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REPRESENTATION OF A NEW GENERATION IN BHAGAT'S FIVE POINT SOMEONE

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Abstract:

The liberalization of the Indian economy has dramatically and drastically influenced social life in India and scholars have commented extensively upon how the image of a 'New India' brand has been created by media, corporate power houses and politicians based on the changes witnessed as a result of economic reformation. The creation of this 'New India' brand accompanies the attempt to construct a new generation Indian subject who will play an integral role in narrating this new liberalized nation. Bhagat's novels and protagonists are, in part, representative of the new generation Indian youth in more ways, as his novels center on the dynamics of metropolitan life and the influence of economic liberalization amongst this new generation Indian youth. The present research paper significantly sheds light on the new generation youth expressed and delineated through the dynamic characters in *Five Point Someone*.

Keywords: New India, Zippes, liberalization, privatization, globalization, modernization etc.

The generation of young India post liberalization, privatization and globalization in the early 1990s can be classified as the 'New Generation Indian.' Economic liberalization has increased the presence of capital, technology and information by decreasing the barriers to foreign investment and through its promotion of the modernization of telecommunications. This has resulted in a globalization of not just the economy but also lifestyles at an accelerated speed, particularly among those of the middle class belonging to the urban centres of India. The liberalization of the Indian economy has dramatically influenced social life in India and scholars have commented at length upon how the image of a 'New India' brand has been created by media, corporate power houses and politicians based on the changes witnessed as a result of economic reformation (Chowdhury 2-3). The creation of this 'New India' brand accompanies the attempt to construct a new generation Indian subject who will play an integral role in narrating this new liberalized nation. Bhagat's protagonists are, in part, representative of the new generation Indian in more ways than one, as his novels focus on the dynamics of urban existence and the influence of economic liberalization amongst this new generation Indian youth.

In fact, the new generation Indian has been given the label ‘zippies’ which is characterized as ‘liberalization’s children’ by journalist Manjeeet Kripalani in her article titled “India’s youth” for BusinessWeek. Explaining the coinage of the term and highlighting its difference from “midnight’s children”, Lukose writes:

The term is a play on “midnight’s children” – the generation named after the Salman Rushdie novel which focused on those born during the first hour of the year 1947, when India gained its independence from British colonial rule. The term intertwines the lives of those born in the immediate aftermath of independence with the life of the nation, a nation shaped by the socialist-inspired understanding of national development represented by Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister. In contrast to liberalization’s children, midnight’s children seem mired in the ideological baggage of Nehruvian nationalist development, with its focus on the rural poor and service to the nation; as lacking in ambition; and being risk averse, “uncool,” and fearful. (Lukose, 5)

Bhagat’s novels can be seen as the expressions of the new generation Indian youth. The youth described in the novels, comes mainly from a middle class family. In the portrayal of his characters, he also delineates a specific kind of new India and new Indians who are completely in tune with the economic reforms. The heroic subject of Bhagat’s narrative in most cases is a young Hindu male from a middle class family who takes pride in Indian’s cultural heritage. At the same time, these young protagonists wish to uphold the nation’s reputation in the world. This outstanding characteristic is seen in almost all his protagonists, be it Shyam and Varun in *One Night @ The Call Center*, Gopal and Raghav in *Revolution 2020*, Hari in *Five Point Someone*, Madhav in *Half Girlfriend*, Govind in *The 3 Mistakes Of My Life* or Krish in *2 States*. His novels trace the lives and challenges of those aspiring to win their place or maintain their position in the new middle class group, those that tend to be defined as the metropolitan subject.

The debut novel of Bhagat, *Five Point Someone* deals with the struggle of today’s engineering students in India who get into the country’s top University and who tries to balance boiling academic competition and personal problems. Hari Kumar, Ryan Oberai and Alok Gupta are the main protagonists in this novel and they all come from different segments of the middle class family. The novel reveals the perception of the emerging young aspirants within a premier institute like the IITs, it also reveals how the costs and risks of failure in these institutions are borne by those in the lower reaches of the middle classes; amidst the popular corporate success story endorsed commonly in the media.

The novel exposes a stern competitive academic environment that makes the institute seems like a ‘Jail’ for the students. Very soon the burden of courses and grades, innumerable quiz, tests and presentations comes heavily down upon the three protagonists and they decide to rebel against the system by devising a radical solution for their hectic schedule. They decide to duplicate assignments and share the workload so that they can take time off for pursuing other interests and activities. However, their plan is soon met with failure. We also see the victim of this academic pressure represented in Neha’s brother who committed a suicide for not making it to the IITs and in Alok Gupta who also attempts to commit a suicide as he loses hope of graduating from the

institute after he and his friends were caught in their desperate attempt to steal a question paper from Professor Cherian's room. At one point, Alok also confided in Hari about the pressure he faces from his family, "That is all they talk to me about; problems and more problems." (124).

Alok's father has been crippled due to an accident and his mother as a teacher with modest income is the only earning member in his family of four. With an unmarried sister to support as well, he is seen as a redeemer by his family to bail them out of their financial woes and thus the pressure to graduate successfully weighs heavy on him. Ryan, Alok and Hari represent the 21st century Indian youths who are young and ambitious but also feels burdened by the stifling atmosphere of traditional education system. To get away from the stress of the academic pressure, they began watching movies, smoking cigarettes and marijuana and learn to drown their sorrows in alcohol. Soon after, even their friendship is put to test as Alok decides to leave their circle in the hope of securing better marks without distracting influence of his friends. Their feeling of dejection and low self-esteem is narrated by Hari as their results identify them as losers, "another five point something, another tattoo stamped on your worth as an individual in IIT society" (77).

The story of *Five Point Someone* reveals that with the pressure to get a good paying job, the importance of education, as a social capital for the rising middle class youth is an important factor that cannot be ignored. In this connection, Pavan Varma writes:

Education was something the middle class always valued, but its importance has only grown in these last years. Traditionally, the feudal gentry had the insulation of landed wealth and the hereditary rich had money; for the average middle class person, however, education was the only means to move upwards ... Educational avenues had been increasing ever since 1947, but job opportunities multiplied manifold after the economic reforms of 1991 and the advent a little later of information technology ... The middle class has put in a great deal of hard work to be a part of and benefit from this unfolding educational boom. For every seat in a technology institute there are thousands of aspirants ... This kind of competition could be daunting; it could led to resignation, an acceptance of the improbability of success, a withdrawal from the arena of battle. (Varma, *The Great Indian* xxiii)

In the *Five Point Someone*, Ryan Oberoi the main hero of the novel is described by Hari as "tall, with spare height, purposefully lean and unfairly handsome" (3) whose body was flawless with muscles that cut at the right places. His idea of a great party include vodka, rum, marijuana with Pink Floyd music at the background and pictures of nude women extracted from US porn magazine adorning the walls of their room. This description is a reflection of the porn culture and its seduction of the new consumers which can also be regarded as an erosion of Indian traditional cultural values. Hari nevertheless admirably describes him as follows when they met for the first time.

Ryan Oberoi, I repeated his name again mentally. Now here was a guy you don't see in IIT too often; tall with spare height purposefully lean and unfairly handsome. A loose gray T-shirt proclaimed "GAP" in big blue letters on his chest and shiny black shorts reached his knees. Relatives abroad for sure, I thought. Nobody wears GAP to bed otherwise. (Bhagat, *Five Point Someone* 3)

The intensely competitive atmosphere of the educational system especially in the IT sectors that is witnessed in India is tied to the ultimate IT dream symbolized by young urban professionals who earn high salaries and enjoy multiple perks in multinational companies. Such careers and jobs are regarded as symbols and markers of the lifestyle associated with the liberalized middle class and one which the new generation Indian aspires to.

Among the new generation Indians, many of the young IT aspirants seek to adopt and acquire various social capitals in the hope of promoting their employment prospects in the emerging economy. In their attempt to acquire such social capitals to negotiate the restructured labour market, they employ different individualized strategies. Such strategies can include gaining computer skills, English training and cultural styles, private tuitions and coaching classes which appear to have intensified in particular as a process of privatization following the change in India's economy (Fernandes, 133). In fact, coaching classes and private tuitions have been seen as an integral part of middle class strategies in gaining access to education. The mushrooming of such coaching centres for IT schools across the country which is the result of labour market has been clearly reflected in novels like the *Revolution 2020*.

Thus from the above analysis of *Five Point Someone* it can be easily recommended that Chetan Bhagat is a contemporary voice of a new young generation which is craving for healthy, wealthy and prosperous nation as a whole. The students (protagonists) of the novel are the real voices of suffering and tolerant generation; they are the mouthpieces of new brand generation which is called 21st century generation.

References:

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