

DEPICTION OF PRESENT EDUCATION SYSTEM AND CAMPUS LIFE IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S *FIVE POINT SOMEONE*

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ABSTRACT

The title of the paper is **Depiction of Present Education System and Campus Life in Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone***. The writer has taken the novel *Five Point Someone*, one of the novels of Chetan Bhagat. Chetan Bhagat is one of the top leading writers of Indian writing in English. In this paper, the writer tries to project how the novel depicts the present education system and the lives of youths in college campuses. Through this novel, the novelist clearly portrays the life of IIT executives and also thinks about the future of India. The novel takes up the theme of disoriented youth in a renowned academic campus that puts a premium of conformism and rote-learning, and discourages any hint of innovation or rebellion. The GPA (Grade Point Average) scores hang like a sword of Damocles on youthful heads, and any score around five is like a blot on the scutcheon, a perpetual question mark about the academic abilities of the student. The author gives an idea that the observational technique makes them observe the things minutely and find out the solution in the objects. If they are unable to find out the solution, they are allowed to discuss the same with the teachers and other classmates. At last, they find answers to their queries. It makes them innovative. The novel also depicts the contemporary experiences that the students face in the college and hostel premises including romance, ragging, friendship, fun, etc.,

KEYWORDS: Education System, Rote Learning, Campus, Pre-Marital Sex, GPA

INTRODUCTION

Education has been a problem in our country and lack of it has been blamed for all sorts of evil for hundreds of years. Even Rabindranath Tagore wrote lengthy articles about how Indian education system needs to change. Funny thing is that from the colonial times, few things have changed. We have established IITs, IIMs, law schools and other institutions of excellence; students now routinely score 90% marks so that even students with 90+ percentages find it difficult to get into the colleges of their choice; but we do more of the same old stuff. Rote learning still plagues our system, students study only to score marks in exams, and sometimes to crack exams like IIT JEE, AIIMS or CLAT. The colonial masters introduced education systems in India to create clerks and civil servants, and we have not deviated much from that pattern till today.

In *Five Point Someone*, Chetan Bhagat focuses on the lives of three friends from IIT, Delhi- Harikumar, the narrator, Alok Gupta and Ryan Oberoi. Bhagat gives emphasis on the observational teaching. He believes that only this can get rid of mugging from the students. It makes the students get the knowledge in a natural way. The observational technique makes them observe the things minutely and find out the solution in the objects. If they are unable to find out the solution, they are allowed to discuss the same with the teachers and other classmates. At last, they find answers to their queries. It makes them innovative.

Nonetheless, the observational teaching method cannot be implemented in a big institute like IIT. Bhagat grieves for the sterile dogmatism of the present educational system. He blames the professors who never allow the students' creativity. He finds the professors' bigotry in not allowing any prolific change in the system.

For instance, all the three friends suffer ignominy at college campus. All others including the professors and the students take them as nuts, idiots, and losers only because of their poor performance in their examinations. They get five points something as their grade points. But, they are freethinkers, true lovers of life, harbinger of innovative ideas, icons of liberty and precursors of the youth calling approach. They are not like others who do muggings and all others like a book-worm. They do not lose their strength and confidence. They work hard on the lube project. Eventually, their project gets approved and they succeed in achieving big name and fame.

The novel begins in a unique way where the author takes the liberty of sharing his opinion that the book is not a guide on how to get into IIT but it cites examples of how screwed up our college years can get if we don't think straight. The author is more concerned about what to do after getting admission into an IIT than the admission process itself. He points out that getting into IIT is not all that difficult as it is made out to be. As he puts it, "If you can lock yourself in a room with books for two years and throw away the key, you can probably make it here." Chetan Bhagat through his novel *Five Point Someone* indirectly conveys a serious message in a humorous tone that it is a wakeup call for the elite technical institutes to replace the traditional teaching style of 'I teach; you listen' with an approach that develops students' own abilities to collect, select, filter, and assimilate information; that inspires students' creativity by developing their life-long abilities; and that teaches students how to learn efficiently and actively. The novel in a mild tone points out that our technical education has become a lifeless system and needs reformation.

The students initially come to the IIT with a superb feeling of being among the chosen children of Saraswati goddess and begin to entertain utopian ideas at the time of their entry into these elite institutes. But once they fall into the nuts of routine studies, they scale down their dreams. Hence some of the wishes and dreams of these students in their frustrations become far from high sounding; rather they become humbler ones, sometimes as silly as those of school children whose greatest pleasure comes when a day's holiday is declared. Hari and his friends, after studying up to three O'clock in the morning every day, "passionately prayed India would go to war on the morning of our first major" so that their examinations get postponed. In a mood of depression, Hari wondered if he, keeping in mind the uncertainty of clearing IIT examinations and getting a good job, could work "at the ice-cream parlour, filling cones all day and never have to worry about classes, courses, grades and Alok-Ryan arguments."

The novel also touches an important chord - the helplessness of the Professors to handle the brilliant students who can pose challenging questions based on their common sense. Prof. Dubey, Mechanical Engineering Department, mentions: "The definition of a machine is simple. It is anything that reduces human effort. So, see the world around you and it is full of machines." (9) A student, Ryan asks: "Sir, what about a gym machine, like a bench press or something?" "That doesn't reduce human effort. In fact, it increases it." (10)

In college life, romance is like a harbinger which conveys the message of love in the tender hearts. The romanticism evoked with the love affair of Hari and Neha, daughter of Prof. Cherian, is noteworthy. Hari gets ready to do anything for his lady love Neha. Hostel life is all about friends, alienation from families, smoking cigars, drinking vodka and listening to Pink Floyd. Commitment to relationship overrules the fresh admitted undergraduates to such an extent that they are ready to do anything for earning name and fame. Hari is basically a timid person but this flaw of timidity becomes

so overbearing that on important occasions he becomes totally dumb, his tongue so much paralyzed as if the power supply to it were cut off. On such occasions, a person's imagination becomes over-active and Hari begins to envision things which are fantastic, as is obvious from his use of hyperbolic comparisons.

Ostensibly IITs are known as Centers of Excellence but the institute could not succeed to win laurels for the country by making significant technical contributions. The grading system to assess the students' performance has not only overburdened the students but also spoiled their originality. The limitation of the IIT system was intricately brought out by the remarks of Ryan Oberoi in a get together party:

You know guys, this whole IIT system is sick. Because, tell me, how many great engineers or scientists have come out of IIT? I mean that is supposed to be the best college in India, the cast technology institute for a country of a billion. But has IIT ever invented anything? Or made any technical contribution to India? Over thirty years of IITs, yet, all it does is train some bright kids to work in multinationals. I mean look at MIT in the USA.... What is wrong in the system....? This system of relative grading and overburdening the students? I mean it kills the best fun years of your life. But it kills something else. Where is the room for original thought? Where the time for creativity? It is not fair. (34 - 35)

Competition is so intense in IITs which has duly created lot of pressures among the students and one of the professors made a remark at the end of his class:

Best of luck once again for your stay here. Remember, as your head of department Prof. Cherian says, the tough workload is by design, to keep you on your toes. And respect the grading system. You get bad grades, and I assure you – you get no job, no school and no future. If you do well, the world is your oyster. So, don't slip, not even once, or there will be no oyster, just slush. (11)

Chetan Bhagat as an IITian records the psychological reactions of the grade system in IIT. It is not a matter of the failure in examination only but it also becomes a prelude to the apprehensions of failure in the examination of life.

Hari as a compensation for his loss seeks consolations in the company of Neha, provides her gifts and enjoys the pleasures of her curiosity to apply Hari's lipstick on her lips. The whole process becomes a diversion in the life of Neha. With these passionate dreams, Hari comments, "I watched Neha's face as she applied her lipstick with the same concentration as Alok had when doing quanti problems. Girl's are beautiful, let's face it, and life is quite, quite worthless without them" (106). In this respect, Chetan Bhagat through the dilemmas of Alok, Hari and Ryan captures imbalance disturbing the equilibrium of the consciousness of youths. Such fragmentation is essentially a sign of the sickness of the social structure that is gradually losing its centre for the better integration of human sensibility.

Along with this serious issue, the author also touches the topic of pre-marital sex. The episode of romance between Hari and Neha accidentally starts with an accident. They have their second meeting over melting ice cream in a parlor and decide to meet there every Sunday. The first time Hari proposes a date to Neha, he feels it almost like a stressful viva. (47) They meet in the absence of their parents and have had their ice creamy kisses (70) in the parlor. Hari, with the help of Ryan, presents a self-designed personalized lipstick container to please Neha on the eve of her birthday and receives her praise. (104) He also kisses his beloved right in her own room midnight on her birthday with Ryan's help. They go to a temple on her brother's death anniversary. When he meets her so as to fetch the keys of her father's office, they have lots of fun, love, and sex. (120) having infatuation towards other gender; running an affair with a boy/girl friend;

enjoying outings and sex has become a trend of the day. Nobody bothers much about morals; pre-marital sex among new generation students in colleges is common. They are second to none in this aspect. Chetan Bhagat presents it in this novel. Unlike his predecessors, Bhagat has glorified sex in his works.

Bhagat believes in the sanctity of sex, that he validates referring to the Holy Scriptures of Indian Culture. In *The Times of India*, Bhagat hints that, "Our ancient texts such as the Upanishads discuss sex in an explicit manner. The Mahabharata refers to Draupadi's polyandry. The temples in Khajuraho leave little to the imagination" (Bhagat 15). Bhagat seems to be sad over man's attitude, which changed towards holiness of the creative force of life (sex) during the span. No other writer of the past but Bhagat sanctified sex. They posted it in the harlotry. They watched it in the reluctance of the woman. They found it in the sadism of man.

The pain of ragging; laborious academic schedule and the stress caused by it; parent's attitudes and great expectations; the methodologies of teachers and students; criticism on the existing system; malpractice for the examinations; individual academic plan and violation of the plan on the part of students; and committing and attempting suicides to escape academic and parental pressure have been mainly focused by Chetan Bhagat in this novel. Besides these academic activities, we can also figure out considerable amount of fun and enjoyment on the part of student-life like developing new friendship with people with different socio-economic background; attracting people and forging relations with other gender; meeting, dating, exploring sexual relations; celebrating every possible occasions; love, romance, break-ups; smoking, drinking, consuming drugs etc. altogether to have a very factual description of student life. The humorous way of writing with a sense of reality makes one revisit the old memories of college days.

The pressure from the parents on their kids is also illustrated in the novel through the character of Samir, the only son of Prof. Cherian. He writes a letter to his beloved sister in whom he mentions: "I have tried three times to get into IIT, and each time I have disappointed dad. He cannot get over the fact that his son cannot handle Physics, Chemistry and Maths. I cannot do it.... I cannot get into IIT. And I cannot bear to see dad's eyes... What can I do? Keep trying until I die? Or simply die?" (167) Samir commits suicide. This is a clear instance of parental pressure. The father wants to see his son as IITian. He does not mind what his son aspires to be in life. The consequence is loss of invaluable life! When Prof. Cherian realizes the fact, it is out of his hands. The loss occurred is irrevocable as his dear son kills himself. He confesses in public in his convocational address: "I am sorry everyone for bringing up this sad story on your special day. I told myself that if I admit to my mistake publicly, perhaps my son will forgive me. And I wanted to thank the one student in this class because of whom I found out the truth. It is my daughter's boyfriend- Hari. And he is here sitting right in the front row." (260).

CONCLUSIONS

The novel is also guidance for teachers, professor and educational system that are running a factory for producing engineers. It has tried to touch upon several aspects of education role learning, blind rat race, unrealistic material values, creative teaching methods, creative practical intelligence, deceptive grading system, over-obsession with marks and qualifications, importance of fearless attitude etc. It also implies that people should not be judged by degrees alone, which can be deceptive. In future soft skill alone gets the students in to better job market and it is very clear in the novel.

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