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## Chetan Bhagat's '*The 3 Mistakes of My Life*': An Elucidation from The Perspective of Realism

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**Dr. Ram Janam**, Assistant Professor

Department of English, Gayatri Vidyapeeth P.G. College Risia, Bahraich, (U.P.)

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### **Abstract:**

In the current scenario, Chetan Bhagat has been considered one of the best novelists of Indian fiction. Bhagat has depicted modern Indian youths and their need in his novels. He expresses that novels are the medium of delight and instruction through which one can express his views and opinions about society and the youth. In modern India, human behavior has changed into lust, greed, hypocrisy, and hatred. These are the major themes of Bhagat's novels. His novels are incomplete without a realistic touch. The background in which Chetan Bhagat has written novels is predominantly of the society in the post-globalization era. His novels are based on day-to-day happenings in Indian society, so ultimately, he has written the problems of Indian society. He has depicted the modern situation in a proper manner. One cannot deny the possibility of family conflicts, which Bhagat has described. Chetan Bhagat describes here about the communal hatred and harmony in Indian society. This paper aims to study the realistic views of Chetan Bhagat about the religious and political views of Indian people.

**Keywords:** Political and religious conflict, love, youth problems, career, ambition, Godhara riot.

Realism is the faithful representation of the reality of the world. It seeks to convey a truthful and objective vision of contemporary life based on direct observation of the world. According to Pam Morris, "Realism is a close resemblance to what is real; fidelity of representation, the rendering of precise details of the real thing or scene'." She further points out that the two terms closely associated with this meaning are 'mimesis' and 'verisimilitude. 'While mimesis refers to the direct imitation of words and actions, verisimilitude is 'the appearance of being true or real .' (Morris, 4-5) It began as a recognizable movement in art in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and since then, it has been a dominant art form. In fact, realism has been a revolt against classicism and romanticism—artistic movements characterized by works that idealize or romanticize life. Classicism shows life as being more rational and orderly than it really is, while romanticism depicts life as being more emotionally exciting and pleasant, and full of romance

than it usually is. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. 9, "... Realism in the arts is the accurate, detailed; unembellished depiction of nature or of contemporary life."

Social realism came to attain international fame in India, Russia, Britain, America, and elsewhere. Its aim is to emphasize the real description of social problems such as exploitation, hunger and poverty, social backwardness, and political subjugation.

Chetan Bhagat is a notable figure known for his depiction of social, political, and personal events and incidents. Therefore, characters in Chetan Bhagat's novels represent the actual men and women in real life. We find in his writing a fusion of emotional and fictional autobiography. In a realistic novel, one sees characters that appear real, and the reader visualizes many things through the character's eyes. Chetan Bhagat portrays the lives of men and women in totality. It is not just a piece of life but also the whole life itself. He depicts a character's life through its entire fortune, social, emotional, moral, and intellectual aspects. Chetan Bhagat's *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* is based on real events which happened in Gujarat, India. The novelist intermingles the story of the characters with past events like the Bhuj earthquake and the Godhara riot in Gujarat. He takes us to the period of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The novel is about three friends who open a cricket materials shop on the Swamibhakti temple's premises in Ahmedabad. The author beautifully describes the contemporary happenings in India through these characters' lives. The political turmoil, the Ayodhya issue, and

the Gujarat earthquake all contour the background of the plot whilst turning the dream of Govind, Ishaan, and Omi into a nightmare. Yet to cherish the dream, to reach the goal, to attain everything that they desire, they have to face it all - religious politics, the earthquake, riots, and most importantly, forbidden love and, above all, their own mistakes which life throws as if a challenge to them. With his typical style, Chetan Bhagat weaves the tale of three friends, the tale of shattered dreams, and the realistic account of joining those dots of broken dreams and then dreaming again. Moving from humor to wit and then from fun to seriousness and ultimately to the dark problems of life, this novel has almost everything from passion to laughter, from emotion to romance, and from friendship to revulsion.

The novel opens when the writer receives an email. The email is from a boy named Govind in Ahmedabad. The mail reads that the boy has committed three mistakes in his life and, therefore, is failing to find the reasons to carry on his life any further, and therefore, he pops sleeping pills. The story gains pace as the writer catches the flight and rushes to meet this young man lying in the government hospital bed. *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* is thus the tale of this young man who thought to finish off his life because of the mistakes he committed. The novel is the saga of friendship. The tale of dreaming dreams, the story of chasing the dream.

The story of the novel revolves around three friends, Ishaan, Govind, and Omi. Ishaan is a cricket lover, Omi is the son of a priest, and Govind is the protagonist.

Govind is an expert in Math and a dreamer. He dreams of floating his own business. He wants to forget all his worries, fear, tears, and agony and just wants to start his own business to survive in the harsh world where dream shatters almost every now and then. The three friends start a sports goods shop, and it works. Things seem to be a lot better. Govind experiences for the first time the taste of being a businessman. The story moves from one event to the other. Ishaan finds Ali, a young cricketer with lots of talent, and decides to coach him. Govind, besides being the businessman and math lover, falls in love with Ishaan's sister and then starts committing his famous "three mistakes." The major characters in the novel are Govind, the main protagonist and maths tutor; Ishaan, a cricket freak; Omi, a religious boy; Vidya, Ishaan's younger sister, and Govind's girlfriend; Ali, a Muslim boy and a good cricketer; Parekh-ji, a Hindu leader; Bittoo mama, Omi's maternal uncle, and Dhiraj, Bittoo mama's son. It is the story of three friends who are interested in Business, cricket, and religion. Govind is very much interested in BusinessBusiness and, being a topper in Maths subject in the board exam, takes maths tuition. Ishaan loves cricket so much that he leaves his NDA and returns home. Omi is confused about his passion as he follows Parekh-ji's politics and his father's religion. Talking about their passion, Govind says:

I wasn't sure if Omi really believed in what he said or if he was revising lessons given by Parekh-ji. He never spoke about this to Ish and somewhere, but deep down, did he

also feel like Bittoo's mama? If Ish's passion was cricket and my passion was business, was Omi's passion religion? Or maybe, like most people, he was confused and trying to find his passion. (3MML, 69)

Govind convinces his friends to do business. They opened a shop in the premises of the Swamibhakti temple. Govind takes maths tuition. Ishaan forces him to take his sister Vidya's maths classes. Govind teaches her and falls in love. He invests saved money in the shopping mall, which collapses in an earthquake. To recover the lost money, they work hard day and night. Govind, for the sake of Ishaan, is ready to go to Goa and Australia for Omi to attend the meeting of political parties. At the end of the novel, they have to face the anger of Bittoo Mama and his team to save Ali from them. Bhagat lived in Ahmedabad for his MBA. He, through the eyes of Govind, realistically describes the city of Ahmedabad. He says:

Yes, Ahmedabad is my city.

It is strange, but if you have had happy times in a city for a long time, you consider it the best city in the world. I feel the same about Ahmedabad. I know it is not one of those hip cities like Delhi, Bombay, and Bangalore. I know people in these cities think of Ahmedabad as a small town, though that is not really the case. (3MML, 46)

Govind shows his scientific attitude by saying he is agnostic when Bittoo's mama asks him about his religion. He takes part in the political and religious activities of

Parekh-ji and Bittoo Mama but never likes his participation. Ishaan forces him to take maths tuition classes for his younger sister, Vidya. Govind, while teaching her, falls in love and does what one cannot expect from a good friend. He has sex with her and commits the second mistake of his life. Omi's cousin, Dhiraj, is killed at the Godhara railway station while returning from Ayodhya on the Sabarmati Express. Hindus blame Muslims and start killing them. On that fateful night, Ali, a Muslim boy, is with these friends at the bank building. Bittoo Mama attacks the bank building where Govind and his friends hide Ali. Govind, while saving Ali from the trishul of Bittoo mama, makes a one-second delay, which allows Trishul to pierce its angle into Ali's wrist. Here, Govind makes the third mistake of his life. The love story between Govind and Vidya has a realistic touch. Initially, Govind concentrates on his teaching, but it is Vidya who incites him to do what any good friend doesn't want to do with his best friend's sister. She starts liking him and goes to see him in the hospital when he is admitted. She gives him a letter in which she calls him a passion guide and shows her love for him. She writes:

To my maths  
tutor/passion  
guide/sort-of-friend, I  
cannot fully

understand your loss,  
but I can try.  
Sometimes, life  
throws curve balls,  
and you question  
why. There may be  
no answers, but I  
assure you that time  
will heal the wound.  
Here is wishing you a  
heartfelt 'get well  
soon' Your poorest  
performing student,  
Vidya. (3MML, 112)

She is the first one to kiss and have sex with him on her birthday. Bhagat gives Vidya's character a modern girl's attitude, as she wants to go away from the constraint of the four walls of her house. She wishes to take her education in Mumbai. Being a motivational speaker and alumnus of IIT, the author describes the fear among the students for maths through the character of Vidya. She says:

I have lived, compromised,  
and struggled with it. It is a troubled  
relationship we have shared for  
years. From classes one to twelve,  
this subject does not go away.  
People have nightmares about  
monsters. I have nightmares about  
surprise maths tests. I know you  
scored a hundred, and you are in  
love with it. But remember, in most  
parts of the world, maths means  
only one thing to students. (3MML,  
46)

Chetan Bhagat reveals the mentality  
of Indian people and how they look at a  
beautiful girl. Govind and Vidya go to the

shop to purchase the chemistry book, where the shopkeeper and other buyers start gazing at her. On being asked, he tells her, "He (shopkeeper) was asking me about the girl. See, this is the reason why people think Ahmedabad is a small town despite the multiplexes. It is the mentality of the people"(3MML, 85). People in India like cricket very much. The passion for cricket among the boys is shown through the character of Ishaan. He is a cricket freak and ready to do anything for it. He is the champion and plays district-level matches for his school. Like many Indian cricket lovers, he sees all the matches of the Indian team. After Govind's suggestion, he started cricket coaching. He takes Ali's coaching free of cost and wants to see him in the Indian team. He takes Govind and Omi to Goa to see a cricket match and to test Ali with the Australian players. He doesn't care about money if it is related to cricket. He wants to use the profit of the shop for the trip to Australia. Bhagat, through his character, presents the face of an angry young man. Ishaan shows his anger by beating a young boy who used to come to see Vidya at his house. The author of the novel writes about the real cricket matches played between India and South Africa at Vadodara on 17 March 2000 and India and Australia on 11-15 March 2001 at Eden Garden, Kolkata. Ishaan watches every cricket match and wastes important years of his life. Like many Indian parents, his parents are not happy with their son's nature and behavior. Omi represents the religious boy. He, like many young people, is not able to decide his main aim in life. He concentrates on religious things and the

other half on his maternal uncle, Bittoo Mama, who is a political worker of Parekhji. He is influenced by Parekhji and Bittoo mama and attends their every meeting. Bhagat here tells about the Hindu-Muslim conflict related to the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Omi defends his religion when he quarrels with Ali's father. An excerpt from the novel throws a light on Ayodhya's disputed land:

Why can't you let us make a temple in Ayodhya? Omi said. 'Because there is mosque already'. 'But there was a temple there before'. 'That is not proven. It has. The government keeps hiding those reports. 'Incorrect' Whatever. It is not an ordinary place. We believe it is the birthplace of our lord. We said, "Give us that site, and we will move the mosque respectfully next door." But you can't even do that. And we, the majority, can't have that one little request fulfilled. Parekhji is right: What hope does a Hindu have in this country? (3MML, 69)

Chetan Bhagat writes about the social aspects which take place in the first decade of the twenty-first century. He correlates fiction with realism. In February 2002, at the Godhara station, Muslim people burnt the Sabarmati Express, where kar sevaks were returning from Ayodhya. Dhiraj, Bittoo mama's son, dies in it. Bittoo Mama, to take revenge on his son, decides to teach a lesson to Muslims. He, along with his political workers, started killing the Muslims and burning their houses. The writer here writes about the contemporary

political and religious conditions of Gujarat. In the novel, he also gives a realistic account of the earthquake that took many lives in Gujarat in 2001. Bhuj city is ninety percent destroyed. Govind books a shop at the shopping mall, but unluckily, it also collapses on the ground. Religious politics is at an extreme level in Gujarat. Bittoo Mama and Parekh-ji represent the Hindu religion, and Naseer, Ali's father, represents the Muslim religion. In their political meeting, they blame each other. Parekh-ji, being Hindu, is a great supporter of Ram temple at Ayodhya. He motivates Bittoo Mama and other party members to organize trips to Ayodhya. Bittoo Mama decides to bring the soil from Ram's birthplace, distributes it among the Hindu family, and convinces them to vote for the Hindu party. He is a blind follower of Parekh-ji and invites Omi and his friends to attend their political meetings. On the other hand, Ali's father, Naseer, calls his party secular. He opposes the Ram temple at Ayodhya, as he believes that the place belongs to the mosque. Hindu-Muslim conflict is shown here. The writer tells the causes of conflict between Hindus and Muslims and suggests ways to solve their problem. Omi, being the God Ram's follower, does not eat at Ali's house, but later he eats a banana. The Godhara riot gives a historical and realistic touch to the novel.

The writer also describes the condition of government schools. In India, government schools lag behind the private schools and colleges. Ishaan tells the budget of cricket materials to the Principal of Kendriya Vidyalaya. The principal, after hearing from Ishaan, says that their school

cannot afford cricket materials as they do not get enough funds for school and sports. She depicts the pitiful condition of the school and says, "Do you know half our classrooms leak in the rain. Should we get shiny balls or fix the leaks"(3MML,131). As per the title *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, Govind makes three mistakes in his life. The first mistake is that the shop which he books at Navrangpura, by giving advance money, collapses due to the earthquake. The second mistake is manmade and caused by the passion and lust for sex. He has sex with his best friend's sister.

The third mistake is related to Ali. During the Godhara riot, Hindus started killing Muslims. Bittoo mama wants to take revenge on his son, Dhiraj, by killing Ali, a Muslim boy, and for that, he attacks Ali with a Trishul. Govind makes a second delay while saving Ali, and one of the trishul's angles pierces into Ali's wrist. The novelist's main concern in the novel is to depict the aims of modern Indian youths and to study the effects of religious politics on society and the after-effects of the Godhara riot in Gujarat. The author is well acquainted with the political and social conditions of Gujarat state as he stayed there. He delineates different incidents in a credible manner such as an earthquake that shook the whole of Gujarat in 2001, the love story between tutor and student, religious politics, the Godhara riot and its after effects, and three friends' journey to Goa and Australia. The narrative technique is quite interesting. The characters seem real with respect to the society. The ways of describing the situations and the words used for them are of day-to-day spoken

language. Conversation between mother and son, tutor and student, the havoc caused by the earthquake and after-effects of the Godhara riot,

After all, it can be said that Chetan Bhagat, in his novel, *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, has tried to present the realistic situations happening in Indian day-to-day life. In the novel, the author stresses realistic things like family conflict, Communal harmony, Political and religious crisis, Hindu-Muslim relations, and the before and after effects of the Godhara riot. Govind, Ishaan, Omi, and Vidya speak like real people, not like merely bookish characters. Bhagat is successful in bringing a realistic look to the novel by describing the Godhara riot and Hindu-Muslim relations. New readers who don't know the literary language can also enjoy the writing style of Chetan Bhagat. Bhagat has succeeded here in describing all the things

in a beautiful manner. He has also succeeded in keeping the readers stuck to the novel up to the end.

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