

## Chapter – II

### Cultural Politics of Blogging

The chapter concentrates on the political dimension involved into the blogs which are obviously written into a cultural wrapping. The content of bogs is fundamentally determined by two factors i.e. profession and mental inclination of the blogger. Bloggers post blog with a plain motto of achieving their ends through these blogs and usually they are successful in doing so.

#### **Arun Jaitley**

The first blogger under scanner is Arun Jaitley. He was born on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1952. He graduated from University of Delhi and also did his law education at the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. He was the President of Delhi University Student's Union. He started his career as a lawyer. He has been practicing law before the Supreme Court of India and several High Courts in India since 1977 and became the additional Solicitor General at the age of 37 under the V. P. Singh regime in 1989. He had been the member of the Akhil Bhartiya Vidayarthi Parishad during his student years and has been a member of the National Executive of the Bhartiya Janta Party since 1991. As a BJP leader, he became spokesman and General Secretary of the party. He held many portfolios in the government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Jaitley represented India on various forums including the United Nations General Assembly and the World Trade Organization. He has been a member of the *Rajya Shaba* for the last fifteen years. He gave up his lucrative legal practice in order to serve the country and its citizens. He has also been adjudged and conferred the award for being the most outstanding parliamentarian by the Indian Parliament.

As mentioned earlier, blogs are like an online journal. Most of the times, one can find bloggers exhibiting the highlights of their routine public life and their personal opinions on current national and regional issues. In this election year, when the social environment is highly politically charged, there is an attempt on the part of all the politicians to publicize themselves as much as possible.

In one of his blogs, Arun Jaitley has made a reference to a beautiful cricket stadium built in Dharmshala, Himachal Pradesh. For comparison its parallel has been found in the Mughal history with one of its most magnificent monument, The Taj Mahal. The post reads: “Shahjahan built the Taj Mahal and was prosecuted. Now there is a repeat of history in Himachal Pradesh Politics . . . . Anurag and Dhumalji built India’s most beautiful cricket stadium in Dharamshala. Now they are being harassed for it” (*Twitter*, 2 April 2014). The very first question that strikes one’s mind is what the common element is between the two structures drawn apart in terms of time, space and location. Why this very parallel? And the obvious answer is to make the comparison appear as stark as possible. The Taj Mahal is a very famous monument and is well known. Had he given reference to some other monument, the comparison wouldn’t have been that much interesting. Definitely the comparison is an exaggerated one because the Taj Mahal reflects our cultural heritage and legacy; and also it is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World, but no such parallel can be drawn about the aforesaid stadium. This, actually, is a very strange way of highlighting an issue using unequal parallels.

The blog content depends not only upon the political atmosphere but also the political stature of a leader. A leader of national stature blogs not only about the regional issues but also about the national or international issues as it is a professional requirement. This trend is clearly visible in his/her blogs. For instance, in the blogs of Arun Jaitley, one can witness discussion on a wide range of topics: discussion about World Autism Awareness Day; extending wishes to the people on Dr. K. B. Hegdewar’s birth anniversary, on Odisha State formation day, on Cheti Chand, etc. These events which are scattered over different cultures traversing the geographical boundaries are used as a weapon to strike the right cord. The simple philosophy involved in this is to appease all the sections of the society and giving an impression that their great men and cultural events, as also cultural heritage is respected and the same will be done in future too. To accomplish this sort of task a leader must exhibit a broad vision and mental horizon at least in the public life.

In some of his blogs, he has stated some rhetorical questions. This shows a pre-conceived idea of arousing desired sentiments in the minds of the followers. In one of his questions, he attacks his rival candidate by raising the issue of his association with a political party responsible for executing the Operation Blue Star. He writes, “Operation Blue Star was an ill-conceived and an ill-planned operation. Why is the Captain associated with a party responsible for Blue Star?” (26 March 2014 <https://twitter.com/arunjaitley>). A very simple strategy is involved into the question. It tries to evoke the feeling of love and fidelity to one’s religious places and a feeling of hatred for the people responsible for sacrilege. The people may be well aware of the fact but the timing of the post definitely tries to produce the desired impulse.

Another related question, questions the rival candidate’s decision itself for returning to the political party responsible for Operation Blue Star and he further states why he is following the commands of the party cadres who are the inheritors of the guilt of sacrilege. The adjectives used for the Operation Blue Star are: ill-planned and ill-conceived. Whatever may be the reality, we are not concerned with it at this juncture; for us the big question here is why these issues are raised at this point of time. The simplest answer is for gaining political ends. The interesting point to be noted here is that the same event i.e. the Operation Blue Star is presented in different hues by different political outfits depending on the fact that how it suits their political ends. However, it may be possible that the different perspectives adopted by different political set-ups may be correct because the political parties pick the pattern suitable for the cultural group they support or the cultural group in power. One party may designate it as an ill-planned and ill-conceived act whereas the other may term it as a step taken according to the need of the hour. Still another group may have another point-of-view depending on its cultural affiliation. All the outfits try to justify their claims by presenting the related facts and leaving the rest of the facts hidden. This involves a deep psychological insight on the part of the assertive group otherwise one may not be able to produce the tide in favour of one’s culture and ultimately in favour of one’s political outfit.

Referring to his blog posted about his social media interactions, he raises a question which is an outcome of the reader’s response. The blog states: “In all my recent social media interactions, not a single question was asked on Congress. Is the congress disappearing from the mind space?” (26 March 2014). The bloggers provide space for the followers to comment on their posts. From these comments they gauge the general political mood prevalent in the society. They make their political assessments based on the trends of these comments. The

blog refers to the lack of queries made about his political party's arch-rival i.e. the Congress party. The point in question here is that how things can be modulated suiting to one's likes. The followers on social networking sites of a political leader are usually the persons who like their party and their ideology. They are interested in the political agenda of the party whose leader they are following rather than the rival outfit. From another perspective, the case may be that the followers wish to acquaint themselves with the political and social agenda the party would pursue if voted to power. In both the cases, it is unlikely that there will be queries regarding the rivals. Still the trend requires a serious thought as it involves a deep psychological peeping into the minds of the followers as it would lead to cementing the bond between a leader and his/her followers on the one hand and the followers and the political outfit on the other hand. A very interesting thing that can be pointed out here is that one can put only one's supporters on the forefront and then say see our following.

Another blog under study is from his campaign diary which is a regular feature of his blog posts after he filed his nomination papers for the *Lok Sabha* polls from Amritsar constituency. The post reads:

In the course of my campaign, I have met thousands of people, Trade and Industry Organizations, and several entrepreneurs. The declining economic situation in the country has impacted all. There is the need to expand economic activities, recreate investment environment period, place more money in the hands of the consumers and lower the burden on the weaker sections. (4 April 2014)

An impression which can be easily made after reading most of his posts in his series of campaign diary is to strike another cord i.e. the model of growth and prosperity. The current political atmosphere where all sort of ethical boundaries of speech are transgressed and cheap personal jibes are common; he refrains from the style of rebuttal and counter-allegations. He takes the debate in his blogs to a higher plane and speaks earnestly about the need for developing the constituency from which he is contesting i.e. Amritsar. He talks passionately of the prospect of developing Amritsar as a pilgrimage-tourist hub, building infrastructure, stepping up border trade, bringing down the high degree of unemployment among the youth and wiping out the drug menace.

The other thing he does is that he arranged meetings with several small groups of professionals, traders, and various citizen forums on regular basis. The strategy can be interpreted in two ways, one tackling the real issues with true spirit and second doing what

the opponent is not doing or able to do. As per the first interpretation, he shows people the future which may lie ahead by showcasing the long term result of schemes and policies which he offers them to be implemented if voted to power. The economic scenario will be different; there will be prosperity and development. For this he talks about a tangible model and shows that he is not building castles in air. For instance, he talks about development of Amritsar as a tourist hub which appears tangible because around one lakh tourists visit the city daily. Another important problem he highlighted is that of drug abuse. Regarding drug menace Jaitley writes in his campaign diary:

In the areas bordering Pakistan, drug trafficking is rampant. A large number of youngsters start with the thrill of experimentation and eventually become drug addicts. Wherever I travelled during campaigning, many people have expressed concern on the issue. Several families have been destroyed due to this problem. The potential of young men has been damaged. The social fabric of the society has suffered badly. (3 April 2014)

Highlighting this type of issue and providing possible feasible solutions definitely help positively. The families whose near and dear ones have either been ruined or lost due to this menace would definitely support someone seriously concerned about this issue because it's an issue that is very close to their heart. Now from the second perspective, he is doing what his opponent is not doing; or is not able to do or hasn't done in the past. The first major difference that Arun Jaitley has made is the ease of access so as to make huge inroads into the deep trench created between his opponent and the populace. The fact is highlighted into print media too. "The BJP candidate is on his feet from early morning till late night; the maharajah, more relaxed, does not normally meet people before lunchtime" (*Indian Express* 1). He intelligently picks the shortcomings of his opponent and highlights them so as to pinpoint his opponent's narrow vision. He speaks about this in one of his interview with *The Indian Express*.

I had thought that Capt Sahib with his legacy and background would have something substantial to offer to this campaign. But I find that he finds it difficult to address national issues or constituency-specific ideas. He can only indulge in mindless aggression, rooted in impolite language. That has never been my style. In effect he is a tu-tu, main-main candidate which is in contrast to my style. I am therefore keeping

away from that lumpen debate. I am concentrating on national issues, what the NDA government will do for the country and what my vision for my constituency is. (8)

Reflecting on his interview and some of his blogs on the issue, it can be easily concluded that there is a deep psychological connotation of the contents which play a decisive role in eating away a substantial chunk of potential voters. He has posted a blog regarding the issue: “The Congress candidate from Amritsar, Captain Sahib, has still not come to the constituency. Regrettably, he is resorting to his old USP i.e. lower the level of debate through “personalized and discourteous language”. I have to resist the temptation of reciprocating in the same manner” (23 March 2014).

Usually when a leader involves in a war of words with the opponents, the people tend to align themselves with one or the other leader according to their orientations. The tendency takes away them from the real volley of issues. The people too enjoy the exchange of jibes and it becomes a matter of public gossiping except in the circles of intelligentsia. Once a leader declines to involve in rebuttal and leg-pulling, he becomes a cynosure. He starts commanding respect; when he talks about national issues, developmental schemes, etc. rather than indulging into frivolous talks. This becomes all the more important when the leader is considered eligible for the post of deputy prime minister. Here is an excerpt in this context from his interview: “On Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal’s announcement that Jaitley would be deputy prime minister: I know that it is Mr. Badal’s affection for me that makes him wish such a post for me” (*Indian Express* 8). This is also a well planned and time tested strategy of not engaging in useless debates and let one’s deeds speak for him/her.

Talking about another blog posted by Jaitley regarding the poll agenda of the rival parties for general elections, it can be clearly asserted that here he is full of exuberance which is exhibited when he highlights that the rivals are only countering their strategy rather than presenting their own vision. For instance, he writes in one of his blogs:

The AAP has switched gear from corruption to an Anti-Modi emphasis. The AAP leaders now defy the Economic reality to argue that Gujarat has not progressed. The farcical drama being enacted with regard to contesting against Modi at Varanasi is being done in order to ensure that AAP can at least partly occupy the Anti-Modi space. The Congress and Rahul Gandhi hardly had an electoral

strategy. . . . Having failed to strike a chord, they have also gone back to the Anti-Modi theme of 2002 Gujarat Riots (18 March 2014).

The blog can be best interpreted in terms of dominance or to be more precise hegemony. Riding on Modi wave, if there is any, and the so-called media created hype, the BJP seems exuberant. The blogger alleges that abstract slogans and theoretical concepts alone can't entice people. He further states that AAP leadership is trying to occupy the vacuum created due to anti-incumbency. The vacuum is likely to be filled by Modi wave and that's why AAP has adopted an anti-Modi agenda. This is the reason why most of the time people are seen either talking in favour of or against Modi. This led BJP to create an impression that whosoever talks against him is against their party. Attacking AAP in the blog, he writes that the outfit believes that by criticizing Modi and BJP they can secure votes. He calls the decision of Arvind Kejriwal to contest against Modi as a part of their poll strategy which implies that they don't have any economic or political vision for India rather they have only one issue i.e. blindly criticizing Modi and his Gujarat development model. By saying so he implies to say that AAP is trying to spread the word that BJP is lying but actually his intention is exactly opposite i.e. AAP is lying. AAP is trying to capture the stray votes created due to anti-incumbency factor which should otherwise go in favour of BJP.

Another interesting blog taken up for analysis is a reaction against a speech delivered by Rahul Gandhi, the Congress vice-president, in Gujarat in which he compared Narendra Modi to Adolf Hitler, the German dictator. In the blog there is a systematic and interesting presentation of facts in which Arun Jaitley retorts how Indira Gandhi was more alike to Hitler. He begins in a sarcastic manner by saying that Rahul Gandhi would be unaware of the conditions during internal emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi because he was a child then. After that he goes on to elaborate upon the similarities between the two leaders. Here is an excerpt from the blog:

Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany in January 1933. Within a month he invoked the emergency powers for 'the protection of the people and the state'. He restricted personal liberty, free speech, fundamental rights and imposed various restrictions on the right to privacy. . . . Indira ji also proclaimed the Emergency in India on 26th June 1975. She claimed that JP was leading an agitation where Armed Forces were being asked to defy illegal orders. She therefore suspended all

fundamental rights including the right to life and liberty. She imposed censorship on the Press, compromised judicial independence. (12 March 2014)

In the blog there is a vehement attack on the then prime minister so as to create a negative image of her regime. The concern here is not about the facts but the depiction of the situation prevalent at that time. Jaitley supports his claim by giving his own example that how he was made to spend nineteen months in prison on fictitious grounds. He also talks about the underground literature criticizing the then government's move to impose emergency. He lends authenticity to his German account by giving reference to an authentic text written by an author named Shirer about the history of Nazi Germany.

There are various references in the blog about the atrocities committed by the Indian government on all the persons who opposed the government or any of its moves. This can be stated in other words that every individual opposing the dictates of Indira Gandhi was considered as the enemy of the whole party and nation. The intention behind writing the blog appears that most of the youngsters who haven't themselves faced the internal emergency could be acquainted with the dark side of reality with the obvious aim of bagging the votes. An element of sympathy is also clearly discernible. Another important highlight of the blog is a reference about the propagation of one-party set up in the country by the then Congress government. The blog further states: "The White Paper on Misuse of media during the Emergency gives illustrations of the kind of censorship which came into existence. Gandhi family newspaper 'The National Herald' advocated that a one-party set up was desirable" (12 March 2014).

The apparent purpose is to bring to light the narrow mindedness of the ruling party and its eagerness to eliminate its opponents and that too by lending it a legal status. Now this can be viewed from another vintage point i.e. a sick mentality which reflects phobia of opponents, a desire to put an end to a healthy democracy, a dictatorial mindset. It is a beautifully designed and condensed reply in terse terms. Yet another interesting aspect of the blog is its last paragraph in which the blogger has condensed the whole text along with a harsh comment on the current scenario of the party i.e. the dominance of a single family.

Suspension of democracy, abrogation of civil liberties, detention of political opponents, suspension of democratic activity, abandonment of free Press, absence of judicial independence and vestige of power in one person were features of Hitler's



regime. Each step had inspired Indira ji's internal Emergency. There was one basic difference between the two. Hitler did not promote a dynasty because he did not have any one to promote (12 March 2014).

The last sentence of the paragraph stresses in a sarcastic manner that Indira Gandhi had even one more evil as compared to the notorious Adolf Hitler that she promoted dynastic culture in the Congress party by vesting all the powers of the party in a single family. The fact is exploited by all outside the Congress party and often allegations are leveled at public platforms regarding the issue. This has become a standard allegation against the Congress that it has no internal democracy and that it is often viewed as a paradox that the party ruling the world's largest democracy is in itself an autocratic party. The blog seems to support the notion that the Congress is perpetually ruled by a single family singly. This is considered as one of the most vicious evil in most of the rulers of the world. In world history, one can find numerous examples of monarchs who have tried to guarantee the rule of their progeny. In a sense, the blog implies the continuation of monarchy in the world's largest democracy. What an irony!

Another very interesting blog written by Jaitley is again a response against Rahul Gandhi's remark about Modi's marriage. A political storm gathered momentum after Narendra Modi submitted affidavit as a part of procedural formality for filing his nomination for contesting the *Lok Sabha* election in which he disclosed for the first time his wife's name. The most interesting aspect of the event is that he was considered a bachelor by most of the Indians by then. The opponents tried to take political mileage out of this. Differing views started to crop up in electronic as well as social media at that time. The issue was given a political colour by all the parties who were looking eagerly to get a controversial issue regarding Narendra Modi to be debated upon.

In the blog, Arun Jaitley gives a succinct reply so as to subside the issue. In most of the his blogs he comments in an impersonal manner, but in the blog one can clearly observe that he directs his counter attack on a personal note referring to the matrimonial life of a former Prime Minister of India without mentioning the name. In his usual fashion, he strategically counters their allegation and puts a question mark on the ability of the so-called young face of the Congress alleging that they don't have substantial issues to talk and that's why they are indulging in futile talks. He alleges that they don't have a development vision for the country and that's why they are trying to distract them to petty issues.

He very intelligently highlights that Rahul Gandhi has no inspirational quality. He further questions his communication abilities and very confidently says that he has no knowledge of the economic system. He further asserts that given his leadership qualities and other attributes he has not clicked the Indian masses. He hints towards the unacceptability of Rahul by the Congress workers themselves which indirectly hints at the internal dissension of the party without overtly referring to it. This is a very interesting way of interpreting and exposing the facts. The most interesting ingredient of the blog is a reference to an unstated code of conduct which according to the blogger has been breached by Rahul Gandhi. What an irony! Expecting leaders of the world's most volatile democratic set-up to follow the so-called unstated code of conduct where leaders openly flout the well-established model code of conduct framed by the Election Commission of India and which is strongly backed by the law enforcing agencies of the country. The blog states that there is a mutual understanding among political leaders of all political parties of not highlighting one another's vices. Excerpt from the blog:

How many current senior Congressmen are in illicit relationships and yet have paraded their wives only for photo opportunities during nominations. Surely if people have a right to know about the "legal" relationship of Modi, they also have a right to know about the illicit relationships of Congressmen. The latter is more relevant for people's right to know about the ethics of their candidates (12 April 2014).

The blog is a stinging satire on the entire political fraternity especially the Congress party as it highlights the moral standards of the legislatures who frame the laws for the common man! The most interesting aspect of the blog is that even after it got published on the front page of one the renowned national daily i.e. *Indian Express* it didn't draw either response or criticism from anyone either from the Congress or any other political outfit. This is precisely the way how politics is used to hegemonise people. The blogger says, albeit in covert terms that the people who themselves don't have a good character don't have any moral right to rule the masses. Ultimately everybody in the race is trying to gain hegemony.

At the end of the blog, there is a comment on the opponent party and their mental bankruptcy inherent in the assessment of the current political scenario and issues of national interest. The blogger is consistent in his criticism regarding lack of a political vision in the national leadership of their arch-rival. Consistently, he talks about immaturity in the speeches delivered by their opponents and the sense of desperation in their behaviour. The sense

implied is that in one stroke one can achieve two things. On the one hand, one retorts swiftly in terse term and on the other hand the response reflects that the opponents are talking nonsense.

This helps in achieving one's objective as one super-impose himself/herself on the scene by creating an impression that he/she is committed towards healthy politics and concerned with the politics of development and is striving for national unity and integrity rather than the politics of allegations and counter-allegations and this quality is very much prominent in this blogger and this has also been fully exploited by the Bhartiya Janta Party. Albeit, the blogger is not an official spokesperson of the party, he is often seen in the electronic media responding to various allegations leveled against the party and its leaders and it's useless to mention that most of his blogs are considered as the official statement of his party. This reflects his maturity and habit of restrain from indulging into controversies.

This is another facet of cultural politics which guides the strategy of putting forward the most soft-spoken face among the masses so as to create an impressive image. In the blog, he further levels the accusation that the opponents are immature and desperate for power. The statement tries to draw attention to the issue that the opponent party is power hungry and that they have developed an addiction for power because their party is ruling the country for the last one decade and still they are desperate to regain power. The image which the statement is trying to create is again in a negative perspective i.e. power-hunger rather than service to the nation. The blogger desires to take the credit of propagating an agenda centered politics along with a vision for the country rather than making petty issues a political storm. The ultimate objective is image creation which can finally be translated into votes. All these techniques are employed to gain ascendancy in terms of hegemony.

## **Shobhaa De**

The next blogger under study is one with multi-faceted personality. She is Shobhaa De. She has been a very prolific blogger. She is also known as Shobha Rajadhyaksha. She became Shobhaa De after her second marriage with Dilip De, the famous business tycoon, in 1981. She was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of January in 1948 in Mumbai. All her education is from the financial capital of India. After studies, she established herself as a model and later on switched over to journalism. During this phase, she was associated with three magazines. These magazines presented news linked to the celebrities and the film industry; even one

magazine was named *Celebrity*. As Mumbai is a film city, it provides a lot of opportunities to peep into the personal life of the celebrities which results into the mushrooming of a lot of magazines and journalists thriving on this profession. She has also contributed in a prolific manner to various national dailies and magazines as a freelance writer and columnist. She has explored the psychology that guides the social life of the fashion city, Mumbai. Shobha De has also been active in literary festivals. She has written a lot of books e.g. *Shobhaa at Sixty*, *Shetji*, *Surviving Men*, *Second Thoughts*, *Strange Obsession*, *Shooting from the hip*, *Socialite Evenings*, etc. She has also contributed as a writer for several popular television soaps. As a blogger, she is very active and her comments are available on most of the events of national and international importance. She talks about human rights, women rights, etc.

Bloggers while blogging keep in their minds various objectives, for instance: to deliberately exhibit their broad-mindedness; to gather optimum public support; to enlarge their following; to entice masses with their blogs; etc. The later aspect is very crucial as it lends weight to one's comments. The big question here is how to enlarge one's following.

The blogger has devised a very interesting way i.e. posting her photo's with famous people. In one of her blogs, she has posted her snap with Fatima Ali Bhutto, the famous Pakistani poet and writer and grand-daughter of the former Prime Minister of Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, along with a comment appreciating her beauty. The lineage of the Pakistani lady is enough to impress her followers and to entice others, especially the followers across the border. Another facet is that if somebody is publicly pampering someone else by writing in highly dignified and appreciative terms then obviously one expects the same from the other one. Have a look at the post: "The Shadow of the Crescent Moon ! Powerful and passionate. Congratulations Fatima Bhutto" (*Twitter*, 29 Oct. 2013). She also wrote about her to-be published book in a high-flown style. What a beautiful marketing strategy!

In one of her blogs, she criticizes the media hype created around the eviction of tenants living in an apartment in Mumbai in which the employees of Campa Cola lived. She stresses that in our country thousands of people are evicted out of their houses without any of their faults and in this case people are crying foul that they have been deceived by the builders. The point she wishes to drive home is that these people got media attention due to their association with a renowned company but what about those common masses of our country who are not lucky enough to get such a media attention and consequently they even didn't

have a ray of hope of relief. The notion of rich and poor divide once again comes to the fore-front and there is an implicit allegation on the media of being partial because it highlights the high profile cases only. Media is depicted covertly as TRP hungry rather than servant of the society which should sincerely do its job as the fourth pillar of democracy.

Another very interesting facet of blogging, especially with a large number of followers is that one can easily market himself/herself without any extra cost. Nice idea! Isn't it interesting in a highly monetized world that advertisement comes at no cost at all. At the launch of her book, *Shobhaa: Never a Dull De*, she had posted the cover page of her book extending an invitation to all where people will get a chance to meet another celebrity i.e. Gauri Shinde, the director of the movie *English Vinglish*. So it appears to be a double enticement for the people to attend a launch ceremony as well as to get a chance to hang out with celebrities.

Before the launch of the book on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2013, she had posted a blog about the launch of the book and had requested people to book their orders in advance. Implicitly, two benefits are derived from this style of marketing— one, easy and hassle free marketing and second, there is no need to channelize marketing strategy to target target-group. The followers are usually the target-group. In a way, it enhances one's stature and provides easy accessibility to the people of one's interest and with the advent of online shopping era it has become all the more convenient to entice the shoppers by providing hassle free shopping. Utilizing this facility, she has provided the link of websites from which they can place advance orders. And the fabulous use of adjective's— not a dull De, sparkling Shinde, etc. — an impressive use of alliteration and this is where an author peeps out of an activist. It is very difficult for a person to keep his/her literary instincts lying buried for long.

At another place she writes in a very condensed manner “some of the most interesting people in the world are tea vendors....” (*Twitter*, 14 Nov. 2013) referring obviously to Narendra Modi. The incomplete sentence expresses a lot and the most important aspect is that it lends neutrality to the writer's opinion as it is up to the reader how he/she interprets it. The word ‘interesting’ may give positive as well as negative connotations and even *prima facie* it doesn't appear to be a political statement. In this blog too, the author's literary instinct are explicitly exhibited. The blogger has tried to express her views but there is a lot of scope for the reader-response interpretation.

In some of her blogs, she has talked about the cricket legend i.e. Sachin Tendulkar. She has posted blogs about his 200<sup>th</sup> test cricket which he played at Wankhede stadium in Mumbai. She writes that the day be renamed as Sachin day. What a tribute! What an attractive way to entrap Sachin fans! Among these posts, once again there is a very condensed blog which states that “India weeps” (*Twitter*, 16 Nov. 2013) which refer to the famous speech delivered by Sachin Tendulkar on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2013 which was widely and repeatedly broadcasted by almost all the news channels. It was a highly emotional speech which made almost all the cricket lovers to cry leave alone weeping. The blog shows her love and regard for both the sport and the legend. As a reward, probably, she is assured of the loyalty of the cricket lovers. A good strategy! Enjoy the sport! Enjoy the leisure! And enjoy the followers!

Further she adds a political hue to the matter. In one of her blogs, she talks about the response of the public after they spotted Rahul Gandhi in the Wankhede stadium. “The moment Rahul Gandhi was spotted by the Wankhede crowd, the chant changed from Sachin! Sachin! to Modi! Modi! Telling or plain scary?” (*Twitter*, 14 Nov. 2013). The blog is another instance of neutral depiction of the events without adding any personal opinion. The followers are given a space to interpret the event in their own way. Albeit, this covertly shows an anti-congress stance of the blogger but the tactics is to give only a slight hint to the followers and let them reflect upon the issue.

Another politically coloured blog reads: “Politics of Bharat Ratna.Yup.Ratna is political. Sachin deserves his. Will Cong use him as star campaigner? Will he be made Sports' Minister?” (*Twitter*, 18 Nov. 2013). The blog tries to exploit the sharp reaction generated from some quarters of the country against the conferment of Bharat Ratna to Sachin Tendulkar. On reflecting, it appears to be a biting satire on the veterans of various fields, for instance, sports, cinema, etc. who join politics after their retirement from their respective fields. These personalities are often used as star campaigners during elections and after that they vanish from the scene only to re-appear during the next elections. It is alleged that the funds which are allocated to these members as their MP quota often go unused. She has passed a stinging satire on the issue of politics involved in the conferment of the country's highest civilian award. The blogger drives home the point that by conferring the award the government is trying to entice the legend and in the future he may be rewarded with similar other benefits like, giving a ministry or something of that sort. The big question here is what

the government is eyeing. And the most obvious response is votes as the dirty vote bank politics has vitiated the whole environment of the country. It has engulfed the entire social, political and economic domains of the nation. The aforementioned post clearly exemplifies the scenario. All the government policies and strategies are viewed from this view-point only; even the opposition lends support or stages their protest keeping this proposition in mind. See the dirt of this dirty politics; it has not spared even the world renowned 'gentleman sportsman' of this sport.

Talking about another blog of the lady in which she talks about the horrible condition of law and order prevailing in the country. In the post, she talks about Jiah Khan's case and recommends the reopening of the case. Jiah Khan died in mysterious conditions and her family has alleged it a murder. The post reads: "Jiah Khan's case must be reopened. Soon! Before the poor girl's body disappears from the grave. Anything is possible" (*Twitter*, 9 Nov. 2013). Shobhaa De lampoons the law and order system in her post stating that the case must be reopened at the earliest possible. She passes a stinging satire that the delay may lead to the disappearance of the girl's body from the grave. The hidden intention is to pass the buck upon the legal as well as social system for the appalling conditions of the women in the country.

One interpretation may also lead to the conclusion that if this may happen to a celebrity then what about the general populace. Celebrities are the cynosure of the masses and that's why they get a lot of free media attention and suppose if the same thing happens to a common woman it will go un-noticed and even people may never come to know about the incident. The post reflects the dark side of the shining India. One can imagine the horrifying law and order situation if the statement proves correct. And the focal point remains the condition of women in our country. Can corpse really disappear from the grave!

Moving on to discuss another blog in which she congratulates the women of the country on the occasion of the inauguration ceremony of the Bhartiya Mahila Bank Limited, the first ever all women bank opened in India, in the true spirit of a staunch feminist. "Important day tomorrow. Inauguration of Bharatiya Mahila Bank Ltd. Sonia G and P.M. to do the honours. Looking forward to this function!" (*Twitter*, 18 Nov. 2013). These are various psychological devices which are fully exploited by various governments, organizations, individuals, etc. to make people feel the outer and superficial luster of shine India; and futile talks of empowerment. For instance, read this blog: "Bharatiya Mahila Bank! Empowering

women. Empowering India. Congratulations!” (*Twitter*, 19 Nov. 2013). The big question posed at this juncture is what substantial change a bank employing just a handful of women can bring about in the lives of millions of women rotting in the rural and inaccessible parts of India. And the question becomes all the more pertinent if one talks about women belonging to the lower strata of the social ladder. The most interesting part of the story is that the bank is inaugurated in the capital city of the country and most of its branches are located in major cities across the nation. What an empowerment! If any government, organization, etc. wishes to do something really substantial then they should try to do something for the betterment of the rural India because India still resides in villages.

In one of her another very interesting blogs, she writes on a very controversial political issue i.e. Narendra Modi’s marriage. She speaks allegorically about the common woman of India. She assigns the name Sarojben to these common women. Taking the opportunity she hints very intelligently towards the hardships faced by the common women and in the same breath she praises them untiringly. She showers praises upon them in the following words:

My friend Saroj lives in a village outside Amdavad. But her strenuous work takes her across India.... and straight into some of the most exclusive mansions. Saroj is by far the most knowledgeable person I know when it comes to textiles and embroideries, craft skills and artisanal excellence. She has impeccable taste and an eye for beauty . . . that would be the envy of highly qualified curators and experts. But, get this - Saroj is unambiguously poor and technically illiterate. Though to me, she is one of the 'richest' and most 'educated' people I know. (*Bangalore Mirror*, 19 April 2014)

These lines clearly exhibit Shobhaa De’s love and admiration for the skills and expertise possessed by Indian women. The title of the article smartly rubbishes the debate erupting after the name of Modi’s wife went public. It went viral into social media and a lot of controversy erupted. She starts the discussion in a very interesting way stating that Sarojben, a name she uses to refer to common women, is more important than Jashodaben. She emphasizes the economic contribution of women; praises their incredible strength and patience. She shows her concern for the piteous and pathetic life women have to undergo. The untold saga of their sufferings and sacrifices are honestly depicted in the post. The big question at this juncture is what this has to do with this description. The answer lies in the later part of the blog.



Has Modi's decade-long sarkar impacted her life in any way? Enhanced and influenced it? Is her village taking advantage of all those programmes one keeps hearing about? Has she experienced the much-touted 'progress' in her State? Benefitted from even a single scheme? Is Saroj aware of the several women's empowerment initiatives? Does she have proper latrines, sanitation, clean drinking water at home? Nope, to all the above...but she isn't one to moan and groan about these lapses. She is a highly intelligent woman, who has managed to survive using her robust common sense and sharp wits. (*Bangalore Mirror*, 19 April 2014)

In the later part of the blog, she has castigated the Gujarat government for spreading canard about development model of the state. According to the blogger, there is no such development in the state from women's point of view. She goes further to state that the women in the state are not provided even basic facilities like water, sanitation, etc. Again she overwhelmingly praises women for their robustness and optimism in the true spirit of a feminist.

She passes a stinging satire on the male mind-set by commenting that finally Narendra Modi has admitted to his legal marriage. The underlying postulate is that the silence of women is exploited and misused as has been in this case. And she passes one more scathing satire that there might be a change in the fortunes of Jashodaben in the near future. This is in utter contrast to reality as both Modi and Jashodaben have clearly expressed their unwillingness to unite in future. The issue that can be raised at this juncture is how we can identify Jashodaben with Sarojben. It can be asserted about Jashodaben that; firstly, she didn't live a parasitic life and lived on her own working as a government teacher. Secondly, she exhibited as much patience as any Sarojben can exhibit. Thirdly, she sacrificed like any Sarojben without any moan and groan. This shows how the events can be manipulated so as to favour one's view-point even though the facts may be depicting an altogether different truth.

Another blog under study is again related to the same topic but the perspective is altogether different. The vintage point is women's mentality. In the blog, she talks about Modi in scathing terms and grabs the opportunity to discuss in detail about what qualities women expect in a husband. She severely criticizes Modi from feministic vintage. She lampoons him for his statement in a public rally about his 56 inch chest albeit which was later on moderated down to a more acceptable figure of 44 inch. At this point it won't be wrong to

assume that she is giving vent to her own likings and dislikings at a public platform and trying to give an impression as if it is a general opinion. She gives a very succinct account of Modi's nature as a human being by relating it to a quotation from Macbeth. "But here's the catch: he is more feared than loved. More admired than respected. Women loathe bullies/ tyrants/ autocrats/ egoists. Unfortunately, Modi falls into this reviled category" (*Mumbai Mirror*, 12 April 2014). The account described here shows that the modern woman deserves equal status and they detest the typical dominant macho natured husband. This may be termed as a personal as well as impersonal account.

Moving on to her another blog, in which the dominant trait of her personality is clearly visible. She has often been branded as a social-activist. In the post, she loathes people who are racist and requests the general public to support the mother of Nido Taniam, the boy from the north-east who was killed in Delhi in a tussle which was termed as a racist murder, in her struggle for justice. The post calls for a fight against racism and to express solidarity with the brothers and sisters of the north-east because "they are us. We are them" (*Twitter*, 4 Feb. 2014). The post depicts the blogger's support for a good cause; and highlights the plight and hardships faced by the people from north-east in their own country. They are treated as second-grade citizens which is definitely a product of sick and diseased mentality. But if we view the blog from another perspective, this may be an artificial expression to create an impression of one's broad-mindedness albeit this is a far-off possibility in case of Shobhaa De as she has been often dubbed as a true cosmopolitan. But again there is a distant possibility that one can create such an image by consistently exhibiting such behavioural traits artificially. Whatever might be the case, the point that can be raised at this juncture is that these things can be done with an intention to trap a large bulk of north-east Indians. The outrage poured in the social media by the crusaders like Shobhaa De and others and wholeheartedly supported by the people at large produced a positive result. Delhi Police has faced flak for its handling of the Nido Taniam case and other cases related north-east residents. In a bid to connect with those hailing from the north-east states, the Delhi Police decided to launch a new page on social networking site *Facebook* and it was inaugurated on May 9, 2014. Titled 'DelhipoliceforNEfolks', the site is monitored by a dedicated police team and it is open for discussion and complaints regarding problems faced by the north-east community in the capital. In a way, this is directly an outcome of outrage which can be easily gauged on the basis of public support an incident gets on social networking websites.

The next blog under study is on a very sensitive and controversial issue where the blogger has made her stand very clear leaving no room for ambiguity. The blog refers to Section 377. And the blogger supports the issue by stating that the fight to achieve the rights must continue. “The fight must go on. Section 377” (*Twitter*, 28 Jan. 2014). The debate over Section 377 of the IPC continues to dominate discussions in public forums. A number of specious arguments have been advanced to argue against decriminalization of homosexuality. The conservative-minded people argue that it is against ‘our culture’. It is not true, because our ancient texts and our art are replete with instances of homosexuality. Fact is, the anti-gay law was enacted by our erstwhile colonial masters around 150 years ago and reflected their Victorian values, not ours. Even the British have long discarded it, and have now cleared same-sex marriage. The blog broadly conforms to the views expressed in the foregoing discussion.

*Facebook*, the popular social networking website, has added 56 more gender options for user profiles to its existing list of only male and female. It’s a big boost when a website as popular as *Facebook* recognizes the transgender community. All the people of any community desire to be able to express them the way they want, and not get tied down to accepted codes. With the new options, the people get to be themselves, and the neutral terms give them more respect. At the end of the day, it’s all about one’s identity, and small things like these go a long way in making a person of the community feel positive about their own self.

The struggle of the transgender community is to achieve the right to a respectable place in the community and to secure at least a cubicle for themselves in the hegemonic culture which is stiffly resisting the new entrant wrapped into an altogether different cultural wrapping. Intolerance is violence and accepted intolerance is violence with the acquiescence of the society. And people like Shobhaa De have been vocal regarding expressing their views on these sensitive issues which acts as a motivating force for these communities. Our democracy needs to be large-hearted enough to accept people of diverse faiths, beliefs and orientations, as long as they do not subscribe to hatred and violence. Who and how they choose to love consensually and in private shouldn’t be anybody else’s business. By supporting the cause of the so-called ‘minuscule fraction’, the blogger secures their following. This is very true in this case because the community in question is challenging the hegemonic culture; and is trying to carve for themselves a part of the existing domain and is very assertive and at the

same time it's very vulnerable. The people supporting them will probably achieve the stature of a '*messiah*'. So the fight must go on incessantly.

## **Chetan Bhagat**

The last blogger under study is one who is the master of popular fiction. The blogger is Chetan Bhagat who was born on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1974 in the capital city of India. He is *alma mater* of the prestigious institutes like IIT Delhi and IIM Ahemdabad. He started his career as an investment banker in a company located in Hong Kong after completing his post-graduation from IIM Ahemdabad. During that time, he devoted his spare time in writing and published two of his books while working. After working for eleven years as an investment banker, he finally left the job to fully dedicate his energies to literature. Currently, he is a renowned columnist, author, motivational speaker and screenwriter. Till now he has written six books of fictitious and humorous genre and all of them have been a huge success. The books are *Five Point Someone* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *2 States* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011) and *What Young India Wants* (2012). Some of his books have been translated into famous Hindi films like *3 Idiots*, and recently released *2 States*, etc. The later one inspired from the book with the same title.

Chetan Bhagat has often been accused for lowering the standard of writing and defiling the pious profession of literature. The argument can be countered by the view that unlike other famous authors, he shares a loving relationship with the readers as he is more easily approachable because he often interacts with people on various platforms. The reason that can be cited for his extraordinary popularity as a writer, especially among the youth, is his ability to strike the right cord because his novels depict the issues pertinent to lifestyle of today's youth. Most of the young people can easily identify themselves with the characters in his novels. Even in two of his novels i.e. *Five Point Someone* and *2 States*, he has depicted the veracity which he encountered in his life at the IIT and the problems faced during inter-cultural and inter-community marriage respectively. He has also been conferred various prestigious awards along with being included in *TIME* magazine's list of world's 100 most influential people in 2010.

Going through his blogs, one thing becomes very obvious that his MBA have honed his marketing skills tremendously. The recently released movie *2 States* which is an adaptation of his book with the same title finds an overwhelming coverage in his blogs. He expresses his

excitement, anxiety, happiness, love, etc. before and after the release of the movie both verbally and pictorially. His blogs are inundated with gimmicks. A lot of reviews appeared in print media too about the movie. Here is one such review:

Perhaps, in a tale centers around cultural clash, some stereotyping is bound to exist. But, then we all know North and South continue to view each other with blinkers on. So if Tamilians are condescending about the uncouth uncultured Punjabis, the Punjabis too dismiss them as a dark-skinned race from another planet. (*Tribune* 11)

The book is an important document depicting north-south cultural divide. One thing is very sure that blogs serve an important medium of advertisement especially when one has around 2.5 million followers. Chetan Bhagat has dedicated many of his blogs on the verdict of the Supreme Court of India decriminalizing gay sex. He has posted the blogs after the verdict. The verdict can be summarized as follows:

In a historic judgment that put personal autonomy and right of choice on par with human dignity, the Supreme Court Monday granted constitutional recognition to transgenders as a third gender and also gave them the right to have family. The court directed the government to treat transgenders as a socially and educationally backward class, entitled to quotas like OBCs in educational institutions and for public appointments (*Indian Express* 1).

The judgment was painted in a political hue by Chetan Bhagat. He views trans-genders in terms of vote bank. “bottomline is there's enough LGBT supporters to cause a swing in the elections. can't see sense in move to publicly denounce a community” (*Twitter*, 15 Dec. 2013). This is true up to a certain extent as people belonging to LGBT community are striving hard for identity. Trans-genders look for these types of opportunities. Sometimes trans-genders play an active role in politics too. One can find a lot of persons from trans-genders who are well known faces in politics in their regions. They have very warm relations with other politicians of their locality. These politicians tend to take advantage of their popularity and rapport with local populace which these trans-genders have established through their welfare activities. This report exemplifies the stand:

Rajni Rawat of the third gender was . . . welcoming people to an election rally. While greeting the visitors, Rajni was also blessing them. Finally, Rajni’s chief guest, Saket

Bahuguna, who is former chief minister Vijay Bahuguna's son and the Congress nominee from the Tehri parliamentary seat, made an appearance amid drumbeats . . . . She has a strong network, particularly among the economically downtrodden, whom she reportedly helps financially. Saket, who is aware of Rajni's popularity, addressed her as bua (paternal aunt). (*Indian Express* 7)

This shows how in politics trans-genders are treated as vote bank and politicians try to derive political mileage using their influence. The politicians may have a different opinion about them in their personal life but when it comes about taking political advantage, they are at the forefront. This is not a lone incident that the trans-genders are active in politics. They have grabbed the headlines many a times. For instance:

Rahul Gandhi and Narendra Modi will each face an opponent from the third gender. Sonam has filed her nomination from Amethi where she faces Rahul, Kumar Vishwas and Smriti Irani. In Varanasi, Bashir Kinnar alias Kamla has filed her nomination as an independent against Modi and Arvind Kejriwal. Sonam, 35, has previously worked as a Congress member in Rajasthan. "I was president of the Ajmer district Congress committee but when I met Rahulji for a ticket from Ajmer North during the 2008 Rajasthan assembly elections, he refused. That day I vowed to fight against Rahul someday," she says (*Indian Express* 7).

This not so miniscule community has played a major and often substantial role in politics as is evident from the above-stated incidents. The major issue with the LGBT community is that they constitute a heterosexual group consisting of four diverse components i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. The relief given to a component is again discriminatory. They now face another problem i.e. what to do next. The other three strands will look forward for similar verdict in their favour. The dilemma is clearly exhibited here:

The transgender community is now planning celebrations in all states and to spread awareness about the movement. "The government needs to decide if it supports non-discrimination of the LGBT community as a whole or not. The current situation leaves the community a bit stranded and confused," Shaleen Rakesh, who manages the '207 against 377 campaign' at HIV/AIDS Alliance, said (*Indian Express* 9).

Trans-genders are looking forward for getting equal rights for all gender minorities like they achieved themselves. This is a long drawn process that will take some time to actualize.

In one of his blogs, Chetan Bhagat talks about women's day. He talks about his own experiences and then extends his heartiest wishes on the International Women's day. The blog reads: "Although a lot of my life's energy has gone into making women happy, it has been worth it. Happy Women's Day!" (*Twitter*, 07 March 2014). This spirit is well reflected in his book *2 States* too. Another related blog talks about his version of feminism. "I think I am a closet feminist" (*Twitter*, 07 March 2014). He appears to be self-contradictory here by stating that he has spent a lot of energy in making women happy in his life but it appears that by doing so he has done a favour towards them by making sacrifices. The reality may be altogether different. The problem with the male mind-set is that even if they are giving women their due places in their life, they think that they have done something extraordinary. One of the critics criticizes Chetan Bhagat in the following words:

His 2011 column titled "Don't worry, be happy", based on a Nielson survey that said Indian women are the most stressed in the world. Mr Bhagat first indulges in a lot of hand-wringing, because according to him (a) Indian women are the most beautiful and (b) "as mothers, sisters, daughters, colleagues, wives and girlfriends - we love them." He reveals his true colours right there, but the fun's just begun. (Aravind, *Business Standard*, 21 March 2014)

In the article Bhagat has been severely criticized for falsely posing as a feminist and the critic compares him to Narendra Modi to make the comparison starker. The critic further writes: "I think I am a closet feminist," Chetan Bhagat tweeted a day before International Women's Day. I guffawed, as any self-respecting woman would. I would have laughed louder only if Narendra Modi had suddenly declared he was secular. But we digress (*Business Standard*, 21 March 2014).

The stand of Chetan Bhagat here is compared to the hard-core Hindutava image of Narendra Modi. The comparison shows the extent of detest a person can have on a plain claim, rather a false claim to be more precise, made by someone. Feminism is a belief in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes and is manifested in the form of commitment for more rights for women in their best interest. It challenges the traditional notion of confining women to domestic sphere, denying them certain vital rights and

reserving public life for men. Chetan Bhagat has been attacked on this front too that he still sticks to century's old tradition. He has been alleged to have a biased mind. He exhibits a feminist fervour for the sake of show-off only whereas the underlying reality is altogether different. The following paragraph states what the critic feels about Bhagat in this regard:

The idea of a world without women terrifies Mr Bhagat because, among other things, "There would be body odour, socks on the floor and nothing in the fridge to eat". . . . And while their fathers are raising a stink, literally, just by raising their deodorant-less arms, Mr Bhagat predicts that children in this all-male universe will turn into "drug addicts" and "psychopaths". Apart from this truly awful stereotyping, that's a slap on the faces of all those men out there who are bringing up children alone or with male partners. (*Business Standard*, 21 March 2014)

These blatant statements about him show his mind upside-down and exhibits how one can have two contradicting opinions at a time. He asserts that men and women are unequal's and that by divine order they have been assigned their respective roles. Talking about women empowerment is quite easy but to place women on equal footing with men requires a change of social attitudes towards them which is very difficult to bring about and this is obviously evident in the aforementioned blogs. It is easier to profess than practice.

The next blog under discussion is one written about the minority community and its associated political, social and economic considerations. The blogger throws light on various aspects that how politicians exploit innocent people invoking their religious and communal feelings. The demagogue politicians are skilful in serving their selfish ends and leaving people ultimately in their pitiable condition. The blog becomes all the more important if we look deep into the psephology which has always centered round communal lines in the Indian context. Broadly speaking, the Indian voters tend to polarize along caste, community or religious lines at the time of casting their ballot. The following report elucidates this further:

This is also the time to reflect on a virtuous strategy to engage with the new government, especially in the context of the Muslim community in India. This election polarized the two major parties to such an extent that the BJP cast itself as the party of Hindutva, while the Congress was made the party of Muslims. Such religious polarization is detrimental not only to democracy but to development. The political



leadership should have no role in promoting or even supporting a religious identity.  
(*Indian Express* 8)

The leaders often tend to exploit the feeling of insecurity prevalent among the minority communities. The blogger talks about various ways through which the minorities can become an important and productive part of the society rather than an alienated chunk remaining totally cut-off from the mainstream. Bhagat talks about liberal values, personal liberty, role of education and an attempt to assimilate with the majority community. He writes:

Assimilation does not mean abandoning one's culture, or bending to the majority. It simply means finding as much common ground as possible. It also means not heeding leaders who are encouraging people to vote along communal lines. Even if one ignores the right and wrong of communal voting, it's also not a productive strategy. Instead, Muslims need to put forth a checklist—a set of conditions—on what it would take for them to trust the BJP again. They mustn't only oppose the BJP . . . . However, successful minority communities have been able to do that and allowed the wounds to heal (*Times of India*, 04 May 2014).

This is an obvious exemplification of the idea that a minority community should look for real gains rather than merely believing in demagoguery so that they can be truly emancipated. The minority community can keep all the political parties on their toes provided they keep a feasible set of conditions in front of all political parties which are usually considered as the representatives of the majority community. But if a minority community takes permanent sides with a particular political party, it may result counter-productive. A minority community should try to build trust with the majority community, albeit it appears quite difficult if that trust has been broken in the past. But life has to move on and all the successful communities in the world have allowed their wounds to heal. But the big question that may be posed at this juncture is, "Are Muslims really a minority." This refers to a statement made by the current Minority Affairs Minister Najma Heptulla.

If you have six children it is always important to see what you can do for the weakest of them. So far as my ministry is concerned, of the six minority communities the weakest is clearly the Parsis. They are a miniscule minority that is so precariously placed that one needs to take care of their survival. Muslims really are too large in number to be called a minority community," the minister told *The Indian Express*.

She said the very concept of minority and majority is relative and when talking about minorities it is imperative to understand that it is a term that encompasses many parameters, including language, apart from religion. Neither is there a 'one-size-fits-all' formula for the welfare of minorities. (*Indian Express* 1-2)

The bone of contention still remains there as what is more important: identity politics or development politics. Everyone is engaged in proving his/her point.

In one of his blogs, Bhagat makes mention of an article written about his achievements in *The Business Standard*. In the blog, he writes in a self-congratulatory manner that the title given to him is sarcastic and immediately says it isn't. "Actually that this is a sarcastic title, but wow, it isn't! | Chetan Bhagat, national treasure | Business Standard" (*Twitter*, 21 April 2014). It's a nice style of highlighting one's achievements and it becomes all the more interesting if one articulates it among one's followers. He very often indulges in self-applause and self-conceit. He has exhibited this vanity many a times by posting his selfie's with celebrities and powerful political leaders. For instance: "When the front-running PM candidate of the world's biggest democracy remembers your birthday and posts a selfie, have to say, it feels nice" (*Twitter*, 21 April 2014). This is one instance among many that exhibits how one can make oneself appear special. It's in human nature that we believe in self-applomb. Pampering our ego gives a very soothing feeling to our mind and it usually doesn't matter who is doing so and at times when nobody does that for us, we usually don't hesitate in doing it ourselves and this tendency is in abundance in this blogger. Another example may be cited to support the claim: "Chetan. Anusha. Alia. Arjun. :) #selfie #2states" (*Twitter*, 20 April 2014 [https://twitter.com/chetan\\_bhagat](https://twitter.com/chetan_bhagat)).

A selfie may be described as an important way of self-portraiture. Selfie is an important invention as elaborated in the following sentence: "Selfies have changed the primary function of the cellphone, which is no longer an instrument for talking to other people, but an instrument to provide visual evidence of you having been to wondrous places and seen spectacular sights" (*Times of India* 16).

Selfies are quite ubiquitous nowadays as they are used by almost everybody, from common man to celebrities, as an effective device of self-flattery as the following report suggests: "President Barack Obama likes to do it to himself. So does British Prime Minister David Cameron. Maybe so do Rahul Gandhi, Narendra Modi and Arvind Kejriwal. Why not?"

After all, *everyone*—or almost everyone—seems to be doing it to themselves these days. Taking selfies, that is” (*Times of India* 16). So when everybody is engaged into selfies, why not Chetan Bhagat; obviously it’s the easiest and fastest way to enrich one’s profile; and also an easy way to exhibit one’s political propensity especially in a highly politically charged environment.

One of the most interesting blogs written by him is on first April i.e. Fool’s day. The post reads: “I think it is amazing symbolism April Fool's day came in the middle of India's election campaign” (*Twitter*, 1April 2014). It’s a biting satire on the whole political set-up. One can easily identify the underlying irony after analyzing the blog. In our political system, every person tries to befool every other person. For instance, politicians try to befool people during their tenure in the government and they repeat the same thing during election campaign through their impressive oratory and demagoguery and *prima facie* it appears that they succeed. The politicians also try to befool the Election Commission of India by hiding their poll expenses from it or getting their money expended in somebody else’ name so that they can save their skin. During election campaign they often deliver provocative speeches leading to communal clashes and later on claim that it is taken out of context. Some people try to deceive the system by not casting their votes. But they actually deceive themselves by doing so. Some others who rather act more smartly try to befool the system itself by casting multiple votes often indulging into the corrupt practice of impersonation. Some others whose strong belief lies in selling out their votes for few bucks and still few others bring alive the age-old barter system by exchanging their votes for liquor, goods, etc.

Political parties try to befool their workers by dictating that they are working for an ideology and they should sacrifice their individual good for the party and see the irony that it has often been observed in the past that even political parties are sacrificed for individual good; even some political parties were created for/by particular individuals. Sometimes even politicians are themselves victim of their own parties and that’s why we often come across news of politicians switching sides during elections. Some are expelled from their parties and some resign (actually terminated) from their party or government portfolios. Everybody in the system is trying to befool someone or the system itself and on the other hand being duped in return. See the irony! The big question is who is actually being duped. The blog rightly points that the fool’s day ironically comes in the midst of the high drama of Indian general elections where this give-and-take drama of befooling one-another is at its zenith.

The last blog under study is about an incident which occurred in a college hostel in Uttar Pradesh where some Kashmiri students were expelled from the college for cheering for Pakistan. The blog reads: “Obviously you can’t punish the Indian students using Indian colleges to study who cheered Pakistan, but would love to know their psychology” (*Twitter*, 10 March 2014). Chetan Bhagat displays broad-mindedness by stating in a straight-forward manner that these students shouldn’t be punished simply for cheering Pakistan. The stance taken by Bhagat seems to be driven by the fact that the students were slapped with serious charges of sedition. Yet, he seems to be interested in studying their psychology. These two differing statements appearing in the same blog makes it self-contradictory. He beautifully states that they have done something wrong or at-least their mind-set is not right and that’s why he is interested in studying their psychology; but in the same breath, he goes on to support the students who committed the aforesaid crime.

The blog has deep psychological connotations as for an intelligible understanding of their psychology, one need to study the socio-political dimensions of the Kashmiri state which is in a socio-political and emotional turmoil ever since independent India’s inception and which has only intensified during the last two decades. And this is the reason why it is very hard to assess the psychology of these students. In a way, one can support Bhagat that instead of punishing these types of students, the government should look deep into the root cause of these problems and try to rectify it rather than taking vindictive actions.

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