

## The Literary and the Non-Literary Novel in the Twenty-first Century

Vivek Kumar Dwivedi

Northern Border University  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

### Abstract

*The dividing line between the literary and the non-literary novel has ever eluded readers. Even some of the most racy and thrilling novels can have literariness, and on the other hand, some of the novels written in the simplest style with hardly any literary devices can be classed as literary. Perhaps a novelist can never be quite certain that he has written a literary novel until literary critics decide that he has done that. Of course, there is the obvious literary novelist that appears sometimes, but in the twenty-first century he has to be exceptionally fortunate to be accepted by the publishing marketplace.*

*The twenty-first century seems to have blurred the line of distinction between the literary and the non-literary novel even further. What Derrida said about the inseparability of literary and non-literary language is probably equally true about the literary and non-literary novel in this century. It is difficult to say where one sub-genre begins and where the other ends. Reading Jodi Picoult's *Handle with Care* (2009) is an education in this context. She sits on the fence between the literary and the non-literary novel. She shares certain features with someone as non-literary as Chetan Bhagat and some with someone as literary as Arundhati Roy.*

*The paper is divided into three parts. The first part explores the difference between literary novel and non-literary novel. The second part deals how the difference between these two genres is narrowing and the third part seeks to study two novels, *Handle with Care* and *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008) as representatives of literary cum non-literary novel and non-literary novel respectively. The paper seeks to delve deeper on these lines.*

**Keywords:** Fiction, India, Picoult, Chetan Bhagat, Literary.

This paper involves research of a different kind from the traditional academic scholarship of fiction. It goes to the roots of the creation of fiction in the contemporary world—the basic economic and other contemporaneous factors that have led to a novel of a particular kind. This paper has used the Internet very largely for data related to the market of contemporary fiction. Much of the information relates to the information available on Publishers Marketplace, Writer's Market, the websites of the literary agents and their blogs.

The first question that this paper attempts to answer is “What is the difference between the literary and the non-literary novel?” The answer to this cannot be given in exact terms because the distinction between the two is of a shifting nature and lacks in concreteness. But still for convenience let me chalk out some of the basic differences:

- (a) The literary novel reflects human experiences and contains depth and vision; the non-literary novel often remains tied to proceeding from one event to another, remaining largely at a superficial level. It touches the intelligence rather than the inner being of the reader.
- (b) In the literary novel, realism matters a great deal. Henry James, E.M. Forster and the practitioners of magical realism have approached realism in some way or the other, always realising that the departure from this can ruin the genuineness of a novel. The literary novel often attempts to link the real with the eternal. The non-literary novel does not have such ambitious plans. Though even this form of the novel must have a semblance of realism or it will not be convincing. The non-literary novel has to sacrifice realism to an extent because its readers have picked it up to kill time rather than become watchers of stark reality.
- (c) In a literary novel literary devices and techniques matter a great deal. Often the realism is arrived at after a defamiliarisation of the everyday experiences of life. The language of a literary novel is charged with literariness— devices like figurativeness, symbolism, tone; even sound effects are managed through alliteration, assonance, dissonance, etc. Literariness in a non-literary novel is assumed to be a deviation and, therefore, the non-literary novel generally employs language that is reduced to its bare bones.

There are several other distinctions, but I restrict myself from enumerating them so that I can deal with some other significant aspects of the literary and non-literary novels.

There are various accepted working definitions from which we can extract our purpose. In an article in *The Guardian*, Robert McCrum has tried to answer the question:

What is 'literary fiction'? To many, it's the titles on the shortlist for the Booker Prize. To some, it's those serious-minded novels of high artistic intent by writers with a passionate commitment to the moral purpose of fiction. To others, it's a slippery piece of book jargon. It's certainly a label that's attracted its share of critical opprobrium. 'Literary' can be synonymous with 'highbrow', but I've heard 'pretentious' and even 'unreadable'. Literary fiction is what many writers aspire to, though quite a few will

also run a mile at the first hint of it, too. Every reader will have his or her idea of what constitutes such a category.

As McCrum has called it “unreadable”, there are very fewer chances that such novels will find many readers in today’s generation which is too distracted to focus on something like this.

Judi Clark, the editor of mostlyfiction.com defines literary novel as "it can be the broadest category and in a sense is a catch all, but the intention is to list books that really draw you in with language, imagery, character insight and sense of place". It can be said that it is the use of language, imagery, character, and insight are to be studied to chart out the merits of a literary novel and these are the features that distinguishes it from non-literary novel.

Commercial fiction is always aimed at amusing its readers. And this is its primary function. It may not be believable; the story it narrates may be highly unreal and unlikely to happen, with characters, setting, and plot that are unarguably unusual and may not be found in real situations. The same, however, cannot be said of literary fiction. Literary fiction is a genre that does entertain and interest its readers, but it is not limited to amusement; it has a more sublime purpose with much wider scope, which is to offer an insight into human nature and psyche, an understanding of how a certain type of character responds in a certain situation, to give a perspective on society's conduct. Therefore, it is important that the characters, plot, setting, sequence of events, and twists and turns must be credible in the sense that they are not far removed from reality. The reader shall be able to connect them to the real world and they should look possible. Then and then only literary fiction can deliver the message it intends to do. Surprisingly, it is the need of the time to make the story-telling devoid of too much of realism. The novel writing in today’s market demands a certain kind of balance between realism and believable imagination. “The air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel” (*Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism* 57). This Jamesian idea seems bleak as too much of realism is a death of a novel.

Often, commercial fiction has a set pattern that it follows which is not the case with literary fiction. Literary fiction emphasises on the reality of what might take place in real world. Shelly Thacker Mienhardt differentiates between literary and popular fiction in the following way:

There are two kinds of fiction in today's market. Literary fiction is the fiction of ideas. Its primary purpose is to evoke thought. The writer’s goal is self-expression. Any consideration of the reader– if one exists at all– is purely secondary. Popular fiction is the fiction of emotion. Its primary purpose is to evoke feelings. The writer’s goal is to entertain the reader. Any consideration of self-expression– if one exists at all– is purely secondary.

According to Joyce G Saricks, literary fiction is "critically acclaimed, often award-winning fiction. These books are more often character-centered rather than plot-oriented. They are thought-provoking and often address serious issues . . . ‘these are complex, literate,

multilayered novels that wrestle with universal dilemmas'" (177-78). There are innumerable definitions of literary and non-literary fiction, each definition focusing on different perspectives. To address more important issues I must move on to the second part of the paper.

In the twenty-first century the dividing line between the literary and the non-literary novel has been narrowing. The chief reason for the overlapping of the literary and the non-literary novel has been of an economic nature. Today, the author has to think first of the market that he is targeting. Market research is a major concern of the novelist. The literary agent who is as important, if not more than the publisher, in managing for the novelist a publication of a high quality is rare to come by. The agent is not only interested in a well-finished novel but would like to know how far the novelist has created a visibility for himself through the media and through agencies such as Twitter, Facebook, and personal blogs. Without a market and guaranteed readership, an agent is hardly convinced of the sales of a novel and hence does not risk teaming up with unknown literary novelists. If today some novels of a truly literary nature have survived, it is because the author already has the kind of readership that will take the sales of a novel to above fifty thousand copies. That if a novelist's name sells, his novel will sell is the principle of accepting novels for publication. Demand creates its own supply is the simple formula and what may come it will never change. Critics are of the opinion that the publishing industry has become fixated with celebrity authors and "bright marketable young things" at the cost of serious writers. Most renowned publishers usually do not accept unsolicited manuscripts from first-time authors. And here comes the role of the literary agencies to discover new talents. After being convinced with the idea that the publishing houses can no longer distinguish quality literature when they see it, the Sunday Times decided to test their theory. They sent opening chapters of books by V.S. Naipaul to twenty publishers and agents only to receive rejections from all of them. Doris Lessing once submitted a novel to her own publisher under a pseudonym, and it was rejected. One publisher rejected George Orwell's submission, *Animal Farm*, with these words: "It is impossible to sell animal stories in the USA." J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* was rejected by many big publishers before it was taken by a London publisher Bloomsbury on the behest of CEO's eight years daughter who found it interesting.

The twenty-first century brought with itself the Internet revolution and economic boom. The new dynamics of the market changed the dynamics of the publishing industry as well, as they had to deal with a new group of readers. The new set of readers was the product of the economic boom. The advent of globalistaion brought about many paradigmatic shifts in the attitude of people in general and youth in special. One such change is that it made the whole world a market and us the products. In the changed world-stage the onus lies on the people to make themselves saleable and so was the case with the authors of the new century. Today the market is reader driven and it was well anticipated by Henry James, long before:

The future of fiction is intimately bound up with the future of the society that produces and consumes it. In a society with a great and diffused literary sense the

talent at play can only be a less negligible thing than in a society with a literary sense barely discernible. (*The Theory of Fiction* 341)

As with all forms of entertainment, the guiding force of popular fiction is its audience—their language, sensitivities, perceptions, likings, etc. The strength of genre fiction lies in its emotional element that possibly leaves greater impact on a reader's subconscious than most literary fiction, as literary fictions are usually approached by readers with a more critical mind-set. In his Preface to *The Great Gatsby*, Michael J. Bruccoli writes, “Literature has staying power, but it is subject to metamorphosis. Every reader's response to a work of fiction is determined by his or her presuppositional biases, beliefs, experience and knowledge (vii)”. This is particularly a key factor in the realm of popular fiction: a genre fiction which often fails to draw attention of critics and academia. As Casanova tells us, “this market has now come to assume global proportions, giving rise to a new breed of novel whose international success is the combined result of the triumph of the commercial model of publishing and of the universal adoption of popular American tastes in fiction” (170).

The participation of readers in popular fiction is of different kind. In literary novels they participate to understand the complex plot and the issues raised in the novel whereas in the non-literary fiction their participation is limited to “what to publish” apprehensions. In popular fiction generally not much is left to the reader's imagination. It is so plain and simple that readers do not have much to ruminate.

It is often said that it is the publishing industry that executes and highlights the conventions applied to works of popular fiction, but these applied practices originate from the actual or perceived outlooks of the readers. The unbelievable popularity of the *Harry Potter* series leads to the sudden upsurge in magical stories. Publishers and writers mean business and their aim is to mint money, so they write and publish to satiate the yearnings of the readers and cater their work in ways they think will most appeal to their readers. This brief example explains the fundamental supply-and-demand relationship which is often ignored in creative fields.

There have been claims that the literary novel as a work of art is dying before our eyes. Many commentators believe that our contemporary culture is at odds with this form of fiction. The reason for this could be found in Tim Parks's observation on the changed reading pattern:

There are more breaks, ever more frequent stops and restarts, more input from elsewhere, fewer refuges where the mind can settle. It is not simply that one is interrupted; it is that one is actually inclined to interruption. Hence more and more energy is required to stay in contact with a book, particularly something long and complex.

Parks predicted that, “the larger popular novel, or the novel of extensive narrative architecture, will be ever more laden with repetitive formulas, and coercive, declamatory rhetoric to make it easier and easier, after breaks, to pick up, not a thread, but a sturdy cable”.

Parks anticipation seems to have come true as both *Handle with Care* and *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* use a tried and tested formula. *Handle with Care* was very much similar in plot to *My Sister's Keeper* whereas in treatment *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* resembles in great deal to *One Night @ Call Centre*.

Today the successful novelist must either follow a set formula in the form of a genre novel or give only that much of the story which makes the reader ask a question— “what happens next?” As a result the literary novelist writing a first novel has to be conscious that his novel is inclusive of the traits of a non-literary novel, in other words if he wants to succeed in the market and if he does not have an established reputation he would have to club the features of the non-literary with his literary fiction. Alternatively, he would have to fall in the trap of diluting his felt experience and compensating that with exciting and “sexciting” in his tale to thrill the reader or to grip him with a narrative, the literariness of which has been sifted out. Today’s literary novel, more often than not, tends to border on the non-literary. Even Arundhati Roy who could well be a symbol of the literary novelist has used certain elements of the popular novel like rape, violence, sex, sensation, etc. It is possible to combine the literary with the non-literary novel as literary agent Alex Glass of Trident Media Group asserts: “There are novels with literary writing with commercial plots.”

I have picked up Jodi Picoult’s *Handle with Care* and Chetan Bhagat’s *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* to foreground the conjecture that the dividing line between the literary and the non-literary novel has been narrowing.

We can safely call *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* a non-literary novel, as it contains all the characteristics of a commercial fiction that makes it a form of pure entertainment. The elements like plot, setting, theme, and characterisation all follow certain measures intended solely to amuse the reader. The author does not try anything extraordinary, instead he uses simple methods for presenting his ideas to grip the audience’s attention. *Handle with Care*, on the other hand, has not been written exclusively for the purpose of entertainment value, but it also attempts to educate the reader about human life and its complexities.

I have chosen Jodi Picoult as a representative novelist who also becomes the best-seller by combining the literary as well as the non-literary elements of novels. Chetan Bhagat falls in the other category— the writer who does not attempt anything even close to literariness. He succeeds all the same and the only thing he shares with Jodi Picoult is his novels sell as much as hers. If she can retain some literariness it is only because she has first put in the formula of guaranteed success, i.e., telling the story well.

*Handle with Care* is the story of a family of four: Dad, Sean, is a cop; Mom, Charlotte, was once a professional pastry chef who now spends time taking care of two daughters. The second daughter, Willow, was born with *osteogenesis imperfecta*, type III, a condition that makes her bones break easily and that limits her height and movement. When Willow is four, her parents decide to sue their obstetrician, Piper, who is Charlotte’s best friend for “wrongful birth”, claiming that Willow's condition should have been diagnosed

earlier in the pregnancy so that they could have terminated the pregnancy. Willow's teenaged half-sister, Amelia, suffers as well, overshadowed by Willow's needs and lost in her own adolescent turmoil.

Writing fiction in the twenty-first century involves tremendous research. The author who would write a literary novel must carry out a thorough research at two levels — 1. Market research 2. Research related to the subject of the novel. Had Picoult not researched well she would have never been able to educate us on *Osteogenesis Imperfecta*, its definitions, symptoms, and medical facts in such detail.

In *Handle with Care* Jodi Picoult succeeds in both the kinds of research. She writes primarily women's fiction which interests men as well. She knows women's writing will never go away; it will always remain one of the favourites with the readers. In this novel she researches on the abnormality called *Osteogenesis Imperfecta* (OI) which is a condition in which the bones are so brittle that they can break even in a sneeze. In a conversation she has confessed, "For research, I tried to walk a brief way in the shoes of a parent whose child has OI, by visiting multiple families with kids who were afflicted by the disorder."

Picoult constructs an emotionally charged complex novel, knitting tender and distressing moments into a difficult story of suffering and sacrifice. There is a great amount of trauma infused in the treatment of human relationships in *Handle with Care*, for example: Charlotte's decision to sue her best friend for a "wrongful birth" causes enormous pain to both sides; at the same time it also shows unpredictability of human relationships. Picoult's use of emotional dialogues like when Willow assures her mother that, "You don't have to say *I love you* to say *I love you* (172) arouses sympathy as well as pity. Throughout the novel 5-year-old Willow quotes arcane facts like, "Leonardo da Vinci invented the scissors" (19). Picoult has shown Willow super-intelligent girl which ostensibly was a deliberately bestowed compensation for her physical disability. Picoult tries to balance Willow's disability with her impeccable intelligence and trivia-storing capacity, perhaps to arouse sympathy of the readers and making the reader hate the idea that her birth could have been thwarted.

Picoult's signature style is alternating first-person point of view. Each chapter is narrated by a different character, so the reader gets an access to every character's mind that makes it look a more realistic and believable account. Being able to intrude the minds of different characters helps in analysing the story from numerous perspectives. This technique further leads to multiple interpretations of the novel, what can be termed as one criterion to be categorised as literary novel.

Tim Parks predicted that, "the novel of elegant, highly distinct prose, of conceptual delicacy and syntactical complexity, will tend to divide itself up into shorter and shorter sections, offering more frequent pauses where we can take time out". The recipe chapters in *Handle with Care* serve as such necessary pauses in the novel which is otherwise so emotionally charged and at times too gloomy.

In *Handle with Care*, Charlotte tells Willow, “In fact, sometimes I was sure that the reason people stared at you with your crutches and wheelchair had nothing to do with your disabilities and everything to do with the fact that you had abilities they only dreamed of” (40). Her assurance to Willow is a kind of raising awareness among people that differently-abled children, who have often been subjected to society’s ill-treatment, their negative attitude towards them and at times felt excluded, have many a time turned out be the biggest achievers. One important aim of the literary novel is to communicate a message. Through her fiction Picoult raises a certain kind of awareness about the social and moral issues. *Handle with Care* serves this purpose very well with these lines:

I’d fly you halfway around the world to introduce you to people who, like you, beat the odds to become someone bigger than anyone ever expected. I would prove to you that being different isn’t a death sentence but a call to arms. Yes, you would continue to break: not bones but barriers. (412)

Throughout the story, the question is raised of what it means to be a mother. For Charlotte, it means doing anything in her power to provide the best life for Willow, but at the same time, strangely enough her other daughter’s suffering goes unnoticed as she develops bulimia and begins cutting herself.

Breaking is a theme in *Handle with Care*: bones break, hearts break, friendships break, families break. The only thing is that certain breaks can be repaired while others are irreparable. The broken trust between Charlotte and her obstetrician is irreparable. There is a certain kind of breaking of trust between Charlotte and Willow too.

The incidents in *Handle with Care* are well knit; even the subplots seem to be necessary part of the plot. Picoult handles subplots very well— there is a conflict in the family lawyer's private life that echoes the main story thematically. The subplots in the story do not look out of the place. They look so coherent, even though they do not have much role to play in the movement of the main plot. The canvas of the literary novels is usually vast as is the case in *Handle with Care* that tries to answer many question on varied issues like medical ethics, morality, and what is to be a mother. At the same time it raises many questions and makes the reader participate in those thought provoking questions that keep haunting all of us off and on as Jodi Picoult herself confessed in a conversation, “It’s my job as writer to present all sides of the story and then, based on the evidence, leave you to decide what was wrong and what was right”.

Linda Busby Parker, a teacher of Fiction Writing, notes that literary fiction is character driven while genre fiction is said to be plot driven. Parker’s distinction secures a place for *Handle with Care* in the class of literary novels. The characters in Picoult’s novels are always layered and complex, as are the issues that plague them. She has largely sketched dynamic and round characters whereas Chetan Bhagat has shown no such interest, consequently his characters have turned out to be static and flat. Characters in *Handle with Care* are not pure; there are loveable as well as despicable at the same time, Charlotte is a good example. Charlotte is one who is adopting wrong

ways to reach a right place. Her sole motive is to give the best of life to Willow, even if she has to claim that Willow is an unwanted child and even if she has to sue her best friend, even if she has to claim that she would have aborted the foetus from which Willow was born. She believes in “ends justify means”. Interestingly Charlotte is a character that we identify most with. Had we been in her place we might have also taken the same route. We might also have succumbed to the situation in the same way.

Picoult has mastered the art of maintaining the readability and capturing the readers' interest as well as making them think about the issues she deals with. She combines the art of writing entertaining fiction with her ability to make her readers empathise with her characters. She engages the readers not only in the narrative but also in the subtext of her novels. *Handle with Care*, too, like her earlier novels, does not betray her readers' loyalty. The novel offers everything that her readers having been conditioned by her sixteen novels, would expect from her. The provocative and intricate theme the novel deals with has been handled with remarkable finesse in her graceful, elegiac prose. *Handle with Care* deals with an uneasy and tense moral dilemma surrounding disability, abortion, adoption, bulimia, self-harm, neglect, divorce, rape and death, and many other issues. It brings into question medical ethics as well as society's moral reaction, or lack of it, over these issues. The way Picoult narrates and the issues she deals with make the novel a captivating read, making the reader toss and turn with each twist in the story. Picoult deals with a range of issues in depth, but leaves many of them unresolved, perhaps suggesting that these problems have perpetuated and very much part of human life. It is usual of her not to say everything in the novel. The reader may look for an outcome, but will not find even after turning the last page. The novel finishes, the story doesn't. The reader can feel reverberations from the characters' lives. Perhaps encouraged by the success of *My Sister's Keeper* Picoult, gives the same ending to *Handle with Care*.

Picoult's narrative involves multiple dimensions and varying viewpoints, which not only engages the readers' interest into the characters to the extent that they can peep into the characters' psyche. More importantly, it is Picoult's greater success that she is able to bring her readers' involvement with her characters to an emotional level. Charlotte O'Keefe's love for Willow is so intense that she can delete everything from her memory to align herself with her happiness; Sean O'Keefe feels the pain for his inability to support his family; Amelia O'Keefe has to cope with her guilt consciousness; Piper Reece fails in her duty in her personal relationship as well as in professional ethics; and Marin Gates, the lawyer, looks for her biological mother, while she detests the case she represents. The novelist often employs different artistic devices to build and reveal her characters. She has to go beneath the surface of the action to present a reliable view of a character's mind and heart. This way the author is able to create an aspect of a character which people cannot guess in real life. Such devices are of course artificial. In real life one cannot claim to fully know even oneself. Since one cannot know others more than oneself, it is unconvincing if readers are told about the motives that too with a certain sense of certitude.

Picoult has an eye for detail and portrays the complexities of human relationships and its dilemmas with such finesse that touches readers' sensibilities.

*The 3 Mistakes of My Life* portrays the lives of three childhood friends, their struggle, successes and failures in the midst of small-town politics and religious riots in Ahmedabad. From cricket fever to romance, it has everything that appeals to teenage and adolescent readers.

Having nothing better to do and having been fond of cricket, the three friends open their Team India Cricket Shop in Ahmedabad. Soon the small space that houses the shop becomes their life. It is their shelter from hopelessness, failure as well as riots that the city witnesses. Their new enterprise crumbles into debris of Bhuj earthquake in 2001. This disaster lands them in debt, but soon it is followed by a miracle when India defeats Australia in a Test cricket match series in 2001. It boosts their cricket gear supply business. Six months later, the terrorist attack of September 11 shatters the social fabric on religious grounds. Again in February 2002 in Godhara, miscreants set fire to a train carrying *karsewaks* returning from Ayodhya. What follows in the form of large scale bloodshed and arson destroys everything that the three friends Gopi, Ish and Omi have built. Not only the small fortune but also their friendship and love life are severely affected. In *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, Bhagat deals with inter-religious social fabric, communal hate and political mileage out of it. He employs love as a tool to weave the story. Love in its changing dimensions, i.e. one's first love, love of mathematics, and love of the game of cricket plays a central role in the lives of the three teenagers and has certainly a big appeal to the age group of readers that Bhagat seems to have targeted. But the many streams of sensibilities that the novelist has taken up to portray create confusion perhaps because of his failure to efficiently handle the array of issues together. He fails to leave an imprint on the mind of a thoughtful reader. If one limits the function of novel merely to story-telling, which undoubtedly is its primary purpose, the novel is a success reflected in terms of sales and readership, but it certainly fails to achieve a level that literary fiction enjoys. It fails to inspire or provoke its readers. It is too much of its own time and place.

Reading Bhagat's novel can be compared with watching a Bollywood movie. With remarkable narration, the novel retains the reader's curiosity to know "what happens next". Besides, the price, an equivalent to \$1.5, is not a burden on the pocket money of youngsters, which adds to the success of the novel. The novel is an entertaining read, but it does not force you to think, nor does it move you to any deeper meaning. It amuses you for time you are reading the novel. It certainly has the quality to engage the reader till he turns the last page. It has the *masala*, emotion, suspense, and thrill of a commercial movie. It is not simply a coincidence that this novel, like his earlier one *One Night @ Call Centre*, has been made into a Bollywood movie titled "Kai Po Che".

The most important feature of a Chetan Bhagat novel is its readability, which makes it a best-seller in a world where one has to constantly struggle for leisure in the fret and fever of life, it is not an insignificant achievement on the part of the novelist that a reader can actually finish his book in just one sitting.

Bhagat realises that philosophy does no longer interest the semi educated young generation which he caters to. Philosophy: it is too tedious and slow in today's fast world. That's why he has chosen to keep away from philosophising that literary novelists often tend to do.

*The 3 Mistakes of My Life* is at best a formula fiction. There is a set pattern in his stories: A middle class landscape with a boy next door protagonist who wants to make it big in life, an intimate scene between the protagonist and his lady love he has always ogled since he started showing signs of life post puberty, and the future where the hero is either a successful business magnate running a call-centre or a cricket academy training prospective cricketers. The important thing is that this trick works for him every time. He might have failed serious readers, but most certainly he is successful in reaching out to those he wants to cater.

The target audience of Chetan Bhagat is youth: a way too distracted youth who has recently been exposed to the life of metro cities, call-centres, Internet Revolution, and multi-brand stores because of the economic boom that world has seen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, at least in the first decade of the century. This youth is not a trained reader. He is a reader under compulsion, one who has not been educated to decipher the literariness in a fiction. Literary allusions are all Greek to them. What they simply want is to be included in a class (which is in fact a mass) that likes reading books. Their pretentious fondness for reading books paints a very pathetic picture of them, as this whole ordeal for being included in such a group is quite superficial and ephemeral. Parks, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, has asserted that “the state of constant distraction we live in”, thanks to email, messaging, Skype and online news, “affects the very special energies required for tackling a substantial work of fiction — for immersing oneself in it.”

*The 3 Mistakes of My Life* is unquestionably a page turner. It is surely ironical and sad that in a country that boasts of having biggest pool of university graduates a certain Booker prize winning Kiran Desai does not get decent sales figures whereas Chetan Bhagat's books break every possible sales record making them look monumental. His books create a furore as soon as they are on shelves in the book stores. The Booker prize winner John Banville stressed that “I don't mind that— every writer who's worth anything has about 2,000 readers. Many more admirers, maybe, but about 2,000 readers.”

Bhagat's books are cheap and often sleazy which is a right kind of fodder for the supposedly sex-starved Indian youth and college kids. In the novel Bhagat ended up successfully unhooking the collective sexual frustration of a repressed young Indian

male population. His language is mediocre but that is what makes it readable by not-so-trained-readers.

Bhagat has craftily devised his visibility by commenting on every topic with great authority. He does not shy away from commenting in the capacity of political scientist, social activist and academic. He is often invited to television debates, for lectures on personality development and to college festivals. Interestingly, of late he is judging a dance competition in some reality show on a TV show! He has hewed out his image of a person who has something to say on everything. This carved image immensely helps him sell his books.

To conclude I would like to point out that the difference between the literary and the non-literary novels is decreasing and any literary novelist who wishes to survive in the market of fiction must embrace some qualities of the non-literary novel. The literary novelist, however, must never forget that he can continue to write literary fiction once his name is known and the market has accepted him.

## References

- A Conversation with Jodi Picoult. Accessed on 12 April 2015. Url:< [http://books.simonandschuster.com/Handle-with-Care/Jodi-Picoult/9780743296427/reading\\_group\\_guide](http://books.simonandschuster.com/Handle-with-Care/Jodi-Picoult/9780743296427/reading_group_guide) >.
- Bhagat, Chetan. *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*. Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2008.
- Book Page magazine. Accessed on 12 July, 2015. Url: < <http://www.jodipicoult.com/handle-with-care.html#kudos> >.
- Booth, W. C. "Telling and Showing." *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- Brucoli, Matthew J. Preface. *The Great Gatsby*. by F. Scott Fitzgerald. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992.
- Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Trans. M. B. DeBevoise. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Flood, Alison. "Will the internet kill literary novel? Depends on who you ask". Published in the Guardian. Accessed on 15 July 2015. Url: < <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jun/16/will-internet-kill-literary-novel-tim-parks-john-banville> >.
- Forster, E. M. "The Story." *Aspects of the Novel*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1927.
- James, Henry. "The Art of Fiction." (ed.) Morris Shapira, *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968. (1st ed. 1963).
- — "The Future of the Novel", (ed.) Henry James and James Edwin Miller, *The Theory of Fiction*. US: University of Nebraska Press, 1972.
- La Bloga, "Literary and Popular Fiction, my Agita y Zapata". Accessed on 14 May 2015. Url: < <http://labloga.blogspot.com/2008/08/literary-and-popular-fiction-my-agita.html> >.

- Meinhardt, Shelly Thacker. "Market Savvy for Fiction Writers: Popular Fiction vs. Literary Fiction". Accessed on 06 July, 2015. Url: < <http://www.shellythacker.com/market-savvy-for-fiction-writers/> >.
- Neff, Michael. "The New Author's Champion." "An Interview with Alex Glass of Trident Media Group". Accessed on 14 Feb, 2015.  
Url: < <http://www.webdelsol.com/Algonkian/Classes/interview-AlexGlass.htm> >.
- Parker, Linda Busby. Linda's Blog. Accessed on 12 Mar, 2015. Url: < [http://lindabusbyparker.typepad.com/lindas\\_blog/2010/04/](http://lindabusbyparker.typepad.com/lindas_blog/2010/04/) >.
- Parks, Tim. Reading: The Struggle. The New York Review of Books. Accessed on 20 Mar, 2015. Url: < <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2014/jun/10/reading-struggle/> >.
- Picoult, Jodi. *Handle with Care*. New York: Atria Books, 2009.
- Preuss, Simone. "Book Review: The 3 Mistakes of My Life." Accessed on 02 Jan, 2015. Url: < [http://asian-literature.suite101.com/article.cfm/book\\_review\\_the\\_3\\_mistakes\\_of\\_my\\_life](http://asian-literature.suite101.com/article.cfm/book_review_the_3_mistakes_of_my_life) >.
- Robert McCrum. "The End of Literary Fiction" in The Guardian. Accessed on 16 May, 2015. Url: < <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/aug/05/features.review1> >.
- San Antonio Express-News. Accessed on 12 Mar, 2015. Url: <<http://www.jodipicoult.com/>>.
- Saricks, Joyce G. *The Reader's Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*. US: American Library Association, 2009.
- Stoda, Kevin. THE 3 MISTAKES OF MY LIFE by CHETAN BHAGAT: A Book Review. Accessed on 15 May, 2015. Url: < <http://www.opednews.com/articles/THE-3-MISTAKES-OF-MY-LIFE-by-ALONE-080830-138.html> >.
- The Boston Globe. Accessed on 15 May, 2015. Url: <<http://www.jodipicoult.com/>>.