

**Acquiescence or Rebellion: A Postcolonial Attitude in
Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* with a Special Reference to
David Mamet's *Oleanna***

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As Post-Colonialism emphasizes a contemporary state of the society, it propels Chetan Bhagat to write novels of contemporary interest that may create an awareness among his readers about the prevailing socio, political and educational condition of our country. Leela Gandhi in her *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (1998) rightly pointed out, "Post colonialism pursues a post national reading of the colonial encounter by focusing on the global amalgam of cultures and identities consolidated by imperialism (141). As a post colonial novelist, Chetan Bhagat in his *Five Point Someone* vividly portrays the retrogression of the quality of education in the institutions of higher education especially in IIT Campuses in India. He tries to provide an authentic report of the actual condition that exists in the IIT Campus as he himself has been one of the inmates of it. Shri N. R. Narayana Murthy, the Chairman of Infosys, vibrates the same in his speech while he regrets over the absence of the essential new projects in IIT Institutions. There is a need to overhaul the selection criteria for students seeking admission to the prestigious technology institutions ... the quality of students entering Indian Institutes of Technology has deteriorated over the years due to the coaching classes that prepare the engineering aspirants ... with limited sets of problems.

He also laments over the poor English speaking and social skills of the majority of IIT students as the task of getting good English speaking students at IITs become more difficult now-a-days.

The IITians with a sole intention of getting better placement and lucrative income either from the reputed firms of India or the US, whether poor or rich, make frantic efforts to seek admission in the best IIT Institutions of our country. Hence, they are blind to all other moral and human values that are very much essential to construct a new healthy India. They become so, as they are the victims of materialism, hypocrisy, lack of familial love, financial crisis in families, failure of genuine human relationship, suppressed emotions and, above all, the meaningless and valueless educational system of schools or colleges and universities in our country.

The three IITians namely Harish Kumar, the narrator and his two friends namely Alok and Ryan Oberoi are compelled to fall a prey to rote learning, the only available and viable

means that facilitates them to get better GPA in their academic performances. The lack of practical sessions of inventing new techniques and upgrading old techniques, the non-availability of space for expressing innovative and original ideas and the indifferent attitude of both the mugging students and the professors after mugging land them either in a world of acquiescence or rebellion. While the mugger and bookworm Venkat enjoys the smoothness of the stereotyped education, the trio undergoes humiliation and insult of both the teachers and other fellow-students. They show no reluctance to silence or to be silenced to achieve the dreams of their life. The rebellious attitude of Ryan acts as a driving force that urges him devise a C2D (Cooperate to Dominate) formula to escape from the cynical professors, their monotonous teaching and the world of ennui that fills them only with assignments, seminars, quizzes, tests, etc. As per the plan, if one attends the classes, others can repose and rejoice in their leisure time. Their attempt to bring a change in the educational system implies that all the institutions of our country are direly in need of immediate modification and change in the teaching-learning process. The trio tries to escape from the tyrannical clutches of modern education that is purely based on the traditional pattern. Hence, they take refuge in a world of smoking, drinking, gambling and flirting to give an outlet to their impatience, anxiety, intolerance and suppressed feelings and emotions.

The world of the trio is an ostracized world as they are absolutely cut off from the rest of the common public life. The new IIT world that they have recently entered appears to be an enigma. To their stupefaction, on the very first day, the very first word that they encountered on the black-board was “M-A-C-H-I-N-E” (FPS 7) and the professor who sat next to the board resembled like a “bloated beetle” (7). The very first suggestion imparted by Professor Dubey to the student-community is to fall in love with the world to become masters of the machines. As he has already been the successful master of machines all these years, there is no doubt that he would succeed in transforming all the new comers into machines before they quit the campus. It is quite obvious that the expectation of both the institution and the teaching faculty is implicit obedience, mugging and excellent academic performance. The excellent academic performance is nothing but reproducing the reproduced materials. As the professors are quite accustomed to ‘I teach and you listen’ system, they act like switched on and switched off tape-recorders at the stroke of every bell that is heard both in the beginning and the closing of every teaching hour in the campus. Hence, if one analyses the following narration of Harish, one can quite understand the actual state of the existing teaching system there.

“Shshh,” ordered Prof. Dubey, looking at the three of us, “anyway, the definition.

Of a machine is simple. It is anything that reduces human effort. Anything. So,

See the world around you and it is full of machines” (9).

Unable to tolerate the continuous definitions given by Prof. Dubey for the term ‘machine’, the inquisitive Ryan retorts, “What about a gym machine, like bench press or something?” (10). Prof. Dubey struggles too hard to give his student a proper reply for he has been accustomed

only to an uninterrupted and unquestioned teaching hours all these very long years. Hence, he uses threatening as the only weapon to silence Ryan as well as rescue him from such an embarrassing situation. He intimidates and silences Ryan saying, “Watch it my son. In my class, just watch it” (FPS 11). The professor openly insists and instructs that listening to his teaching without raising queries is a mark of obeisance. It shows that professors of today do not even have the slightest intention of ushering their students into a new world of innovation, exploration, examination and solution. Instead, they grind and regrind the reproduced subject materials in their classrooms to make the students reproduce the reproduced. They do so only with an intention of facilitating the students to get better GPA which in turn adds credit to the name of the institution and the staff working there. Eventually, the students, exactly like machines in factories and prisoners in cell, engross themselves in the activity of executing everyday tasks assigned to them. They are made blind to all other activities that are going on around them.

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 evening were spent in the library or in our rooms as we prepared reports and finished assignments (FPS 12).

Carol, a student in her twenties in *Oleanna*, echoes the same while exposing the pathetic and the helpless condition of the poor students who are unable to learn and understand anything from their study-course in spite of contributing their continuous effort.

CAROL. No. No. There are people out there. People who came here. To know something they didn't know who came here. To be helped. To be helped. So someone would help them. To do something. To get,... “To get on in the world”. How can I do that if I don't, if I fail? But I don't understand. I don't understand. I don't understand what Anything means And I walk around. From morning “til night with this one thought in my head. I'm stupid (O 12).

Though Ryan is highly inquisitive, aggressive and intellectual, he is forced to embrace acquiescence if he really wants to pursue his higher studies there. On the contrary, Ryan does not want to remain passive as he has lot questions to shoot at his professors to get suitable answers for the same. What he actually wants to observe, experiment and invent in the mechanical engineering arena is nothing but projecting and experimenting new ideas and theories that will bring about tremendous changes and improvement in the existing educational system and theories. He strongly believes that the system existing in the higher education does not proffer meaningful contribution either to the intellectual growth of the students or the academic excellence of the country. It makes them behave like human robots except accepting the commands and strict rules and regulations of the IIT. Hence, Ryan, unable to tolerate the taxing hours in the IIT campus, explodes, “This is high standard? Working away like moronic drones until midnight. ManPro yesterday, ApMech day before, Quanto today ... it never ends” (fps 14). Yet, the constant advice of the professors is, “keep revising your notes” (FPS 17). It is

quite apparent that the universities focus only on imparting quantitative education which is quite inappropriate for the practical life of the pupils. Hence, while Alok, the victim of rote learning, urges his friends Ryan and Harish to study, Ryan ridicules him, “Yes sir, let us mug and cram. Otherwise how will we become great engineers of this great country?” (FPS 18). It is quite clear that the curriculum design of the institutions of our country right from the lower level to the higher level forces the young generation to resort only to mugging and reproducing the same in the exam papers to prove their academic capability. Otherwise, they will land in a world of darkness and chaos. It is a thought-provoking fact that even the meritorious students discharge bad performance in their internal assessment tests and secure very low marks. Whether it is a capitalistic country like America or a democratic country like India, there is no difference in the curriculum design and the execution of the same. As far as Carol, a student of higher education in David Mamet’s *Oleanna* is concerned, the pedagogy provides only an unpromising and unreceptive environment to her. She has never been able to find any nourishment in her culture. When John, her professor expresses his frustration and dissatisfaction over her class performance, she shrinks like a snail that has been hurt and feels inefficient, incompetent and inactive. Similar such situation causes Carol of America and Ryan, Harish and Alok of India undergo same kind of perpetual traumatic experience, restlessness, anxiety, aggressive attitude, silent protest, etc. Hence, the IITians in *Five Point Someone* venture daringly into a shameful act of stealing the internal test question papers to secure higher GPA in the test. Similarly, Carol goes to the extent of lodging complaint with the Tenure Committee against her professor. *Five Point Someone*, thus, exposes the truth that the blind adherence of the institution to the outdated syllabus squeezes the teaching faculty as well as the learning community and eventually forces them fall a prey to it. As a result, they absolutely turn against each other unable to tolerate the pressure on them. The academicians who frame the syllabus and the professors who blindly stick on to it do not bother either about the non-utilitarian value or the lack of innovative strategy or the non-challenging factor involved in the study-package or about the future of the students. Gradually, the students become the replica of Poe’s Raven which has learnt through rote learning nothing except “nevermore” (R 7). David Mamet, in his *Oleanna*, exposes the same kind of dissatisfaction and humiliation confronted by Carol in America. She feels inferior to other students while comparing her academic performance and intellectual ability with them. The powerful articulation made by Carol is punctuated with argument, concepts and precepts.

CAROL. Nobody *tells* me anything. And I *sit* there ... in the *corner*. In the *back*. And everybody’s talking about *this* all the time. And ‘concepts’, ‘precepts’, and, and, and, and, and, WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? And I read your book. And they said, “Fine, go in that class.” Because you talked about responsibility to the young. I DON’T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS AND I’M TALKING... (O 14).

Ryan, like Carol, has different expectations about the role of professors and different views of the educational system and its process. Hence, he bursts out with anger against mugging as follows, “Boss, mugging is the price one pays to get the IIT tag. You mug, you pass and you get

job” (fps 25). Harish, the narrator in the novel, also expresses his utmost contempt for the unapproachable professors who advocate mugging, “Yeah, we have to mug. Some profs get this vicious joy driving students nuts...” (29). Carol in *Oleanna* and the trio in *Five Point Someone* become angry when their faith in the value of education is challenged. It is quite discernible that rebellious student like Ryan and obedient students like Harish and Alok detest the system to the core as it involves no original ideas and creativity. Hence, Ryan explodes, “This system of relative grading and overburdening the students. I mean it kills the best fun years of your life.... Where is the room for original thought? Where is the time for creativity?” (FPS 35).

The monotonous and stereo-typed method adopted in the institutions urge the students to become the dupe of acquiescence or rebellion. It is quite clear that the system of higher education is very rigid, impersonal and unintentional that resembles machines. It also tries to convert the students an epitome of machines. Hence, Alok, a facsimile of Carol, vocalizes his fervent desire of getting higher grades as follows, “My grades are important to me. My future is important to me (65). Both the students and their parents, who make frantic efforts to seek admission in IITs, are unaware of the hard struggle encountered by the students who have already got admission there. It will become quite clear if one examines Harish’s statement of animosity against the institution. He reveals his disapproval against his institution as, “... It is this place. I hate it” (69). Even an introvert like Harish speaks out his aversion for IIT in a tirade.

I loved people who did not have GPA. I loved anyone who was not at IIT.
I did not want to go back. I wondered if I could work at the ice-cream
parlour, filling cones all day and never have to worry classes, courses, grades,
and Alok-Ryan arguments. (70)

The novelist who has had direct and close association with the IIT Campus conveys through the narrator of the novel that the IIT students are very much ready to prefer menial jobs than undertaking routine and meaningless efforts to get useless education and worthless grades there. It is a lash given to every academician and educationalist who plays a pivotal role in framing and executing the syllabus. As a consequence, the students in an eerie world of IIT roll and grope in darkness. They find it very difficult to extricate themselves from the cobweb of books and the mechanical world of professors. Hence, they suffocate and suffer. Ryan opines that the IITians have entered “a mice race” (101) in which they have to run continuously “for four years, in every class, every assignment and every test.... Name one invention in the last three decades (101). It is not the query and anger of Ryan alone but the hue and cry of the whole frustrated young generation of today. Above all, the students who strive very hard for the betterment of their future are blind to human values and morality. Harish, the narrator, is an apt example of the victim of machine-like life which is devoid of sincere love, friendship and genuine relationship. For instance, his superficial love for Neha does not end in marriage instead it prolongs without any solution.

Shri Pranab Mukherjee, the President of India, in his speech at the inauguration of Loyola College School of Commerce and Economics on 20th December 2013 echoes Ryan's urge for the implementation of innovative educational system and the latest technology in the institutions of higher education especially in IIT Campuses. Pranab Mukherjee exhorts the Universities of India to:

prepare our graduates compete with the best in the world. For that they must be equipped with life skills such as creative thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, managing interpersonal relationships and stress management. These skills are important for a healthy development of an individual and should find due place in our academic curriculum ... Innovation is the key to future economic progress. ("The Hindu", 2013)

There are ample evidences of conversation that are highly pervasive throughout the novel. The dialogues undoubtedly prove the existence of the post-colonial characters of both acquiescence and rebellion. As post-colonialism emphasizes a contemporary state of the society, it occupies a remarkable place in Chetan Bhagat's novels of contemporary interest. As a post-colonial novelist, Chetan Bhagat in his *Five Point Someone* portrays the deterioration in the quality of the educational system in India especially in IIT, Delhi. It is an undeniable fact that poverty, injustice, hypocrisy, double-dealing, east-west encounter, poor academic performance, severing and disfiguring of language and above all typical Indianness of the contemporary society come within the purview of Chetan's writing. Chetan Bhagat's association with national and transnational themes indicates his outspoken attitude and sensible approach towards life. He does not want to hide reality by using superfluous and superficial language filled with verbiage. Chetan in "*The Times of India*", comments on hypocrisy and malignity in his blog: "We blush, pretend it does not exist, look the other way, change the topic, hate the person who brought it up and do whatever we can do to avoid confronting a healthy and balanced discussion on it" (Feb. 2012). Hence, it is possible for him to give an authentic and authoritative report of the actual academic condition that prevails in the IIT Campus, Delhi as he has had direct association with it as one of its inmates. The novelist does not allot any room for the role of his whims and fancies in *Five Point Someone*.

Mamet's *Oleanna* as well as Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* provide the readers with the society that lacks ethical values and practical-oriented pedagogy that force the people lack the capability of making good connection with others. They search for meaningful academic world and stable relationship with each other both in the society and in the institutions of higher education. However, in order to preserve their personal benefits, they whimsically embitter the companionship they desire to build up. Gradually, they tend to be alienated from their true selves and others. Under the pressure of materialistic concerns, people tend to become the symbols of spiritual and moral vacuum. On being immersed into the fathomless realm of anxiety, chaos and perversion, they somehow seek to establish a congenial relationship with others yet beneath the surface of life-partnership, friendship or family relationship and teacher-

student relationship, there exists a trap of irresponsibility, superficiality and duplicity. The more they grow reticent or loquacious and rebellious less they become cordial, congenial and cooperative that they emerge as captives of post-colonial society. What actually Chetan wants to unravel is the absurd educational system that gradually coerces the young generation to become an embodiment of silent agitation or violent reaction. John, the professor in *Oleanna* and professors like Dubey in *Five Point Someone* attempt to demonstrate both the superiority and superficiality of the enlightened individuals over received institutional theory and practice. Consequently, the students of higher education both in America and India try to liberate themselves from the tyranny of impersonal and objective system by embracing either silence and obedience or violence and disobedience. Any system that transmutes its subjects into unproductive and affective learners is considered only as the curse and the threat to the society, the country and the world. The title of the novel, *Five Point Someone*, is quite ironical for it bears no capital letter in the beginning of each vocabulary. It proves that the author of the novel is very much wishes for the reconstruction and renovation of our educational system which lacks consistency, determination and coordination. Hence, the novelist in *One Night @ the Call Centre*, urges the people to ponder over two things in life such as “Think about what you really want and what you need to change in your life to get it” (ONCC 217). Thus, Chetan through all the possible means has clearly mapped out the unhealthy educational system which needs immediate modification and reconstruction. The meaningless educational system of today mounts pressure on the learners and makes them asphyxiate. In their utmost struggle for survival, they either overpower others or remain passive and submissive to achieve the goals of life successfully. The novelist strongly believes that the change in the curriculum design will certainly bring a change and growth in the educational system and the academic excellence of our country on par with or above the quality of the institutions of higher education in China and America and also the economic growth of our country. The students in our universities ask only for **bread** but they are given **stone**.

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