



The theme of what Young India wants of Chetan

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What Young India Wants is a non-fiction book by Chetan Bhagat. A compilation of his speeches and essays, it focuses on Indian society, politics the youth. The book revolves around Bhagat's thoughts and innovations on how to improve the Indian economy through social reforms. It also criticizes the dis-function of the Indian government as well as moralities regarding the current condition of India. Bhagat writes about how India can be a progressive society in the future. He talks about the rampant corruption in India and how society should change to rid it. The theme is central to his dream of a free and forward thinking India. Published in August 2012, the book was universally panned by critics.

What Young India Wants is based on Chetan Bhagats vast experience as a very successful writer and motivational speaker. In clear, simple prose, and with great insight, he analyses some of the complex issues facing modern India, offers solutions and invites discussion on them. And, at the end, he asks this important question: Unless we are all in agreement on what it is going to take to make our country better, how will things ever change?

Chetan Bhagat asks hard questions, demands answers and presents solutions for a better, more prosperous India.

Why do our students regularly commit suicide?

Why is there so much corruption in India?

Cant our political parties ever work together?

Does our vote make any difference at all?

We love our India, but shouldn't some things be different?

All of us have asked these questions at some time or the other. So does Chetan Bhagat, India's most loved writer, in What Young India Wants, his first book of non-fiction.

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The underlying theme of Chetan Bhagat's What Young India Wants is righteous indignation at the perceptibly sorry state of Indian affairs, especially 'Corruption'. The author concludes that corruption is a way of life in India. He says:

Our Society respects power, not excellence or integrity. Power-driven systems resemble the jungle. The lion is always right and the lion's friends have a good life. Everyone else's place in life is dependent on their power. Sure, such societies can function, but do not progress much.

Exploring further on how we can change, he says:

Deep down we all are sceptical and ashamed of ourselves. We all want to be honest, but we don't want to be the only ones honest, for then we will suffer. This paradox prevents change.

In this context, Chetan cites the example of everyone pushing and shoving to get into a bus even as every one of them knows that if all of them queue up, it will be far more comfortable for everybody.

The author acknowledges that India has major problems and also believes, in a highly simplistic and Obama-like conclusion that 'they can be fixed.' To me, this confidence truly represents Young India, which hates the old world intellectual mumbo-jumbo that complicates simple matters and rationalizes selfish inaction.

In the section 'Our Society', Bhagat laments the lack of definable values in the Indian society. He compares our abstract values with definite American values like Wealth, competition, Individualism and religion. However, he rationalizes absence of concrete set of Indian values to the fact that the concept of Indian state itself is relatively new. The phenomenon is further typified by the existence of different sets of values for various subsets of Indian society. The author exhibits wide-eyed acclamation of American society and almost ignores its own weaknesses. The typical American concepts like 'greed is good' are repeatedly used in the book. At the same time, he differentiates between the concepts of Lakshmi (The goddess of Wealth) and 'mere accumulation of money' He takes potshots at Indian society which worships the goddess but is being merely money-minded instead of understanding the true meaning of 'Lakshmi' (wealth accumulated through honest means).

The author also argues that 'being rich does not mean being bad'. It is driven into our psyche from childhood that we Indians are good, god-fearing people and everything western is bad and decadent. But in that case, why are we so miserable? Bhagat's reaction to this has to be quoted in his own words:

"What happened? Weren't we supposed to be the good ones? And yet, it is the greedy, Western 'baddies' who seem to be doing a better job at being just, truthful and equal. They are not only richer; they seem better, too. It is disheartening to face this ugly truth. After all, poor person is supposed to be the better person- at least that's what they show in the movies"

Bhagat also attempts an analysis of the three main traits of Indian psyche acquired from three distinct sources. The traits are Servility (school is the source), numbness to injustice (environment) and divisiveness (Home is the source!). After fortifying his theory with simple examples, he prescribes mass self-psychotherapy for curing the said traits and advocates conscious change of our mindsets to break the cycle so that we don't pass on these traits to the next generation.

In the 2nd section i.e. 'Politics', the author advocates a fairly radical economic idea of en masse unlocking of the value of state-held real estate in our Metros by moving out government offices to the suburbs and using the proceeds for infrastructure-building. He says "To sit on assets at the expense of the common people is called feudalism, and we were supposed to have ended that sixty-five years ago."

Further, he talks about how new-age politicians are bolder than before. He brings both sides in the Lokpal agitation (Civil society and the Government) together on the 'same page.' He frankly admits that Indian Politics is a jigsaw puzzle that can take decades to understand. And that shows. Bhagat has just

scratched the surface as far as Indian Politics is concerned. He offers altruistic and naïve solutions like 'Politician-Industrialist socialization should not be encouraged' and cliques like 'Just as a terrorist has no religion, a corrupt politician has no political party.'

In the final section called 'Our Youth' the author explains why he chose to write this particular book in the following words:

"I have been described as one of the voices for the youth of the nation. I am not sure if that is correct, but I do try to speak about youth issues wherever possible. Young people read my books, mostly, and I want to do something for them."

In *What Young India Wants*, Chetan Bhagat sees a spark in the young Indians which is 'difficult to find in the older lot. As we age, the spark fades. People whose spark has faded too much are dull, dejected, aimless and bitter'. However, astonishingly, his prescription for nurturing the spark is 'not to take life seriously'. I can see the danger inherent in this prescription as the Indian youth, who are already accused of lacking direction in life, may lap up this prescription.

The author castigates the Indian primary education system but says again that 'this can be fixed'. Bhagat delivers another idealistic exhortation on the need for the primary education to be vast enough in scale and scope and on the need for it to be seen as a utility such as power or telecom. He says that ideally, just as with a few power utilities, the effort should be privatized (as if it is not already!) may be on a subsidized basis. He adds that if the education is worth it, people pay for it. This particular idea is symptomatic of the author's incapacity to understand the real needs/compulsions of rural children which is the crux of the matter as far as primary education is concerned. On higher education Bhagat is on much firmer ground when he lampoons the institutes of higher learning as 'Indian Institute of Idiots' and 'The Bootlegging of Education'.

In a hilarious debate on Nerds Vs Lards (Educated in Technology Vs Educated in Liberal Arts), Bhagat unabashedly takes the side of the Nerds and exposes the hypocrisy of the so called Lards. However, I being a lard did not stop me from thoroughly enjoying his jibes.

Chetan Bhagat sums up his book with two short stories and an open declaration of what he calls 'the Great Indian Dream' should be. The dream is that every citizen should work hard, prosper and succeed through innovation and hard work and once successful, every citizen should give back to the society that made her or him what he or she is. He emotionally appeals to Indians to live this dream. He also links what he has embarked upon now to the said dream.

'What Young India Wants' is the first attempt by the bestselling author of 'cool' racy novels like *5 Point Someone*, *2 States*, *3 Mistakes of My Life* and so on to write non-fiction on the harsh challenges facing India. Through this book of 181 pages only, he tries to make discussion of these serious topics the 'new cool' (after tragedy of course, for those who have watched the *2 States* movie trailer!) among youth of India.

At the outset he clarifies that why he, a writer who talks about young people 'making out in confined spaces' chose to enter more serious territory of nonfiction. Hence he gives his own life story and finally leads to a noble conclusion that as he commands a huge young reader base who read his books and listen to his motivational speeches, he decided to tap into this youth pulse to spread ideas of how India can develop faster and better. He considers this his duty as a writer and I must say that he brings in his own signature style of putting in wisecracks at many of the places and drives home serious points for the 'cool' generation!

The book is divided into four parts (Society, politics, youth, Two Stories) each of which have important subtopics. As it was published after mid-2012 issues discussed are very current too. Reading it gives an overview of issues & suggestions to solve the issues too are given from author's experience, viewpoint & discussions with his vast network. I especially liked the following points:-

- 1) Cutting govt deficit by making good use of Lutyens Delhi land as posh 2-acre bungalows are not needed for ministers & high officers when efficient buildings on lower FSI could be built, in the chapter 'Getting Realistic about Real Estate'.
- 2) Open letters to Mahatma Gandhi & Sonia Gandhi are interesting. Letter to Gandhi written from the 'Indian youth' has some food for thought as it makes readers think would Gandhi if alive today have really used internet to get together the youth? Also, letter to Sonia Gandhi has good points about getting in best youth talents into politics & nurturing them by giving regular stipends to run their lives so that they will not have to become corrupt right from start.
- 3) Talking about 'peace' in context of Pakistan as a practical need and solution for our nations' development rather than confusing it with love for the bitter neighbour. However, at that time (2012) it was under military rule and his solution of using world stage to coerce it into democracy is now practically no use, as even a 'democratic' govt under Nawaz Sharif has led to continuous and severe border fighting.
- 4) Due to my reading of 'Being Indian' I was better able to appreciate his chapters on wealth creation, values, power, dynastic rule etc. It is true that this book has a microcosm of the views given in 'Being Indian' still for the uninitiated, it gives brief insights into our colonial hangover, obsession with power & connections and why our young must be taught better values, rather than a confused picture of values which is now given out.
- 5) Being passionate about reforming education system, the author suggests breaking free from shackles of bureaucracy even within the cream institutions like IITs etc. as now seniority rather than merit among faculty is preferred. The highly educated, talented do not set up institutions in India due to nonprofit clause attached which leads to lot of bribery. Laws must be changed in this direction so that more top class institutions can come up.
- 6) His two fictional stories towards the end are a take on reality and are brilliantly crafted.
- 7) At the end he talks about The Great American Dream but rues that we have not had our version and thus, defines one and asks the young to come on board. On an optimistic note he says- "Just like the freedom fighters who made such sacrifices for us, let us also join hands to make India a better place.

There is no Hindu India or Muslim India. There is no Punjabi India or Tamil India. There is no upper caste India or lower caste India. There is not even a Congress India or a BJP India. There is just one India, our country, which we all want to become a better place..."

In the book, the author supports the idealistic Anna movement cause. I found it amazing to see that how even within less than two years, fluid happenings like weakening of the movement and formation of a new party which even formed Delhi govt and subsequently resigned in a most bizarre manner thereby letting go of a great opportunity to demonstrate good governance, have occurred. Wonder if his new nonfiction book would be about this!

The author takes off directly addressing his readers by way of a letter titled 'My Journey', in which he summarizes his life so far. He relives a typical, upper middle class childhood and college life, fairly uneventful except for a short-lived suicide plan. Eventually he flowered into a highly successful investment banker at Hong Kong until he gave it all up on discovering his passion in writing and never looked back.

To summarize this, Chetan Bhagat's What Young India Wants is a good reading for those youngsters (especially nerds!) who have been too bogged down in the rat race of exams and ranks to care for and form opinions about the issues concerning contemporary India. For others who have already applied

their minds to the said issues continuously, the book will add no value but still will make interesting reading from the point of view of understanding the psyche of the urban young Indian populace.

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