

Voice of the Voiceless with special reference to Chetan Bhagat's
Three Mistakes of My Life

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ABSTRACT:

Chetan's third book, *Three Mistakes of My Life* presents the life of three youngsters Omi, Ishaan and Govind, who thrive to settle down in a small-town in Gujarat. The novel revolves around these characters where Chetan created interesting actions and realistic plots in his novel. Govind a business acumen, Ishaan a passionate cricket and Omi a typical religious person brought up with no inclination of becoming a priest are the three central characters of the novel. Another important character in this novel is Ali, one of the local Muslim boy, who has a magical ability in cricket. On seeing his talent, Ishaan decides to train the 12-year old cricketer. They endure great pains and plans to train Ali as an international cricketer. The plot also focuses how their ordinary people's lives get affected by the political and religious disasters. This paper aims to investigate how the oppressed one's dreams crash into pieces by unexpected events and how the oppressed rebuild one's dreams. Chetan Bhagat has placed the novel in the era, when Ahmadabad suffered with a nightmare of an earthquake and riots. The novel connects well with the youth of India at present and how they were treated by the political powers. Many of their dreams were shattered and their talents were unnoticed.

Key words: Subaltern, post-colonialism, political mobilization, domination, religious division.

There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard

-Arundhati Roy.

The term subaltern was coined by Antonio Gramsci, notably through his work on cultural hegemony, which identified the groups that are excluded from a society's established institutions and thus denied the means by which people have a voice in their society. The term subaltern is also derived in an "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak :New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa as:

Subaltern is not just a classy word for "oppressed", for [the] Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie.... In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern-a space of difference. Now, who would say that's just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It's not subaltern.... Many people want to claim subalternity. ((de Kock, Leon 45-46)

Chetan Bhagat's *Three Mistakes of My Life* describes the life of three youngsters in the city of Ahmedabad. The novel traces the story of the three friends, who are struggling to follow their goals and passions in the locale of earth quake, politics and communal violence. The novel puts forth the typical life of Ahmedabad, where Chetan Bhagat has characterized the people who have their margins inside the society as majority and minority people, socially outcaste people based on faith and religion, who were known as dalit-which means to crack, split, broke and crash. When the subalterns dream to sprout in this society, there come the clash between the superiors and subalterns. Their voices have been denied in this class society. The characters

portrayed are young, ambitious and passionate towards their goals; having the same moral, social and religious dilemmas as many of the youngsters of today's India.

Chetan Bhagat has explicated closely on the mental agony of the subalterns and their living standards. Govind, the main protagonist of the novel and inner voice of Chetan Bhagat probes thing that has happened in the small neighborhood town. Once he says, "I want to stop the gossip theories people come up with about other people" (p.8). The writer has faithfully portrayed the victim of the subaltern in his work. Chetan Bhagat makes use of real life Gujarat riot incidents to express the present pathetic condition of India. He has portrayed clearly of how people are marginalized by their religion and caste in this independent society. This paper highlights two events happened in this novel to depict the ideas of how the dreams of the subaltern have been shattered by the so called upper class people or superiors.

It is understood that in olden days the superiors colonized the subalterns land, wealth and labor. But now, the upper class people or wealthy superiors confined the thoughts and emotions of the oppressed people. They were marginalized and they were never given a chance to attain their goals or ambition in their life. Here the characters like Govind, Ishaan and Ali, who are bestowed with talent but are totally denied by the society. They were marginalized by their religion and wealth.

Govind hails from a poor family of Ahmadabad. He is the bread winner of his family and leads their living by running a small homemade food shop with the help of his mother. He also manages his finances by taking tuitions to the students in Maths. Ishaan, another protagonist of the novel, is not interested in studies but has a strong passion towards cricket. Ishaan has left Nation Defense Academy in order to chase his desire. Omi, another protagonist of the novel rose from a staunch Hindu Brahmin family. Though his father is the priest of a temple, Omi neglected

the traditions of his family, as he wants to escape of becoming a priest. At one point, Govind decides to install sports shop in their locality with his friends. Omi's parents helped them by allotting a small place within the temple. Govind saves money from their business and pays an initial installment for a new shop in Navrangpura Mall which was later collapsed in an earthquake.

Omi's maternal uncle Bitto mama, a devotee of Parekhjithe, a leader and also a member of the Hindu Political Party often visits their shop. He often introduced them to some politicians and invited them to his political meetings. Chetan Bhagat skillfully handles another character Ali, a twelve year boy who has a great talent in cricket. His special talent is to hit sixes at every ball. Ishaan was surprised to see his talent. He decided to take care of him and wished to train him as a successful national team player. At first, he approached Omi to take the responsibility of his diet as he is a malnourished. Initially, Omi refused his proposal as he feels that he is a Muslim and son of Bitoo mama's arch rival - a leader of secular party. Later, Omi agrees to assist Ali but keeps it all as a secret. After significant training there is perfection in Ali's performance. Ishaan wishes to take him to a match between India and Australia, where he introduces him to some influential person who could help Ali to become a successful cricketer. This idea is well expressed by him when Ishaan states "I will teach the best player in Belrampur. That kid has serious potential (p.56)".

It is noted that the first event to describe the highest of brutality of elevated society over the subaltern was Godhra sabotage incident and the riots happened in Gujarat. During the riot they killed many lives of the oppressed. Bitoo mama stabs Ali's father and then along with his supporters reaches the building, where demanding for Ali so that they can kill him too. Govind, Ishaan and Omi tried to control the mob. But the mobs set fire to the building and blow up the

cylinder and entered the building. Accidentally, Omi tries to save Ali, but unfortunately, he was killed by Bitoo mama. Then he had Ali in his grip. Govind failed to act immediately to save Ali by a split second and Bitoo mama cuts Ali's wrist which made heavy blood loss. In the end, Bitoo mama dies in the fight. Govind promises to pay for Ali's treatment. Ali gets saved by surgery which turns him to become a successful cricketer.

Homi Bhabha, a key thinker within postcolonial thought accentuates the prominence of social power relations in his work through the definition of 'subaltern' groups as: "oppressed, minority groups, whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group: subaltern social groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who has hegemonic power"(p.). Thus the lower class people who were economically down are denied to sprout among the majority group. The growth and talents of the minority group are not recognized and accepted in this independent soil. Many of their talents are being degraded, dishonored and crumbled by the higher authorities. Even in the same religion they were sullied by the caste system.

It is understood that Ishaan cherishes a dream which is hard to be achieved in India like many other Indian youths. His desire to become a cricketer in Indian national cricket team has been shattered in the novel because of the rationality among the politicians and authorities. He was not given the chance. His madness in cricket is explained in the following words, "to be in the top eleven of a country of a billion people was in many ways an impossible dream, and even though Ish was top class in Belrampur, he was no Tendulkar" (p.12). Govind here echoes and becomes the representative of the disappointment youth in India, where their talents and qualification have been excluded.

Through these incidents, Chetan Bhagat clearly picturizes the realistic representation of the selection system in India in sports and also jobs in public sectors. Cricket is the most loveable game of many Indians. Every child in India plays cricket. Only a few dream of being in the Indian Cricket Team comes true. Moreover, sports are not given much priority and they do not have much scope in their career in cricket. Trillions play cricket and only millions of those practices scrupulously and desire to get into Indian Cricket Team. Among them, only eleven players find place in the Indian Cricket Team. The remaining huge mass does not have any career options. Their life time efforts and practices do not help them to make their living. But the opportunities are narrowed in the field of sports. Consequently, millions of such youths have to end up with a career that is not in harmony with their interest and temperament.

Ishaan, being a victim of subalternity battles tries hard to raise Ali as an International cricketer. He suffered the pain of dejection and as a result he coaches Ali to make him successful in his desire. The politicians or the economically high group finds no time to listen to the desires of the subalterns. Their talents and labor are wasted, and they are not given chances to chase their passion. In the beginning, Ishaan persuades Ali with box of chocolates, marbles and a new sports cap to involve in cricket coaching. Ishaan concern for Ali's cricket career is outward on his saying, "No way, the selection people will destroy him. If they reject him, he is going to be disappointed forever. If they select him, they will make him play useless matches for several years. He will go for the selections, but only the big one – the national team. (p.99)". The words of Ishaan clearly reflect his passion and his regret for not being selected. He feels as follows:

I love this game but, but have no gifts. I pushed myself – woke up at 4 a.m. every day, training for hours, practice and more practice. I gave up studies, and now that I think of it, even my future. And then comes this marble player

who has this freakish gift. I could never see the ball and whack it like Ali.

Why Govind? (p.97)".

Ishaan's profound love for Ali is obvious at the time of communal riots, when Bitoo Mama and his followers come to end Ali's life and he battles with them by taking risk of his own life. Through this novel, it is understood that how the dreams of the subalterns are shattered and how they overcome their pressures and difficulties in order to withstand in the society. To put it in a nutshell, the novelist clearly explains whether making mistakes can be fatal and the dark reality of life can override the passion of an individual's dreams.

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