Impact Of Modernization On Indian Youth In A Social Context – A Study Of Chetan Bhagat’s Five Point Someone

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Abstract

Chetan Bhagat chooses unique and inimitable themes for his fictions and non-fictions among which the protruding one is youth and their lives. Bhagat is called the youth icon of India because the major subjects in his writings are the middle-class young generation and their social and economic issues. The present-day youngsters in India face many problems related to their education and career and hence they undergo many challenges and frustrations. Bhagat’s first novel entitled Five Point Someone has an autobiographical touch as its plot is set in a reputed technical institution IIT, Delhi in the early 1990s. The novel uses the first-person narrative technique in which the protagonists are three mechanical engineering students and the narrator Hari indirectly represents the author himself. The students of IIT get admission into the institution after cracking the entrance examinations with good percentage of marks but the three protagonists in the novel are not able to cope with the grading system of their college. In the novel Five Point Someone, the writer tries to delineate the education related issues of technical students such as competitive examination system, earning high grade points, competition in getting proper job, poverty in the family and so on. The objective of this paper is to explore the social comportment of young generation in India and it also analyses the impact of modernization on present youngsters in a social context. Chetan Bhagat’s Five Point Someone is the voice of all youngsters in the contemporary India who desires to achieve the highest standard of education and job opportunity in this globalized scenario.

Keywords: Five Point Someone, modernization, globalization, Indian society, social context

Introduction

India has youth as the major part of its population and hence the strength of the country is laid upon the young generation of the country. The present generation after the globalization and
modernization in the early nineteen nineties can be named as the ‘new generation’ of the country. The modernization has changed the outlook of the country as it decreases the barriers in the foreign communications and telecommunications. The technological advancement increased the capital investments of the country and it promoted the liberalization of the country in the entire global circle. Thus, the modernization can be seen not only in the country’s economic arena but also in the lifestyles of the people in the middle-class families. Bhagat portrays the social issues faced by the youth in the novel through the three types of students in the same college. They are the real representatives of this young generation as the story focuses on the dynamics of urban existence and the impact of modernization on this new Indian generation.

Bhagat writes his novels with a view of expressing the emotions of the new generation of Indian society. All the young characters of the novel Five Point Someone belong to the normal middle-class family of Indian society. He portrays these characters by describing a specific kind of modern India and modern Indian society that is completely tuned by the influence of modernization and its reforms. The three protagonists of the novel belong to Hindu middle-class family who are proud of their conventional culture and heritage. However, these young people want to raise the name of their country in the global level. They have the dream of upholding the reputation of the country inside and outside of it. All his novels delineate the life and its challenges of those who aspire victory and to create their own gap in the middle-class social community.

**Youth and Modernization in Five Point Someone**

The background plot of Five Point Someone has been set in the well-known Indian Institute of Technology. The story revolves around the life and its struggles of the three mechanical engineering students in the IIT. The narrator of the story Hari and his friends Ryan Oberoi and Alok Gupta meet at the campus and their journey in the college start with numerous challenges. They find difficult to cope with the grading system of technical education in India. Hari and Alok are average in their studies and introvert in nature whereas Ryan is smart enough to handle new innovative ideas in technical field. All these three friends dislike the grading system and they are not able to secure a GPA more than five points something in their examinations. Although they try to improve their grade point, things get worse repeatedly for them in the college. Bhagat describes the drawbacks of Indian education system and the evaluating system of students’ skills in this debut work. Alok and Ryan are brilliant students who are indifferent and have creative thinking ability but their talents are not recognized by the teachers and parents at the right time and so they feel insecure and reckless. The novel is written with a humorous tone whereas it discusses one of the serious issues of current young generation. It passes through many dark points every now and them but tries to make the readers think about the solution of the problem. The novel ends up with a puzzle for the readers that it is the duty of the person who reads it has to decide whether the life of a student should enjoy freedom or should be toiled for academic excellence.

Today’s youth are attracted by the modernization in the present century in which technology rules the world. The young generation of this century tempts to grow up in a social
modern culture. This makes them different from the earlier generations. The social and economic issues that are faced by today’s youth are not limited to only the middle-class society but also to all the young people in the country in general. The issues that are discussed in the work of Chetan Bhagat include crime, violence, sexuality, poverty and so on. Moreover, he discusses the educational challenges that are faced by youth in order to get admission in well-known colleges and to get suitable opportunity according to their own interest and talents. Bhagat tries to portray the complete picture of present young generation through his novels in order to make the readers stay back with his writings. In one of his interviews, he states that,

“What attracts the readers about my novels is not the high literature rather the simplicity of language in portraying the aspirations, mind-set and problems of the present generation youngsters. I hope that I can strike the correct chord of the feelings of the readers in the right way as I am in the same age group. The readers can relate their own life to the life of the characters when they read the novel” (The Hindu 2005:11).

Five Point Someone is the debut work of Chetan Bhagat which tells the story of three engineering students in the form of narration by Hari, some other passages by the other two students Ryan and Alok and also a letter written by Hari’s girlfriend Neha Cherian. Though the book has been written in a humorous tone, it passes through some unhappy events frequently in the family of the three students. The book also tells the significance of human relationship through the events that happen in the life of the three friends and also the relationship of Ravi with Neha. Ryan is intelligent and is able to do projects in the college, but is not able to get a grade more than five point someone. His inbuilt talent and creativity are not recognized by his professors and his parents. He frequently gets upset and laments that the lauded IIT grading system has spoiled the students’ creativity by forcing them to give more importance to the grades than innovative ideas. The teachers were uninspiring and they gave them assignments and tests now and then to get them spoon-fed with the lessons. The students started finding a sympathizer in Prof. Veera, the fluid mechanics professor of their college.

In Five Point Someone, Bhagat depicts the realistic scenario of the children who sacrifice their life aspirations for their parents’ desires. The best example he has portrayed in the story is the incident of suicide of Prof. Cherian’s son. Only because he was not able to face his father after failing in the entrance examination, he chooses the solution of killing himself. His sister Neha knows the fact, yet she hides it from his father and reveals to Ravi at the end. Similarly, Alok attempts to commit suicide at a certain point when he feels depressed of thinking that he is not able to cope with the studies and he cannot be graduated with his low-grade points in the examination. He is also worried about his family issues.

“That is all they talk to me about, problems and more problems” (FPS 124).

The novel is an eye opener to all the parents who forces their children to walk through their own path without giving any value to the aspiration of the child. Bhagat’s direct method of depicting the facts and the informal style of portrayal help to touch the emotions of the readers very fast. The novel illustrates how the children’s creativity is spoiled by parents and teachers and how they waste their opportunities if they don’t have the skill of creative thinking. Ryan, Alok and Hari are the representatives of 21st century Indian youths who are real aspirants
of successful life but feels encumbered with academic pressure in the traditional educational system. Their feeling of self-esteem as the result of the frustrated life is narrated in the words of Hari,

“Another five point something, another tattoo stamped on your worth as an individual in IIT society” (77).

The novel Five point Someone reminds us the importance of education in this modernized world to uplift the youngsters of middle-class society. The advancement of modern technology cannot be ignored in the field of education as it can provide a higher-level eminence in the present scenario. According to Pavan Varma,

“Job opportunities have been multiplied after the reformation and modernization after the advent of information technology … the middle class has put in a great deal of hard work to be a part of and benefit from this re-counting educational prosperous” (Varma, The Great Indian xxii).

The competitive modern educational strategies using technological resources have been developed in our country and is tied up with the ultimate corporate companies to make the urban young technocrats to get placed in great companies with high salary and other kinds of special perks. Such professional areas are the symbols of high standard life style that is found among the modernized middle-class people and it is the major objective of new generation people in our country. Among these new generation Indian students, many of the information technology aspirants prefer modernization as it gives the hope of promoting their modern life styles and professional development. In such a way, they like to acquire various social capitals in the aspects of professional as well as personal development. In their journey of attaining professional growth and economic growth, they have to employ various kinds of customized strategies. These strategies include gaining communication skills, learning computer languages, appearing coaching classes and so on. Modernization in the country can help the youngsters to a certain point, to make themselves trained according to the needs of the corporate companies.

The core theme of the entire novel is the various issues related to the present educational system in India. The speech of Prof. Cherian, Head of the Department on the graduation day makes the readers emotional as he narrates his own life story at the moment. He accepted his mistake before everyone that he had underestimated the three students Hari, Alok and Ryan for getting low grade points. His daughter Neha hides the truth about the death of her brother from him and reveals it to Hari, he realizes his mistakes and repents,

“When I realized that GPAs make a good student, but not a good person … these boys have something really promising” (261).

The novel ends with a positive note to all the students by the professor,

“This is a message to all you students as you find your future. One, believe in yourself and don’t let the GPA, performance review or promotion in job define you” (261).
The novel Five Point Someone not only pictures the campus life of technocrats but also delineates the impact of modernization on the youth in the field of education and their career. Bhagat tries to visualize the aspirations of young generation from all the angles and highlights the social challenges in their life. The narrative empowers the readers to transcend the limits of present cultural values and move forwards towards the modernization around the world. The modernization can uplift the career and life if it is viewed in a positive perspective. Bhagat expressed his views on this distinguished topic as the impact of modernization in boundless among the present generation people. Since Bhagat is an IITian, he depicts the problems of engineering graduates who have been shaped by IIT with a realistic autobiographical touch in the novel Five Point Someone. The voice of the 21st century young generation reflects in the novel and the characters in the novel act as the mouthpieces of contemporary Indian youth.

Conclusion

Chetan Bhagat uses his simple and informal writing style in his debut novel Five Point Someone that points out the issues of Indian youth in this era of modernization. All the characters in the novel carry out some purpose and give some precise message to the emerging youth of contemporary India. There are numerous reasons such as wrong grading system and erroneous family relationships which are responsible for the suppression of youth in the society. India is a country that ties the bond of traditional cultural values to the human life and hence the modernization has certain limits. Chetan Bhagat observes the life of youth minutely and understands their psyche. The modernization has a positive impact on the social life of the youth as it can uplift the social status of the young generation.

References