

12 Years: My Messed up Love Story, A Romantic Novel by Chetan Bhagat, published by HarperCollins India, 2025.

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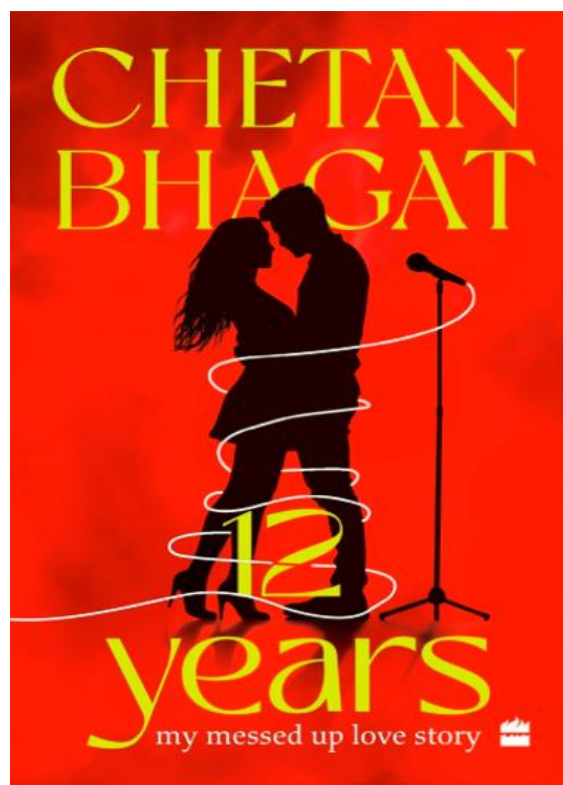
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“The course of true love never did run smooth”

(Act 1st, Scene 1st, A Mid-Summer Night’s Dream)

This famous line of William Shakespeare though stated in the early sixteenth century in his dramatic jewel A Mid-Summer Night’s Dream is beautifully applied by Chetan Bhagat in his twenty first century romantic novel *Twelve Years: My Messed up Love Story*. Chetan Bhagat is a well-known and one of the most popular writers among young generation. The success of his previous novels *Five Point Someone*, *Three Mistakes of My Life* and *Two States* is the best example that he has influenced a large circle of audience in India. Filmmakers have also presented youthful romantic stories on cinema screen and earned great box office collection. His latest novel *Twelve Years My Messed up Love Story* was published on 1st October 2025 and I got its copy available on online platform very soon. First I thought it as one of the IITian youthful romantic stories like his previous novels but this time Chetan Bhagat worked on a romantic love story but with a different perspective. Though in his previous work *11 Rules for Life*, he tried his hand on different theme like the principles of success and personal growth but again he has returned to his favourite subject of love in his latest novel *12 Years Love*.

This novel is divided into three parts: Mumbai, Dubai and again Mumbai, the background of the story also sails from India to



abroad and returning to its place of beginning. This is the love story of two different persons belonging to two different generations, ideologies, communities and backgrounds. Saket Khurana is 33 years old matured, divorced and struggling standup comedian while Payal Jain is a 21 years old, young and ambitious equity analyst in a reputed company Blackwater Capital. Saket belongs to an open-minded frank Punjabi family and Payal belongs to a conservative Jain family strictly following the principles of Jainism. In spite of having differences, they are in love with each other but like previous novels of Chetan

Bhagat they have to stay apart due to the family pressure.

The story opens with Saket who is trying to come out of emotional and financial fall out of his married life but at the same time following his passion to establish himself as a standup comedian. During his debut performance at Crayons Club he met a young girl Payal Jain and falls in love with her. Though there is much age gape of twelve years which justifies the title of the novel and both of them having different commitments; Saket has promised himself for not being involved in any relation after his bitter experience of divorce and Payal not having any boyfriend due to the conservative attitude of her family, slip into a relationship which becomes intimate very soon. It is an extraordinary love between a matured adult and an innocent girl. The main conflict enters in the novel when Payal's parents strongly disapprove their match due to their different communities, professions, lifestyles and specially age-gape. According to them this is not love with an older man but the physical, mental and emotional exploitation of an innocent young girl by a matured adult. Like other Indian parents, prioritizing their community and expectations over their daughter's choice, they arrange her marriage with Piralal the boy of their community. Chetan Bhagat shows how Payal is hastily married to Piralal under intense family pressure and how Saket is drowned in alcohol in utter depression.

The novel shows a leap of five years in a shift in Dubai where Saket has founded a successful cybersecurity firm SecurityNet. Though financially successful, he is

emotionally detached. His friend Mudit who is one of the incredible friends of hero like the previous novels of the author, tries to distract his mind from Payal by taking him into contact of other girls who have relations for money and to remove mental stress. Saket comes into contact with many girls but finds no emotional relief. Again after 12 years of separation, story brings Saket and Payal together for a business deal. Payal's divorce from Piralal sparks a new ray of hope for their reunion. Their love experience is messed up but ultimately Chetan Bhagat's earnest faith as shown in his previous novels also that 'the power of love conquers all' and 'all is well that ends well' occurs in this novel in a very interesting way. The plot makes a circle of completing the journey of love at the same point where it was started.

It is not just a common love story of passions and emotions; it reflects the pressure and flaws of our society, parents' pressure, their domination in the matter of marriage, difficulties in taking a divorce, post-divorce condition, caste and pride, mental and psychological pressure in the corporate world, breakdown of communication between couples and families. Chetan Bhagat has taken contemporary issues or we can call them the issues of Gen Z era. The novel explores the themes of sexual relations, dating apps, modern love's pitfalls such as 'ghosting', illusions of social media picture life and 'tick mark theory'. He describes this theory very beautifully as "Tick marks-that's what we need from people. We live our lives collecting all these damn tick marks. All the people around us, who judge us and tell us how to live, are tick-makers. If we do what they say, they

give us their approval-tick mark”. Besides it Chetan Bhagat’s observation on modern life reflects through some funny yet sharp remarks which make us pause for sometimes and think deeply. Some of these statements are: “The best jokes come out of life and suffering” and “more red flags than a Chinese Communist Party parade”.

The novel is written in a very simple and colloquial language which is the signature style of Chetan Bhagat. Like his previous novels it is a contemporary romance of odds and challenges, humour, drama and commentary on contemporary social and emotional challenges of modern relationships. The story moves slow and we find unnecessary description of certain events which can be avoided. It gives a perfect flavour of a romantic Bollywood movie. Though it may not satisfy the readers looking for complex literary artistry, it is an enjoyable modern day love story with certain interesting twists while raising some questions on contemporary society.