
Chetan Bhagat's *Revolution 2020*: A Novel on Love, Corruption and Ambition

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Chetan Bhagat is India's paperback king.

--The Guardian

ABSTRACT:

*Chetan Bhagat is acknowledged as the voice of India's rising entrepreneurial class. All his novels became best sellers and ensured him a huge readership. He rocked the Indian sensibility with his thought-provoking insight in shifting paradigms of human condition entangled in the maze of love, corruption and ambition. Chetan's latest novel Revolution 2020 is a gripping and a fast-paced story of love, betrayal and corruption. It is set in the sacred city of Varanasi and it unveils the darker side of India's education system and the rampant corruption it involves. The theme of love conflict is also mirrored in this novel. The story deals with two boys—Gopal and Raghav—and a girl, Aarti. This is narrated by Gopal, the protagonist of the story. They are the childhood friends in the city of Varanasi. They belong to **Sunbeam school** in Varanasi. All the three principal characters have strong ambitions in life. Both the male protagonist fell in love with the same girl. Gopal wants to earn money and Raghav nourishes bigger ideas and wants to create a revolution which demands sacrifice of personal feelings. The ending of the novel seems contrived and inspired by Bollywood potboilers where the antagonist-protagonist undergoes a sudden change of heart and gives up the girl he loves to his friend in a noble gesture that wins him the readers' sympathy. The novel ends up with Gopal's realisation that although he succeeds in getting money, power and even the favour of Aarti, he is not as good as Raghav. So he turns all the negative things into positive for the welfare of society. The novel ends with the message that how an ordinary person inspite of all his vices can bring out the good in him by obeying his conscience. The novelist anticipates that the prevailing corruption and misuse of*

power in the technology-advancing world in the absence of spiritual and moral values are not auspicious indications of genuine progress for the next generation.

Chetan Bhagat's novels are about the new millennium and point at the mode of negotiating the long and tortuous history. Despite the little scholarly attention outside India, he speaks for the aspirations of social and economical mobility benefitting from the economic liberalisation. His novel *Revolution 2020*(2011) illustrates the growth of irreligion, discontent and covetousness in the wide social spheres in modern India. The novel addresses the sizzling topics of corruption. The story is put down against the environment of a corrupt social system where anything and everything can be bought and sold. The story is set up in the holy city of Varanasi. Gopal Mishra, Raghav Kashyap and Aarti are the three principal characters in the novel. They are childhood friends. All the three survive with their own dreams of life. They survive in three different mental spaces but share a common sensibility in which Aarti specially intends to survive. Aarti is the beautiful and well groomed daughter of the District Magistrate who is personally honest but not averse to looking the other way at corrupt dealings. Her grandfather was a famous and revered political leader. Her soul aim is to become an airhostess fly like birds in the sky. She is a woman of integrity but not averse to ignoring corrupt dealings. She cares a lot for her family and friends. Gopal Mishra is the son of a middle class, debt-ridden, suffering and retired teacher. Their land is under litigation. Raghav Kashyap belongs to an elite family background while Gopal is a normal guy, an average student with an ailing father. Gopal is a motherless child who gets happiness in the company of his two friends. Raghav is an exceptionally intelligent boy who cracks the JEE with an all India rank of 1123. The novel begins when Gopal the chief narrator of the novel, meets Chetan Bhagat's and narrates him his story. Bhagat adopts meta-fictional device of authorial intrusion and becomes a character who is invited as a chief guest to inaugurate MBA coaching block. Although a failure at both IITJEE and AIEEE, even in second attempt, Gopal dramatically turns out to be the young director of Ganga Tech Engineering College which has expanded its wing for a new MBA coaching centre. The story is set in the holy city of Varanasi except a few parts which take place in Kota, generally regarded as the coaching-capital of India. Bhagat said in an interview that he chose Varanasi because he had a very special connection to the city:

I come from Varanasi, which my social studies teacher says is one of the oldest cities on earth. People came to live here in 1200 B.C. the city gets its name from two rivers, Varuna and Asi, which pass through the city and meet the Ganga. People call my city several names – Kashi, Benares or Banaras – depending on where they come from. Some call it the City of Temples, for we have thousands of them, and some the City of Learning, as Varanasi apparently has great places to study. I simply call Varanasi my home. I stay near Gadholia, a place so noisy, you need to put cotton balls in your ears if you want to sleep. Gadholia is near the ghats, along the river Ganga. So if the crowds of Gadholia become too much to take, you can always run to the ghats and sit by the Ganga and watch the temples. Some call my city beautiful, holy and spiritual – especially when we have to introduce it to foreign tourists. Many call it filthy and a dump. I don't think my city is dirty. It is the people who make it dirty.¹

There is no philosophical reflection in Bhagat's novel, what one finds instead a profound concern about pollution, shame and corruption that government projects like Ganga Action Plan (GAP) generate in this holy city. People who live here now, have modern aspiration which are evinced by the mushrooming engineering colleges, IT industries and shopping malls on the outskirts of the city. It is this contrast between antiquity and modernity, holiness and growing corruption that is sought to be highlighted in the novel. the novel begins with a prophetic note in its prologue:

'And I hope not just you but our whole country will keep that spark alive. There is something cool about saying – I come from the land of a billion sparks. Thank you,' I said, ending my motivational speech at Tilak Hall, Varanasi. (p. 1)

The novel *Revolution 2020* is a justification of the fact how the unbridled ambitions have irrigated the creepers of corruption in which love the only consolation for human survival is going to prove a weak stem. Raghav joins IT—BHU not nearly to earn a degree in engineering but also to fulfil his ambition to usher in a corruption-free society as a journalist. After completing his engineering studies, Raghav joins a newspaper *Dainik* as a trainee-reporter.

Raghav begins his life as an idealist who intends to expose the emerging corruption with the power of his pen. He begins a newspaper entitled *Revolution 2020* and clarifies about its mission.

'Revolution 2020. That's his goal. That India must have a full-blown revolution by 2020. Power will be with the youth. We will dismantle the old corrupt system and put a new one in place.' (p. 197)

In the novel, there are distinctive echoes of the oppressive burden of corruption gripping the consciousness of young Indians in the dawn of the new millennium. The idea of revolution according to the novelist is not sheer idealism but the echoes of the cries born out of the helplessness of thousands of Indians. Raghav intends to promote the cult of the reincarnation of the society. Through Raghav, Chetan Bhagat communicates his prophetic vision to ensure peace and justice in India. Gopal, another protagonist of the novel, after his failure in JEE, is forced to take the burden of studies at Kota. Though he is physically at Kota mentally he is in Varanasi. His heart is intertwined with Varanasi. Bansal classes, Resonance and Career Point disturb him every time. Gopal is forced by his father to move to Kota, the capital of coaching classes to join a coaching centre as a repeater. In that way he spends his father's retirement savings. He is severely disturbed by the sudden and shocking revelation that Aarti has developed a romantic affair with Raghav during his absence from Varanasi. Gopal sends SMS to his beloved Aarti:

Gopal Kota Factory: Hey, you upset? I am sorry if I said something wrong ... You don't have to ...

Flying Aarti: Hey, sorry ...

Flying Aarti: Boyfriend called to apologise. He's finished his work. We are going for the movie!!

Gopal Kota Factory: Oh, that's great.

Flying Aarti: What were you saying ... wait. Of course, we can see movies when you are back. Why are you sorry?

Gopal Kota Factory: Nothing, I just felt ...

FlyingAarti: Relax. Okay, I have to go get ready.

Gopal Kota Factory: Fine.

Flying Aarti: I better look smashing to get his attention. Else, he'll be proof-reading his article on our date.

Gopal Kota Factory: Okay. I better study too.

Flying Aarti: Two more months. Then we can all have lots of fun.

Gopal Kota Factory: Yeah. Thanks.

Flying Aarti: Bye, Xoxoxo.

And Flying Aarti logged out. (p.88)

The students like Gopal from the lower middle-class families become the victims of this current cult. In Kota Gopal tries to do his best to crack out the examination. But he cannot concentrate on his aim because of Aarti. Gopal's ailing, indebted and desperate father dies without having fulfilled his last and keen desire. His old father cannot bear his son's repeated failures. Now Gopal has become an orphan. He is pressurised by his creditors and loan-sharks for loan repayments. With past debts totaling two lakh rupees, Gopal strikes a deal with the local MLA, Shukla, to start a private engineering college on his family's disputed land. The irony is that with the help of dishonest uncle and Shukla, an MLA, the uneducated Gopal becomes the director of a new college (Ganga Tech College). Here Chetan Bhagat depicts very realistically what is happening at the private colleges in the country. He does not deny if education becomes a commercial business, it is not okay if it becomes corrupt. Gopal learns that he will have to pay bribes to just about everyone, from the government officials for bending and relaxing rules and giving sanctions to professors for joining the college as faculty. Gopal comes in the company of MLA Shukla, the most corrupt leader of Varanasi. The back support behind Gopal's successful transformation into entrepreneur is a corrupt politician, MLA, Ramanlal Sukla. He is accused for a scam of thirty crore rupees under the name of Ganga Action Plan. With his blessings, sway, political power and capital, Gopal embarks on the ladder that leads him to fulfil his ambition. Chertan Bhagat helps the younger generation to dream through his novels and gives inspirations to fight against odds through examples. He has been called the voice of his generation. Shukla renders Gopal financial assistance. Now, Gopal becomes skilled at handling corrupt politicians and bureaucrats whom he offers bribes and completes his works. Gopal, a despondent failure on all fronts, takes on to the practical aspects of life and considers earning money as his religion. Along with the MLA, he makes an enormous fortune and becomes the part and parcel in his corrupt deeds. Raghav Kashyap who has entered a mission to root out corruption, wants to help the poor and bring about a change to rebuild India. Raghav, news-reporter of *Dainik* is sacked as

a reporter by Shukla. Because Shukla and Gopal think that it is Raghav who has disclosed the details of Gopal's interview. Raghav produces adequate evidence to confirm that the MLA is a corrupt man. As a result of it, Shukla has resigned. Aarti stands behind Raghav giving moral support to his plans and projects. Aarti is a fickle-minded girl and as established sexual relations with Gopal when he is a prosperous state. Gopal says that his life is insipid without Aarti. Aarti, who had a strong zeal for Raghav, had physical relations with Gopal and then married Raghav. She surrenders herself to Gopal for momentary pleasures. As far as this novel is concerned from the tag line of this novel—every reader labels this story as a narration of the current situation in India. Chetan touches all aspects of life. He says:

I think by now my readers know that no matter how serious the issue is, I make my stories light and entertaining. The issues with the education system and the levels of corruption in the country are obviously grave concerns, but as a storyteller I have to balance it with the need to make a gripping, entertaining story. ("Revolution 2020- Chetan Bhagat's New Book").²

Raghav has no time to spare for Aarti. She develops a deeper friendship with Gopal. She becomes a Guest Relationship Manager at the newly opened Ramada Hotel. Gopal wants to prove himself that he is a successful man in all walks of his life: his love affair with Aarti and his business career. But Keshav, a young boy's innocence and words become an eye opener to Gopal. Now he realises that Raghav is a better human being than he is. This notion brings about a change in his attitude towards life. Gopal wants to make amends. Raghav, with his newspaper *Revolution 2020*, creates a horror in the lives of corrupt leaders. Though he has lost many things in his life, he has succeeded in achieving his ambition to free the society from the shackles of corruption. Dramatically, Gopal has taken a right decision to sacrifice his beloved Aarti to Raghav. Gopal gains the sympathy of the readers. The ending of the novel, as some people say, is a disappointing one:

The story is fabulous but I feel that Gopal didn't have to sacrifice his love and I felt real upset about it.³

Although the main plot of the story revolves around the triangular love between Gopal, Raghav and Aarti, Bhagat intends to convey a social message of goodness over corruption. He highlights all aspects of life in India including the political, educational and social systems. The novel ends with the message that how ordinary persons inspite of all their vices can bring out the good in them by listening to their conscience. Chetan Bhagat opines that goodness never really dies in people. The novelist provides the youth of India with a path to lead with love and sacrifice, honesty and integrity being beacons of hope.

Works Cited

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