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Major Themes in Chetan Bhagat's '*The 3 Mistakes of My Life*' and '*2 States*'

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ABSTRACT

Today, the name of Chetan Bhagat has spread like never before in the history of Indian writing in English. 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 national integrity, Indian education and political system. This paper aims to study the different themes given in the novels of Chetan Bhagat in the novels viz, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* and *2 States*.

Keywords: National integrity, Communal harmony, Inter caste marriage, religious conflict, Godhara riot

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.

The 3 Mistakes of My Life is the most celebrated novel that has brought name and fame to Chetan Bhagat as a writer of high stature. In this novel, the major themes are national integration and ambition of today's youths. But it also has sub-themes such as hopes and aspiration, failure and frustration, young generation's intense desire for sex, the family conflict, patriotism, the religious-politics, bad condition of government schools, religion, business mind of Gujarati. All the major and minor events are discussed and described through the character of Govind Patel. In the novel, Chetan Bhagat uses the new form to express his political and religious views. In India, still these things have greater importance. Bhagat highlights the contemporary events happening in India. The earthquake in 2001 destructed most of the parts of Gujarat state. Incident of the Godhara riot happened in 2002 where many Muslims were killed. The

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family conflict at Govind's house and his strong desire to start a business are presented in the opening pages. Govind Patel lives with his mother as his father abandons them and goes to live with his second wife. His mother has to look after the family. To support his mother, he starts maths tuition classes and motivates his friends, Ishaan and Omi for a business. Govind is a witness to the earthquake of 2001, which kills thousands of people in Gujarat. These friends book a shop at shopping mall before the earthquake, which shatters Govind's hope of becoming a great businessperson. He says:

Two years of scrimping and saving, twenty years of dreams- all wiped away in twenty seconds. The 'Navrangpura Mall's' neon sign, once placed at the top of the six floor building, now licked the ground. May be this was God's way of saying something- that we shouldn't have this malls. (3MML, 108)

Govind and his friends start a shop at the premises of Swamibhakti temple where they sell cricket materials. Govind wants to increase the income by opening a new shop in the middle of the city. He says, "I don't want this short-sighted mentality. I will open a store in a mall and by next year have one more store. If you don't grow in business, you stagnate". Govind represents a real Gujarati who is not satisfied with small income. He encourages his friends by saying, "We have a long way to go. Three thousand a month is nothing. And Ish doesn't let me keep notebook and pencils ...". He tells the Gujarati's passion for business:

There is something about Gujarati, we love business. And Amdabadis love it more than anything else. Gujarat 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 a cushy jobs that gives a steady salary and provides stability. In Ahmedabad, service is for weak. (3MML, 12)

Unacceptable love is also one of the major themes in the novel and it is depicted through the characters of Govind and Vidya. Ishaan forces Govind to take the maths tuition of his younger sister, Vidya, who prepares for medical entrance exam. Love marriages in India are still unaccepted. Vidya attracts towards Govind and forces him for friendship. Govind cannot imagine that friendship will change into love. In addition, one day on her birthday he makes his life's second mistake by sleeping with his best friend's sister. He gets extremely involved in her love and thinks of her only. He instead of thinking about his business sends her messages. Ishaan stops talking to Govind when he comes to know latter's love affair with his sister. He does not talk to him for three years and denies his proposal of marriage with Vidya. Therefore, after getting frustrated, Govind tries to commit suicide by popping sleeping pills. On the other hand, Vidya is a modern girl who does not want to restrain her in four walls of the house. She says, "I want to get out of Ahmedabad. But mom and dad won't let me". She with the help of Govind goes to purchase books at the bookstores and enjoys ice cream at restaurant. She wants to enjoy each moment of her life. She becomes very happy when she attains eighteen years of age.

The novelist discusses many themes related to the development of India and 'National Integration' is one of them. Chetan Bhagat presents this theme through Omi's character. During the Godhara riot, Hindus start killing Muslims to take revenge. Bittoo mama's son Dhiraj is one of the kar sevaks who are killed at the Godhara station. Bittoo mama and his party members kill Muslims and burn

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their houses. Ali, a Muslim boy is with Ishaan at the bank building on that night. When Bittoo mama attacks Ali, Omi, a strict Hindu comes forward and saves Ali's life by sacrificing his own life. Omi tells Mama, "He is a good boy mama; he didn't kill your son. All Muslims are not bad" .

The 3 Mistakes of My Life is structured around the inter-connecting incidents of religion, politics and ambition. It consists of Govind's passion for business, who wants to earn money as much as he can; Ishaan's interest for cricket for which he leaves his NDA course and keeps himself always busy in watching and playing cricket; Omi's interest is in religion and he helps Bittoo mama and Parekh-ji's party. Bittoo mama and Parekh-ji have roles in religious politics, organize Chaitavani yatra to Ayodhya; and Ali's father's interest is in secularism. All these people try to achieve their goals in their life. In addition, in some places they clash with each other. All the characters represent their particular area of interest.

Religion dominates Indian politics. Since the beginning of electorate system in India, religion and caste have been playing major role in the winning of any candidate. Most of the parties in India call themselves secular but in reality, we see the interest of people in the candidate of same caste and community. Chetan Bhagat in the novel describes the dominance of religion in India during last decade of twentieth century and first decade of twenty first century. Bittoo mama is a strict follower of Hinduism and he is ready to give his life for religion. He organizes camps and takes people to Ayodhya, God Ram's land. He follows Parekh-ji, a Hindu leader. Parekh-ji shows his sympathy for earthquake affected people by distributing grains and food. To get voting, Parekh-ji suggests Bittoo mama to bring soil from Ayodhya and distribute it to each and every Hindu house in Ahmedabad. Parekh-ji's religious politics is disclosed when he says:

No one would say no to a spoonful of soil from Ayodhya. But with that,

they were inadvertently buying into the cause. Sympathy for people fighting for Ayodhya would be automatic. And sympathy converted well into votes. (3MML, 117)

Through Naseer's character, Bhagat warns Indians "India is a free country. You have right to your views. My only advise is Hinduism is a great religion, but don't get extreme". Chetan Bhagat does not want to stretch the debate on religion and to resolve the conflict between Hindu and Muslim, he, through the character of Naseer, tells Omi a story of Chimpanzee how they kiss each other after fighting:

Male chimpanzees of the same pack fight violently with each other-for food, females, whatever. However, after the fight, they go through a strange ritual. They kiss each other, on the lips ... the point is this ritual was created by nature. To make sure the fight gets resolved and the pack stays together. In fact, any long-term relationship requires this. (3MML, 71)

Bhagat tries to give historic touch to the novel by describing the earthquake (2001) and the Godhara riot (2002). Govind books a shop at a mall by giving advance money and decides to move there in the month of February. The horrible earthquake comes on the republic day and shatters the hope of Govind of becoming a big businessman. Bittoo mama is interested in politics. He wants to get noticed by high authority by doing extra work of sending kar sevaks to Ayodhya. He arranges Chaitavani yatra to Ayodhya, Ram's birthplace twice a month. In 2002, in the month of February, Muslim mob burns bogie no S6 of Sabarmati

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express where kar sevaks are present. Fifty-nine Hindu people roast like coal. Bittoo mama loses his son, Dhiraj. He decides to take revenge of his son's death by killing Muslim and burning their houses.

Ali, a Muslim boy, shows patriotism in the novel. He is a gifted player in cricket. He has the ability to move each ball out of the boundary. However, he has a problem that he cannot play more than six balls. Ishaan takes him to a doctor and tries to fix out the problem. He requests Fred, an Australian player to test Ali, who later gives these friends an offer of training in Australia. In Australia, after seeing Ali's game, chairperson of scholarship department offers him Australian citizenship, which he denies. He says, "I cannot play for Australia, as I am Indian". Australian tries more to persuade Ali's mind but fails and wishes that he should play for Australia in next life. Ali says, "I don't want to be Australian in my next life. Even if I have a hundred next lives, I want to be Indian in all of them".

In *2 States*, the cultural difference is the main theme. The novel is semi-autobiographical in nature. It consists of Bhagat's experiences of his life, particularly the marriage with his wife, Anusha. The novel deals with the struggle between Punjabi and Tamliian family in getting their children married. It is written with post-colonial point of view. In the novel, Chetan Bhagat writes on educational survey of IIM-Ahmedabad and cultural differences between two Indian states. Love story between Krish and Ananya is introduced in the opening pages of the novel. Krish is a protagonist of the novel. He is a student of IIM-Ahmedabad. He first meets Ananya, a beautiful and clever student, in the college mess where she fights with mess worker over the bad quality of food being served to the students. Krish helps her and becomes her friend. Their friendship turns into love, which later forces them for sex. Both, Krish and Ananya before leaving the college, decide to get married after getting approval from their respective parents.

National integration is one of the major themes in the novel. India is a large country where

people of different castes and religions live together but do not support love marriages and inter caste marriages. Krish and Ananya love each other since the beginning at IIM-A. They decide to get married after the placement but the old tradition of marriage in the same caste becomes an obstacle in their marriage. Krish is from a Punjabi family and Ananya, a Tamilian Brahmin. Punjabi thinks themselves great and so, Krish's mother does not give permission to Krish's marriage. Ananya's family being Brahmin, wants a boy from same category. Krish accepts job at Chennai, helps Ananya's father, brother and mother; and convinces them for Ananya's marriage to him. On the other hand, Ananya helps Krish's relatives and attracts their attention. After mutual understanding, their parents are ready for Krish and Ananya's marriage. Complicated love marriage of two lovebirds is described here. On the cover page of the novel, Bhagat writes that in the world, love marriages are simple but in India, boy and girl have to pass through some stages. In India:

Boy loves girl. Girl loves boy.

Girl's family has to love boy.

Boy's family has to love girl.

Girl's family has to love boy's family.

Boy's family has to love girl's family.

Girl and boy still love each other.

They get married.

Chetan Bhagat, in the novel describes about the social evil, dowry. The demand by groom's parents and pitiful condition of bride's parents are depicted here in a proper way. Bhagat in his earlier novels also threw a light on social evils. In *Five Point Someone*, Alok's parents live stressful life as their only daughter cannot get married due to their poor condition, in *One Night @ the Call Center*, Priyanka fights against an old woman who curses her daughter-in-law for not bringing enough dowry and giving birth to girls. In the same way, Krish's

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relative and Minti's father, Rajji mama fights with Duke's parent on the matter of dowry. Rajji mama promised them of Hyundai Accent but gives Hyundai Santro. He puts "His turban at Duke's parents' feet. They ignored him. He offered a cheque, Duke's parents refused it". One of the important functions in the life of Indian people can get disturbed only because of dowry. Dowry makes poor unhappy and insulted. Krish's "mother and her two brothers folded their hands in front of Duke's parents. Like a landless farmer, they waited for the feudal lords to respond". Groom's father decides not to start marriage ceremony unless he gets an assurance of Hyundai Accent.

The relationship between mother and daughter-in-law in the novel is not new to the readers, as Bhagat already describes it in his earlier novels. Krish's mother lives in high status as her son did MBA from one of the India's prestigious colleges. Besides, she always thinks herself superior to Ananya's parents and advises Krish to stay away from them. She says, "South Indians don't know how to control their daughters. From Hema Malini to Sridevi, all of them trying to catch Punjabi men". Though Krish's mother opposes Rajji mama from giving dowry to Duke's parent in reality, she is in its favour. She shows Krish a girl from a rich family which has six cars and two petrol pumps. She gives him an example of herself who is unhappy by marrying to government servant and on the other hand, she talks about Shipra masi who is happy after being married to a businessman. In North India, boy's family members get lots of respect so Krish's mother demands the same from Ananya's family. In Goa, she becomes furious, when she does not get respect from Ananya's family. To keep his mother's heart, Krish says, "Mom, she (Ananya) is here with her parents. But I am marrying only her; once she comes to our house, we can control her. You only say, no, that South Indians are docile and scared".

Bhagat's novels are based on the life and culture of metropolitan cities. Bhagat for education lived in Delhi and Ahmedabad. He is familiar with the places and culture of these cities. However, his

characters are from metropolitan cities but they represent the youngsters of India. His first novel *Five Point Someone*, is set at IIT Delhi, the second, *One Night @ the Call Center* at Gurgaon, Delhi, The third, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* at Ahmedabad, the fourth, *2 States* is at Delhi and Chennai and all these novels are based on the life of students and youngsters. Indian parents are more interested in their children's coaching classes. Students think the coaching classes increase their chances of getting selected in the exams. Manju, Ananya's young brother, prepares for IIT entrance and takes Krish's help for his study.

The thematic study of *2 States* indicates Chetan Bhagat's search for Indian's importance to religious culture and old tradition. It would be hyperbolic to say that Chetan Bhagat in the novel has advised Indian people not to stick to old traditions. But it would be more appropriate to say that he has tried to create awareness among Indian readers about not to give importance to dowry system and encourages them for inter caste and inter religious marriages in India. Presentation of characters, time and place propels the readers to imagine the situations. Each one in India is familiar with the situations like mother-father, and in-laws and daughter-in-law's conflicts. The thematic originality and complexity create interest among the readers and keep their attention up to the last line of the novel. Problems in inter caste marriage and the concept of 'live-in-relationship' compel readers to read this novel. Chetan Bhagat in *2 States* has universalized the specific through the concept of love marriage in India.

The novel tells a story of 'cross-culture'. Krish and Ananya represent two castes in Indian society. It is not a skin color, which becomes an obstacle in their marriage but it is a caste and culture, which shorten the thinking power of typical Indians. Bhagat does not make comment on any particular society. Punjabi people call themselves superior but Tamilians are not less than they are. Krish's mother and her relatives want Krish to marry the girl of same caste but Krish decides to marry

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Ananya. Sense of hatred for South Indians by North Indians is told here through the character of Shipra masi and Krish's mother. Shipra masi tries to change the mind of Krish by luring him. She asks him, 'How much will that Madrasin earn?' On the other hand Tamilian calls North Indians rascal and ill mannered.

2 *States* deals with not only about cultural clashes among the Indians but also the solutions of the problems. Chetan Bhagat gives different examples of it. For example, Krish spends some time in Aurobindo Ashram where he tells guruji his problem in getting married to Ananya. Guruji with his power finds the Krish's conflict with his father and asks him why he gets problem in sleeping at night. Krish tells him how his father used to beat his mother and him. Guruji guides Krish and tells him to apply a word, 'forgiveness' in life. He says:

I'll give you one word to apply in life, i.e. forgiveness ... For you forgiving doesn't make the person who hurt you feel better, it makes you feel better. (2S, 199)

This shows that the novelist not merely reports the cultural and social conflicts but also gives the solutions. The novelist tries to solve the problems of day-by-day life. Guruji tells Krish that forgiveness is very important in life if one wants to live stress less life. The word 'forgiveness' is such a weapon that calms the enemy also. He tells Krish about the Bhagavad-Gita. According to it he suggests him "To work hard and not to worry about the rewards". Bhagat, in the novel, depicts one of the controversial episodes about the Brahmin community. The Brahmin worships cow, never touches meat and beer. Ananya is from pure orthodox Tamilian Brahmin family. Effects of modern world fall on her. Whenever she gets a chance of eating at restaurant, she eats chicken and drinks beer. She is a habitual of eating non-veg. Ananya in Chennai is ready to come at Krish's room

if he gives her chicken. She says, "You will feed me chicken? I'm dying to have non-veg and get beer too".

Backing to nearer relatives and friends in politics and service is not new in India. Chetan Bhagat discloses this truth through the novel. Krish is the only North Indian at City bank Chennai. Bala, the manager does mistake by investing customers' money in share market. Unluckily share market collapses and money loses. Bala asks Krish to take blame as the country manager belongs to North India. Anil Mathur, a country manager does not take any action against Krish when he comes to know Krish is a North Indian, and suggests him not to do mistakes in future. 2 *States* is a contrast of culture of North and South India. It is the cordial connections between two families that make the book stand out. It is written from a perspective completely different from his earlier novels. Bhagat to get married to his wife, Anusha follows their customs and to impress her family members he dedicates this novel to his in-laws. Bhagat is well known with the rituals of Tamil as his wife is from there.

It is understood that there is a tug of war between two cultures. Bhagat here just reveals out the obstacles and differences in their thinking. He does not favour his own state or caste and hates others but instead he tells the drawbacks of Indian society and narrow mind of Indian people while getting married their children. Krish argues with his mother on the topic of marriage with Ananya. He says to her, "Aren't they all Indian? Can't they be good human beings?" Bhagat wants to give a message of equality to Indians. He says all Indians should be treated as Indians and not as a state wise with different cultures and castes.

Chetan Bhagat very well understands that this is the twenty first century and the methods and manners of the show are quite different. The novel is written by considering the problems of this century. Indirectly, Chetan Bhagat gives a message to Indian people to change their attitude of looking at old traditions and try to eradicate the social evils from

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society. Besides, Bhagat also uses telephone, which plays an important role in the characters' life. Readers in the beginning understand Krish's hatred for his father. It is the phone, which creates fear of beating to his mother by his father in Krish's mind if he avoids talking with his father on telephone. And, it is the same telephone which brings happiness in the life of Krish by giving him the good news that Ananya's parents are ready for Ananya and his marriage.

Social aspects of Indian society are Chetan Bhagat's main concern in his novels. Like his other novels, in *2 States*, too, Bhagat incoincidentally exposes existing social evils because the writer is of view to change it. Minor characters disappear once they complete their role but the major characters from both the families remain on the pages and do not disappear up to the end of the novel and bring unity to place and time.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Chetan Bhagat in his novels, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* and *2 States* has tried to present the different major themes. Chetan Bhagat has tried to cover all the themes related with the society. The main characters like Govind, Vidya, Krish and Ananya represent the characters which we can find in our society. All the themes 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 writing style of Chetan Bhagat. 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 at the end.

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