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Relationship and impact of modern technology on contemporary society: A review of 400 days by Chetan bhagat

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Abstract

There is no doubt that things change with time. Change is the law of nature. This is evident in human life also. The life changes with the time and is effected by the development and transition that wraps it. With the rapid development of science and technology in the last 20 years, the impact of it is tremendous on human life and relationships. It has drastically changed the outlook of human relations where people and children give weightage to modern gadgets. The life of today's children is largely effected by gadgets. They spend too much time on screen and what they view is of great concern for the children. Bhagat has raised this issue in a very beautiful and heart touching manner. An interesting and mysterious tale of a young girl wraps all the issues which are of great importance now-a-days and make the parents ponder over what type of environment and time they are providing to their children. The latest issue of Paedophile and such persons of this mental attitude also makes the parents to rethink about the screen time spent by their adolescent children.

Keywords: Human life, human relations, Bhagat, mental attitude, adolescent children

Introductions

Chetan Bhagat is undoubtedly the most reckoning and popular writers of those readers who wait desperately for his works & who love simple and straightforward English. He has made his mark with several best-selling books. This novel published after Covid pandemic has several ingredients of successful masala entertainment which alludes to a full entertainment Bollywood movie which binds the readers from beginning to end.

Bhagat has tried to explore the consequences of strained relationship between Husband and wife which can lead to disorientation of family and at the same time tried to present in vivid terms the annihilation effects of internet and social media platforms especially for the teenagers who spend their lot of time on mobile phones, laptops, computers or other modern gadgets.

Bhagat has also touched the social relationship that exists between father and son, son and mother, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and above all the main theme of this novel, the infatuation and strong bond that exist between mother, Alia and her elder daughter, Siya which is the pivotal part of this suspense thriller.

It is a simple suspense thriller which is sequel of two previous books consisting of duo detectives Kesav and Sourabh, the first two are totally different from present work and thus can be read as a standalone book. When the novel starts it shows that Keshav, the protagonist, is an IIT graduate and currently preparing for Civil service exams.

Keshav is 29 years old and as usual the parents expect more from their children to achieve a prestigious position in their life so that their esteem could be raised in the society, the same is presented by Bhagat through the stained relationship between father, Rajpurohit and his son, Keshav. The stereotype parents is well delineated by Bhagat which is common in every household of India. The father is quite disappointed that the son has no job and at the same time he is unhappy with Keshav's detective job which is the passion and interest of his son.

“Who will marry him? My father said. No job. Sitting around the house all day. Doing his silly detective business while pretending to prepare for the toughest exam...” (pg 2)

It is common thing with the parents that they wanted to shape their children according to their will and desire irrespective of their interest. They keep thrusting their choice and thinks

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that whatever they do or plan about children is apt and want to control their life with their choices. This is presented by Bhagat in the very beginning of the story:

“My parents keep telling me how I should a) get married, b) get a job, c) meet more people, d) close this detective agency business, e) keep my room clean, f) talk more, g) talk less, or whatever else they feel is wrong with me that day.” (pg 3)

But the irony is that the Keshav got rupees one crore and a diamond necklace at the end when he cracked the case of Siya after 400 days, from the Arora's family. Then the same father who used to pass jibe or mocking remarks at his son and considered him and his profession as rubbish and useless, the perspective and attitude of the same father changes. Now he supports and endorses his son's plan to open detective agency with a child security software company and give up his idea of his son's preparation of IPS examination:

“What's the point of it? Less than 0.1% chance of selection. Even then, they will shunt you around remote corners of India. Make you suck up to politicians do your own thing. You have the capital to open up your own office and even hire a small team.

Okay, fine. Why are you being so grumpy? My mother said. She stood up with her plate and ...

Keshav, my father said.

Yes, Papa? I said.

‘I am so proud of you, ‘he said.’ (pg342 &43)

Chetan Bhagat has tried to present the annihilation effect of technology for children, if it is used uncontrolled and without the supervision of the elders. Though it is a poignant and heart touching story of a lost 13-year-old girl, Siya, who is abducted by the family priest only, on whom the family has full trust. During the course of solving this mystery, the dark world of paedophile sort of people is also presented. The persons like Roy, exist in the society who lures and exploits the young children. Bhagat somewhere allures/hints to the current parents that we should keep a check on how our children are using their mobile phones. But at the same time this internet technology can be quite useful in solving many cases. The same mobile phone helps Keshav and Sourabh to crack this case of missing girl for 400 days. These two when suspected Pandit ji i.e. Shastri ji for his hand in Siya's missing, they used spare mobile phone in silent mode to track his location through GPS by hiding the phone in Shastri ji car. This helped both of them to trace the movement of his car which goes at midnight from Hauz Khas, Delhi to the rural area of Morta outside Delhi in Ghaziabad region of U.P:

“Wait, I have a better idea than us following him; Sourabh said.

What? I have a spare phone and a power bank at home... Oh, track his location through GPS?

Chetan Bhagat has vividly presented the strained relationship between not only son and father but also

another important of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Perhaps, he has to some extent succeeded in delineating it well. The bond or chemistry between these in Indian households is like the dagger drawn between them. It is the stranded saas-bahu relationship. In this strained relationship neither of them gives up and the most sufferer - the son. The same is shown by Bhagat in the story where there are numerous instances from the beginning to the end where Durga, the mother-in-law and Alia, the daughter-in-law are poles apart in nature. It is only because of Durga that Alia compelled her husband Manish to shift from sprawling Bungalow to flat in Gurgaon. Durga uses a very despicable words for her and dislikes her from the very beginning when Manish brought her to their Bungalow. Even after her son's marriage to her, which she always opposed, she never minces any moment to taunt her:

“They are ruining everything Shamsher ever worked for. Now you know why I call you a curse? That's why I did that puja, to get rid of your evil eye. Kameeni, why did you even come to our house? (Pg 81)

“I also saw the indifference on my mother-in-law's face. She hardly spoke to me at home anyway. But could not she just pretend to care for one day? ... ‘Hun sambhal ik aur billi ankh wali nu, she said in Punjabi. It translated to ‘now take care of another cat-eyed one.’ (Pg 158)

It is because of their malicious or vicious relationship which makes even Keshav Rajpurohit and Sourabh to suspect Durga of abducting her granddaughter, Siya, when both the detectives could not find any clue or headway in the case of child missing though her husband, Shamsher tried to absolve or defend her:

“Let me be direct with you, Mr Arora. Do you trust your wife completely? I said. As in? said Shamsher, his eyebrows peaking. We know she does not have a good relationship with Alia; I said. But that is common saas-bahu not getting along. Durga has a loose tongue, makes it worse.” (Pg 297)

“Durga has issues. She is mean, petty and I would say, even horrible to Alia sometimes. But she can't kidnap or be involved in kidnapping her own granddaughter. It's just not her; Shamsher said.” (Pg 298).

There is no doubt that Bhagat's novel captivate or binds the readers from beginning till end until the climax is reached. It is like a successful and interesting Hindi movie which has all masala ingredients in it which makes it interesting. After suspecting the hand of Roy, a paedophile and Darmesh the tutor of Siya the final and malefactor was the family pundit who was attached with the family for long time. In order to make it look real Chetan Bhagat has used real names of places and stick to the minutest detail to keep the interest of the readers. In this novel also he has shown the contrast and union of North and South India. The hero, a Punjabi Arora family boy who gets attracted towards a charming, good looking and attractive South Indian model, Alia.

The pan India theme of union of different cultures is central theme presented by Bhagat in his other works also. The same is presented here also. He wants to lessen the concept

of division of different cultures and wanted to spread the message of harmony and union. The general notion of averseness or prejudice that the people of particular area or region build up in their minds should be replaced with the feeling of acceptance and reverence. This is a general and widespread and people mistook it. This is evident in the expressions of Durga from the beginning keep scolding and shows her contempt for Alia:

“Main nahi jaana kiddan koi Madras nu milan; Mummy ji said and stormed out of the living room” (Pg 155)

“So, you are South Indian? She said midway through the meal. ‘Half-Keralite and half -Rajashthani. But I live in Kerala, yes’.” (Pg 143)

Bhagat is unique master of story-telling and blends protagonist from North and South of India. Though there is difference of culture, language, customs and eating habits. But even after so many diversifications there is one thing which binds all the Indians and that is bond of Indianness, which binds all of us despite differences. The north Indian Punjabi culture is well contrasted with the South Indian culture. The novelist wanted to convey the message that with passage of time and in the time of globalization these are petty things and the younger, new, educated generation no longer believes in the older dogmas and myth created in the past.

The story binds the readers with its mystery of missing of a young girl but simultaneously it blends the romantic feeling and attraction of Alia and Keshav. When Police fails to crack the case and heeds in no direction, Alia finds a ray of hope when she heard about Keshav who lives in the same society. During their routine sortie to find the missing daughter of Alia, they were in constant touch with each other. The domestic discord between Alia and her husband Manish provided a vent in the form of Keshav. There are many romantic meetings and conversation between Alia and Keshav and at one point it seems that the pious bond of marriage will prove null and void in front of illicit attraction between married Alia and Keshav.

Keshav even goes to her house in Kochi and spend some memorable time of her life with Alia. He becomes so sentimental and emotional in his relationship with Alia that both started thinking of starting a new life with each other after Alia's divorce with Manish. Their romantic love story has been given a beautiful and satisfying twist at the end of the novel. The novelist, Bhagat, has kept traditional and family values above personal emotional feelings. Both of them decided to sacrifice their love for their family and this is evident and beautifully presented by Bhagat in their last meeting at the hotel:

“We cannot do this; I said.

Tears streamed down Alia's face as she gave the tiniest nod. Alia, I love you. More than anything else in the world. I know, she said. So how can I say we can't. I had promised you.... (pg 340)

I'll always love you too, Alia, I said, for the rest of my life. But sometimes love means letting go, for the happiness of others. I turned around to face her and we embraced one last time. Alia, I said, fighting back tear. Yes? She said. ‘tell Suhana I miss her, Keshav uncle misses his little Uno champion.’ (pg 341).

The novelist handled the climax of the story with great care and what could be better ending to the story as provided by Bhagat. There is no doubt that human relationship are very complex to understand and define. It is not easy to understand the feelings and psyche of others. Relations are based on mutual understanding and sacrifice and it is true to all the relations. Chetan Bhagat has raised and handled these issues of relationship and the use of modern technology with a balance. He has very carefully tried to provide a moral, message to the society through his simple narrative and spellbound style.

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