

**CRUSADE AGAINST THE HYPERREAL SYSTEM: A STUDY OF THE
MOVIE *3 IDIOTS*, AN ADAPTATION OF THE NOVEL
*FIVE POINT SOMEONE***

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Abstract

When Lenin exclaimed that cinema is the most important of all the arts, by saying this, he was in fact putting his belief that cinema can be used as propaganda to influence the masses. That is what I believe Raju Hirani is doing from his movies, from Munna Bhai franchise to 3 Idiots. *3 Idiots*, inspired from the novel *Five Point Someone* by Chetan Bhagat, is among the finest adaptations from novel to movie, revealing the flaws of system in a fairytale way. Though Chetan Bhagat has also criticized the convictions of IIT yet his vision, I believe, lacked the magnetism that can lure any student to do what he is good at, to follow his dreams. Raju Hirani takes Bhagat's vision a step ahead and inspires the nation.

To me, this movie is not about 3 idiots but it is a film with strong message to the many idiots running the education system of this country and to the millions of idiots who accept this system without questioning - in turn ruining the childhood of millions of children and making them handicapped in their abilities for the rest of their lives; not to mention the innumerable lives lost in the form of unfortunate suicides in the process.

This movie is revolutionary in the sense that it makes us aware of our nation's decrepit education system where nothing is real. It is a hyperreal system which believes on selling dreams to students. However, the movie is not without flaws as its prophesises everything in an idealised way. My attempt in this paper will be to explore the pros and cons of the movie within various philosophies and how it is different from the novel *Five Point Someone*.

Where the mind is without fear
and the head is held high...
Where the clear stream of reason
has not lost its way into the
dreary desert sand of dead habit...
my Father,
Let my country awake.
- R N Tagore (*A Poet's School*)

When the legendary American writer Mark Twain said, 'I have never let my schooling interfere with my education', he was putting a trenchant remark against the traditional institutions of learning believed to be the monastery of wisdom. He was proclaiming that our genius and intelligence are not dependent on these institutions, functioning under the pillars of 'tradition, honor, discipline, and excellence' (Dead Poets Society), selling a dream of a better, brighter future. Today, the educational institutions have become more akin to Disneyland, producing an illusion of reality. As Baudrillard calls Disneyland "...a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real." What he means by this is that Disneyland exists to convince us that rationality is outside the walls of its childish domain, rather than the fact that rationality has been replaced by childishness everywhere. Similarly, nowadays, the educational institutes are promising to give under their brand names of a life that will uplift us from ordinary to extraordinary levels, and this is done by them by producing a hyperreal image of themselves. A *discourse* (Foucault) is being propagated by the system which makes us to put down our faiths on them that they will "educate" us. To make it clearer, take for an example a coaching institute comprising of hundred students among which only ten or say twenty students are able to qualify an entrance examination, then the image of those few students are used to attract more lots, guaranteeing hundred percent success, hiding the facts of their failure. On the top of this, the institutions in which we get admitted after sacrificing the prime years of life cannot assuredly provide us an improved life or make us genius and adept. Before enlightening on what I mean, have a glimpse on the statement that came from Infosys' chairman emeritus, Mr. N. R. Narayana Murthy regarding one of the most prestigious educational brands of our nation, that is, IIT: "Apart from the top twenty percent of students who crack the tough IIT entrance examination and can stand among the best anywhere in the world, quality of the remaining eighty percent of students leave much to be desired."

Now this statement is really a damaging one on the stature of an Institute like IIT that promises to produce the best brains from our country. If IIT can develop only twenty percent of its flock into the best one, where does the rest of the crew stand? Why isn't the faculty smart enough to produce better results than that? The most ironical and deleterious fact about the best engineering institution of our nation is that it doesn't even rank among the top hundred engineering colleges of the world yet it boasts about harvesting the geniuses of our nation. This issue is not only with the IIT; however, the condition is same for almost all the brands spreading the "noble" task of education. Now where does the problem lie? A teacher voices the same concern in the documentary *Waiting for 'Superman'* (2010):

So you're a kid, you're doing fine in school till you hit the fourth grade, fifth grade. Between the fifth grade and seventh grade, you see a huge number of minority kids go from being B students to D students. Now, one of two things is happening. Either the students are getting stupider every year, right? Or something is wrong in the education system.

Now, coming on to the main question, what do we really understand by the term "education"? The word "education" may be used to describe any form of training, any manner by which physical or mental aptitude, which a man may desire to have for the purpose of his work, may be acquired. Education is both the development of mind and personality of the individual and his development as a useful member of the society, as John Keating of Dead Poets Society exclaims, 'to create a verse of our own'. The primary social function of education is to prepare the individual to participate in the democratic process which is the soul of a nation. However, today, the diagram of education has changed functioning as *ideological* state apparatus (Althusser) to generate certain *ideologies* (Terry Eagleton) eradicating the real motif of education. A false consciousness or a discourse is generated by the system which we believe to be ours, the idea of getting into a certain 'brand' institution and doing a certain course that will give us a better future, not realizing a single time that we are being "commodified". Karl Marx explored in the first volume of Das Capital - the concept of 'commodity', defined as items bought and sold in markets. Thus, when 'markets' are created in which educational commodities are traded, it is argued that education is one of the soundest investments in terms of its economic returns. Education itself has become an industry with pre-packaged programmes assured to yield profits! Certain institutions (now 'brands') have become known for their success in 'manufacturing' students guaranteed a place in the market related to particular professions.

This sounds increasingly familiar as we in India begin to see well-known corporates enter the education market. Success and financial profitability become synonymous. Here is a scathing comment by Mary Kupiec Cayton on what happens when education turns into a commodity: 'When a grain turns into a commodity, you are still eating wheat, though perhaps with less nutritional value or freshness. When education turns into a commodity, it may change not just in quality, but also in kind. Instead of buying skills or preparation, you may be buying a certificate of completion for a certain number of standardized credit units.

The voice against this infected system of education is coming from all around the world, and India is no exception. I am using the term infected because the institutions have nothing but commodified the noble task of gaining knowledge. Looking back over the past few decades, we note some pathetic patterns of what happens within the classroom environment: The same lessons and lectures are delivered year after year, with little motivation among teachers to update their knowledge or delivery method. Students are viewed as lifeless vessels into which certain facts and figures must be poured, in total disregard of what this must produce inside. Now, this pattern of education is being challenged by filmmakers all around the world. Films like *I Not Stupid* (2002), *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *To Sir With Love* (1967), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *Waiting for 'Superman'* (2010), *The Lottery* (2010), *Special Education* (*Specijalno Vaspitanje*, 1977), *FALTU* (2011), *Taare Zameen Par* (2007) and many more manifests their rebellious attitude towards the claustrophobic aura of education, where the students are dumped under the heap of pressures and aspirations ending in frustration or suicide. Raju Hirani's *3 Idiots* becomes the part of the same crusade launched by filmmakers around the globe, questioning the authority of the system where creativity and innovation are strangled on a large scale.

When, there is commodification of everything, including education, what becomes important is the notion of *performativity* (Judith Butler), rather than performance. Lyotard argued in the 1970s that higher education would come to be dominated by performativity: skills needed to increase the "performativity of the social system" would be prioritized. For example, teaching of computer sciences and engineering would take priority over traditional subjects such as philosophy and the arts. And, that is what we are witnessing in our contemporary scenario where the education institutions have become tools for producing better products (students), rather than human beings. This notion of performativity is being severely criticized by *3 Idiots* and *Five Point Someone* in unison. For instance, the concerns raised by Ryan in *Five Point Someone*:

What is wrong is the system...This system of relative grading and overburdening the students. I mean it kills the best fun years of your life. But it kills something else. Where is the room for original thought? Where is the time for creativity?

, are revoiced by Rancho in *3 Idiots*:

Yaha par koi nayi ideas ki bat hi nahi karta sir, inventions ki bat hi nahi krta, bat karte he to sirf marks ki ya fir USA me naukri ki. Yaha gyan nahi diya ja rha he sir, yaha sirf ye bataya jar ha he ki marks kaise laye.
(‘Here we don’t have any talks related to new ideas, no talks on inventions. What we talk is about marks, or else job in USA. We are not given any knowledge here, but are taught how to gain good marks’.)

This ideology is so developed that it becomes embedded into the very psyche of an individual. Characters like Chatur and Suhas are the products of the defined norms of society. They represent performativity, whereas Rancho, Ryan and Keatings resonate performance. Those who do not find themselves fit enough in the structure either commit suicide like Joy (*3 Idiots*), or Neil (*Dead Poets Society*), or feel strangled by it like Raju Rastogi (*3 Idiots*). Now, why are we not able to guide and motivate our children to fields for which they are passionate about? It is because we are always in fear of some Mr. Kapoor (a man mentioned in the dialogues between Farhan and his father in *3 Idiots*), who put our actions into surveillance. 'Our life begins by killing', exclaims Viru Sahastrabuddhe (*3 Idiots*), and by this way, we enter the world of competition, a world where everyone is in the race of marks and certificates. We are becoming more and more 'well trained' rather than well educated, as mentioned by Rancho:

Ab apne life ka ek minute rewind karo or socho, jab mene ye sawal pucha to kisi ne ye socha ki aaj kuch naya sikhne ko milega, maja ayega? Nahi, sab race me lag gaye. Aise padh ke first aa bhi gaye to kya fayda, aap logo ki knowledge badhegi? Nahi, sirf pressure badhega.... Chabuk ke darr se to circus ka sher bhi darr kar chair par bethna sikh jata he, lekin aise sher ko hum well trained kahte he well educated nahi.

(‘Now rewind one minute of life a bit and think, when I asked this question, anybody thought that today we will get something new to learn? No, everyone got into the race. What is the use of such study even if you come first? Will you improve your knowledge? No, only pressure will increase.... The lion in the circus also learns to sit on the chair fearing the whip of his master, but we call such a lion as well trained not well educated’.)

Whenever we try to oppose or move away from the ideologies of system, we become the source of *abjection* (Julia Kristeva), and Ryan, Rancho, John Keating and the real-life character

of Mark Zuckerberg of *The Social Network* (2010) come under the space of abjection. The micro-powers in society functioning like the panopticon remind us time and again to follow the system. We are told to follow the code of conduct as Rancho is told by his teacher that if he wants to pass, he will have to follow the books, “*Kitab me yahi definition he aur agar aapko pass hona he to aap yahi likhenge,*” or as John Keating is told by Mr. Nolan in *Dead Poets Society* that, “...the curriculum here is set. It’s proven it works....Prepare them for college, and the rest will take care of itself.” The reminder is given because persons like Rancho are like the breaches in the functioning of society. They are “the other” for the system who strive for the change in the stagnate structure. But such ruptures are necessary because they lead the society to move forward. I am not saying that persons like Suhas and Chatur don’t deserve a sophisticated life; they do, because they find themselves fit and comfortable on the scale of performativity. But we also need people like Rancho who can point the faults of the system and can proceed to bring a reformed structure out of it. For the reformation, the most necessary aspect is to understand the real passion inside us, like Farhan (*3 Idiots*) understood that he is a better photographer than an engineer. For a change, it is also necessary to have a different outlook from the parents, not getting blind by the ideologies like the parents of Ishan Awasthi in *Taare Zameen Par*, who were not able to see that their child is a gifted one. We need to realise that our children are not machines working for to produce better results; they are a part of human race ‘filled with passion...medicine, law, business, engineering, these are the noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for’ (*Dead Poets Society*). And, that is what we are draining out from our children, that is, the passion for life.

However, not everyone is negative about this commercial trend. There are those who look a bit more positively at the commercialization of education. In a free-market society, educating children becomes the good and service over which marketers do battle, promoting their wares in the form of educational learning packets, technology, academic testing, school management, and school reform. Free-market proponents claim that their involvement in education promotes healthy competition for improved schools resulting in better education for children. As in all things; a healthy balance is required. Of course, we need newer technologies and will certainly benefit if some good business brains are to shape the direction of many of our institutions, but, first, we need to consider what constitutes the essence of good education. In my opinion the essence exists in the performance of every individual, when each of us is ready to contribute for the betterment of society. To quote Whitman:

O Me! O Life! ...of the questions of these recurring;
Of the endless trains of the faithless-of cities filled with the foolish;
What good amid these, O me, O life?

Answer.

That you are here - that life exists, and identity;
That the powerful play goes on, and you will contribute a verse.

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