

# A Critical Review of Chetan Bhagat as a Bestseller Author



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## Abstract

Literature talks about fiction, imagination and reality altogether and provides an opportunity to examine things in a critical aspect. The modern novels capture the realities of contemporary life, both the pleasant and the unpleasant, with or without morals and ideological considerations.

Chetan's works have touched millions of hearts. The objective of this research paper is to focus upon the features behind Chetan Bhagat as a bestseller author in 21st century. Few more bestseller authors emerged as his contemporaries like Preeti Shenoy, Durjoy Dutta, RavindraSingh and Amish Tripathy etc. Chetan Bhagat has merged highbrow and lowbrow fiction into one, which is now approved as a bestseller genre in Indian English literature. In his novels, Bhagat represents problems and their solutions through his characters. He could change the definition of a bestseller writer. Before Chetan Bhagat, five thousand copies were in the category of bestselling but when first novel of Bhagat came millions of copies were sold. His aim is to bring more and more readership in country among youth, not to only focus upon winning awards which makes him a challenging writer.

**Keywords:** Bestseller Genre, Marketing, Youth, Highbrow Fiction, Lowbrow Fiction.

## Introduction

ChetanBhagat – India'sbestselling author and script writer is an Indian author who has published eight novels and two non – fiction books. His novels' sales have been seen enormously high in India as well as abroad. Millions of copies were sold of each and every novel. Five novels are adapted for movies: 3 Idiots from Five Point Someone, Hello from one Night @ the call center, Kai Po Che from Three Mistakes of My Life, 2 States from 2 States and Half Girlfriend from Half Girlfriend.

Chetan Bhagatwho was born on22nd April, 1974 became the India's bestseller author. He came into the field of creative writing and got his millions of copies sold in a year of one single book. Many of his books undergo reprinting as the demand gets high for his novels. Readers of his books wait passionately for the next book. The Girl in Room 105 is India's top mostin demand books in the list on the basis of pre-order on Amazon.

Jeff Belle, the Vice President said, "*Millions of readers have enjoyed Chetan's work for over a decade. Hisbooks deftly weave together the everyday life of youngsters with the prevalent social milieu of our time.*" (1) Review

The Indian English novel as it emerged around 1930s had some well-defined features. Q DLeavis is the one who distinguishes novels according to their target audience. In her epoch-making critical treatise, fiction and the reading public, she labeled certain novels as highbrow fiction that everyone praised and nobody wrote commentaries about them. With the rise of market power, a new genre of English novel emerged out that was considered as bestseller. The readers not only love bestseller kind of novels but also liked to comment upon them.

ChetanBhagat has merged both highbrow and a lowbrow genre into one, which is now approved as bestseller genre of the Indian English literature. He chooses the persons from the real life metropolis. He exactly depicts theirreal life pictures and entertains all the classes. Bhagat wrote about the youth; their issues like unemployment, dis-satisfaction, aspiration, ambition, education system and premarital sex etc.He covered all the interesting topics henceforth, people of all age groups loved to read his works. His language possessed such a simplicity that people from all the strata liked to read him. It is very much visible that he is an author who believes in bringing the realism in art.

Chetan Bhagat is the writer of modern India and he has painted various kinds of issues. He tries to convey the message to the young generation that they need not to get depressed or frustrated, even if they fail in a particular assignment. His ideology tries to strengthen the youth to fight against the ills coming up in the society. His subjects show the issues maturing but also they get curbed at a solution giving note. Such features keep the reader intact into reading his novels at a stretch. This basically proves the gravity of a topic being chosen by him every time.

Novel readership in India is being observed to be the highest at this point of time. The circulation of novels is gradually increasing. Many popular fiction writers are emerging in India like Chetan Bhagat, Preeti Shenoy, Durjoy Dutta, Anurag Mathur, Amish Tripathy, Ravindra Singh and Kavita Kane etc. Amongst all these writers, major credit of the 21st century goes to Chetan Bhagat because he is the one who wrote eight novels and all these became the bestsellers. Approximately thirteen million copies have been sold all over India. The success of Chetan Bhagat's debut novel paved way for an era of popular English literature dominated by campus based novels.

In India, innumerable titles are released each year but all does not happen to become successful. The reasons behind their not getting successful are sometimes poor marketing, lack of strong selling strategy, at times it is poor quality inclusive of the subject matter, writing style or audience's approach. The best bookselling competition in India is getting tougher each day. But what is change in Chetan Bhagat, who is enjoying a prominent place as a bestseller author. Those persons, who were not interested to read a book or visit a bookstore, began their reading habit with a book of bestseller authors. Youth is not so interested to read classical works, but with the emergence of bestseller authors, they are interested also and enjoying the novel.

#### **Aim of the Study**

This research paper is about analyzing Chetan Bhagat as the Bestseller author. It will focus upon the features which made him bestseller author. His novels are highly entertaining, but at the same time they are imbued with serious purposes. The significance of Bhagat's being acknowledged as a bestseller author is a fact which is proved through the various features. To name a few here; Attractive and Catchy Titles, Commonality of Characters, Role of Marketing and Social Media etc. Bhagat's efforts are worth to make more and more people readers of novels written in English language. This habit of reading was being observed slowly to deteriorate. Chetan, by his way of writing in simple and easy language, he enhanced the number of readers in last few years.

#### **Review of Literature**

To carry out the investigation, the related research work in the field of bestseller authors has been studied. Besides research papers, articles and text books upon Chetan Bhagat's works as mentioned in the bibliography, **The Icon of Popular Fiction** by Tapan K Ghosh and R K Dhawan and Chetan

Bhagat's novels: A Critical Study by Dr. Sachin Kumar R. Pandya are some critical books reviewed for the investigation. Reading pulp fiction of the writers like Durjoy Dutta, Ravindra Singh and Amish Tripathy etc. contributed in establishing the foundation of the research.

Amish Tripathy, another bestselling author of pop fiction, identified the signs of this new trend thus; quoting:

*"I think India is changing, and people frankly don't care for the kind of books big publishers were coming out with- stories of the British Raj or the struggles of NRIs. After a century, India is rich again, and people want to hear stories about themselves – about our call center generation, or a Punjabi marrying a Tamilian or our myths told in a modern way. A few of us have just been lucky to be blessed with stories that connect with this mood".*

*The New York Times* stated about Bhagat as "the biggest selling English novelist in India's History". He used extremely simple language. K. Narsimha Rao comments "Bhagat represents the voice of a generation of middle class Indian youth facing choices and frustrations in an era with a promise of growing prosperity". He is not only a bestseller author but also an influential person as *Time magazine* named "Chetan Bhagat as one of the 100 most influential people in the world."

About his sense of humor and use of words Divya Pathak calls him "the pied piper of Indian fiction, who weaves magic through his words, his sense of humor inter-mingling with a grave dark background that has revolutionized the way modern Indian fiction is written as well as looked upon in India."

Attractive and Catchy Titles- Attractive and catchy titles is also a significant point to bring success to Bhagat's account. Such titles arise a feeling of connect and hence get motivated to read his novels. Also, a unique thing is associated to his novel's titles and that is a number. All his novels have a number either in suffix or prefix like 'Five' in '*Five Point Someone*', 'One' in *One Night @ the call center* and '105' in *The Girl in Room 105* etc. All the eight novels have a number, which is a unique thing. These titles generate a curiosity in the minds of readers to discover the book further. People began to imagine something related to their personal experience. Good sounding, confusing abstract, blunt titles catch a reader's attention in the bookstore.

#### **Bhagat's Writing Style**

His writing style is extremely informal. This may be referred to as modern English. This language is a language of common people. The writing style of the novels of Bhagat is extremely reliable to each and every individual. He uses Hinglish, (English language with Hindi words), sharp tone of the language of the book. He writes in simple English and in a story form. This type of storyline can be seen in many movies. Uncomplicated sentence formation and ease of understanding made people read his books.

He paved way in the writings for so many writers like Amish Tripathy, Ravinder Singh and Durjoy Dutta etc. His biggest quality is, capturing the youth and middle aged generation alike. This quality

is unbelievable and favorable. 'The Girl in Room 105' is his eighth novel and overall tenth book of Chetan Bhagat. It's an interesting and gripping story. It can be completely read in one or two sittings. Reader gets completely involved in it, and wants to know, who the murderer of Zara Lone is? The novel reflects an un-love story and a murder mystery of a girl named Zara, which is murdered by her fiancée, Raghu. But it is clear in the end of the book. It is a mystery. It is a thriller fiction, bestselling book. It is a simple story in simple language like other books of Chetan Bhagat.

Chetan Bhagat describes so many things in this book; like Hindu and Muslim religion, RSS, strikes by Kashmiris against Indian Army, police's inability to arrest criminals, murder mystery, natural beauty of Kashmir, and about Indian Army etc.

One important reason to help a bestseller author is to write similar kinds of storylines within a period of time; they help each-other work. People get addicted to the same kind of content in the book related to romance, college love, insecurity, jealousy, lives of youth etc. These themes or set of emotions are easier to connect with larger Indian base. Various mythological authors, Indian literary novels, crime thriller Indian authors are emerging in India as bestsellers.

#### **Commonality of Characters**

Chetan Bhagat is a master of characterization. While reading his novels, readers relate themselves to the characters. They feel as if, their emotions, feelings, aspirations, ambitions, problems and solutions are depicted in the novels. His female characters have weak and strong, both the features, very much like real characters.

In the novel, 'Half Girlfriend', Riya is a very strong character. She does not follow Indian society blindly being a traditional Indian woman. She had courage to divorce her husband. She doesn't accept the misbehavior being done to her by her husband. She takes a bold step against her husband on his slapping her. She introduces Madhav before her parents very boldly. In spite of all these characteristics, she possessed some weaknesses as well. She wasn't enough strong to face comments and rude behavior of Madhav's mother.

Chetan Bhagat has an emotional and touching element in his writings which people want to read as it is close to reality. In *The Girl in Room 105* novel, Keshav and Saurabh are friends, Keshav drinks alcohol every day. They are working but are not satisfied. Keshav and Zara met first time in a seminar hall in a debate competition. They continue to love each other for four years but their cultures were totally different. Keshav was Rajsthani and Zara was a Muslim girl. Keshav's father does not agree to this marriage.

In the novel ON@CC Shyam, the narrator is introduced to the readers first. He is the black sheep of the family. A call center worker in a family of professionals, and achievers. He faces so many problems due to financial issues. Radhika, who is a docile housewife have sacrificed her dreams to be a good teacher. She did it all just for the sake of saving her marriage which was an arranged marriage. She is

lorded over by her mother-in-law and ignored by her husband.

Vroom is angry and rebellious, though very bright and smart. He reminds the reader of Ryan in *Five Point Someone*. He is innovative character, designs a website.

Hence, we can find the commonality of characters.

#### **Bhagat's characters are like Angry Young Men**

These characters forget close contact with the family and neighbors. They lead lives of great tension. The characters suffer from complete isolation. They are not blind followers of their parents like traditional people. Ryan Oberai, Vroom, Ishaan and Krish are all young, angry men in their own way; they refuse to make compromises that may reward them. They refuse to buy success. They would rather choose the path of rebellion that may bring them to their knees for a while, but their heads are always held high. Inspector Rana says about media, because journalist says "clueless Delhi Police" on TV. "He pounded both his fists on the table; what are we supposed to do? Go into everyone's home every night so nothing bad ever happens? How can we prevent crime?" (67) *The Girl in Room 105*

The authors today want to go with masses. 'The Girl in Room 105' attracted so many women readers. People wait for the release of Bhagat's upcoming books. They want him to write more and flash new books for them to read and enjoy a close affinity with the characters and the story lines of his. Bhagat usually keeps a target to release a book in every two years.

#### **Role of Marketing**

For Chetan Bhagat as a bestseller author, marketing also has played an important role. Except one novel 'The Girl in Room 105', all the books of Bhagat have been published by Rupa Publications. The latest novel 'The Girl in Room 105' is published by Westland Publications. Bestseller authors like Amish Tripathy, Ravinder Singh, and Preeti Shenoy are adopting promotion strategy self-promotion and paid promotion through the help of publishing houses, where the price is shared equally between the author and publishing house. A book no matter how well marketed and targeted would fail to perform without proper concept, basic writing skills, audience connect and a need to be read. Most important factor in bestselling is language itself. Setting of tone is important to understand the context of the book. Bhagat's writing method reflects today's world and its reality.

Readers entertain themselves by the books of Bhagat. With the release of his first novel 'Five Point Someone', a story of three young IITians comes across. Bhagat's popularity as an author grew massively. His second novel was again a bestseller. He understands the pulse of India's masses. His novels successfully maintain a strong connect with Indian readers. His writing style is simple, easy flowing and he has a knack for making his stories engaging. His books have been published in several Indian languages including Hindi, Marathi, Tamil and

Malayalam. The authors today want to go within masses.

#### **Humorous Tone**

Humour is the most important ingredient of a happy life; this is also been taken care of, by Chetan in his novels so that the readers can develop interest to complete the novel.

Some humorous scenes were also witnessed when Keshav and Saurabh goes to Kashmir to meet Sikander. The Inspector says "you guys restarted that Zara case? And went to Kashmir? Mad aashique you are, first." (11) *The Girl in Room 105*

His works have striking similarities with parables in projecting moral messages, divine guidance and technical suggestions. The victories and defeats of the youth are common aspects of Bhagat's stories with common respect to the young generation.

Most of the protagonists in his novels are named after Lord Krishna such as Shyam, Krishna, Hari, Govinda and Madhav. Bhagat is considered to be a youth icon rather than being just an author. With his vigorous and humorous ways of depicting stories, he has encouraged the habit of reading in many young Indians. According to him, novels are perfect devices for both inspiration and entertainment.

#### **Novels Delivering a Message**

Generally, novels are written for fun but these written by Chetan Bhagat are good enough to convey a significant message to the readers. If we happen to quote few examples; in the first novel, the author uses a satirical tone on the uninspiring teaching and uninteresting assignments. Ragging, which is considered as a crime, is also an important part of this novel. In this novel he has a story to tell and he does so in a neat, racy style and techie-words. He refuses to preach and advise about traditions and moral customs. He focuses more on emotional aspect rather than on debatable discourses. He locates a theme near the young hearts. The Five –pointers are dehumanized, rejected as an outcast, not worthy of being identified. They are back-bencher, a loser, an object of pity and humor at the same time.

In the second novel, the author's intention is to make the people steady and strategic even in their difficult times. It is a black comedy genre. The main actors are calling center operators, losers in the metropolitan India. These are mostly those people who have not gone to the prestigious institutions. The jobs they hold are reasonably well-paid but absolutely soul-billing. They have to work all night to answer silly questions hurled by abusive and arrogant Americans. All six major characters have a dark secret that keeps haunting them; their dreams are crushed, their ambitions thwarted. However, they keep on laboring as the money is good and there is no other choice.

#### **Role of Social Media**

Social Media reserves a special and a very important place for bestseller authors. They have a miraculous wand with them to ignite the sale of such authors. The promotional ads on Facebook,

Instagram, Google, Author Pages, Book Reviews, Magazine Interviews, Book Events or Launches, College Fest Talks, Motivational Speeches, Writing Competitions, Big Associations and also TV Interviews etc push these renowned authors incredibly.

A good PR of a well-established author can bring wonders with the book. Chetan Bhagat works through an official website which is why he has already become a mini-celebrity. Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie are among the elitist book writers, whose books reach soaring success also because of their international presence. Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" became an international success because of her effective media presence like TV interviews. These are ways to reach out to a larger audience.

Chetan Bhagat began getting involved in the TV industry to promote his book. Along with many things, the recent idea of converting novels into movies is also trending. Filmmakers are constantly in need of good scripts and novels are their latest option, in which Bhagat made his mark; his five novels have been converted into movies. Converting an author's book into a movie is fascinating in 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is a major platform these days to register one's strong presence amongst the people.

#### **Conclusion**

This paper is an attempt to bring forward Chetan Bhagat's features and qualities that honoured him with the title of Bestseller author. It can be said that Chetan Bhagat is a bestseller author, who is liked not only by youth, but all the age groups. There is no specific class who wants to read his novels rather people from every walk of life prefer to read his novels. His style is very simple. The fictional art of Chetan Bhagat has become a class in itself and it has given a new direction to the stream of Indian English fiction to be livelier. It is free from the burden of obscurity and stark philosophy. It deals each and every aspect of modern India and his youth. Chetan's works touches everyone as if the readers are connected this way or that way to his works.

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