



Simplified English and Mass Readership: The Popular Appeal of Chetan Bhagat and His Contemporaries

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Abstract

Simplified English as a style in popular fiction, especially exemplified by the success of Chetan Bhagat, along with some of his fellow writers in India, is a profound shift within India's literary and readership landscape. Simplified English places value on ease of reading, relatability, and quickness and ease of consumption instead of dense and complex prose—as is normally associated with high literature. Motivating the mass liaison with writers like Chetan Bhagat is his ability to imitate spoken language into a colloquial reader-friendly simple and straightforward writing style. This writing style contends, in part, to represent the way young, urban, semi-urban Indians speak English—as an “Indian English” mixed with Hinglish, or idioms from other regional languages. Bhagat has also been credited with writing English novels that are accessible to massive sections of the population who may be intimidated by more serious literary English. His books are described as accessible, easy to read and instantly understandable, which has the effect of bringing fiction reading for pleasure to all youth. The stories are intensely focused on the present day peers and pressures that young Indians face: dealing with qualification matters associated with once prestigious IITs, jobs in corporate culture, romance, inter-caste/cross-cultural, professional ambition, and corruption/relationships in the modern age. The readers can make an immediate connection to the characters and their dialogue because it resonates with this age group—their lives are mirrored on the page. The novels are generally fast-paced, funny, and often feature an optimistic attitude or a clear answer to a problem. Their structure invites consumption, which mimics commercial cinema, which is one of the reasons why they are regularly adapted into incredibly successful Bollywood films.

Keywords:

Culture, Education, Writing, Fiction

Introduction

Chetan Prakash Bhagat was born on April 22, 1974, in New Delhi, India, to a middle-class Punjabi family. His father was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Indian Army, and his mother worked in the agriculture department of the Indian government. Bhagat has an impressive educational background having graduated from two of India's most prestigious universities: he received his engineering qualification from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi and his MBA from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad. Before devoting his career to being a full-time writer, he experienced a career as an investment banker for 11 years, mostly based out of Hong Kong for firms such as Goldman Sachs or Deutsche Bank. Incidentally, many believe that his corporate background influenced the themes and settings in his first few novels. His shift to writing, after leaving the investment banking world to a full-time novelist, is a notable moment in his career. (Kumar, 2021)

Bhagat is also known for his simple, straightforward, and direct writing style – a reason his work resonates with potentially many readers, particularly young adults. His work is typically written in a first-person narrative and is typically light-hearted in tone.

Novels like *2 States* (drawn from his own intercultural relationship) and *One Indian Girl* discuss love, marriage, and social pressure in contemporary India. Some literary critics have regarded Bhagat's "condensed," or uncomplicated, style of writing as unfavorable; nonetheless, he has performed commercially very well—with almost all of his novels becoming bestsellers and subsequently adapted into popular movies from India's western-style cinema. Bhagat is popularly acclaimed as the first author to "shine in this category", which is to say accessible fiction but a new category among Indian publishing.

In addition to novels, Bhagat writes non-fiction articles about youth issues and national development in leading English newspapers (e.g. *The Times of India*) and Hindi newspapers (e.g. *Dainik Bhaskar*). He is also a public speaker and screenwriter, where he keeps his audiences excited during public speaking events and during his travels around the world (Kaur, 2021). Ultimately, since Bhagat later transitioned from an

investment banker to an author, he has gained a reputation as a bestselling author and will be remembered and recognized as a "cultural commentator" and youth icon in India. Chetan Bhagat is frequently referred to as the "Pied Piper of Indian Fiction" for being the only writer to inspire a trend. His first novel, *Five Point Someone* (2004), appealed to and conveyed the frustrations of boys studying engineering while resonating with a massive audience. He inspired a host of writers who followed his example, replicating his recipe, emphasizing the gen-next experience, using accessible language, and making it commercially viable.

Even though the writers involved in producing the trend could differ, this pattern of writing involving Bhagat includes (and does not limited to) writers pursuing commercial fiction instead of literary fiction. This mode of writing often consists of mass -taste elements, such as:

Campus Novels: Akind of fiction which focuses on college life and exams, with aspects of struggle in early careers.

Romance/Drama: A kind of fiction, with love interests at its center with conflicts based in a modern Indian context (ex: inter-faith marriage, intercultural marriages).

Social Commentary(Milder Forms): Addressing topics like corruption or social pressure, often less sociopolitical and instead more of western (individual) experience of pressures. Critics will contend that such simplification promotes a literary superficiality, stereotypic characterizations, and a dependence on melodrama ("masala"). On the other hand, advocates argue that the merit lies in reaching millions who had previously not read books and discussing meaningful, social topics in their own language.

The cumulative result of such relating content and simplified style has been a rapid increase in the English reading base in India.

Commercial Success: These books have sold phenomenal numbers and have sold even better than more literally-related literary fiction, and use of the term bestseller is the new mark of success in Indian English publishing. (Jain, 2022)

Literature Review

Bhalla et al. (2021) : Bhagat, along with others, has made reading English novels by Indian writers fashionable among the youth in urban and semi-urban settings, positioning the genre as an aspect of popular contemporary culture.

Chawla et al. (2021): Bhagat has facilitated a meeting place for high appreciation literature (often thought of as unapproachable) and popular entertainment, where he finds a profitable middle ground appropriate to the social and economic contexts of modern India.

Kaur et al. (2020): Chetan Bhagat's Making India Awesome is more than a book; it is a heartfelt plea for thoughtful citizenship. It prioritizes rational dialogue over allegiance to emotion, and encourages young Indians to know their participation is not in vain.

Khan et al. (2020): By exposing the problems and placing the responsibility for embarking upon objective civic actions firmly on 'the people', Bhagat seeks to ignite the energy of the nation's young by presenting yet another path - albeit a simplified one - on the journey toward an awesome India

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Chetan Bhagat's novel, Five Point Someone: What not to do at IIT, often discusses its critical viewpoint of the Indian higher education system and an approachable acknowledgment of youth struggles. The book is narrated by Hari Kumar, whose story follows three university students, Hari, the anxious but reasonable Alok, and the rebellious, eclectic Ryan at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT).

The dominant theme is one of subtle cynicism toward the intense requirements to uphold a certain GPA. As mentioned in the title, the lowest 'passing grade' is a 5 out of 10, which makes these grade and any metrics quite central in the book. Although all three friends are confronted with their schoolwork, ineffective teaching methods and looming pressures and fears of not passing, they are determined to find a balance between degree of self-academic honor and their organic desire to be college students, not just learners. Eventually, the three friends make up for the collective data of having below a "five point" GPA. The novel satirizes the premise of the tag "IIT" becoming a more relevant form than studying and simply being a better person.

The novel importantly discusses the theme of friendship and support structures for resilience. Their connection is central to the story and their support gives them emotional strength to face academic and personal

challenges. In many cases, Ryan is the instigator of acts of rebellion - encouraging his friends to either devise ways to suppress the system or enjoy being young, spawning comical and tragic misadventures. To some degrees their rebellious nature is due to their perceptions of a lack of rigidity and community to develop them holistic.

The novel also tackles themes of personal identity, parental pressures, and love, outside of the academic rigours. Alok bears the burnt of the lower-middle-class expectations, and believes that the IIT degree is the only method for financial stability for he and his family. Meanwhile, and much of which motivates Hari in conflicting direction on his academics with his romantic pursuits of Neha, who is the daughter of Professor Cherian, the Head of Mechanical Engineering department faculty, complicating his story graph more than Alok's.

The tragic story doesn't shy away from dark moments involving immense psychological trauma student experience, including tragic instances involving trauma are the main thematic elements mirror a human cost of the system as it plays out in the novel.

Five Point Someone strongly resonated with youth audiences because it expressed their unsaid concerns on performance, conformity, and the meaning of education. It was criticized for its simplicity (in language, or for being too informal), but its humour, rawness and semi-biographical representation of the pressure-cooker environment of elite Indian engineering colleges proved popular enough to become a phenomenon, and which inspired the enormously successful Bollywood movie, 3 Idiots. Ultimately, the novel is a call for the education system to value becoming well-rounded individuals, rather than valuing high-scorers.

Chetan Bhagat - a name that represents modern Indian English - pivots his focus from romantic entanglement and academic pressure in his first non-fiction book, *What Young India Wants* (2012), to the larger socio-political situation of India. This text is a collection of his public speeches and essays and is a space to articulate the hopes, frustrations and aspirations of young, emerging demographic of India's youth. An informal critique of current, contemporary India, the text has three overarching theme areas: Our Society, Politics, and Our Youth.

The central thesis of the work is a passionate, yet pragmatic, appeal to the youth to recognize their collective power and responsibility in transforming the country from its current state of dysfunction to a progressive global leader.

One of the most resonant themes across the book is the critique of rampant corruption and the perceived moral decay in public life. Bhagat, drawing from his own middle-class upbringing and experiences observing the global economy firsthand, questions the disconnect between India's proclaimed greatness and its on-the-ground realities of poverty, inefficiency, and graft. He challenges the tendency to blindly revere past leaders and established systems, instead advocating for a culture of accountability. This focus on corruption is not merely an indictment of "the system" but an invitation for the individual to ask critical questions about governance and ethics.

In the section on Society, Bhagat discusses the need for a clear, modern set of national values, often contrasting them with what he perceives as the more defined, merit-based ethos of the West. He laments the social ills stemming from deep-seated issues like the caste system, religious divisiveness, and the urban-rural divide. His core message addresses the need for educating reform. Bhagat emphatically condemns rote learning, alongside the exclusivity and high-stakes of elite education, arguing that it inhibits innovation and contributes to phenomena like student suicides and brain drain. He believes education should be seen as a utility focusing on skill development and implementation.

The section on Politics addresses the self-imposed inertia of the political class. Bhagat believes that orthodoxy must be cast aside and the vote must now turn to leaders that merit fully who genuinely care about serving the people's welfare. The tone shifts to a rightful indignation as he scolds the readers to abandon an inconsequential and cliché-fueled notion of thinking. He encourages readers to demand change, often evoking contemporary examples, such as that currently being spearheaded by Anna Hazare.

The book's appeal is found in its conversational approach and its direct appeal to the Youth. Bhagat almost seamlessly includes this large demographic—India's colossal "youth bulge"—as the most significant asset India has and only real agent of change. Bhagat connects more abstract national dilemmas and issues to the more grounded experiences of young Indians—job worries, costs of education, and hopes for a more level playing field. The essays generate a sense of ownership and lead young people to think that small, continuous, and honest action taken by millions might lead to the "Great Indian Dream."

Although *What Young India Wants* has been celebrated for its directness and ability to create a much needed conversation, it is not without criticism. Some readers argue that some of the comparisons of Indian and American societies have fleeting depth and, while provoking thought, some of Bhagat's ideas in response have either been too simplistic or too controversial to reconcile, particularly when discussing foreign policy or national security.

What Young India Wants is less a policy memorandum and operates as a manifesto of hope. Chetan Bhagat effectively channels the collective malaise and disappointment of a generation that is hungry for justice and progress while giving another possible way to move forward. The book's lasting significance is its declaration that the aspiration of a developed India is not entirely in the hands of politicians or on the pages of a constitution, but rather, in the awakened conscience and active engagement of its youth.

Discussion

Chetan Bhagat, the novelist who helped capture a generation with tales of relatable youth angst in books like *Five Point Someone*, has shifted to write about the nation itself in the non-fiction book *Making India Awesome: New Essays and Columns*. Published in 2015, this book is a candid, accessible attempt to diagnose India's most "intractable problems," but further to inspire the very youth that make up his core readership to become the agents of change. It is a call to arms, not rooted in political theory written in dense prose, but rather, in the straightforward, common, and direct style that has even become a trademark of Bhagat's writing.

The central argument of *Making India Awesome* is predicated on the assertion that India's potential is impeded by failures and as a result of a lack of civic engagement from its most active demographic, the youth. Bhagat organizes his exploration of large national issues, such as unemployment, poverty, corruption, gender inequity, communal violence, and illiteracy. He uses his platform to contribute some worthwhile, practical solutions to this debate.

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At the heart of Bhagat's proposition is his categorization of the Indian population in terms of their engagement in civic responsibilities. He famously labels the population by presenting the argument that nearly everyone

is either disinterested or in the case of those that are interested, most of them are long-term party adherents, becoming ideological sounding-boards. His emphasis on the “Caring Objective Indians”, a small and pragmatic minority of citizens that cares about their country, but with no political affiliation and the ability to think objectively and develop solutions, is intentional. This is the group he argues needs to step up, move away from party divisions, and demand better governance.

The core of Bhagat's stance is his classification of the Indian populace through their civic involvement. He boldly speaks of the populace, claiming that, almost all either have no interest, or if they do, it is mostly all in the form of partisan loyalists who form ideologically-redundant echo chambers. His mention of the 'Caring Objective Indians,' a small and practical segment of citizens who care about the nation, but are unassociated with a party, are more capable of truthfully thinking and problem-solving, is an intentional juxtaposition. This is the group he suggests needs to activate their engagement, come together beyond partisanship, and ask for better governance. To continually ground his less concrete points into substance of a national context, Bhagat identifies examples from real life the average citizen can consume, such as the Maggi controversy or the Delhi Gang Rape incident. Bhagat supplies real life examples from each, to allow the average citizen a point to reflect on his more abstract assertions. For example, he criticizes social behavior, and the political apathy towards it, towards both examples he cites. Moreover, the book has also met some critique. The review versions, for instance, state that Bhagat's a very easy decoding of even the most brash generalizations sometimes sit upon historical or political intricacies, at least in static regional spaces, that are less debatable and depressing. There are claims that he sometimes circumvents naming actual people - or absolutely fails to delve deeply into the structural causes of problems - to simplify issues for mass comprehension. Additionally, in certain essays, his intense concentration on North Indian politics has further led others to believe that his conception of India is not wholly pan-Indian. Nonetheless, the power of Making India Awesome is its accessibility. Bhagat is not attempting to provide a complete political manifesto; rather, he wants to mobilize mass dialogue and engagement of an apathetic public. Nonetheless, in the case of Making India Awesome, he effectively pulls in readers who might otherwise ignore politics into national conversations by converting high level discussions addressing policy issues into an understandable vocabulary for college students and young professionals. He frames the obligation of nation-building not only as a government o verse but as a commitment from each citizen every day.

Conclusion

The success and popularity of Chetan Bhagat and his contemporaries rest on their strategic and often premeditated use of Simplified English. Their style of writing opens up a vast, new market by appealing to a large youth- demographic of English speakers with the simplicity, emotive potential of their writing and speaking styles and resonates with anxieties and dreams. This is evident and highly relevant because it alters the Indian reading landscape as we know it amongst a specific demographic of readers.

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