

Youth Sensibilities and Education: In the Perspective of Irony in Chetan Bhagat's Novel *Five Point Someone*

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ABSTRACT: Sensibility means ability to receive sensations or sensitiveness. Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines sensibility as 'an understanding of or ability to decide about what is good or valuable, especially in connection with artistic or social activities.' Education is an important part of youth issues. Education is basic thing for human progress. It plays an important role in all-round development of the individuality and society. It creates disciplined, patriotic and productive manpower. Thus, education means the process of developing individual personality and organizing a disciplined society. Education is must for the all-round development of youth generation; it is marked as priority globally. Like many other postmodern writers of India, Chetan Bhagat deals with the issue of education in his works. In his novel *Five Point Someone*, he depicts the pictures of Indian education system with its defects and shortcomings. This present paper tries to present youth sensibilities and education in the novel that the novelist has exposed with the help of irony and satire.

Keywords: Youth, sensibility, defective, education, reform, irony

INTRODUCTION

When studying about the youth-sensibility and education, one has to define sensibility and education first. Sensibility means ability to receive sensations or sensitiveness. *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines sensibility as: 'an understanding of or ability to decide about what is good or valuable, especially in connection with artistic or social activities.' The young age is a very sensitive age in which the young people attract towards any part of life by using their sensitivity and try to take decisions by emotions only.

"This will probably be the case," he replied; "and yet there is something so amiable in the prejudices of a young mind, that one is sorry to see them give way to the reception of more general opinions." (*Sense and Sensibility*- Jane Austen, p. 40)

Education is an important part of youth issues and it is basic thing for human progress. It plays an important role in all-round development of the individuality and society. It creates disciplined, patriotic and productive manpower. Thus, education means the process of developing individual personality and organizing a disciplined society. Therefore, it is the young generation that should be more sensitive to education system. Chetan Bhagat has depicted the Indian education system in some of his novels- among them *Five Point Someone* is remarkable. *Five Point Someone* is Chetan Bhagat's first novel which is a campus novel; IIT, Delhi is the campus here. It depicts the picture of Indian faulty education system through the story of three main characters- Ryan Oberoi, Alok Gupta and Hari Kumar who are friends and the students of this institution; and live in Kumaon hostel in the campus

No doubt, some researchers have mentioned about this trait of Chetan Bhagat's novels including *Five Point Someone* but they have left untouched how the three friends of the novel try their best to reform education system knowingly or unknowingly, directly or indirectly. Youth sensibilities towards education system is very clear in this novel through the characters of the three friends, especially through the character of Ryan Oberoi who revolts directly against Indian education system. This revolt against faulty education system can create awareness in young people who would support and take active part in it for reformation. By writing *Five Point Someone*, Chetan Bhagat has certainly reflected a touchy matter that deals with the students of young generation in India. The critics may think of his works as literature in making but he has become the need of the new generation readers.

As the subject of the study is narrative, usually the method of narrative analysis is observed throughout the paper. The study is based mainly on primary data, collected from the novel *Five Point Someone*. A lot of secondary data have also been collected from some reputed articles and books. These sources of data are found from both physical and digital library and studied thoroughly. To establish the study more logical and reasonable, some texts are quoted directly from the novels as it is. The aims and objectives of this study is to bring out the reformative zeal that Chetan Bhagat tries to spread among young generation through the novel against Indian defective education system to contribute the nation. Young people are more active than the elders who need only proper suggestions for action. The researcher will try to do it depicting the events concerning education system and focusing on the concepts of the novelist regarding it. This study will help the researchers who will research in future on this fact of defective education system in India through the novels of Chetan Bhagat

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The mind-numbing hard work which is needed for getting admission in an IIT has been described in *Five Point Someone* in a funny way. "I think half the trees in the world are felled to make up the IIT entrance exam guides..... All we would say as advice is, if you can lock yourself in a room with books for two years and throws away the key, you can probably make it here." (pp. 1-2) Human race has gone beyond the boundaries of nations and geography in the 21st century with the development of internet. In this competitive era, knowledge has become the currency and those who have knowledge are successful. In the cut-throat competition of a globalized world, a student can be successful if he has diverse potentialities like creativity and innovation, technology, risk taking and adventurous spirits as these are key factors to success. Talents can be cultivated through education and culture. Education is the cradle of talented people and human resources; it is also the foundation of civilization.

Chetan Bhagat through his novel *Five Point Someone* indirectly conveyed 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 emphasis should be placed on learning methods instead of knowledge accumulation. And we need to help students turn their knowledge into innovative ability and knowledge application ability, both of which are much needed in profit creation. ‘*Five Point Someone*’ in a mild tone points out that our technical education has become a life less system and needs reformation. (Biswas, 13)

To clear the matter of IIT education in India, Bhagat depicts some pictures of IIT in his novel *Five Point Someone* what goes on there. He depicts the class of professor Dubey perfectly but with a tone of satire. In which manner the professor begins his class, it seems that he is incomparable pundit but the same pundit becomes pale when Ryan puts him a question and makes the professor realize that his definition is wrong. His “*Watch it son. In my class, just watch it,*” (p. 11) proves his piteous condition and unannounced surrender to Ryan and then he moves to another topic leaving that there unanswered. The IIT professor, thus, proves that he is only ready with readymade answer, lack of presence of mind or deep- thinking power; nothing innovation is there in him. Then he begins to clean up the way for leaving the class misleading the students with some unnecessary serious thought. This is the piteous condition not only of Prof. Dubey but also of Indian education system, having no greater creativity.

Professors try to dominate by terrorizing them about quiz and internal marks. One day Prof Sen comes to class and says, “*Time for some fun. Here is a quickie quiz of multiple-choice questions.*” (p. 19) They get fun by pressurizing the students in the name of test, surprise quiz, internal marks, viva and job placement. The ratio of students’ suicide due to the burden or unsuccessfulness in examinations is increased in India. In the essay ‘*Factors That Raising The Percentage of Suicide Rates in Youth*’ the writer shares the view as:

India records to have the world’s highest suicides rates with people aged between 15–29 years. Every year nearly 30-40 people per 100,000 Indians attempt suicides. Major cause of this concern is the utmost pressure from parents to perform well in national board exam, especially in class XII. In the attempt to fail in succeeding themselves, students aged between 16-18 undergo pressure. In the year 2013, 2,471 students have attempted owing to the failure in the examination.

The stubbornness and mercilessness of professors is reflected when the Physics professor gives a dark looks at Alok’s request for re-quiz as he couldn’t perform well due to his father’s illness. Ryan is humiliated for his creativity by Prof. Vohra who teaches students to design a screw-jack and asks them to replicate it. But Ryan doesn’t copy, he designs the ‘modified screw-jack’ “in which one did not manually have to open and raise the jack. “*A flat tire did not mean the engine had failed, hence one could attach a motor on the traditional jack and hook it up to the car battery. If one switched on the car ignition, the motor could derive power.*” (p. 117) Unlike rest of the class, he does something original. However, Prof Vohra insults him for doing something different from what he suggests. It shows how students are forced to stick to the syllabus and not allowed to do something original. Innovation, in this system, is not appreciated by teachers. Prof. Vohra is the representative of many orthodox teachers with high ego who cannot tolerate anything different from their perception. On the first place the course content in our education system doesn’t change with the pace of changing world. For example, the technology has advanced a lot but the syllabus doesn’t in technical education. The content taught to the students is of little use in the real life. Even the people who design the syllabus are not exposed to the need of corporate and industries. And professors insist the students to stick to the course which is outdated. Teachers should help students utilize their knowledge in innovation. Innovation and creativity should be encouraged. *Five Point Someone* is a light satire on Indian education system. Criticizing the education system, Chetan Bhagat, in one of the articles of his book *What Young India Wants* says:

“We treat lessons as rules to be adhered to, and the better you conform, the more likely you are to score. I hated it personally and I am sure millions do, too, but they have no choice. Innovation, imagination and creativity, crucial for the country, as well as more likely to bring the best out of any student, have no place in our education system. In fact, we actually ensure we kill this spirit in the child as fast as possible. Because innovation by definition means challenging the existing way and that is just not something good Indian kids who respect elders do.” (pp. 121 & 122)

Student’s skill and originality is crushed by both the system and the teachers who are the essential part of the system. Because of Prof. Vohra’s negative response, Ryan stops attending his lectures and starts copying the assignments directly from Hari’s notes. This is how he gives up the designing. Had he been encouraged by Prof Vohra, he might have done many innovative projects but he was discouraged as:

“*What is this?*” Prof Vohra said, twisting his head around to make sense of Ryan’s unfamiliar drawing.

“*Sir, this is a modified screw-jack,*” Ryan said, “*It can be attached to the car’s battery....*”

“*If you don’t want to be in my class or follow my course, you may leave.*” (p. 118)

Prof Cherman is depicted as the typical strict professor who wants to demonstrate his importance over students. He throws a piece of chalk at the student whom he finds talking to other in his class. When he hears whispers in the class, he bangs the duster on the table saying, “*No one talks for the next sixty minutes.*” (p. 140)

The following statements of Hari Kumar, the narrator of the novel and Ryan establish IIT, one of the so called best educational institutions of India as a dangerous mind numbing, life spoiling institution.

“*THEY SAY TIME FLIES WHEN YOU ARE HAVING FUN. IN THE first semester alone, with six courses, four of them with practical classes, time dragged so slow and comatose, fun was conspicuous by its absence. Every day, from eight to five, we were locked in the eight-storey insti-building with lectures, tutorials and labs. The next few hours of the evening were spent in the library or in our rooms as we prepared reports and finished assignments. And this did not even include the tests! Each subject had two minor tests, one major and three surprise quizzes; seven tests for six courses meant forty-two tests per semester, mathematically speaking. Luckily, the professors spared us surprise quizzes in the first month, citing ragging season and the settling-in period of course; but the ragging season ended soon and it meant a quiz could*

happen any time. In every class we had to look out for instructor's subtle hints about a possible quiz in the next class." (p. 12)

"I think this is jail. It really is. Damn jail," Ryan said, hitting the peeling wall with a fist." (p. 14)

Chetan Bhagat throws light on the criteria of the education system to judge students by their marks or grades only. Actually, through Ryan the novelist attempts to prove that it is not fair to judge a student by his GPA or marks only which suppresses the creativity of a person and kills the originality of his whole personality. The authority seems to be very callous about it. They are only concerned about the marks or grade-system. Here Chetan Bhagat exposes the dark side effects of the education system in which the student would be judged on the basis of his results. From the conversation among three friends Ryan, Alok and Hari, we come to know a lot about Indian education system, especially about IIT education:

"You know guys, this whole IIT system is sick," Ryan declared.

"I mean this is supposed to be the best college in India, the best technology institute for a country of a billion. But has IIT ever invented anything? Or made any technical contribution to India?"

Ryan continued to muse. "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." (p. 34)

"What is wrong is the system," Ryan denounced soundly, sounding like a local politician. Blame the whole damn system if you can't figure anything out.

But Ryan had more. "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." (p. 35)

Chetan Bhagat has exposed the flaws like relative grading system which makes the whole academics a race. Alok says, *"It's relative grading system, so if we don't study and others do, we are screwed."* (p. 18) It reflects well how the whole education system has become a matter of competition rather than cooperation. Students compete with each-other to score good grades and that's why they will never be cooperative. It makes the students highly ambitious and they can do anything to fulfil their ambitions. They have few friends in the college as all their class mates are their competitors. The best examples are Venkat and Prof. Cherian. Venkat is a real mugger and can do anything to become the topper. He doesn't have any friend in the campus. He has become selfish beyond certain extent in order to achieve the position of the topper. Prof. Cherian doesn't have any friend in his life though he is a successful person. He has even lost his son Samir as he forced him to fulfil his own ambition in his (Samir's) career. Cherian is lonely in his life; even his daughter doesn't share the secret of Samir's suicide with him. Venkat has followed the foot-steps of Cherian's life – competing with others in order to be the topmost. Students create enemies rather than friends from college. Is this the thing we want from the young generation of India? This is the indirect question put by Bhagat in this novel.

In this grading system, mugging seems to be the only way to get good scores. Students are judged on the basis of marks they cover in the written examinations. The less weightage is given to the practical knowledge. In this system, a so-called competent student is the one who can mug up the whole syllabus before the day of examination and can vomit out the mugged up stuff in the answer script. Every individual is unique in his own way. Each has his own temperament, nature, tastes, likes, dislikes, insights and background. Everyone is different from the rest of the world. Our current examination system tries to judge all the different types of students with the same syllabus, with the same question papers and with the expectation of the same answer. This is totally unfair. Ryan satirizes the education system when he says, *"Yes sir, let us mug and cram. Otherwise, how will we become great engineers of this great country."* (18)

In most of the top ranked Indian educational institutions inequality of teachers' treatment in teaching the students is observed. The best one is given best treatment and the weak one is given less treatment and this best and weak is considered on obtained GPA or marks only. The following statement of Ryan proves it -

"Yes, that Prof Bhatia. I mean you were there, right? I gave him some ideas on how one could design a suspension bridge and he got all excited. He told me to make a scale drawing and submit it, said he would give me a special internship project. Then he asked me my name and found out my GPA. So, then he calls me and says to forget about the drawing and internship. Can you believe that scum?" Ryan said." (p. 78)

The way recruiters look upon the candidates depends upon candidate's grades. Hari writes, *"Yes, five-pointer was pretty crap. From now on, every prof would know that I was a below average student and that would influence my grades in future courses. I know a few five pointers who were panned at campus recruitment last year."* (p. 62) Ryan's lube project that he has prepared spending hundreds of hours in the lab is rejected by Prof. Cherian only because of Ryan's low grades displayed on the title page of the proposal. Student's competence is evaluated by the grades he or she scores in examination by merely mugging the syllabus books. If any right teacher like Professor Veera teaches in right way, he becomes the butt of hatred to other traditional teachers like professor Cherian, it is observed from the following conversation of Hari Kumar and Neha Cherian:

"Late again?" she said. I must have been late by like two minutes.

"Had fluMech class. Prof Veera overshot time and we did not even realize it."

"Prof Veera is that young guy right?"

"Yes, you know him?"

"Not really. Dad mentions him. I think my dad hates him."

"Your dad sounds like a total..." (p. 86)

Five Point Someone is all about the dark secrets of IIT life. In the education system of India teachers put the burden of some special subjects on the students and ever try hard to give them bookish knowledge. In Chetan Bhagat's novels, we have some new aspects of a wrong education system. Some characters of his novels try to be rebellious to study as per their choice. In this present novel Riyan plays that part. Riyan's 'Mice Theory' or 'C2D Theory' satirises the IIT education system of India. He puts:

“And this IIT system is nothing but a mice race. It is not a rat race, mind you, as rats sound somewhat shrewd 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 have IITs given to this country? Name one invention in the last three decades.” “Anyway,” Ryan continued, “screw the profs. Coming back, 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,” Ryan said, looking at Alok, “then you will be pushed behind. As we have been pushed behind by morons like Venkat.”

But we can change all that,” Ryan said.

“How?” Anurag said. At least someone was listening to this trash.

“By living on our own terms. By being rats, not mice, work together and beat the system. I will not give up my friends for this system. In fact, my friendships will beat the system.” (p. 101)

When Hari asks Ryan about the implementation of the C2D theory, Ryan brings out all the faults in IIT education. Ryan handed out some pieces of papers to his friends bearing the title THE C2D PLAN. The contents of the papers were-

‘Cooperate to Dominate. 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 you with a draconian GPA system that destroys relationships.*
- 4. The profs don’t care for the students.*
- 5. IIT s have hardly contributed to the country.*

So, the only way to take on the unfair system is through unfair means – which is Cooperate to Dominate or C2D. And this is the plan that Ryan, Hari and Alok agree to for the rest of their stay at the insti. The key tenets are:

- 1. All assignments to be shared – one person will do each assignment by turn. The others will simply copy it. Saves time, saves duplication of effort.*
- 2. We will divide up the course responsibilities. For instance, if there are six courses in the semester, we will take care of only two each. One must attend all classes that one is responsible for, but can skip all others. (note: Ryan gets all Prof Veera courses) In each class you attend for your course – take copious notes. The rest will merely copy them.*
- 3. We share lab experiment observations.*
- 4. Our friendship is above GPAs. With all the new spare time, we live our lives to the fullest.*
- 5. We combine our hostel rooms into one living unit – one common bedroom, one study room and one fun party room.*
- 6. We split the cost of vodka regardless of how many drinks each person has had.’ (pp. 107-108)*

Indian IIT education system though thought very perfect but ironically seems to be quite opposite of it since it gives less importance on skill development which is in real sense a perfect education. When Hari told Ryan about Prof. Cherian’s class on assembly line task (dividing a task into several parts and performed by the workers separately), Ryan reacts:

“Are you stupid. You found this Indem crap interesting”

“But what if each worker wants to make his own shirt and wants to improve the design? It is just the same Cherian crap, treat humans like mindless machines.” (pp. 141-142)

Sometimes the cruel system of Indian educational institutions like - IIT compels students to follow unfair means to succeed in examinations. The three friends Ryan, Alok and Hari enters midnight at Prof. Cherian’s office room to rob the major question paper and for this crime they have been expelled for one semester which lost one year of their life. Being unable to cop up with it Alok jumps from the top of building to commit suicide. The top ranked educational institutions like IIT make the students’ life machinery like robots or machines. To Neha, about IIT business Hari Kumar says:

“Classes, classes and more classes. Eight to six every day. Then another three hours in the library. Then another two for assignments and revisions. I am going mad. But what to do? Never had this much course-load before.” (p. 237)

No judgement is there in the field of employment in Indian education system after getting degree; the eligible cannot get the job fit for him and the ineligible can get job beyond his/her eligibility. After completion of IIT education, Alok and Hari get good salaried job which they themselves cannot believe as they are totally poor in comparison to Ryan who has not got that job. Of course, later he gets job of Prof. Veera’s RA (Research Assistant) for only two thousand rupees a month. Hari thinks: *“Ryan had not got a job? He was the creative, confident, smart one. He was what I always wanted to be.” (p. 253)*

CONCLUSION

In *Five Point Someone*, Chetan Bhagat focuses especially on the lives of three friends of IIT, Delhi, who cannot cope up with the grading system of the IITs. Ryan is a bit smart and outspoken, whereas Alok and Hari are blindly followers of Ryan. The three friends suffer the ridicule of both the teachers and classmates. However, they think about the reformation of the traditional education system. They dislike the teaching method which is very old and traditional. The students are asked to mug the subjects to score good grades. The intelligence and competence of the students is measured on the basis of the grades they score in the examination. The education builds students’ career. But the system tries to judge only the memory power of the students. What about their insights in practical matter? The traditional evaluation system does not have the measure to judge students’ other talent like sports or music. The only measurement for evaluating student’s calibre is how much they can mug up before the day of examination and how well can they present their memory power in the answer-script. Ryan is the best example of a talented guy who is wrongly evaluated because of the inadequate evaluation system. Besides being sporty and smart, he is practically sound in the field of engineering. Nobody can beat him in practical knowledge which is actually useful in real life. But he cannot mug up well like Venkat. And therefore, he gets below average grades while Venkat gets the highest grades because he can mug up for the whole day. Venkat tops the examination though he lacks the practical knowledge. All the teachers and the students take the three friends

for as idiots and losers only because they perform under average in the examinations scoring only five point something. But like most of the other they are not blind followers, they think freely, love life truly, full of innovative ideas, model of liberty and pioneer of the youth-calling-approach. With full confidence, they work hard on their lube project and at last the project gets approval for which they become successful to achieve name and fame.

Thus, in this novel, Chetan Bhagat has presented the dark sides of Indian educational institutes. This novel illustrates how students waste their opportunities in college years if they don't think straight. Through the story of three friends, the book describes various facets of IIT life – the academics, the professors and campus life as a whole. The novelist is successful in bringing out the reformative zeal that he tries to spread among young generation through the novel against Indian defective education system to contribute the nation. The novel is a projection of bitter irony on Indian education system.

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