

CHETAN BHAGAT, THE SALVATOR OF THE INDIAN YOUTH: A STUDY OF HIS FIVE POINT SOMEONE AND THE 3 MISTAKES OF MY LIFE

S. Nithya Fraila Julie & T. Jayakumar

Research Scholar, Department of English, Periyar EVR College (Autonomous), Trichy, Tamil Nadu, India

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a device to project human psyche aesthetically and realistically. It inspires the younger generations greatly who are in search of a new identity. A very few writers try to disseminate the emerging cosmopolitan set up and materialism. Chetan Bhagat, the best-seller of his novels, and “a rock star of Indian publishing” (Agarwal 1) constantly tries to bring out a seismic shift among the Indian youth and helps them understand the present socio-political situations with his simple language.

KEYWORDS: *Emerging Cosmopolitan, Present Socio-political Situations, Post Globalization Era*

INTRODUCTION

Chetan Bhagat is a well-known fiction writer who excellently pens down the present world atmosphere exactly as it is prevailing. Chetan is such a name today who has made a significant and permanent place in the hearts of the millions of youth. His novels revolve around the youth of today. His novels deal with the aspirations, motivations and manipulations, struggles and strategies of survival, compromises and confusions and a questionable and controversial value system of youth. His works come up with fresh subjects that revolve around the glitzy college life that includes campus love-affairs, student politics, joys and sorrows of friendship, drug and booze sessions, examination phobias, placement dreams, the monotony of classroom studies and viz. He attempts to guide their ripe energies into proper directions.

His novel has the magic to sooth and it gives confidence to the broken hearts of youth. His novels deal with youth and the problems and frustration they face every day. They illustrate the problems of corporate people and IIT students. It talks about both the upper class and lower class people. He has endowed the genre with personnel from the real-life metropolis. He exactly depicts the real-life situations. He writes for the upliftment of youth and Indian society. His young characters are products of post-liberalization where success is the only mantra; the catch lies in their attempt to save their best years from the drudgery of hard work. His characters want to ‘live’ and ‘achieve’ and find the whole task quite overwhelming.

Youngsters create their own kingdom and rule it like an uncrowned king with their own ideologies that rarely match with the reality of life. The main focus of his novels is to reveal the struggles of the youth in the post globalization era. He writes about every aspect of India like its culture, its problems, and its language that depict the life of the younger generation. According to Bhagat, today’s young India wants a good life, a good job. He tells the youth that they have to face the reality of life that they are in the country which remains unchanged.

Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone – What not to do at IIT* (2004) adopts a very casual approach in declaring that the novel is not meant to people who wish to get into IIT, rather it portrays a very distinct picture of complexities the youth face today. Boys and girls in their twenties earn more than their parents; they go and live abroad or in metros. Every middle-class family has a dream that its son or daughter makes it to the premier institutions like IIT and IIM. While their families expect them to conquer the world, their sons and daughters are not able to fulfill the parents' wishes nor topnotch their goals.

Five Point Someone (FPS) is set in New Delhi's Indian Institute of Technology during the period between 1991 and 1995 which was, historically, the beginning of India's economic liberalization and globalization. It also marks the emergence of an English speaking, enterprising and upwardly mobile middle class. The novel focuses on the negative aspect of the Indian educational system. It is the system that crushes the creativity of the students. Above all, it presents a brilliant picture of campus life in a premier engineering institution in India. The novel adopts a satirical tone to expose the attitude of students who believe in cramming to make into IIT, Delhi and then humorously protests against the system which thwarts the ability of the students. The trail to success is traversed through education. Education brings out the desirable modification in behavior and gives a perfect shape to the budding talents. Bhagat though humorously in his debut novel *Five Point Someone* cautions the highly famed institutes to change their pedantic approach of learning and embrace student-friendly teaching style which will help the youngster to enrich their abilities and enhance creativities. The novel in a disguised tone highlights that the professional institutes need a change to replace a lifeless system.

The novel is about the experiences of the mechanical engineering students, Hari Kumar, Ryan Oberoi, and Alok Gupta who start their career in the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, during the year between 1991 and 1995. They fail to acclimatize with the grading system of the IITs. Of the three, Ryan is clever and candid, whereas Alok and Hari are the mute spectators of the degrading atmosphere of the IIT. For the three friends, IIT system is too much and the only thing they do not want is to cope with it. They simply want to dominate it and for this, they prepare the list with the heading "Cooperate to Dominate." The IIT system is unfair because: firstly, it suppresses talent and individual spirit; secondly, it extracts the best years of one's life from the country's brightest minds; thirdly, it judges workers with a draconian GPA system that destroys relationships; fourthly, the professors do not care for the students, and fifthly, IITs have contributed to the country.

In the beginning, Chetan Bhagat highlights the glaring effects of ragging which is common practice among the elite institutes. The freshers of the IITs including the three main characters are harassed by the seniors at midnight. The juniors are supposed to be obedient to each and every instruction given the seniors. One of the seniors, Baku, ordered them "Off with your clothes" in the balcony in the midnight. This embarrassing practice in the name of ragging creates a psychological trauma among the freshers. Ryan, a very smart student, protests against the ragging and defies all the discrimination between seniors and juniors. Ryan helps Hari and Alok in many tough situations and becomes one of the best buddies for the rest of the years. The students, the professors, the classrooms, the surprise tests, the successes and failures in the inescapable rat race to score better grades and thus to ensure better job opportunities are the key themes of the novel. Ryan, the mouthpiece of Bhagat calls up for the spirit of the youth:

Relative grading and overburdening the students. I mean it kills the best fun years of life. But it kills something else.

Where is the room for original thought?...it is not fair. (FPS 35)

The trio suffers from the ridiculing of the teachers as well as the classmates. However, they avow to reform the patriarchal system of education. They dislike the teaching method, which is as old as the college itself. The students are asked to mug the subjects in order to score good grades. Bhagat puts emphasis on the observational teaching. He believes that this technique must help the students in getting rid of mugging. It must support them to apprehend the things in a natural way. The observational technique makes the students to observe the things minutely and find out the solution in the objects. After all, if they fail to make it out, they are invited to discuss the same with the teachers and other classmates. At last, the students find an answer to his query. Nonetheless, such method is good for nothing in the big sci-fi institute.

The students hail from the different places with a variegated background. Alok joins with Venkat and rejoins with Ryan and Hari. Prof. Cherian has a son named Samer who wants to be a lawyer but his father expects him to be a student of IIT. He tries IIT entrance exam thrice but does not get through. He is depressed and so ends his life on a railway track for not fulfilling his father's dream. The novel is divided into twenty-seven chapters, deals with numerous attempts by the troika to cope with and beat the system as well as Alok's familial woes and Hari's romance with Neha, "the cute daughter of Professor Cherian," the formidable Head of the Department of Mechanical Engineering.

Aspirations of the youngsters and their departure to achieve them are also discussed in *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (MML). The novel narrates the life of three friends and their business. Like all other Chetan Bhagat fiction, this novel too strikes a chord in reader's mind. It talks about the story of three youngsters who dream high. The hero of the novel is Govind. Like all other businessmen in Gujarat, Govind's dream is to be a successful entrepreneur. He joins hand with his close friends Ishan and Omi.

Cricket game is another important character in the novel. Ishan is a former district-level cricketer. Cricket is the main priority in Ish's and Omi's life. They determine to open cricket equipment selling the shop. Omi's family helps them to get a rented place outside a temple. Ishan takes a great liking to one of the local Muslim boy, Ali, who has the gifted ability to smash ball for a six each time. Ishan decides to train that little boy Ali. They train him for free and they take Ali all the way to Sydney on the suggestion of one of the Australian players, Fred Lee. However, they have to come back to India as things are not favorable to them.

Meanwhile, the business also does not go well. Govind has a great plan but nature has its own plan. They opened their shop in town but unfortunately, earthquake hits and their shop is devastated next. The novel portrays the three youngsters Govind Ishan and Omi, and their dreams and how they are disappointed in reaching their goals.

There are many similarities between the two novels. In both the novels, there are three friends facing their problems with studies and job. *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* begins in an informal style with the information of the suicidal note of an unknown businessman who through his e-mail communicates his intention of committing suicide. His real identity remains hidden and he only declares, 'I'm an ordinary boy in Ahmedabad who reads your books.' The novelist introduces the three friends Ishaan, Omi, and Govind who enjoy cricket match with an utmost concentration in Ishaan's house. Each one intends

to construct the images of life beyond the burden of emotions. The opening of 'Team India Cricket Shop' is amusing and Chetan Bhagat presents it with the tinge of light humor. The ease of expression helps to construct the inner psyche of youth who make the relentless struggle to make spaces for themselves. Chetan Bhagat intends to expose how the social prejudices spoil the rational and balanced approach of the youth in the novels. As Vidya argues with Govind:

What do you think I should do? Crush my passion and surround myself with hydrocarbon molecules forever?'

'Say something I should lump these lessons even if I have no interest in them whatsoever as that is what all good Indian students do?'(MML102)

Through the argument between Vidya and Govind, Chetan Bhagat intends to construct some inner reality that governs human motives. Vidya considers herself as a caged bird. For her, the dreams and instructions of parents work like a cage that does not permit free growth of her sensibility.

Chetan Bhagat through his narrative defends that the youth of today are equally conscious of their responsibility for the vital national issues. Bhagat disseminates his message through Govind who acts as a mouthpiece. He expresses his concern about the communal violence through Govind thus:

The city glowed orange in the thick winter night. One, two, three. I saw three balls of flame across the poles. The nearest flame came from a building fifty yards away. A crowd of people stood outside. They threw stones on the burning building. I couldn't see well but could hear the screams of the people inside the pole. The screams mixed with celebratory chants. A burning man ran across the road. The Hindu mob chased him. He stumbled on a stone and fell, around twenty yards away from us.... I had witnessed someone's death for the first time in my life. My heart, face, neck, legs –everything turned cold. My heart beat in the same irregular way as it did on the day of the earthquake. Nature caused that disaster, man made this one. I don't know which is more dangerous. (MML 221)

In *Five Point Someone*, he calls into question the education system that discourages original thinking and research in favor of mugging up and getting high grades. Hari, Ryan, and Alok try to circumvent this system but ultimately they have to come to terms with it. HOD Cherian's son commits suicide because he cannot live up to the expectations of his father to get into IIT. In *Three Mistakes of My Life*, Ishaan who is involved in sports-coaching tells his friends:

These kids, Govind. Look at them, thirteen-year-old holding their bats with pride. Or the way they want to learn to bowl better. They have a fire in their eyes before every match at Nana Park. When India wins, they dance. of course in two years time they will reach class X. Their bats will be replaced with physics books. And then the spark will begin to die. Soon, they will turn into depressed adults. (FPS 30)

It is an education system that bulldozes everything. Bhagat does not stop here. He goes a step further and exposes the glamorous and over glorified careers and provides us with an inside view. He shatters many myths. In *Five Point Someone*, Ryan says:

And this IIT system is nothing but a mice race. It is not a rat race, mind you, as rats sound somewhat shred and clever. So it is not about that. It is about mindlessly running a race for four years, in every class, every assignment and every test. It is a race where profs judge you every ten steps, with a GPA stamped on you every semester. Profs who have no idea what science and learning are about Yes, that is what I think of the profs. I mean what IIT's given to this country? Name one invention in the last three decades. (FPS 101)

He further says,

. . . .this system is an unfair race. If you are a mouse who thinks or pauses to make friends with other runners, or stops to figure out what you want to do in life or drag baggage from the past. Then you will be pushed behind. (FPS 101)

In *Five Point Someone*, Ryan, Alok, and Hari devise C2D i.e. Cooperate to Dominate plan which involves copying and save plenty of time for them to have fun. Desperate to get better grades, they even break into HOD Cherian's chamber to steal exam question paper, which proves out to be a complete misadventure. Bhagat's youngsters often succumb to the temptations of shortcuts and they learn their lesson the hard way. Their dilemma lies in their ambition to carve a successful career and a desire to have unrestricted fun; they are lured by the promises of a market economy on one hand and striving to save their best years from the gallery-slavery of the so-called lucrative careers on the other. This is also to be noted that the emerging urban youth is fascinated by its growing permissiveness. The large, lusty and loving youth is shown here with its full force, fascination, and fire.

But there is also the other side of this fun-loving, liberal, career-oriented and go-getter kind of youth. Bhagat also touches upon the streak of self-destruction in his youngsters. Their frustrations and failures often lead them to suicidal attempts. It is also a known fact that most of the suicide cases take place between 12 and 25 years of age. In *Five Point Someone*, it is Alok who jumps from the top of IIT building and is killed.

In *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*, he touches upon the political exploitation of youth. Through Ishaan, the novelist records the frustration of the contemporary youth of India:

The younger generation from the Eighties is the worst India ever had. These thirty years are an embarrassment for India. We played good cricket but that's about it. We remained poor, kept fighting wars, electing the same control freaks who did nothing for the country. People's dream

job was a government job, yuck, nobody took risks or stuck their neck out.

Just one corrupt banana republic marketed by the leaders as their new socialist,

intellectual nation. Tanks and think tanks, nothing else. the

clueless Sixties to Eighties generation is now old and running the country.

But the Nineties and the . . . Zeroes think different but we are being run by

old fogeys who never did anything worthwhile in their prime time. The

Doordarshan generation is running the Star T.V generation. (MML 74-75)

The 3 Mistakes of My Life is based on real-life events. It begins in a dramatic mode with Bhagat receiving an e-mail from Govind who has taken many sleeping pills and writes to him while waiting to embrace the deadly sleep. Chetan is shaken enough by the incident to track the boy down to an Ahmedabad hospital. Fortunately, he is still alive to tell the tale. The enchanting novel is loosely based on the three mistakes that he made in his life. Firstly, the earthquake of Gujarat ruining Govind's over one lakh investment for a shop in a newly built mall is his first mistake; secondly, Govind falls in love with Vidya; when Ish discovers this and declares Govind as a traitor, and their friendship collapses; thirdly, a split second delay by Govind in making a specific move which could have saved Ali.

CONCLUSIONS

It seems that with Bhagat, Indian writing in English enters into the post-modern phase. Chetan's fictional works give the youth hope. They can get the ingredient of life by virtue of which they can fight the battle called 'life'.

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