

# Post-Colonial Narrative Techniques in ChetanBhagat's *Five Point Someone*

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## Abstract:

Technique, the literary middleman between life and art, helps the novelist in interpreting and transforming reality. The narrative technique helps the readers to discover and travel among other selves, other identities, and other varieties of the human adventure. They long for intimacy, to be allowed into the mind of characters. They also long for an underlying structure, tension and drive in the words written. There are two modes of narrative fiction in English : the romance and the novel. The romance is a heroic fable; it treats of fabulous persons and things; it is written in lofty and elevated language; and it describes things unlikely to have happened or to happen. Whereas, the novel is a fictional prose narrative of a certain length; it is a picture based on real life and manners and the times in which it is written. The contemporary Indian novel is receptive to history, ideas, sociology, ethnology and black experience.

## Introduction

Indian Writing in English has a very short history about 150 years. India and English had dealt with each other in trade, military and political affairs. From the historical perspective, Indian English Literature has passed through several steps such as Indo-Anglian, Indo-English, Indian Writing in English and currently Indian English literature. The works of Indian writers get not only a vast category of readers, but also receive a vast critical acclaim. Geert, Hofstede.

“It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population”.(89)

The position of ChetanBhagat in Indian English Literature is still a debatable issue. Many critics and advocates of serious literature do not consider him as a serious novelist. By many critics he is placed in the

group of popular literature or pulp literature writers whose literature is mostly sold at the railway stations, bus-stops and on streets at cheap rates. ChetanBhagat is very successful as a writer of realistic fiction in the modern time. He writes for the common community of readers. His characters are from the middle class community of contemporary India. The stories of his fictions are based on the life and issues of the middle class people of contemporary India. Due to that, he is more popular among the readers of middle class population of India. He receives favour from large readership especially from the young readers. ChetanBhagat himself accepts many a times that he writes for the purpose of entertainment. Entertainment is always at a top priority in all his fictions. His style of presenting the content is so easy and straightforward that one can hardly find formallinguistic beauty and subtleness of content in any of his fictions. All these indicators can easily lead one to put him in the category of writers of popular or pulp fiction writers in Indian English literature. An understanding of the concept and characteristics of popular literature may definitely help one, for positioning ChetanBhagat in Modern Indian English Literature.

Post-colonial period is the time of rapid and radical changes. Terms like ‘diaspora’, ‘heterogeneity’, ‘hybridity’, ‘syncreticity’, ‘ambivalence’, ‘binarism’ ‘otherness’, ‘centre’, ‘marginality’, ‘subalternity’, ‘metropole’, ‘authenticity’ speak of the new reality of the global village, our world. Modes and categories of the past, in writing, do not seem to fit the new reality. So the modern Indian Writers like ChetanBhagat use certain themes, narrative strategies, images, symbols and sources of language to express their understanding about themselves. To understand the significance of liberation of post-colonial writing, such as Bhagat’s, knowledge about various discourses and their overlapping is helpful.

William Long defines ‘colonialism’ as “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods” (19). Colonialism and imperialism are often used interchangeably. Loomba’s definition for ‘imperialism’ is “the phenomenon that originates in the metropolis, the process which leads to domination and control” (6-7). Loomba further says that the “imperial country is the ‘metropole’ from which power flows, and the colony or neocolony is the place which it penetrates and controls” (7). Without formal colonies,imperialism can function but colonialism cannot.

The tremendous success of ChetanBhagat as a novelist is a miracle of rare device. The credit goes to his management skills, mushrooming of thousands of new private engineering colleges necessitating his mastery over simple past tense, his justification of immoral instinctive human acts in garb of new age realism and above all one term from great Hindu philosopherSunil Sondhi “Throw a lucky man into the sea, and he will come up with a fish in his mouth” ( 54)

Since the phrase, the bestseller English language author has become the synonym for ChetanBhagat. The legend deserves some critical attention and evaluation as the master of sentiments of young generation, a name and place, both in the hearts of their sweet hearts and in society. His five novels „*Five Point Someone*“, „*The Three Mistakes of My Llife*“ and „*One Night @the Call Centre*“, „*Two States of my Marriage Life*“ and „*Revolution 2020*“ have adventure, romance, background music, expert comments on social, political and education systems. This writing style is now recognized as one of the important innovations taking place in the. field of novel writing. ChetanBhagat has been defining the literary taste of budding book lovers since the publication of his first novel „*Five Point Someone* in the year 2004.

The craftsmanship of a novelist is revealed largely in plot construction. Different novelists have constructed their plots in different ways, because novel presents the story to ‘please and instruct’. Merely saying that the kind died and the queen also died after some time is nothing but narration of the simple facts. The novelist describes the mental agony of the queen after the death of the kind which turns the story in a study of human character. But if the queen is suspected to have her hand in the murder as happens in Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’ the plot unfolds the characters and the events taking place quickly to force the plot grow faster and faster. It is a well – made plot which brings the characters to the forefront.

The plot in this novel is well –organized as all the events are linked inextricably. The novelist makes the narrator Hari say in the beginning “It is my story, I am the one writing it and I get to tell it the way I want it.” (FPS 25) Thus, the novel contains the first hand account from the horse’s mouth. The novelist makes it clear that he will design the plot in his own way, independent of rules and traditions. He first tells the readers that this novel must not be taken as a guide for the competition to make it to IITs, yet he gives an unsought advice, “Most of them (the guides) are crap, but they might help you more than this will”. It is an unwarranted remark since he has already stated “This book will help you get in the IITs is a Herculean task” (FPS 29) “I think half the trees in the world are felled to write guide to help students make up to the IT.” (FPS 33) Hari, the narrator of the story can be pardoned because he is narrating his own experience, and the implication is that he, Ryan and Alok who have made up to it are boys of extra-ordinary caliber.

Ryan being a boy from a well off family believes that life is incomplete without sports and amusement – after all “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,” Ryan becomes a sharp critic of IIT’s pattern of life, devoid of enjoyment and overloaded with work. He says plainly. “I think this is jail, It really is. Damn jail”. Alok being a boy from a hard up family wants to devote himself entirely to the studies so that he may get a job and

help his family financially. But Ryan's is the last word in his group of three friends. He castigates the over working students as 'moronic drones', 'real muggu'. He takes his friends to a film, but when he comes back from the film, he finds "everyone from Venkat to Sukhvinder running around with note pads and text books ..... The professor had sinisterly advised to keep revising your notes." (FPS 42) As Alok comes to realize that they have to study for Apmech which will take hours, he grumbles about the time spent on the film – "This whole movie thing was a dumb idea, I told you." Ryan is held responsible for the debacle in the test any Ryan is heard saying, "I screwed up the quiz for both of you because I took you to the movie." (FPS 47)

The description of the daily routine of the students in the second chapter Terminator very clearly reflects the realistic situation of the engineering students in the institute of national status. Elizabeth, Lowell says:

Every day, from eight to five, we were locked in the eight-story inst-building with lectures, tutorials and labs. The next few hours of evening were spent in the library or in rooms as we prepared reports and finished assignments. And this did not even include the tests! Each subjects had two minor tests, one major and three surprise quizzes; seven tests for six courses meant forty-two tests per semester, mathematically speaking ( 12)

Ryan and Alok are happy. Ryan exclaims, "Sex and horror" the same day. The boys go to the sixth floor, succeed in opening the office door and getting the brown bag containing the paper but Alok foolishly tries to talk with his mother on the office phone past midnight. The operator gets suspensions, runs with the security man to see who are there in the room at this odd hour. All three of them are caught in the act and suspended for one semester. The boyish activities provide diversion in a serious theme.

As the boys realise their mistakes, they decide to devote themselves entirely to the studies, to start attending classes regularly and working in the lab with utmost care and devotion. Hari tells Neha,

"Classes, classes and more classes.Eight to six everyday. Then, another three hours in the library. Then, another two for assignments and revisions. I am going mad. Hari further telssNeha, Ryan and Alok are qually overworked. And we will still fall short of credits." (FPS 69)

Though boys are working hard, yet they know full – well that they will not be able to make up the credit shortage. Boys are now anxious about their careers. The hard-hearted Cherian comes to their rescue.

He asks Hari to stay to listen to him after the second Disco and asks him what they think to do to make up the credit shortage. A God sent gift comes to them – Cherian asks “If I sanction you all to work with Prof. Veera this semester to follow through on this project, we could give you laboratory credit.”(FPS 73) Hari is simply astonished to see much change of heart of Cherian. Words don’t come to him. Thinking that Hari has not followed the import of his offer, Cherian repeats, “I could get you lab credits if you are ready to work on this project this semester. I know you are overloaded.” (FPS 75) Now Hari manages to say, “I think you should go to Prof. Saxena’s class. And start preparing for those job interviews.”(FPS 77) This offer gives great joy – it was a hope to the hopeless. Prof. Cherian exhorted him not to drunk in the job interviews as he did in his viva. Prof. Cherian’s behaviour and offer of help overwhelmed the boys so much.

That Alok says, “Open the second bottle.” The lease expected of him. Therefore he repeats, “Today I am telling you, Ryan, open the second bottle.” Nothing can be more joyful to these disheartened and disgraced boys. Hari and Alok get jobs – Hari gets offer in Bombay and Alok in Delhi. But Ryan gets nothing. He is rather distressed, but Prof. Veera comes to ask Ryan if he will like to work with him as a Research Assistant for a measly sum of Rs.2,000/- per month, but he has great prospects as he says, “I am sure you will find an investor for it one day. I project the market for this product at atleast ten crore. You will get a royalty of, I don’t know, say ten percent.” (FPS 80) Professor Veera’s offer to Ryan will then become as lucrative as of Alok and Hari. Ryan’s father has promised to market the product. Alok’s family is in distress, in a financial crisis. Alok’s company sends him to U.S.A. with so high a salary that “one stroke wiped out his family woes.” Hari pines for Neha; both of them continue to love each other with same intensity and Cherian’s kindness shows that he will be happy if their love culminates in marriage. Marriage is not even talked of, but the abiding love is a happiness far greater. The novel closes with happiness to all.

A cursory glance on the episodes of this novel will reveal that one scene leads to another from the beginning to the end. The three boys who are the main characters, have come from such families as could not give love which him in the hostel from his early age. Hari’s father, being a colonel has turned the house into an army camp, and Alok’s family has been in insurmountable difficulties. Such boys come to be neighbours in the hostel and soon became friends – Birds of a feather flock together. This coherence of the plot lasts till the end. The three boys make plan, work together, suffer together, and blessed in one stroke of fate. Hari and Neha affair lends romantic fervor to the plot; They come to love each other truly and sincerely. It is their love which lends them in trouble but the trouble does not lessen the intensity. Hari continues to have a

craving to meet her even when he is overburdened. It is during their love affair that Cherina comes to know the truth about his son's suicide which turns the hard hearted man into a kind father and professor. It is a compact plot with no loose ends.

A novel is a picture of the society on a large canvas, generally showing the evils that have afflicted the society. The novelist may not suggest how to purge the social order of the evils but certainly makes one see the evils clearly as in a mirror. ChetanBhagat's novel is about IITs which are considered as the best institutes of our country. All this is happening in one of the best engineering institution of the country. Such an embarrassing situation does not promote any new or creative idea in the mind of the students because one needs to have a tension free mind to think something creative. The students are expected to reach certain standards to study in such institutions. That is the reason why the students are kept overloaded with the academic work. The talk of the students is really thought provoking who are facing such a clutching situation where they are expected to work like a horse with blinkers.

“May be you are forgetting that you're in IIT, the best college in the country,”

Alok said, cracking Knuckles.

“No but you expect a certain standard,”

Alok said, putting his hand up to indicate height.

“This is high standard? Working away like moronic drones until midnight  
Man-Pro yesterday, Ap-Mech day before, Quanto today...it never ends,”

Ryan Grumbled. “I need a break, man” (. . .) (FPS 14)

All the characters in the novel are closely related with IT Delhi which is supposed to be the best of all IITs. They have no concern with the world outside except that the IIT has brought three student characters, bound in love. IIT makes clear that all the three boys are above average in spite of their unfortunate childhood. In order to show how difficult it is to make it to IIT, the novelist says, “I think half the trees are felled to make up the IIT entrance exam guides”, (FPS 83) yet he gives the advice to the aspirants.

“If you can lock yourself in a room with books for two years and throw away the key, you can probably make in here.” (FPS 86)

The truth of the advice is endorsed by many others. This fact, however, goes a long way to form the characters of the IITians. They are in general hard-working students, so much so that they are cut off from the world outside. Alok tells his friends that the great family responsibilities have made him resolve that he would go to IIT because that ‘virtually guaranteed the future’. He worked hard all the way to achieve his aim “For two years Loser (Alok) did not step out of the house apart from school, gained fifteen kilos and muttered calculations while wiping bed-sores.”(FPS 89) Hari rues when he gets only five point. Namrata, Behera says that she had always been a very good student –

“Now I am no Einstein or anything but this never happened to me in school. My score was five on twenty or twenty five percent. I have never in my life scored less than three times as much.” (93)

Hari speaks little of himself, but Alok’s life is an open book. His father has been in the bed since long, his mother is a teacher. Half of his mother’s salary is spent on his father’s treatment. His sister is of marriageable age. His family lives in Delhi. He therefore visits his parents now and then. He is worried about his family, his father’s illness, etc.

“There was no money to afford a nurse, and loser (Alok) was appointed as one. He was in class seven then, and for the rest of his school years he sat next to his father’s bed after school.” (FPS 109)

The novelist has rightly presented the truth that family atmosphere goes a long way in making the character of a child. A peaceful family prepares a child to be quiet, forward – looking while the cantankerous one makes a child irritable and quarrelsome, unamenable. The novelist has very pertinently spoken about the necessity of a healthy atmosphere in the family, the necessity of parental love, but he has not explained how the three boys coming from turbid or disordered families managed to compete successfully for admission to such a prestigious college as IIT. It is mind- boggling.

The novelist’s main aim is to write a book on IIT’s atmosphere. As he does not want to go into the psychological issue, he brings the three boys having almost same type of parents, and same mental make-up, in the same wing of the same hostel of the same institute to show how they act in the IIT atmosphere.

In spite of their distorted circumstances and upbringing the three boys evince a strong desire for friendship. As Ryan saves his two friends from very torturous and inhuman ragging he becomes the leader of the group of the three. Ryan, indeed, imposes his will upon the two in various matters, yet they have love and respect for another. Hari being the narrator of the story gives space to his friends also to speak out their minds, lest some important facts or opinions should remain undiscovered. Alok says thankfully, “His highness Hari has given me itsy-bitsy space to give vent to my feelings.”(FPS 121) Alok does speak about his misfortunes, but he cannot help admiring his friend Ryan – “Ryan the man who lives for the moment, who does not want to be like him.” (FPS 125) He further observes, “Ryan is infectious, and Hari is a perfect example of his infection” (FPS 129) because Hari follows Ryan’s proposals literally, and joyously. He takes opportunity to reveal Ryan’s dilapidated childhood. Hari, Alok thinks, is like him – “Ordinary, unattractive, fat and dull ..... Who turns corpse during viva.” (FPS 133) Ryan is, in the like manner, given opportunity to speak about his friends, both of whom are different from him. Therefore he says, “what is it with Alok, or for that matter, even with Hari? When will they grow up?” (FPS 139)

The students do not find any space for original thoughts. They do not find space for creativity and innovativeness due to the rigidity of the system. Such a system exploits the very important years of students’ life. These years can prepare them for the future challenges of life. This important time has all the potential to make their life happy or miserable. If they are taught to shape their thinking for future challenges, they can never fail in their life and if they fail in any case, they can never be afraid of it rather they can bravely fight it. Such self-confidence or self-esteem never comes with the mindless mugging rather it comes in creative and innovative minds.

The system of IIT depicted in the novel reflects the failure of the system which has not contributed anything productive to the country. Ryan who is very creative and innovative in his approach does not cop with the current situation. M. N. Srinivas shows his annoyance at the system as:

‘This IIT system is nothing but a mice race. It is not a rat race, mind you, as rats sounds somewhat shrewd and clever. So is not about mindlessly running a race for four years, in every class, every assignment and every test. It is a race where professors judge you every ten steps, with a GPA stamped on you every semester. Prof who have no idea what science and learning are about. Yes, that is what I think of the professors. I mean, what have IITs given to the country? Name one invention in the last three decades ( 101)

The character of Ryan sometimes looks like mouth piece of ChetanBhagat himself. What is spoken by Ryan seems the indirect voice of ChetanBhagat himself against the lifelessness and rigidity of the

contemporary Indian education system. The issue of mindless mugging has been criticized very strongly in the novel. The author wants to convey a clear message how the creativity and original ideas are crushed under the domination of rigidity and mindless mugging in contemporary education system of India. Much time, money and energy is invested in educational activity but if the end results are not satisfactory, it a matter of serious concern for the responsible authorities.

He says so because neither of the two shows initiative or drive like other boys, they want nothing but to pas examinations and get jobs – Nothing of new researches.

True it is that this novel is about the IIT and the three friends, but while talking of characters, Neha cannot be omitted. Neha is a young daughter of a very strict father. She is the forth character, like the other three whose parents are very strict, hard and rigid, caring not at all about the ambitions of their young ones. Prof. Cherian's rigidity has cost him dearly – lost his son. Neha knows her father and the suicide note of her brother has also told about it in plain language. She knows that she cannot change her father's attitude, but she cannot suppress her eros, the desire for the male company. Owing to her love for parents, however, antiquated they be, she keeps the fact of the suicide of her brother a secret from her parents, and carries on love affair also secretly. She is a loving daughter on one hand, but a rebel on the other. She tries her best to keep her erotic feelings in check to a great extent, but finally yields to the natural cravings of the youth. However, the girl does not first with any other boy, not even with Ryan who she knows is richer and more flamboyant. She has chosen her boyfriend, loves her 'five-point loafer'. Such a good girl deserves a better deal. Her father has after all learnt his lesson. He chooses Hari to tell him that he will give them lab credits to enable him to get his degree and also a job. Prof. Cherian becomes a model to such fathers as Hari and Ryan have. A ten point topper becomes generous and kind to a low grade five pointer. The novelist gives the message that everybody should change, should be dynamic, as Prof. Cherian has, in changed conditions of life.

## **Conclusion**

The Post - Colonial discourse analysis of many theorists and critics indicate a new way of thinking. Such studies show that cultural, intellectual, economic or political processes are at work together in the formation, perpetuation and dismantling of colonialism. Such developments in the intellectual and academic sphere have to be viewed along with the growth of certain political movements like feminism or anti-colonial

struggles. All these intellectuals and activists have questioned totalizing frameworks and worked towards the possibility of social change. Colonial discourse has later evolved into post-colonial studies.

The novelist has presented a study of such characters as have antiquated parents, but he seems to say that even sons of such fathers can rise in life. This assumption is rarely true. A man's personality reflects what kind of life he had in his home. The great poet Wordsworth has said in his *TintenAbbey* - "Child is the father of man" (line 14) but ChetanBhagat has tried to disprove it. He seems to say that nothing can prevent a spirited child from rising to the highest level.

The world is a changed place and this is the only reality that everyone must accept that the new generation is all together a different generation in the history of mankind. This point is raised and highlighted by the New Age Realist ChetanBhagat.

"You may love him or hate him, but ChetanBhagat's big contribution to Indian publishing has been to bring out of the woodwork a whole segment of readers that publishers had traditionally believed never existed."( <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1851931,00.html>)

ChetanBhagat's success has demonstrated that there is a huge market for Indian fiction with everyday Indian characters outing out everyday Indian stories. Publishers may kindly take note that homegrown talents should find a voice and publishing authors like ChetanBhagat is not only risky but also actually be profitable. The greed is good' is the creed of ChetanBhagat and he is the social realist of the new age because he writes what he sees and it hurts the people with traditional mentality that he promotes and supports immorality, though as a writer; he should talk morality and values that are not to be found around him in the new age society, and ChetanBhagat is, of course, not T.S Eliot to talk about three Ds of Dan, Daya and Daman the ultimate solution to the moral degradation not only in twentieth century but in all centuries to come. The approach of ChetanBhagat as a novelist explains his characters' efforts to obtain sound financial standing in Indian conditions.

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