



Negotiations between Popular Fiction, Media and Capitalism in Chetan Bhagat's Fiction

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ABSTRACT

The publishing industry has been driven by market forces and largely based on consumerism which is always conditioned by the profit motive. Market mechanisms and various marketing strategies have dominated the production and distribution of popular novels. The last decade has witnessed a proliferation of Popular Fiction throughout the world. There has been changes in reading habits as well. A report on Market Figures from the UK National Literary Trust reveals that there are more people reading for pleasure than ever before. At this point popular Fiction has its market and is by no means negligible. In India, Popular Fiction is relatively a recent phenomenon. In Indian scenario, Chetan Bhagat has emerged as the most important popular fiction writer. Many forces, like, media, capitalistic players etc. help in propagating Chetan Bhagat as the favourite popular fiction writer of India and in turn they reap the dividends as well. In this paper, the nexus existing between popular fiction, media and capitalism will closely be analysed.

KEY TERMS: Popular Fiction, Publishing, Capitalism, Media, Profit, Commodification



The Popular fiction has developed all through by the commitments from various Indian dialects. The language and famous fiction achieved development by experiencing various periods of improvement. The tales were dependably in the general public, in legends and old stories. The term “popular fiction” has been defined in a number of ways. **In New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society (2005)**, the word popular has the following distinct use: ‘Something that is widespread and well-liked by many people; Popular to mean the mass media imposed on people by commercial interest; Popular used to describe a culture made by the people for themselves’. Mainstream fiction has been characterized from various perspectives in Western English-language analysis in the course of the last 50 years. Well known fiction is characterized by what it isn't ‘writing’. It is for the most part characterized by its diverge from abstract novel. While artistic fiction focuses to reflect the human condition, prominent fiction focuses to charm, engage, rush and solace the perusers. Most pundits straightforwardly or verifiably hold fast to the accompanying cases: whereas—literature is unconcerned with the commercial center, unique and mind boggling, prominent fiction is basic, erotic, misrepresented, energizing, and equation based. Artistic scholars invest decades struggling with each sentence, while type hacks produce another soft cover every year. Famous fiction is characterized by a wide and shifted readership that has a place with an average or lowbrow class. The base of the word 'mainstream' originates from a Latin word 'popularis', from populus 'individuals'. It begins from a legitimate and political term that initially implied - having a place with the general population. Be that as it may, in its chronicled move to present day utilization the word currently signifies 'well- Introduction, enjoyed', "conveys a solid pejorative sense identifying with its ramifications of “selling out to pick up support”. (Williams, 198). A prominent novel as indicated by J A. Cuddon is the one that has wide readership having a place with center or "tacky" classification.

Contemporary world is driven by the Corporate Sector. What we are witnessing at the present time is that humans have become malleable and hackable. Their choice pattern has been



recognized, hacked and manufactured in the firms. Even though the emergence of MNCs, Supermarkets and Big Bazaars seem to have provided more choices, they in reality have limited human freedom. This boom in the democratization of markets has drastically altered the literary world as well. The definition of literature under the given present scenario has radically changed. People have been turned into mere consumers. This has changed the notion of what art is from the classical liberal humanist notion to a one where it is looked upon as any other product of the market meant to be consumed. The grand alliance of this capitalist 'big-bang' has largely extended, changed and altered the borders of literature in India as well. It is intriguing that the literature which used to be the handiwork of geniuses, which had noble ambitions, has been pushed back by the onslaught of this capitalistic and consumerist culture. This has given birth to an alternative discourse, which on the one hand subverts the traditional canonical idea of literature and at the same time taken up the popular imagination for the discussion. This alternate or parallel discourse is 'popularly' called as Popular Fiction.

Popular fiction is relatively a recent phenomenon in India. During the early 1990s, the names that mattered in the Indian Novel in English were confined to Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, R K.Narayan, Khushwant Singh and others.. With the gradual passage of time and a sudden shift in the economic landscape, observers of Indian writing in English noticed a dramatic change in the literary scene. An unprecedented exposure and accessibility to the global publications (including books, lifestyle and fashion magazines), along with international films and television programs, paved the way for a new kind of fiction called "popular fiction". A grand example of popular fiction in Indian context is Chetan Bhagat. According to a New York article, "Mr.Bhagat might not be another Vikram Seth or Arundhati Roy, but he has authentic claims to be one of the voices of generation of middle class Indian youth facing the choices and frustrations that came with the prospect of growing wealthy". [Greenlees; 2008]



“Chetan is the only author in Indian history who has launched a book with a pre-order success which is historic. When we released it, the pre-order number was 20 times more than the recent Harry Potter pre-order number. This gives you an indication of the success .The combined sales of Chetan Bhagat’s books across the last 9 books has been upwards of 10 million copies... This has never happened before in Indian history. Chetan Bhagat has been translated in 20 languages worldwide.(Kapish Mehra, *One Indian Girl* Book Launch; Viralbollywood, Oct 2, 2016). According to the press reports, Bhagat’s novel ‘*2 States*’ sells a copy every 20 seconds and is only outperformed by his previous bestseller,*The 3 Mistakes of My Life*. This, according to *The Guardian*, “sells a copy every 17 seconds”.These facts gives us the idea of the extreme popularity of Chetan Bhagat in the popular imagination. His books have sold flighty three million duplicates, making him India's top rated writer right now. Contemporary white collar class Indian stresses around globalization turn around broad view of developing Westernization among youth and youthful grown-ups and the danger of defilement of these posture. Dynamically, significant partnerships in created nations have set up BPO divisions in creating nations, allowed by headways in data and correspondence innovations. India is the significant center point of such activities, a wonder which has been helped by the advancement of the economy since 1991. To a great deal, the call focus has turned into the image of India's rapidly globalizing economy. While conventional India dozes, a dynamic populace of exceedingly talented, expressive expert's works as the night progressed, working on U S time under made-up American nom de plumes. They imagine recognition with a culture and atmosphere they have never experienced, gain pay rates that their seniors couldn't have envisioned, however stilla division of what an American would make, and appreciate a way of life that is a mixed drink of untimely luxuriousness and synthetic Westernization.

The quick rise in the production has given path for a more competitive marketplace. It has, thus, become imperative for publishing houses to find and produce best sellers simply to survive in the increasingly competitive marketplace. As a result of this, thousands and



thousands of new titles are found struggling for places in bookshelves, in departmental stores and in the best seller lists. To withstand with 'short shelf lives', the novelists are given pressure to come up with works of fiction regularly and publishers are compelled to adopt different innovative marketing strategies which resulted in the commodification of books. Publishing industry is now much more consumer and market oriented. The commercialization has, in fact, revitalized the literary sectors in book trading also. The book market is now flooded with popular fiction, entertainment books, lifestyle magazines and a huge variety of other genres and they now play the role of feeding sources to the book industry. Publishers have even started to operate other cultural media industries. The content owned by the publishers is re-used by other cultural industries like film and video games which intensifies the process of cross-media synergies resulting in a maximum profit for publishing industries. Claire Squires observes, "Books can be urged into filous (and vice versa), Merchandise is produced alongside television shows and spin-off books, and electronic games give print or audio-based characters repurposed form of life "(24). Angus Phillips and Giles Clark have rightly said in their *Inside Book Publishing*, that the book trade has become "part of the larger media leisure industry by which not only the patterns of ownership has completely changed but also the synergy between book publishing industry and other leisure products and the procedures". One of the main disturbing features of commercialization is that the market is turning literary works into consumable goods. Books have, now-a-days, been regarded as a commodity based cultural artefact. Literature is the study of content and cultural value whereas publishing is a business, which not only focuses on the cultural value of books but also on the financial success and the money that can be made from it. Commodification which has become an inevitable subject today goes hand in hand with consumerism which in turn connects itself with reading culture; now reading may also be treated as consuming. It is absolutely correct to say that the twenty first century common man lives in a consumeristic society dominated by commodification. Commodification, which has become totally a cultural force, is the process of changing things into object for sale. Every individual can now envisage the encroachment of commodification in almost every



aspect of life. Pearsall and Trumble define commodity as “an article or raw material that can be brought and sold”. Noble defines commodity as, “Something grown, produced or manufactured for exchange in market” (291). Joanna Pitman clearly explains how a novel is treated as a commodity. According to him, “The clear cut genre novel allows booksellers to think in analogies, and that can be a helpful marketing device. Books are, after all, as much as expressions of ideas and imagination, and the more alike they are, the easier they are to sell in large quantities” (16-17). The shift in publishing practice and the change in book retail environment have influenced the production and the acceptance or the reception of the novel in the twentieth century. The publishing industry has thus commercialized literature and the writers have become mere ‘cultural workers’. As a result, by the mid 1980-s, a huge market for popular fiction had been created thus offering readers light entertainment. The economic reforms over the past two decades have transformed the way the books are marketed. The publishers, the book sellers, the retailers and the other agencies that are associated with the marketing of popular fiction are responsible to create a cultural connotation for these pulp fiction readers through negotiations with the marketplace.

Popular fiction writes and sells what is popular, recent, the trend and the fashion. And it is being sold at an astonishing speed and with a hot fervor in India. Seeing the mind boggling currency of popular fiction, a conscious mind gets pricked to ponder over that what makes popular fiction so popular in *India*? Upon its examination, it could be deciphered that a well-knit mechanism and machinery is working for its propellant. Upon analyzing this phenomenon, it gets uncovered that a covert relationship underplays between popular fiction, media and different capitalistic forces. It could be seen that during any of Chetan Bhagat book release, the corporate media creates a hype in the market about the book. This sensation creation in turn drives the pulp consumers into the market who grab the novel and read it out and feel pleased. During this whole enterprise it is not only the popular fiction or its writer who gets paid off rather a well-thought-out reciprocal relationship is working underneath it.



The media and entertainment companies and the different property magnates in turn reap its dividends also. Thus in the processing of popular fiction, a whole capitalistic structural system is at work. A typical example to understand this is: On October 1st, 2016, during the book release of Chetan Bhagat's seventh fictional novel, *One Indian Girl*, the *Viralbollywood Entertainment Limited* company organized the release function in *Oberoi Mall*. During the release, the Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut was also invited who had a live question-answer session with Chetan Bhagat. The *Viralbollywood Entertainment Private Limited*, which organised the show, is a media and entertainment industry. The *Oberoi Mall*, inside which the book launch took place, is one of the biggest malls based in Goregaon on the Western Express Highway, Mumbai. This mall is owned by Vikas Oberoi, the property magnate, who has been considered as the billionaire of India. The special guest from *Rupa Publications* was Kapish Mehra. Mr. Mehra is the managing director of *Rupa Publications Company*, which has publishing rights of all the Chetan Bhagat books. Now if we look carefully at these different persons and companies, an interesting and intertwining web of Publishing Companies, Media & Entertaining Companies, and Business Corporates, can be seen at play. The Oberoi Mall, wherein the book release was held, gets the huge amount of mall booking rental charges; Viralbollywood Entertainment obtained the organizing charges and a well-wrought movie script in the near future; and Rupa Publications tapped in the flooded purchasing public for its new book also.

CONCLUSION:

Hence a perfect win-win equation and a 'profiteering capitalistic order manufactures the tastes and drives of society. Thus from all these factual details, it becomes obvious that how the big capitalistic forces are controlling and filtering the information and feeding it to the public the way they prefer to. So, under this mirage of fiction and literature, a full on money minting business is on the go, controlling and colonizing the imaginations of masses.



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