



MANIFESTATION OF MODERN MILIEU IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S *FIVE POINT SOMEONE AND ONE NIGHT @ THE CALL CENTRE*

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Abstract

Indian English Literature is a significant product of Indian culture and ethos on one hand and Western language especially English on the other. Indian English writers from different time frames have variedly injected the socio-political and cultural components in their literary works as it is said that Literature mirrors society and can serve as a social document. No writer can escape from the race, milieu, and moment in which he or she has lived. The same variedly colored and shaped their imagination and creativity and the same has been very well reflected in the works of Chetan Bhagat.

The very quality of Bhagat is the fact that he writes about Indians and for Indians. This research paper aims to study multiculturalism with special reference to Bhagat's Five Point Someone and One Night @ the Call Centre. Bhagat very well depicts the Very concept of Unity in diversity. The following concerns fall under the umbrella of this research paper. How do different characters of Bhagat contribute to cultural diversities and stand as spokespersons of different generations? The paper also deals with the very pertaining question of fact and fiction. Whether the culture depicted by Bhagat is sheer imaginative or true to nature. The picture of today's youth as presented by Chetan Bhagat has also been taken into account to palm the concept of relation between men and culture.

Key Words: Chetan Bhagat, Indian Writing in English, Multiculturalism, Indian Youth, Imagination, Generations, and Society.

India is known for its unity in diversity. India beholds heterogeneous culture and language as well. Different cultures, traditions, languages, and customs make India a colorful country connected in a unique way complementing and making a beautiful rainbow. Literature grows out of culture and language. Writers also grow out of language and culture. So it would be needless to say that Chetan Bhagat is influenced by the race, milieu, and moment he has been living in. Indian English literature is a significant product of Indian culture and ethos on the one hand and Western language especially English on the other hand. The very objective of Indian writers is to land a nationalist spirit and to awaken Indianness among people since the time of inception. It can be said that the Renaissance awakened the true Indian spirit. Shree Aurobindo in his essay *Renaissance in India* defines the Indian Renaissance as;

An attempt to reawaken national spirit to find a new impulse of self-expression which shall give the spiritual force for a great reshaping and rebuilding.
(Aurobindo)

He won “The Youth Icon Award” on 17th April 2011 during the event organized by the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industries at Gujarat University convention hall at the hand of Shree Narendra Modi, for his magnum opus works. Chetan Bhagat is said to be the spokesman for the young generation voicing the suppressed voice of young Indian youth. The very characters of all novels of Bhagat are young and young in spirit. Revolting against the existing system, rebelling against the set norms, setting a new path, dreams, and aspirations, and breaking up a dogma are some of the major concerns of Bhagat. As in one of the interviews by Bhagat for *Hindu*, Chetan Bhagat has admitted,

“It’s not high literature”, admits Bhagat, “both of my novels portray the aspirations, mindset, and problems of the present generation in a very simple language. And since I belong to the young generation, I feel I have been able to strike the right chord with my readers. When they read my books they can relate themselves to the characters and the plots. (Hindu)

Bhagat’s choices of subject for his books are very Bhagatian- his first two books *Five Point Someone* and *One Night @ the Call Centre* deal with life at an Indian Institute of Technology and a Call Centre respectively. Chetan Bhagat has the potential to be called one of the voices of a generation of middle-class Indian youth facing the choices and frustration that come with the prospect of growing wealth and advancement. In these two novels, he describes the perennial themes like parental pressure on children to get admission in highly competitive institutes, earn high grades, gets a good job, poverty, exploitation at the workplace, dissatisfaction with the job, feelings of insecurity at workplace, ill effects of domestic quarrel on children, etc. These all are the common notions found in Indian culture and faced by average Indian youth. Bhagat has very aptly touched upon and highlighted these aspects.

His first novel *Five Point Someone* is set in the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, in the period 1991 to 1995. It is a story about the adventures of three mechanical engineering students Hari (the narrator), Ryan Oberoi, and Alok Gupta. They fail to cope with the grading system of the IITs. Ryan is a smart as well as outspoken boy, whereas Hari and Alok are comparatively introverted personalities. They are not that bright to be the front liners and always secure a GPA of Five Points something very low. Though they try to improve their grades, things always get worse for them. This book directly as well as indirectly discusses the grim side of the IIT education system, which is lauded by the elite. Hari, Alok, and Ryan fit the

character of present-day youth who are intelligent, creative, indifferent, dejected, feeling insecure, and irresponsible. The novel closes with an open ending where one cannot decide whether the student's life is for the enjoyment of freedom or labor for academics. Even if the enjoyment of freedom means drinking vodka, smoking cigarettes, listening to Pink Floyd, or something else then that is an insoluble query for academics. Though the novel takes dark turns now and then, it has a humorous tone. Ryan, who possesses creative thinking, has been forced to value grades more than anything else. Bhagat's second novel *One Night @ the Call Centre* is a story about the events that happen during *One Night @ the Call Centre*. The story of *One Night @ the Call Centre* revolves around six main characters Shyam, Varun, Priyanka, Esha, Radhika, Military Uncle, and their boss Mr. Bakshi. *One Night @ the Call Centre* is a tale of love and conflict, exploitation at the workplace, absence of family affection, the darker side of the modeling world, identity crisis, unfulfilled ambitions, and the work environment of a globalized office. This information is derived from Wikipedia. *One Night @ the Call Centre* is told through the view of Shyam, the protagonist, who is working as a call center agent. In *ONCE* every character has some ambitions which they want to fulfill during life but are unaware of the right path to fulfill their ambitions. The scoring bosses, family liabilities, lack of recreational activities, or housing problems the youth endure the ever-growing list of problems to establish their position in society. As a result, youth constantly feel like being alienated from the world or society. We have produced a world of contented bodies and discontented minds.

All characters in Bhagat's novels are from varied backgrounds. Bhagat aims at creating the whole Indian at a miniature scale portraying the mindset, mentality, customs, and turmoil of every region, religion, class, and age group. Shyam is an average Indian boy who keeps on searching for his identity and underestimates himself. Vroom is a spokesperson for an ambitious young man who prefers to fly hard and ride his bike at optimum. Military's uncle represents the old generation who constantly finds himself detached from his younger generation, his son and grandson. Esha represents a modern girl who strives to be independent and self-reliant. In Indian culture, after some age girls are considered as a burden till the time they get married. The reason for Priyanka's readiness for the marriage with Ganesh is nothing but the pressure of her mother. Otherwise, she demands some time to know him well. But as she is of the age, parents can't wait. To narrate her situation Priyanka says,

They brought me up for twenty-five years, and now they can't wait more than twenty-five days to get rid of me. What is with these people- am I such a burden?
(Chetan, 138)

Five Point Someone is a story of three friends, the book describes various facets of IIT life – the academics, the professors, campus life, and the rat race to get better grades. As the title suggests, the book is about the cruel grade and marks system that is being practiced and imposed on the students. The book is an honest self-experienced attempt to convey the message to the young generation that what will happen if they fail to score good marks in educational exams. The very book starts with the sense of repentance, in the sense that Harikumar talks about the experiences, of being IITs, that are not worth undergoing.

Welcome to *Five Point Someone*. This is not a book to teach you how to get into IIT or even survive it. It describes how bad things can get if you don't think straight. Funny, dark, and non-stop, *Five Point Someone* is the story of three friends whose measly five-point something GPAs come in the way of everything - their friendship, their love life, and their future. Will they make it?" (Preface)

The lines quoted above are a clear indication of the way students are forced to think, act, and behave. To put it simply, talent is imprisoned. It loses its freedom. As a result, innovativeness suffers. The chief element that permeates both novels is conflict which pushes the characters into the cannon of disillusionment. Ryan with his rebellious nature protests against the existing system which later on turns into a form of conflict. Young people have far more options than their parents but their choices remain circumscribed by a traditional education system and overbearingly high expectations. Ryan compares the place with jail where they don't have the *freedom to think* innovatively, freely, or in their way.

In great *fury*, Ryan says, "I think this is a jail. It really is, Damn Jail" (14)

The spirit of YOUTH is enlivened in the major characters like Harikumar, Rayan Oberoi, Alok Gupta, Neha Cherian, and Chetan Bhagat who created them. Harikumar is over-conscious about what he tells or what he is going to tell. He always infers the counter question and utters with „Reason“ of his own. Harikumar has a habit of self elaborating their views. Very easily he can pass the witty remarks on to his friends. It clearly shows that he is very friendly and witty in his nature and use of language.

Bitter satire on the education system is very well employed by Bhagat. Because of throat-cut competitions, colleges are employing more and more norms to keep the students engaged in syllabus-based activity which does not give the students to be original and creative. They are always engrossed with the syllabus part rather than the curriculum. Ultimately they feel the burden of their study. Ryan also asserts the importance of creativity and said,

“ 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 is the time for creativity? It is not fair.” (104)

The system is corporate to dominate. Ryan concludes that the IIT system is unfair because:

1. It suppresses talent and individual spirit.
2. It extracts the best years of one's life from the country's brightest minds.
3. It judges students with a draconian GPA system that destroys Relationships.
4. The Profs don't care for the students.
5. IITs have hardly contributed to the country.

Bhagat has depicted a live picture of campus life in the novel. Bhagat has utilized very lucid cosmopolitan language which is very popular among the young generation like crap, screwed, damn, fuck, etc. Bhagat has presented craze dhaba culture and canteens in the novel. These are places where they frequently visit to pass the time and get relaxed. Alok, Ryan, and Hari go to a movie to get rid of educational tension. The strict approach and attitude of parents are carried out through the characters of Prof. Cherian, Alok's father. They restrict the scope of their children by forcing them to choose the field of „their“ interest. They impose their views on their children. They decide their future. Samir, son of Prof. Cherian commits suicide after getting tired of his father's pressure. It seems to be a mere accident but in reality, Prof. Cherian indirectly killed him. Alok's father does not let him be a photographer. He wants him to be an engineer as engineers are in demand. No matter what Alok wishes to be.

Bhagat has also introduced the modern culture of the young generation. Today young people believe in enjoying the luxuries of life. Especially in colleges, young boys go on dates with their beloved and spend money in pizza huts and grand hotels. They waste precious time of their life in enjoying life rather than concentrating on their studies. When they realize their mistake it becomes too late for them to come back in life. As Rayan says, “Whatever Alok, Let's celebrate it over the chicken”(216)

Bhagat also satirizes the concept of success for students. Today teachers, parents, and students consider good marks as a success. To achieve success students bank on digests and material. They mug up the syllabus and get good marks. Teaching becomes informative rather than knowledge-based. Students feel sad and bad when get lower marks in exams. The same happens with Alok, and Hari when the result of GPA and they *Five Point Something*. Both of them become sad and start accusing themselves of not getting good marks. At this point, Ryan proclaims that real study is skill-based not information-based. Nobody is going to consider the

grades that you have secured if you don't have talent and skill. As Ryan says, "... and who cares about how much you mugged" (228).

Operation Pendulum is the worst example of the shortcuts students prefer to do. Nowadays students expect quick success without working hard and to do that they can go to any extreme. Such snobbish and mean mentality of the students is put forward by Bhagat through the example of Operation Pendulum. In Operation Pendulum, Hari prepares himself to steal paper from Prof. Cherian's office. Hari first steals the key from Neha and makes her befool by telling her that he is dying to meet her. He uses Neha as a means to reach Prof. Cherian's office. Operation Pendulum is a grave mistake by Ryan, Hari, and Alok consequently it brings chaos in the lives of all three as all three of them are caught by the security chief. An accuse is imposed on all three of them and Prof becomes extremely furious. The security chief says to Prof, "Cheating sir, Stealing major paper. My boys Caught them." (288). In a country like India love affairs or love marriages are hardly seen with positive eyes. People always raise red eyes. They hardly accept the love between youngsters. Many critical issues can be raised if they show their keenness to marry each other. The same thing happens when Ryan is found in love with Neha by Prof Cherian. Prof threatens Ryan and tries to break the relationship between them by using his power of being Ryan's teacher and Neha's father. Prof expresses his fury by proclaiming that,

"Good. I don't want people talking, so I won't bring this up again. But you stay away from her and focus on your courses. For, Hari one slip in the insti and I will ruin you. I will bloody ruin you." (260)

In a nutshell, what strikes you first about Chetan Bhagat's novels is the fact that this author writes about Indians and Indians. His characters are young, ambitious, and passionate and have the same moral, social, and religious dilemmas as many of the young Indians today. At the same time, their context and sensibility too are unabashedly Indian. If one examines the studies on the attitude and behavior of youth, all these refer to the context of national transformation from a „traditional“ to a „modern“ society. Jaganathan and Balasundra's (1963) study explores the behavior patterns about (i) aspects of an individual's personal life. His urges and aspirations; (ii) „Stimuli“, which deal with the dynamic factors in personality and how he sees and directs his life; (iii) the reactionary tendencies or overt behavior of an individual. Bhagat's world is the contemporary urban upper middle-class world. His language is the one that you hear in this world. This class emerged largely in the post-nineties era of privatization, liberalization, and globalization. This is the Hinglish-speaking generation from the English medium schools in towns and cities.

As the shoe wearer knows where the shoe pinches, being a young Bhagat has very well depicted modern sensibility through the various characters like Ryan, Alok, Hari, Shyam, Vroom, Radhika, Esha, etc. The very prominent and burning issue, internal clashes, of the 21st century is touched by Bhagat through characters like Radhika, Alok, and the Military uncle. Bhagat has remained the mouthpiece of Indian youth and representative of India. His writing comes out of his keen observation of his surroundings. As a result, his writing is colored by the sensibilities of modern people and the world. No writer can escape from the world in which he or she lives. Taine's theory of Race, Milieu, and Moment is very aptly and appropriately allocable in the works of Chetan Bhagat. Bhagat's popularity among collegiates shows his deep understanding regarding college life in particular and modern life in general. His rest three novels namely *Three Mistakes of My Life*, *2 States*, and *Revolution 2020* also deal with the same setting and characters of the same age. So it is concluded that Bhagat has picturized the modern milieu and modern people with their problems, dreams, aspirations, and conditions in the context of modern society realistically and keenly but at a miniature scale.

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