

**Jitendra Jain's *Chasing 33%*: A Critical Study of the Raised Voice
Towards the System**

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Abstract

The paper intends to explore the theme of self- realization, independence and Individual actualization and identity in the novel. It tends to enquire the Indian education system which through grading or marking system has tried to judge the students as successors or failures. It also tries to focus on the thing that this grading system makes students only fusspots. It focuses on the fact that how the fear of board examinations has changed the actual meaning of learning. It is a sharp critique of Indian education system as well as its pattern of board exams.

Keywords: Jitendra Jain, *Chasing 33%*, MBA, IIT, Love- hate relationship, Failure, Success, Grades, corruption, Numbers, etc.

In all genres of literature whether it is the work of fiction or non- fiction, fiction reflects most descriptively the intimate social realities of the society in which it produced. It is considered one of the most powerful literary tools to show the socio- cultural, political and philosophical milieu where it existed. This condition also applies even on the novels written during twenty first century. No novelist living in or dealing with this period can avoid himself to write about this revolutionary Indian students' experience. Every writer is influenced by the condition of the age in which he writes. In the words of David Daiches, "it is no doubt, largely true that an age is reflected in its literature which reveals the tides of thought, the varieties of emotions, the springs of actions that animated its men and women (Dhull,1)."

Among Indian writers in English, Jitendra Jain is a well-known writer writing about the struggling school days of students. Whereas in this novel, he reminds every reader about his/her school days, but on the other hand also reminds about the faulty education system which makes the students life massive. Jitendra Jain is a new name in writing career, as he has not written too many works. He is a senior tax professional for major multinational. He claims to be the only chartered accountant who loves words more than numbers. He is an ardent opponent of the exam system but a big believer in the learning process.

The number 33 may not be much important to all of us, but it does matter a lot in a student's life. He/ she is identified failure or successor just because of this number. The education which is considered one of the most powerful tools to mould someone's life, it unfortunately gets limited in numbers just because of grading system. This grading system makes them just in memorizing form, no more than it. It is the story about the life of a 16years old unnamed protagonist and his two friends Maggie and Swadhin, who are all facing the stress of 10th standard board exams. Jain takes us through the meaningless views of 'winning and losing'. It is an apt portrayal of our education system, which unfolds the complexities of competitive school exams, number system, traditional views of society to define a person through his/her scores, which can make or break one's future. Jain through his novel's protagonist says, "I didn't understand why students were evaluated based on exams. Why did we need to be evaluated at all? Lakhs of students appeared for their board exams every year. Not all of them passed the exam. Did that mean they were all failures (166)."

On the other hand, we have another character Swadhin, who also has the same view that he is studying just to satisfy his parents. when the unnamed protagonist of the book asks him about the use of this math in life which they are studying. Then Swadhin states: "Look, you know very well that this education does not make any sense for me. I am studying just to please my parents. I want to build innovative gadgets. My ideas will sell one day (31)." It means each and every student has the same problem. All of them are doing something for their parents because it is our society which injects the thing to this way in their mind. So, because of this burden they start to struggle and don't have option to free themselves. But in reality, through this depiction, the writer seems to give a message that if they are freed independently, then better results can be gained. Things should not be imposed upon a student. But he must be allowed to do whatever he likes. His choice may be much effective rather than imposed ideas. This concept gives us an idea that our education system should be burden less rather than being burdened.

Even the teachers and managing committee of schools also starts to think them bad for their schools just because of marks. Jain through his protagonist wants to give us the idea that even the teachers have this traditional thinking of defining students on the basis of grades. Even being educated, they are also not able to recognize the reality. Jyoti Sharma, principal of the school starts to chide and slapping the protagonist just because he was playing cricket before the two days of his exam. He states, "It is because of students like you that our school is not considered to be the best school in town (8)."

On this day the protagonist decides to quit his studies for further. Even because of this pressure of board exams and our education system, the protagonist starts to compare his life with the animals and find that they are better than us. Once when he goes for walk with his sister and

sees the swans, then utters. “They don’t have to worry about learning different languages. They don’t have to worry about board exams (128).”

Although this is not the way to behave with students. They should be treated well if really the elders want to encourage them for studies. On the other hand, one more excerpt is there when Swadhin’s father puts many expectations on the protagonist and starts to describe the struggle of the family which they suffered just to make him literate. Swadhin’s father starts to suggest the protagonist, while stating, “Do something to make your father proud. Do something so that he is able to relax at least for a day. Do something so that he can spend the rest of his life the way he wants (55).”

We read in the story that commissioner whose son is going to admit in IIT is very much happy and predict it that now there is no need to worry about him as he has enrolled in engineering and preparing. Like people have idea that life can be defined just on the basis of degree which is not so easy. How can one predict about someone’s future just on the basis of a piece of paper? This is our traditional system which does not allow a student to come over it. In the story Commissioner states, “well, once you have a degree from either IIT or IIM, you don’t need to take care of anything else, everything is taken care on its own. You get everything easy in life then (43).”

In spite of education system, the writer gives some hints of social evils like dowry, rape, difference between a girl child and a baby boy, corruption etc. It seems that through this novel , Jain wants to tell the realities, that how this race of grading system and chasing for 33% marks make our education just a joyless race without leaving the imprints of knowledge or reason on the mind. Even in the age of 21st century, we get in the novel, that people are producing more and more children and increasing population just in the want of a baby boy. Through this excerpt the writer wants to show that even in this technical age of science people have orthodox views regarding gender. Even today they believe in fate or destiny. Mr. Ghosh has nine daughters and even then, he is expecting for the 10th child believing that surely it will be a baby boy. He states, “My nine daughters will go to their respective families after marriage.” (50) Jain through his unnamed protagonist tries to convince him that in this age daughters are not less to a boy in any field. You are still living in the eighteenth century of orthodox views. Your daughter will take your care better than sons. But even than Mr. Ghosh states, “You are right, but a boy is a boy. I am sure this time it will be a boy (51).”

In the novel the views of the protagonist are unorthodox and not limited to just hatred for some specific subjects like Maths, Music, Hindi, English, Science etc. but also for other social evils which are surrounding the education system. Jain has tried to reveal the reality of student life and our education system through his writing. Goyal can be right in this context, when he

quotes to E.M. Forster, "...it is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source (7)." So, he has done this work through his writing.

Even the writer gives us a very good example of corruption in his writing, when we read in the story that in Science exam the protagonist always gets 32 marks and Swadhin just managed 33% because his father was in the governing body of the school. Through the comparison of science teacher and English teacher, the protagonist of Jain wants to aware the reader that there matters the way of teaching also if we try to go in reality. Science teacher doesn't have the way to teach so they are poor in that subject, but on the other hand English teacher's way of teaching is good, so students have better knowledge in that subject. In the paper, the raised voice refers to the voice of young generation towards the old one. If we see then we find that there is a very wide generation gap. On one hand, we have middle aged generation, who believes in superstitions, man like Mr. Ghosh. When the protagonist asks him about the surety of a baby boy, then he states, "well, the tantrik wanted me to off a nara bali to get a hundred percent assurance that the next child would be a boy." But on the other hand, we have younger generation who almost have started to interrogate these superstitious things. In the story, when Swadhin, Maggie and the protagonist meet a Sadhu and he starts to predict about their future and tells about Swadhin that you ll be a lawyer, then he denies while saying, "No, I am not. But you should be realistic and practical." So, it means that they don't follow the things as our old generation does.

In this way, the novel raises a voice towards the system and serves a guide for teachers, parents and to the education system in India. It also implies that people should not be judged by grades only. It tries to break the established norms of society about the scoring marks which in reality taking away from the learning. Exams are not the final words to define someone. But as a parents, teacher and guardian, we should make them creative and should be given focus on practical skills.

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