nervous’, I said.

‘Don’t be,’ she said and hugged me. She felt my body shake. ‘You ok?’(3MML, 201)

Krish Malhotra

Krish is an obedient son who follows his mother’s orders. He does not want to rebel against his parents’ wish. Bhagat says, “Usually a boy loves a girl and a girl loves a boy. They are united in the

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marriage. Nevertheless, in India the custom is different. Girl's family has to love the boy and boy's family has to love the girl. Bride's family has to love bridegroom's family and the bridegroom's family has to love the bride's family. Krish after completing his engineering from IIT is admitted to MBA at IIM-Ahmedabad. He is a Punjabi but lives in Delhi. His mother is a housewife and father is retired from army. In IIM-A's mess he helps Ananya, a beautiful girl to get her a best food. She thanks him and takes him to have some good food at restaurant outside the campus. He becomes her good friend. He helps her in doing her assignments and maths problems. He is jealous on those people who stare at her. After getting good marks in test, she owes him a treat but he rejects it on the basis that she wears short dress. He says: Every time I saw a guy talk to her or laugh with her, a lot flush started from my stomach and reached my face.

Krish takes Ananya to Delhi to get permission for their marriage from his mother. Somehow, she wins the heart of his mother and relatives. To get family understood each other they decide to meet in Goa. He tries his best to convince his mother to accept the culture of Ananya's family but he fails. He goes in depression when Ananya deserts him. Krish's father comes to his help and assures Ananya's parents of her safety at his house.

Ananya

Ananya is vivacious and bold. She comes from a typical, conventional, well-educated family. The whole family has a thirst for education. She is from a Tamil-Brahmin family in Chennai. She is a modern type of girl who in spite of taking birth in Brahmin's family eats chicken and drinks beer. She is rebellious by nature. Her behavior, in the mess, in the beginning of the novel itself displays her rebellious nature. She quarrels with mess worker. An excerpt from the novel 2 States:

What you want? The mess worker said in a heavy South Indian accent. 'You calling rasam not rasam. You make face when you

see my sambhar. I feed hundred people they no complain. And that is why you don't improve. Maybe they should complain," she said (2S, 04).

Ananya is a beautiful girl and is tagged as the "best girl of the fresher batch". More than thirteen students propose her. She meets Krish Malhotra, a protagonist of the novel, in the college canteen. At the marriage programme, Bridegroom's father is not ready for his son's marriage, as they do not get the fixed car in the dowry. Ananya takes initiatives, calls Duke, the bridegroom and warns him. An excerpt from the novel shows her daring:

"What do you do Duke?" Ananya asked. 'I am a software engineer', he said. 'How much do you make?', Ananya said. Duke kept quiet. 'Tell me', Ananya said in a loud voice. 'Ten thousand a month' he said in a heavy Punjabi accent. 'Great I make twenty five thousand; still can you tell me what have you done to deserve a wedding like this? What have you done to deserve a car to be gifted to you? 'I, I am the b...boy's side. Duke stammered. 'So? Have you seen Minti? Ananya said. Duke nodded. 'You are having an arranged marriage. That is why you are getting girl like her. If you had to woo her, can you even in your dream to have a girlfriend like her?'" Duke kept quite as he shifted his largeness from one leg to other. 'What?' Ananya said. 'This is too much', Ananya said. 'I am too much', Ananya agreed and gave Duke a Bharatnatyam- style glare. She spoke again. 'Do you know what Minti's parents had to go through this wedding for you? That car cost two and half year of your salary, Mr Duke! These two parties have thrown him into debt, now you want an Accent?

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It would be your accent, it will be what you managed to wrench out of a helpless father who didn't want a drama at his daughter's wedding to turn into a scandal' (2S, 213).

Ananya makes everyone happy and wins not only the heart of Krish's mother but also of all the relatives of Krish.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Chetan Bhagat in his novels, *Five Point Someone*, *One Night @ The Call Center*, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* and *2 States* has tried to present the different real characters. He has tried to cover all the characters related with the modern society. The main characters like Ryan, Neha, Govind, Vidya, Krish and Ananya represent the characters which we can find in our society. The characteristics of the main characters are described in beautiful and realistic manners. Bhagat is successful in making the reader happy. New readers who don't know the literary language can also enjoy the conversation between the characters. The author has succeeded here in describing all the things in beautiful manner. He has also succeeded in keeping the readers stick to novel up to the end.

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