

## Language and Gender: A Cultural Study of Chetan Bhagat's

### *Five Point Someone* and its Film Versions

**Bemi. C. M**

**Assistant Professor-English**

**Loyola College, Chennai**

**Abstract:** Cultural Studies and Media Studies are converging to become a lively and vibrant area of study that seeks to make sense of the rapidly changing global media environment. When a novel is adapted for the movie, many modifications are made that either enhance the beauty of the original novel or bring about changes in perspective. It is therefore an interesting and fruitful endeavor to look into the potentialities and possibilities of these two different medium and make a comparative study of both in order to discover what has contributed to the appeal and success of both movies and texts. This paper highlights the importance of language and use of language from a gender perspective. It also talks about the non-verbal communication used in the visual media. The difference in the nature of the language used in the novel *Five Point Someone* and the films *3 idiots* and *Nanban* are deeply analysed.

**Key Words:** language, media, culture, gender, adaptation

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Language is a method of human communication that is either spoken or written. It consists of the use of words in a structured and conventional way. Communication is also possible in a nonverbal method of expression or communication. This is full of gestures and facial expressions. A major function of language is that human beings use it to express themselves and to influence objects in their environment. Any form of arts is a kind of language that communicates things. Even a painting communicates in an illustrated sense. When it comes to literary form of art and film art, they prove to be different mediums with varied language and other communication aspects. Difference in form, structure and representations are found.

Cinema is a kind of pan art. It can make use of, even absorb, just about every other art, ... Film shares its visual aspect with painting, its dependence on movement with dance, its ability to produce kinetic and

emotional effects with music, its reliance on performance and spectacle with theatre, its technological basis with architecture. (Boyum 12)

Novelist and film makers use different languages to communicate their views and ideas to their audience. Novelist use written language where film makers use spoken language, visual and other patterns of gestures. In film adaptations, there is transfer of a written work to a film. It is a type of derivative work. A common form of film adaptation is the use of a novel as the foundation of a film adaptation. Adaptations have been almost as common as the development of original screen plays. For the most part, these adaptations attempt either to appeal to an existing commercial audience or to tap into the innovation and novelty of a less well known author. A film with its visual image tells a story with an audio effect. The visual location of the film with its atmosphere and the physical appearance of a character make the film effective with the use of cameras. Thus the power of images becomes more effective than the power of words in literature.

In *Five Point Someone*, Chetan Bhagat uses words and the film makers Raj Kumar Hirani and Shankar use images in *3 Idiots* and *Nanban*. In the films the images are extracted from the thoughts available in the text and are also improved upon it. Film is not simply a language of images. It is a medium that makes use of various systems of signification. Films also use language of sounds, both natural and unnatural.

The film *3 Idiots* qualifies as a loose adaptation of Chetan Bhagat's novel and based on the kind of recognition received, it has become more effective than the original text. The novel acts as only a fact but the film *3 Idiots* presents a moving picture with

lively tones. The film *3 Idiots* naturally addresses the feelings more immediately, directly and powerfully than the novel. The inherent potential of film's mixed language of Hindi and English, along with sights and sounds make the film more engrossing. As Boyum expresses in *Double Exposure*

...the essence of cinema lies in its difference from the other arts. But, surely the uniqueness of film, its distinctiveness and special quality, lies in something quite the opposite, in its meeting pot' nature, in the fact that it not only shares each and every one of its qualities with other art forms, but combines the effects of all of them, looking at film this ay-stressing the extent to which it combines the resources of literature, music, dance, painting. (Boyum 16)

Communicating through sound and pictures also include words, pure sounds, images and colours. The words used in the films are linguistic sounds through which people share a particular language to speak to each other. The sound effects of musical instruments are used for heightening a mood and emotion of the characters. Dialogues in the films are more informal and natural than the novel. Films do not follow any kind of grammatical structure and also there are no predetermined rules for its construction. The verbal language used in the films add one to the other in some logical relational sequence in order to make out for any meaning. In *3 Idiots* and *Nanban* the words and images share a natural 'concreteness' of giving out meaning.

Chetan Bhagat in his novel *Five Point Someone* uses simple words to bring out a kind of realism to his tale. Chetan Bhagat has a style of writing that combines humour, satire and seriousness. And he writes as if he directly speaks to the reader. His choice of topics, his style of writing and the fast pace, all combine together to make his books an engrossing reading experience.

Bhagat's writing style is extremely informal. This may be referred to as Modern English. But the idea is to write as people talk in college age. Hence, no flowery language, no tough words one dreaded in a dictation, no set rules, yet it works because it is the language of real people. There is a lot of fuck, screw, crap, fatso etc uttered by the college students. The readers' vocabulary may be enriched with terms like insti, disco, lingo, etc exclusive to IITians. The characters are no heroes of a movie, their accounts can be felt. What makes Chetan Bhagat's books worth reading is that the characters and places of his books are real, no fictions, the characters he shows in his books can be related to one's neighbour, may be even oneself. and his problems are real and not exaggerated, the problems this society is known to inflict and bear.

Chetan Bhagat is by no means an R.K.Narayan or a Salman Rushdie. His style of writing is indeed simple with minimum use of vocabulary. It's almost like even-I-cud-have-written-this-kinda-stuff thing. Yet people love to read his books because people are able to relate to characters from his novels even though they are fictitious. They seem like the people next door, the ones we play with, the ones we meet at schools or college. They

have similar problems to what we face in real life. They struggle to find success, joy and love. They are a slice of our own lives. (“Why Chetan Bhagat isn't such a bad writer”)

Films in general, are often said to be the reflection of the society. It is true in the case of *3 Idiots* and *Nanban*.. The language used in the movies are regional and can be viewed as a verbal expression of culture. Because they present the North India and Tamil youth culture such as the use of words like Buddy, Dude in *3 Idiots* and Machan, Maamu, Mapuley in *Nanban* Such words are mostly used in slang and not in literary works. Machan in Tamil language originally means brother- in- law. But it is commonly used in Indian English and Tamil to address a close friend. It's a very popular word amongst the English speaking youth of Urban Tamil Nadu.

Regarding comedy, the language is exploited in *3 Idiots* and *Nanban*. There are too much of toilet-humor so fluidly mixes with the insight of the plot. The movies also trivialize higher education by looking at the films from a gender perspective. In the movies the idea of rape is exploited to create humour, yet it received overwhelming appreciation from all kinds of audience including women.

This idea figures in the most popular episode of *3 Idiots* where a speech is given by Chatur Ramalingam, who can mug up information of any length and on any topic. The college principal appreciates Chatur, so he allows him to deliver a speech on the foundation day of the college. Chatur wants to impress the principal and the chief guest of the function – the minister of education. The fact that Chatur has a weak command

over Hindi is established in the opening scene itself, which is why Chatur takes help from the college librarian and types the text in Roman Hindi. Rancho, the protagonist wants to teach Chatur a lesson. He plays a prank on Chatur by making him move away from the computer on which Chatur is typing his speech. While Chatur is away, Rancho removes two words from the speech and replaces them with two boldly lewd equivalents. The words he replaces are *chamatkar* (miracle) and *dhan* (money) and the words he substitutes them with are *balatkar* (rape) and *stan* (breast).

Chatur mindlessly memorises the speech and delivers it in the college auditorium in front of fellow engineering students, faculty members, the college principal and the chief guest. The replacement of those two words in the speech leads to the formation of sentences like the following “For the last 32 years, the principal of the college has been committing rape one after another and hopefully he will carry on ... You have given your breast in the hands of this rapist man; now just watch how he uses it”. The student body, faculty members and the chief guest find this hilarious and the film shows them collapsing with laughter. As a matter of fact, the word *balatkar*(rape) figures twenty one times and *stan*(breast) four times in Chatur’s speech. While everybody in the auditorium is rolling in laughter, the principal is visibly upset and wants to leave. In the rest of the movie, Rancho uses the phrase, “Do I have breast?” several times in order to cheer up his friends.

Evidently, the crudeness of Hindi cinema graduates to a new level of vulgarity in *3 Idiots*. What is worth noticing is that it is accomplished

without the usual camera tactics and shoddy music. This change also involves a significant break from the earlier image and status of the hero. The new hero that *3 Idiots* establishes derives fun out of rape. Till a few years ago, rape was associated with the villain's role, for which he was punished in due course. Amir Khan, the hero of *3 Idiots* obviously gets no punishment; instead, he has been awarded a Padma Bhushan, one of the highest national honours. (Language, Cinema and State )

The long joke on "rape" and "breast" in *3 Idiots* was invented by the script-writer of the film, Abhijat Joshi, and the director, Raj kumar Hirani. Apparently, all these illustrious men have shown a fine understanding of the male mind along with a businessman's sense of the importance of Hindi for expressing this mind. They are aware that in order to recreate the fun that men derive in real life by talking about sex and the female anatomy, the use of Hindi would be essential. Crude jokes about women could not have evoked loud laughter in Indian cinema halls if they were cracked in English: this is the moot sociolinguistic point which the director and the script-writer encashed.

The choice of balatkar and stan resonates with culturally upheld male mental worlds in which the female body is an object of pleasure and so is its exploitation.

*3 Idiots* received outstanding reviews in almost all the English national dailies. *The Times of India*(TOI) gave it "five stars" and wrote:

The high point of the film is the fact that director Rajkumar Hirani says so much, and more, without losing his sense of humour and the sheer



lightness of being. The film is a laugh riot, despite being high on fundas. Certain sequences almost have you rolling in the aisle, like the ragging sequence, Omi's chamatkar/balatkar speech.... (3 Idiots movie review)

The TOI reviewer did not just praise Chatur's speech but considered it a highlight of the film— suggesting that the tendency to draw pleasure out of women's exploitation is so entrenched in everyday parlance and values that its use to evoke humour is regarded as being worthy of appreciation. The audience watching the movie in cinema halls also found the speech and other similar dialogues hilarious. Young girls, middle-aged and older women were also present in the audience. They too joined in the laughter and the claps. It merely reveals the extent to which women have internalised their own objectification. Even feminist groups did not raise a voice against the derogatory reference to rape and the female body, nor did any female film reviewer object to such treatment of these two for developing the central comic plot of the movie. The above observation by Latika Gupta's brings out very clearly the mind of men and women in a patriarchal context in India.

The role of language in creating structures of relationships, ideas, emotions and feelings needs to be probed further in order to bring out the semiology of *3 Idiots*. It was certified "UA" which means it was considered fit for universal viewing with some "adult" content. The media promoted the movie as being appropriate for children because it deals with the pressure which urban middle class boys commonly face in the process of becoming engineers. It can be argued that young boys in the audience, who witnessed the

repeated use of balatkar and stan in a comic context, would disassociate rape from the agony which rape victims experience. The association now established is with fun. 3 *Idiots* harps exactly on this continuum of exploitation in the life of boys and girls. The former learn to view rape as amusement and the latter learn that their inescapable fear is a matter of fun for the society.

Hollywood cinema has certain set conventions which organize the possibilities of the gaze into a particular structure of binary opposition, so that “active”, “male” and “sexual looking”, are gathered on one side, while “passive”, “female” and “identification” are gathered on the other. The determining male gaze projects its phantasm on the female figure which is styled accordingly. The whole concept of Mulvey can be summed up as: “woman is the image, man, is the bearer of the look”. (Mohan 232)

The portrayal of women in recent films is very derogatory, characterized by scantily-clad heroines singing songs with terrible grotesque movements. The use of camera angles, especially in the song and dance sequences and the dress adopted by the heroine contribute towards presenting the female protagonist as a sexual entity. The woman in Tamil cinema does not seem to be evolving at all. If anything, she is more of a sexual object- an ‘item girl’ who can be used to sell the film. In *Nanban* 'Asku laska' a song proceeds as "triangle on your nose I'll scrutinize, diameters and depth on your bosom I'll analyze, curve on your waist I'll summarize". 'Irukaana' is a song dedicated to the svelte physique of Ileana and is a typical Shankar film song with elaborate and intricate

and colorful set works which also has dozens of dancers with minimal clothes. This song is mainly to focus Ileana's enviable figure.

These episodes in the films highlight the fantasies and repressed desires of not only the youth but also the older generation of India. According to Latika Gupta, Indian parents in any case, do not talk about sex to their children and rape is an even more forbidden topic. The parents face a heightened dilemma because of their hesitation and the contrast between the real meaning of rape and how this film presented it. In the absence of parental intervention and help in sorting out the confusion of values, one can say that Aamir Khan succeeded in teaching boys that rape is entertainment and that the female body is comic material. His reputation as a teacher was already established in society by his pedagogic blockbuster *Taare Zameen Par*. In *3 Idiots* he has neutralized the possibility of a sense of horror and guilt being associated with rape. Thus *3 Idiots* and *Nanban* trivialize higher education by looking at the films from a gender perspective.

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