

**THE NEW GENERATION INDIAN IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S FICTION – A  
STUDY**

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Submitted

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “The New Generation Indian In Chetan Bhagat’s Fiction – A Study” written by Phillia L. Kiangte has been written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down within the Ph.D. regulations of Mizoram University. The thesis is the result of her own investigation. Neither the thesis as a whole nor any part of it was ever submitted by any other University for any research degree.

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**DECLARATION**

I, Phillia L. Kiangte, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University or Institute.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Chetan Bhagat was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1974 in New Delhi and is a living Indian author who has written six novels namely *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: The Story of My Marriage* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), *Half Girlfriend* (2014) respectively and a collection of essays titled *What Young India Wants* (2012), and these are the works that have been selected for study in this thesis titled “The New Generation Indian in Chetan Bhagat’s Fiction – A Study.”

Bhagat was raised in a Punjabi family in Delhi and studied at Army Public School (1978-1991), Dhaula Kuan, New Delhi. He finished Mechanical Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi (1991-1995), and went on to study Business management at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad (1995-1997), where he was conferred the title of “The Best Outgoing Student”. He found love with his classmate Anusha Suryanarayan during their student days at IIM and they later got married. The novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*, is said to be a fictional representation of their love story. After Bhagat completed his education from IIT and IIM, he worked in a financial service company called Peregrine based in Hong-Kong. Unfortunately it closed down in six months but he continued to stay in Hong-Kong for eleven years, and was later employed at Goldman Sachs. His novels are mostly written in ordinary conversational English and his style of writing is lucid with linear narratives.

The name of Chetan Bhagat is highly recognized today in the field of Indian English fiction. According to *New York Times*, he is “the biggest selling English language novelist in India’s history” as his books have registered a sale of over a million copies. He has made a

huge contribution to the world of entertainment through some of his novels which have been adapted into popular Bollywood movies. He has also made a contribution for big newspapers such as *The Times of India* and *Dainik Bhaskar*, where he writes as a columnist discussing and commenting on various social and national issues. Bhagat is listed by Fast Company, USA, as one of the world's "100 most creative people in business" and has also been included in the *Time* magazine's list of "World's 100 Most Influential People" in the year 2010. In the introductory article of his book, *What Young India Wants*, he explains the reason for his change of profession from that of an investment banker to a writer and says:

I was an NRI, someone who earns in dollars and spends his evening being nostalgic about India. I had no idea I would quit banking and be back in the streets of Mumbai. If there is someone who should believe in destiny, it is I. All of this became possible because of the one little, ignored aspect of my personality when I was a child – me as the entertainer. It surfaced again and changed my life ... That same entertainer re-emerged in Hongkong. My other banker friends took on hobbies like gold and bridge. Almost by chance, I decided to do what I enjoyed: tell stories. (Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* xvi)

Even before Bhagat's emergence in the Indian literary scene, Indian English Literature has been wealthy in terms of content and structure. English was brought to India through a colonial education and was introduced as part of a deliberate policy. In the words of Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1835, the idea was to "form a class who may be interpreters between the British and millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Clive 238). With the introduction of the English education in India, the first Indian novel in English *Rajmohan's wife* was witnessed in the year 1864 by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (Chaudhuri 31).

According to Ulka Anjaria the early English fiction did not develop within its own distinct sphere but rather in relation to and in tandem with the vernacular writings that was emerging at the same time. While English was envisioned to be the site of consolidation of colonial power, it also became a site of potential resistance alongside the vernaculars. Many of the early Anglophone writers were equally engaged with their respective vernacular language and interchange among the various linguistic traditions continued beyond the nineteenth century. (Anjaria 6)

The early twentieth-century Anglophone writers Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan and Raja Rao were often clubbed together as “nationalist/socialist writers who wrote in English” (Anjaria 7). Their protagonists are seen to espouse “Gandhian national identity” and these fiction writers “employed images of the Indian village community to promote national self-consciousness in literature” (Sethi 88). Remarkable narratives of “real” Indian villages with traditional principles associated with Indian village communities were employed extensively in much of the writings at this period such as Narayan’s *Malgudi*, Rao’s *Kanthapura*, Nagarajan’s *Chronicles of Kedaram* etc. It can be seen that Raja Rao’s Moorthy in *Kanthapura*, R.K. Narayan’s Raju in *Guide*, the porter boy Munno in Anand’s *Coolie* are all staunch supporters of Gandhian principles. In other words, the Indian novels at this time sought to express Indian national identity framed around “Gandhian” thoughts and ideology (Sethi 89).

As the novels continue to develop and evolve under the influence of modernism in the nineties, it can be observed that much of the Indian novels in English from the 1980s to the present are characterized by diaspora and cosmopolitanism. The inaugural text of this phase is Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* published in 1981. As noted by critics and scholars, numerous academic surveys and commentaries on Indian fiction in English dwell exclusively

on literary fictions and “establish a canon which functions as both a repository and confirmation of literariness” (Gupta 141). Alex Tickell observes that:

For many commentators, the internationally marketed Indian-English novel, which became really successful in the 1980s, is inextricably linked not only to Indian readership but to the literary taste and critical-theoretical priorities of readers in the global North, with whom cosmopolitan Indian authors have entered into a sophisticated cultural dialogue. The success of diaspora writers in purveying an image of India globally, and the process by which these images constitute a reflexive ‘re-orientalizing’ of India, which resonates with pre-existing discourses about the subcontinent, have further complicated the representational politics of the contemporary novel in English. (Tickell 40)

Today among the contemporary writers there are scores of Indian diasporic writers which includes names such as Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amit Choudhury, Kiran Desai, Nirad C. Choudhury, Bharati Mukherjee Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Seth, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, V.S Naipaul to name a few who have established a name for themselves by producing literature which depict typical diasporic experience and themes among the expatriates and emigrants. Many of these literatures have been recognized internationally as “Salman Rushdie won the Booker of Bookers (1993), Vikran Chandra won the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize (1995); Arundhati Roy won the Man Booker (1997), Amitav Ghosh won the Arthur C. Clarke Award (1997) and Jhumpa Lahiri won the Pulitzer Prize (2000)” (Viswamohan xv). Some of these writings celebrate hybridity and multiculturalism in the ongoing process of globalization and transnationalism. Few of them have also highlighted some of the problems and experiences encountered by the displaced people in foreign lands adopted by them which are mostly in American and European countries. Many of these writers have no doubt achieved international critical acclaim and

their works have been recognized as culturally prestigious literary fictions. Unlike these diasporic writers, Chetan Bhagat writes his novels as an Indian residing within India and for the Indian audience in conversational contemporary English. His novels with India as the central focus come as a refreshing and noticeable change from the abundant diasporic literatures available today.

Writers like Salman Rushdie depict India's partition of 1947 as a social, political and psychological tragedy for the succeeding generations in his award winning *Midnight's Children* (1980). Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) illustrates the emerging polity of postcolonial India in the form of a political fable as a mother looks for a suitable groom for her daughter to marry. The novel can be regarded as an examination of national political issues reflecting the period of 1952, the year in which the first national election after India's Independence was held. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) is famous for its attack on the class/caste structure of Indian society where the lower classes are victims of class disparities and discrimination in society under small time feudal lords. Unlike these famous Indian English novelists, the social milieu as presented in the fictions of Bhagat is primarily that of the urban society in the post liberalization (early nineties) era. While many of the great writers of Indian novels have focused on the fiction of India's past, Chetan Bhagat has won popular imagination today by choosing to narrate about the contemporary present. Sablok remarks, "His novels are not set in the laid-back milieu of small-town India; they are right in the hustle and bustle of metropolitan Indian cities where life moves at a fast pace and change is preferred to continuity" (Sablok, vii).

Chetan Bhagat has been selected for study because his novels have successfully captured the life and popular culture of the modern Indian urban youth and the challenges that they experience in various aspects of their life including education, love, sex and marriage and career goals within the context of new liberalized India. Other contemporary

writers like Vikas Swarup, Aravind Adiga, Suketu Mehta and Upamanyu Chatterjee, also presents to us themes concerning consumerism, rising metropolitan culture, urban towns, changing principles and influence of globalization. However, Bhagat has captured the sense of conflict and anxieties that the aspirational youth of Indians feel over the changes that the middle-class social structure has undergone which include gender norms and power relations in the context of globalization like no other contemporary authors. In depicting the changing culture of modern India and its impact on the youth, he has raised certain questions which are not only timely but also relevant in the coming century as India continues to evolve and develop in this globalized world.

Bhagat is certainly a recognisable name in the popular culture of India today. John Storey describes popular culture as a “culture that is widely favoured or well liked by many people” (Storey 5) and Bhagat’s fame especially among his young audience and ‘bestseller’ status has confirmed that he has firmly established his place in India’s popular culture. Even as Bhagat captures media attention and popular imagination; intensive studies on his writings are few. As the social changes brought about by economic liberalization are of a recent phenomenon and are still ongoing, serious critical study on creative works depicting such changes are not many. In analyzing the novels of Bhagat, this thesis seeks to pursue among others three significant objectives: i. To study the representation of the new generation Indian youth whose lives have been affected by the structural changes of liberalization and globalization; ii. To study the formation of neoliberal subjectivity post liberalization; and iii. To study the emergence of the ‘New Indian Woman’.

Through the above objectives, this research project aims to contribute to the study of contemporary Indian realities as reflected in literature and also highlight how the ideological and economic factors of liberalization and globalization in the early nineties affect the new generation Indian youths. In seeking to read novels such as Bhagat’s that portray the lives of

contemporary Indian youths, this thesis utilizes critical insights from the social sciences and globalization studies without ignoring literary approach in order to achieve a fair analysis. This interdisciplinary approach is crucial to enrich the understanding of Bhagat's texts and more importantly to understand how he explores the social, political and economic realities of contemporary India affecting the lives of the new generation Indian. Therefore, it is important that Bhagat's location as fictionist among his Indian contemporaries may be visualized at the outset. In this regard, major interests and preoccupations of the novelist that his works address are here outlined in order that this detailed inside stories would be critically appreciated and examined further ahead. This being kept in view, Bhagat's novels are put in a comparative framework along with some works of his contemporaries. What centrally engages Bhagat's fictional art is his contemporary Indian society. Bhagat's works present a restive middle class India; a city centered aspirational India, which looks ahead with promises despite pitfalls on the path.

The changing social conditions witnessed in India as a consequence of economic reformation in the nineties officially registered the shift of India's economic and political system from a pro socialist model to that of a capitalist mode. As a result there has been a significant change witnessed in the Indian novels in terms of how it has aesthetically represented India in both contents and themes. Thus, the main thread of enquiry running through the study of Bhagat's texts is that of new India and how as a part of post liberalization Indian fiction in English it shapes and forms identities of being Indian in this context. The reading of Bhagat's novel as a cultural narrative is based on the idea and notion that his writings cannot be severed from the immense effects of economic reforms in new India. Looking at how culture and politics interlink with economic transformation in India, one is reminded of Raymond Williams's pronouncement who asserts: "As government ... increasingly rests for real power on a modern economic system, older social purposes become

vestigial, and whether expressed or implied, the maintenance of the economic system becomes the main factual purpose of all social activity” (188). Williams went on to say that, “[p]olitics and culture become deeply affected by this dominant pattern, and ways of thinking derived from the economic market ... become increasingly evident” (188). These assertions fittingly describe the way culture, politics and economic changes intersect with each other in India, and are helpful in the understanding of *subject formation* in contemporary India.

Bhagat is a writer who expresses the experience and aspiration of the new generation Indian as he witnesses. His stories mainly centre on youth and the struggle they have to face and that is why his novels appeal widely to the young people today. Liberalization, privatization and globalization witnessed in the early nineties have ushered in new doors of opportunity and India began to be identified as a place of potential market and investment by foreign companies. As a result of this phenomenon consumer goods imported from foreign countries swamped the Indian markets like never before. Then towards the close of the twentieth century, the country witnessed the mushrooming of the IT industry which eventually paved the way for the call center culture that began to spread across all the urban cities of India. The astounding communication technology which today encircles the globe has brought in immense change in the society that has triggered a fierce competition in this field of information technology. This new culture appears to project an image of India no way similar to that presented by diasporic as well as other Indian English novelists. Before Bhagat emerged on the literary scene, not many authors have tried to reflect this India and its changing culture in the context of this emerging cosmopolitan environment, newfound opportunities and commodity culture.

Bhagat is no novelist to tap into the pre-Independent India, unlike Narayan, Anand or Raja Rao who were often regarded as “nationalist writers” (Anjaria 7) and is unlike others whose concerns and writings have been identified as ‘postcolonial literature’. It is apparent

that the modern globalized India has too many issues and concerns which engage his attention readily. Rather than diasporic encounters, what his immediate concern involves are Indian middle class phenomena of struggles and dilemmas in a progressive India as well as economic problems in life among others.

The novels of Bhagat studied in this project have convincingly captured the local realities of a contemporary modern India that is going through the process of transformation under the various influences of economic liberalization. These changes also often result in conflict between the traditional and the modern and are often a cause of anxiety not just to the older generations but to the younger ones as well. According to Ellen Turner's observation of an Indian society, "traditional forms of Indian adult subjectivity often revolve around marriage, family, and community" (2) and many times an individual is gauged in the society by how well he or she conforms to such accepted notions of behaviour which include ideas concerning marriage and starting a family. A disregard for such traditions and practice is often regarded as blatant individualism which is now seen commonly amongst many of the contemporary Indian youths. Turner is of the opinion that such practice is bound to cause a conflict amongst the older and newer generation of Indians (Turner 2).

In observing some of the cultural concerns in contemporary India, Shehzad Nadeem in his essay titled "Macaulay's (Cyber) Children: The Cultural Politics of Outsourcing in India", has said, "Contemporary middle-class anxieties as a result of globalization revolve around widespread perceptions of growing Westernization among youth and young adults and the threat of corruption these pose" (Nadeem 103). In a similar manner, commenting on the lifestyle of those who work in BPO (Business Processing Output) industries such as the call centers, Shashi Tharoor observes:

To many, the call center has become the symbol of India's rapidly globalizing economy. While traditional India sleeps, a dynamic population of highly skilled,

articulate professionals work through the night, functioning on U.S time under made-up American aliases. They feign familiarity with a culture and climate they've never experienced, earn salaries that their elders couldn't have imagined (but still a fraction of what an American would make), and enjoy a lifestyle that's a cocktail of premature affluence and *ersatz* Westernization. (Tharoor 78)

As these concerns are expressed, a critical study of Chetan Bhagat's works can help analyse if these anxieties are misplaced or justified as multinational corporations in developed countries continue to establish BPO divisions in developing countries, as a result of advancement in information and communication technologies.

The idea of opposition between Western and Indian paradigms has been an established but traditional notion. This paradigm repeatedly presents the case if the Western mode would fully assimilate the Indian or the Indian would totally reject the West. This thesis will also further explore whether Bhagat's fictions have articulated a space where certain 'integration' other than assimilation or rejection have taken place with the new generation Indians in the way they've projected and identified themselves. Although sociological and globalization studies have been helpful in understanding what young Indians today are undergoing and experiencing as a result of economic change, the study of literature can nevertheless provide useful information and deeper insights into the meaning and culture of this generation. This is why Bhagat is chosen for critical study.

Chetan Bhagat with his celebrated novels has inaugurated a new era of Indian fictions in which he exposes the realities of young contemporary middle class Indians. His novels have introduced a new phase of Indian commercial fiction which has distinct features and forms differentiable from established Indian literary fictions. The employment of "home grown English" (Gupta 151) and Indian idioms without apologies or explanation is an

interesting development that can be seen in some of the contemporary Indian novels in English including Bhagat's.

It is discernable that the author's intended audience is not the cosmopolitan elite but those Indian readers who might potentially read in English and in any of the Indian languages in which his books have been translated. His novels are set in different cities like Ahmedabad, Varanasi and Chennai apart from the more cosmopolitan cities like Delhi and Bangalore which also has resulted in a wider audience of young readers within India. The stories in these novels represent the world of young urban Indians and also simultaneously address them. The novels have a decidedly domestic orientation in which English is claimed not only as an Indian language but as one that is easily accessible to the masses. In contrast to the celebrated literary novels of Indian fictions in English, those by writers like Bhagat easily incorporate local Indian language into their English and also address the readers with engaging intimacy. What can be observed in his books is the absence of glossaries or attempts at translating food or other cultural items for a western reader. In this regard, Suman Gupta in her analysis of contemporary Indian commercial fiction in English writes:

It appears to be held that writing fiction about India in English has almost inevitably been an act of defamiliarization, and yet paradoxically English is an Indian language and should have the capacity of familiarized usage for fiction. It is averred that Indian commercial fiction in English, *a la Bhagat* and others, has now hit upon it: by eliding explanations and an exotic sensibility and by using English as if it is habitual within the locale that is described, as if English is 'native' to the Indian habitus. (Gupta 152)

Bhagat has developed a narrative style in which he directly addresses his readers which can be observed in most of his novels. His epilogues inform the readers that the narrative that follows are stories based on real life told to Chetan Bhagat himself by a real life reader who has read his previous works. There is a prevalence of colloquial English in all his novels for

which he is unapologetic. He has repeatedly acknowledged that his fiction is not meant to be regarded as ‘literary’ and many of his works have been adapted for Bollywood. His readers are identified as young people who are not the most linguistically proficient in the English language and “who would not normally buy highbrow Indian-English fiction” (Dhaliwal).

Priya Joshi notes that writers of the twenty-first century Indian novel in English like Bhagat thrive because of a loyal base in India that helps them maintain their bestseller status with “print runs of over a million that easily outpace” the printings that “the internationally renowned literary novelists enjoy” (310). Joshi also credits Bhagat’s success to his multilingual presence in Hindi and English, his presence in print and film, and other discursive fields such as finance, management and policy. She observes that Bhagat’s different roles as motivational speaker, journalist, policy wonk, columnist, banker, mechanical engineer and novelist brings to mind popular writer like Dickens who inserted themselves into a culture in which they make themselves matter through their varied works (Joshi 320). This observation is not without merit as Bhagat himself admits:

I write for change. In order to change, I want to first reach as many Indians as possible through entertainment and then influence them with my non-fiction writings and views. For this, I want to be flexible with the medium, be it books, TV, films, stage or the internet. I do not see myself as an author alone, and my job is to reach and communicate with as many people as possible, using any available means. To me, everything I do fits in that underlying goal. (Bhagat, Q & A)

The changes in the literary preference and the rise of the popular or commercial fictions in English within India echo the socio cultural changes of the last twenty years. Changes in the economic regulations in the late eighties have put India on the course of liberalization and since then significant changes have taken place in the lifestyle, consumption and leisure activities of many Indians. The Indian literary scene has changed considerably with the rise

of popular or 'commercial' fictions and Bhagat's contribution in this regard is noteworthy. Gupta also notes that "while the academic expert places Rushdie as progenitor of contemporary Indian 'literary fiction' in English, the publishing expert appoints Chetan Bhagat the same for 'commercial fiction'" (143). Numerous academic research and studies have been conducted on Indian fictions in English but they have dwelt exclusively on literary fiction and not many academic exploration of Indian commercial fiction in English have been undertaken. Therefore this thesis is also an attempt to address such a gap.

In fact any attempt to analyze contemporary Indian-English fiction must acknowledge and recognize the increasing demand in the domestic Indian publishing market for popular genre fictions. In her essay titled "Contemporary Indian Commercial Fiction in English", Gupta makes an observation that though this kind of genre fiction has a noticeable presence in India; it is not widely known and only "perfunctorily registered" (141). She mentions that "'commercial fiction' is characterized more emphatically by market performance than the intrinsic features of texts," such as the "generic features, themes and stylistic devices that can be discerned in specific texts" (140). She makes an attempt to distinguish literary and commercial fictions in that "Literary fiction is the respectable public face of Indian literature in English at home and abroad, while commercial fiction is the gossipy café of Indian writing in English at home" (Gupta 141). While these distinguishing features and demarcations may be made and observed, it doesn't make these increasingly popular commercial fictions any less important.

It is relevant to know how Fred Botting in his essay titled "Bestselling fiction: machinery, economy, excess" explains that bestsellers primarily have two functions. The first is for commercial purpose that is to make money and the second function is, loosely, "ideological", which reinforces "prevailing attitudes and assumptions", confirming "existing

norms and values to the point of indoctrination”, or sometimes, in subverting those “norms and values” (164). He writes,

In part, the bestseller operates according to a logic of consumer culture, the very image of a consumable commodity is its contemporaneity ... In this respect, the bestseller’s generic focus on depicting commodities and lifestyles is significant. Its ‘immediate’ appeal and its taste for newness lie in this sphere, newness not of artistic innovation but of consumable novelty. But the bestseller is far from being reducible to a temperature gauge measuring all – in cultural and social terms – that may be of interest in capturing a contemporary mood but neglecting anything to do with artistic innovation or invention. Instead, the bestseller may be able to conjoin cultural climate and aesthetics in a ‘symbiotic’ manner in which both remain irreducible. Here, popular fiction seems to move beyond its subordinate status in relation to a literary aesthetic to offer ‘a space in which imagination must be designed for contemporary tastes’ and towards a more enduring position of ‘popular myth’. (Botting 165)

The above observation made on the global scenario by Botting is interesting and apt also in analyzing Bhagat’s fictions which have been commonly labeled as ‘bestsellers’ by quite a number of critics and scholars. To recall, Gramscian hegemony essentially “describes the process of establishing dominance within a culture” (qtd. in Procter 26) and Gramsci argued that “the popular was a key site at which ongoing hegemonic struggles take place” (Gramsci 12). Stuart Hall an esteemed cultural thinker followed this idea in “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular” and asserts that popular culture is a space of contradiction, a site where continuous negotiation takes place. Hall says that “popular culture is the site at which everyday struggles between dominant and subordinate groups are fought, won and lost” (Hall 228) and that popular literary forms like genre-fictions are rarely “escapist” or “hegemonic” but are rather the “arena of consent and resistance” (228). In line with this critical

observation, this thesis will also attempt to analyze Bhagat's novels as a site of resistance and containment of neoliberal middle-class values and identity under the influence of globalization.

Although Bhagat's success as a writer has generated much criticism from the more 'literary writers', his ability to relate to his readers and convincingly portray their world is admirable and cannot be ignored. Bhagat himself is aware of the criticism leveled against him by many of the critics and appears to be non-chalant about them. Infact, in some of his novels, he alludes to his narrative techniques and makes a justification for them. In the novel *2 States* which has a semi-autobiographical element, Ananya asks Krish the kind of writer he aspires to be to which he replies, "Someone who tells stories that are fun but bring about change too" (Bhagat, *2 States* 17). This reply made by Krish clearly indicates the kind of writer Bhagat wish to project himself as. In the same novel, there is also a hint of sarcasm directed against the prize winning contemporary writers when the protagonist cum narrator Krish describes the smell of cooking emanating from Ananya's kitchen. He writes,

Another fryer went on the stove. This time smells of mustard, curry leaves and onions reached us. If this was one of those prize-winning Indian novels, I'd spend two pages on how wonderful those smells were. However, the only reaction I had was a coughing fit and teary eyes. (Bhagat, *2 States* 121)

Similarly, in the novel *Revolution 2020*, Aarti and Gopal attends the launch of a BHU college magazine in which Raghav is the chief editor whose passion lies in writing. Aarti explains to Gopal about Raghav's strategy for attracting the audience and potential readers which is to, "(e)ntertain them first, grab their attention and then say what you want to say" (Bhagat, *Revolution* 98). This particular line appears to sum up the overall approach of Bhagat as a writer as he himself claims in an interview quoted in the previous paragraph that

he writes for change and to do this he first attempt to attract as many audiences as possible by entertaining them and then share his views with them through his non-fiction writings.

An interesting aspect of commercial contemporary fiction such as Bhagat's is that it tends to be "celebratory about Indianness" (Gupta 141) as many of these novels are designed for and published with a view to circulate it within India and not aimed at foreign markets. It can be observed that "the Indian commercial fiction in English is perceivably new and different from, and even resistant to, the established Indian-English literary fiction. It makes a claim of local rootedness, of national resurgence, which could be unpacked further" (Gupta 150). This observation appears to hold true for many of the contemporary commercial fictions of Indian English novels including Bhagat's and this will be explored further in the ensuing chapters.

Many of Bhagat's preoccupation in the novels are not grossly different from the postcolonial literary texts that have achieved wide world fame which have registered the tremendous social and political effects of globalization. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* have represented India's globalizing economic transformation. Contemporaries of Bhagat such as Arvind Adiga have expressed suitably provocative reflections on post liberalization India through his novels such as *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower*.

These novels critique a range of socio-economic problems of twenty-first century urban India and the spread of neoliberal values amongst the rising middle class of urban India. In *The White Tiger*, according to Betty Joseph neoliberalism is critiqued as an all encompassing ideology that continuously reshapes both global conditions and individual's aspirations as the characters adapts traits in order to succeed in the neoliberal world. Adiga's protagonist Balram Halwai becomes a murderous entrepreneur whose life is overrun by obsessive self-interest where criminal activity and violence is utilized to promote his wealth accumulation. His character embodies the neoliberal practices and ideology to a disturbing

degree and in portraying his transformation, the system that guides and propels such development is severely critiqued. With neoliberalism's profound obsession with the individual, personal self-interest became the sole focus for the protagonist Balram Halwai. His character proves to be a lonely and isolated person who is severely detached from other people, but perfectly in tune with the demands of the social order. (Joseph 68)

This prevasiveness of a neoliberal outlook likewise forms a background to the novel *Last Man in Tower* and is once again the subject of the novel's critique. The novel presents the story of advancing Indian urban middle-class inhabitants of an old apartment building named Vishram Society's Tower who accept significant financial advancement from a Real estate developer named Dharmen Shah to evacuate the old building. Shah plans to build a luxury high-rise which will be considered as one of the city's most attractive and prominent addresses. As the inhabitants of the Vishram Society accept the offer of Shah, they completely disregard the population of slum dwellers who will be dispossessed and the old school teacher called Masterji is the only one who adamantly refused Shah's monetary offer. What Adiga cleverly captures in this story is the way in which self-interested individualism becomes the governing motive which affects everyone as manifested in the lives of the characters. In this aspect, Adiga's novel functions as a critique of the pervasive neoliberal logic. At the same time the capacity of the novel to be the potential site of socio-political resistance is also reflected through such stories.

In a similar manner, Alex Tickell's review of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* as a post-liberalization fiction reflects the impact of economic reform and the impact of global capitalism in the South Indian rural area. He views the novel as a social critique of economic reforms through its presentation of the account of the before and after "arrival of satellite television and package tourism in the Kerala backwaters" (Tickell 45). The changes brought about by these factors can be seen in the life of the character such as Baby

Kochamma, and parallels are drawn between “the blindness of caste-prejudice” and “the blinkering effect” of television. Tickell acutely observes that *The God of Small Things* registers the changes such as “environmental degradation of Kerala’s rivers” (46) and the transformation of the local economy with increasing tourism in the region and also warns the danger of treating the local culture as a commodity. Tickell writes,

If we think of *The God of Small Things* not as Roy’s only novel to date, but as part of the continuum of her fictional and non-fiction writing, then its most telling feature, alongside its local environmental concerns, is its critique of caste-gender inequalities in the fated, caste-challenging love affair between Ammu, a Syrian-Christian divorcee, and Velutha, an ‘untouchable’ carpenter ... The slow-burning Maoist insurgency supported by adivasi and dalit groups in central India, detailed in Roy’s recent journalism, is perhaps the most troubling political counterpart to India’s economic rise, and throws a long shadow over the visible affluence of the middle class. (Tickell 47)

Thus, Roy’s novel can be viewed as an early critique of liberalization’s local effects. Vikas Swarup is another contemporary of Bhagat’s whose first book *Q&A* was published in the year 2005. He has received quite a number of awards, including the Booker Prize in South Africa and the Prix Grand Public at the Paris Book Fair (2007). His work is known to have been translated into 34 languages across the world. The success of his book reached its zenith when it was made into a British film by Danny Boyle with the title *Slumdog Millionaire* in the year 2008. He has also published a novel *Six Suspects* in the year 2008.

Vikas Swarup’s success as a writer can be attributed to a product of globalization and marketing forces. The novel *Q&A* is constructed around the suspense and enigma of the protagonist Ram Mohammed Thomas’s ability to answer the questions at the quiz show called ‘Who Will Win a Billion?’ and despite being an uneducated waiter, he becomes the first contestant to answer all twelve questions correctly to take home the prize. The novel

opens with a scene of torture being narrated in the present by the protagonist: “I have been arrested for winning a quiz show” (Swarup, *Q&A* 9) as the television producers suspect him of cheating. He gets a reprieve when a lawyer decides to hear his side of the story which reveals his experiences and the incidents which have enabled him to answer those particular questions correctly. In narrating his life’s experience in episodes he eventually reveals how the correct answers to the quiz were identified by him. Similarly *Six Suspects* also follows similar pattern where the question of the killer of Vicky Rai amongst the six suspects becomes one of the key issues in the novel. In this way, Swarup’s novels follow a familiar framework as the ‘whodunits’.

Chinmoy Banerjee in assessing his works situates Swarup as someone who seems indifferent to serious literary concerns such as notions of authenticity and language as witnessed in the works of writers like Raja Rao and Amit Chaudhuri. Nevertheless, the India found in the pages of Swarup is that of slums that would become tourist destinations, where poor orphan children are left entirely at the mercy of those in power, where the poor live in appalling condition amidst enormous wealth. Through the life of Ram who has been orphaned several times, who had to fend for himself at a relatively early age and had to experience misery, evil and heartbreak and only whose only chance of survival depends on luck, Swarup confronts the horrors of modern India seeking status as a global economic power with indignation or comic satire. Swarup presents in his novel many scenes from the life of the poor and the particular hard lives they lead amidst enormous wealth around. Banerjee (35)

Unlike his contemporaries, Bhagat’s novels are not as confrontational as they may appear on the surface. His novels are situated in “the aspirational spaces of India’s middle class” (Tickell 51) such as the elite IIT colleges and management schools, call-centres, BPO industries and corporate offices. Much of his success as a writer lies in his ability to

convincingly portray the emotions, issues and cultural predicament of a post-liberalization generation and his writing caters to the interest of the cosmopolitan, urban middle class, for whom liberalization has brought attractive advantages and opportunities. Nevertheless, in a real sense, his focus on the urban middle class has sidelined the pictures of the Indian poor and the oppressed beyond the pale of neoliberal progress.

Although some of his later works touched upon themes of social issues such as communal conflict, corruption, education and inter-regional marriage etc, upon a close examination of his novels, he appears to espouse a strong faith in Indian national culture while at the same time his fictions also reproduce the corporate ethos and embraces a progressive outlook. This makes him unique in his approach and is able to garner a loyal fan base whose lives and conflicting interests are reflected in many of his novels.

As it has been mentioned briefly above, many of the popular Indian fiction in English and postcolonial literary texts have carefully registered the damaging social and political effects of globalization and have critiqued the faceless homogenization or the perceived vulgarities of post-liberalization commercialism in the society. However, Bhagat has shown sensitivity and an understanding of the changes that the new generation Indian youth has come under as information technology and globalization has rocked the established pattern of behavior and has modified the structures of relationships, professional life, economic patterns and questions of morality. This makes him an interesting author for a serious critical study. Tickell's observation with regards to Bhagat's works is noteworthy, as he writes, "Anglophone fictions such as Bhagat's have shown how the literary politics is diversifying and tilting away from a default critique of the Indian state's neoliberal project" (Tickell 55). Therefore, this thesis will also attempt to reflect Bhagat's works through the lens of neoliberalism and study its influence as a powerful ideology that helped form and shape subjectivity in contemporary modern India.

The economic liberalization of India has elicited a wide range of socio-economic and political changes and these are manifestations of the worldwide effects of globalization at large and are a testament to the way economic globalization has reshaped developing nations like India. As a result, the new literary developments witnessed in Indian literature are significantly representative of the new trends in postliberalization novels that respond to the changes and power dynamics of globalization. It also reveals important underlying ideological consciousness that shapes and forms the texts which help to explain the socio-economic impact of neoliberal globalization. Thus, studying contemporary Indian fictions such as Bhagat's through the critical lens of neoliberal globalization requires a significant understanding of the way these emerging literatures have been shaped by global capitalism and how it has also responded to the forces of globalization.

Also, unlike other previous research that takes into account the diasporic and transnational experiences of globalization, this thesis is specifically focused on the effects of globalization within the nation state of India as seen in Bhagat's novels. Thus, instead of examining themes popularly reflected in many postcolonial literatures such as the problems of migration, questions of hybridity and diasporic communities which are the most frequently discussed areas of literary studies of globalization; this thesis looks at impact of economic globalization especially on the middle class urban youths of contemporary India who are situated within the country. The novels of Bhagat that are analyzed in this project are all narratives of the 'local' India affected by global forces, specifically portraying the new generation Indian youths whose lives are inextricably influenced and controlled by the forces of globalization they encounter.

These questions of Indianness alongside the idea of a new India are explored in depth in this thesis through the representation of the new middle class as post-liberalization Indian English novels such as Bhagat's present and re-narrate middle class concerns and aspirations

exclusively. Amidst the myriad manifestations of middle-classness, Radhakrishnan describes and attempts to explain the new middle class in the following manner:

In the earlier Nehruvian model of Indian nation building, the “old” middle class was made up of government workers who served the nation by working for it. In a globalized model of the Indian nation, the middle class engages in a global economy of work and consumption, serving the nation by, ironically enough, directing itself away from it. (Radhakrishnan 42)

Leela Fernandez in her broader investigation on the impact of economic liberalization on the middle classes found that “there is a mutually constitutive connection between liberalization and India’s middle class so that being middle-class in present-day India involves the continuous production of ‘a distinctive social and political identity’” (Fernandes 2006, xviii). These concepts are further investigated and utilized in understanding how the identity of the new generation Indian is evoked and what implication does it have for the young Indians in general as middle class becomes a desirable social identity.

It is observed that a growing number of middle class women in India have joined the public workforce as a result of expansion of service and private sectors following India’s incorporation into the global economy. Their prominence in public and professional life is now much more recognized by media and popular culture. This raises an interesting question of how women in India are perceived to benefit from the structural adjustment policy of the economy or if participation in paid employment has enhanced their overall sense of empowerment. In relation to this, a study is undertaken to include in this thesis how the concept of the ‘New Indian woman’ is propagated and identified in Bhagat’s fictions and how boundaries of societal acceptability is redefined in new India through their role as a female.

With the success of his first novel *First Point Someone* Bhagat appears to have established a strong fan base among the young Indians. The locale of this novel is the campus

of IIT, Delhi, and the story revolves around the life of three students struggling to adjust themselves in India's most prestigious institution. The protagonists Hari, Alok and Ryan hail from different family backgrounds with different sets of expectations. Their friendship is sealed firmly when Ryan comes to the rescue of Alok and Hari from the humiliation of ragging by their seniors. Alok is the most ambitious amongst among them with the aim to become a 'nine pointer' burdened by the sense of responsibility he possessed towards his family consisting of a handicapped father, an emotionally traumatized mother and a sister whose marriage is yet to be arranged.

Together the three friends struggle to find a way out of the kind of academic pressure they encounter and finally resorted to making an attempt to steal question paper from Professor Cherian's office which turned out unsuccessful. However towards the end of the novel not all is lost with the three friends as they get back on track with their studies and redeem themselves from the disgrace that they've experienced through hard work, commitment and a repentant attitude.

The novel to a great extent captures the disappointment, frustration and loneliness of contemporary Indian youths in a competitive academic environment and this theme has resonated well with many of Bhagat's readers. Bhagat realizes the importance that education plays in the formation of the psyche of the Indian youths especially amongst the rising middle class. Education has been one of the most important means for the majority of middle class in India to move upwards in the social ladder and continues to be so. However, through the novel Bhagat puts forth the idea that at some point education ceases to be creative, innovative learning process but is only seen as a means to earn bread and butter.

Pavan K. Varma in his book titled *The Great Indian Middle Class* observes that after India achieved its independence, the direction of State policy was being dictated by middle-class interests in many areas including the field of education. Owing to the pressure of the

middle classes for higher education, there was a growth in the higher education but it occurred at the expense of other educational priorities such as “free and compulsory education for all children until the age of fourteen” as was adopted in the Constitution by free India in the year 1950 (58). This resulted in a wide gap between those illiterate children who come from poor households, mostly in the rural areas and the educated trained and skilled manpower belonging to the middle class and urban background. In a country where many are illiterate and “drop-outs at the primary education level, the educated elite enjoy a high scarcity value for their education and profession” (59). However in time the increase in the number of higher educational establishments could not keep pace with the rising numbers from the middle class who sought to avail of the benefits. In such an environment, obtaining a degree became a substitute for the quality of education and this is a concern which Bhagat has reflected wryly in his novel. Varma also remarks on the Indian scene:

There is little doubt that the lopsided development of education in India is directly linked to the structure of Indian society, and that the inequalities in education are, in fact, a reflection of inequalities of economic and social powers of different groups in India. The educational inequalities both reflect and help to sustain social disparities. (Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class* 58)

It has been noted the role of an education system structured initially in response to middle-class needs but becoming inadequate in making an average middle-class person into a creative, sensible and intellectually well-equipped citizen cannot be overestimated in understanding and analyzing the behavior and reactions of this class overall. Moreover, Bhagat realizes how the education system affects millions of young Indian lives across the country and this is a concern he reflects in some of his essays and columns too. Some of the questions he raises reveal his genuine concern for the education status in the country, for instance in his essay titled ‘The Bootlegging of Education’, he asks,

We have good, reputed colleges that, at best, accommodate 10 per cent of the applicant pool of students. What happens to the rest? Obsessed with starting salaries, IITs, IIMs and DU cut-offs, we ignore the millions that don't make it. Where do these students go? Do they have a shot at a good life? (Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* 124)

These are themes that are touched upon once again in his later novels such as *Revolution 2020* and also hint at in his latest novel *Half Girlfriend*.

*One Night @ the Call Center* is the second novel of Bhagat which was published in the year 2005. This novel explores the lives of six call center employees in Gurgaon, Haryana who encounters various challenges in their personal as well as professional lives. The novel is narrated through the voice of one of the characters Shyam Mehra who recounts incidents in the past in order to throw lights to the readers about the present predicament that the characters find themselves in. Although the entire action of the novel revolves around one particular night, the flashback technique employed enables the author to cover a wider span of time. Through the characters of Shyam, Priyanka, Esha, Vroom, Radhika and Military Uncle, Bhagat paints a realistic picture of the working conditions and atmosphere of call centers in India which has become one of the biggest employment organization in the metropolitan cities of India today.

Most of these characters join the call centre to help them meet their financial needs and although they enjoy the respite from financial crisis that the job offers them, they appear to lack professional commitment to the job as they seem to suffer from the stressful environment and the frustration that comes with servicing clients located overseas who are often condescending and demanding. Shyam works in the call center because the job he had in the web department of an ad agency did not pay well, similarly Vroom left his job as a journalist since being a call center agent gives him the opportunity to earn more money than the journalism job. Esha is an aspiring model and while she seeks for modeling assignment at

day time, working at the call center helps her manage financially before she lands a modeling contract. Radhika, the married woman juggles her family responsibility with her call center job in order to supplement the family's income. Military uncle has retired from the army and since his own son and his family has deserted him, his job at the call center enables him to fend for himself financially. Priyanka works as a call center agent while trying to save up enough to open a kindergarten school one day. Through his characters, Bhagat has shown that the many of the new generation youths work in call centers due to lack of better employment opportunities in the country.

In this novel Bhagat has highlighted the culturally homogenizing effect of globalization and even critiques the rampant consumerism amongst the new generation Indian youth on the surface. However, a deeper analysis of the novel can be seen to critique the neoliberal attitude while championing it at the same time. Ironically however, the novel ends with the business at the call center being rescued and some of the characters in the novel continue to work there. The novel also probes questions of accent neutralization and renaming practices in these call centres which is linked to an erasure and undermining a sense of "Indian" identity. *Bangalore Calling* written by Brinda Narayan, *Call Me Dan* written by Anish Trivedi and Neelesh Misra's *Once Upon a Timezone* are few of the others novels that feature themes of accent neutralization and renaming of Indian names to American names which has been linked to distortion and alternation of Indian identity.

The way the call centers have impacted the lives of the urban youth in Indian metropolitan cities have been brilliantly captured in novels like *One Night at The Call Center*. Today in the country there is an increased participation of women in the service sectors of IT industry which according to sociologist like Shehzad Nadeem is regarded as a threat to the existing traditional power relations of society. Although the employment opportunities afforded by the opening of the Indian economy to foreign investors have been

widely recognized and celebrated, it is observed that the ensuing cultural change has not been compatible with certain conservative traditions and practices of Indian life (Nadeem 107). The reason for this as cited by Ellen Turner in her assessment of the novel *One Night @ The Call Center* is due to an “increased presence of young women in the workforce” and also the effect of “culture of individualism that is apparently propagated by such workplaces” (Turner 3).

*The Three Mistakes of My Life* is the third novel written by Bhagat which was published in May 2008. The story is set in the city of Ahmedabad and includes few incidents based on real events. In this story, the three friends Govind, Omi and Ishaan are unemployed and desire to achieve success with their business venture. Together the three friends decide to open a store of cricket goods near the temple run by Omi’s family. Just when they start to witness their business thrive, fate had something else in store for them. The earthquake that shook Gujarat violently destroyed the dream shop they had invested heavily in an upcoming fancy mall.

Together the three friends pick up the pieces and start their journey afresh. Amidst religious conflicts and political issues that plague their lives; the three friends forge their own path courageously to act upon what they believe is the right to do and not give in to family pressure, religious fanaticism and politics. They also end up saving the life of Ali, a young Muslim boy with an extraordinary gift of reflex on whom Ishaan pins his hope for India’s future cricket. To Bhagat, the division caused by religion that is seen commonly amongst Indians especially between that of the Hindus and Muslims appears to be a matter of grave concern. Mentioning this in his essay titled, “Don’t Let Them Divide and Rule Anymore” he writes:

My dear Muslim brother and sisters, you have been had. Yes you have been fooled time and again by these politicians who promised you the world, but kept you as oppressed

as ever ... They kept us busy with the Hindu versus Muslim debate while they hid the fact that the entire country suffered due to their government ... Laws should be put in place to prevent discrimination and, we will have to become more open-minded if we dream of seeing our country as a developed nation. (Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* 58-59)

This is perhaps why *The Three Mistakes Of My Life* with its clever combination of religion, politics, cricket and economics strikes an emotional chord among the new emerging generation in India as the novel can be read as a critique to religious fundamentalism and politicization of religious sentiments. Bhagat raises an important question on the role that religion continues to play in the lives of the increasing urban middle class amidst the various structural changes and values that liberalization has ushered in. The novel probes alongside the overwhelming preoccupation with material acquisitions and increasing exposure to western ideas of rationality and progress with notions of modernity, if the role of religion has reduced in the middle-class person's life or if religious identity has acquired a new significance.

First published in 2009, Bhagat's fourth novel *Two States* is based on the author's personal experience and is a novel critiquing age old issues of race, caste and traditions. The novel highlights the tension that the new generation Indians has to navigate through as they are caught in between the socio-cultural mores of the older generation and yet fully unable to adapt to the westernized values of an increasingly capitalist culture. In negotiating the conflicting demands of traditions kept alive by parents and elders in the family and the widening progressive mind-set ushered in by modernity, the contemporary Indian youths have to tread with utmost care and caution. As the novel is semi auto-biographical in nature, it is befittingly set in IIM-A, one of the most prominent and important B-school in the country.

Krish Malhotra comes from a conventional Punjabi family while Ananya Swami Nathan from a traditional Tamil Brahmin family. The two lovers struggle to reconcile their family members, whose hostility is based on cultural intolerance which is profoundly rooted in tradition. After much misunderstandings and emotional roller coaster ride that the protagonists are put through, the parents and relatives of the two families finally consented to the marriage. Bhagat's exploration of family ties, tradition and loyalty on one hand and individuality, prejudice and caste barriers on the other hand addresses plaguing issues of present-day India. The novel is narrated with ample dose of humour and sarcasm highlighting the prejudices and suspicions that the two families have against each other.

The cultural differences of the Tamilians and Punjabis are glaringly portrayed in the novel with a comic touch. There are many other humorous descriptions of cultural differences and practices seen through the eyes of the Punjabi boy Krish that lends a comic touch to the novel. Through the portrayal of the female protagonist Ananya Swaminathan, the novel shows that in many ways, more women are becoming educated, and more among them are gradually asserting their identity and their opposition to the male-dominated assumptions of the past. However, at the same time issues concerning dowry system which is tied to a woman's value in the marriage market are serious concerns still plaguing many middle class families today and these are themes that Bhagat has hinted upon for further reflection through his novel.

In his novel titled *Revolution 2020*, Bhagat attempts to portray themes of love, corruption and ambition in the young lives of three central characters Raghav, Gopal and Aarti. In this novel, Bhagat presents an engaging and disturbing picture of the corrupt practices common in the education sector especially in private institutions which impact millions across the country. The novel can be seen as a scathing critique of the corruption afflicting the education system in India and the blind race to secure admissions in institutions

such as the IITs by millions of students which has led to depression and frustration in which they become easy preys to corrupt practices in their quest to achieve success. The love triangle between the three characters forms an interesting background to the story and also introduces an element of suspense.

Once again in this novel, Bhagat touches upon the subject of education system in India especially at the college level and the prevalence of corruption in many of the private colleges in India. The obsession for admissions to renowned engineering colleges which is seen as a ticket to the “good life” by many of the youths not excluding the parents becomes one of the focal point of the novel. Through this novel, Bhagat predicts that the struggle to get through the entrance exams in medical or engineering college is going to be one of an existential dilemma amongst the new generation Indians. Through the presentation of Kota, a town in Rajasthan, the novel also critiques the unregulated coaching centers in India that try to take advantage of the aspiring lower middle class students desperate to enter a competitive university program in fields such as business, engineering and technology.

Chetan Bhagat through the despair and dejection of Gopal portrays the sense of failure invading the lives of many new generation Indian youth who are under great pressure to achieve the security that a good job and an income provides in the ever competitive social and economic environment. The novel also explores at length the vices of corruptions and malpractices involved in the process of opening private colleges. Such practice is an example of how the existing systems are exploited for the benefit of few corrupt businessmen. The novel also exposes the depressing situation and plight of the education sectors in the country which has become a serious area of concern especially for the new generation Indians.

The last novel selected for study, *Half Girlfriend* was published in the year 2015 and in this novel, Bhagat revisits the campus setting. Madhav Jha, the protagonist is a talented basketball player who hails from a small-town Bihar. He managed to secure an admission

into the reputed Delhi's St Stephen's College through the sports quota. Through this novel, we see Bhagat's attempt to present some of the issues plaguing India's poorer states.

One of the interesting aspects that the novel dwells upon is concerning the question of class difference demonstrated through fluency in the English language. Madhav's fondness for Bhojpuri films and Hindi music along with the thick accent that accompanies his below average English diction are seen as markers of lower class in comparisons with the other St Stephen students. As an unlikely hero from a small-town Bihar who speaks bad English, Bhagat uses the character's viewpoint to raise questions of class mobility.

Bhagat appears to critique this linguistic divide and challenge the smug linguistic security availed by those who inherit the usage of English as part of their social background. At the same time the novel also reveals that competence in English usage has become one of the most important qualifications to possess in order to take advantage of the opportunity that a modern and globalized economy presents. Therefore, in the novel we see Madhav Jha taking English lessons from Riya, who comes from a privileged background where English is spoken as a first language in order to present a speech which will help him secure Gate's financial support. In fact in his essay titled "Learn and Share English Lessons with All", Bhagat writes,

A section of people believe that teaching and learning English should be a high-class affair. Elitism and English are linked and people who speak good English look down on people who don't ... English is not competing with the vernacular – but it is a necessary skill for middle-class youth to rise in the modern world. (Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* 118)

Finally Bhagat's non-fiction book titled *What Young India Wants* was published in the year 2012 and it contains a collection of his essays and columns which have been featured in popular newspapers. Much of his thoughts on politics, corruption, value system, education

system and economic conditions are highlighted through these essays and articles. He makes an attempt to analyse some of the root cause of these issues which are prevalent in modern contemporary India and also suggests some forms of solutions. Some of these themes find reflection in his work of fictions but it can be argued that the strong stand he takes on many of these themes doesn't quite reflect with conviction in his novels. The first few pages of this book introduce the reader to the background of Bhagat's professional life and also contain an explanation of the reason he chose to become a writer. The entire book is divided into four sections in which the first section is titled "Our Society" where he makes an attempt to draw comparisons between American Society and the Indian Society. It touches upon topics relating to money, wealth, religion, economics, casteism, terrorism, cricket and corruption. The next section titled "Politics" contains about ten essays on the subject of politicians and political parties, Real Estate, judiciary system, government policy, relationship with Pakistan, Anna Hazare's movement and the Lokpal Bill. The third section is named "Our Youth" and in this section he addresses the new generation Indian youth concerning the Indian Education System, academic pressure, importance of English and the need to value 'talent'. Through some of the essays which are well thought out, it is obvious that Bhagat is passionate about the Indian Education System. In his essay titled, "Indian Institute of Idiots", he writes:

I avoid writing on the Indian education system as it is not good for my health. For days, my blood continues to boil, I have insomnia and I feel like hurting someone real bad. The Indian education system is a problem that can be fixed. It affects the country's future, impacts almost every family, everyone knows about it and it is commercially viable to fix it. Still, nothing happens because of our great Indian culture of avoiding change at all costs. Because, change means sticking out your neck and that, ironically, is something we are taught not to do. (Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* 119)

The last section of the book is titled 'Two Short Stories' and in this section, he makes an attempt to challenge and inspire the readers for change through two fictional stories.

Through the rise of popular fiction, the Indian literary scene has changed tremendously in the last decade and Chetan Bhagat has played one of the fundamental roles in this shift in terms of both production and consumption. McCrum commenting on the Indian commercial fiction and the demographic of this readership describes:

This new middle-class audience – small entrepreneurs, managers, travel agents, salespeople, secretaries, clerks – has an appetite for literary entertainment that falls between the elite idiom of the cultivated literati, who might be familiar with the novels of Amitav Ghosh or Salman Rushdie, and the Indian English of the street and the supermarket. Theirs is the Indian English of the outsourcing generation. (McCrums)

It is this very middle class whose quantum growth has been registered with the 1991 economic reforms and the higher growth rates they heralded, that has been reflected in the novels of Bhagat. With the economic growth, so did jobs and opportunities for the middle class as it introduces new structure which is specifically conducive for the middle class. For instance, the service sector grew at a much higher rate than agriculture and industry, and accounted for a much bigger share of the overall economy including the IT boom at the turn of the millennium. This increasingly powerful and influential middle class whose concerns are captured and portrayed so vividly in Bhagat's novels has instantly catapulted Bhagat to instant fame.

Besides this factor, Bhagat's lucid narrative style and fairly simple English has been an attraction for many young readers. His novels provide an insight into the new generation Indian youths who find themselves under different pressures of life within the Indian society which is undergoing change under impact of globalization, liberalized markets and thriving media and technology. His protagonists are mainly confined to metropolitan India but the

software professionals and the metropolis that he reflects in his novels are as much a part of India as anyone else. His fictions provoke thought and cannot be confined to the entertainment value alone. He has not always been considered worthy of academic research and study because of the doubt raised by certain critics on his literary merit; but his novels and essays often throw light on complex social, political and economic contemporary conditions. In the light of this background the thesis attempts to analyze the various facets of Bhagat's novels which intrigue and inspire the younger generation of India today. The study of Indian contemporary novel which registers commercial success and popular acclaim would be incomplete without including the name of Chetan Bhagat.

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## Chapter 2

### Representation of the New Generation Indian Subject

The launch of the economic reforms in 1991 has been perceived to be a turning point for India as liberalization was officially recognized as the new economic policy of the country. According to Kanishka Chowdhury, it was the Congress Party under the then finance minister Manmohan Singh that was responsible for introducing a number of economic reforms to open up the country's economy. It was then later passionately promoted by the BJP during its term of office. Under the new policy, growth rates, foreign reserves and foreign investments registered new figures which were regarded as an indication of India's economic strength and "proof that the nation has gone global" (Chowdhury 2) becoming an important participant in the global pursuit of wealth. Based on these changes, media, politicians and corporate power houses have welcomed a new era of the "New India" which has been marketed with great enthusiasm (Chowdhury 2).

This generation of young India post liberalization, privatization and globalization in the early 1990s can be classified as *the new generation Indian*. Economic liberalization has increased the presence of capital, technology and information by decreasing the barriers to foreign investment and through its promotion of the modernization of telecommunications. This has resulted in a globalization of not just the economy but also lifestyles at an accelerated pace, especially among those of the middle class belonging to the urban centres of India. The liberalization of the Indian economy has dramatically influenced social life in India and scholars have commented at length upon how the image of a "New India" brand has been created by media, corporate power houses and politicians based on the changes witnessed as a result of economic reformation (Chowdhury 2-3). The creation of this "New India" brand accompanies the attempt to construct a new generation Indian subject who will

play an integral role in narrating this new liberalized nation. Bhagat's protagonists are in part representative of this new generation Indian in more ways than one as his novels focus on the dynamics of urban existence and the influence of economic liberalization amongst this new generation Indian youth.

In fact, the new generation Indian has been given the label "zippies" which is characterized as "liberalization's children" by journalist Manjeeet Kripalani in her article titled "India's youth" for *BusinessWeek*. Explaining the coinage of the term and highlighting its difference from "midnight's children", Lukose writes:

The term is a play on "midnight's children" – the generation named after the Salman Rushdie novel which focused on those born during the first hour of the year 1947, when India gained its independence from British colonial rule. The term intertwines the lives of those born in the immediate aftermath of independence with the life of the nation, a nation shaped by the socialist-inspired understanding of national development represented by Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister. In contrast to liberalization's children, midnight's children seem mired in the ideological baggage of Nehruvian nationalist development, with its focus on the rural poor and service to the nation; as lacking in ambition; and being risk averse, "uncool," and fearful.

(Lukose 5)

It is clear that a juxtaposition between "midnight's children" and "liberalization's children" according to Lukose aims at highlighting a shift in "generational sensibilities, attitudes and values" (5) of the new generation Indian in the age of liberalization. Majority of the characters in Bhagat's novels represent these new generation urban middle-class youths with aspirations of social and economic mobility, from sections of society benefitting from this economic liberalization which opened new opportunities as foreign goods and influence

swamped the market. Bhagat's fictions also capture the aspirations of those from lower middle class with an "appreciably smaller 'provincial' stock of educational, economic and cultural capital, but nevertheless aspires to the rewards of liberalization through a combination of ambition, hard work, education and an identification with the values of the neoliberal project" (Tickell 43).

Bhagat's novels which showcase the lives of the urban Indian youth are identified by characteristics and interests that are associated with India's embrace of a liberalized economy. An article in *New York Times* writes, "Mr. Bhagat might not be another Vikram Seth or Arundhati Roy, but he has authentic claims to being one of the voices of a generation of middle-class Indian youth facing the choices and frustrations that come with the prospect of growing wealth" (Greenlees). This new generation urban youths seen in Bhagat's novels represent a group with a modern global out-look and an attitude that holds on to the promise of a new and exciting model of advancement and growth. And it is this new generation Indians who will enable the nation to successfully play a part in the global capitalized market alongside the advanced industrialized countries. Thus a revitalized notion of 'Indianness' is created and mobilized through this influential urban middle class youth group described as the new generation Indian in this chapter.

It is seen in Bhagat's novels that one of the most outstanding features of liberalized contemporary India is the visible presence of a confident new middle class. The expansion of the service sector of the economy and of professional, white-collar private-sector employment as a result of the economic restructuring has added a new layer to India's middle class termed as "new middle class" by sociologists like Leela Fernandes. In studying the nature of this new middle class, Fernandes asserts that this new middle class is no doubt shaped by contemporary economic factors; however it is not just simply produced by liberalization. Instead, she suggests "it is the mutually constitutive connection between

liberalization and India's middle class that is new", so that being middle-class in present-day India involves the continuous production of "a distinctive social and political identity that represents and lays claim to the benefits of liberalization" (xviii).

Fernandes's observation reveals that India's new middle class in the present age represents citizenship in ways it had not done so before. According to her "instead of the hydro-electric schemes and tractors that figured national progress in the Nehru era, the contemporary symbols of progress are consumer goods such as TVs and cellphones" (qtd. in Tickell 43). She further states:

while earlier state socialist ideologies tended to depict workers or rural villages as the archetypal objects of development, such ideologies now compete with mainstream national political discourse that increasingly portray urban middle class consumers as the representative citizens of liberalizing India. (Fernandes xv)

In a similar manner, Radhakrishnan also mentions that "in the earlier Nehruvian model of Indian nation building, the "old" middle class was made up of government workers who served the nation by working for it" (42). However this is no longer the case because in a globalized model of the Indian nation, the middle class engages in a global economy of work and consumption and is identified by cultural or nationalist values which can be considered "conservative and" yet expresses a "desire for global consumer goods" at the same time (42).

Likewise, in Bhagat's novels it is seen that the new generation Indian youth is mainly represented through new middle class youths who come mainly from a middle class background family. In the portrayal of his characters, he also delineates a specific kind of new India and new Indians who are completely in tune with the economic reforms. The heroic subject of Bhagat's narrative in most cases is a young Hindu male from a middle class

family who takes pride in Indian's cultural heritage. At the same time this young protagonist wishes to uphold the nation's reputation in the world. This characteristic is seen in almost all his protagonists, be it Shyam and Varun (*One Night @ The Call Center*), Gopal and Raghav (*Revolution 2020*), Hari (*Five Point Someone*), Madhav (*Half Girlfriend*), Govind (*The 3 Mistakes Of My Life*), or Krish (*2 States*). His novels traces the lives and challenges of those aspiring to win their place or maintain their position in the new middle class group, those that tend to be defined as the metropolitan subject.

In analyzing Bhagat's novels, it is evident that one of the ways to access membership of the distinctive middle class for this new generation Indian youth is through IT jobs and outsourced jobs such as the call centers and BPO (Business Processing Outsource) centers which have symbolized India's accelerated economic growth since the early nineties. The shift in the direction of new middle class employment aspirations reflects the new socioeconomic boundaries of the new middle class. Fernandes rightly observes that "In symbolic terms, the cultural and economic standard for the "old" middle class would have been represented by a job in a state bank or the Indian Civil Service. Members of the new middle class aspire to jobs in multinational corporations or foreign banks" (89). The new generation Indian youths has thus been associated with the expanding service sectors and private sector professional workforces which are considered areas affected by liberalization and economic restructuring.

In light of this background, Bhagat's novels such as *Five Point Someone*, *One Night @ The Call Center* and *Revolution 2020* can be analyzed further as it reflects the struggle of young college students all in the effort to secure for themselves a comfortable middle class lifestyle in which IT colleges and management schools are seen as the passport to such future. Besides, these fictions also demonstrate the power of the middle class IT dreams heralded by

liberalization of the economy and its impacts on urban middle class youths who aspire to get into these premier educational institutes.

The first novel of Bhagat, *Five Point Someone* deals with the struggle of today's engineering students in India who get into the country's top University and who tries to balance stifling academic competition and personal problems. Hari Kumar, Ryan Oberai and Alok Gupta are the main protagonists in this novel and they all come from different segments of the middle class family. While this novel reveals the consciousness of the emerging young aspirants within a premier institute like the IITs, it also reveals how the costs and risks of failure in these institutions are borne by those in the lower reaches of the middle classes amidst popular corporate success story endorsed commonly in the media.

The novel exposes the fierce competitive academic environment that makes the institute seem like a "jail" for the students. Very soon the burden of courses and grades, innumerable quiz, tests and presentations comes heavily down upon the three protagonists and they decide to rebel against the system by devising a radical solution for their hectic schedule. They decide to duplicate assignments and share the workload so that they can take time off for pursuing other interests and activities. However, their plan is soon met with failure. We also see the victim of this academic pressure represented in Neha's brother who committed a suicide for not making it to the IITs and in Alok Gupta who also attempts to commit a suicide as he loses hope of graduating from the institute after he and his friends were caught in their desperate attempt to steal a question paper from Professor Cherian's room. At one point Alok also confided in Hari about the pressure he faces from his family, "That is all they talk to me about; problems and more problems." (124). Alok's father has been crippled due to an accident and his mother as a teacher with modest income is the only earning member in his family of four. With an unmarried sister to support as well, he is seen

as a savior by his family to bail them out of their financial woes and thus the pressure to graduate successfully weighs heavy on him.

Ryan, Alok and Hari represent the 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian youths who are young and ambitious but also feels burdened by the stifling atmosphere of traditional education system. To get away from the stress of the academic pressure, they began watching movies, smoking cigarettes and marijuanas and learn to drown their sorrows in alcohol. Soon after, even their friendship is put to test as Alok decides to leave their circle in the hope of securing better marks without the distracting influence of his friends. Their feeling of dejection and low self esteem is narrated by Hari as their results identify them as losers, “another five point something, another tattoo stamped on your worth as an individual in IIT society” (77).

The story of *Five Point Someone* reveals that with the pressure to get a good paying job, the importance of education as a social capital for the rising middle class youths is an important factor that cannot be ignored. Pavan Varma writes:

Education was something the middle class always valued, but its importance has only grown in these last years. Traditionally, the feudal gentry had the insulation of landed wealth and the hereditary rich had money; for the average middle class person, however, education was the only means to move upwards ... Educational avenues had been increasing ever since 1947, but job opportunities multiplied manifold after the economic reforms of 1991 and the advent a little later of information technology ... The middle class has put in a great deal of hard work to be a part of – and benefit from – this unfolding educational boom. For every seat in a technology institute there are thousands of aspirants ... This kind of competition could be daunting; it could lead to resignation, an acceptance of the improbability of success, a withdrawal from the arena of battle. (Varma *The Great Indian* xxiii)

The intensely competitive atmosphere of the educational system especially in the IT sectors that is witnessed in India is tied to the ultimate IT dream symbolized by young urban professionals who earn high salaries and enjoy multiple perks in multinational companies. Such careers and jobs are regarded as symbols and markers of the lifestyle associated with the liberalized middle class and one which the new generation Indian aspires to.

Among the new generation Indians, many of the young IT aspirants seek to adopt and acquire various social capitals in the hope of promoting their employment prospects in the emerging economy. In their attempt to acquire such social capitals to negotiate the restructured labour market, they employ different individualized strategies. Such strategies can include gaining computer skills, English training and cultural styles, private tuitions and coaching classes which appear to have intensified in particular as a process of privatization following the change in India's economy (Fernandes 133). Infact, coaching classes and private tuitions have been seen as an integral part of middle class strategies in gaining access to education. The mushrooming of such coaching centres for IT schools across the country which is the result of labour market has been clearly reflected in novels like the *Revolution 2020*.

In the novel *Revolution 2020*, there are three main protagonists – Gopal, Raghav and Aarti. Gopal and Raghav are two friends who fall in love with the same girl Aarti. Gopal comes from a middle class family with limited resources. He has been raised by his father whom he calls 'Baba' and whose only dream was to see his son make it to NIT (National Institute of Technology). As Gopal narrates his story, he is aware of the kind of hope that his father pins on him. He narrates:

Raghav, Aarti and I had joined JSR coaching classes in Durgakund to prepare for the engineering entrance exams...The AIEE attracted ten lakh students annually for thirty

thousand seats in the National Institutes of Technology (NITs) across the country.

Every engineering aspirant took these exams. I didn't particularly want to become an engineer. Baba wished to see me as one, and that was why I went to JSR. (Bhagat, *Revolution 2020* 23)

The intense competition for acquiring seats in premier engineering colleges amongst the Indian youth is evident in such description. When it comes to studies, Gopal is a mediocre unlike Raghav who is endowed with rare intelligence and described as "IIT material" (23). Although Gopal has no particular interests in becoming an engineer, he cannot escape the expectation and hope of his father who regards engineering as a means to secure a life of the coveted comfortable middle class status. The obsession of his father to get his son into NIT has become a cause of frustration and depression in Gopal's life and this condition mirror the predicament of many of the lower middle class youths. After he received his AIEE (All India Engineering Entrance Exam) rank which wasn't good enough to secure him a place in the NIT, Gopal confesses:

The entrance exam had given me so much pain. The mere thought of repeating it caused physical agony...I wanted to say I felt fucked up inside. I wished he would figure out I wanted to cry, and that it would be great if he hugged me... I kicked myself for not getting those six extra problems right. I kept rewinding to the day of the exam. As if my brain could go back in time...Regret – this feeling has to be one of the biggest manufacturing defects in humans. We keep regretting, even though there is no point to it. I stayed in my bed, dazed. (Bhagat, *Revolution 2020* 33)

Gopal describing Bansal, one of the better known coaching institutes in Kota noticed "Like in many other coaching classes in Kota, the students had uniforms to eliminate social inequality... Equality in clothes didn't mean Bansal believed all students were equal. A class

system existed, based on your chances of cracking the entrance exam” (60). In fact describing the abundance of coaching classes in Kota, Gopal narrates incredulously:

Kota now had small coaching shops to coach you to get into the top coaching classes. From there, you would be coached to get into an engineering college. Once there, you study to become an engineer. Of course, most engineers want to do an MBA. Hence, the same coaching-class cycle would begin again. This complex vortex of tests, classes, selections and preparations is something every insignificant Indian student like me has to go through to have a shot at a decent life (Bhagat, *Revolution 2020* 55).

Such system reveals that the attainment of a “respectable” middle-class status is dependent on individual’s success or destroyed by their failure to acquire the necessary skills and credentials thus revealing the limited entry to this esteemed class for many aspirants. In a similar manner, expressing the concern of these aspiring Indian youths, Bhagat in his essay titled “The Bootlegging of Education” which is included in *What Young India Wants* points out the dilemma that faces millions of modern Indian youth who strive to get into good educational institutions. As a social critic, he remarks:

We have good, reputed colleges that, at best, accommodate 10 percent of the applicant pool of students. What happens to the rest? Obsessed with starting salaries, IITs, IIMs and DU cut-offs, we ignore the millions that don’t make it. Where do these students go? Do they have a shot at a good life? (Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* 124)

This is a valid concern for many of the new generation Indians who aspire for a secure and comfortable middleclass lifestyle. As engineering graduates are often preferred in the emerging job markets of a globalized economy, it results in pressure from parents to admit their children in reputed engineering schools. This is something that the change in economy has brought about. It is seen that over the last two decades, the role and contribution of

technology has been massive which has also led to an economic growth of many countries including India and the Indian software industries provide employment to a large number of people. It has been observed engineer students are often preferred in software industries because of their technical skills and ability to think and problem solve logically which are found useful. Therefore there is much pressure to get into reputed engineering colleges.

However, absence of a well defined education policy and futile obsession of technical education in well known institutions like IIT and NIT are common factors responsible for the depression among the youths as can be inferred from the novels of Bhagat. Raghav's passion lies with Journalism, Gopal has no passion for engineering, Alok's passion lies with painting yet they are not free to pursue careers of their choice. Thus globalization and the resulting economic restructure do not herald an era of unprecedented freedom for young Indians inspite of the opportunities that it presents. Besides, the idea of success as perceived by the rising middle class in India which puts enormous pressure on young Indians appears to promote negative self-esteem for many of those unable to meet such expectations. Thus, the boundaries which define who enter into the exclusive fold of IT knowledge professionals or the upper tier of the middle class status in 'New India' are remarkably limited.

Novels like *One Night @ The Call Center* reflect the lives of many aspiring Indian youths who unable to join the IIT profession join the BPO industry whereby call center jobs allows for a more limited kind of mobility, both economic and geographic. Bhagat has mentioned that his "call-centre cousins, sisters-in-law and friends" inspired this novel "providing information, stealing various training materials and arranging meetings" (317). In fact, in the prologue of this novel, Bhagat mentions that the idea of this story has been provided to him by a beautiful stranger that he meets on the train who chastises him for paying little attention to "the biggest group of young people facing a challenge in modern India" (5), that is the 300,000 young people who earn their livelihood from the Indian call-

centre industry. It is evident that the call-centre business in India offers a huge employment opportunity to many English educated aspiring middle class youths in liberalized India and thus occupies an important place in the new India. Through this novel Bhagat paints the picture of the middle class world which Varma describes as:

(A)n urban scenario, where new townships with giant malls and offices come up almost overnight, and youngsters tired of imitating western accents stagger out at dawn from call-centres spread across the country. The personal world of the middle class is in a phase of transition where the past and the present coalesce in strange and unpredictable ways. (Varma *The Great Indian* xxxiii)

In this novel, the main protagonists are six call center executives namely Priyanka, Esha, Radhika, Varun, Military Uncle and Shyam, the narrator of the story. Through this story Bhagat unravels the uncertainty and insecurity that accompanies the professional and personal identity of young people working in call centres. The story revolves around an event which takes place on a particular night at work and the personal story of each of the protagonists is revealed through the flashback method employed. The changes that globalization has brought about in the lives of the emerging youth is evident in this novel. These changes are reflected in food habits, dress, cosmetics and ornaments, dance and music, modes of communication, leisure and recreation. The lifestyle of these call centre employees in this novel includes drinking, dancing and partying at 32 Milestone, dating in trendy places like Mocha Café, Pizza Hut and Sahara Mall, visiting a night club in the middle of work dressed in western clothing etc. These call center executives appear to represent the young upcoming generation of an urban modern society well versed with lifestyle associated with global youth culture. However, their lives are also fraught with tensions as they experience problems related to different aspects of life including job insecurity which plays an integral and primary concern in their daily urban existence.

Among the jobs created by India's new focus on high-tech service professions, according to Radhakrishnan there exists a hierarchy of at least two tiers: one occupied by the IT professionals including engineers, technical writers, graphic designers who tend to be well versed in technical and managerial languages that are translatable across national boundaries and the other occupied by those in the business processing outsourcing (BPO) industry, which includes call center workers, medical transcriptionists, simple data entry positions etc. (Radhakrishnan 43). There is a symbolic hierarchy between the two jobs. This is because while BPO jobs can be applied to by most college graduates with fluency in English, IT jobs require a specialized technical education, such as an engineering degree (44). Shyam, the narrator protagonist of *One Night* confirms, as a call center agent he is not regarded highly in his family, "I waved goodbye to everyone, but no one acknowledged me. It wasn't surprising, I am only cared for so much. Every cousin of mine is becoming a doctor or engineer. You can say I am the black sheep of my family" (Bhagat, *One Night* 15). In fact, Priyanka's mother does not approve of Shyam as her daughter's boyfriend for the very reason that he works in a call center and is regarded "not settled" (130) even referring to him as "useless call center chap" (125). These distinctions between IT professionals and those in the BPO industry are often hinted in various discussions of the "downside" of globalization in India. Moreover, according to Radhakrishnan's observation, it appears Indian IT workers often project the anxieties of rapid cultural change as well as perhaps status anxiety onto call center workers (45). Such perception finds similar expression in this particular novel through its depiction of the lives of the call center workers.

The call centre job at Connexions, Gurgaon, requires the six young characters to assume a 'western identity' as is the norm in most call centres in the country. For example in the novel, Shyam Mehra is known as Sam Marcy and explains "American tongues have trouble saying my real name and prefer Sam" (11), Esha Singh is known as Eliza Singer,

Radhika Jha as called Regina Jones, Varun Malhotra as Victor Mell. They take on a western name, learn and adopt a western accent, as Shyam observes, “Everyone was speaking with an American accent and sounded different from how they had in the Qualis” (35). They learn about western cultures to help them deal with western clients and they operate according to the timezone of their American customers.

The call centre’s practice of renaming and accent training to neutralize one’s regional accent is clearly depicted in *One Night @ The Call Center* as a challenging process. It is also evident that Bhagat critiques the call centre’s rule of insisting that workers use a form of English which is considered “global” or “neutral”, in which the linguistic traces of their Indian origins are removed in an attempt to make them more intelligible and comprehensible to the international callers. Such experience is portrayed as unpleasant for the workers as Shyam confesses in the novel:

I hate accent training anyway. The American accent is so confusing. You might think the Americans and their language are straightforward. Far from it – with them, each letter can be pronounced several different ways ... I hate accent training man. You can’t teach Delhi people to speak like Americans in a week. (Bhagat, *One Night @ The Call Center* 37-38)

According to Stephanie Southmayd’s assessment of the novel, Bhagat appears to critique “accent neutralization” and renaming practices in call centres as it is linked to a distortion of an Indian identity by compelling Indian workers to “pass” as Americans. This is further linked to the concerns for cultural homogenization caused by globalization through its “valorization of an Americanized or globalized form of an English language” (Southmayd 9). Thus the novel also touched upon contemporary India’s middle class anxiety about increasing Westernization brought about by globalization which appears to be manifested prominently

amongst call center workers. Such narratives echo the perception of mainstream media in India that BPO workers are more susceptible to the dangers of losing themselves or “forgetting” their culture in comparison to IT workers and affirm a particular kind of Indianness, defined by class and “background” (Radhakrishnan 46). In the novel, the critique of the BPO industry through the voice of Vroom is unmistakable and in one particular episode, he vents:

We should be building roads, power plants, airports, phone networks and metro trains in every city like madness. And if the government moves its rear-end and does that, the young people in this country will find jobs there. Hell, I would work days and nights for that – as long as I know that what I am doing is helping build something for my country for its future. But the government doesn’t believe in doing any real work, so they allow these BPOs to be opened and think they have taken care of the youth. (Bhagat, *One Night @ The Call Center* 187)

It has been observed rightly that the BPO industry in being more flexible about the types of acceptable educational requirements provides opportunities for a broader range of people as compared to IT jobs which employ those that come from a social and cultural location that makes an advanced technical education possible. Therefore, the critique of the call center industry in the novel and the kind of western cultural invasion that call centers are seen to foster comes from an elite perspective that Bhagat himself make as one belonging to an IIT background and an upper middle class background. This reflects the variation that exists across the different layers of the middle class group and the kind of exclusivity that inscribes those that belong to the upper tier of the urban middle class group.

As well known, India is a country of myriad castes and classes and of languages and creeds, however the image of a new and young India in Bhagat’s novels is presented largely

on the mobility and aspirations of the urban middle class Indians. As observed by sociologist like Smitha Radhakrishnan, “the dominance of India’s middle class in the political and cultural imagination of the nation is a result of powerful class segregation practices that have persisted over time” (42). She also argues that such practices have permitted “older forms of social, economic and cultural capital to be transformed constantly to suit shifting sociopolitical climates while keeping class division intact” (42). Radhakrishnan goes on to say that the middle-class status appears to be obtained from “the possession of specific kinds of professional skills”, and for this reason education becomes an important factor as it operates as a means to achieve “economic and social mobility” (42). In other words, acquisition of an education then becomes one of the modes through which class segregation is continued in modern India. This also means that those who are acquire the skills and professional educations to advance in a modern economy are those that already possess a “significant amount of economic and symbolic capital” (132).

In a similar manner, the creation of the new Indian middle class has also been linked historically to the development of the British colonial educational policy. Thomas Macauley had announced that the purpose behind this educational policy was to create a “class, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect” (Varma, *The Great Indian 2*; Fernandes 3) that would play an important role in colonial administration. Thus, the middle class in India has its origin in the political economy of colonialism and British educational policy has shaped the formation of the colonial middle class in significant ways.

The class consciousness in India is interlinked with its caste formation since ages and introduction of the English education has aggravated this in new structural, political forms and governance. As a result of this, the attainment of an English education has served as an important means for entry to the colonial middle class, seen as a “new elite social group that

was emerging distinct from, and in an uneasy relationship with, traditional elites as well as with other less privileged segments of the middle class, particularly the vernacular, lower the middle class” (Fernandes 5). Thus, English education has continued to shape the middle class even in postcolonial India. The dominant construction of the new liberalizing middle class identity has rested primarily on idealized representations of the urban English-speaking middle class. It is no wonder that Fernandes has remarked, “The acquisition of English-language skills represents a critical means by which various segments of the “old” middle class preserve or gain access to membership in the new middle class” (209).

Interestingly, as observed by many scholars the relationship between language and middle class formation has been strengthened by globalization as the expansion of private sector and out-sourcing have validated the importance of English-language skills. It is noticed that a section of the middle class that has been able to acquire English education historically has been in an advantageous position to utilize it as a means to move forward in a liberalized labour market. It is rightly noticed that “in postcolonial India, the demand for English education has spread within the middle class as along with the upwardly mobile segments of lower-income families” (Fernandes 210) post globalization and liberalization. With the expansion of middle class English education, language has been transformed by various forms of cultural and social capital. Fernandes argues that changing discourses and practices of lifestyle, manners and taste have made visible the distinction between the upper tiers of the English-speaking middle class and the other sections of the middle class attempting to realize the promise of access. This has resulted in a complex set of practices and strategies that individuals and segments of the middle class have deployed as they have attempted to shape, negotiate, and respond to both this new class identity and the consequent changes sparked by liberalization. (Fernandes 209)

Such regard for the English language as a cultural capital is reflected in *Half Girlfriend* through the life of the protagonist Madhav Jha who secures an admission in the prestigious St Stephens College through the sports quota. In the initial part of the novel, he is seen to constantly struggle against his lack in self confidence owing to his inadequate English language skills and provincial background. In his admission interview, describing the smug attitude of his interviewers after he greets them one by one he narrates, “They smiled. I didn’t think it was a good smile. It was the high-class-to-low-class smile. The smile of superiority, the smile of delight that they knew English and I didn’t” (9). Madhav finds himself baffled by the questions asked as he is unable to express his thoughts and ideas fluently in English. When he attempts to answer their questions in Hindi, one of the professors promptly assert that Madhav reply in English. As the interview process ended, one of them comments, “English is no longer a foreign language, Mr Jha. It’s a global language. I suggest you learn it.” (13). This highlights the role that the English language plays in the contexts of rising opportunities in modern India such as admissions to reputed educational institutions, interviews for various jobs, acceptance amongst peer groups and in relationships.

As the novel progresses, Madhav falls in love with a fellow student, the beautiful Riya who speaks the “perfect English” (15) and who happens to share his love for the game of basketball. When he meets her for the first time, he introduces himself and says “Myself Madhav Jha” which he later regrets as he narrates, “That was my reflexive response. It was only later that I learnt that people who construct sentences like that sound low class” (19). A little later he also describes the English language as “the language one needed to impress girls” (19) and as if to prove his perception right, he finds himself later being laughed at by Riya’s friends for his accented English . As he tries to initiate a conversation with Riya’s friends, they responded with an incredulous laughter. He narrates: ““Would you like to order anything?” I said. The three girls froze and then began to laugh. It dawned on me that they

were laughing at me. My English had sounded like this: ‘Vood you laik to aarder anything?’ I didn’t know this was such a cardinal sin” (27).

Through this novel, Bhagat reflects that clearly the ability to command the English language has become a marker of class status in India. Bhagat himself says in an interview,

It isn’t just the English versus Hindi class divide anymore ... the new class divide is varying degrees of English. A lot more people are in the English fold, but with varying levels of proficiency. The elites laugh and sneer at their country cousins who are trying to learn English in India, and that is what *Half Girlfriend* is about. (Bhagat)

Assessing the role of the English language in a globalized economy and the general attitude to the English language in the country, Bhagat in his book titled *What Young India Wants* says that English is a “necessary skill for middle-class youth to rise in the modern world” (117). In order for this happen Bhagat is of the opinion that the link between Elitism and English must be done away with in order for the rising generation Indian to progress. He says, “Elitism and English are linked and people who speak good English look down on people who don’t. Elitism hurts the inclusion process and without inclusion, the nation as a whole can never progress” (117). He also believes that English should not be regarded as a threat to Hindi or other local languages and more should be done to promote local languages but he firmly believes that “as a developing nation, English is one of the few tools available to make Indians take their rightful place in the world” (118). Through novels like *Half Girlfriend*, Bhagat critiques the practice of class sneer practiced commonly against those that are not well versed with the English language, which is clearly still a legacy of the British colonization. At the same time, his solution is not one of refrain from mastering the language but of sharing it wide and learning it together to utilize it for progress as suggested in his

essay “Learn and Share English Lessons with All”. However, this is something not easily achievable due to the class and caste structure that is implicated.

Salim Lakha in his essay titled “The State, Globalisation and Indian Middle-Class Identity,” has also mentioned that “the acquisition of an English-based education” (266) is one of the prominent status markers of today’s middle class. Therefore lifestyle built around an English education appears to be one of the identity markers for the urban middle class and is employed to mark their exclusivity from other socioeconomic groups of the society. Besides this, sociologists like Krishna Kumar has also remarked that “competence in English usage has become the single most important yardstick of a person’s eligibility for negotiating the opportunity structure that can be availed of in a modern economy” (qtd. in Varma 66). The regard of the English language as a valued capital not just for employment across different sectors of the economy but also as a marker of social class is manifested in the fictions of Bhagat. Thus the acquisition of English-language skills represents a critical means by which various segments of the new rising middle class and aspiring new generation Indian youths gain access to middle class membership as the face of liberalized India.

The acquirement of the English language as a form of exclusion is starkly evident since educational opportunities are not readily available for class mobility across the country. However, this does not deter the new generation Indians from their aspiration to enter into the new middle class fold as they resort to different forms of privatized strategies to negotiate such boundary. As can also be witnessed in the novel *Half Girlfriend*, Madhav soon joins a private coaching center to hone his English speaking skills and in addition to this, aided by Riya, he ultimately overcomes his language handicap to achieve his goal.

Access to membership in the new middle class is also formed through other means such as a visible consumption practices that are associated with the lifestyle of the new

middle class. In this regard, Fernandes argues that commodity therefore has taken the place of economic parity. She claims:

Commodity consumption has taken the form of a kind of public language that holds a promise of potential access to new middle class membership that may otherwise seem too easily foreclosed by the linguistic politics of English. This language of class has been coded into narratives of lifestyle that rework existing status distinctions and mediate the anxieties and tensions of social differentiation that stem from restrictions on this promise of access. (Fernandes 71)

This observation is especially valid in Bhagat's novels as the novels reveal the formation and emergence of a middle class consumer identity which has been moulded and influenced to a great extent by globalization and liberalization. It is seen in Bhagat's fictions that this widespread practice of consumerism and materialism constitutes an important factor in identity formation amongst the new generation Indian youth. Commenting on the formation of cultural identity in modern day India, Salim Lakha writes that "consumerism and the consumption of global commodities are important in defining the cultural identity of the middle class" (264). He further elaborates on the consumption pattern of the upper middle class and says that:

[C]ontemporary Indian middle-class identity, particularly that of the influential new-rich elements, is largely constructed through lifestyle practices and media representations centred on the consumption of expensive global commodities ...

These are the major status markers of today's Indian middle class. And they are not accessible to all the social groups commonly included under the label middle class. Neither are they characteristic of all who have money. For example the rural rich, despite their substantial wealth, are commonly seen in the cities as lacking the cultural

sophistication and taste codes associated with a globalised consumer middle class.

These attributes are associated mainly with the urban middle-class professionals, who are in managerial positions in both the private and state sectors. Also, sharing these attributes are the new entrepreneurs, some of whom are of urban professional background. (Lakha 266)

Such insights reveal the existence of variations among the different layers of the middle class group and how the upper layer of the urban middle class distinguish themselves through their consumption practice from the rest of the middle class group.

According to scholars of globalization theory like Bornman, the collapse of a sense of community to a great extent brought about by modernity and globalization creates feelings of fear, anxiety and powerlessness amongst individuals in society. He says that as individuals feel helpless, privatized and isolated, their attention is grabbed by things they can change, even if the nature of these things are petty and these include “activities such as compulsive shopping”, those related to “self-improvement and health industry” (6). Bornman also confirms that: “In the age of globalization, consumption and commodities have become important ways in which individuals acquire and express their identity ... The spread of consumer culture has also supplanted human relationships with material relationships” (29).

Bhagat’s novels with their images of plush coffee shops, malls, call centres, pubs, fast food joints, internet cafes, cell phones, discos, jeans, rock/pop music of global brands reflect the abundance of global consumer goods amongst the contemporary youth culture. Antony Palackal writing about the middle class in a postmodern society writes that in the arena of consumer culture, “our identity seems to be moulded as consumers. Consumer goods are considered as a privileged part of Identity” (Palackal 9). Similarly across Bhagat’s novels, the consumption of expensive goods and the imitation of western lifestyles to certain

degrees become markers of socioeconomic position. The dissemination and popularity of a consumerist culture in developing societies that is seen in the recent years is an impact of economic and corporate globalization. The emergence of a culture of consumerism is not merely a consequence of the formation of the middle class and as writers like Mark Liechty has observed, “it is the most important cultural processes through which an emerging middle class actually creates itself as a socio cultural entity” (7). Consumption has turned into “privileged site for the fabrication of self and society, of culture and identity” (Nadeem 53).

Subsequently the consumer culture reflected in Bhagat’s novels can be witnessed in clothing, food, drinks, fashion, music and other modes of lifestyle practiced by the characters. In *Revolution 2020*, after Gopal has secured the kind of financial success that he always dreamt of, he gets ready to meet Raghav, his old friend and competitor, “I pressed the nozzle of a Gucci perfume five times to spray my neck, armpits and both wrists. I wore a new black shirt and a custom-made suit for the occasion. I put on my Ray-Ban glasses and looked at myself in the mirror” (Bhagat, *Revolution* 258). His new found sense of confidence comes from being dressed in the latest fashion. To Gopal’s mind, the label or brand that he wears represents his financial status and identifies him as a successful person.

In the novel *Half Girlfriend*, Madhav Jha, the hero from Dumrao village in Bihar ensures that he is dressed “appropriately” after he finds himself admission in the prestigious St. Stephen’s college in Delhi. On his first day, upon running into the girl of his dream, he narrates, “I adjusted my yellow T-shirt and blue jeans while she looked at the board. I had bought new clothes from Patna for St. Stephen’s. I didn’t look like a government office clerk anymore. I wanted to fit into my new college” (21). It is clear that for Madhav his attire become an important part of his identity and allows him to ‘fit in’ in his new environment. It helps him achieve the kind of confidence that he needed to be part of the new social

environment and befriend the girl of his dream, Riya who wears “expensive Nike ankle-length sneakers”, a pair of “diamond earrings” and speaks in “perfect English” (14,15).

In the *Five Point Someone*, Ryan Oberoi the main hero of the novel is described by Hari as “tall, with spare height, purposefully lean and unfairly handsome” (3) whose body was flawless with muscles that cut at the right places. His idea of a great party include vodka, rum, marijuana with Pink Floyd music at the background and pictures of nude women extracted from US porn magazine adorning the walls of their room. This description is a reflection of the porn culture and its seduction of the new consumers which can also be regarded as an erosion of Indian traditional cultural values. Hari nevertheless admiringly describes him as follows when they met for the first time.

Ryan Oberoi, I repeated his name again mentally. Now here was a guy you dont see in IIT too often; tall with spare height purposefully lean and unfairly handsome. A loose gray T-shirt proclaimed “GAP” in big blue letters on his chest and shiny black shorts reached his knees. Relatives abroad for sure, I thought. Nobody wears GAP to bed otherwise. (Bhagat, *Five Point Someone* 3)

It is obvious that Ryan is considered as unique by Hari not only for his admirable physique but is also identified by the kind of clothing brand that he wears which marks him as someone who comes from a well to do family with relatives abroad. In the contemporary market situation, what appears to set people apart is what they buy rather than who they are. Their identities are defined by their taste in clothes, food, appearance and lifestyle. “The field of consumer culture, it is argued, is the privileged stage where the contestations and negotiations of identities occur in contemporary society” (Palackal 3).

The spread of consumerism is evident in novels like *One Night @ The Call Center*. In one of the scene in the story, Vroom attacks a billboard which features a Bollywood actress

advertising a coke: “This airhead chick is supposed to be our role model. Like she knows a fuck about life and gives a fuck about us. All she cares about is cash. She just wants you to buy this black piss” (236). Vroom himself is not unaffected from the materialism that he critiques. He works at the call center after leaving his job at a local newspaper as he is able to earn a better salary there; He is aware of his addiction and weaknesses for consumer goods as he confesses in a self-deprecatory manner, “I like pizza. I love it. I like jeans, mobiles, and pizzas. I earn, I eat, I buy shit, and I die” (239). Vroom’s character stands as a lone, minor voice of sane criticism of globalization and consumerist lifestyle in the novel and is also often the mouthpiece of the author. The novel also clearly affirms and at the same time critiques this rampant consumerist practice which has become the defining factor of middle class lifestyle among the urban contemporary youths.

In Bhagat’s novels, it is noticed that construction and expression of identity revolves around image, clothes and lifestyle for the youth. Scholar Anandita Chatterjee in her essay titled “Chetan Bhagat and the New India”, notes that the image of modern India that gets advertised and showcased through Bhagat’s novel is “one that is globalised, connected by social networks, one that believes in cultivating a metro sexual image of flat abs, fair face and anorexic bodies” (74). Styles and outfits are important aspects of identity for the young Indians. They are in touch with and at the same time preoccupied with the emerging trends of the globalized world in comparison with their elders. More and more young people are attracted towards the seductive realm of commercial advertisements of contemporary global market culture.

Visual representations of newly available commodities as seen in the novel have become central symbols that depict the benefits of economic liberalization. Indeed the emergence of consumption practice and lifestyle trends associated with newly available commodities is the most visible cultural coding of economic reforms. Fernandes in tracing

the spread of a consumerist culture amongst the Indian middle class has asserted that “newly available commodities, consumption practices and urban lifestyles in the 1990s became linked with a national cultural standard associated with the rise of the new Indian middle class” (39). She claims that discursive practices of commodity consumption point to the ways in which such consumption practices now serve to distinguish this new middle class from the traditional middle class and from other socioeconomic groups. She is of the opinion that “Newly available commodities have become the symbols of modernity and status that upwardly mobile individuals and families must acquire. They represent forms of cultural and social capital that individuals obtain in an attempt to improve their social location” (72). Fernandes also observes that the “less-privileged segments of the middle class” too may attempt to perform consumption practices based on popular trends of consumer cultures as a means of upward mobility in their attempt to access “membership in the new middle class” (72).

Based on such observation and insights, it is clear that the intensification and expansion of commodity culture associated with the liberalization of the Indian economy have made consumption of goods and consumer images a key site for producing youth identities especially those of the urban middle class. Such discourses of consumption have also reconfigured what it means to be young Indians in contemporary India.

In Bhagat’s novels, like fashion, romance also emerges as a key site for negotiating consumer citizenship, constituting an important link for a cultural politics of belonging. The dating practices of young people in public spaces such as malls, restaurants, coffee shops and ice cream parlour can be seen as the adaptation of public consumer spaces as a site of romance and the restructuring of class and gender relations in the context of a commodified romantic culture. Ideas of modern romance have reconfigured the changing space of emergent middle-class ideas of marriage. According to Ritty A. Lukose, romantic love

emerged “as a site for a complex reworking of tradition and modernity” under the influence of colonial modernity, in which traditional marriage arranged according to caste and community rules is pitted against “companionate ones in which the idea of the modern couple becomes central” (101). Lukose points out that scholarship has drawn an important link between romance and modernity where “western notions of romantic love, situated most often within the courtly traditions of the European Middle Ages, arise as a subversive, anti hierarchical tradition that places love outside the confines of marriage, which is understood in familial and practical terms” (101). She goes on to explain that as modern marriage was reworked as a form of new social agreement based on individual rights, love within a marriage became a key site of expressing individual subjectivity and authenticity. In a similar manner, it can be seen in the novels of Bhagat that the protagonists’ choice for love marriages over arranged ones becomes an important way of expressing their individuality and independence. Lukose also adds, “the reworking of community, understood as either the overcoming of caste and religious differences in the name of a secular modernity or the social reform and modernization of community norms, became an important aspect of romantic love” (101). As such the subversive potential of love to transform the institution of marriage from one that is controlled by community and family into one where two individuals are free to express desire and consent has become an important aspect of Bhagat’s fictions seen especially in novels like *Two States*, *One Night* and *Half Girlfriend* and which is celebrated by the new generation Indian.

With the idea of modern romance, there is also changing attitude to sex amongst the new generation Indians which is also reflected in Bhagat’s novel whereby the young characters practice dating one another and are not hesitant to enter into sexual relationship with their partners. In the *Five Point Someone* there is Hari and Neha’s relationship, in the *One Night @ The Call Centre* much of the novel revolves around flashback of Priyanka and

Shyam's dating scene, in *The Three Mistakes of My Life* Ishaan feels betrayed by the secret relationship that develops between Govind and Vidya behind his back, *Revolution Twenty20* has the love triangle of Govind, Aarti and Raghav. The *Two States* tells the story of the love and courtship between Krish and Ananya who 'lived together' in a small hostel room while studying together before they got married and in the love story of Madhav and Riya in the *Half Girlfriend*, dating in trendy café's like Barista, Pizza parlour and movie theatres are a plenty and all these characters are portrayed to have no qualms in entering into sexual acts to express their love and commitment to one another.

Reflecting on today's youths approach to love, sex and marriage, in his essay titled "Let's Talk about Sex" in his latest collection of essays and columns *Making India Awesome*, Bhagat writes, "Indian culture wants us to be sexual only in the institution of marriage, for purposes of procreation. Any deviation and you are a person of loose morals, harmful to yourself and society" (85). He also claims that due to repressed sexual desire, many Indians especially the youths live double lives, "People are not open to talking about dating or sex with the families, where they are expected to be falsely pious. As a result, there are lies and avoidable hypocrisy" (86). This perception reminds one of Sigmund Freud, the psychoanalytic theorist who believed that 'sexual repression' was the primary psychological problem of mankind. Freud had surmised that "repression and constriction of sexual behavior in youth become manifest in adulthood" and that "sexual repression was rampant, unhealthy, and the indirect cause of much crime, illness and woe" (Hey). Similarly, Christopher Ryan and Ian Buruma from their studies are of the opinion that sexual deprivation can have an adverse effect on the human behavioral system and psyche. Christopher Ryan, the co-author of *Sex at Dawn: The Prehistoric Origins of Modern Sexuality* writes in his essay titled "Sexual Repression", that "... if expression of sexuality is thwarted, the human psyche tends to grow twisted into grotesque, enraged perversions of desire" (*Sexual Repression*). Ian

Buruman's writing about the motivational factors attributed to suicide bombers wrote, "Sexual deprivation may be a factor in the current wave of suicidal violence ...."(*Can Sexual.*). Based on such findings, Bhagat's concerns on the common attitude to sex and sexuality in the Indian society in general can be understood.

According to Bhagat it appears that today globalization has made the new generation Indian youth more 'open' towards sex and dating as part of their social identity and Bhagat himself observes:

Recent advances in technology have meant that people are also connected like never before. This means that our youth, brought up in this modern environment and curious about sex, like their counterparts around the world, will be unable to follow our traditionally strict anti-sex attitudes. This does not mean we should open the floodgates and make it an 'anything-goes' society. However ... the traditional versus modern balance needs to shift a little towards the modern, and be more suited to current times. Else, the problems and hypocrisy related to sex will never go away. (Bhagat, *Making India Awesome* 87)

Perhaps Bhagat in trying to tip the balance between the traditional and modern a little towards the modern has been consistent in his depiction of the general attitude of the new generation Indian towards sex throughout his novels. It is therefore not surprising that in all of Bhagat's novels, we see the characters using the act of sex as a means to express their feelings and emotions. The attitude to sex by the middle class in India according to the observation of Pavan Varma has been fascinating. He identifies three conditioning factors that have helped mould the general attitude – the legacy of the past symbolized by Khajuraho and the Kamasutra with its openness to the issue of sex, secondly, the legacy of sex as taboo

bequeathed by Mahatma Gandhi and thirdly, the impact of the media revolution such as electronic medium and films. (Varma 166)

According to Varma, sex, in Hindu mythology and in the Hindu outlook on life, before the coming of the Muslims and British Victorianism (a reference to the moral values advocated widely during Queen Victoria's reign throughout the British Empire), was considered an essential part of refinement and aesthetics. He explains "*Kama*, the pursuit of sensuous desire, was given a place among the four *Purusharthas*, or aims of life, along with *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Moksha*" (Varma 166) and confirms that sexual desire was accepted as an aspect of life, and that to acquire refinement and expertise in its expression was considered as an achievement of a kind. Varma is of the opinion that the advent of the Muslims in India imposed a new value system which looked down upon the importance given to physical desire in the Hindu world-view. Later, the British colonizers sought to project the supremacy of their own race, religion and culture by considering such Hindu world-view as immoral and degenerative. Varma argues that such derogatory assessment was internalized to a great extent "by the otherwise well-meaning revivalist and reforming movements of Hinduism in the nineteenth century" (167) which strengthened the tendency to consider sex as something objectionable. He claims that the views of Mahatma Gandhi on sex propagated such an outlook as Gandhiji had opted for celibacy at the age of thirty three and along with his other major legacies relating to Swaraj, ahimsa, satyagraha, the emancipation of the downtrodden, etc., all his personal ideas on life and living, including sex, bears a deep influence on the nation. Varma believes that to add to this conflicting approach was the impact of films and the media and the explosion on cable TV of Western television serials and films with their explicit sexual imageries has been difficult to ignore. As a result, he argues that outside the secrecy of the home, the primary attitude of the middle class' approach to sex has been accompanied by hypocrisy, guilt and aggression – "Hypocrisy because the appeal of sex

cannot be openly admitted, guilt because even when pursued, it is considered as something wrong; and aggression because the conservative milieu for the interaction between sexes allows limited scope for more normal relationships to develop” (170).

It is interesting to note that studies in Ancient Indian History also suggest that sex was not reserved only for married couples and was not a subject considered taboo. Scholars such as Kaustav Chakraborty and Rajarshi Guha Thakurata have written about Indian’s contribution to the treatment of sexual intercourse as a science and the employment of sexual education through art and literature in their paper titled “Indian concepts on sexuality.” Rohit K. Dasgupta in his paper, “Queer Sexuality: A Cultural Narrative of India’s Historical Archive” also wrote about the use of sexual practices in ancient India not just for procreation but rather for pleasure tracing how the existence of homosexual relationships were found in many historical texts such as the *Mahabharata*, Somadatta’s *Kathasaritsagara* and *Kritivasa Ramayana*. Such studies have revealed that the treatment of sex in ancient India was not in conflict with the traditional cultural value system. However according to Dasgupta, it appears the colonial period brought in a drastic change to the attitude of sex and how sexuality was observed in India. With the introduction of the British Anti sodomy law in India as Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, homosexual or queer act was outlawed in the country (Dasgupta 660). Also, as observed by Chakraborty and Thakurata: “Victorian values stigmatized Indian sexual liberalism. The pluralism of Hinduism and its liberal attitudes were condemned as “barbaric” and proof of inferiority of the East” (2) thus explaining the changing attitude towards sex and expression of sexuality after the colonial period.

These studies have been helpful in explaining some of the general attitudes of the new generation Indians as reflected in Bhagat’s novels as the characters in the novel are caught between these conflicting influences in which old inhibitions remain and yet new curiosities and opportunities emerge. Similar reference is also seen in the “hypocrisy” and “problems”

that Bhagat similarly alludes to in his essays. Belonging to this same middle class that he depicts about, Bhagat too is conservative to a certain extent in that he is reluctant in portraying his characters as committing callous sex without any responsibility, it can be noticed that they either get married or are committed together in the relationship. However his novels are a clear reflection of the changing attitude of the new generation Indian youths towards sex and sexuality and demonstrate that it forms an important aspect in the expressions of their identity.

In Bhagat's novels, we see an interesting combination of the global and the local in the production of youth identity which is coded as Indian. Much of his novels "emphasize the "local" feel of globalized Indian youth, one that relies on representation of the social category of youth as metropolitan, middle class, assertive and confident" (Lukose 202). They are not simply imitators of the West as they easily blend a global cosmopolitanism and their local contexts in the way they dress and move about. They effortlessly weave English and Hindi, commonly referred to as "Hinglish" and move between spaces identified as "global" such as nightclubs and food stalls on the local street. At the same time, the successful expansion of new cultural forms, styles, and fashions is followed by the persistence of moral panics about the new generation Indian youths as consumers and citizens. The anxiety about the status of youths as citizens of the nation is part of a wide-ranging and globally circulating discourse in which a perceived decline in civic and patriotic values among young people is linked to their excessive consumerist lifestyle (Lukose 203). However, through the portrayal of his character as "angry young men", the term which originates from the title of Leslie Allen Paul's autobiography in 1951 (qtd. in Sablok 94) referencing the cult anti-hero and anti-establishment fictional creation made especially famous in Joan Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, Bhagat reaffirms that today's consumerist Indian youth can be inspired to engage the

problems that plague contemporary Indian society. Infact, Reena Sablok in assessing Bhagat's novels refers to his protagonists as 'angry young men'. She writes:

Ryan Oberoi, Vroom, Ishaan and Krish are all angry young men in their own right, refusing to make compromises that may reward them but bill their souls. They refuse to buy success at the cost of meek conformism to the dictates of a rotten system. 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. (Sablok 111)

It is true that the young heroes of Bhagat's fictions reflect much of the discontentment and anger of the aspiring middle class youths who are often frustrated with existing establishment and systems in their quest for the "good life" – a life of security and prosperity. In the *Five Point Someone*, Ryan is disappointed with the drudgery of IIT's stifling environment and attempts to rebel against the system. He quips, "Continuous mugging, testing and assignments. Where is the time to try out new ideas? Just sit all day and get fat like Hari" (Bhagat, *Five Point* 25). Vroom in *One Night @ The Call Center* thinks that India's policymakers are to blame for trapping youth power in India to the call center industry which is regarded as a sweatshop. He tells his friends, "The government doesn't care for anybody ... Even that youth special channel, they don't care either. They say youth because they want the damn Pizza Huts and Cokes and Pepsis of the world to come and give their ads to them" (254) and elsewhere he continued, "I want to have a life with meaning, even if it means a life without bed or daily trips to Pizza-Hut. I need to quit this call center" (219). In *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, Krish is angry at India's cricket establishment for not giving chances to youngsters like Ali, the Muslim boy endowed with rare reflex gift. In his tirade against a corrupt system he says of his country, India:

Yeah, we played good cricket, but that's about it. We remained poor, kept fighting wars, electing the same control freaks who did nothing for the country. People's job was a government job, yuck. Nobody took risks or stuck their neck out. Just one corrupt banana republic marketed by the leaders as this new socialist, intellectual nation. Tanks and thinktanks, nothing else ... (Bhagat, *3 Mistakes* 75)

In *2 States*, Krish is angry with the tradition of an arranged marriage in India which is pitted against love marriage. He is angry with his parents and his Punjabi community for their narrow view and their feelings of racial superiority and he tells Ananya, his beloved, "They'd have a problem with anyone I choose. And you are South Indian, which doesn't help at all. Ok, its not as bad as marrying someone from another religion. But pretty close" (40). Later he tells Ananya, "These stupid biases and discrimination are the reason our country is so screwed up. It's Tamil first, Indian later. Punjabi first, Indian later. It has to end" (102). In *Revolution 2020* Raghav is angry against the corrupt politicians who control the city of Varanasi and in his paper writes:

What do you say about a society whose top leaders are the biggest crooks? What do you do in a system where almost anyone with power is corrupt? India has suffered enough. From childhood we are told India is a poor country. Why? There are countries in this world where an average person makes more than fifty times that an average Indian makes ... This has to stop. We have to clean the system. Che Guevara, the great revolutionary, once said, 'Power is not an apple that falls from a tree into your lap. Power has to be snatched from people who already have it.' We have to start a revolution, a revolution that resets our corrupt system. A system that shifts power back into the hands of the people, and treats politicians like workers, not kings. (Bhagat, *Revolution 2020* 205)

In a similar vein, the *Half Girlfriend*'s Madhav is angry against inept government that does nothing for the development of states like Bihar. When asked why Bihar is a “backward” state in comparison to the rest of India, he replies, “Bad government” and continues, “The government is in bed with criminals and together they exploit the state and its people”(12).

In Bhagat's novels we see the construction of an image of Indian society as a corrupt and unscrupulous democratic political establishment which the new generation Indian must confront in which he is seen both as a victim and a reformer. The result of such corrupt practices can be seen in areas that concern and impact the lives of young Indians such as in intense competition for seats in higher education, scarcity of jobs, depression and high rate of student suicides amongst other themes which all find expression in all of Bhagat's fictions. Bhagat's “angry young men” can also be said to represent middle class frustration and anger which can also be seen as an expression to the middle class views that their interests are not being paid attention by politicians as well as the state. It is such “middle class anger and the corresponding question of the representation of middle class interests that lies at the foundation of the merging consumer-citizen in liberalizing India” (Fernandes 187). However, Varma's remarks that “the underlying causes for middle-class anger have been largely constructive, change-oriented and pro-reform” (Varma, *The New Indian* 54) appears to sum up Bhagat's intention in the expression of middle class concerns reflected through his writings.

The education sector is what appears to concern Bhagat the most as it affects millions of young Indians across the country and this concern is reflected unmistakably in his novels too. According to him, there are two main problems with Indian education system, “one, the supply of good college seats and, two, the actual course content and intent behind education” (Bhagat, *What Young India* 119). He asserts that with “one crore students taking the class XII exam each year” (119) the demand for A-grade institutions will only get higher and wonders

why the government does not fix this problem. The failure to provide educational seats for the aspiring new generation Indian youth spells disaster for the nation as a whole and is part of the corruption prevalent in the country. In his essay “The Bootlegging of Education” Bhagat continues to assess the educational system and opines that with reputed colleges accommodating only about ten percent of the applicant pool of students, the rest ends up in private colleges which can be a good thing only if the quality of such private education measures up. Assessing the reason for corruption rife in the education sector, he writes:

To ensure quality, the government has put in place procedures like elaborate approval processes and regular inspections. However, these are abused and corruption is rife. Many private college owners have personally admitted to me that they had to pay bribes at every stage in setting up the college – from getting land and building approvals to approving the course plan and setting free structures. Corruption in the private education sector is such a norm that nobody in the know even raises an eyebrow anymore. One big reason for corruption in the government’s no-profits-allowed policy for private institutes. Every educational institution has to be incorporated as a non-profit trust. Technically, you cannot make money from the college. The government somehow believes that there are enough people who will spend thousands of crores setting up good colleges for the millions who need seats every year just out of the goodness of their hearts. On this flawed, stupid assumption that people are dying to run colleges without ever making money rests the higher education of our country. (Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* 125)

Much of this theme and concerns are reflected in the novel *Revolution 2020* in which private players with the aid of corrupt politicians are able to open private engineering colleges in order to cater to the many who are unable to enter the exclusive state owned

engineering colleges due to limited seats. Bhagat has emerged as a social critic whose understanding is wide and clear of India's multiple problems. In one of his essays, he writes,

India must get rid of corruption ... it not only cuts existing benefits, it cuts out future opportunities for the young. Corruption is worse than terrorism. Terrorists blow up existing infrastructure such as roads, airports and power plants. Corruption prevents such infrastructure from being created in the first place. (Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* 139)

Seen from Bhagat's perspective it appears that corruption is what ails Indian society today and is seen as the biggest enemy of the new generation Indian youth. Unlike midnight's children for whom India's problems are seen to be rooted in the rural masses according to Lukose, "problems that Nehruvian nationalism seek to resolve through state-centric development" (203), for liberalization's children, India's problems are rooted in corruption and malpractices which must be removed in order for the benefits of liberalization and globalization to reach everyone especially the new generation Indian middle class youths. Thus, Bhagat's novels engage with notion of citizenship on the part of India's globalized consumerist youth by taking a firm stance against corruption and its illegitimate practices.

While Bhagat's fictions express the anxieties of the new generation Indians, at the same time it invoke a fantasy of a way of life enabled by the fashioning of new consumer identities which is in a way a fragment of the neoliberal imaginary. Bhagat's construction of a new Indian subject based on an idealized middle-class ignores much of those who are located outside the 'New India' brand. His novels focus on a particular class of individuals, and leave a limited space for the underclass, religious minorities and Dalits whose lives center on the margins of postcolonial India. It is interesting to note that in most of Bhagat's novels, inspite of the many hardships and challenges that are met on the way for the new generation Indian

youth aspiring for a comfortable middle class lifestyle, subjectivity evolves from a combination of assimilation and adaptation to the global neoliberal system and not in resistance to the system. It is seen that unlike some of the concerns expressed in his collection of essays, the focus of Bhagat's novels do not lie with those on the margins of the economy whose interests may be immaterial to the global capitalist system. This is because his novels largely represent the Indian state, its languages and concerns of politics and citizenship for the purposes of the new middle class.

As an advocate of the economic reforms, Bhagat appears to seize on an upwardly mobile middle-class citizen as the exemplary subject amongst the new generation Indian. As an advocate of neoliberal policies, he believes that the state is one of the primary sources of many of India's problems and that it also intensifies division based on caste, class, or religion. The novels of Bhagat thus portray a specific kind of neoliberal citizen who is typically a member of the aspiring middle class and his is a narrative that constructs an aspiring middle-class citizen with a moral conscience as the ideal citizen. His presentation of the new generation Indian is thus limited to the middle-class subject as he or she is constructed in a particular class-based urban context.

Bhagat's novels also at the same time reveal that the culture of this class is full of ostensible contradictions as it embraces individuality, development, and change but holds fast to specific ideas of tradition and family. It claims inclusivity by defining itself as "middle class" yet not everyone can enter into this group. This is because the ability of individuals and social segments to engage in strategies of mobility are both formed and constrained by their interaction with existing structures of inequality of caste, class and gender. Therefore the boundary in terms of who enters into the fold of this middle class group is remarkably limited. These sensibilities comprise the dominant expectation of what it means to be "new generation Indian" among a class of people for whom that identification defines their place in

a global cultural and political landscape. Bhagat is an example of how “the post-liberalization Indian-English novel presents and re-narrates middle-class concerns as the collective embodiment of ‘an idea whose time has come’” (Tickel 41) and that matters of class, while not the only factors, are without a doubt one of the most important elements in the construction of the new generation Indian. It is obvious that liberalization in India has produced certain subjectivity among the new generation Indian youths which is explored further in the next chapter.

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## Chapter 3

### Neoliberal Subjectivity and the Enterprise Culture

As we have seen, highbrow postcolonial literary texts have carefully registered the damaging social and political effects of globalization, but contemporary Anglophone fictions, such as Bhagat's, show how literary politics is diversifying and tilting away from a default critique of the Indian state's neoliberal project. (Tickell 54)

The previous chapter discusses how with the launch of the economic reforms in the early nineties, the present historical conjuncture in India is celebrated in the novels of Bhagat for marking an epochal shift, the chief significance of which lies in the creation of new generation of Indians, whose dreams, aspirations and desires are succinctly portrayed and represented. It can be said that much of Bhagat's success as a novelist has been credited to his ability to convincingly portray the concerns and expectations of a post-liberalization generation. This chapter analyzes how neoliberalism might operate as "ideology" in Bhagat's fictions in the Marxist sense of the term as it plays a crucial role in its capacity to influence the middle class youths shaping them into ideal subjects for the market regime.

Raymond Williams explains the notion of ideology as "(i) a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group; (ii) a system of illusory beliefs—false ideas or false consciousness—which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge; (iii) the general process of the production of meanings and ideas" (Williams 55). Ideology therefore can be understood as a form of control system used by dominant groups to maintain order in the society and according to Althusser "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (170) or in other words, it transforms individuals into obedient "subjects" (Althusser 174).

Gramsci further analyzes how dominant groups exercise power over society and came up with the notion of “hegemony” (12) which Boggs explains as “the prevailing consciousness that has been internalized by the population [so that] it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things” (39). Gramsci asserts that there are primarily two forms of control to maintain hegemony - the “Political government” which constitutes the "apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively” and the “social hegemony” that generates “spontaneous consent” from the “great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci 12).

Althusser explores Gramsci’s ideas further to theorize on the specific organs of the system of ideology. He differentiates between what he terms as the “Repressive State Apparatus” which “functions by violence” and the “Ideological State Apparatuses” which “function by ideology” (145). According to Althusser, while the repressive state apparatus control the citizens through “the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons etc” (143), the ideological state apparatus controls its citizens through the operation of ideology in institutions such as religion, education, family, law, trade unions, communication and culture (143). Together they contribute to the “reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology” (132) and become an effective system of regulation by the capitalistic state. Althusser asserts that “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all)” (174) by the operation that he calls as “interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’”(174).

By this same principle, the prevailing ideology of neoliberalism treated as a “common sense” in the Gramscian sense of the term has been expounded by scholars like David Harvey. Explaining how neoliberalism has come to be a “common sense” in contemporary society propagated through different channels, Harvey writes:

So, how, then, was sufficient popular consent generated to legitimize the neoliberal turn? The channels through which this was done were diverse. Powerful ideological influences circulated through the corporations, the media, and the numerous institutions that constitute civil society—such as universities, schools, churches and professional associations. (Harvey 40)

Taking these notions of ideology in the context of neoliberalism, this chapter examines Bhagat’s novels in terms of how it conceptualizes and embodies the ideology of neoliberalism, through its valorization of an enterprise culture and its promotion of enterprising individual subject or critiques them as a means to express its resistance to the impacts and influence of globalization.

The term ‘neoliberalism’ has become an important theoretical concept in academics to discuss the social, political and cultural development of contemporary period especially in social sciences and globalization studies. ‘Neoliberalism’ is a political and economic philosophy that is commonly associated with the processes of economic liberalization and globalization of a capitalist free market, witnessed in our contemporary world. According to Nandini Gooptu, neoliberalism is usually taken to imply “an ideological emphasis on a market ethic, competition, and commodification with an underlying model of individual human behavior based on profit or utility maximizing rational choice, in response to incentives created by the market” (Gooptu 4). It is within these contexts that Bhagat’s novels

depict the local realities of a new, changing, and globalized India under the forces of economic globalization.

According to David Harvey, the age of contemporary globalization, also known as neoliberal globalization, can be said to have roughly begun around the 1978-80 when several nations adopted new monetary policy of free market and open trade. Harvey explains that Deng Xiaoping's liberalization of a communist-ruled economy in China in 1978 was an important step that brought about a huge economic transformation in the country. Similarly Margaret Thatcher implemented an economic policy for Britain in 1979 that restricted trade union power and promoted privatization, free trade and fewer regulations on businesses. Ronald Reagan also introduced economic reforms for United States in the 1980s that promoted free market which were important events that propelled the spread of "a particular doctrine that went under the name of 'neoliberalism'"(2). Harvey goes on to explain that the impact of neoliberalism since the 1970s has spread all over the globe and have been embraced by different countries and financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) that regulate global finance and trade. He declares: "Neoliberalism, in short, has become hegemonic as a mode of discourse" (3).

As already discussed, with the introduction of economic liberalization in 1991 under the then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, India too started to follow a more neoliberal policy of reform which encouraged Foreign Direct Investments and which minimized regulations on international trade. Many sociologists and scholars have noted that this policy change marks an important move from a socialist growth model to capitalism leading to an emergence of consumer goods economy. Economic liberalization has brought tremendous transformation in India's socio-economic structure which has resulted in the rapid rise of the middle-class, increased presence of global commodities in Indian markets, restructuring of

the urban space, growth of private sector and creation of an enterprise culture according to the norms of neoliberalism. (Oza 2006; Gupta 2011; Gooptu 2013)

The social environment depicted in the novels of Bhagat is chiefly concerned with that of the urban middle class society in the post globalization era as already established in the preceding chapter. Consequently, the figure of the middle class becomes an important subject both in the narratives of Bhagat that espouses the neoliberal ideology, as well as in the fictions that critique and resist neoliberal globalization. As India enters the global economy, the need for technically trained personnel for the expanding IT and its related service industries increases. According to Paromita Chakravarti, The National Knowledge Commission Report has stressed the need to transform India into ‘knowledge economy’ with a focus on “creating IT proficiency, efficiency, innovation, enterprise and excellence” (42). Along this line, Bhagat’s first novel the *Five Point Someone* exposes the competitive academic environment of the IIT colleges through the experiences and lives of the three protagonists Hari, Alok and Ryan. In this novel, while Bhagat questions the middle-class equation of academic success with fulfillment, we see the endorsement of education that promotes the neoliberal spirit of entrepreneurship, individuality, creativity and skillfulness and questions the capability of premier institutes like the IITs to cater to the need of the new generation aspiring youth.

Education has been seen as one of the key sites of neoliberalization as market ethic comes to dominate not only business but all spheres of activity including educational goals and ideals. Education was once seen as a state responsibility which “should be inclusive, morally and socially transformative and directed towards building citizens and the nation for the future but it is now seen primarily as an arena of individual achievement and economic success” (Peters 59). The emergence of education as a significant site of neoliberal self-making is recognized and reflected in this novel as it questions and criticizes the ‘outdated’

practices and teaching method employed and followed in Indian premier institutes such as the IITs.

The process of ideological construction of an educational system in a fiction like Bhagat's is intertwined with the idea of the market and enterprise. What is critiqued in the *Five Point Someone* is the lack of skill development and inadequacy of the system followed by institutions such as the IITs to provide suitable skills required for workers in a globalized, liberalized economy not just in terms of technical knowledge but also to fuel aspirations and instill a new kind of work ethic and enterprising attitudes, conduct and behavior in line with the enterprising culture.

In this novel Bhagat is aware of a gap between youth's new aspiration and the nation's old economic structure especially in its field of educational system. Ryan appears to be the main mouthpiece of the author and we see that he is blatant in his critique against IIT's method of educating its students and compares it to being put in a jail with the endless cycles of classes, assignments and tests that they are made to go through. Voicing his disappointment with the institution, he admits to his friends, "... frankly this place has let me down. This isn't exactly the cutting edge of science and technology as they describes themselves ... Continuous mugging, testing and assignments. Where is the time to try out new ideas?" (25). Elsewhere in the novel, he continues, "I mean this is supposed to be the best college in India, the best technology institute for a country of a billion. But has IIT ever invented anything? ... Over thirty years of IITs, yet, all it does is train some bright kids to work in multinationals." (34) Questioning the rigorous system of relative grading, he asks "Where is the room for original thought? Where is the time for creativity?" (35). As Ryan convinces his friends with his plan for noncooperation with the system followed at IIT, one of the reasons cited for coming up with such a plan was that "It suppresses talent and individual talent" (107). We see a similar critique against the current education from Bhagat in his

collection of essays, *What Young India Wants*, in which commenting upon the current education system in India he writes:

We emphasize sticking to the course, testing endlessly how well the student has revised his lessons. We treat lessons as rules to be adhered to, and the better you conform, the more likely you are to score. I hated it personally and I am sure millions do, too, but they have no choice. Innovation, imagination and creativity, crucial for the country, as well as more likely to bring the best out of any student, have no place in our education system ... Because innovation by definition means challenging the existing way and that is just not something good Indian kids who respect elders do.”

(Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* 122)

It is apparent that Bhagat espouses a form of education system more in tune with the neoliberal form of ideology, in which values such as independence, initiative, self-reliance, and proactive conducts are valorized, qualities which are helpful to prepare one for working effectively in global corporations and their local units. Harvey has asserted that as an economic policy neoliberalism “proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2). As such, the novel promotes concepts of individualism, free thinking and fierce independence which can be seen closely related to ethos of neoliberalism.

As India enters the global market, there is a growing need for trained personnel who are efficient, technologically skilled, competent and innovative for the expanding IT and IT-enabled service industries and such a market requires individuals to be self-reliant, self-regulating and enterprising, capable of managing their lives without state support. In such an environment, educational institutes becomes an important site of neoliberal self-making

which equip students with coping strategies for a rapidly changing and competitive world. Keeping this in mind, Bhagat's criticisms of the State's education system appears to be prompted by the need and requirements of a market driven economy and espouses educational reforms that are congenial for enterprise development. Through his novel and essays he questions the ability of the educational institutes in India to produce internationally competitive workforce.

One of the most prominent and encompassing effects of neoliberal globalization has been observed on the formation of an individual subject. It is to be noticed that neoliberalism is not just an economic policy but is a powerful force that has the capacity to influence and reshape individual and social identities into a new type of neoliberal subjectivity. Harvey confirms this when he writes: "It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (3). Neoliberalism also seeks to curtail government action in favour of individual liberty and freedom in order to maximize efficiency.

*The Birth of Biopolitics* written by Michel Foucault is one of the early important theorizations on the concept of the ideal neoliberal subject referred to as "homo economicus". In this theory, Foucault refers to the neoliberal subject or the "homo economicus", as an "entrepreneur of himself": "being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of his earnings" (Foucault 226). In other words, Foucault believes that the "homo economicus" is a "self-regulating subject" that has internalized market ethics and principles and has also been shaped by it. The origin of this concept of the "homo economicus" as defined by Foucault can be traced back to classical liberalism where the "homo economicus" is seen as the "man of exchange" (147) but in neoliberalism, the "homo economicus" is no longer "one of the partners in the process of exchange" but is transformed into a consumer as well as "an entrepreneur of himself" (226).

In this regard, Foucault declares: “we should think of consumption as an enterprise activity by which the individual, precisely on the basis of the capital he has at his disposal, will produce something that will be his own satisfaction” (226). In other words, individuals invest in themselves or advance themselves through their consumption choices, in order to receive a return in the future. This perspective regards all activities even seemingly non-productive ones to be considered as form of capital investments. According to Foucault, the “homo economicus” is someone who “pursues his own interest” in the market actively but is also governed by the “invisible hand” (278) of the market forces. The “homo economicus” is seen as the model citizen in a world where neoliberalism operates without restriction.

Foucault’s concept of the “homo economicus” or the economic man can be employed in understanding the protagonists of Bhagat’s novels as they are seen to exemplify Foucault’s concept of the ideal economic man of the neoliberal system as both entrepreneurs and consumers. Some of the defining characteristics of ideal neoliberal subjectivity such as self responsibility, self care, exceptional entrepreneurial skills, innovation, risk management, and fierce individualism are seen to be embodied by Bhagat’s heroes to a great extent.

Ryan in *One Night* can be seen as the main hero of the novel and is presented as one embodying the values of an enterprising culture in more ways than one. Based on his observation and experience, he is critical of everything that the IIT system espouses. He is portrayed as an ideal neoliberal subject who does not depend on other agents for his well being and act on his own. He is somebody who takes care of himself, has a fierce sense of individuality, who remains independent and assumes responsibility for his actions. Even the description of his physical appearance is that of one who takes care of himself, Hari admiringly narrates “Ryan’s body was flawless. He was a hunk: muscles that cut at the right places and a body frame that for once resembled the human body shown in biology books. You could describe his body as sculpture.” (4). In the very opening chapter of the novel Ryan

is presented as an ideal student, able to think for himself with a sharp mind and brave enough to question Professor Dubey's simple definition of "machine". He is the one who adds sparks to the dull lives of his two best friends Hari and Alok by cajoling them to indulge in occasional outings of fun, movies and parties. He is idolized by his friends including Hari, who describes him as "the creative, confident, smart one" and confesses that "He was what I always wanted to be." (253) He is critical of the common system of rote learning method or the acquisition of a text book knowledge propagated by the IITs as opposed to development of creative and innovative thinking. He did not have the perfect childhood but is able to overcome his disappointments and make the most of his situation. Speaking of his childhood he informs his friends:

I have been in boarding school when I was six. Of course, like every kid I hated it and cried when they left me. But then, it was at boarding school I got everything. I did well in studies, got noticed in sports, learnt how to have fun and live well and made my best friends. (Bhagat, *Five Point Someone* 39)

His ingenuity and enterprising spirit is unmistakable in his approach to studies. For his term paper he wrote an impressive report on the impact of lubricant efficiency on scooter fuel consumption based on his private experiment. He is more interested in practical research experiments rather than giving in to the "mugging" method of his peers and demonstrates creativity by assembling some of the spare parts found in the Physics laboratory to create a radio. He professes his individuality by refusing to be part of the "rat race" for grades at the IIT and attempts to go against the system, making his own rules, coming up with a plan called "Cooperate to Dominate" in order to survive the stifling competitive atmosphere. It is Ryan who comes up with an original and clever idea of making a lipstick holder as the perfect gift for his best friend Hari's girlfriend. When everyone else is sketching a basic car jack design in Professor Vohra's class, he thinks of an original design which the professor

sadly was unable to appreciate as it was not something that was taught in class which adds to Ryan's disappointment against the institute. In the figure of Ryan, we have an image of the new youthful persona representing ambition, a spirit of adventure and individualism and aggressiveness projected to be fundamental qualities of the new generation enterprising urban Indian youth. He displays an appropriate neoliberal enterprising attributes and mindset that Bhagat seeks to promote in his novels.

The only professor who recognizes and appreciates the talent and potentials of bright and innovative students like Ryan is Professor Veera who encourages Ryan to pursue his experiments with lubricants in spite of his low GPA (Grade Point Average). As Ryan finishes off the final semester with the lowest GPAs, and finding it difficult to secure a job with the private companies, Professor Veera comes to his rescue and offers him a job as a Research Assistant which will allow Ryan to continue with his research project and which will eventually give him the opportunity to look for an investor to commercialize his product. Thus the novel ends with an optimistic note in which success for the hero is implicated with the market.

Similarly in *The Three Mistakes Of My Life*, entrepreneurship is celebrated and portrayed as one of the inherent skills that Indians possess. The story unfolds in the city of Ahmedabad and follows the story of three friends struggling to fulfill their aspirations and dreams amidst many setbacks. Govind is projected as the main protagonist in the novel whose business acumen and thirst for success is contagious as he convinces his two friends Ishaan and Omi to start a cricket shop with him. In the very opening of the novel Govind narrates that he comes from a poor economic background supported by his mother through her small Gujarati snacks business. Confessing his love for business at an early age, he narrates:

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. Shopkeepers no longer avoided us, relatives re-invited us to weddings and our landlord's visit did not throw us into turmoil. And then there was the thrill - I was *making* money, not earning it under some boss or getting a handout. I could decide my fate, how many students to teach, how many hours per class - it was *my* decision. (Bhagat, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* 11)

Infact, it was young Govind at the age of fifteen who convinced his mother to open her snacks business in order for them to survive when his father passed away. In Govind's mind, his mother was no businessman, for she was emotional, would sell on credit and buy on cash, and would not maintain accounts. In the meantime, displaying a flair for numbers, Govind easily topped Mathematics paper every year inspite of having many drawbacks at school where "emphasis on studies was low with more teachers bunking classes than students" (9). Capitalizing on his gift, he became the only Mathematics teacher in Belrampur and supplemented his mother's meager income with the tuition money that he earned. Commenting upon the first business success that he had achieved which fuels his ambition further, he writes:

Along with khaman and khakra, trigonometry and algebra became sources of income in the Patel household. Of course it was a poor neighbourhood, so people could not pay much. Still, another thousand bucks a month was a lifestyle changing event for us. From fan, we graduated to cooler. From charis, we went to a secondhand sofa. Life became good. (Bhagat, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* 10)

Thus, Govind quickly transforms himself into a businessman propelled by the early success that he achieves. Much of Govind's drive and ambition comes from the enterprising culture of Gujarat that the novel projects and valorized. He narrates:

There is something about Gujaratis, we love business. And Ambavadis love it more than anything else. Gujarat is the only state in India where people tend to respect you more if you have business than if you are in service. The rest of the country dreams about a cushy job that gives a steady salary and provides stability. In Ahmedabad, service is for the weak. That was why I dreamt my biggest dream – to be a big businessman one day. The only hitch was my lack of capital. But I would build it slowly and make my dream come true. (Bhagat, *The 3 Mistakes Of My Life* 12)

It is evident from the passage that entrepreneurial skills and services are preferred over government jobs with steady salary. The lack of capital to start a business does not deter the young protagonist, rather than discouraging him, it generates in him the aspiration to move towards his goals with zeal and determination. The novel represents enterprise culture from the vantage point of its lower middle-class protagonists and suggests that relatively marginalized youth can aspire to make their place in the new economy.

As the narrative progresses, Govind with the help of Ishaan who is a military school dropout and Omi, the son of a priest without an academic future, decide to open a shop inside the Swami temple complex looked after by Omi's family. They begin with selling cricket goods as cricket happens to be the most popular game in Belrampur and there were no other sports shop nearby. They also come up with the idea of providing cricket tips to every kid who accompanies their mother to the temple in order to attract them as customers. As they discuss the logistics of their plan, Govind assures his friends and tells them that "it will work ... If you put your heart into it, it will", ( ) Thus, for these individuals it is the ability to take risks, to have the right passion and determination even in the absence of cultural capital such as education which are regarded as key components of the new enterprise culture. In the current context of global capitalism, the ability to improvise, innovate and manage with whatever resources are available is seen as the road map to growth, success, and progress.

This emphasis on entrepreneurship in terms of individual responsibility and risk-taking is affiliated with the reshaping of the Indian economy by neoliberal capitalism.

Three months after they've opened their shop, the three friends garnered a decent profit from their business much to their delight. Govind then comes up with a business expansion plan and proposes to open a shop in the new mall that was being constructed at Navrangpura. Unfortunately for them, as luck would have it, the earthquake that rocked entire state of Gujarat did not spare them either and after two years of saving for their new shop, Govind's dream dashed to pieces leaving him heartbroken and dejected. It is then that Dr Verma chided him and advises him to learn from the Navaldharis who are hardcore entrepreneur community in Gujarat. He explains to Govind that "a true Navaldhari businessman is one who can rise after being razed to the ground nine times" (110). Professing his deep understanding of how business works, he tells Govind that "there is no businessman in this world who has never lost money. There is no one who has learnt to ride a bicycle without falling off. There is no one who has loved without getting hurt. It's all part of the game" (111). Explaining the risk-taking involved in enterprise culture he asks Govind to "stop talking like middle-class parents. So scared of losing money, they want their kids to serve others all their lives to get a safe salary" (111). This is the same message that Bhagat reiterates in many of his essays when he says, "we should be celebrating innovation and entrepreneurship, not money, consumption and power" (What Young India Wants 19). With hard work and determination, Govind, with the help of his two friends Ishaan and Omi began to rebuild their business after the earthquake disaster. With quick thinking and planning, they were able to convert a visit from the principal of Kendriya Vidyalaya into a business opportunity turning them into sports goods supplier for an initial period of six months. Thus, the novel's advocacy of the spirit of entrepreneurship and "risk-taking" even in the midst of

adversity is evident instead of relying on a “safe salary” which is regarded as deterrent to imagination and innovation.

Another entrepreneur protagonist can be seen in the novel *Revolution 2020*. The central character Gopal comes from a lower middle class household in Varanasi. He is raised by a single father whose only hope in life is to see his son make it to an engineering college. However, Gopal consistently falls short of a qualifying score in the entrance examinations for engineering colleges much to the disappointment of his father. Gopal decides to take the future in his own hands and build an engineering college of his own with the offered help from the corrupt politician MLA Ram Lal Shukla. Unfortunately for him, building a college requires navigating through a corrupt system that includes bribes-taking politicians and inspection officials almost at every stage. In spite of these setbacks, within three years of hardwork and determination, Gopal ends up opening his dream college GangaTech enabling him to earn significant amount of money. With money comes an opulent lifestyle consisting of big bungalows, Mercedes car, expensive whisky and custom-made suits. Owing largely to his success, he is also able to win back the affection of Aarti, his dream girl who had rejected his proposals several years earlier in preference of his childhood friend Raghav. He contemplates marriage and joining politics as advised by his benefactor MLA Shukla, who tells him that as a “politician, businessman and educationist – power, money and respect – perfect combination. You are destined for big things.” (256). Contemplating on his future with Aarti, it is clear he had everything going for him:

I could be engaged to her next week, married in three months. In a year, I could be an MLA. My university approvals would come within the space of a heartbeat. I could expand into medicine, MBA, coaching aviation. Given how much Indians cared about education, the sky would be the limit. Forget Aarti becoming a flight attendant, I could buy her a plane. If I played my cards right, I could also rise up the party ranks. I

had lived alone too long. I could start a family, and have lots of beautiful kids with Aarti. They would grow up and take over the family businesses and political empire. This is how people become big in India. I could become really big. (Bhagat, *Revolution 2020* 266)

However, Gopal does not represent the ideal entrepreneur and is far from happy in spite of all his achievements. The entrepreneurial success that he has achieved in his life does not compensate for the emptiness and guilt that he carries with him. In this story, the Raghav's character is contrasted with that of Gopal's who is to be regarded as the ideal entrepreneur. Unlike Gopal, he secures a good ranking in the JEE exams which gives him an opportunity to join the IITs but he decides to join the IT-Banaras Hindu University to be able to study Journalism. In his opening speech at the launch of their college magazine named *BHUKamp* which means earthquake, Raghav appears to echo Bhagat's advocacy for change and political reform with his declaration that, "The world has changed. Our college, our city, our country needs to change too. ... Who is going to change them? We are. It starts here. We will shake the world" (99). He gives up his engineering studies to pursue Journalism as a profession because as Aarti explains it to Gopal, "he loves it. That's what he is meant to do. He wants to change things" (122).

In fact, much of the personality and character of Raghav appears to be ideal and some aspects of his life are based on the author Bhagat himself who left a lucrative corporate career to become a writer who advocates change in the society. Raghav's vision includes action by the common man, the young people who feel empowered to bring about a change. In the novel, Raghav's passion as the college magazine editor took Gopal by surprise. In fact, one of the cover stories in the college magazine was to reflect the true state of their hostel kitchen, and when Gopal chided Raghav for wasting his time on such issues, he replied, "That's such a narrow-minded view. And what about the things around us? The food being cooked in an

unhygienic manner. Labs with outdated machines. Look at our city. Why is Varanasi so dirty? Who is going to clean our rivers?” (100). With a lot happening in their life, Gopal doesn't think the responsibility falls on them but Raghav feels otherwise and tells Gopal, “That's the attitude, I'm here to change” (100). After completing his engineering course, Raghav eventually turns down a job offered by Infosys to joins *Dainik* paper as a reporter whose articles are concerned with social issues of Varanasi much like Bhagat who used to write for *Dainik Bhaskar* in real life. Raghav is passionate about his work, firmly believes “the revolution begins at home. Society changes only when individual family norms are challenged” (149) and has faith that “there will be a real people's revolution in India one day” (149). Not wanting to be part of a “corrupt enterprise” (163), Raghav also turns down Gopal's offer to be a part of his college faculty to eventually start his own newspaper called *Revolution 2020*. Infact, Raghav's motto is “Making a difference. Changing India for the better. That is what we live for” (243). The novel seems to present the author himself taking up the role of a social reformer who emphasizes individual probity and social vision for a better nation.

In his essays Bhagat also promotes the idea that true change comes in changing the mindset of the people and not in blaming politicians alone, “after all, we elect the politicians. So for every MP out there, there are a few lakh people who chose him or her” (Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* 21).

In *Revolution 2020*, we see an example of the kind of political transformation that Bhagat wishes to promote through his fictions. He calls for a political transformation in which the development of the nation can be traced in the transformation of the common men to that of enterprising citizens, whereby corruption and political patronage are denounced as bad not just for national development but also for one's own piece of mind. He envisions a new political culture in which citizens are motivated to take action to resolve social issues

and injustice in the wake of an ineffective government. Raghav embodies an ideal entrepreneurial citizen who is independent-minded and forward thinking, motivated by a desire for good governance and the elimination of corruption, rather than personal political ambition or financial reward. He wishes to see a radical transformation of India's system of governance through individual initiative and an ethic of enterprise. The enterprise culture endorses a new kind of political subjectivity that embody 'self-governance' in its literal and figurative sense. Rather than implore the state to provide them help or come to their rescue, individuals need to strive to tackle the problems themselves. This is a political engagement framed in terms of initiative and self-actualization. In this they play the role of civic activists who epitomize the entrepreneurial ideal of neoliberalism.

According to renowned author and academic Professor John Harris who specializes in development studies and political anthropology of India, civic activists in India who advocate a politics of good governance rather than a politics of livelihood are the "subjects who are able to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives and are also the entrepreneurial consumer-citizens who function effectively in a free-market society" (Harriss 2717).

While the novel *Revolution 2020* celebrates entrepreneurship and portrays the ideal entrepreneur in the character of Raghav, the novel also serves as a warning about the corrupting influence of excessive wealth on a person's character as seen from Gopal's life story. Towards the end of the novel, Gopal suffers from a sense of personal unease due to his moral failure despite the economic success that he achieves. He is unable to sleep peacefully till he sets things right even if it means losing the love of his life, Aarti all over again. His collusion with a corrupt politician like Shukla and his involvement with acts of bribery in every stage of his economic rise to success are not considered enterprising acts of self-responsible subject which stands against the virtuous attributes of responsibility and

restrained, ethical self-government of the enterprising self. There is a clear critique of the unregulated pursuit of wealth and success by entrepreneurs who fail to measure up to the idealized yardstick of the enterprising self because they demoralize the free operations of the market by resorting to corruption and crime. Thus ironically the novel also portrays the limitations of enterprise culture.

*Half Girlfriend's* Madhav Jha is yet another example of Bhagat's heroes who embody similar neoliberal values of the 'enterprising self'. He comes from small-town Bihar and has managed to secure an admission to the prestigious St Stephen's College in Delhi through the sports quota.

In the first part of the novel, Madhav's love for Riya goes unrequited leaving him heartbroken and miserable. In his attempt to rebuild his life with a purpose, he gives up a bank job that offers a handsome salary and goes back to Bihar in order to help his mother who runs a local school which the government is supposed to aid but does not. Thus the theme of a morally conscious entrepreneur who does his bit to help the society is injected into the novel. Unfortunately for Madhav, his mother's school desperately need funds for its infrastructure development but opportunity arrives only in the form of Bill Gates' visit to Bihar who is described as an "eminent entrepreneur and philanthropist" (116).

As the school prepares itself to host Gates as the chief guest for its annual day programme, Madhav is required to deliver a speech in English to Gate's NGO team in the hope of winning grants from the Gates Foundation. Madhav has two months to prepare himself for the big day of Gate's visit and with an aim to improve his English speaking skills; he goes to Patna during the weekend to attend coaching classes for spoken English. This is where he encounters Riya Somani once again after a gap of three years who offers to help him with his English. With hardwork, determination and drive, Madhav overcomes his fear of

speaking in English and successfully communicates his desire and ambition for the school. In his speech he applauds Gates for his achievements, recognizes his enterprising spirit and tells him “people must tell you that you are a lucky man to have so much money. It might irritate you also, since what you have achieved is not just because of luck. It is because of your creativity, vision and hard work. You deserve it” (184). Here, Bhagat’s clear admiration for personalities like Gates who represents the ultimate icon of entrepreneurial success is reflected in the narrative and is presented as the role model that young people like Madhav should aspire to emulate.

Madhav’s speech wins him the much needed grant from the Gates Foundation enabling him to turn the Dumraon Royal School as one of the best schools around in a matter of three years. Turning the school into a site for foreign investment through the tourism initiative, “Madhav explained how they had started rural school tours, which included a stay in the haveli. People came from all over the world, allowing the school to earn revenue in dollars.” (259). He explains:

Tourists spend a day with our kids. They teach them a class, share pictures or talk about their country. They say it is one of the most meaningful things they have ever done in their life ... Students love it. They get an exposure to the world. Many tourists send regular grants or gifts to the school later on. (Bhagat, *Half Girlfriend* 260)

Madhav and Riya who eventually got married, visits the US every year for three months in their effort to raise funds for their school. Madhav works at the UN during such stay and does marketing for the rural tours and Riya performs in musical concerts. Their effort is complemented and seen as “innovative” by the narrator writer Bhagat who has been invited to visit the school. Thus the success of the school can be seen as a direct result of the entrepreneurial efforts and success of the protagonists. The novel shows the representative of

the Indian state in the figure of power hungry politicians as corrupt and risk-averse and in such a condition the government cannot be relied upon to provide solution but instead relies on individual initiatives and enterprising actions. Thus the novel can be read as a celebration of individual enterprise against all odds and against corrupt or unjust administrative or political systems.

While Bhagat's protagonists are hailed for their enterprising spirit and his novels features young characters who believe in determining their own destiny, it is also interesting to see that some of his novels such as *One Night @ the Call Center* and *Revolution 2020* also clearly highlight the limitations of a neoliberal enterprise culture. As discussed already, novel such as the *Revolution 2020* warns against the pitfalls of extreme individualism and the blind pursuit of wealth which could be detrimental to the new generation Indian youths.

Bhagat's *One Night @ The Call Center* is much less enthusiastic in its projection of neoliberalism as it also offers a critical commentary on the impact of neoliberal globalization. This novel captures the call centre culture and portrays the material effects of neoliberal globalization on the lives of the new generation Indian youths. One of the more recognizable impacts of globalization has been the outsourcing of jobs to low-wage countries such as India. Multinational companies started setting up call centres in India in the late 1990s and these call centres are established mainly for the purpose of cost savings. From the late 1990s to 2001 the call centre industry had shown tremendous growth. Furthermore the United States is considered to be the largest export market for the IT-BPO industry according to a report by *The Hindu* (Srivastava 2014). The call centre industry in India became a success mainly because of the infrastructure changes that reduced the charges of making/receiving international phone calls through the use of information technology and satellite communication (Stitt 2003).

According to Bhagat, it appears that transnational workplaces such as these call centres have contributed to the proliferation of neoliberal ideology consisting of materialistic and consumerist culture propagated by western countries. In this novel, Bhagat paints a realistic picture of the working conditions and atmosphere of call centres in India which have become one of the biggest employment organizations in the metropolitan cities of India today.

Through the voice of Varun better known as Vroom, Bhagat appears to critique the call centres that have attracted thousands of Indian youths and the kind of consumerist culture and imitation of the western culture that it has given rise to. In one of the episodes in the novel when he gives vent to his feelings, he says:

I am angry. Because every day, I see some of the world's strongest and smartest people in my country. I see all the potential, yet it is all getting wasted. An entire generation up all night, providing crutches for the white morons to run their lives. And then big companies come and convince us with their advertising to value crap we don't need, do jobs we hate so that we can buy stuff – junk food, coloured fizzy water, dumbass credit cards and overpriced shoes. They call it youth culture. (Bhagat, *One Night @ The Call Center* 226)

As neoliberalism promotes the growth of capital through global trade, it has been established by many scholars that it results in mercantile economic exploitation thus identifying it to be a new form of colonialism termed as “neocolonialism”. Tyson explains, “This neocolonialism, as it's called, exploits the cheap labour available in developing countries, often at the expense of those countries' own struggling businesses, cultural traditions, and ecological well-being” (425). This in turn has resulted in cultural imperialism. Tyson further explains:

Cultural imperialism, a direct result of economic domination, consists of the “takeover” of one culture by another: the food, clothing, customs, recreation, and values of the economically dominant culture increasingly replace those of the economically vulnerable culture until the latter appears to be a kind of imitation of the former. American cultural imperialism has been one of the most pervasive forms of this phenomenon, as we see American fashions, movies, music, sports, fast food, and consumerism squeeze out indigenous cultural traditions all over the world. (Tyson 423)

This cultural imperialism which births mimicry of American culture and consumerist lifestyle amongst the call centre workers as highlighted in the novel is seen to be the material effects of neoliberal globalization. Sociologists like Jonathan Murphy in his survey and interview with Indian call-centre workers confirms that that these young professionals have “substantially more consumer goods in comparison with the wider Indian youth population” (426).

The narrative of *One Night* is replete with references that conjure up images of contemporary consumerist culture. Few examples are “The words ‘my wife’ sizzled my insides the way they fry French fries at McDonald’s” (155), “He clicked his pen shut with a swagger, as proud as da Vinci finishing the Mona Lisa” (48), “ ‘Show us the picture!’ Esha screamed, as if Priyanka was going to show her Brad Pitt naked or something.” (56), “We had gone to Pizza Hut, and pizzas have never tasted as good ever since” (159). Besides, the characters themselves are conspicuous consumers as Esha likes to wear expensive designer ‘Calvin Klein’ perfume, Shyam and Priyanka enjoy dating in fancy cafes and malls and Vroom is portrayed as addicted to bikes, phones, pizzas and the internet. In short, they are seen to celebrate capitalism and its effect of consumer culture. Stephanie Stonehewer Southmayd in her assessment of the novel comments that,

With its themes of upward mobility and the achievement of the “American dream,” capitalism inevitably informs the contents of the pulp novel, offering the reader a sense of optimism that he or she may rise from his or her current economic situation and a utopian happy ending ... (Southmayd 6)

The possibility of this “upward mobility” becomes a dream achievable for the characters in the novel through call centres jobs which enable them to earn an income not easily matched by other services. While call centre jobs might not be seen as the most prestigious sectors of the software industry, it still enables someone with modestly low educational capital to earn a well paid job and enjoy the benefits and status of working within the outsourcing sector. From this perspective, the story showcases the possibility of social mobility through access to the new forms of labour enabled by neoliberal economic policy.

Such optimism however is diluted by the insecurity that accompanies the labour market dictated by neoliberal policies. In a neoliberal market economy, “workers are hired on contract, and in the neoliberal scheme of things, short-term contracts are preferred in order to maximize flexibility” where “security of tenure becomes a thing of the past” (Harvey 168). The novel reveals such kind of work environment whereby the employees are beset with feelings of insecurity and unease about their job. Harvey explains, “Under neoliberalization, the figure of ‘the disposable worker’ emerges as prototypical upon the world stage” (169).

In the novel Shyam and his friends are shown to be anxious and worried when they hear rumours of the Connexion call centre closing down due to the decreasing work volume. At the very beginning of the novel, Radhika expresses her concern as she asks her colleagues, “Any news on the call center. I’m scared” (18) to which Shyam explains that either the call center closes or there will be “major job cuts” (18). A little later in the office, confirming their worst fear about the end of the workplace, Vroom informs Shyam, “Things are bad

around here, my friend. Bad news may be coming” (51). As they had rightly suspected, manager Bakshi soon reveals to them about the company’s plan for reducing the number of employees by thirty to forty percent of the workforce which would mean job loss for the “hundreds of people” (167) working at Connexions. As the unpleasant news hits them, the only parting words Bakshi had for them was to remind them that, “Such is corporate life, my friend ... You know what they say. It is a jungle out there” (168). Thus the novel highlights the predicament of many young Indians who work in such call centers and other BPOs (Business Processing Output) in which they become a disposable workforce where “labour is a commodity like any other” (Harvey 171).

However towards the end of the novel when the six friends have analyzed their personal problems and gained a new understanding and perspective after a phone call from ‘God’, the call centre no longer appears to be such a bad place to work after all and it is only the bad bosses like Bakshi that are critiqued as Varun admits to his coworkers, “Idiots have managed this place, because of which we have to suffer tonight.” (225) In fact earlier in the novel when Vroom makes a complaint for the call centre, Shyam admonishes him and says, “It’s just Bakshi. You are worked up about him and now you are blaming it on the call center,” (186) By the end of the novel as Shyam regains his lost confidence and Varun his lost convictions, they come up with a plan to save the call center from being closed down and later made plans to enter into a new business venture ready to participate in the globalized market.

Thus, when analyzed against the context of neoliberal India, the target of Bhagat’s criticism is not so much global capitalism itself, but rather bad bosses represented by Bakshi who are running the call centres and in extension those that are running the government as Vroom states, “Screw Bakshi, he is not the only bad boss around. C’mon the whole world is being run by a bad, stupid-evil boss” and then goes on to critique the Indian government

commenting upon how “the government doesn’t believe in doing any real work, so they allow these BPOs to be opened and think they have taken care of the youth.”(187). Thus, Bhagat critiques the state and its failure to provide opportunities for the youths thereby leaving it to the globalized market to do so.

The critique of the state is not an uncommon theme in Indian literature. In the novels of Bhagat too, we see a critique of the state but this criticism can be understood within a context that specifically concerns the post-liberalization India. Bhagat’s promotion of an enterprising spirit to make one self sufficient and self-responsible appears to come from the realization that the state has not done enough to create opportunities for its citizens especially for the young Indian youths and therefore one must resort to the ‘self’ in order to progress and advance forward in life. In this regard Swaralipi Nandi also notes:

Unlike the Western capitalistic societies, the neoliberal propaganda of self-responsibility in the Indian context is not based on the rhetoric that the individual must be free from the constraints of the interventionist state, but rather derives from the issue that the welfare state has failed to intervene and ‘provide’ for its dependents. Thus, contrary to the Western concept of individualism, the Indian socio-political model is primarily based on the expectation of welfare and an increased affirmative intervention from the state to protect its citizens. (Nandi 80)

This perception appears to hold true in the case of Bhagat’s critique of the state as it is also based on this understanding of the state’s role and responsibility as an overseer for the overall welfare of its citizens. Clearly Bhagat is angry and disappointed at the government for its failure to implement neoliberal growth across all sections of society. He supports the liberalization of the economy which has led to a modern India but feels let down by the fact

that the benefits of liberalization are only witnessed and enjoyed by few. In *What Young India Wants*, he writes:

The fact is that despite liberalization of the economy, benefits are not reaching everyone. Yes, they reach the top 10 per cent. However, the other 90 percent are still untouched. In fact, these people get the worst of badly implemented capitalism – inflation kills their savings and purchasing power, their land gets stolen by corporate houses and their politician cares only about the rich guys ... Our rural poor never see the benefits of liberalization. Add to this, poor education, archaic caste-based social discrimination, poorly implemented welfare policies and a general lack of job opportunities, and it leads to a kind of passive frustration ... (Bhagat *What Young India Wants* 25)

The state thus comes to be critiqued as an ineffectual distributor of resources and a failed provider for the majority. In such a circumstance the free market system appears to be a better alternative which the new generation Indian can take advantage of in order to advance in life. The narratives of Bhagat thus voice a critique of the state, and project a belief in the neoliberal policy of the globalized market which is seen as a better provider of opportunities for success rather than the state especially for the new generation Indian youth provided they have the right drive and motivation.

In this market driven economy Bhagat's protagonists are ideal "homo economicus" in many ways, primarily because they embody one of the most important characteristics expected of the neoliberal subject which is an awareness of self-responsibility. Ryan (*Five Point Someone*), Gopal and Raghav (*Revolution 2020*), Govind (*The 3 Mistakes of My Life*), Shyam and Vroom (*One Night @ The Call Center*), Krish (*Two States*) and Madhav (*Half Girlfriend*) despite having their individual differences are all essentially self made men to be

otherwise known as “a thinking man” and “an entrepreneur” (Foucault 3) who undertakes the responsibility of their own life. This concept of self-responsibility is essential to the notion of the ideal “economic man”. Foucault argues that the neoliberal logic regards the body as a “human capital” (221), which must be invested wisely in order to participate in the growth of capital. Here human capital is typically regarded as competencies and talents but can include any activity pursued considered appealing to the market which will benefit the person. The individual therefore is expected to assume responsibility for his own well being. In doing this, he is expected to take an active part as “consumer-entrepreneur” in the market. This self-regulated subject is the kind neoliberalism seeks to produce because it aims to limit government intervention.

In a similar vein, Nandini Gooptu explains that besides market rationality being one of the key feature of neoliberalism, another is government from a distance which refers to a “specific neoliberal modality of exercising political power, not through direct control but indirectly through the responsabilization of autonomous actors to make their own decisions and choices” (Gooptu 8). She further explains:

Neoliberalization, thus, depends on the development of self-regulation, self-direction, and self-management of enterprising selves. To generate consent for neoliberalism, and to construct ‘neoliberal subjectivity’ then, it is necessary to achieve the generalized acceptance or universalization of the norm of the ‘enterprising self’.

(Gooptu 8)

The enterprise culture propagated by Bhagat through his novels therefore features new kinds of literary protagonists who are seen to embrace ambition, personal initiative, and rejection of the old, corrupt political system. The enterprising ethic informs character motivations, shapes decisions, and establishes moral authority. Protagonists of Bhagat’s

novels are individuals who make their own choices, accomplish things through their own actions, who do not reconcile themselves to their circumstances. For such protagonists, personal growth and development, to use Gartner's idea "comes not from reconciling oneself to an allegorical life, but from the active accumulation of knowledge, the refusal to be a victim, and the rejection of fate" (Gartner 352). These new protagonists embody this ethos of "entreprendre", which means "to take in hand, to take hold of" (360) and for them growth comes not from inaction and sitting passively by but from the courage to act and seize opportunities thus showing that individuals can determine their future beyond the circumstances of the moment.

In addition to this, Bhagat also introduces an element of spirituality in his protagonists which act as a positive and defining influence in their lives as seen in characters like Gopal, Govind, Omi and Krish. In fact, Gooptu in her study of new religious practices that are concerned with the individual and personal subjectivity notes that spiritualism has become one of the most common practices of self-making and personal well-being now sweeping across India. Meera Nanda in her book titled *The God Market: How Globalization is Making India More Hindu* argues that as India integrates into a global marketplace, instead of the weakening of traditional faith, India has seen a remarkable intertwining of Hinduism and neoliberal ideology as opposed to expectations of growing secularism. She notes that spiritual practices, such as yoga, meditation, and traditional healing therapies are now widespread and ubiquitous, being promoted by both individual gurus (spiritual teachers) and organizations, in response to an escalating demand for self-care tools and self-help techniques in post-liberalization India. In the novel *Two States* we see an element of such spiritual practice that enables the protagonist to overcome his personal battles.

The story of *2 States* features two ambitious protagonists Krish Malhotra and Ananya Swaminathan who juggles studies and romance in the prestigious institute of IIMA

(Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad). Krish wants to get a job that pays well so that he can save enough money to become a writer. Ananya on the other hand has a passion for marketing and wants to work for HLL (Hindustan Lever Ltd.). On the day of placements they both manage to secure their dream job. Unlike the other protagonists of Bhagat, Krish and Ananya are overachievers, “the ultimately middle-class fantasy kids” (2 States 39) as asserted by Ananya herself and yet they have a big hurdle to overcome, one that is not tied with financial matters or career prospects but one that concerns their relationship with their parents. As they both belong to different cultural community, they soon realize that their parents will not easily consent to their relationship. Therefore, inspite of their promising careers and financial success, they struggle to achieve emotional fulfillment as they seek to win their parent’s approval for their marriage. In the midst of this, the story also hints at the broken relationship between father and son which stands in the way of making Krish into an emotionally healthy and competent person rendering his financial success incomplete.

Krish’s strained relationship with his father is revealed at the initial chapters but it is something that he refuses to address or talk about. Normal conversation becomes impossible without getting into an argument and it haunts Krish quietly but firmly. He narrates in one of the chapters “I lay down in bed at night, waiting to fall asleep. My mind oscillated between wonderful thoughts of Ananya’s hair as they brushed against my face when we sleep in campus and the argument with my father this afternoon” (59). Although Krish refuses to admit it to himself, the situation with his father steals his peace of mind, refusing him sleep at nights and adds to his frustrations even as he attempts to win his mother’s approval for Ananya.

In one of the key episodes of the novel, Krish accompanies Ananya to Pondicherry and visits the Aurinbindo Ashram while waiting for Ananya. There he meets a lady from Finland named Diana who introduces him to one of the gurus. To Krish’s question of how

one seeks an answer to life's questions, she knowingly informs "Well, the answers are *within* us. People stay in the ashram for a few weeks to introspect" (161). This spiritual message of the novel highlights the importance of the "self" in overcoming life's problems and places the onus on the "self" to make one's own destiny. Krish's encounter with the ashram's Guruji becomes an important step in achieving emotional healing as Krish finds himself narrating to Guruji for the first time about an unpleasant incident with his father in the past which has been the root cause of his hurt, anger and pain. Guruji's advice for Krish to forgive his father and to let go of the past becomes crucial for Krish to become emotionally stable again. As he finds himself on the verge of an emotional breakdown, Krish consults a psychiatrist who reminds him about the guru's advice which propels him to finally act upon it and in doing so brought about a positive change in his circumstances.

This religious practice hinted in the novel reminds one of what Nandini Gooptu explains as "new spiritualism", a concept "which draws upon pre-existing Indian traditions with their emphasis on personal introspection" (74). As Gooptu explains, an important aspect of this new spiritualism is to become aware of the inner power of the self – the mind and the soul. In order to generate one's inner power, the key concept of responsibility, choice and individual autonomy which are the essential attributes of the neoliberal enterprising self are given importance in this new spiritualism. This teaching advocates 'letting go' and relinquishing one's dependence on external or outer elements, be it other people, events, or objects. It also encourages one "to forgive those who vitiated their lives and acknowledge the shared divinity of all humans, even those whom they found abhorrent" (80). This act of "letting go" brings about a positive transformation, activates the inner power and enables detachment from external elements and avoidance of dependence on other humans.

Gooptu asserts that with such an emphasis on the independent self, the role of the spiritual leader is recast into that of a counselor or a therapist whereby the followers of the

new spiritual guru receive knowledge and guidance to empower themselves mentally and spiritually (81). Gooptu also believes such kind of internal reawakening “forge the right kind of empowered individual, akin to the enterprising subject, who can successfully attain mental and spiritual well-being, as well as prosperity and plenty” (83) much like the change witnessed in Krish once he makes a choice to follow the guru’s advice.

With an emphasis on self-introspection, self-motivation and harnessing the power of the mind, the novel *Two States* also briefly reflects how the values of neoliberal enterprising conduct are cultivated in the realm of spiritualism. Thus the novel places an importance on the role of spiritualism and spiritual training to enhance one’s own lives. The novel also ideologically legitimized and sanctified the responsible, self-determined, self-managed, self-governed enterprising subject as both morally desirable and practically achievable. .

Bhagat’s novels explore the enterprise culture and the construction of the individual enterprising subject as a means to express the nature of India’s contemporary transformation. While his protagonists are seen to embody Foucault’s concept of the ideal economic man of the neoliberal system on some level, it is important to note that Bhagat’s protagonists are not confined by such parameters. For some of Bhagat’s novels also strongly warn against a total rejection of community or complete alienation from social groups which goes against Foucault’s concept of the “economic man”. For instance Bhagat’s novels such as *Revolution 2020* and *The Three Mistakes of My Life* warn against the pitfalls of extreme self-interest which is one of the hallmarks of the “homo economicus” or the economic man. His novels appear to register an awareness of the insufficiency of the enterprise narrative while also showcasing its utility and its effectiveness as a means to better one’s lot.

Despite Bhagat’s strong support of innovation and entrepreneurialism in his collection of essays included in *What Young India Wants*, and *Making India Awesome*, his fictions are

infused with moral values and leave a room for questioning the very ideals of a neoliberal enterprise culture, a culture in which the texts exist and which enables them. In the novel *One Night @ The Call Center*, Varun clearly exposes and critiques the consumerist culture of liberalization that has lured many of the Indian youths alongside the material success it offers. In the *Revolution 2020*, Gopal clearly is a lonely man as he alienates himself completely in his pursuit of material success making his achievements hollow and empty. In *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, Govind the young entrepreneur gifted with business acumen is beset with feelings of guilt over the choices he has made in his life and is compelled to reevaluate the values that he has hold on to. In *Half Girlfriend*, the protagonist Madhav Jha gives up a lucrative career at a private bank in order to serve his community back at his village and goes on to build a successful school for the village children showing that one need not give up the community in order to pursue individual success. *Two States* and *Five Point Someone* reflect the importance of family ties and community which cannot be given up easily by the new generation Indian youths. Thus, Bhagat's novels can be read as one invested in the neoliberal enterprise narrative but not completely contained and exhausted within it. Either way, as a supporter and a critic of a neoliberal enterprise culture, his novels testify to the pervasiveness of an enterprise culture vested in neoliberal ideology and its ability to reconstitute subjects to a great extent. It can be surmised that overall Bhagat seems assured by the new economic order where the new generation Indian has the potential to emerge as a winner rather than being overawed by the neoliberal culture.

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## Chapter 4

### The Emerging New Indian Woman

Popular fictions are considered to be one of the important cultural sites that engage with changing gender subjectivities. Similarly, Bhagat's fictions project post liberalized Indian women as symbolic of the new liberalized India and captures their changing subjectivity. Rupa Oza in tracing the origin of the idea of the new Indian woman states that in the beginning of the 1990s, popular fictions in India began to refer to the new Indian woman whose emergence coincided with India's economic liberalization. According to Oza "in contrast to the image of the more docile and 'homely' figure of the idealized traditional Indian woman", this new woman is presented as "aggressive, confident, urban" and ambitious and she also displays a confident sexual identity (Oza 31).

According to Kaye Mitchell, the ideological work of popular fiction in the "construction and reinforcement of gender and sexual norms" has resulted in differing interpretation of it as, it has led to, "encouraging a kind of 'false consciousness' and participating in the work of gender and sexual regulation", while on another level, it has also succeeded in "providing opportunities for the negotiation of normativity and its contestation" (Mitchell 125). Bhagat's novels likewise can also be read as one whereby the role and representation of women reflected in his novels subscribe to the concept of the new Indian woman presenting it as emergence of new subjectivity for Indian women while also delineating the many challenges and conflicts inherent in its construction.

This particular chapter focuses on the discourse on the new Indian woman and how the representation of the Indian woman's subjectivity in Bhagat's novels is also the terrain on which the tensions and conflicts between tradition and modernity are also often negotiated in the context of liberalization and globalization.

Jyothsna Belliappa in her assessment of the contemporary middle class Indian women has noted that in the period following economic reforms, “alongside discourses of a new resurgent nation that could rival the developed nations of Europe and North America emerged the discourse of the new Indian woman” (63). According to her, a discursive construct involving the emergence of the new Indian middle class woman is found in “the print media, television, advertising, literatures and recurrent debates on morality and globalization through the 1990s” (Belliappa 64).

In a similar manner, Rupal Oza has also acknowledged that the post-liberalization era sparked the idea of the ‘new Indian woman’ in the 1990s which presents the image of the ‘modern’, emancipated and liberated woman in popular culture. This idea was regarded as important to the national project as it is tied to India’s aspirations to be seen as a global economic power. Oza asserts that “Within public cultural discourses the Indian woman was carefully crafted to be modern, representing globalizing India, yet “Indian” by being anchored in ‘core’ values” (Oza 31).

According to Professor Rajeswari Sunder Rajan the new woman serves as a contrast to earlier images of oppressed, burdened, and backward Indian women. She is projected in sharp relief against this earlier image as confident, assertive, in control, and particularly modern. Thus, this new liberal Indian woman, is “new” in “the sense of both having evolved and arrived in response to the times, as well as of being intrinsically ‘modern’ and ‘liberated’” (Rajan 130). She further comments:

She is 'Indian' in the sense of possessing a pan-Indian identity that escapes regional, communal, or linguistic specificities, but does not thereby become 'westernized'. The primary site of this construction is commercial advertisements in the media, both in print and on television. The image of the 'new Indian woman' is of course derived

primarily from the urban educated middle-class career woman. They are therefore a response to the actual reality of the existence of a small but growing and significant female population in Indian cities. (Rajan 32)

The image of the obedient, self-sacrificing mother often reflected in many of the writings of earlier generation was replaced by the image the newly 'liberated' woman who was introduced into the public sphere. Female protagonists from the earlier era of fiction are often presented as facing difficulties caused by their identities as women, mothers or daughters. The lives of women depicted in such literatures are often stressful and at times deeply emotional and disturbing. Female Indian authors like Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, and Anita Desai are representatives of an earlier generation of authors whose writings according to Lau, "frequently include detailed descriptions of the interior spaces of home, the negotiation of roles and hierarchies, and the emotional lives played out against a background of the bedroom and the kitchen" (Lau 1098). For instance, in Kamala Markandaya's novels, the anomaly in the social system imprison her women protagonists to narrow and restrictive path. Her women by and large are conservative and traditional in their outlook accepting their destiny as "Karma". Nayantara Sahgal delineates with keen perception and sensitivity the problems and sufferings of women within the marriage institution, who feels trapped and restricted by their responsibilities towards their husband and home. Anita Desai through her method of psychological exploration of women protagonists explores the lives of women who are lonely and sensitive. Shashi Deshpande heroines are a portrayal of the pathetic and heart-rending condition of women in male-dominated society. In contrast, many of the commercial fictions written especially post liberalization including Bhagat's novels reflect post-millennial Indian woman and her urban life, a new context of living and lifestyle choices and, in turn, myriad new possible identities. In contrast to the earlier female narratives, the norms of social pressure and expectation seem

to have shifted with the women now finding themselves now more intrinsically bound to pressures of globalization, economics, and the very real possibility of personal choice. However, both generations of narratives explore what it means to be a woman in the Indian society.

Also according to Dana McLachlin “the modern, ‘new’ Indian woman was a representation created from the political, economic, and cultural context of the 1990s” and the unstable “contradictions of the simultaneous forces of globalization and religious fundamentalism” (7). She is made to “symbolize the fusion of tradition and modernity” (7) in the increasingly globalized culture witnessed after the liberalization of the economy. McLachlin further states that the introduction of the ‘new Indian woman’ also came at a time when the Indian gender social structure was undergoing change, as more and more women were seen participating in the public space and Indian society as a whole was experiencing an overwhelming presence of imported goods and western images. All of these experiences created “cultural anxiety, sparking increasing fears of ‘Westernization’” which resulted in the the simultaneous “rise of globalization and Hindu religious fundamentalism” (McLachlin 7).

Belliappa on the other hand argues that while the supposed “newness of the Indian woman” is constantly stressed, the post-liberalization construction of Indian womanhood is in many ways a “continuation of the nationalist representation of middle class Indian woman” (64). To elaborate further it is seen that education for women continues to be esteemed for the scientific disposition and broader perspective that it gives to women. It is believed to help her in her responsibility towards her husband as a “companion and helpmate” (64). In addition to this, professional employment is incorporated into the construction of the new Indian woman as an important “marker of her modernity”. Belliappa further states that the new Indian woman “personify self confidence, self reliance, and strong commitment to career and are able to negotiate public spaces: qualities that the audience is invited to admire through the

eyes of the male lead.” What is admirable in the characteristics ascribed to the new Indian woman is that they are represented as one committed to their professional ambitions and individualistic in their choice of life partners, at the same time their individualism does not negate traditional values. Therefore the discourse of the new Indian woman implies that professional success and individual achievements are tied with traditional values such as commitment to family and community values. In this way she is made to represent “respectable modernity enshrined in tradition” (Belliappa 64-65; Thapan 415).

Amidst increasing western influence brought about by globalization, the new Indian woman is made to represent the nation’s modernity, its new found economic power and unique cultural traditions. Her image is created as one who embodies “‘Indianness’ in the face of globalization” and she appears to be less shielded from the Western influences when compared with the women of the nationalist period. The new Indian woman strives to balance tradition and modernity as she is made to bear the hallmark of “‘Indianness’” while participating in the global economy and culture. Her increased presence and visibility in the public space of the new economic environment doesn’t relieve her of the responsibility accorded to her at home and to family relationships instead she manages them efficiently (Belliappa 66). This description of the Indian woman has been useful in the analysis of the projection of women in Bhagat’s texts as this is the identity that runs throughout most of the women characters.

Belliappa also argues that the discursive production of the notion of the ‘new Indian middle class woman’ is closely related to middle class discourses on globalization and modernity. According to her, the manner in which the discourse is produced has to be understood in the context of the “‘middle classes’ relationship with modernity”, a modernity “‘which is both culturally specific and highly gendered” (Belliappa 49). Drawing on Yoko Hayami, Akio Tanabe and Yumiko Tokita-Tanabe’s argument, Belliappa explains that in

order to understand modernity in postcolonial nations, it has to be viewed in its relation to the colonial experience. According to the theorists mentioned, the “development of the colonizer’s self-construction as the epitome of modernity and rationality required the construction of the colonized as exotic, traditional, chaotic and corporeal” (Belliappa 54). Unfortunately such construction was adopted by the colonized people so that their concept of the ‘self’ was formed by it. Modernity in postcolonial nations as a result needs to be understood in terms of this mutual propensity to create an ‘Other’ on the part of both the colonizer and the colonized. Citing Hayami, Tanabe and Tokita-Tanabe, Belliappa says that to understand modernity in colonial and postcolonial contexts, there is a need to take into consideration “a number of dichotomous frameworks such as modern: traditional, West: East, colonizer: colonized, rational: emotional, mind: body and public: domestic” (qtd. in Belliappa 54). This cultural essentialization eliminates common elements and diversities between colonizers and the colonized. Thus the colonized culture is inclined to react to the “humiliation of colonialism by selectively valorizing its own traditions” in the negotiation of modernization. (Belliappa 54)

Belliappa further explains that the relationship between Indian middle classes and modernity has to be understood under such circumstances as they see “themselves and their culture through the colonial gaze, internalizing both the criticism of the colonizers and their fascination with India’s cultural heritage” (55). Therefore their dream for an independent India was for it to be able to interact and engage competitively with the more developed nations of the West whilst also representing a “uniquely Indian modernity” (55) that was distinctive in terms of certain cultural traditions. Given such legacy, the middle class continue to define their modernity through certain traditional ideals, norms and practices which were regarded as “intrinsically good and worth preserving” (55). In this context, tradition is then used to define “the cultural specificity of Indian modernity and distance it

from the modernity of the West” (55). Belliappa’s observation and argument has been useful in understanding the concept of the new Indian woman, which might throw significant light on Bhagat’s women protagonists.

Within the debates of modernity and national identity in colonial and postcolonial nations, women become “the symbolic bearers of the collectivity’s identity and honour” (Yuval-Davis 45), and the nation’s modernity comes to be signified by the women’s position within it. In the projection of a nation, women are made to be “border guards” who are responsible to preserve and uphold cultural values (Belliappa 56). At the same time women are also seen as one in need of protection as the violation of their honour is seen as a challenge to the masculine image of the nation. Therefore the discourses of gender and nationhood tend to be closely interconnected, especially in the context of modernity. As a result it is seen that the “discursive construction of ideal womanhood in postcolonial India” continues to be informed by the association of women with tradition and spirituality to a great degree (Belliappa 56).

Bhagat’s construction of women subjectivity in the context of the ‘New India’ can be argued that as a text, his novels participate in the continuing construction of the new Indian woman, posing her as both modern subject and bearer of the Indian tradition. The representation of the new Indian woman in popular fictions such as Bhagat’s reflects the emergence of new subjectivities for Indian women that are tied, in particular ways, to older ones. Through the novels participation in this projection of the new Indian woman, it is seen that this new Indian woman much like her predecessors is however not without problems and conflicts as experienced by women in the previous generations. She still has to battle dowry, patriarchy, societal pressures, sexual abuse at home and workplace which are the common sites of women’s oppression. Therefore, it can be argued that Bhagat’s novels accommodate and celebrate women within the paradigm of modernity and liberalization while also

challenging some of the existing social order through the depictions of these larger issues still prevalent in the Indian society at large.

In the novel *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, Vidya who is the younger sister of Ishaan plays the love interest of Govind the narrator protagonist. In the novel, she has just completed her class XII and has decided to take a year off to prepare herself for medical entrance examination. Upon Ishaan's request to Govind who is a mathematician, Govind decides to coach Vidya for the entrance exam and has to visit their house regularly for the tuition as "Dad will never send her out alone. You come home" says Ishaan to Govind (38) It is clear that Vidya lives a sheltered life under the watchful eye of her parents, especially her father and she feels imprisoned in her home. Vidya dreams of going to college in Mumbai and claims "I want to get out of Ahmedabad. But mom and dad won't let me. Unless of course, it is for a prestigious course like medicine or engineering ... "(47) for this reason alone she decides to prepare herself to clear the entrance examination for medical school which will give her passport to the freedom she desires.

Govind cannot help but admire her beauty and her brash self-confidence. She is well in tuned with the contemporary popular culture. On the walls of her room were posters of Pop stars such as Westlife, Backstreet Boys, Hrithik Roshan (48). She is a quick learner and is quite intelligent. Although she dislikes maths intensely, Govind thinks she has the aptitude for it. She is mature beyond her years when it comes to relationships and she is the one who easily coaxes Govind to open up about his feelings, relationship with his friends and future dreams. She tells him, "You are older than me and a hundred times better than me in maths. But, in some ways, I am way more mature than you" (184). She's brash and unafraid to voice her feelings and concern which often makes Govind uncomfortable given his inexperience with girls and besides Vidya happens to be his best friend's sister. Vidya is the one who initiates their relationship and when Govind initially hesitates, she assures him, "I am turning

eighteen. I can do whatever I want ... I can vote in that election. I can have a bank account. I can marry ...” (184). It did not take long for Govind to be convinced to embark on a secret relationship. All the while, Vidya’s concern to get away from home remains. One day she asks Govind, “how do I get out” (197) and even contemplates running away, but even at the height of her desire, she wants to refrain from hurting her parents. She asks Govind, “Is it possible to run away and not piss off my parents?” (198).

Although Govind is her mathematics tutor, she is the one who becomes his teacher in other matters of life which includes areas related to relationship and intimacy. Vidya is the one who takes the initiative to arrange for their dates, even if it is under the pretext of shopping for a new science book. On her eighteenth birthday, Vidya plans a special birthday celebration for just the two of them on their terrace under the water tank where they decided to have sex. Through the representation of Vidya, we see woman as desiring subject who feels the need to express sexual freedom and curiosity. Soon after they slept together for the first time, she says, “Wow, I am an adult and am no longer a virgin, so cool. Thank God,” (201). Expressing and fulfilling her sexual desire becomes an important step toward attaining liberation for Vidya.

The accumulation and expression of sexual desire constitutes the attainment of freedom in to a certain extent. In Bhagat’s novels we see that love, friendship, sex and relationship are compelling motifs. Pre-marital sex is an issue around which the female protagonist actively makes her own decision and it signifies a position of independence and choice in the relationship between male and female. This is in contrast to many of the situation of the women protagonists in novels of earlier period. For example, Shashi Deshpande’s novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* represents the difficult reality of marital rape in which the female protagonist Saru attempts to flee from such circumstance yet ultimately fails to speak out the marital violence that she suffers. Sita, the protagonist of Anita Desai’s

*Where Shall We go This Summer* longs to escape her marriage and view men as animals with only an appetite for sex but realizes the difficulty of escaping such relation. In *Voices in the City*, Monisha too feels suffocated and stifled in her new surroundings after marriage but is left only with the choice to either succumb or commit suicide. These are only but a few examples.

Unlike these earlier female protagonists, Vidya, the heroine of *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* confronts the world with a character and drive uncommon for most women in India. She is never afraid to express what is on her mind and strongly believes in recognizing the rights of young Indian youths to make their own individual choices concerning their lives. Later when her romance with Govind was discovered by her family, Vidya was soon put under house arrest and her phone confiscated but eventually Govind narrates later that she was sent off to Bombay by her parents to do a PR course just like she always wanted.

In this novel Vidya is represented as a rebellious daughter. Sunder Rajan in her book titled *Real and Imagined Women* mentions about a sharp polarization between the representations of younger and older women in popular media. She writes:

The young woman or more accurately, the teenager, may enact actual rebellion, or even project sexual desire; whereas the older woman, invariably married, exercises her autonomy – her education, her earnings- on behalf of the family's well-being (or at a pinch, conjugal sex). Both rebellion/sexuality in the one case, and financial autonomy on the other, are controlled and made acceptable by a certain 'femininity' that is encoded as physical charm. The polarization in any case, subtly deconstructs itself into continuity: the young woman's freedom, because it precedes marriage and domesticity and will therefore be 'naturally' tamed by them in due course, makes her youth a sanctioned space for a last fling of rebellion. (Rajan 38 )

This observation can be applied in the characterization of Vidya. Although represented as a rebel, Govind is instantly attracted to her feminine appeal, the first time he met her he noticed “her room had the typical girlie look – extra clean, extra cute and extra pink ... her brown eyes looked at me with full attention. I couldn’t help but notice that her childlike face was in the process of turning into a beautiful woman’s” (45). On another occasion he narrates:

She was dressed in a white chikan salwar kameez on the day of our Law Garden trip. Her bandhini orange and red dupatta had tiny brass bells at the end. They made a sound everytime she moved her hand. There was a hint of extra make-up. Her lips shone and I couldn’t help staring at them. (Bhagat, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* 84)

Thus alongside her youthful rebellious attitude, Vidya’s physical charm and femininity are constantly highlighted through the male gaze of the narrator Govind. In the novel, although Bhagat indicates quite a few times that potential mother-in-laws would find Vidya as a bride-to-be quite daunting, it is noted by the end of the novel when she comes back to Ahmedabad to visit Govind after his attempted suicide, she appears to have sobered down and tells Bhagat the writer, “I miss Ahmedabad, can’t wait for my course to be over in six months,” (257) affirming that she no longer feels like a girl trapped in the small city of Ahmedabad with her wings clipped. When quipped by Bhagat about her fondness for Bombay, she confirms, “Oh well, Bombay is nice, but my own is my own. Pao bhaji tastes much better in Ahmedabad,” (257) indicating that the process of being “tamed” eventually has already begun for her. In this manner, she represents a young woman who is on her way to becoming “the ‘new woman’ who will not “jeopardize the notion of a tradition which is preserved intact in the idealized conjugal and domestic sphere” (Rajan 39).

In *Revolution 2020* Aarti is the female protagonist caught between the affection of the two heroes Gopal and Raghav. She is the daughter of a District Magistrate endowed with abundant beauty, feminine delicacy and sensibility. Gopal has been in love with her right from the start but she only regards him as her best friend. Later Raghav too falls for her and she becomes his girlfriend. Although she has never lacked any male attention, Aarti faces the same patriarchal pressure as the other heroines of Bhagat's novels. She desires to become an air-hostess but her parents will not let her leave Varanasi and she is therefore compelled to look for a job within Varanasi. Although she is allowed to pursue a course in Aviation, she is unable to convince her parents to allow her to work elsewhere. She sadly says "My parents can't see why I want to work. They can't understand why the DM's daughter has to slog. All my girlfriends are getting married, planning kids and I am not. I am weird" (220). After completion of her course, she is offered a job as Guest relations trainee at Ramada hotel, a five star hotel within Varanasi and is initially unsure if she should join. Tearfully she confesses to Gopal, "Once I join, my parents will say – this is a good job, close to home, stay here. If I sulk at home, maybe they will let me try for some airline" (171). However, with no other alternative, she eventually accepts the offer. Later however she soon settles down in her new job and appears to be quite content. She informs Gopal, "I am happy in Ramada" (197).

Although she is in a steady relationship with Raghav, a love relationship of her choice, she is not entirely happy. Raghav is caught up in his job and is not in a hurry to get married. In the meantime, pressure from Aarti's parents to get married becomes unavoidable. She informs Gopal about the dilemma she finds herself in, "My parents are pressurising me to get married. I can't fight them forever ... Raghav doesn't seem to understand that." (226)

Aarti is portrayed as ambitious enough to have her own choice of career but not enough to join politics which is commonly considered a man's domain. Although there is a possibility for her to be involved as a candidate for an MLA due to her family's involvement

with politics through her grandfather, she tells Gopal she has no desire to be a politician but hints that her husband may be one if he desires to become one. Aarti's feminine sensibilities are also constantly highlighted in the way she is portrayed - as one needing to be loved and in need of constant affection and attention. The reason she wanted to break off with Raghav is that he "doesn't have time for me" (220). She is shown as one who surrenders to powerful men, men who lust after her and will cherish her. In spite of her character's portrayal as an educated, ambitious and fairly intelligent woman who is not happy to just sit at home and get married, she is subservient to her family's wishes and to general Indian sensibilities and traditional values.

In fact her appearances and manners of dressing are always paid close attention through the narrator protagonist Gopal. She's always immaculately dressed in a salwar-kameez which Gopal never fails to mention. On their date together: "She wore a mauve chikan salwar-kameez. Her father had bought it for her from Lucknow" (170). After Gopal returns from Kota, he was ecstatic to see Aarti as "her pink salwar-kameez became visible at a distance" (97). On the day they were to open GangaTech college, Aarti came dressed for the occasion wearing a "green salwar-kameez with a purple and gold border" (177). She was particularly conscious of the cultural tradition. In writing about the significance of clothing choices, Nancy Cook mentions that: "'Clothing performances" are not as frivolous as is sometimes assumed, and are a form of cultural expression that can reveal a lot about perceptions and practices of subjectivity" (Cook 353).

Through her clothing performance, it is unmistakable that Aarti conforms to the accepted ideals of femininity expected of Indian women. In an essay titled "Defining self and others through textile and text", an article that examines the importance of clothing in defining the self and for the performance of socially approved femininity, Jones writes:

Mediating between the body (associated with what is private and personal) and the external world, which simultaneously requires decent concealment and display, [clothing] becomes an important indicator of social identity and difference. For women, it also marks conformity with accepted ideals of femininity. (Jones 378)

Feminist scholar like Uma Chakravarti and others too have highlighted the fact that women are often considered as the “repositories” for a nation's, religion's, or community's "honor" and that men are often praised or critiqued according to how well "their" women conform to accepted norms of behavior (224). Chakravarti writes, “In Indian context honour of a family or caste is deeply determined by the conduct of women” and also explains that “both men and women embody notions of honour but differently” where “the woman is the repository and the man is the regulator of this honour” (224). A woman’s choice of attire is regarded as an important means of expression which reflect the honour, respectability, or social customs of a community. Therefore, it is not accidental that in Bhagat’s novels much more attention is paid to what the women characters wear than the men.

The name Aarti is also a pun on the Hindu religious rite of an evening prayer and in this particular novel *Revolution 2020* we see how the heroine of the novel is closely tied to the traditional Hindu religious activity. As noted by Belliappa, “The discursive construction of the ideal womanhood in postcolonial India continues to be influenced by the conflation of women with tradition and spirituality” (Belliapa 60) and this observation can be appropriated in the description of Aarti. For Gopal, Aarti represents the perfect woman in the way she embodies the spirituality of Varanasi. He narrates:

We saw the evening aarti from a distance. A dozen priests, holding giant lamps the size of flaming torches, prayed in synchronised moves as singers chanted in the background. Hundreds of tourists gathered around the priests. No matter how many

times you see it, the aarti on Varanasi ghats manages to mesmerise each time. Much like the aarti next to me. She wore a peacock blue salwar-kameez and fish-shaped silver earrings. (Bhagat, *Revolution* 2020 46)

Upon his return from Kota, Gopal also observes:

Even the filthy and crowded streets of Gadholia seemed beautiful to me. No place like your hometown. More than anything, I wanted to meet Aarti. Every inch of Varanasi reminded me of her. People come to my city to feel the presence of god, but I could feel her presence everywhere. (Bhagat, *Revolution* 2020 95)

In this novel, Aarti somehow evolves to generate an important image of Indian cultural and traditional values regarding women. So, in a way Aarti is an embodiment of partially free women of Indian obedient enough to uphold the traditional value of a patriarchal society and intelligent enough to pursue one's dreams and desire and therein lies her representation as the new Indian woman commonly portrayed in contemporary popular culture.

Riya Somani's character in the *Half Girlfriend* is presented as that of "the poor little rich girl. Coming from a wealthy Marwari business family with an address on Aurangzeb Road, in Lutyens' Delhi, one of the richest areas, she comes from a world very different from that of the male protagonist Madhav Jha. Their world collided at the basketball court of St Stephens College and soon became close friends. Riya in the very early part of the novel complains to Madhav about the unequal treatment she receives at home for being a girl. She says: "[a]lso I don't matter. My brothers do, because they will take over the family business one day. I'm supposed to shut up, get married and leave. The high point of my life is to have kids and shop ... sucks being a girl in this country, I tell you" (32). Much like Bhagat's other female protagonists, her dream of studying music after college is not supported by her family

as they want her “to marry into a rich Marwari family” and “live like a queen” (32). Sharing her personal dream with him, she tells him:

I have this dream. I want to play music and sing ... in a bar in New York ... I don't want to be a famous singer or a rock star. I don't want to marry a billionaire. I just want to sing in peace, surrounded by passionate people. I want to own a house in Manhattan, my house, filled with books and music CDs. I want to play basketball on weekends, I don't want to check out a dozen lehengas for my engagement. (Bhagat, *Half Girlfriend* 33)

It is apparent that Riya longs for freedom to follow her own dreams but to Madhav this was not easy to comprehend initially as he saw her as one who comes from a privileged background and whose beauty is ardently admired by everyone. On the day of her birthday celebration as she is decked in her refineries, Madhav describes admiringly: “She wore a wine-coloured dress which ended six inches above her knees. She had applied light make-up. Her face even looked prettier than it did every day. She wore dangling diamond-and-white gold earrings, with a matching necklace and bracelet” (50). However later as she confides in Madhav, it becomes clear that marriage appears to be the only option for her to escape her golden prison. She informs Madhav about her decision to get married to a family friend and tells him, “I don't want to be near my sexist relatives” (88).

Once she made up her mind, she marries a rich family friend Rohan Chadak whom she has known since childhood in the hope of escaping her life in Delhi to start a new one in London where she plans to attend a music school. Gradually she discovers that marriage to Rohan wasn't all fun and adventure as he had promised. He turns out to be a drunkard of a husband who abuses her physically. When she caught him cheating with another woman, she decides to leave him and returns to India making her mind to never go back. For Riya,

marriage fails to give her the kind of escape she had hoped to achieve in the first place. Later, she finds herself a job at the Nestle company as a sales agent posted in Patna, Bihar and decides to live her life alone on her own terms. A chance meeting with Madhav Jha once again changed the course of her life and she finds herself drawn to him and his life much against her wishes. Ironically it is Madhav's mother who warns her from getting close to the boy, and that is when she decides to leave him again for the second time.

Riya represents the new Indian woman in the way she thinks and carries herself. She is educated, smart and confident in her own skin. She is an ace basketball player, and is gifted with musical talent. She knows her own mind and is clear in her ambition to be a singer. She doesn't want to live the kind of life her patriarchal family envisions for her. She understands the kind of future that awaits a girl like her from her community and she makes her own decision to look for an alternative. When Rani Sahiba asked how her parents have allowed her to go to places like Bihar to work, she replies, "They don't let me do things. I wanted to. I can decide for myself ... I mean those decisions don't always work out so well. But I do like to make my own decisions" (161). Riya values her independence fiercely and will not allow anyone to dictate to her. Although she comes from a rich Marwari family, she confesses to Madhav's mother that the reason she has chosen to work is because "I want to be independent" (162). Yet, in spite of all these qualities, she is a victim of incestuous sexual abuse which leaves her inhibited and scarred for a long period of time. In this regard, the image of a fun fearless feminist heroine becomes overshadowed by one who is a victim of sexual abuse.

When she realizes that her past which includes a failed marriage will always come in between Madhav and her happiness, she decides to remove herself completely from his life, feigning a terminal lung carcinoma and requesting Madhav not to come look for her. In this portrayal of the heroine as so self-sacrificing, as one who puts the interest of her man before

her personal desires, Riya still conforms to the idea of the traditional Indian women inspite of her fierce sense of independence which is a defining characteristic of the new Indian woman. After Madhav realizes the truth about her, he sets out on his quest to look for her. We see that Riya has pursued and achieved her dream of becoming a bar singer in New York City all on her own, cutting all ties with her family and close acquaintances. However, with all that she has undergone to realize her dream and attain the kind of independent life she dreamed of, her life appears to be in perfect order only after Madhav finally comes to find her and together they go back to Dumraon to look after the Dumraon Royal School where they also start a family and live happily ever after. In this ending scene of them at the school, the projection of the new Indian woman's is complete because in the end Riya is content living in Dumraon playing the role of a wife and a mother. As much as she values her independence and is accomplished enough to make it on her own, she is contented with doing only a few music gigs during the three months they spend at the US every year while she helps Madhav run the school throughout the rest of the year. She is willing to give marriage a second try despite the bad experience that she has had thereby upholding the traditional idea of a family above individualism.

Priyanka is the main heroine in the novel *One Night @ The Call Center* and plays the love interest of the narrator protagonist Shyam. When the novel opens Shyam appears to still be in love with Priyanka although they have recently broken up. Priyanka is presented in the novel as a strong character and someone who stands up for what she believes in. She joins the call center in order to save money for herself as she tells Shyam, "I could have done my B.Ed right after college. But I wanted to save some money first. Can't open my dream nursery school without cash. So until then, it is two hundred calls a night, night after night" (43). She has a clear idea of what she wants to do with her life and she is willing to work hard to achieve her goals. She has a strained relationship with her mother and this conflict with her

mother stems largely from their difference in opinion of what is considered appropriate behaviour and attire for a young woman. She informs Shyam:

She had different rules for me and my brother, and that began to bother me. She would comment on everything I wore, everywhere I went, whereas my brother ... she would never say anything to him. I tried to explain it to her, but she just became more irritating, and by the time I reached college, I couldn't wait to get away from her."

(Bhagat, *One Night @ The Call Center* 97)

One of the other reasons for a strained relationship between mother and daughter is due to the fact that her mother would like nothing better than for Priyanka to marry a rich man and 'settle down' as a conservative system would approve. When Priyanka attempts to explain her plans to study further and about her relationship with Shyam, her mother bluntly states that she has never liked Shyam because he was not "settled" (130) and sadly tells Shyam, "She wants me to show that I love her. She wants me to make her happy and marry someone she chooses for me" (130).

However, this wasn't the only reason for the two lovers to separate ways, Priyanka too feels that Shyam was not ambitious enough, she tells him, "a relationship never flounders for one reason alone. There are many issues. You don't take feedback. You are sarcastic. You don't understand my ambitions. Don't I always tell you to focus on your career?" (131). It is clear Shyam doesn't measure up to her expectation in many ways. In fact, even at workplace she dislikes the way Shyam allows their boss Bakshi to bully him. She feels that Bakshi gets away with it only because Shyam lets him and indirectly asks Shyam, "Why can't people stand up for themselves?" (70).

Quite the opposite in the novel we see Priyanka as someone who is not afraid to stand up for what she believes in. As Shyam narrates one of their past dates in at Havemore

Restaurant, Pandara Road, he recalls an interesting episode that occurred. Adjacent to their table was a family consisting of a young married couple, twin daughters of about four years old and an old lady. As Shyam and Priyanka were preparing to leave, they couldn't help but overhear their arguments. The old lady was giving a hard time to her daughter-in-law chiding her not bringing in enough dowry with her and for heaping "two curses"(78) upon them by giving birth to two daughters instead of sons. The man who was clearly the husband said nothing in defence of his wife who was silently weeping. It was then that Priyanka decided to stand up for the humiliated lady and proving herself to be an empowered female. Pretending to be a member of the CBI, Women's Cell, she sternly warns the old lady and her son that they could be jailed for three years for harassing women on a quick trial basis. Visibly shaken, thereafter the man and his family quickly left after an apology.

Much later in the novel, we also see another incident in the novel in which Priyanka comes to the defence of her colleague Esha against one of Vroom's verbal attack. Esha has been going through a rough time as her plans to look for modelling assignments has left her with bad choices. When Vroom who had always liked her and who had asked her out several times found out about her secret, unable to handle the tension that they were experiencing in the office, vents out and calls her a "certified slut who'll bang for bucks" (170). Esha is seen visibly shaken at this accusation and soon after Priyanka approached Vroom and delivered a hard slap across his face warning him to "Learn how to talk to women" (170) which propelled Vroom to come to his senses and apologize for his crude remarks. This incident exposes Vroom as a modern youth with imbalanced ideas especially irreverent to woman which Priyanka opposes.

Thus, Priyanka is portrayed throughout the novel as an admirable character who cares for the welfare of her fellow women. In fact, when Shyam and she met for the first time, it was at a college campus fair during their second year. Both of them had stalls and

interestingly, the theme of Priyanka's stall was "female empowerment" (194). The stall showed slides of problems faced by rural women in India and female education programs. Shyam had a video games counter and because the two stalls were not very popular with the crowds, they both decided to visit each other's stalls several times a day and ended falling in love. It is evident that the portrayal of Priyanka as a strong willed woman with a hint of a feminist vein is deliberate.

Priyanka endowed with all these qualities represents an ideal modern Indian woman who is educated, ambitious with a mind of her own and yet the importance of the marriage issue cannot be evaded by her. Marriage is still expected of everyone and Priyanka too finally relents to her mother's idea of an arranged marriage and tells her friends, "I am happy. I can see what Radhika says now about getting a new family. Ganesh's mom came home today and gave me a gold chain. And she was all hugging me and kissing me" (58). Although Priyanka opened herself to the idea of marrying a stranger and seemed quite content about it, towards the end of the novel it finally dawned on her that her fiancé Ganesh might not be everything she had hoped to be and that she didn't really know him at all. When she discovered about the fact that he has sent her a picture that has been re-touched in order to hide his balding hair, she is disappointed by his deception and decides to break off with him. However, this incident still does not deter her from wanting to get married. For her it becomes an eye opener as to who her true love is. After the near-death experience that the characters in the novel undergo, she finally confesses to Shyam, "I want to marry you Shyam" (243), "Deep inside, I am just a girl who wants to be with her favourite boy. Because like you, this girl is a person who needs a lot of love" (245). She tells him, "And even if the world says I am cold, there is a part of me that is sentimental, irrational and romantic. Do I really care about money? Only because people tell me I should" (243). Although Priyanka is a representative of the new Indian woman, far from opposing the traditional idea of Indian marriage, she

embraces it for the right man. In this regard, the text participates in the continuing construction of the new Indian woman, positioning her as both modern subject and bearer of the Indian tradition and the discourse around the significance of marriage remains resilient in all these novels of Bhagat.

Neha plays the role of Hari's love interest in the *Five Point Someone*. She is a fashion designing student and happens to be the daughter of Professor Cherian from the Mechanical Engineering department. She is described as a pretty woman with a round face and an attractive nose. Hari crossed path with her while he was out on a jog one fine morning where she nearly ran him over with her car. They soon became friends and would meet up regularly albeit secretly outside the college campus. Unable to acknowledge Hari in public on one occasion, she later informs him: "My dad is really strict about me talking to boys and he would totally flip out if he hears I am friends with a student" (43). When Hari phones her at home, she warns "My parents are very strict about me getting calls from boys" (58). It is obvious that she is under strict surveillance of parental authority especially that of her father. She is terrified of her father and seems to obey him unquestioningly. Yet, in spite of these restrictions imposed on her, she manages to find ways to meet Hari without the knowledge of her parents and sets up the 11<sup>th</sup> day of every month as a date day knowing that her parents would be away on such particular days to mourn and commemorate the death of her brother who had passed away on that particular day. As their relationship progresses along, Hari narrates:

First I was just a friend. Then I was a good friend, then a friend who was special, then really-really good and special friends or some such crap. For her, calling someone a boyfriend was a big thing. Her dad had made her promise that she would never have a boyfriend, and she wanted to keep it. Of course, it did not prevent her from watching

movies with me hand in hand every two weeks for over a year. (Bhagat, *Five Point Someone* 86).

Thus for Neha defining her relationship with Hari in her own terms by not giving him the official label of a “boyfriend” allows her to negotiate and navigate the strict rules and regulations set by her father.

In the novel it is seen that during the initial stage of their friendship Hari often stereotypes Neha to be the ‘traditional’ girl which he explains as follows:

There are two kinds of pretty girls in Delhi. One is the modern type, girls who cut their hair short, wear jeans or skirts, and tiny earrings. The second is the traditional type who wears salwar-kameez, multi-coloured bindi and large earrings. Neha was more the second type, and she wore a light-blue *chikan* suit with matching earrings. (Bhagat, *Five Point Someone* 44)

On another occasion of their outing together, commenting on the movies shown in English theatres in Delhi, he narrates, “They either show action or adult movies. I don’t mind the latter except that you can’t really take a girl to them. Especially these really nice and good-Indian-traditional girls like Neha” (86). He also confides his feelings to Ryan and says, “I couldn’t imagine Neha wanting to do the same things I wanted to do with her” (80). However, he soon finds out that she often transcends his narrow definition of a “traditional” girl and surprises him constantly. She makes him take her up on the institution roof where he and his friends often hung out together. To his complete surprise, she does not hesitate in asking for a drink and on the day Hari visited her at her home, she decided to sleep with him and asked him to fetch cigarettes after they had sex. However, none of these actions can really be termed as not “traditional” but what stands out to the reader is that these actions are not a careless behaviour on the part of Neha. She is serious about Hari but at the same time

she has a plan of her own. She understands that in order to win approval from her parents about her relationship, especially from her father, Hari would need to impress him, hence she often asks Hari and encourages him to secure an 'A' in her father's subject. In one of her confessional letter to her dead brother Samir, mentioning about Hari and her feelings for him, she writes:

You could call Hari my boyfriend, though I don't. Not very good looking or anything, nor super smart but there he was, this silly bumbler ... My plan is the day Hari gets a job, I will introduce him to Dad. I mean, Dad will still flip his lid, but at least there would be something going for Hari. Right now, he is a little bit of a loser if you ask me. (Bhagat, *Five Point Someone* 133-134)

Although strong hold of patriarchy and discourses of tradition may limit Neha's freedom in choosing to have a relationship with a man, she circumvents around such limitation placed upon her and cleverly manages to act upon her desire and choice without having to completely cut ties with her family. Neha's account in this story reveals contrary to popular opinion, families continue to be strong in the face of modernity and globalization and women play an important role in servicing and maintaining family ties. Contemporary discourse of choice and responsibility play a strong role in the new Indian woman's life alongside discourses of family and tradition. Changing values, the emerging ethos of individualism and the idealization of romantic love encourage women to seek more choice in partners or marriage, but the need for security and traditional practice also obliges them to win parental approval and remain within broadly defined boundaries of caste and community. The story reveals that while cultural discourses tend to exert pressure on a woman and influence her behaviour, a woman may subvert such cultural discourses by making strategic decisions to conform to traditional normative standards in order to strengthen their positions within their families.

Ananya of *Two States* has both beauty and intelligence. She was a university topper in economics from Delhi University and is easily the prettiest amongst the twenty girls admitted to the premier IIMA in a batch of two hundred students. Krish narrates with a sexist undertone, “Girls like Ananya, if and when they arrive by freak chance, become instant pin-ups in our testosterone-charged, estrogen-starved campus” (1). Right from the start we see her as outspoken, impulsive and confident. Krish meets her for the first time at the mess queue where she argues with the chef for the poor quality and quantity of food. She belongs to a Tamilian Brahmin caste, which according to her is described as “the purest of pure upper caste communities ever created” (7) with meat and drinking strictly prohibited. However, she is far from conservative and is not one to follow rules. She enjoys beer and chicken and openly confesses to craving for cigarettes. She informs Krish that her parents are quite conservative and she doesn’t get along very well with her mother. She tells him “My mother already feels I’m too ambitious and independent” (17). Soon after their acquaintance, they develop a friendship which eventually blossomed into a relationship. She soon moved in with Krish in his room within the campus which earned him the tag of a “stud” and “she earned tags ranging from stupidly-in-love to slut” (29). Ananya however, never wavered from her purpose and ambition and is often the one to drive Krish to work harder at his studies. One night she encourages him and tells him, “You are a whisker away from being in the top ten. One more A in the Statistics final exam and you are there” (30). On the day of their placements, she is the one who coached Krish on what to say in his interview, “Well, you should say this – I want Citibank as I want Indians to have access to world-class financial services. And use words like “enormous growth” and “strategic potential”” (33). On being asked about his poor grades in his undergraduate program, Krish narrates:

A girlfriend, fun-loving friends, alcohol, grass and crap profs happened, I wanted to say. But Ananya had told me the right answer. ‘Actually, Mr Sharma,’ I said,

emphasising his name so he felt good, ‘when I entered IIT, I didn’t realize the rigours demanded by the system. And once you have a bad start, due to relative grading, it is quite hard to come back. I did get good grades in the last semester and my IIMA grades are good. So, as you can see, I’ve made up. (Bhagat, 2 *States* 35)

Ananya clearly plays a big role in Krish’s life and is behind much of his success. However, with all her intelligence and achievements, Ananya however is sadly mistaken in assuming that their relationship will be accepted by their parents. When Krish confesses concerns about their parents’ approval, she dismisses him and says, “C’mon mine are a bit conservative. But we are their overachieving children, the ultimate middle-class fantasy kids. Why would they have an issue?” (39).

Ananya is fully aware that she is no average girl to have accomplished what she did in a male dominated society. She is in control of her own destiny, motivated by her own desires and ambitions and is not restrained by the forces of history or tradition. In this regard, she is similar to the representational type of the new Indian woman, who despite the continuing and pervasive inequalities of nation, state, caste and religion can fulfill her aspirations. These aspirations and dream are closely tied to the possibility of material success in the rising land of opportunity, the ‘New India’.

The confidence she had in herself makes her ask Krish, “Your parents will have a problem with me? ... But I also aced my college. I have an MBA from IIMA and work for HLL. And sorry to brag, but I am kind of pretty” (40). However, she soon realizes none of these actually mattered to Krish’s parents but not one to give up easily, the two lovers decided to work on convincing their respective parents instead of eloping. When Krish finds himself posted in Chennai, it is under Ananya’s direction, he becomes a tutor to her brother Manjunath, an IIT aspirant, makes a PowerPoint presentation for “Mr Hindu-addict

Grumpswami” (108) and arranges a concert for Mrs Radha Swaminathan and finally manage to win their approval to marry Ananya.

When it was Ananya’s turn to win over Krish’s parents, opportunity presents itself at Krish’s cousin Minti’s wedding reception. A misunderstanding arose between the groom’s family and the bride’s which was eventually solved due to Ananya’s timely and courageous intervention. Ananya instantly wins the approval of Krish’s aunt and uncle eventually leading to her being approved by Krish’s mother. This practice of parental approval of youth’s marriage reflects another significant dimension of the Hindu custom, that is to engage two networks of family relations in this important institution like marriage. This network is so strong that divorce does not take place so easily. Thus, it is a lasting bond between two families far beyond two individuals.

In the novel it is obvious that Ananya is able to break the glass ceiling of gendered restrictions, yet she also represents the sphere of safe domesticity. She is subordinate to her father’s authority; her bond to her family is constantly stressed in the novel. On the walls of her room at IIMA can be seen pictures of her family strewn across a chart paper which were taken on occasions of festivals, weddings and birthdays. It is also understood that in spite of her potentially rebellious acts, she is fully cognizant of her responsibilities to her family.

Explaining their situation from her parents’ perspective, she informs Krish:

My parents came to Chennai with great enthusiasm. But now dad lost his promotion. Pesky relatives visit us all the time. Amidst all this, their daughter wants to impose a non-Brahmin, non-Tamil, Punjabi boy on them. Of course, they will freak out. We have to be patient. I love them, too, Krish.” (Bhagat, *2 States* 97)

On another occasion, she also informs Krish that an elopement is out of the question, she tells him: “I don’t want to hurt them. I already have by choosing a Punjabi mate, but I

think we can win them over. I want them to smile on my wedding day. That's how I imagined my marriage since when I was a child" (102). Her willingness to put her family's honour and reputation ahead of her personal desire can be witnessed when she finally turns down Krish and tells him, "Will your mother change? Will her bias towards me, towards South Indians, towards the girl's side, change? ... I want to marry where my parents are treated as equals" (233). Thus the projection of Ananya as one who is independent, smart and capable, whose devotion to family is unquestionable makes her a perfect representative of womanhood that balances both tradition and modernity.

However, in projecting these images of the New Indian woman, Bhagat's novels also points out some of the problems that the new Indian woman has to negotiate and navigate. As much as women's freedom to have a career and the opportunities afforded to them through the liberalization of economy is celebrated, it is also true such aspirations bring with it certain challenges. Alongside the discourse of the new Indian woman is the consistent tension of preserving Indian 'tradition', identity and culture. Partha Chatterjee's comment seems useful in this context as he observes:

The question of gender in the context of the New India is particularly potent because representations of women are inevitably connected to hegemonic ideas about the nation. Moreover, the figure of woman in the New India is simultaneously representative of an unchanging nation space, untainted by the perceived ills of globalization and modernity as well as the seemingly limitless possibilities of self-expression and liberation that are so much a part of neoliberal dogma. (qtd in Bhatt, 180)

Alongside the seemingly limitless possibilities of self-expression and liberation that Chatterjee alludes to in his comment above, the unchanging nation space which is observed

in traditional notion of family values and the role women play in its upkeep can also be observed in the kind of challenges that still pervade the lives of women living in post millennial India.

In the novel *One Night*, Esha experiences sexual harassment at workplace when she is encouraged by her agent to have sex with a forty year old designer in order to secure a modelling contract. She gives in to the pressure but is soon told that she is too short to be a ramp model: “Like the bastard didn’t know that when he slept with me” (142) says Esha. Later to compensate her, he sends her money which makes her feel even more miserable. Although she has not actually been forced to have sex with the man, later she feels exploited and feels an awful sense of guilt. She declares miserably to Shyam, “I hate myself, Shyam. I just hate myself. And I hate my face, and the stupid mirror that shows me this face. I hate myself for believing people who told me I could be a model” (143). Because of her appearance and self-presentation it is obvious that Esha is often objectified and attracts unwanted attention thus placing her at a vulnerable position. For instance, Shyam narrates in the early part of the novel, “I saw Vroom stare at Esha. It’s never easy for guys to work in an office with a hot girl. I mean, what are you supposed to do? Ignore their sexiness and stare at your computer” (51). In another instance, Bakshi tells Esha, “You were tight skirts and tops, but I only look at them from a distance” (221). With her impeccable sense of style and attractive appearance, she was also voted “hottest chick at Connexions” (19). In the final chapter of the novel, Shyam narrates that Esha appears to be doing quite well in her new job where she works with an NGO to fundraise with corporates. He states, “I guess when male executives hear such a hot woman asking for money for a good cause, they cannot say no. Most of them are probably staring at her navel ring when they are signing the cheque” (252). This clearly suggests that often women in neoliberal workplaces of new India sometimes cannot escape being objectified which puts them in a vulnerable position.

For Radhika it is clear that she struggles to maintain work life balance as she also needs to fulfil her obligations as the dutiful daughter-in-law. She struggles to be on time for work and constantly need to rush as she juggles “cooking three meals a day and household chores and working all night ...” (17) as observed by Shyam. Once married Radhika also only wears Indian clothing as she lives with her husband’s family who are quite conservative. Shyam describes Radhika with dark circles under her eyes looking sleep deprived. “She wore a plain mustard sari, as saris were all she was allowed to wear in her in-laws’ house. It was different apparel from the jeans and skirts Radhika preferred before her marriage” (22 ). However, as they discussed about their household practice, she later assures her friends and defends her in-laws: “They don’t make me do anything, Esha. I am willing to follow their culture. All married women in their house do it” (52). Radhika’s decision to work in a call center is also motivated by her desire to contribute to her family’s welfare and not because she is desirous of being independent from the family. Radhika herself admits “I need this job. Anuj and I need to save” (18). Therefore, the popular assumption that earning an income makes women independent proves untrue; rather their incomes are directly connected with their family responsibility. In this regard, she represents the new Indian woman as one whose financial motivation comes from her commitment to her family. However, for Radhika, the constant pressure to balance work pressure and household responsibilities takes its toll on her as she becomes addictive to anti-depressants for her to maintain sanity. At one point she tells her friends, “Trust me, being a daughter-in-law is harder than being a model” (83) after her husband Anuj berates her over the phone for not crushing the almonds a bit finer for her mother-in-law. With more Indian women entering public workforces the gendered division of labour at home doesn’t seem to undergo any change for many of them depending on their class position. This reflects that while women have access to opportunities created by

globalization, their capacity to realize these opportunities depends upon and is subjected to their position within the middle class and other structural factors.

In novels like *Five Point Someone* and *The Three Mistakes*, the hold of patriarchal authority especially on the daughters is strong as already highlighted. In her letter to her dead brother Samir, Neha expressing her frustration with her parents she recalls the extent to which her father had gone to intervene in her life. She narrates: “Remember how he called cops to arrest a man who whistled at me at the campus bus stop? And the time he changed the home phone number because a male classmate called for notes? He wants to bring up his daughter right. I am his mission in life” (134). Similarly in the *The Three Mistakes*, Neha has to put up with not only a strict father but also an overprotective brother. When Omi finds out about the relationship that was developing between Neha and Govind, reminding the plight of the boy who had developed a liking for Neha, he warns his friend, “Ish will kill you, or her dad will. Or any man who is related to her will. Remember that guy in the car? Trust me, you don’t want to be that boy, or that car.” (174). Such petrifying patriarchal dominance still pervade the lives of many of the new generation Indian women despite many changes and opportunities in modern India. Even in the novel *Two States*, although Krish’s mother is portrayed as a strong woman to whom Krish turns to for comfort and advice on many occasions, evidently it is only after Krish’s father intervenes and blesses the marriage that it acquires legitimacy and is deemed honourable especially by Ananya’s parents. Thus, in the end it is the father who always imposes his will on the family, and the narrative resolution occurs only when Krish’s father relents and gives his blessings.

With the liberalization of the economy, it is true that more and more women enter public workplaces and are given opportunities to supplement family income or to be independent. However alongside such opportunities and changes, it appears social evils such

as the demand for dowry as a bride price have not been erased but have only increased with rising income, consumerist aspiration and materialism. Belliappa writes:

The custom of taking dowries from brides' families at a wedding which had been confined to a few communities in pre-colonial times spread across caste and regional lines in the colonial and post-colonial period. In the 1970s and 1980s growing consumerist aspirations amongst the middle classes led to exponential increase in demands for dowry by grooms' families. Demands included cars, scooters household goods, electronic equipment, clothes, jewellery, property and money. When the demands were not met it often led to domestic violence, murder and suicides of young married women. (Belliappa 62)

Such observation is a cause for concern and is quite evident in novels like the *Two States* and also hinted in the *One Night and Five Point*.

In the *Two States*, we see a humourous yet satirical account of Duke and Minti's wedding event whereby the wedding was almost called off because the groom's side demanded Hyundai Accent car which costs five lakhs instead of Hyundai Santro which costs "only three lakhs" (209) as a wedding gift from the girl's family. The women from the bride's family tries to appease the sulking groom's father by taking off their jewellery and offering it to the groom's side as a security deposit before the car can be replaced. Ananya, the heroine of the novel intervenes and came up with a plan gathering the younger section of both the families. She tries to make Duke understand the ridiculous demand that his family was making, reminds him that he could get a girl like Minti only because it was an arranged marriage and thus managed to salvage the situation through her timely intervention.

Ananya too inspite of all her educational qualification and accomplishment cannot escape being evaluated in terms of the money she would bring to the groom's household.

After rejecting his mother's recommendation to marry Dolly, Krish's maternal aunt Shipra masi pointedly asks, "How much will that Madrasin earn? Dolly would have filled your house" (68). Later in Goa, following Krish's advice Ananya and her parents find themselves spending four hours in Panjim selecting and buying gifts for Krish's mother in order to appease her and win her approval.

Similarly the *Five Point Someone* also hints at how the dowry system is still a major cause for concern in many of households including urban India. Alok finds himself beset with family problems including one that concerns dowry for his sister's marriage. Hari, the narrator friend learns from Alok that his parents had finally "managed to palm off their daughter to someone" (154) who wanted a Maruti car for dowry, but had agreed to wait for it until Alok was able to afford it. When Hari asks why they were in such a hurry to marry off the sister, Alok simply replies, "The older she gets, the more dowry people will demand. Waiting will mean more expense later. I'm happy the deal is cut" (155). Later as the story unfolds, to add to his woes, Alok learns the news from his mother that his sister's engagement has been broken off by the groom's side because they wanted the portion of the dowry straight away and although Alok's mother offered to apply for a loan to "lock in the boy", the groom's family couldn't wait as they "get another deal" (178). Such narrative reveals that women in contemporary India are not spared the humiliation of such practices that their counterparts in previous generation have undergone. The practice of dowry is one of the common social evils that have been highlighted by prominent Indian novelists such as Narayan in *The Bachelor Of Arts* and *The Vendor of Sweets*, Raja Rao in *Kanthapura*, Kamala Markandaya in *Nectar in a Sieve*, or Manju Kapur in *Home* amongst other examples.

Again in the *One Night @ The Call Center*, there is a small but important scene that showcased concerns about dowry related matter. During one of their dates together, Shyam and Priyanka happen to be seated next to a family consisting of a young married couple, their

two young daughters and an old lady. As they were preparing to leave, they were disturbed to hear the conversation that was going on. Clearly, the old woman was giving a hard time to her daughter-in-law. She complained rather loudly, “What to do? Since the day this woman came to our house, our family’s fortunes have been ruined ... The Agra girl’s side were offering to set up a full clinic. I don’t know where our brains were then.” (78). The young lady sat quietly with tears in her eyes, as the old lady continues to verbally abuse her while the husband says nothing in her defence till finally Priyanka intervenes. Such scenes find their way into the novel making the readers aware that social evils like the dowry system are still largely prevalent in the present day society.

It appears that the formation of the new Indian woman is not fully able to discard the outgoing structures of oppression; rather, she is still subjected to existing and new forms of patriarchal oppression. Sunder Rajan in assessing the representation of the new Indian woman seen commonly in advertisements has observed that: “Women in history and myth who are ‘modern,’ as well as contemporary women who are ‘traditional’ ... are made to serve as harmonious symbols of historical continuity rather than as conflictual subjects and sites of conflict” (135). Bhagat’s novels appropriate such a statement as his novels demonstrate on many occasions that “contemporary women” can be both “traditional” and “modern” as seen from his women protagonists. On the other hand his novels also clearly reflect the conflict and challenge that women in contemporary urban India experience while trying to straddle tradition and modernity. In spite of the shifting limitations imposed on women as a result of the economic liberalization and globalization, it is also clear from the novels discussed that the new Indian woman is still not free from patriarchy, dowry, sexual harassment, sexism at workplace, work at home, which are the common sites of women’s oppression thereby casting a long shadow on the celebratory discourse of the new Indian woman as

representative of liberalized India. On the whole, Bhagat's novels however present the neoliberal image of Indian women as potentially promising of a better future.

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## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

This thesis explores the novels of Chetan Bhagat that depict the lives and challenges of the new generation Indian in the context of economic liberalization and globalization. It seeks to highlight the concerns and issues facing young Indians as they attempt to negotiate their place in the “New India” (Chowdhuri 2) and explore what it means to be a new generation Indian. The notion of this new India is often grounded in a sense of economic growth and development owing to the tremendous changes experienced as a result of economic reforms in India during the early nineties. This thesis also examines a variety of themes reflected in Bhagat’s novels that are experienced in contemporary Indian realities; especially focusing on how the material and ideological aspects of economic globalization affect the formation of the new middle class especially within the youth groups and how it presents it as an attractive group for others to aspire.

It is obvious that contemporary Indian novels in English now in many ways have attempted to capture the new changes and developments caused by the overwhelming impact of the global capital and policies of free trade after 1991, which have affected every aspect of the Indian life with increasing momentum. This is certainly a different direction taken from the previous generation of writers in the 70’s, 80’s and early 90’s, whose writings have centered around colonialism, postcolonialism, partition, questions and issues related to national identity etc. It can be seen that many of the contemporary Indian English novels break away from the focus on colonialism, Emergency period or the cosmopolitan and transnational consciousness seen commonly amongst the diasporic writers to instead focus on the effects of contemporary globalization. Bhagat is certainly a writer who belongs to this new breed of contemporary writers whose writings can be categorized as the “post-postcolonial writing”

according to Paul Jay who explains such writings to be “in many ways demonstrably different from what we might call the classic postcolonial texts, for, while they allude in some way to the legacy of colonialism, they pay more attention to the effects of contemporary globalization than they do the imperatives of postcolonial state making” (96). This has been amply evident in Bhagat’s narratives which stand apart from diasporic and Indian heritage-related writings such as those produced by Salman Rushdie and R.K Narayan or Raja Rao. Moreover, creative Indian writing, unlike the ancient Vedic Sastras as exception, is not an imaginative enterprise free from social realities. It is true the Indian novels no longer reflect the social world of these earlier writers precisely because the contemporary Indian reality has changed radically in the recent years.

Bhagat specifically narrate a post-liberalization India through his fictions and recognizes the overwhelming influence and presence of liberalization and globalization. In Bhagat’s novels, the challenges, opportunities and conflicts of the new India are confronted through fictional characters drawn from the youth section of the society trying to make it into this new fashionable and desirable world of the middle class. Consequently the figure of the new Indian youth becomes an important subject in the narratives of Bhagat that reflect the neoliberal ideology, alongside the narratives that critique and resist globalization. Thereby the focuses on the representation of the new generation Indian and the way neoliberal globalization affect their lives forms an important focus of this thesis. It also addresses concerns of neoliberal globalization such as the formation of middle class groups, the implementation of neoliberal form of subjectivity and how this social formation affect and presents the image of the Indian woman who is seen to challenge the stereotypical roles and customs assigned to her. It is apparent that at the centre of Bhagat’s narratives is the figure of the new generation Indian youth on whom is seen the various effects of neoliberal globalization as established already. In a similar vein, Dawson Varugheese too has expressed

in his book *Reading New India* that “‘Young India’ is a considerable part of the identity that is New India” (16).

To recollect what has been discussed in the preceding chapters, with the introduction of the new economic policy in the nineties comes the exposition of an image of a “New India” which has been advertised and publicized by the media to attract foreign investors and business opportunists. Alongside this concept of the new India emerges a new generation Indian represented by the new middle class youth group for whom the construction of identity is dependent on various factors. It is found through the study that with the increasing opportunities in the service sectors of software and call centre industries, the new generation urban Indian youth find themselves vying for jobs in these places which will in turn enable them to live the new middle class dream of financial comfort and security. However, it is seen that along with such opportunities also comes intense competition and pressure for entry into the restructured labour market created by the capitalist economy. This is reflected in stories like *Five Point Someone* which reflect the stifling learning environment of premier institutes like the IITs where every student finds himself under extreme pressure to secure good grades for entry into the coveted IT job markets. The result of such environment is that individualized strategies are employed in various ways as young IT aspirants seek to attain various social capitals in their effort to increase their employment prospects.

A novel like *Revolution 2020* is a testament to the anxiety that is plaguing the new generation young Indians and to which parental pressure is an additional load that the youths have to bear. Success measured strictly in terms of lucrative IT jobs puts them in a vulnerable situation which makes achieving success through corrupt means and practices becomes attractive. This is the circumstance that a young protagonist like Gopal finds himself in the novel. It is also seen that suicidal tendencies arises among the young people when they feel that they’ve run out of options to explore. Examples of youth committing or attempting

to commit suicide are not an uncommon trope in the novels of Bhagat. As established in the preceding chapters, those who are unable to find software jobs are left with the choice of joining the call centre industry. *One Night @ The Call Centre* reflects the condition and lives of such call centre workers in many of the metropolitan cities in India. While it offers them opportunity for financial independence at an early age, there are also concerns of rampant consumerism, erosion of values and job insecurity that the author invokes through the novel. It can be surmised that call centre jobs apart from lucrative IT jobs are one of the ways to define the new generation Indians as it offers them the financial capability to access lifestyle symbols which are considered to be markers of the liberalized middle class and one which the new generation Indian aspires to.

It is also observed in this study that lifestyle built around an English education appears to be one of the identity markers for the urban middle class and the acquisition of the English language skills becomes an important means for various segments of the aspiring new generation Indian to gain membership into the world of the middle class. The linguistic politics of English has been highlighted by Bhagat in both his essays and fictions such as *Half Girlfriend* in which English language skills is used as a social capital that one can utilize in the liberalized job market and is considered as a social capital to mark the exclusivity of those that can enter the middle class fold. With the influence of globalization on modern Indian youths, widespread practice of consumerism and consumption of global commodities constitute an important factor in cultural identity formation of the new generation Indian. This is evident in almost all the novels of Bhagat where the protagonists are deeply implicated with the consumerist culture of the society they live in. In this regard, Chowdhury observes:

If postcolonial identity is an identity always constructed within the shadow of Western economic dominance, then an economically determined nationalism is one

way to assert identity. This new Indian identity, however, does not mirror the economic nationalism of the Nehru years, which was rooted in a nationalistic developmental politics of non-aligned third worldism. Instead, it embraces a “nationalism” that is based on a competitive and collaborative alliance with Western capitalism.” (Chowdhury 77)

It can also be surmised through the study that as Bhagat’s novels centres around the lives of young Indian adults, romance and attitude to love, sex and marriage are important factors to consider in their expression of their identity. It is observed that the changes reflected in their attitude towards such aspects in comparison to earlier generation can be attributed to exposure to western lifestyle and images based on media portrayal. However, it is also evident that the hold of traditional practices is still very strong amongst the young people and that they often find themselves having to negotiate between the two influences in the quest for their identity. If the characters provide a clue to Bhagat’s creative mind, it can be observed that Bhagat has positive notion of community and family tie. Though in many respects he sounds radical especially in his advocacy for change, he does not emerge as a firebrand revolutionary but as a social realist who does not wish to see many of the Indian socio-cultural values to be sacrificed to breed a culture of free and irresponsible individualism.

In all of Bhagat’s novels it can be seen that the construction of the new generation Indian subject is based on idealized middle-class who is seen to benefit the most from the liberalized economy and this subjectivity evolves from a combination of assimilation and adaptation to the neoliberal system inspite of the various challenges that is thrown at them.

A significant finding of the study is in the prevalence of neoliberalism as an ideology that is found to operate in Bhagat’s novels and this ideology is embraced and promulgated through the valorization of an enterprise culture and through the promotion of an enterprising

individual subject. In other words, enterprise culture is identified as a key feature of neoliberalism with the notion of the individual as “the entrepreneur of himself” (Foucault 226). In this aspect, market-based principles of competition, performance and efficiency “with an underlying model of individual human behaviour based on profit and rational choice in response to incentives created by the market” (Gooptu 4) have been adopted in large measure. This in turn injects careful and “responsible behaviour on the part of individuals and communities” which will help them “to manage and survive the risks of economic fluctuations by enhancing their own skills and employability” (Peck 24).

The concept of “homo economicus” or the economic man as an ideal neoliberal subject which is propounded by Foucault has been found to be useful in understanding the kind of protagonists that Bhagat has featured in his novels. Foucault’s “homo economicus” is essentially someone who “pursues his own interest” (Foucault 278), is an active participant of the market economy and is one who is governed by the “invisible hand” (278) of the market force. The economic man is regarded as the ideal citizen of a neoliberal society.

Across all his novels, it is seen his heroes be it Ryan (*Five Point Someone*), Shyam and Varun (*One Night @ The Call Center*), Govind (*The 3 Mistakes of My Life*), Gopal and Raghav (*Revolution 2020*), Mhadav (*Half Girlfriend*), are self-driven and believes in chalking out their own destiny. They possess qualities such as inventiveness, ingenuity, tenacity, resourcefulness and pragmatism, qualities associated with the economic man which enables them to rise above their circumstances and achieve their goals. They embody an important characteristic of self-responsibility which is seen as one of the traits of homo-economicus.

Acknowledging the role of economics in life, one may realize in Bhagat’s novels that the protagonists of this new entrepreneurial India are young people and this new generation Indian youth is construed as one possessing certain kinds of appropriate enterprising character attributes, mindsets, skills and proficiencies that were apparently lacking in the

previous generation. To achieve consent for neoliberalism and to construct “neoliberal subjectivity,” it becomes necessary for the idea of “enterprising self” become the norm (Gooptu 8). This new youthful personal that dominates Bhagat’s novels represent ambition, a spirit of adventure, individualism and a certain level of aggressiveness to achieve a desired goal which are projected as fundamental qualities of the new generation of enterprising urban youth across India. A neoliberal subject is seen as one who should stop depending on other agents for his well being and instead should remain independent and assume responsibility for himself possessing a fierce sense of self-care much like the heroes of Bhagat some of whom have also been described as “angry young men” (qtd. in Sablok 94) in their struggle to seek overhaul of stereotypical systems and to secure a better life for themselves.

It is interesting to note that the values of neoliberal enterprising conduct are far reaching and are also cultivated in the realms of spiritualism. Bhagat also introduces an element of spirituality in his protagonists which act as a positive and defining influence in their lives as seen in characters like Gopal (*Revolution 2020*), Govind and Omi (*The 3 Mistakes of My Life*), Krish (*2 States*). In fact, Nandini Gooptu in her study of new religious practices that are concerned with the individual and personal subjectivity notes that spiritualism has become one of the most common practices of self-making and personal well-being now sweeping across India. It has been observed by scholars that the permeation an enterprise form to all forms of conduct such as “to the conduct of government and to the conduct of individuals themselves” (Burchell 276) is an important feature of neoliberalism. This is the reason why neoliberalism is seen as more than a set of economic policies but rather as a form of political-economic governance.

Through the analysis of Bhagat’s fictions, it can be observed that the celebration of entrepreneurship connected with the free market system in Bhagat’s writings appears to stem from a desire to see it as an alternative option for the middle classes from corrupt political

system that have been made ineffective due to government corruption and inefficiency. Paradoxically it is the State that is ultimately responsible for ensuring that a framework exists for market economy to thrive. In opposition to the idea of complete non-interference of the state in the market in “liberalism”, neoliberalism rather requires participation of the state as a supporter of the market. In this aspect Harvey’s idea on the role of the state may be noted. He observes, “The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defences, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights, and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets” (Harvey 2). Therefore for neoliberalism to thrive the role of the state cannot be negated entirely.

However, it is also observed in this thesis that inspite of the pervasiveness of an enterprising spirit and culture in the novels of Bhagat, there is also an awareness of its shortcomings which is reflected through the moral values and lessons infused in the novels. Such awareness is presented through the dilemmas that the protagonists encounter in various ways and this is reflected in stories such as *Revolution 2020* and *One Night @ The Call Center* which are critical of liberalized India and its associated ideals while also raising important questions on the impact of the enterprise culture for the new generation Indian youths. In these fictions clearly there is a critique of the unfettered pursuit of wealth and success which often leads to entanglement with corruption and shady politics. Therefore Bhagat’s novels do not espouse blind conformism to the neoliberal ideologies of a capitalist market which could be at the cost of ethical self-government. At the same time it is also apparent that Bhagat is a capitalist at heart for he expresses a belief in the central message that capitalism usually endorses - which is that the widespread reach of the capitalist economy will eradicate social differences. He confirms this in his answer to a question asked in an interview about young Indians and their commitment, whereby he says:

I think they [young India] are very ambitious and their primary focus is going to be themselves. That's just how people are, especially in a society where wealth has been missing for a long time. Most people have grown up with very little money, and the middle class or lower middle class have already been through a lack of resources, so one of the first things they want to do in life is make sure they have enough money. And then they'll think about the country- that's a fact! It's not really a bad thing, if everybody wants to make money and everybody makes money, it would lead to a more developed India. What we should keep intact are the values, and how we make that money - it should be through moral means and meritocracy, so that needs to be emphasized. (Bhagat)

It is therefore clear that the enterprise culture propagated by Bhagat includes a celebration of the self whereby betterment of the self would eventually lead to national development. This is in marked contrast to Gandhi's belief that true freedom comes through a "denial of the self" whereas for advocates of enterprise culture freedom is achieved through "the embrace of the self" (Anjaria 192).

The early nineties which witnessed India's economic liberalization also mark the emergence of the new Indian woman who is celebrated as an icon of the new India in media and popular culture. Bhagat's novels are quite conscious of her presence in the young India. This is mainly because as India integrates into the global economy, a considerable number of women especially those belonging to the middle class have benefitted from the expansion of the private sector which offers them unprecedented incomes and opportunities for greater freedom of mobility not experienced by the earlier generations. The image of the compliant and subservient gendered subject in this narrative of a changing nation is no longer viable.

It can be seen that the discursive production of the notion of the new Indian woman is closely related to the middle class discourse on globalization and modernity whereby the

middle class continues to define their modernity through certain traditional norms and practices while also espousing values such as greater independence, self reliance and strong commitment to careers and professional growth. The new Indian woman is no longer located only in the domestic world but is also seen to participate actively in the professional and public domains. In this construction of the new Indian woman, she has to find the right balance between tradition and modernity.

Meenakshi Thapan also notes that the construction of the new Indian woman “simultaneously portrays her as glamorous, independent, conscious of her embodiment and the many forms of adornment and self-presentation available to her, and yet enshrined in the world of tradition through her adherence to family and national values” (415). Scholars like Munshi argues that the figure of the new Indian woman is constructed through market ideologies as it became closely linked with consumerism and that instead of challenging patriarchal power structures, it helped facilitate the explosion of consumer capitalism (573). Chowdhury too argues that in the narrative of the empowered woman, progress and growth in women’s social position have come due to the “unfettered capitalism that has created the opportunities” via economic reforms and not because of the “struggles of women through decades of activism” (146). Meanwhile, Belliappa also notes: “The post-liberalization discourse on Indian women co-opts many of feminist ideals, choice, autonomy and freedom, to recreate women as consumers and encourage their participation as workers in the transnational capitalist economy” (64) but he also assert that “the discourse of the new Indian woman suggests that individual self-actualization and professional success are bound with commitment to family, community or nation.” (65). Despite slightly differing perspectives on India’s neoliberal woman, the new woman stands as an equal participant in the enterprise culture. These observations have been found useful in the analysis of the women protagonists in Bhagat’s novels.

In the late 1980's similar reconstitutions of gender were apparent around the "New Traditionalist Woman" discourse in the United States where the "new traditional women" were "contemporary women who find fulfilment in traditional values that were considered old fashioned just a few years ago" (Darnovsky 72). Similarly it is seen that the identity of the new Indian woman is derived from both their achievement in the public space which includes their workplace and in their commitment to family encompassed within a traditional value.

In the description of the women in Bhagat's novels be it Vidya (*The 3 Mistakes of My Life*), Aarti (*Revolution 2020*), Priyanka (*One Night @ The Call Center*), Neha (*Five Point Someone*), Riya (*Half Girlfriend*), or Ananya (*2 States*), it is observed that despite their distinct personalities, they all uphold the traditional values of family over individualism; they are admired ardently for their feminine charm and physical beauty and they also possess strong personalities. They exude ample self-confidence and intelligence to assert their own identity and individualism. They are admirable in their commitment to establish professional careers in order to gain their independence. At the same time, they make rational choices not only for themselves but also for their family members. The characters of these heroines are sketched and defined as one who is aware of her place in world while conscious of her role as a daughter, wife and mother at the same time. Thus it can be observed that the women in Bhagat's novels represent the new Indian woman who is both modern and independent yet is able to negotiate home and family simultaneously. In this way the novel participates in the construction and dissemination of this particular female image.

In each of the novels, the persistent narrative is that the primary inclination of a middle class female is to get married and settle down eventually. The resolution of women's traditional roles within the persona of the new liberal Indian woman is arrived at through a discourse on women's innate sense of familial care, loyalty to one's own family and

reluctance to rebel against parental authority which rests on patriarchal structure. Through this fundamental discourse, the message appears to be that the new woman can be modern and assertive while continuing to inhabit traditionally prescribed gender roles as sister, wife and mother.

In assessing how the concept of the new Indian woman is circulated in advertisements, magazines and televisions, Rupal Oza notes that “the discourse of the new woman implies that the liberalization of the economy opens up spaces and possibilities for Indian women to express themselves and satisfy their aspirations in ways not previously possible in a closed economy”(37). However, the conclusion drawn from the study is that although the new liberalized economy provides unprecedented opportunities for the women and offers the possibility of self-transformation and empowerment for women, it also brings undeniable challenges along with it.

Due to the increasing consumerist lifestyle of the middle class, an additional income for the family becomes increasingly essential. Therefore, women were seen commonly in the public workplaces often for the sake of their families’ well-being and not for their own independence alone. The new woman makes rational choices not only for herself but for her family as well. This is seen in the story of Radhika from *One Night @ The Call Center* where her desire to work in a call center inspite of demanding household chores stems from the need to contribute to the family income. In the case of Esha, she becomes a victim of sexual harassment at workplace in her desperation to secure a modelling contract. Stories like theirs reveal that women employment is found to be both enabling and constraining at the same time.

Also it is seen in Bhagat’s novels that despite the immense progress that post liberalization middle class women have made in terms of achieving personal space, ambitions and freedom to pursue career objectives, they are not fully free from some of the problems

that the earlier generation of women experiences. Issues such as the dowry system and oppression under the patriarchal authority are some of the persistent themes and concerns that are expressed and reflected across all of Bhagat's novels. In his essay "Don't Worry, Be Happy" expressing deep concerns for the welfare of the Indian women in general, Bhagat notes: "A survey by Nielsen revealed that Indian women are the most stressed out in the world: 87 percent of our women feel stressed most of the time" (Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* 52). He expresses disgust and dismay at the discrimination, neglect, violence and exploitation the treatment often meted out to women in a patriarchal society like India and writes:

At an extreme, we abort our girls before they are born, neglect their upbringing, torture them, molest them, sell them, rape them and honour-kill them. Of course, these criminal acts are performed by a tiny minority. However, a majority of us are involved in lesser crimes. We judge our women, expect too much of them, don't give them space and suffocate their individuality. (Bhagat, *What Young India Wants* 53)

Clearly it can be construed that the reality of most Indian women's lives unfortunately is in sharp contrast to the position of the middle class female subjects, who are part of the neoliberal dream of consumption and advancement and that the discourse of the 'New Indian Woman' remains incomplete and contentious in such a situation.

On the whole, Bhagat has attempted to construct a new narrative of India whose economy and politics affect a generation who are responsive to the economic globalization in the world. It is admitted that the writer's chief concern has been to portray a variegated picture of the emerging middle class and its values, challenges and ethics. In the process, the aesthetic and literary traditions of the ancient past as well as of the recent diasporic history are sidelined. This is because the major focus is to provide more space to new socio-cultural issues which the new generation Indian demands. One may justifiably read this literary

phenomenon as a distinct break with the Indian past. However, in recognition of India's old civilization, eminent journalist Mark Tully has once described India as "a land where there are no full stops." Similarly, this new generation India too may be regarded as a differently oriented facet but remains linked to an "old" India in the process of new developments, whose real break with the past has not occurred. Perhaps Bhagat is cognizant of this fact as his narratives draws attention to values like spiritualism time and again which is deeply entrenched in the Indian traditional values. Thus, Bhagat is not totally forgetful of an old India while emphasizing the post-liberalized image of India. It is obvious that the ancient pictures of India are no longer centrally dramatized or focused upon, nevertheless Bhagat's narratives repeated call on family values, friendship and community living, without aestheticizing power, politics and life.

As this thesis has focused its study on the representation and issues concerning the new generation Indian youths, there is a potential for further research on the comparative study of the written works of Bhagat versus the movie adaptations as some of his books have been made into successful movies. Also since Bhagat is a living author who continues to write till date, further study can also be done on his newly released books which have not been included in this thesis. These are suggested areas for further research in order to uncover fully the contribution of Chetan Bhagat who has carved a niche for himself within the popular fictions and culture of India.

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## APPENDICES

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Sl. No.	Year	Title of Research Paper/Seminar presented	Name of book/journal	Publication details ( Place/Publishers) with ISBN/ISSN
1	2017	Contestations of Neoliberalism in <i>One Night @ The Call Center</i>	MZU Journal Of Literature And Cultural Studies	Published by Dptt. Of English, MZU.ISSN :2348-1188.
2	2018	Exploring "Difference" in Anjum Hasan's <i>Lunatic In My Head.</i>	Claiming The Difference: Identity In Literatures And Cultures	Published by Authorspress, ISBN: 978-93-87281-72-1
3	2018	Understanding the Mizos: A Postcolonial Reading of Zairema's Select English Essays		Yet to be released.

## **ABSTRACT**

The New Generation Indian in Chetan Bhagat's Fiction – A Study

Submitted by

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**2019**

## **“The New Generation Indian in Chetan Bhagat’s Fiction – A Study”**

(An Abstract)

Chetan Bhagat is a living writer in his mid-forties, a young contemporary Indian author whose six novels namely *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: The Story of My Marriage* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), *Half Girlfriend* (2014) and a collection of essays titled *What Young India Wants* (2012) have been selected for study in this thesis titled “The New Generation Indian in Chetan Bhagat’s Fiction – A Study.” He was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1974 in New Delhi.

The name of Chetan Bhagat is highly recognized today in the field of Indian English fiction. His books have sold an estimated three million copies, making him “the biggest selling English language novelist in India’s history” according to *New York Times*. His contribution to the field of entertainment is noteworthy as four of his novels have already been made into popular Bollywood movies. He has also made his contribution as a columnist for newspapers such as *The Times of India* (in English) and *Dainik Bhaskar* (in Hindi), where he discusses and comments on various social and national issues. Bhagat has also found himself listed by Fast Company, USA, as one of the world’s “100 most creative people in business” and also included in the *Time* magazine's list of "World's 100 Most Influential People" in the year 2010.

This research attempts to study the works of Chetan Bhagat that depict the contemporary realities of a modern India which define what it means to be a new generation Indian within the context of economic liberalization and globalization. It seeks to highlight in particular how the social, cultural and economic changes affected by liberalization in the

early ninties have impacted modern Indian youths especially those that belong to the urban middle class as they attempt to negotiate their place within the ‘New India’.

It is apparent that while national, feminist, Dalit, and other socio political issues are the central preoccupations with the majority of Indian writers; issues concerning a newly evolving generation in the country has not attracted literary and critical attention on a similar scale. Therefore, the central problem of this study is to reflect the concerns and issues of this evolving new generation Indian through the analysis of Bhagat’s texts which portray their lives. This project aims to meet its objective by focusing the study on the representation of the new generation Indian youth, formation of neoliberal subjectivity as well as the construction of the new Indian woman as represented in the selected novels of Bhagat.

In studying the novels of Chetan Bhagat, this thesis engages with critical frameworks of interdisciplinary research, especially utilizing critical insights of the social sciences and globalization studies without ignoring literary approaches for a fair analytical study. This interdisciplinary approach is crucial to enrich the understanding of Bhagat’s texts in exploring how culture, politics and economic changes intersect with each other in modern India, and how these factors affect formation of ideology and subjectivity in contemporary India. Bhagat’s novels have emerged as a contemporary facet of Indian literature vivified by contemporary globalized culture in a way that India has not perhaps experienced in its more recent past.

The Indian literary scene has changed considerably with the rise of popular fictions especially within the last two decades and Bhagat’s contribution in this regard is noteworthy. Suman Gupta notes that “while the academic expert places Rushdie as progenitor of contemporary Indian ‘literary fiction’ in English, the publishing expert appoints Chetan Bhagat the same for ‘commercial fiction’” (143). Although this observation may sound a bit limiting in its description of Bhagat’s works as “commercial”, Gupta’s observation

nevertheless expresses Bhagat's popularity especially within the Indian publishing industry. Numerous academic researches and studies have been conducted on Indian fictions in English but they have dwelt exclusively on literary fiction. But not many have undertaken academic exploration of Indian popular fiction in English, which already forms a major bulk of literary production. Bhagat is certainly a recognisable name in the popular culture of India today. John Storey describes popular culture as a "culture that is widely favoured or well liked by many people" (Storey 5) and Bhagat's fame with his young audience and "bestseller" status has confirmed that he has firmly established his place in today's popular culture. Even as Bhagat captures media attention and popular imagination, intensive studies on his writings are few therefore this thesis is also an attempt to address such a gap.

The first chapter of the dissertation provides a brief "Introduction" of Chetan Bhagat and also attempts to establish his place among other Indian writers in English. This chapter provides a brief comparison of Bhagat with other famous contemporary Indian novelists in order to understand his unique contribution and affirms the reason for studying his works. Even before Bhagat's emergence in the Indian literary scene, Indian English Literature has been wealthy in terms of content and structure. With the introduction of English education in India, the first Indian novel in English *Rajmonhan's wife* by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay was witnessed in the year 1864 (Chaudhuri 31). Then in the early twentieth-century there were prominent Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K Narayan who were often referred to as "nationalist writers" who wrote in English (Anjaria 7). The Indian novels at this time sought to express Indian national identity framed around Gandhian thoughts and ideology (Sethi 89).

As the novels continue to develop and evolve under the influence of modernism in the Nineties, it can be observed that much of the Indian novels in English from the 1980s to the present are characterized by diaspora and cosmopolitanism. The inaugural text of this phase

is Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* published in 1981. Today among the contemporary writers there are scores of Indian diasporic writers including Salman Rushdie, V.S Naipaul, Nirad C. Choudhury, Shashi Tharoor, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Bharati Mukherjee, Amit Choudhury, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai to name but a few who have attracted readers and academia across the world towards a literature shaped by typical diasporic sensibility among the Indian expatriates and emigrants. Essentially in their works the diasporic complexities and life's tensions are captured; and the production of this kind of literature have been quite rewarding for the authors.

Many of these writings celebrate hybridity and multiculturalism within the context of globalization and transnationalism. Some of them have also provided an inside view of the problems faced by the displaced people in their adopted land mostly in American and European countries. Many of these writers have no doubt achieved international critical acclaim, and their works have been recognized as culturally prestigious literary fictions. Unlike these diasporic writers, Chetan Bhagat writes his novels as an Indian residing within India and for the Indian audience in conversational contemporary English.

It may be noted that famous Indian English novelists have presented social life and dilemmas, of course, with excellent artistry and objectivity; but the social milieu as depicted in the novels of Bhagat is a living reality astir with infringing forces and influences in the midst of which the author lives neck-deep. Thus, the Indian reality he portrays is predominantly of an urban social phenomenon in the globalized era. While many of these great writers dwell on the story of India's past, Chetan Bhagat has become India's popular writer by embracing and reflecting the contemporary social scenario in his works. Bhagat with his celebrated novels has inaugurated a new era of Indian fiction in which he exposes the realities of contemporary middle class Indian youth. Although Bhagat's success as a writer has generated much criticism from the more 'literary writers' and aesthetic artists, his ability

to tap directly into the concerns and expectations of a post-liberalization generation cannot be simply ignored.

It is observed that some of Bhagat's preoccupation in the novels are not grossly different from the postcolonial literary texts that have achieved worldwide fame which have registered the damaging social and political effects of globalization such as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Arvand Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) and *Last Man in Tower* (2011), Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* (2005) and *Six Suspects* (2008). However, Bhagat's novels are not as confrontational culturally as they may appear on the surface. His novels are located in the "aspirational spaces of India's middle class" (Tickell 51) such as the elite IIT colleges and management schools, call-centres, BPO industries and corporate offices. Most of his writings cater to the interest of the cosmopolitan, urban middle class, for whom liberalization has brought benefits, opportunities as well as challenges. Bhagat has shown sensitivity and an understanding of the changes that the new generation Indian youth have come under, as the era of Information Technology and globalization has changed the established pattern of behaviour and modified the structures of relationship, professional life, economic patterns and questions of morality. This makes him an interesting author for a serious critical study. Bhagat has captured the sense of conflict and anxieties that the youth of Indians feel over the redefinition of middle-class social structures, gender norms and social changes in the context of economic globalization not commonly treated in the writings of contemporary authors.

Chapter-Two entitled "Representation of the New Generation Indian Subject" provides the economic background of 'New India' and how it redefines the lives of young middle class Indians who are termed as *the new generation Indian* in this thesis. The chapter explains how the launch of the economic reforms in 1991 has been perceived as a turning point for India as "liberalization was officially adopted as the reigning economic doctrine" (Chowdhury 2). The

changing social conditions witnessed in India as a result of this economic reformation officially marked the transition of India's economic and political system from a pro socialist model to that of a capitalist mode which led to a significant transformation in the aesthetic representation of India in the Indian novels in terms of themes and contents.

Under the new policy, growth rates, foreign reserves and foreign investments registered new figures which are regarded as an indication of Indian's economic strength and evidence that the nation has achieved a global status becoming an important participant in the global pursuit of wealth. Based on these changes, media, politicians and corporate power houses have declared a new era of the "New India" which has been marketed with great enthusiasm (Chowdhury 3). The creation of this new India brand accompanies the attempt to construct a new generation Indian subject who will play an integral role in narrating this new liberalized nation. Bhagat's protagonists are in part representative of this new generation Indian in more ways than one as his novels focus on the dynamics of urban existence and its influence amongst this new generation Indian youth.

In Bhagat's novels it is seen that the new generation Indian is mainly represented through new middle class youths who are completely in tune with the economic reforms. In analysing Bhagat's novels, it is evident that one of the ways to access membership of the distinctive middle class for this new generation Indian youth is through IT jobs and outsourced jobs such as the call centers and BPOs (Business Processing Outsource) which have symbolized India's accelerated economic growth since the early nineties. This is especially seen in novels like *Five Point Somene*, *One Night @ The Call Center* and *Revolution 2020*. The new generation middle class youth has thus been associated with the expanding service sectors and private sector professional workforces which are considered areas affected by liberalization and economic restructuring. The intensely competitive atmosphere of the educational system especially in the IT sectors that is witnessed in India is

tied to the ultimate IT dream symbolized by young urban professionals who have been able to benefit from sharp rises in salaries of multinational companies. Such careers and jobs are themselves symbolic markers of the liberalized middle class.

Access to membership in the new middle class is also formed through a visible consumption practices that are associated with the lifestyle of the new middle class. It is seen in Bhagat's fictions that this widespread practice of consumerism and materialism constitutes an important factor in identity formation amongst the new generation Indian youth. Bhagat's novels with their images of plush coffee shops, malls, call centres, pubs, fast food joints, internet cafes, cell phones, discos, jeans, rock/pop music of global brands reflect the abundance of global consumer goods amongst the contemporary youth culture. Antony Palackal writing about the middle class in a postmodern society writes that in the arena of consumer culture, "our identity seems to be moulded as consumers. Consumer goods are considered as a privileged part of Identity" (Palackal 9). The consumption of high-end goods and the emulation of western lifestyles become markers of socioeconomic position. Likewise with corporate globalization, recent years have witnessed the dissemination of a consumerist ethos in developing societies. Consumption has become a "privileged site for the fabrication of self and society, of culture and identity" (Nadeem 53). It is clear that the intensification and expansion of commodity culture associated with the liberalization of the Indian economy have made consumption of goods and consumer images a key site for producing youth identities especially those of the urban middle class. Such discourses of consumption have also reconfigured what it means to be young Indians in contemporary India.

Interestingly, as observed by many scholars the connection between language and middle class formation has been intensified by globalization as the expansion of private sector and out-sourcing have consolidated the importance of English-language skills. It is noticed that a section of the middle class that has had access to English education historically

has been in an advantageous position to convert this capital into new forms of mobility in a liberalized labour market. In postcolonial India, the demand for English education has spread within the middle class as along with the upwardly mobile segments of lower-income families in tandem with post globalization and liberalization. With the expansion of middle class English education, language has been transformed by various forms of cultural and social capital (Fernandez 196). Such regard for the English language as a cultural capital is reflected in stories like *Half Girlfriend*. Sociologists like Krishna Kumar has also remarked that “competence in English usage has become the single most important yardstick of a person’s eligibility for negotiating the opportunity structure that can be availed of in a modern economy” (qtd. in Varma 66). The regard of the English language as a valued capital not just for employment across different sectors of the economy but also as a marker of social class as manifested in the fictions of Bhagat. Thus the acquisition of English-language skills represents a critical means by which various segments of the new rising middle class and aspiring new generation Indian youths gain access to middle class membership as the face of liberalized India.

In Bhagat’s novels, romance like interests in fashion also emerges as a key site for negotiating consumer citizenship, constituting an important link for a cultural politics of belonging. The dating practices of young people in public spaces such as malls, restaurants, coffee shops and ice cream parlour can be seen as the adaptation of public consumer spaces as spaces of romance and the restructuring of class and gender relations in the context of a commodified romantic culture. With the idea of modern romance, there is also changing attitude to sex and caste amongst the new generation Indians which is also reflected across all of Bhagat’s novels. In this generation’s changing attitude towards sex and sexuality what is being demonstrated importantly is the expression as well as construction of their identity.

In Bhagat's novels, we see an interesting combination of the global and the local in the production of youth identity which is coded as Indian. Much of his novels "emphasize the 'local' feel of globalized Indian youth, one that relies on representation of the social category of youth as metropolitan, middle class, assertive and confident" (Lukose 202). They are not simply imitators of the West as they easily blend a global cosmopolitanism with their local contexts in the way they dress and move about. They effortlessly weave English and Hindi, commonly referred to as 'Hinglish' and move between spaces identified as 'global' or even 'glocal' such as nightclubs and food stalls on the local street. While Bhagat's fiction expresses the anxieties of the new generation Indians, at the same time it conjure up a fantasy of a way of life enabled by the fashioning of new consumer identities which is in part driven by the neoliberal imaginary. -As an advocate of the economic reforms, Bhagat appears to seize on an upwardly mobile middle-class citizen as the exemplary subject amongst the new generation Indian. His presentation of the new generation Indian are thus limited to the middle-class subject as he or she is constructed in a particular class-based urban context.

Bhagat's novels also at the same time reveal that the culture of this class is full of ostensible contradictions as it embraces individuality, development, and change but holds fast to specific ideas of tradition and family. The boundary in terms of who enters the fold of this middle class group is also limited as the ability of individuals and social segments to accumulate capital and engage in strategies of mobility are both formed and constrained by their interaction with existing structures of inequality of caste, class and gender.

Bhagat gives an example of how "the post-liberalization Indian-English novel presents and re-narrates middle-class concerns as the collective embodiment of an idea whose time has come" (Tickel 41), and that matters related to class, while not being the only factors, are undoubtedly one of the most important elements in the construction of the new generation

Indian. Liberalization in India has produced certain subjectivity among the new generation Indian youth which is explored further in the next chapter.

The Chapter-Three titled “Neoliberal subjectivity and the Enterprise Culture” examines Bhagat’s novels in terms of how it conceptualizes and embodies the ideology of neoliberalism, through its valorisation of an enterprise culture and its promotion of enterprising individual subject. The chapter discusses how neoliberalism operates as an “ideology” in Bhagat’s fiction and how it plays a crucial role in its capacity to influence the modern Indian youths shaping them into ideal subjects for the market regime.

The term ‘neoliberalism’ has become an important theoretical concept in academics to discuss the social, political and cultural developments of contemporary period especially in social sciences and globalization studies. ‘Neoliberalism’ is a political and economic philosophy specifically associated with the processes of economic liberalization and globalization of the free market, witnessed in our contemporary world. According to Nandini Gooptu, neoliberalism is usually taken to imply “an ideological emphasis on a market ethic, competition, and commodification with an underlying model of individual human behaviour based on profit or utility maximizing rational choice, in response to incentives created by the market” (Gooptu 4). Harvey goes on to explain that the impact of neoliberalism since the 1970s has spread all over the globe and have been embraced by different countries and financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) that regulate global finance and trade. “Neoliberalism, in short, has become hegemonic as a mode of discourse” (Harvey 3).

One of the most interesting and over reaching effects of neoliberal globalization has been seen in the domain of the individual subject. Asserting the way neoliberalism has moved on from being one of the economic policy to a way of life that restructures individual and

social identities into a new mode of neoliberal subjectivity, Harvey writes: “It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (3). Neoliberalism seeks to curtail government action in favour of individual liberty and freedom in order to maximize efficiency.

Michel Foucault’s *The Birth of Biopolitics* is one of the early theorizations on the ideal neoliberal subject whom Foucault calls a “homo economicus”, an “entrepreneur of himself” (226). Foucault’s concept of the “homo economicus” or the economic man can be employed in understanding the protagonists of Bhagat’s novels as they are seen to exemplify Foucault’s concept of the ideal economic man of the neoliberal system as both entrepreneurs and consumers. Some of the essential traits of ideal neoliberal subjectivity such as self-responsibility and self care, fierce individualism and self interest, exceptional entrepreneurial skills, innovation and risk management are seen to be embodied by Bhagat’s heroes to a great extent.

Bhagat’s protagonists embody one of the most important characteristics expected of the neoliberal subject which is an awareness of self-responsibility. Ryan from *Five Point Someone*, Govind from *The 3 Mistakes Of My Life*, Gopal and Raghav from *Revolution 2020* and Madhav from *Half Girlfriend* despite having their individual differences are all essentially self-made men to be otherwise known individually as “a thinking man” and “an entrepreneur” who has taken the onus of his own life (Foucault 3). This concept of self-responsibility is essential to the notion of the ideal “economic man”. Foucault argues that the neoliberal logic regards the body as a “human capital” (221), which must be invested wisely in order to participate in the growth of capital. Here human capital is typically regarded as competencies and talents but can include any activity pursued considered appealing to the market which will benefit the person. The individual therefore must assume responsibility for

himself and his own well-being and act as an active consumer-entrepreneur in the economy. This self-regulated subject is the kind that neoliberalism seeks to produce because it aims to limit government intervention.

The enterprise culture propagated by Bhagat through his novels therefore features new kinds of literary protagonists who are seen to embrace ambition, personal initiative, and rejection of the old, corrupt political system. The enterprising ethics informs character motivations, shapes decisions, and establishes moral authority. Protagonists of Bhagat's novels are individuals who make their own choices, accomplish things through their own actions, who do not reconcile themselves to their circumstances. For such protagonists, personal growth and development, to use Gartner's idea "comes not from reconciling oneself to an allegorical life, but from the active accumulation of knowledge, the refusal to be a victim, and the rejection of fate" (Gartner 352). These new protagonists embody this ethos of 'entreprendre', which means 'to take in hand, to take hold of' (360) and for them growth comes not from inaction and sitting passively by but from the courage to act and seize opportunities thus showing that individuals can determine their future beyond the circumstances of the moment.

At the same time it is important to note that Bhagat's protagonists are not confined by such parameters. For some of Bhagat's novels also strongly warn against a total rejection of community or complete alienation from social groups which goes against Foucault's concept of the "economic man". Bhagat's novels such as *Revolution 2020* and *The Three Mistakes of My Life* warn against the pitfalls of extreme self-interest which is one of the hallmarks of the "homo economicus" or the economic man. His novels appear to register an awareness of the insufficiency of the enterprise narrative while also showcasing its utility and its effectiveness as a means to better one's lot.

Despite Bhagat's strong support of innovation and entrepreneurialism in his collection of essays such as *What Young India Wants*, and *Making India Awesome*, his fictions are infused with moral values and leave a room for questioning the very ideals of a neoliberal enterprise culture, a culture in which the texts exist and which enables them. Thus, Bhagat's novels can be read as one invested in the neoliberal enterprise narrative but not completely contained and exhausted within it. Either way, as a supporter and a critic of a neoliberal enterprise culture, his novels testify to the pervasiveness of an enterprise culture vested in neoliberal ideology and its ability to reconstitute subjects to a great extent.

The Chapter-Four titled "The Emerging New Indian Woman" explores how Bhagat's fictions represent the idea of the new Indian woman whose emergence in popular culture coincided with India's economic liberalization, and captures their changing subjectivity. The post-liberalization era sparks the idea of the 'new Indian woman' in the 1990s with the image of the 'modern', emancipated and liberated women central to the national project and India's aspirations to be a global economic power. Within public cultural discourses the Indian woman was carefully crafted to be modern, representing globalizing India, yet "Indian" by being "anchored in 'core' values" (Oza 31).

According to Professor Rajeswari Sunder Rajan the new woman serves as a contrast to earlier images of oppressed, burdened, and backward Indian women. She is projected in sharp relief against this earlier image and as confident, assertive, in control, and particularly modern. Thus, this new liberal Indian woman, is "new" in the sense of both having evolved and arrived in response to the times, as well as of being intrinsically "modern" and "liberated" (Rajan 130).

The image of the obedient, self-sacrificing mother often reflected in many of the writings of earlier generation gave way to the newly 'liberated' woman who was integrated

within the public sphere. Similarly Bhagat's novels in contrast to the earlier female narratives, demonstrate that the norms of social pressure and expectation seem to have shifted with the women now finding themselves more intrinsically bound to impacts of globalization, economics, and the possibility of personal choice.

According to sociologist like Belliappa, the new Indian woman is seen to represent the nation's modernity, its economic strength and its distinctive traditions amidst increasing western influence brought about by globalization. She is seen to embody 'Indianness' in the face of globalization and she appears to be less 'protected' from the West when compared with the women of the nationalist period. The new Indian woman is seen to bear visible markers of 'Indianness' while she participates in the global economy and culture. She is expected to continue her commitment to home and to family relationships and to uphold traditional values. (Belliappa 66)

In the description of the women in Bhagat's novels be it Vidya from *The 3 Mistakes Of My Life*, Aarti in *Revolution 2020*, Priyanka in *One Night @ The Call Center*, Neha in *Five Point Someone*, Riya in *Half Girlfriend*, or Ananya in *Two States*, it is observed that they are all unique individuals but despite their distinct personalities they all uphold the common traditional values of family over individualism; they are admired ardently for their feminine charm and physical beauty and they also possess strong personalities. They exude ample self-confidence and intelligence to assert their own identity and individualism. They are admirable in their commitment to establish professional careers in order to gain their independence. At the same time, they make rational choices not only for themselves but also for their family members. The characters of these heroines are sketched and defined as one who is aware of her place in the world while conscious of her role as a daughter, wife and mother at the same time. The resolution of women's traditional roles within the persona of the new liberal Indian woman is arrived at through a discourse on women's innate sense of

familial care, loyalty to one's own family and reluctance to rebel against parental authority which rests on patriarchal structure. Through this fundamental discourse, the message appears to be that the new woman can be modern and assertive while continuing to inhabit traditionally prescribed gender roles as sister, wife and mother.

In assessing how the concept of the new Indian woman is circulated in advertisements, magazines and televisions, Rupal Oza notes that "the discourse of the new woman implies that the liberalization of the economy opens up spaces and possibilities for Indian women to express themselves and satisfy their aspirations in ways not previously possible in a closed economy"(37). However, the conclusion drawn from the study is that although the new liberalized economy provides unprecedented opportunities for the women and offers the possibility of self-transformation and empowerment for women, it also brings undeniable challenges along with it.

Due to the increasing consumerist lifestyle of the middle class, an additional income for the family becomes increasingly essential. Therefore, women were seen commonly in the public workplaces often for the sake of their families' well-being and not for their own independence alone. The new woman makes rational choices not only for herself but for her family as well. This is seen in the story of Radhika from *One Night @ The Call Center* where her desire to work in a call centre inspite of demanding household chores stems from the need to contribute to the family income. In the case of Esha, she becomes a victim of sexual harassment at workplace in her desperation to secure a modelling contract. Stories like theirs reveal that women employment is found to be both enabling and constraining at the same time.

Through the delineation of the women characters, Bhagat's novels propagate the construction of the new Indian woman as both modern subject and bearer of the Indian tradition. His novels reflect the emergence of new subjectivities for Indian women that are

tied, in particular ways, to older ones. It is seen that this new Indian woman much like her predecessors is not without problems and conflicts as experienced by women in the previous generations. She still has to battle dowry, patriarchy, societal pressures, sexual abuse at home and workplace which are the common sites of women's oppression. Therefore, while Bhagat's novels accommodate and celebrate women within the paradigm of economic liberalization, it also challenges some of the existing social order and issues that are still prevalent in the Indian society at large.

The fifth Chapter which is the "Conclusion" sums up the various aspects and critical views explored in the preceding chapters and presents the general observation and findings of the study. It highlights how the material and ideological aspects of economic globalization affect the formation of the new middle class groups, how neoliberal modes of subjectivity is implemented through an enterprise culture and how this social formation affects and presents the image of the new Indian woman. It is apparent that at the centre of Bhagat's narratives is the figure of the new generation Indian youth on whom is seen the various impacts of neoliberal globalization as already established.

On the whole, Bhagat has attempted to construct a new narrative of India whose economy and politics affect a generation who are responsive to the economic globalization in the world. It is admitted that the writer's chief concern has been to portray a variegated picture of the emerging middle class and its values, challenges and ethics. In the process, the aesthetic and literary traditions of the ancient past as well as of the recent diasporic history are sidelined. This is because the major focus is to provide more space to new socio-cultural issues which the new generation Indian demands. One may justifiably read this literary phenomenon as a distinct break with the Indian past. However, in recognition of India's old civilization, eminent journalist Mark Tully has once described India as a land where there are no full stops. Similarly, this new generation India too may be regarded as a differently

oriented facet but remains linked to an old India in the process of new developments, whose real break with the past has not occurred. Perhaps Bhagat is cognizant of this fact as his narratives draw attention to values like spiritualism time and again which is deeply entrenched in the Indian traditional values. Thus, Bhagat is not totally forgetful of an old India while emphasizing the post-liberalized image of India. It is obvious that the ancient pictures of India are no longer centrally dramatized or focussed upon; nevertheless Bhagat's narratives repeatedly call on family values, friendship and community living, without aestheticizing power, politics and life.

As this thesis has focused its study on the representation and issues concerning the new generation Indian youths, there is a potential for further research on the comparative study of the written works of Bhagat versus the movie adaptations as some of his books have been made into successful movies. Also since Bhagat is a living author who continues to write till date, further study can also be done on his newly released books which have not been included in this thesis. These are suggested areas for further research in order to uncover fully the contribution of Chetan Bhagat who has carved a niche for himself within the popular fictions and culture of India.

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