Literary engagement and social corruption: Chetan Bhagat's snapshots from contemporary India

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Abstract
Chetan Bhagat's fiction has often been misrepresented and branded as low literature because of the absence of complexity in its plots and the simple characterisation of the novels' protagonists. The paper intends to focus on Bhagat's choices both as a writer and as a public figure by examining his position between literature and politics. After a brief introduction to the current social climate in India, the paper will investigate how Chetan Bhagat's straightforward style actually hides a literary engagement with a socio-political purpose, that is the genuine narration and denunciation of the socio-economic conditions (and plagues) of Indian society. Bhagat's early novels highlight the inadequate interest the Indian government takes in young people and their future. In *One Night at the Call Centre* (2005) the author describes the growth of India as an emerging consumer society, but also a progressive criticism favouring a "New India" which should be created by students and young workers to contrast a globalised tendency to corruption. The attempt to realise that project is also narrated in his best-seller *Revolution 2020* (2009), as well as in his essay *What young India wants* (2012). These works embody and anticipate both the anti-corruption movement of Anna Hazare (2011) and the lure of Narendra Modi's New India project. The article seeks to explore the links between these various aspects of the Indian political scenario and Bhagat's works; as a result, the last part of the paper will focus also on his readership and his evolution as a writer, from his initial social engagement to his more recent search for celebrity in the mediatic arena, in order to investigate how those two apparently contradictory goals can coexist in his literary production.

Key-words: postcolonial literature, New India, social/literary engagement, Chetan Bhagat.

1. Introduction

The complicated intrigues of the Indian socio-political condition are of great interest in Chetan Bhagat's early literary production,

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especially in his best-sellers *One Night at the Call Centre* (2005) and *Revolution 2020* (2009), as well as the more recent essay *What young India wants* (2012). In *Revolution 2020*, the fluorescent pink A3-sized pamphlet written by the protagonist Raghav Kashyap and entitled "Because enough is enough" seems quite exhaustive in explaining the contemporary Indian situation:

> What do you say about a society whose top leaders are the biggest crooks? What do you do in a system where almost anyone with power is corrupt? India has suffered enough. From childhood we are told India is a poor country. Why? […] Does an Indian farmer not work hard? Does an Indian student not study? Do we not want to do well? Why, why are we then doomed to be poor? […] We have to start a revolution, a revolution that resets our corrupt system. […] It could take ten years. I call it Revolution 2020, the year in which it will happen, the movement that will finally shake the muck of India. (Bhagat, 2009: 205-206)

Bhagat's works originate from that troubled Indian atmosphere where, at the beginning of the new millennium, social demands and violent struggles for the recognition of equal rights started to spread all over the subcontinent. The 1990s had been a period of important economic and social reforms, especially after 1991 and the further development of Rajiv Gandhi's "pro-business agenda" realised, after the Prime Minister's murder the same year, as a continuation of the economic reforms prefigured in the 1980s by the politics of both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv himself. His successors managed to bring into effect a series of major measures; moreover, by 2000, even the ultraconservative BJP party "was an enthusiastic advocate for a continuing process of economic liberalization that offered clear advantages to some of its supporters in the urban middle class" (Corbridge 2009: 312). However, the call for economic and social developments has involved just the middle and the upper classes, thus excluding most of the population.

Chetan Bhagat was born into a traditional, bourgeois Punjabi family. His father served as a lieutenant colonel in the Indian army while his mother worked in the agricultural department of the government. He attended the Indian Institute of Technology and worked with Goldman Sachs as an investment banker before giving in to his passion for writing; as a result, he has never experienced the troubles and difficulties of a lower-class family. Nonetheless, his novels seek to

demonstrate that even the middle-class younger generation may be forced to handle disadvantaged conditions and to accept lowlier jobs. The character of Raghav in *Revolution 2020* and the workers of *One Night at the Call Centre* have to face enormous difficulties in their working lives, sometimes succumbing to a corrupt system. Bhagat offers his support and a "sympathetic ear of relief" (Dhar 2013: 167) to his readers who share the same experiences. His fiction has, therefore, the ambitious aim of describing the turmoil following the reforming era of the 1980s and 1990s: through a series of young and dynamic characters who try to react to the climate of corruption typical of changing societies, Bhagat deals with the exploitation of engineering students or underpaid operators of decentralised call centres. Despite his incredible commercial success, his uncomplicated plots and his recent efforts to become television's "pop-star writer"[1] have induced many scholars and readers, as well as the so-called "social-media haters", to dismiss the Indian author. His straightforward narrative style serves, however, the intention of narrating the multifaceted economic and social conditions (and plagues) of his own society, and the conflict between the social system and youth culture. Bhagat is also interested in examining the emerging consumer society in India as well as the changing tastes of the younger generation, also in literature, as part of global consumerism (Venkatesh and Swamy 1994: 207). Despite the major developments and increasing measures carried out by the new government, Indian society still suffers from "substantial inequalities in education, employment, and income based on caste and ethnicity" (Desai and Kulkarni 2008: 245). Bhagat has discussed these significant themes in his own works, thus anticipating the main actions of protest of the recent years, like the Anna Hazare's movement with its denunciation of Narendra Modi's "New India".

2. From Chetan Bhagat's popular fiction to Anna Hazare's movement for a "New India"

Chetan Bhagat is the progenitor of commercial fiction in India. Aarti Dua pointed out that "It is not as if Indian writers never

[1] He was the judge in the TV dancing show "Nach Baliye 7" in 2015, thus instigating a plethora of cruel – and sometimes exaggerated – accusations and criticisms against him and his total absence of qualification in dancing.

penned commercial fiction before. […] but this never developed into a body of work" (Dua 2009), as it happened thanks to Chetan Bhagat. The history of popular fiction includes a series of theoretical approaches generally developed within the western literary tradition: from Frank and Queenie Leavis's Cambridge English School of the 1920s (1932) and the structuralist line of investigation of authors like Umberto Eco (1965) and Tzvetan Todorov (1977) to the postmodern and cultural approaches that have focused on popular genres such as science-fiction, racial and ethnic representations, and feminist novels, the so-called "popular art" has often been depicted as part of a personal style, a fruitful manifestation of culture created by and for the people (Murphy 2017: 95). Moreover, the same notion of "popular" is usually associated with something which can be enjoyed by many readers, "belonging to the people" as Raymond Williams properly stated in his *Keywords* in 1976. The definition seems in contrast to the concept of literary "classic" texts as a set of works that transcend time and space, constantly creating new meanings. However, considering those definitions from a recent perspective, "while today's popular success might not be appreciated for its narrative style or linguistic accomplishments in a hundred years' time, it can then, nevertheless, still tell new generations about what our society cherished, celebrated or felt strongly about at a certain point in time" (Berberich 2015: 4). This is exactly what Bhagat's fiction has managed to do in India for his readers; and in this regard, literature and popular fiction can be considered simply as two different categories of prose fiction (Gelder 2004: 42) equally stimulating and of vital importance in order to investigate the complexities of the world.

In India, Chetan Bhagat was unquestionably responsible for developing the popular fiction genre. The protagonists of this literary category are the "Affluent Urbanites" in Pamela Shurmer-Smith's words (2000: 29), young people who belong to the large, emerging Indian cities. Bhagat's novels deal with their social environments and inhabitants. His works have sold as well as J.K. Rowling's international success *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* (2005), signifying a noteworthy turning point in the establishment of Indian popular fiction (Gupta 2012: 47), even though they have never been enthusiastically reviewed and received by literary scholars. A significant feature of popular fiction is the fact that it helps to

create first-time readers; and several articles and reviews on Bhagat's works showed that a larger portion of his hundreds of thousands of readers were first-time readers, who gradually moved on to read a different, more sophisticated kind of literature. "It is a continuing process, you see," says bestselling thriller writer that he can relate to, he [sic] is elevated to the next level. It is not going to be the end, but a mere beginning of his tryst with reading" (*The Indian Express* 2017). The problem with Chetan Bhagat's fiction is that his reputation as a writer in India has crumbled fast over the past few years. Expectations about him even grew in 2018, when he signed an agreement with Amazon for his next six novels – or better "romances", as many journalists refer to – but this led to a series of merciless criticisms.

And yet, his career as a writer had begun under the auspices of a celebrated reader: in 2011, with nobody to talk to during his nineteen-day *maun vrat* (silence strike), even the non-violent social activist Anna Hazare[2] declared that he "used all that free time to read Chetan Bhagat's latest novel 'Revolution 2020', and was very impressed by Bhagat's grasp of the issues of corruption and his ability to communicate quick-fix solutions in an endearing and simple writing style" (2011). That admission of interest by Hazare was an important pole of attraction for new readers; moreover, it is interesting to observe the connection between Hazare's protest and Bhagat's novel. The latter became a sort of sponsor for the anti-corruption movement so that Hazare's spokespersons revealed that "Bhagat is the best writer to capture Anna's weighty ideas

[2] Anna Hazare is a veteran activist who started a hunger and silence strike in 2011 "for a second freedom struggle. The first had been against the British, now it was time to fight corruption, he said" (Burke 2011). His protest began after the accusations of corruption linked to the organisation of the Commonwealth Games in 2010 and the passing of the "Lokpal Bill" in 2011 (Varughese 2013: 15). Thousands of people got involved and supported Hazare's fight. His real name is Kisan Baburao Hazare (Anna is a local honorific for an older brother). In his early teens, he left Ralegan Siddhi, the remote village where his family was living, for Mumbai, where he sold flowers. In 1963, Hazare joined the army and served for 15 years. His modest origins have made him and his protest a symbol of an uncorrupted and pure India which cannot admit social inequalities and injustices, on the model of Gandhi's "Quit India Movement" set up between 1942 and 1947 against the Raj and English hegemony.

concerning social reform and spin them into phrases that will appeal to the masses" (2011); a mutual collaboration against corruption "to sustain India's lost sanctity" was launched in 2012 on the Facebook's account of the author.

Hazare's protest targeted the government's new anti-corruption legislation, which the activist proclaimed as too weak. Hazare's demand for a stronger anti-corruption law – leading to the establishment of an independent ombudsman (i.e. public advocate) – had slowly gained momentum in the first half of 2011, when Hazare collected a sizeable following. But Hazare's movement soon lost steam, with key leaders oscillating between calling for a stronger movement based on the "people's guidance" and wondering about the possibility of entering electoral politics through the formation of a new political party (Sengupta 2014: 406). In 2014, the election of the new Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not change the political and social mood of the country. Three years after his appointment, Modi tried to alter the public front of his government and to attract new voters, by sponsoring a five-year programme aimed at "creating a new India that is strong, prosperous and all-encompassing, […]. The New India Movement 2017-2022 envisages India free from poverty, corruption, terrorism, communalism, casteism and uncleanliness and unite the entire country by adopting good governance and using technology" (*Healthy India Chronicle*, 2018). Modi's propaganda also tried to attract Hazare's supporters by citing Gandhi and his "Quit India movement" for the seventieth anniversary of Indian Independence in 2017.

Hazare has always been against Narendra Modi's government, even though the middle class who uphold him was the most vocal in its support for Modi in the run-up to the 2014 parliamentary elections. This apparent contradiction demonstrates that Hazare's anti-corruption movement had already lost its appeal, with a vast portion of the population conquered by electoral promises of a renewed and concerted attempt to put on pro-poor and pro-farmer measures. Hazare, however, has never believed in the actions of Modi's government and launches regular protest campaigns. During a recent political meeting, Modi stated that "The strength of the poor and aspirations of the middle class can take India to new heights" (*The Economic Times India* 2017), but Hazare's reply was a scathing attack against the Modi government and the anti-

corruption issue: "In the last three years, I wrote to you several letters regarding appointment of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas [i.e. two anticorruption organisations]. You did not even reply", Hazare said in a four-page letter reported by the newspapers of the time. "This shows you are not serious about rooting out corruption" (*The Economic Times India*, 2017).

3. Achieving a vast readership vs. discussing national issues

Starting from such a complex socio-cultural context, the literary merits of Chetan Bhagat's fiction remain in the background. However, the greatest virtue of his romance sequences and stories centred in a call centre or at IIT (the Indian Institute of Technology) is their accurate depiction of the current state of mind of the younger population in relation to their socio-political background: Bhagat manages to understand the political discontent and the social frustrations of young Indians who are often qualified people looking for recognition. And this is also the profile of Bhagat's readership which is learning English fast and needs an object of identification. His readers closely resemble his characters; like the protagonists of his novels, many of them started to read his books because they aspired to speak in the language that the world was talking in, and they fancied forbidden intercourses like in *Revolution 2020* but had never spoken of taboos in public, and more than anything else, they wanted to read an English novel that they could easily understand. Bhagat himself realised that he could make the difference by bridging the gap between social groups: "a lot of people were continuing to read my opinions and analyses as well as my stories" he claimed in a recent interview, "and I felt that there was a disconnect in India between people who express themselves in their local language versus English, creating an elitist bubble. I realised that people like me are part of a small group who could bridge that gap" (Shah Mbe 2019). What is interesting is that Bhagat also tries to exploit the pressing needs of that teen-age (r)evolution for his own purposes, by combining them with some significant national issues. He manages to give to his readers what they want and, at the same time, he introduces his own favourite topics, such as the false myth of western consumerism and the corruption of the Indian system. As he has recently affirmed: "A lot of my stories are

about the double life that younger India has to lead. The conflict between conservatism and liberal values. That is the story that so many of our people face, and what they connect with in my writing. Media and literature are playing a huge role in cultural change too" (Shah Mbe 2019). Bhagat's fiction is also trying to respond to the same universal change.

One Night at the Call Centre narrates the aspirations and delusions of six friends working night shifts at a call centre in India, providing technical support for a major U.S. appliance corporation. Skilled in patience – and equipped with American accents – they help Western consumers to solve their everyday problems. Shyam (Sam to his callers) has to find new goals and stimulus after a romantic mishap which involves his colleague Priyanka, whose domineering mother has arranged for her an upscale marriage to an Indian man in Seattle. Esha longs to be a model but constantly experiences difficulties in realising her dreams. Vroom is a dissatisfied young man with high ideals, but he compromises them by wasting his time in a disappointing job. Traditional Radhika has just found out about the betrayal of her husband. And Military Uncle (nobody knows his real name) always sits alone during work, as if he does not want to have any contact with his young colleagues, while in reality he is silently observing and studying them to give his support. They all try to survive under the eagle eye of a boss whose ego rivals his incompetence. But on Thanksgiving night they receive a strange call, from one very special caller: God. After speaking directly to Him, their lives will never be the same. Despite this incredible *coup de théâtre*, the story follows a satisfactory line. But what is important is that it also introduces some serious themes by denouncing the Americanisation of teenagers and young adults, torn between their passion for American motorbikes and Coke, while it also emphasises young Indians' ability to react to unfair conditions and spread their wings. Bhagat warns his readers against labour exploitation as well as arranged marriages and the awful economic conditions derived from an insane tendency to consumerism. The author particularly concentrates his frustrations in Vroom's outburst, when he states:

> "The government doesn't care for anybody," he continued. "Even that 'youth special' channel, they don't care either. They say youth because they want the damn Pizza Huts and Cokes and Pepsis of the world to come

and give pizza and coke, we will be happy. Like young people don't have a fucking brain. Tell us what crap to have and we'll have it." […] "I like pizza. Damn well I do. I like jeans, mobiles and pizzas. I earn, I eat, I buy shit and I die. That is all the fuck there is to Vroom. It is all, bullshit man." (Bhagat 2005: 231)

The straightforward style serves the function of introducing a thorny topic, far from the simplifications usually ascribed to Bhagat. His position towards consumerism is not uncritical or indiscriminate; in a recent interview, he also stated:

> I don't think it's a Western versus Eastern culture issue, but one of emotive society (which is naturally how human beings are). […] India is technically a free society because of our structure as a democracy – but there have been a lot of taboos that have come with religion, and those taboos are getting questioned and going away… yet I think the stage we are at is one where people are not openly acknowledging their desires, and are keeping a certain façade of Indian culture that 'we don't do these things' (Shah Mbe 2019).

Therefore, his intention is not that of criticising foreign and western countries, but rather focusing on what is wrong with Indian society, thus transforming Vroom's peroration against consumerism into a criticism of the corrupt Indian system.

Bhagat also uses the same narrative structure in *Revolution 2020*. This is the story of two friends and brilliant students at IIT, Gopal and Raghav: the former wants to use his intellect to make money, the latter seeks to exploit his intelligence to generate a revolution against the corrupt establishment. Bhagat makes a profound social denunciation through a typical Bollywood plot: a triangular love story between Raghav, Gopal and Aarti, the girl. He artfully concocts a story about childhood relationships, friendship, and love with young people's struggle to find success in Varanasi, in an unfair society that rewards the corrupt. Gopal gives in to the system, while Raghav fights it, and only one of them can be right. Once again, the simple story manages to reveal contemporary India. After all, in recent interviews, Bhagat declared that he gets his ideas from "people. Because I write columns, because I write about national issues. I do motivational talks, events. I am plugged into India more than other writers. So, I get a sense of what happens in the country.

I travel. I was in Bihar. I saw the state of English there" (Sudevan 2019). From his words it appears clear that he feels his cultural engagement strongly. He also stated that his work "depends on knowing real India, not the 'exotic' stereotype" (Shah Mbe 2019), as if his pen could be the flawless gauge of the national consciousness. His self-esteem and high opinion of his own literary production may derive from the support and the attention of a significant part of the political arena. Since the beginning of his literary career, Bhagat has managed to gain the favour of different politicians who have held power or been the protagonists of the political scenario. Besides Hazare in 2011, Prime Minister Modi has also shown appreciation of Bhagat's work. A rather surprising move, considering Hazare and Modi's opposite standpoints. However, the attention of both politicians has allowed Bhagat to move quite easily from one position to another by writing vitriolic or obliging Tweets on the actions of the government according to the circumstances. This situation has helped him to create his current – and debatable – reputation as a "pop-star" writer.

4. A pop-star writer?

As far as this aspect of his career is concerned, it may be possible to affirm that the growth of his readership has gone hand in hand with Bhagat's image as a "pop-star" writer. Since the early 2000s, Bhagat has visited as many colleges and events away from the metropolitan cities as he has been able to. He is among India's highest-paid motivational speakers, but his choice of events has always focussed on the tier-2 and tier-3 cities[3] in order to increase the number of his target readers. In a country that saw a drastic reduction in its literacy rate, especially among the youngest members of the population, as reported in the survey of social attitudes among Indians (de Souza et al 2009), Bhagat deserves credit for having popularised reading in small and rural towns in a manner that India has never seen before.

[3] This is the classification of Indian cities used by the Government of India. The Reserve Bank of India groups the city-centres in six tiers based on population. Tier-2 and tier-3 cities imply a minimum of 50,000 inhabitants.

In spite of their inevitable structural problems and gaps, Bhagat's works reveal a wide spectrum of common and "popular" topics which are part of everyone's life, and this expedient has attracted a huge mass of new readers of cheap mass-produced fiction in English (Tickell 2016: 50). People can recognise themselves in his fiction. He has identified himself as a spokesperson for a younger generation and has attempted to emphasise the multifaceted economic and social conditions of his own society, as well as Indians' anger and frustration caused by the abuses and acts of exploitation of the hegemonic ruling class and the caste system. In *Revolution 2020*, he also tries to depict the precarious system in which young Indians have to live and work. He narrates the scandal of a new engineering college opened in Varanasi with money from corruption (Bhagat 2009: 175), without omitting a harsh condemnation of the scant importance that the Indian ruling class usually gives to these phenomena, embodied by the ironic comment that: "A free lunch beats corruption allegations any day" (p. 177). He underlines the moral sordidness and the lack of values of the whole system, where people are more concerned with making profits than with the protection of their own respectability. He decides to openly discuss these topics in the novel in his references to corruption:

> Surprisingly the inappropriate approvals and the resultant illegal construction are right there in front of our eyes. Unlike other corruption cases where the wrongdoing is hidden (like the Ganga Action Plan scam), here the proof is for all to see. Farms are turned into colleges, which then flout all norms to construct as much as possible. Colleges will soon have malls next-door. Politicians, meant to protect us and prevent all this, are often the culprits. (p. 190)

Even though politicians try to deny their involvement, the protagonist Raghav still works towards and believes in the possibility of "a society where truth, justice and equality are respected more than power" (p. 243). This is why he creates the "Revolution 2020" mission, a project realised by young Indians for a new India, as if all the people on the subcontinent should feel somehow guilty for the nation's corruption. The idea of a sort of cosmic guilt complex seems present in Bhagat's literary production. He cites it in Raghav's pamphlet in *Revolution 2020*, when he underlines that things will change "when young people

will leave their classes and offices and come on to the streets. When Indians will get justice and the guilty will be punished" (p. 206), as well as in his non-fiction essay *What Young India Wants* (2012). The book is another attempt to comment on the Indian social scenario and the New India, and in the preface, he admits that he has sometimes felt a sort of guilt for not having always contributed to "make India a better place" (Bhagat, 2012: xiv). In the essay, he connects the beginning of his writing career to this desire for redemption and to his own public engagement. He still thinks that India lacks important values such as honesty and seriousness, and it is plagued by nepotism and corruption, but at the same time he concludes that Indian society is no worse than others (p. 5). It is hard to gauge the extent of the sincerity of Bhagat's interest in the future of India. His statements can sometimes appear as oversimple and populist, targeted at inspiring people's benevolence. He has certainly tried to make two very different urges coexist in his literary production, that is his social engagement and his search for popularity and celebrity, but his readership has not always appreciated that attempt.

The transition from his denunciation of the social system to his surrender to mediatic allure seems particularly evident in Bhagat's ambiguous attitude towards Narendra Modi, since the first election of the Prime Minister in 2014. Indeed, Chetan Bhagat was a staunch supporter of Modi's government at the beginning. Soon after Modi's election, for example, he posted on his Twitter account a series of selfies with the Prime Minister, praising his job as a politician and his good intentions. Furthermore, in June 2019, Bhagat stated that "putting magazines' covers like "Divider in Chief", describing Narendra Modi, it is really unhelpful" (Shah Mbe 2019). However, it is possible to infer that he spoke in Modi's defence just to acquire mediatic visibility, and both his participation in a TV show in 2015 and his career as Bollywood's playwright seem to confirm his desire for celebrity and public approval. Nowadays, however, Indian people are experiencing a strong disillusionment with Modi's government and, despite his victory in the 2019 elections, their disappointment is reaching a critical point, as demonstrated by the anti-government protests which spread throughout India in mid-December 2019. On that occasion, Chetan Bhagat changed his own standpoint towards Mr. Modi, tweeting, "Many get confused about

my politics here. To be clear I am only interested in an India where everybody lives in harmony and we have stellar economic growth. That is my dream. One-sided groupings bore me. I am not on your fixed side. I am on India's side. And am proud of that" (Roy 2019). Such ambiguous behaviour is exactly what his original readers accuse him of, along with a series of excessive self-appraisals about his own literary works.

Indeed, he has recently affirmed that he wants "a Chetan Bhagat genre. I don't want to be in a genre" (Sudevan 2019); this hugely pretentious stance gives the measure of Bhagat's acquisition of self-confidence during recent years. In the same interview, he also uttered that now he has "a pan-India audience" (Sudevan 2019) which allows him to freely express what he thinks and what his take is on things. Nevertheless, people have started to judge him, and many "haters" still rage against him and criticise especially his search for celebrity and the lack of literary substance in his writing. That said, despite the scarce interest of literary scholars and his exaggerated positions, Chetan Bhagat can be considered a faithful narrator of today's India, with all its contradictions and ambiguities. He has also shown how writing has been a keystone of social change in a country that houses one-sixth of the world's population, and he has managed to combine the narration of the multifaceted socio-economic conditions of India with his search for popularity.

5. Conclusion

Chetan Bhagat's fiction has often been underrated and branded as low literature because of the simple plots and the flat characterisation of its protagonists. This paper has argued that Bhagat's straightforward literary style serves, however, the intention of narrating the multifaceted socio-economic plagues of Indian society, thus highlighting the inadequate interest of the Indian government in the younger generations and their future. As a result, in his early works, Bhagat examines the juxtapositions and dichotomies of his own country. This may be why Bhagat even found support from the anti-corruption activist Anna Hazare, although his attraction for the limelight has led him to take some controversial stances. He has stated that Tariq Trotter, best known

as the rapper "Black Thought", once said to him, "art has always played a role in revolution, evolution and change. Art has always been a great changing force, the great common denominator, and a force to help people understand the world we live in, and the people within that world" (Shah Mbe 2016). Bhagat seems to have taken those words very seriously, as well as his public engagement, despite the selfies with Narendra Modi during the campaign for the general elections of 2014, for example. In this regard, his position has always been ambivalent: he has recently stated (on Twitter) that Modi's intentions are put into practice improperly; nevertheless, in May 2019 he posted an impassioned tweet attacking the stand-up comedian – famously against Modi – Kunal Kamra. On December 2019, after the violent Muslim protests against Modi, he also added: "Looks like Revolution 2020 is coming after all" (Roy 2019). So, it is not simple to understand his real thoughts about Indian controversies. His excessive fascination for mediatic quarrels and fallings-out may be the main reason for readers' criticism and for his lack of success in achieving the definitive rebellion evoked in *Revolution 2020* ten years ago.

Chetan Bhagat knows that "there was a lot more I could do than write love stories" (Shah Mbe 2019), and his engagement in the Indian public sphere may answer his purpose. In this regard, his genuine interest might recall the figure of the writer as an intellectual in the postcolonial arena already theorised by Edward Said**.** The Palestinian critic defined it as an author "testifying to a country's or region's experience, thereby giving that experience a public identity forever inscribed in the global discursive agenda" (2002: 25). And, although Bhagat's literary merits are clearly lesser than those of other engaged postcolonial novelists such as Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel García Marquez, and Salman Rushdie, among many others, the cultural force of writers like Bhagat is their belonging to different categories as assimilated, dissident, and translated figures. All of them are both individualised and classified in what is a highly efficient, globalised quasi-market system with an eye to public engagement as postcolonial intellectuals because "literary relations of power are forms of political relations of power" (Casanova 2004: 81), as Bhagat's fiction aims at testifying.

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