

THE THEME OF SOCIAL DISINTEGRATION IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S
'THE THREE MISTAKES OF MY LIFE'

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Abstract:

Social disintegration occur every day in today's globalized, modern and democratic Indian society through dehumanization, anti-professionalism and fanaticism with enforcement of arbitrary decisions on crucial social, economical, political and religious issues made by ill-informed and prejudiced individuals, institutions and organizations. Individuals in society today feel isolated and insignificant as their previously held value systems fail to contain them. For such individuals rebelliousness seems to be an escape from the unbearable feelings of powerlessness and helplessness. In such a state the problem is simply that of death wish but not a wish for total annihilation of the existing society which seems to be the enemy. This paper explores the themes of social disintegration woven in the novel "The Three Mistakes of My Life" of Chetan Bhagat , the renowned Indian novelist. This paper also attempts to describe how society and its members respond to such experiences and contribute to social disintegration.

Key Words:- *Social disintegration, dehumanization, anti-professionalism, fanaticism, annihilation*

On Social disintegration :-

Social disintegration is the tendency for society to decline or disintegrate overtime perhaps due to the lapse or breakdown of traditional social support systems. In this context, "Society" refers to the social order which maintains a society, rather than the political order that defines its boundaries. Society in the sociological sense is not the same as a country. It is an apparent paradox of globalization that the increasing global economic integration that it creates, leads more to social disintegration rather than to social integration. Economical organizations became more disembedded from social relations and the welfare safety nets that once prevented social disintegration became less effective or token only. The conglomerate of Indian families formed as the Indian society, hardly exists now, it is all crumbling into simple units, hardly even known to each other most of the time. The family which at one time consisted of a strong bond of all brothers, their wives and all the children, has now become a single unit with only father, the mother and the child. Even this miniature family further seems to be losing the feel of a family. Chetan Bhagat in his novel *The Three Mistakes of My Life* has skillfully portrayed the impact of this social change on his characters. The novel which delineates the influence of various elements social, economic, political and religious on Indian youth is a story about

Govind, Ishaan, Omi, Vidya and Ali and Bitto Mama. The theme involves the anxieties, insecurities, powerlessness and helplessness of the rising Indian middle class including questions about life, career, inadequacy, family conflicts, and the relation of the Indian youth to society in which they live.

On the Novelist :-

Along with R. K. Narayan, Rajarao, Mulkraj Anand Chetan Bhagat can be credited with establishing the basic forms and themes of modern Indian literature written in English. At the core of his writing is a humanist philosophy that incorporates elements of socialist political, economical and psychological theory. His socially conscious works provide insights on Indian youth, their affairs and various issues prevalent in the early part of the new millennium. It's a great contribution to enrich the country's literary heritage. Chetan Bhagat through novels poses fundamental questions related to the contemporary Indian society and seeks to awaken the youth and countrymen to various influences, prejudices and irrationalities which hinder their march to progress. He believes in the dictum of "Arts for the sake of humanity". He combines in his novels Tagore's humanism, Bankim's romanticism, Premchand's sympathy for the poor and bourgeois. He describes the whole man and the whole gamut of human relationship. He reveals redundant social systems, organized religions, the intricate, contradictory emotions, feelings, moods and events so that the experience of his characters can represent some part of the totality of life. Bhagat observes life closely and keenly and presents its naked reality in his fiction. His novels are deliberate attempts to expose the distress and disappointments of Indian Youth. They are undisguised in their plea for social change and are motivated by intense anger and pity. He used his novels to make severe attacks on various elements of India's social structure, political, economic and religious life. His novels can be considered important primarily for the social statement that they make.

What prompted Chetan Bhagat to write *The Three Mistakes of My Life* was a poignant story about a twenty three years old businessman Govind Patel from Ahmadabad. After listening to the story of his life and the reasons for his suicidal attempt, Bhagat could not remain unmoved. What followed next was the revision of the whole story modified in the form of a novel.

About the Novel:-

Chetan Bhagat's *The Three Mistakes of My Life* published in 2008. The novel is set in the city of Ahmadabad. It is not one of those hip cities like Delhi, Bombay or Bangalore. It is the sixth largest city in India, with a population of over five million. But if one emphasize the

importance of something in this city Ahmadabad has better multiplexes than Delhi or nicer roads than Bombay or better restaurants than Bangalore. It is, no doubt, a small town but it is the real India of middle class people. This novel has as its principal theme friendship in times of the 2002 communal riots in Gujrat, an era similar to what is shown in Mahesh Dattani's play *Final Solutions*(1993). In this novel the Ahmadabad based Gujrati youth Govind Patel teams up with his cricketer-friend Ishaan and the religious-minded fitness-obsessed Omi, the son of the priest of a Swamibhakti Temple, to open a cricket goods-selling shop. While Ishaan desperately wants to help a patriotic muslim boy Ali to play cricket at national level. Patel is appointed by his friend to privately teach mathematics to his sister Vidya with whom he develops a sexual relationship a fact which temporarily estranges him from Ishaan. Even as the Australian Cricket Team member Fred Li extends help to Ali, having spotted talent in him. Communal violence erupts in Gujrat with the Sabarmati Express being burnt at Godhra on 27th February 2002. In the 18th and 19th chapters of this novel, Bhagat offers a poignant description of the post-train burning riots in which the communally-prejudiced Bittoo Mama, a Hindu Political Party activist, loses his son Dhiraj. In the 21st chapter Omi is jabbed to death by a trident held by Bittoo Mama while he tries to stop his maternal uncle from killing Ali, and in retaliation Ishaan and Ali kill the religious fanatic by batting cricket balls towards his temple(p.248-49). The end of the novel is however a happy one with Patel, who begins the story by narrating details to the intently attentive litterateur. Vidya reunited with a chance of future marriage. The novel also has in its sideline many instances which depict the theme of social disintegration. Hence, the following sub-headings are used to discuss and highlight this theme in Bhagat's *The Three Mistakes of My Life*.

1. Conflict between Tradition and Modernity:- The novel charts the transition in India from an old fashioned way of life to a modern and urbanized and the character groupings roughly correspond to these two spheres. Ishaan's father, Govind's mother, Omi's parents and his maternal uncle Bittoo Mama, Ali's father, political cum spiritual leader Parekhji represent traditional, orthodoxy hierarchy and conservative values, and exhibits the traditional Indian culture and ethos. while other characters Govind, Ishaan, Omi, Vidya and Ali on the contrary, bear features of western or modern culture and manners. Thus the conflict between tradition and modernity or influence of one over the other is ardent in the behavior and conversation of these characters. Some such situations in the novel, where traditional or modern elements are visible in the characters are portrayed below.

It is customary or traditional among middle-class Indian family to obey the orders and fulfill the wish of elderly and venerable persons. But Ishaan goes against the wish of his father.

His father wants him to join defence services but, Govind the narrator of the story says, "Ishaan cannot handle unquestioned authority, and even though he is really excited about the army, he cannot stand some Major ordering him around for the next two decades of his life. So he paid penalty, cited personal reasons like ailing parents or something and ran right back to Belrampur"(p. 8). In fact he is a big cricket freak and also a patriot.

Govind's mother has never been a modern woman. She is not corrupted with modern and materialistic values. She is a traditional Indian wife, longs for affection and care from her husband. But unfortunately her husband deserted her making her alone and her child fatherless. Her husband departure was followed by months of crying with every lady in 'every pol' coming down to sympathize with her, consulting astrologers and arrival of grandaunts to live with her as she could not bring herself to stay alone(p.9). Whereas Govind is comparatively emotionless, the modern influence is evident in his attitude, behavior and temperament.

2. Generation Gap :- Generation gap is actually indifference between the ebullience of youth in one hand and the caution and prudence of old age on the other, or it is the expression of the rivalry between the old and the young; the old want to prolong their hold on authority while the young are over-eager to grab it . The old declare the younger lot to be arrogant fools; they declare the older people to be senile and insipid. The gulf between the two generations seems unlikely to be bridged. In the novel Ishaan's father works in the telephone-exchange. He wants his son to go to the National Defence Academy. However, Ishaan has least interest in it. So he runs away from it. Though his dissatisfied father calls him 'useless', Ishaan loves cricket more than anything else. It is perhaps because of his inclinations towards this game. Govind's mother wants him to study engineering but he decisively declares to his mother: "I don't want to be an engineer, mom. My heart is in business"(p. 13). Omi is the third figure of this trinity. His father is the priest of Swaminathan Temple, which belonged to Omi's mom's family for generations. Therefore, it is clear that he would become the priest after his father. His parents and his Bittoo Mama expect him to be a priest. However, religion is not his true passion his passion is physical fitness.

3. Disturbed Family Unity:- Govind Patel the narrator of the story is a fatherless child. His father left Govind and his mother ten years ago for a second wife across town. Since then he has been living with his mother who runs a small Gujrati business. Ishaan's family consists of parents and a sister but it is obvious in the novel that there is a communication gap among the family members. The parents of Omi and his Bittoo Mama are engrossed in religious activities and have no time to pay heed to Omi's parenting requirements.

4. Moral Depravation :- The study of Chetan's novels holds up a mirror in which we can surely find the weakest yarn of immorality in the youth of new generation of Indian society. The youth of today take immense delight in immoral activities and premarital sex and are not even ashamed of their coarse and mean behavior. In the novel, though the parents of Ishaan trust Govind and Vidya but they indulge in the luxury of love and lust. Moral depravation has firm roots which Bhagat attacks in Vidya and Govind's characters. Vidya is Ishaan's younger sister. She is a rebel at heart and dreams to break free from the constraints of a typical middle class family and society. She is quiet enthusiastic and takes initiative in her romance with Govind, her tutor in mathematics and her brother's friend. She doesn't mind enjoying premarital unprotected sex coming out of the shell of conservatism. Though Govind is hesitant and shy in this relationship because she is his friend's sister and he is her tutor. Ofcourse, there is a great pressure on Govind's mind and he can't forget the trust that the family of Ishaan has in him and his friendship with Ishaan. But finally, love overtakes them both. This shows nothing but the depravation of morality.

5. Religious Fanaticism:- Religious fanaticism has taken deep roots in India. Every community has its hardliners, these self-styled champions of their religion do not understand the language of peace or reason. Our politicians and anti-social elements exploit this situation and instead of preaching tolerance and restraint instigate their followers, defying all moral and ethical considerations. They keep on playing with the lives of ignorant masses so that they can remain in limelight. In the novel, Omi's maternal uncle Bittoo Mama, politician cum spiritual leader Parekhji and his followers seem to be the embodiment of religious fanaticism. Bittoo Mama runs the trust of the temple and agrees to rent a room in the temple building to three friends Govind, Ishaan and Omi for the cricket shop business. He is an active member of a Hindu Political Party. He follows the preachings of Parekhji and has complete faith in him. He locks his horns with Ali's father. Who belongs to the Secular Party. He has a son Dhiraj. Mama is not fond of Govind as he is an agnostic. He is the main antagonist of the story who determines to kill a muslim boy Ali as compensation for the death of his own son Dhiraj who was supposed to be killed by muslim community.

Conclusion :-

Today materialistic modernization is eating into the very vitals of Indian society. Presumably, this had been in the mind of Chetan Bhagat when he wrote this novel to create a feeling of fellowship and companionship between man and man based on liberty, equality, secularism, fraternity and dignity, finally leading into a classless, casteless and welfare society.

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