

Portrayal of Modernity Swing on Indian Values in Chetan Bhagat's Novels

Javaid Ahmad Tantry

Research Scholar

Department of Comparative Languages and Culture, B.U. Bhopal.

Abstract

Modernism is characterized by a self-conscious break with traditional ways of writing both in prose fiction and poetry. It has its origins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries especially in Europe and North America. The traditional modes of representation were overturned and the new sensibilities of the time became the conscious desire of the writers. Indian fiction in English has gone through a lot of transformations from early to modern time fiction writers. In recent years India has produced a good number of Indian English fiction writers who have impressed the literary world with their art of writing. Chetan Bhagat through his writings has single handedly reshaped the Indian English novels. He experimented not only with his content but also with form and style. His characters are modernized in nature and are followers of global culture. They ignore traditions and values of past and believe to run their day today activities of life with ease and in their own way. They don't want to be kept in the prisons of customs, traditions and cultures. The present paper aims to portray the effect of modernization on Indian values and how Chetan Bhagat has displayed it in his novels.

Key words: Culture, Custom, Modernization, Tradition, Values, Westernization

Modernism is a style of art, architecture, literature, etc., that uses ideas and methods which are very different from those used in the past (*The Merriam Webster Dictionary*). It represents radical changes in art, architecture, photography, music, literature, and the applied arts. It started at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century and has roots in western society. Modernist artists' works violated against nineteenth-century academic and historicist traditions believing that earlier aesthetic conventions were becoming outdated.

Modernist art reflected the deracinated experience of life in which tradition, community, collective identity, and faith were eroding. In the twentieth century the mechanized mass slaughter of the First World War was a watershed event that fueled modernist distrust of reason



and further sundered complacent views of the steady moral improvement of human society and belief in progress (*New World Encyclopedia*).

Literary modernism is characterized by a self-conscious break with traditional ways of writing both in prose fiction and poetry. It has its origins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries especially in Europe and North America. The traditional modes of representation were overturned and new sensibilities of the time became the conscious desire of the writers. The horrors of the First World War broke conventions of society and questions were raised against the rationality of the human mind. Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx became the most influential thinkers of the period and modernist writers were deeply influenced by their ideology.

In India Twenty first century is the age of modernization. It is the age of science and technology and has brought about certain promising advantages to the urban sector of India. The modernization has considerably benefited the urban part of developing India. It has brought about better public transport facility, healthcare facility, facility of world class education at the door step, world class production houses and manufacturing units. Such changes have brought ample opportunities for better job options or better earning opportunities, and high standards of living. Modernization no doubt gave many advantages to India but at the same time it has created certain serious issues in Indian urban society especially in the lives of the rising middle class.

Modernization has impacted the urban Indian society to a great extent. It has affected people's behavior and thought pattern. It has brought westernization with it and standard of living, language, clothing, food habit of the people have been much affected by the modernization of the society. A new culture has taken shape in the society in which modern impact is seen apparently dominant. The mall culture has replaced traditional market. The people gradually become brand conscious. The expensive brands in clothes and shoes, international branded fast food and many other items of daily use have taken a deep hold over the market. The party culture namely business parties, DJ parties, kitty parties and many other celebrations have a high impact of westernization on them. The changing urban realities have also given birth to many antisocial evils in the society like smoking, prostitution, drinking, gambling, crimes of different kinds. The impact of modernization on India is so profound that she adopted all the pros and cons of western society giving birth to a new India where western culture and values have been rapidly permeating in lives of people converting the urban part of India into a waste land.



Chetan Bhagat is the novelist whose area of concern is the length and breadth of the entire country especially of the urban areas. He is seen not just an author but more as a youth icon and he has targeted youth in his writing. Bhagat in his novels has given a beautiful portrayal of modernized India. The novels of Bhagat satirize beautifully how modernization has adversely affected the Indian value system.

Chetan Bhagat's novels expose that Indian people are much influenced by the tempting western values that are predominantly alienated in nature. The concepts of love, respect and kindness have been replaced by different vices relating to the satisfaction of self. Due to modernization and westernization, the ideal Indian value system has broken considerably. In India people do not adhere to the conventional ways of living and the western values appeal to them a lot. The concept of marriage as a sacred union, concept of joint family, living for one another, respect and obedience to elders, and indulgence into pre-marital and extra marital affairs are now given due importance in India.

Chetan Bhagat in *Five Point Someone* has properly represented wide gulf even in nuclear family. The children do not agree with what their parents wish them. The family of Hari has different issues and there is seen wide gulf among the members of family. The father of Hari is short tempered man often beating his wife. He has maintained good rapport neither with his wife nor with his sons. He often states, "No TV, no music, no laughing loud. It is all for discipline" (216). His highhandedness had strong influence on his wife who had remained silent for days. He used to hang his belt in his closet threatening to sue it on anyone defying him. He always told Hari not to reply back, "If you answer your superiors back, you will be punished, severely" (216). The family of Hari looks completely segregated over everything. All the values of happy and contented family are broken. Besides, Hari's relationship with Neha breaks all the conventions of Indian society. They indulge in many illegal activities considering themselves to be more modern and open minded. Hari- Neha relationship manifests the power of passion. After the decision of Disco they feel disgusted by the way the things going on in the campus; Hari cannot help himself to be away from Neha for a long time missing her company. He himself accepts that the name of Neha does not allow him to sleep nights. He states, "However, none of these bothered me enough to cause insomnia. Infact, the four months off were great to catch up on sleep. But the one person whose voice, smell, image, feelings crept up next to me at night and



made sleep impossible was Neha” (222). Hari is candid in his relation with Neha and he does not feel embarrassed to disclose his inner feelings for Neha. He openly admits, “That is the only thing I ever did in IIT. It is my passion, my sweat and my belief” (229).

The family of Alok also follows modern way of life ignoring their responsibilities as parents. They are businessmen spending most of their time out of country. Due to this they have ignored their lonely son, Alok who has suffered from alienation since his childhood. Ryan has no affinity with his parents and he does not expect them to be his part of life. He only needs them at the time of financial assistance.

The family of Professor Cherion is good example where the novelist has rightly presented entire family living under one roof but every member has made an individual small world. The family bonding which is based on love or affection and care or kindness cannot be seen in the family. Professor Cherion being the head of the family is very dominating and leaves not enough space to his family. As a result Samir, the son of Professor, commits suicide after failing to realize the dreams of his father leaving the whole family in shock. On the other hand Neha cheats her family by enjoying physical pleasures with Hari with whom she is serious in love. She indulges in all this to overcome the frustration through which she was undergoing. She does not accept to lead her life in restrictions but believes in life where an individual has full freedom to fulfill his/her goals and aspiration. She is directed not to talk with any IITian but she does not pay any heed to instructions given to her developing relation with Hari to enjoy her life as per her aspirations. She breaks all moral and social chains of the patriarchal society. She aspires for one with whom she can enjoy the wonders of life and destiny brings her close to Hari. One can say that she breaks all strong values of Indian family system.

In *One Night @ the Call Center* all the prominent characters experience the embarrassment of broken relationship in their families resulting a worse impact on their personal and professional life. Vroom has serious issues with his father as he leaves his wife and son and builds a relationship with his office secretary. As Shyam states, “Vroom’s dad was a businessman who parted from his wife two years ago. He preferred banging his secretary to being with his family, so Vroom and his mother now live without him (21). The case of Radhika and her husband Anuj is another example of broken family. Radhika being loyal and committed to her family has been deceived by her husband Anuj who develops extra marital affair with a so



called modern girl named Payal. Radhika is from a rich family and for love she leaves her father's home for middle class man. She does many compromises in the traditional family of Anuj but in return she gets disloyalty from her husband. The disappointment from her husband compels her to break her marriage. As it is clearly mentioned by Reena Sablok in her book *The Emergence of Indian Best Seller*:

Radhika, who loved her husband very much, is shocked to learn about his dark side. When Vroom calls up her husband pretending as a radio jockey and asks him to dedicate roses and song to someone special, he chooses his girlfriend Payal over his wife. Radhika who listens to this gets terribly upset as her husband has betrayed her .Vroom's dad was a business man who preferred to live with his secretary for two years after leaving his wife in the name of duty. (51)

The third is the family of Military Uncle who used to live with his married son and a kid. Being a typical military man, he used to be very much disciplined following valued social traditions but his son and daughter-in-law were modern thinking people. The clashes begin to originate between traditions and modernity in the family. Military Uncle dislikes the modern attitude of his daughter-in-law with the result he leaves his son's house and starts to do a job in a call centre to sustain his life. The relationship of Priyanka with her mother has same issues. She likes to avoid discussion on needless arguments with her mother as it leads to more troubles in their relationship. Her mother always prefers to have her control in decision making. She does not allow her daughter to marry on her own choice. This leads to a lot of confusion in the family. Esha is another example whose relation with her family is not good. For her dream of modeling she ignores her parents' advice and moves from Chandigarh to Delhi with a wish to become a model. She maintains herself in figure and outlook to achieve her fantasy but she is scanned disgracefully by others. She even sleeps with a designer for a night who assures to get her a modeling contract. She could not get the contract even by offering her chastity. The man ditches her by telling that she cannot get the contract due to short height. She is often haunted by a sense of guilt. She cuts her skin with sharp blade whenever the guilty conscience pains her. She hopes by punishing herself she can atone for her guilt. In twenty-first century Esha symbolizes the dark



side of the new Indian woman pursuing her career. At the same time the compromising attitude of today's youth has also come to the forefront.

In *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* Krish's family suffers from broken relationship. The father of Krish having military background expects his family to behave in a disciplined manner. Most of the time he fights with his wife and hurls abuses at her. His way of handling the family does not go well with his son, Krish. Krish feels bad to see the behavior of his father and one time he comes in between to stop his father from beating his wife. With the result during the scuffle he hits backs his father. He himself makes confession before Ananya:

‘So tell me, what did you do? And what is with the tilak on your forehead?’

‘I hit my father.’

‘What?’

‘A long time ago. Remember, how I would always avoid talking about my father in campus?’

‘Yes, I never pushed after that,’ she said. ‘But what are you saying?’

I repeated the story of that night.

She looked at me, awestruck.

‘Oh dear, I didn't know your parents were like this.’ (170)

Since then he stops talking to his father carrying the inner guilt with him that keeps him always sad till he gets solace in the company of Ananya.

The relation between Krish and Ananya has full influence of modernization. They indulge in such activities as they were against Indian values. Ananya's approach towards sex is a good example to reflect modern youth mentality. In love she feels no fear to share her room with Krish. She moves ahead in love making, even she takes the first step breaking the convention of women being always coy in matter of love making. Her approach towards Krish is shock for him. He admits, “I froze. Ms Swaminathan didn't as she came close to me. In a second, her Frooti- laced lips were on mine. We kissed for three seconds” (25). Ananya is more extrovert



saying things that are beyond the expectation of Krish. She enjoys sex with Krish with no fear of consequences feeling and behaving so as if she has done any ordinary activity. She says:

‘This is my first time,’ she said after we did it and pointed to her mother’s picture on the wall.

‘And if she finds out, she will flip.’

‘We should cover these pictures when we do it. They freak me out,’ I said, scanning her family members.

She laughed. ‘Was this your first time?’

‘I’d rather not talk about it,’ I said.

‘Did you have a girlfriend in IIT?’ she sat up to wear her top.

I kept quiet.

‘Did you have a sex with a guy?’ Ananya asked eyebrows up.

‘No,’ I screamed and sat up. ‘Are you stupid? You, of all people, are asking me if I am gay.’ (26)

The Three Mistakes of My life portrays Ish and his family in very bad light. The father of Ish often chides him for not following his directions in day today activities. Ish believes on his own way not listening his father’s admonitions that keeps them in conundrum in the family. The family of Govind also suffers from broken relationship. His father leaves them after developing extramarital affair. He does not look after his family in the proper manner. As a result Govind feels disheartened to see the fickle mindedness of his father.

In the novel the relation of Vidya with Govind is shocking. Vidya is more rebellious in her nature following her own dreams. She shows no interest in her studies searching something else in her life. Govind spares sometime in the evening to teach Vidya but she does not care at all about her studies. It has been seen that Govind has been attracted by Vidya right from the beginning. Govind shows shyness to take the initiative but she does not hesitate to give him an opportunity. She chooses to lose her virginity even on her birthday. Besides she chooses her



brother's best friend Govind for that purpose who even was her tutor. She feels happy after losing her virginity and even thanks God for making her adult. She says, "Wow, I am an adult now and am no longer a virgin, so cool. Thank God" (201). Her behavior and desperation for immoral activities reflects her ignorance towards moral values of India. Omi also breaks the conventions of his family. He is a Brahmin boy whose father works in a temple as a priest. He is not at all interested in religious matters although he is traditionally bound to do the rituals of the temple. He enjoys every bit of life and takes wine, watches movies and hankers after beautiful girls.

In *Half Girlfriend* Riya is from upper class family in which the atmosphere is quite dejected. Every member of the family feels alienated and there is no sign of love and care present in anyone. Riya being the member of the family spends most of her time in boarding school feeling completely separated from the family. Her family plans things for her but she has her own plans and dreams. She has been married with a man against her will but that marriage does not last for long time.

Due to modernization and westernization, the ideal Indian value system has broken considerably. In India people do not adhere to the conventional ways of living. The western values appeal to them a lot. They are inspired by values and norms that are suitable to other civilizations but not to Indian civilization. It is observed in the contemporary Indian society that the degradation of social and moral values has been become very common way of life. To achieve their ends People in India follow all sorts of moral compromises. Therefore, Chetan Bhagat has rightly portrayed this change in his novels.

Works Cited

Bhagat, Chetan. *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2004. Print.

--- . *One Night @ the Call Centre*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2005. Print.

--- . *The 3 Mistakes of my Life*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2008. Print.

--- . *2 States: The Story of my Marriage*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2009. Print.

--- . *Half Girlfriend*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2014. Print.

[http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Modernist Art/](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Modernist_Art/)

Sablok, Reena. *The Emergence of the Indian Best-Seller*. New Delhi : Atlantic. 2013. Print.