



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

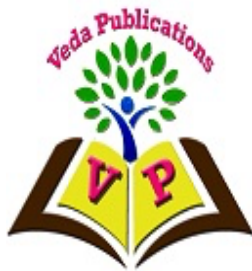


## EXPLORING URBAN REALITIES : A STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION THROUGH CHETAN BHAGAT'S NOVELS

Ravi kumar

*(Research Scholar, Department of English, Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda.)*Email : [26ravikumar91@gmail.com](mailto:26ravikumar91@gmail.com)Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2025.12109>

### ABSTRACT

**Article history:**

Received on : 25-02-2025

Accepted on : 05-03-2025

Available online: 28-03-2025

India is commonly perceived as a cultural repository, and numerous Western countries have embraced Indian culture while achieving significant material success, yet have failed to preserve the spiritual development promoted by India for centuries. Contemporary Indian novelists, such as Chetan Bhagat, often set stories in metropolitan cities that reflect the urban lifestyle of the youth. Urban lifestyles encourage a materialistic approach to life, which can lead to a decadence in people's sensitivity. The depiction of metropolitan cities and peripheral venues, such as public parks, call centres, and coffee houses, can be found in many of Bhagat's novels. These works have mirrored youth culture in big cities and have had a profound impact on the present generation. Chetan Bhagat's novels have shifted the setting from rural regions of the earlier novels to the metropolis in most of his works. The present study examines the depiction of urban culture in the novels of Chetan Bhagat.

**Keywords:** *Chetan Bhagat, Urban lifestyle, Youth Culture, Popular Fiction*



In the domain of Indian English novels, the profound reflection of traditional social values within the literary narratives crafted by Trimurti-Mulk Raj Anand, RK Narayan, and Raja Rao holds considerable psychological influence over readers. The selection of rural settings and portrayal of pastoral characters in these novels contribute to a heightened emotional connection for readers. The vivid depiction of village life establishes a bond with cultural roots, offering readers a snapshot of the microcosmic world of a typical Indian village. Through their narratives, Trimurti not only conveyed the ethos of Indian society but also adeptly captured the intricacies of both village and city lifestyles within the framework of the Indian value system.

The literary works of these esteemed authors extend beyond a mere portrayal of rural life, encompassing the urban landscape as well. This dual focus enables readers to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Indian society. By depicting the rural-urban continuum, the authors navigate diverse social landscapes, presenting a multifaceted portrait of the Indian way of life. These novels have become a treasure trove of cultural richness, exploring the intricacies of societal norms, interpersonal relationships, and the dynamics between tradition and modernity. Thus, the fictional works of Trimurti serve as cultural artefacts that transcend the mere narrative of lifestyle. They offer a portal into the heart of the Indian value system, capturing its essence in all of its diversity. These literary contributions not only preserve traditional values but also provide readers with a timeless and insightful exploration of the evolving tapestry of Indian society.

The industrial revolution and urbanization resulted in a significant alteration of lifestyle, which became evident in the literary works of the era. The proliferation of novels began to depict the characteristics of urban lifestyles. These novels were designed for mass appeal and often compromised traditional social values. Contemporary novelists, such as Chetan Bhagat and others of his ilk, have succeeded in writing novels that focus on city-centric narratives and portray a deformed form of the Indian traditional value system.

The cultural ethos of India, characterized by a way of life that values harmony with nature, is increasingly absent in many contemporary novels. A prevailing trend among contemporary novelists involves the pervasive adoption of hybrid cultures, which often supplants traditional lifestyles. This thematic shift is exemplified by the works of influential authors such as Chetan Bhagat, who frequently explore the dynamics of urban regions and ultra-modern lifestyles. Departing from the cultural richness found in the natural environment, Bhagat's narratives frequently unfold in metropolitan settings, weaving plots that centre around love angles and the complexities of couples navigating life in bustling cities.

Chetan Bhagat, a prominent author in contemporary Indian literature, refrains from portraying the traditional village lifestyle that was rooted in the natural environment. This trend is also evident among several other contemporary novelists who have adopted a similar approach. Authors such as Durjoy Datta, Nikita Singh, Ravinder Singh, Anuja Chauhan, and many others have opted to focus on an urban-centric narrative, depicting the shift from



conventional living to the hybrid culture that is prevalent in modern society.

The aforementioned novelists exhibit a distinct perspective in their fictional works that pertain to the representation of urban lifestyles. The works of Durjoy Datta are frequently set in prominent metropolises such as Delhi and Mumbai, and delve into themes such as love, relationships, and career ambitions. He captures the challenges faced by young adults as they strive to carve out a niche in a fast-paced urban environment. Similarly, Nikita Singh's novels are also set in major cities and explore themes such as love, friendship, and self-discovery. She investigates the intricate dynamics between young adults as they endeavour to navigate the complexities of urban life. Ravinder Singh, who is also influenced by Chetan Bhagat's ideologies, writes novels that deal with themes such as heartbreak, loss, and second chances within the context of urban relationships. He employs the backdrop of big cities to emphasize the pressures and expectations associated with modern relationships. Additionally, another novelist has explored city life in her works, which are characterized by humour and aim to investigate the intricacies of contemporary urban existence. She depicts the struggles of young adults as they attempt to reconcile tradition and modernity and grapple with the cultural clashes that can arise in an urban setting.

However, these writers have employed urban lifestyles as a means of illuminating the distinct obstacles and prospects associated with residing in a major metropolis. Through the examination of themes that hold particular resonance for young adults grappling with the intricacies of contemporary

urban living, they employ relatable characters and present-day settings to engage the reader. Chetan Bhagat, a well-known and widely read contemporary novelist, has achieved widespread popularity by crafting stories that are deeply ingrained in the urban lifestyle of India. It is evident from his literary works that he prefers to set up most of his novels in metropolitan cities, using the urban setting as a realistic backdrop for his stories. One such example is his novel *Five Point Someone*, in which Bhagat skilfully utilises the urban setting of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Delhi to provide a rich and thematically exploratory narrative. The IIT campus has become more than just a physical setting ; it functions as a microcosm of broader urban experience, particularly within educational institutions :

Indian youth is reflected through his characters. Bhagat's focus is on Metro Generation and the changing Scenario of modern India. It is true that IIT, Delhi and IIM, Ahmadabad helped him to construct a comprehensive idiom of the life of youths struggling against the situations that are responsible for perversions and sickness. (Kumar)

In "Five Point Someone" Bhagat examines the difficulties experienced by students in the highly competitive academic atmosphere of one of India's top engineering colleges, located in the urban setting of IIT Delhi.

In his urban-set novel, Bhagat presents a narrative that not only provides entertainment but also offers readers profound insight into the lives of students grappling with the intricacies of elite



educational institutions. This work illuminates the challenges faced by these characters, as they endeavour to harmonise academic obligations with the pursuit of personal satisfaction, thereby creating a storyline that resonates with numerous readers.

Chetan Bhagat's decision to incorporate urban settings in his works, such as *Five Point Someone*, is a deliberate one, intended to anchor his narratives in the reality of contemporary India. By delving into the urban landscape, Bhagat not only tackles universal themes, but also creates a platform for readers to empathise with the difficulties faced by individuals navigating the complexities of urban life, education, and societal expectations. This approach has been instrumental in garnering widespread appeal, and has positioned Bhagat as a literary figure adept at capturing the intricacies of urban existence within the Indian context:

Though Chetan Bhagat has chosen Delhi as a setting for both of his novels, which is similar to other metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, etc. Indian Youth Culture has not remained 'Indian' as such. Because of globalization in each and every domain youth- culture also drastically changed. They changed their styles, interests, attitudes, perspectives, language, habits, and attraction to high speed and effective communication technology like Ryan's scooter. (Jadhav)

In "One Night @ the Call Center", the author, Bhagat, employs the urban backdrop of a call center in Gurgaon to delve into themes such as technological advancement, globalization, and cultural identity. The novel provides an insight into

the lives of six call centre employees and demonstrates how their personal and professional lives intersect in a rapidly evolving urban setting. The novel is replete with references to the call centre workstations, where employees receive calls and resolve the issues of customers:

It was one of my weird calls of the night. The caller was from Virginia and was having trouble defrosting his fridge. It took me four long minutes to figure out the reason. Turns out the caller was a 'big person', which is what Americans call fat people. Hence his fingers were too thick to turn the tiny knob in the fridge's compartment that would activate the defrosting mechanism. I suggested that he use a screwdriver or a knife. Fortunately, that solution worked after seven attempts. 'Thank you for calling Western Appliances, sir', I said and ended the call. (One night@ the call Center 92)

Chetan Bhagat, a prominent contemporary novelist known for his insightful examination of urban life in India, skilfully captures the essence of the most prevalent professional lifestyles in metropolitan cities. One such instance is his investigation of the call centre industry, which emerged as a flourishing and dynamic employment sector during a particular period. Bhagat's novels are greatly appreciated by the youth of metropolitan cities, who harbour a strong desire to work in call centres. During the peak of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) boom, call centres became not only workplaces but also symbols of aspiration for urban youth seeking attractive employment



opportunities. Bhagat's novels frequently depict the dreams, challenges, and experiences of individuals navigating the corporate world, particularly within the context of call centres. The youth aiming to join the BPO sector find a reflection of their ambitions, struggles, and aspirations in Bhagat's narratives, making them potential and eager readers of his novels. By intricately weaving the professional landscape of call centres into his stories, Bhagat not only entertains but also offers a relatable and authentic portrayal of the aspirations and dilemmas of a generation seeking success and identity in the dynamic urban professional sphere. His storytelling resonates with the experiences of those who sought to make their mark in the fast-paced, competitive world of call centres, making his novels a cultural mirror for the urban youth of that era.

In the urban setting, young people who have been exposed to the world beyond their homes often experience liberation from traditional Indian social and familial norms, particularly in matters of relationships between boys and girls. The metropolitan landscape provides a backdrop in which these youth are free from the constraints of conservative societal expectations. Unlike their counterparts in more rural or conventional settings, metropolitan youth typically enjoy a degree of autonomy that allows them to shape their lives according to their personal desires and aspirations. This newfound freedom extends beyond relationships and encompasses economic independence, with many being unburdened by the financial responsibilities of their parents. This economic emancipation further empowers them to pursue life on their own terms. In this environment,

conversations among metropolitan youth often reflect a frank and open discourse about subjects that might be considered taboo or obscene in more conservative contexts. The cosmopolitan nature of metropolitan life allows for more progressive and unrestrained dialogue, contributing to a milieu in which individuals feel liberated to express themselves freely without the weight of societal judgments or familial expectations.

In Bhagat's "2 States", the urban settings of Chennai and Delhi serve a vital function in revealing a narrative that delves into intricate themes such as intercultural relationships, family values, and regional disparities. The plot centres around a couple, Krish Malhotra from Delhi and Ananya Swaminathan from Chennai, who come from culturally diverse backgrounds and choose to wed. The urban environments of Chennai and Delhi are not mere backdrops, but integral components that play a crucial role in shaping the narrative and providing context for the characters' struggles.

The novel examines the complexities of intercultural relationships, focusing on the obstacles individuals encounter when attempting to overcome cultural barriers and establish a union through marriage. As embodiments of South and North India, Chennai and Delhi function as metaphorical miniatures of India's broader cultural variety. The urban settings provide a sophisticated investigation into how regional discrepancies can impact individuals' viewpoints and mould their worldviews.

Family values have emerged as a central motif as the protagonist's grapple with the expectations and prejudices of their respective families. The urban setting serves to heighten the tension between



traditional values and modern aspirations, with both Chennai and Delhi functioning as vibrant arenas where these conflicting forces come into contact. The depiction of familial expectations and the resulting tensions stemming from cultural disparities adds nuance to the narrative and resonates with the real-life challenges faced by numerous couples in intercultural relationships. Chetan Bhagat employs the urban setting to portray the disparate lifestyles, customs, and social mores of Chennai and Delhi. The cultural peculiarities of these cities are essential to the narrative, illustrating how the characters struggle to reconcile their diverse backgrounds. The urban environment, characterized by its rapid pace and cosmopolitan nature, serves as a setting in which the characters navigate their cultural differences and endeavour to establish a life together.

In short, "2 States" is a moving portrayal of intercultural relationships, set in the bustling cities of Chennai and Delhi. With deft craftsmanship, Bhagat creates a story that delves into the intricate web of family dynamics, cultural differences, and regional disparities. The urban settings play a pivotal role in the development of the characters and their relationships, presenting readers with a thought-provoking and insightful exploration of the complexities that arise from the intersection of love, culture, and family values.

"One Indian Girl", like his other novels, based on metro cities of India and the world. In these novel readers can have glimpses of world cities like Delhi, Hong Kong and New York. In the novel, readers find that the characters are working in different field based in the cities like software engineer, investment

bank, Goldman Sachs where Radhika Mehta, the protagonist works and another vibrant field of career.

Contemporary authors frequently depict urban landscapes in their novels, capturing the essence of ultra-modern lifestyles. These works often explore the intricacies of interpersonal relationships against the backdrop of a rapidly changing society. This shift in narrative provides readers with a contemporary perspective on the challenges of modern living, but also signifies a departure from India's traditional, nature-centric cultural values. It is evident that the works of Chetan Bhagat and other contemporary novelists exhibit a deliberate effort to grapple with India's dynamic cultural milieu. By setting their tales in urban settings and delving into the complexities of ultra-modern lifestyles, he offers a narrative that reflects the evolving preferences and challenges of contemporary Indian society. Nonetheless, this departure from previous narratives that once lauded the mutualistic association between individuals and the natural environment signifies a broader cultural shift towards hybridity and urbanization in the literary landscape.

## REFERENCES

- Bhagat, Chetan. *One Night at the Call Center: A Novel*. Ballantine Books, 2008.
- *One Indian Girl*. Rupa Publications India, 2016.
- *2 States: The Story Of My Marriage*. Rupa Publications India Pvt Limited, 2014.
- *Five Point Someone: What Not to Do at IIT, a Novel*. Rupa and Company, 2004.
- Jadhav, Arvind. "Representing Metropolitan Youth Culture: An Assessment of Chetan Bhagat's Five Point Someone and One Night @ the Call Center." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, vol. 12, no. 5, Oct. 2021.



Kumar, Dr. Amit. "Changing of Urban Youngsters, Their Language and Urban Reality of India in the Novels of Chetan Bhagat." KAAV INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LITERATURE& LINGUISTICS, vol. 2, no. 1, June 2015.

---