

A HISTORY OF THE
INDIAN NOVEL IN
ENGLISH

EDITED BY

ULKA ANJARIA

Brandeis University



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CHAPTER 20

Chetan Bhagat: Remaking the Novel in India

Priya Joshi

A curious thing happened to the Indian novel in English on the way to the twenty-first century. It stopped being a child of midnight. It even stopped being a child. Its “midnight” is now spent at the call center, and its “children” are twenty- and thirty-something readers in small towns with weak English and few literary demands, who nevertheless appear to have transformed the publishing landscape in India. In contrast to prize-winning literary novelists such as Aravind Adiga, Amitav Ghosh, and Kiran Desai, whose status is underwritten by recognition overseas rather than in India, writers of the twenty-first century Indian novel in English thrive because of a loyal base in India that keeps them on domestic bestseller lists with print runs of over a million that easily outpace the polite printings of 300 that internationally renowned literary novelists enjoy. India’s robust market for English books has led some observers to predict that it will become “the biggest English language book-buying market in the world” by 2020 (Burke). The claim is hardly hyperbolic: in a dense entertainment ecosystem that includes television, print, the internet, radio, cricket, social media, and gaming, all nimbly delivering content skillfully niched to consumers, annual revenues from print in India are double the revenues from film and just behind television. A 2013 report on the Indian media and entertainment industry by the global consulting firm KPMG remarks that “India is an outlier country where print is still a growth market.”¹

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The novel comprises a slice of India's total print revenues, and the English² novel until recently an even smaller crumb. But then the twenty-first century arrived, and the publishing landscape was turned on its head by writers unheard of outside India who nevertheless seem to have reconceived the economic and social horizons of the novel, of reading, and even possibly of India. No writer better illuminates the transformations in Indian print and readership than Chetan Bhagat (b. 1974), whose novels since 2004 and their adaptation into blockbuster films since 2009 have inaugurated the phenomenon that this chapter describes. All of Bhagat's novels to date have sold over a million copies each, some reaching that milestone in three months – as *Revolution 2020* did in 2011. His latest novel, *Half Girlfriend*, published in October 2014, reportedly had an initial print run of 2 million.³ Bhagat has been hailed as “the biggest-selling English-language novelist in India's history” (Greenlees), with some such as Gauram Padmanabhan, CEO of the publishing firm Westland, noting that Indian publishing today falls into two periods: “BC” (before Chetan) and after (as quoted in Kapoor). Author of five novels and a collection of essays, commentator in a national Hindi newspaper (*Dainik Bhaskar*), motivational speaker, and pundit on “national development” matters (the phrase is his own), Bhagat targets his writing to India's twenty- and thirty-something readers who, he argues, prefer a “Bollywood comedy sort of format” (as quoted in Greenlees). His essay collection, *What Young India Wants* (2012), communicates a canny gift for interpellating readers through catchy titles. Bhagat's novels are published at extremely low prices that appeal to his youth readership (Rs. 95, rather than Rs. 500 for literary fiction by novelists such as Ghosh and Desai) and are distributed outside the metropolitan bookstore circuit, in gas stations and traffic stops, convenience stores and footpaths. As he explains: “My readers do not go to bookstores. They don't even live in metropolises.”⁴ Long ignored by literary writers and respectable publishers, these readers flock to Bhagat and others like him, whose writing captures their pressure-cooker world with its consuming exam culture, family expectations, professional anxieties, and often stifling horizons.

Bhagat's pricing and outreach model have been rapidly copied and modified by others hoping to reach readers whom they insist are keen for new writing that addresses their lives in a post-liberalization India:

I think India is changing, and people frankly don't care for the kind of books big publishers were coming out with – stories of the British Raj or the struggles of NRIs. After a century, India is rich again, and people want

to hear stories about themselves – about our call centre generation. (quoted in Reddy)

insists the novelist Amish Tripathi, who used his business school marketing skills and professionally produced YouTube videos to launch his best-seller *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010). Other novelists, such as Ravinder Singh, worked with the matrimonial website shaadi.com to help sell *I Too Had a Love Story* (2013) (Reddy).

The forms in which the English novel flourishes in India today are decidedly lowbrow and, in some cases, downright antiliterary, less because of their themes (whose key preoccupations include intimacy, community, and personal fulfillment) than because of the *treatment* of these themes in forms that closely resemble what is frequently dismissed as pulp fiction. Thus, romances, college novels, and the very Indian form of crick(et) lit have dominated purchases – with some breaking the million plus mark – while more literary writers such as Kiran Desai and Vikram Seth languish at sales of fewer than 300 copies per year. The language in Bhagar’s novels is colloquial; plot and dialogue dominate over character; and SMS and chats replace narrative alongside a backdrop of combustible social and economic matters such as land grabs and religious tension. The format, combining the casual with the consequential, works. As the scholar Rashmi Sadana observes in her ethnography of Indian publishing, “There are few if any novelistic passages [in Chetan Bhagar’s novels], where people, ideas, or places are described in any kind of depth. And yet whatever is described, even if brief and mostly in the form of dialogue, is compelling enough and moves the story along” (Sadana, *English* 176).

The worlds captured by new writers such as Bhagar and his readers index a phenomenon that is paradoxically old and even familiar in publishing history if one looks back far enough. Uncovering it alongside Bhagar’s contemporary writings provides an opportunity to rethink the Indian novel and to place it in broader contexts than the national or the linguistic, even when both nation and language are intrinsic to the phenomenon that Bhagar’s work illuminates.

This chapter proceeds in three parts. The first outlines the culture of books and reading in which the English novel circulates in India today; the second describes what might be identified as India’s “writing” culture; and the conclusion offers remarks on the social purpose of the novel in the twenty-first century.

The Culture of Books

India is a literary destination, a place replete with books, and a culture that supports books in many languages, of which English is just one. When books are published, their circulation is enabled by a culture that acknowledges them (e.g., reviews) and enables their consumption. The country boasts major literary festivals (such as in Jaipur, for example), supportive publishers, multiple review outlets, book societies, prizes, and serials that together form a node that publishing historians call a *book culture*. A thriving book culture acknowledges production and inspires it as well. India is no different. The prestige of the English novel has penetrated its book culture so deeply that by some half-exasperated accounts, every student in Delhi University has a novel in his back pocket, and every other graduate of the elite Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) uses his job bonus to publish one.⁵

This narrative of unalloyed bookishness urges nuance. India, indeed, has a sophisticated book culture – as the festivals, reviews, prizes, and sellers indicate – yet its book culture is concentrated in a few major cities (notably Delhi, which headquarters a third of India's 225 publishers) and is focused on a few forms, such as fiction, self-help, and business.⁶ This concentration obscures a matter of greater interest to scholars – namely, India's widespread *reading culture*, a term that designates the many locations where readers and reading flourish (P. Joshi, "Futures" 89–90). A decade ago, it was possible to show a congruence between the country's prominent book culture (centered on production and circulation) and its thriving reading culture (centered on consumption by readers and their reading practices). Both matched, supported, and paralleled the other.

The congruence between a book culture and a reading culture is not inevitable (see P. Joshi, "Futures"). In countries such as Nigeria and Colombia that also claim prominent symbolic capital on the world literary landscape, with Nobel and Booker prizes to their credit, a noticeable gap between a book culture and a reading culture remains evident. Thus, while Gabriel García Márquez lamented the paucity of books as a youth in Bogotá, he recalled the vivid culture of reading that made much of the few books around (García Márquez 100). In other words, while Bogotá had a limited book culture, it had a thriving reading culture, and readers met regularly to discuss books and ideas in cafes and bars, even when the actual books were far beyond their means.

The sociologist Wendy Griswold observes a similar trend in contemporary Nigeria: despite a total output of approximately 500 novels published between independence in 1960 and 2000, despite few libraries and even fewer institutions to publish and circulate books, Nigeria reveals a thriving and visible reading culture (Griswold 107ff). The two examples divulge a paradox: the cultures of books and reading do not necessarily require each other to prosper, nor do they necessarily always parallel each other. That India's cultures of books and reading so closely parallel each other is an anomaly that merits closer attention, especially since the situation appears to be changing dramatically, and a cleavage between book culture and reading culture appears on the horizon.

"New" Fictions: Chetan Bhagat

Over the past decade, a vibrant, daring, and different publishing industry for the English novel has emerged in India. Forms such as crick lit, workplace novels, and the regionally specific IIT novels have taken off to hitherto unimagined heights. The previous "Hindu" print run of 500 copies has now been replaced by 30,000 to 1 million-plus first printings for writers such as Chetan Bhagat and Anuja Chauhan (author of the cricket novel *The Zoya Factor* [2008]).

The Indian Novel celebrated at the landmark Jaipur Literature Festival is quite evidently *many* Indian novels, most of them not even especially literary – as a glance at Bhagat, Chauhan, or Vikas Swarup amply documents. More to the point, these novels indicate authorial ambitions quite different from those of novelists typically featured in Jaipur, such as Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, and so on. Bhagat and Swarup outspokenly claim "blockbuster" status for their works, a term more typically associated with popular cinema, in which their titles have enjoyed successful adaptation. Bhagat's 2004 debut, *Five Point Someone: What NOT to do at IIT!* was adapted into *3 Idiots* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2009), which became the second highest grossing Bollywood film of the new millennium at the box office.⁷ Vikas Swarup's *Q&A* (2005) was adapted as the Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* in 2008 (dir. Danny Boyle). In contrast, the 2012 screen adaptation of the iconic *Midnight's Children* (dir. Deepa Mehta) had a sluggish thirteen-week run and is widely considered a flop with worldwide grosses barely crossing \$1 million.⁸ When Bhagat and Swarup eventually made it to Jaipur, it was as much for their novels' adaptations into successful films as for their literary

ambitions. Thus, while these are novels, to be sure, they are quite clearly not literary, *nor do they intend to be*.

The journalist Sheela Reddy names new Indian writers such as Bhagat “lo-cal literati,” a moniker that perceptively identifies the very local nature of their immense popularity alongside their evidently lowbrow status. Bhagat, Swarup, Chauhan, and their cohort write to and for India’s youth market, which loyally keeps their titles on the bestseller lists *in India only* in marked contrast with writers such as Adiga, Ghosh, Desai, and so on, whose overseas prestige underwrites the respect they enjoy in India. When mainstream Indian publishers rejected these popular writers in the early 2000s, new houses rapidly emerged to capture them and their readers. As Jayant Bose of Srishti Publishers (one of the speediest of the publishing firms to capitalize on the “new” writers) explains, these new pulp novels “have stories set in India and about Indians, preferably from small towns,” where the newest and hungriest generation of Indian readers proliferate (as quoted in Reddy). In contrast to the highbrow literary novels of Ghosh and others, those by Bhagat and Durjoy Datta easily incorporate Hindi and Gujarati into their English and adopt a laddish style that addresses the reader with endearing intimacy.

Following the success of his debut, *Five Point Someone*, Bhagat developed a device that he repeats in most of his novels: a direct address to the reader and the conceit that the narrative that follows is a story told to the real Chetan Bhagat by a living reader who engages Bhagat’s previous novels, revises them, and then provides him the narrative that forms the current work. The “living reader’s stories” include IIT’s cut-throat culture, the humiliation of call-center work, the Godhra riots of 2002, and the unregulated coaching centers in India that try to capture lower-middle-class students desperate to enter a competitive university program in high-value fields such as business, engineering, and technology. Bhagat’s intimate voice and colloquial English pervade throughout, as does his evident respect for his readers. In *One Night @ the Call Center*, Bhagat asks his readers to “Write down something that . . . you fear . . . [something that] makes you angry and . . . [something that] you don’t like about yourself.” A page later, he queries, “Have you done it? If not, please do . . . If yes, thanks. Sorry for doubting you. . . . Enjoy the story” (ix, x). The novel proceeds with a prologue: “The night train ride from Kanpur to Delhi was the most memorable journey of my life. For one, it gave me my second book” (1).

The 3 Mistakes of My Life is even more direct. Its acknowledgments border on an *ars poetica*:

My readers, you that is, to whom I owe all my success and motivation. My life belongs to you now, and serving you is the most meaningful thing I can do with my life. I want to share something with you. I am very ambitious in my writing goals. However, I don't want to be India's most admired writer. I just want to be India's most loved writer. *Admiration passes, love endures.* (3 *Mistakes* ix; emphasis added)⁹

Bhagat's claim that "admiration passes, love endures" conveys a daring calculus for a novelist. The language of admiration and love parses placement: one sentiment is reserved for those up above (admiration), the other for those at the same level as the subject. Dismissing the esteem ("admiration") commanded by those held on high, Bhagat instead pursues adulation ("love") claimed from equals ("admiration comes with expectations. Love accepts some flaws," he explains in *Half Girlfriend* [vii]). The metaphor of high and low placement further parses the *kinds of* esteem certain literary forms command: "admiration" for the highbrow, love for the popular. Bhagat's writing goals insist on the lowbrow, invoking the passion that popular forms command (they are "most loved") rather than the more sedate regard enjoyed by the highbrow. And his reasons are simple: admiration passes, love endures. In the world that Bhagat invokes, the claim is likely accurate. However, in arbitrating prestige, book culture tends to have its way and insist otherwise: admiration endures, love passes, or, put another way, the literary highbrow prevails over the popular lowbrow. Eager to contest such an economy of prestige, Bhagat cannily counters with an alternative in his most recent novel: "People sometimes ask me how I would like to be remembered. . . . All I tell them is this: I don't want to be remembered, I just want to be missed" (*Half Girlfriend* vii-viii). For Bhagat and the world that his writing indexes, the lowbrow prevails by claiming a trifecta: it is loved; it endures in popular affection; and it is missed when absent. In short, Bhagat's writing inhabits a zone hitherto reserved in book culture exclusively for the highbrow.

The ongoing contest between high and low is played out in the cultures of books and reading and is especially evident in Indian publishing today. Research on India's recent fiction helps elaborate the cleavage between the presence of a book culture in India and the readerly culture noted earlier. As India's book culture reaches new heights in global visibility (creating many internationally admired writers), and as new forms of the English novel thrive in the domestic context, a new landscape is becoming visible for the novel in India, which Bhagat helps bring to focus. In addition to a book culture and a reading culture, a third "culture" is also becoming evident, which I name a writing culture. Again,

Bhagat illuminates this transformation especially effectively in a number of salient registers.

First, India's "new" English fiction, in contrast to its literary predecessors (by Rushdie, Seth, Ghosh, Roy, etc.) circulates widely across languages and media. Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* is perhaps better known as the film *3 Idiots* rather than as a novel (other film adaptations include Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center* [2005] as *Hello* [2008]; *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* [2008] as *Kai Po Che!* [2013] to rave reviews; and *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* [2009] as *2 States* [2014]). *Slumdog Millionaire* also enjoyed wider circulation in film than it did as the novel *Q&A*. Moreover, Bhagat, in marked contrast to India's monolingual literary novelists – feted in Jaipur and named earlier – writes in both the English and Hindi presses with biweekly columns in both the staid *Times of India* and the Hindi national *Dainik Bhaskar*. "Dainik Bhaskar has a readership in crores [tens of millions]... The Hindi audience gave me a chance to reach the majority, the real India," Bhagat explains (*What Young India* xix). In his newspaper columns, he has gone from fictionalizing India to excoriating it in writing, which gets him and his causes attention among those otherwise likely to dismiss him as a pulp novelist who writes only "stories about young people making out in confined spaces, or drinking vodka on the terrace, or falling in love" (*What Young India* vii–viii).

Bhagat targets his writing to lower-middle-class youth from the long-ignored Tier 2 and 3 cities, who reward his attention with a zeal that no "famous" literary writer can quite summon. His portrayal of their cities is affectionate if unvarnished: "[Kota] looked like any other small town in India, with too much traffic and pollution and too many telecom, underwear and coaching-class hoardings. I wondered what was so special about this place" (*Revolution* 49). Bhagat's ethnography has a light touch: "I figured out what made Kota different. Every one was clued into the entrance exams... This complex vortex of tests, classes, selections and preparations is something every insignificant Indian student like me has to go through to have a shot at a decent life" (*Revolution* 49, 55). And the grind of competition and corruption (Bhagat's self-described "big muse" [*What Young India* xxi]) that the "billion sparks of India" undergo daily for a shot at a decent life is what Bhagat captures in his novels.¹⁰ They are about insignificant students whose interiority and even subjectivity he inspires and conveys. By the end of each of his novels, their pallid outer life is given a Technicolor inner one by a series of events that seem farfetched (a cellphone call from God in *Call Center*) and utterly

quotidian (a pogrom in *3 Mistakes*). “The obvious dilemma,” writes the journalist Mini Kapoor, “is that [Bhagat’s] writing does not have the complexity to be diced by the established instruments of literary analysis” (Kapoor). Bhagat’s readers do not demur at all: “He’s talking to my generation; we connect to him,” insists an eighteen-year old (quoted in MacRae). Even Bhagat’s detractors have had to admit that he captures audiences unreached by India’s literary fiction in *any* language.

Bhagat’s novels describe a social world in which corruption rules and meritocracy proves elusive. From a call center where his indentured characters slave, one finally explodes: “An entire generation [is] up all night, providing crutches for the white morons to run their lives. And then big companies come and convince us . . . [to] do jobs we hate so that we can buy stuff” (*One Night* 253). *Half Girlfriend*, with its ambition to “change . . . the mindset of Indian society” (vii), has its protagonist, Madhav, indulge in a “desi-invasion daydream”: “If the Industrial Revolution had taken place here, there would be Indian ex-colonies around the world. White men would have had to learn Hindi to get a decent job. White teachers would tell white men how to say cow in Hindi with a perfect accent” (*Half* 129–30). No wonder the books sell in unprecedented fashion. For some such as Shagun Sharma, the Hindi-language publisher of Tulsi Paper Books: “[Chetan Bhagat] has done what television channels could not do. He has single-handedly wiped out the Hindi language reader with his easy-to-read English” (quoted in Kaur).

Bhagat’s cross-platform circulation paradoxically illuminates and possibly explains the cleavage between book culture and reading culture increasingly evident in India. Precisely because the “new” fictions successfully capture an audience far beyond the precincts of a book culture, their presence is largely negligible in the metrics of a book culture. Bhagat’s novels have mostly been ignored in the culture of reviews, prizes, and metropolitan bookstores and most markedly by literary critics – a neglect that explains why so many of the citations in the present study come from journalists obliged to attend to the world of publishing he has inaugurated.

In short, India’s “new” fictions are texts and titles that actively short-circuit a book culture of metropolitan acknowledgement and prestige and indicate a whole world of consumption and circulation in which “reading” is simply one part. Let me provisionally name this a writing culture and define it as a node in which writing and ideas prevail, sometimes beyond the spheres of books and reading. Bhagat illuminates one way in

which this may work: his writing and ideas circulate in and beyond print, in film, Facebook (where he has over 13 million Friends), Twitter (with over 4 million followers), TV, and radio, alongside more “traditional” forms of publication. Rather than one medium obliterating the other, the multiple platforms enhance Bhagat’s writing and its reach and even consolidate it. Thus, the term “writing culture” conveys a place where writing appears alongside its forms of consumption. In this example, it is the anti-literary novel that elucidates a new phenomenon and future for the novel in India.

A New Purpose and Presence?

What might the gulf between book culture and reading culture say about the story of the novel broadly, or about India’s literary landscape? And might this gulf indicate new futures for the novel – or book culture – in India specifically and possibly more broadly? Let me address these questions in order, with the caveat that further research is likely to urge refinement of what is an ongoing phenomenon.

While the specific forms that Bhagat currently produces might be new (i.e., not previously present, such as the IIT novel, for example), the production of such writing itself is not new, nor, more keenly, is the gulf between book culture and reading culture especially new. The rupture between popular and literary forms of the novel has been around for some time, as evidenced in the case of the novel in late nineteenth-century Britain. As Q. D. Leavis’s research documents (and as Andreas Huyssen’s and Lawrence Rainey’s later research adumbrates), at some point British modernism manufactured the gulf between popular fiction and what it deemed elite forms in English writing. Confronting the “difficult” and “selective” modernist literary field, averred Leavis, readers stayed with the popular for pleasure and ventured, on rare occasion, toward the modernist for purpose or prestige (see Leavis 35–9).

Not only did modernism precipitate the gulf between popular and mainstream; it created the very conditions to perpetuate that gulf. The elaborate and finely grained networks of patronage, prizes, and reviews (read “book culture”) that espoused Anglo-American literary modernism effectively excluded anti-modernist (read “popular”) forms from serious purview. In essays and reviews, writers such as Virginia Woolf (*Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* and “Modern Fiction”) and T. S. Eliot (“Tradition and the Individual Talent”) systematically created a book culture and defined the titles and forms that were permitted into it. The

institutionalization of Anglo-American modernism and its subsequent prestige in the academy actively perpetuated this gulf and further separated the two domains of books and reading to an extent that one now has to work quite hard to recover a period (and a critical perspective) in which the popular was *also* the mainstream, as it was through the eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, roughly from Defoe to Dickens, when book culture and reading culture were largely the same.

If India's "new" fictions by Bhagat and others vex the separation between a book culture and a reading culture, they do so in a marketplace that resembles in form if not degree that of a previous century and culture. Bhagat's writing and the exuberant range of his activities recall Dickens's; motivational speaker, journalist, policy wonk, national development columnist, banker, and mechanical engineer are just some of the activities alongside novelist that Bhagat claims.¹¹ There is no evidence in any of Bhagat's work that he is troubled by his apparent exclusion from India's book culture or that he seeks it out ("the book critics, they all hate me," he shrugs [quoted in Greenlees]). In the field of ideas that he and others following him have created, if a single culture matters, it is a *writing* culture that captures audiences before readers, often in film before the novel – as was the case with the adaptations of *Five Point Someone* and, later, *3 Mistakes*. When asked why he pursues "all this other . . . non-book work" in film and newspapers, Bhagat explained:

I write for change. In order to change, I want to first reach as many Indians as possible through entertainment and then influence them with my non-fiction writings and views. For this, I want to be flexible with the medium, be it books, TV, films, stage or the Internet. *I do not see myself as an author alone, and my job is to reach and communicate with as many people as possible, using any available means.* (chetanbhagat.com; emphasis added)

The landscape of million-copy print runs that circulate below and outside the purview of institutional and institutionalizing book culture in India indicates a new chapter in the story of the novel in India and elsewhere. If British modernism's academizing split readers from books and kept them apart, then the Indian academy's longstanding reluctance to take Indian literature seriously or to give it curricular presence in the university is possibly a boon.¹² The logic of the market is quite different from that of the academy: in the market, success is measured by vast numbers and economic returns; in the academy, by exclusiveness and symbolic capital. In short, the *book* culture of admiration and prestige that Bhagat and his followers ignore presents no peril to their "love" or popularity in India's *reading* and *writing* cultures.

Bhagat's multilingual presence in Hindi and English, his presence in print and film, and his output in numerous discursive fields (finance, management, policy) recall a cultural moment when books *mattered* far beyond their immediate literary circuits. Again, the Victorian example is instructive. Bhagat may not be Dickens who commanded stage, newsprint, and paperboard equally, a colossus in each medium, but he might be closer to Dickens's compatriot, colleague, and later foe, G. W. M. Reynolds (1814–79), whose Chartist sympathies and reformist zeal were evident in half a century of massively populist journalism, best-selling serial fiction, and self-help books that were published in quantities and audiences to easily rival Dickens's, and that themselves inspired India's important early novels (see P. Joshi, *In Another Country* 74–87). The idea is not to restore Bhagat to some neglected pantheon. Rather, Bhagat's popularity recalls a moment and place when figures like him and the work they did – intrusively, insistently, and popularly – inserted themselves into a culture in which they *made* themselves matter. Love endures, even though readers fade.

And that, in the end, may be the next future of the English novel in India. Writers of popular fiction such as Bhagat speak to a new purpose and presence of the novel in a country that “discovered” the form relatively “late.” India's “new” English novel, like India's Urdu poetry before it, has a powerful partner in popular film. Bhagat and Swarup are not the only figures whose works are adapted to widespread acclaim in Hindi cinema. Their often clumsy critiques of the “national development” story are nuanced and streamlined in blockbusters such as *3 Idiots* and *Slumdog Millionaire*, in the collaborative hands of other writers and the fingers of the world's most-skilled production teams. Absent pretensions themselves (Bhagat cheerfully accepts his moniker as an “unliterary” writer [S. Dasgupta, “Leading”]), their work unabashedly enters that most popular of zones, the Bollywood film, where it participates and shapes dialogues about nation and citizen, modernity and social purpose in realms far removed from print, literacy, and even the novel. That, finally, may be the future of the novel: inhabiting a zone in which it actively coexists with other forms and media, rather than obliterating or being obliterated by them.

Notes

- 1 Revenues from television dominate at Rs. 370 billion; then print a close second at Rs. 224.1 billion, followed from afar by film at Rs. 112.4 billion. See data compiled in KPMG-FICCI's 2013 report, *The Power of a Billion: Realizing the*

Indian Dream, Indian Media and Entertainment Report, 2013, p. 10. <https://www.in.kpmg.com/Securedata/FICCI/Reports/FICCI-KPMG-Report-13.pdf>.

- 2 The “English” novel in this chapter refers to the novel written in English. It does not refer to novels that come from the UK, as earlier practice might demand. In the twenty-first century, when English is an Indian language claimed by more people in India than in the UK and US combined, insisting on national origins for “English” or using terms such as “Anglophone” rehearses outdated colonial approaches. For an elaboration of some of these themes, see P. Joshi, *In Another Country* chapter 1.
- 3 Data on the sales of Bhagat’s novel was reported in Kapoor, accessed August 2014. *Five Point Someone* took three years to sell a million copies, *One Night @ the Call Center* took four years, and *Revolution 2020* reached the million-books-sold milestone in three months.
- 4 “I spend half my time in Mumbai and the other half in small towns where I give motivational speeches in colleges. . . . 70 percent of my readers are from small towns,” notes Chetan Bhagat in an interview with Yamini Deenadayalan (Deenadayalan).
- 5 The masculine pronoun is intentional here: the overwhelming number of campus novels in this publishing “boom” have been written by men. Research into gender and authorship in the last decade urgently merits further study.
- 6 Statistics on publishing houses in major metropolises are as follows: Delhi/New Delhi/Noida registers seventy-three publishers; Chennai sixteen publishers; Mumbai eleven; Bangalore ten; and Kolkata (once the center of Indian print and publishing) today lists only seven publishers. See publishersglobal.com, accessed April 2012.
- 7 The top grossing film since 2000 (adjusted for inflation) is *Gadar* (dir. Anil Sharma, 2001). See <http://ibosnetwork.com/asp/topgrossersbyyear.asp?year=200>, accessed July 14, 2014.
- 8 Box office returns from www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=main&id=midnightchildren.htm, accessed July 14, 2014. The website [rottentomatoes.com](http://www.rottentomatoes.com) provides this composite review of the *Midnight’s Children* film: “Though *Midnight’s Children* is beautiful to look at and poignant in spots, its script is too indulgent and Deepa Mehta’s direction, though ambitious, fails to bring the story together cohesively.” See http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/midnight_children/, accessed July 14, 2014.
- 9 Like *Call Center*, *3 Mistakes* has a prologue that frames it, where “Chetan,” writing in the first person, receives an email from a suicidal fan. Spurred to action, he tries to save the man’s life, and the man tells him the story that forms Bhagat’s third novel. *Revolution 2020* echoes the now-familiar thanks to the reader: “once again, you, dear reader, for wanting a revolution,” conclude the acknowledgments. The prologue begins with a conversation with a man whose story Bhagat putatively conveys in *Revolution* (1). The essay collection *What Young India Wants* begins, “Dear Reader, Thank you for picking up this book” (vii). And the acknowledgments of *Half Girlfriend*

- (2014), his most recent novel, begin with “Thank you, dear reader and friend, for picking up *Half Girlfriend*. Whatever I have achieved today in life is thanks to you” (vii).
- 10 The phrase “billion sparks” comes from the motivational speech Bhagat delivered at the Symbiosis Business School, Pune, in 2008 that went viral on the Internet (“I come from the land of a billion sparks”). “Sparks” is collected in *What Young India Wants* (102–9).
 - 11 See chetanbhagat.com for Bhagat’s self-profile (accessed December 2013).
 - 12 On the academy’s reluctance to include Indian literature in its curriculum, see M. Mukherjee, “Mapping a Territory.” The elite New Delhi college St. Stephen’s produced critically acclaimed novelists such as Amitav Ghosh and Shashi Tharoor, among others, along with an elaborate and approving culture of academic reviewers who sometimes doubled as groupies. See the account provided by Trivedi, “St. Stephen’s.”