



THE INDIANS AND INDIANNESS IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S FIVE POINT SOMEONE

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Abstract

Chetan Bhagat's choices of subjects for his books are very Bhagatian. Bhagat has potential to be called one of the voices of a generation of Middle class Indian youth facing the choices and frustrations that come with the prospect of growing wealth and advancement. His first novel Five Point Someone is set in the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, in the period 1991 to 1995. It's a story about the adventures of three mechanical engineering students Hari (the narrator), Ryan Oberoi and Alok Gupta. They fail to cope with the grading system of the IITs. In five Point Someone, he describes the perennial themes like parental pressure on children for getting admission in highly competitive institute, earn high grades, get a good job, poverty, exploitation at job place, ill effects of domestic quarrel etc. An attempt has been made in this study to place the analysis of the impact of modernization on educated Indian youth in the perspective of modernization of the Indian society. This research paper aims at studying the behaviour of Indian youth in social context. The study of their disillusionment, as presented by Bhagat, has been taken into account to study their sense of being alienated from the world or society. As Adam Clayton Powell claims in *Keep the Faith, Baby!* (1967); "We have produced a world of contented bodies and discontented minds" 7

Keywords: Chetan Bhagat, Indian Writing in English, Indian Youth, Spirit, Five Point Someone, Indian Society.



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Five Point Someone is a debut novel of Chetan Bhagat set in the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, in the period 1991 to 1995. It's a story about the adventures of three mechanical engineering students Hari (the narrator), Ryan Oberoi and Alok Gupta. They fail to cope with the grading system of the IITs. Ryan is a smart as well as outspoken boy, whereas Hari and Alok are comparatively introvert personalities. They are not that much bright to be the front liners and always secure GPA Five Points something which is very low. Though they try to improve their grades, things always get worst for them. This book directly as well as indirectly discusses the grim side of the IIT education system, which is lauded by the elite. Hari, Alok and Ryan fit the character of present day youth who are intelligent, creative, indifferent, dejected, feeling insecurity and irresponsible. The novel closes with an open ending where one cannot decide whether the student life is for enjoyment of freedom or labor for academics. Even enjoyment of freedom means

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drinking vodka, smoking cigarettes, listening to Pink Floyd or something else than that is an insoluble query for the academics. Though the novel takes dark turns every now and then, it has a humorous tone. Ryan, who possesses creative thinking, has been forced to value grades more than anything else.

Today's youth represents the first generation, which is growing up in social modern order. This fact alone distinguishes them from previous generations. Most of the problems faced by today's youth are not restricted to any one ethnic or religious group, but affects young people in general. Most discussion on youth have focussed on issues as drug abuse, crime, violence, sexuality, and poverty. In addition to these, today's youth are affected by new challenges.

These include;

1. An Identity Crisis: *Who am I?*
2. Lack of self confidence and low self esteem : *I am worthless*
3. A sense of hopelessness: *Where am I going?*
4. Confusion and ambiguity concerning moral issues: *What is right and wrong?*
5. The negative impact of the electronic media: *Entertainment?*
6. Competitiveness in education: the uneven playing field: *Excellence by whom? Not Me.*

To get his readers connected to his fiction, Bhagat portrays the picture the of present generation. As Bhagat himself has said in one of his interviews in the renowned newspaper, Hindu;

“ It is not high literature, “admits Bhagat, “ both of my novels portray the aspirations, mind-set and problems of the present generation in a very simple language. And since I belong to the young generation, I feel I have been able to strike a right chord with my readers. When they read my books they are able to relate themselves to the character and the plots.”

(Hindu'11)

Five Point Someone- What not to do at IIT! Is a 2004 novel written by Chetan Bhagat, an alumnus of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi and Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmadabad. This was his debut novel. It is one of the highest selling English novels published in India, and remained on the bestseller list until now since its release in 2004, tied along with other novels by Chetan Bhagat. This novel was entirely typed by Bhagat on Microsoft Word in the font Garamond, as he states in the

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novel. The book is narrated in the first person by Hari, with some small passages by his friends Ryan and Alok, as well as a letter by Hari's girlfriend Neha Cherian. It deals with the lives of the three friends, whose elation on making it to one of the best engineering colleges in India is quickly deflated by the rigor and monotony of academic work. Most of the book deals with the numerous attempts by the trio to cope with and/or beat the system as well as Hari's fling with Neha who just happens to be the daughter of Prof. Cherian, the domineering head of the Mechanical Engineering Department. Their most important attempt was "C2D" (Cooperate to Dominate).

While the tone of the novel is humorous, it takes some dark turns every now and then, especially when it comes to the families of the protagonists. Most of the action, however, takes place inside the campus as the boys, led by the ever creative Ryan, frequently lamenting how the internationally lauded IIT system has stifled their creativity by forcing them to value grades more than anything else. Uninspiring teaching and numerous assignments add to their woes, though the boys do find a sympathizer in Prof. Veera, the new fluid mechanics professor. In this book, Chetan Bhagat presents a very realistic picture of what can happen if kids don't stick to the straight path all through. This story is about how the slightest deviation from the proper and ethical path of living can be disastrous. It tells us how escapism is addictive and how easy it is to forget that life is hard and life is earnest. Chetan Bhagat's style is not only different and informal, it is hard hitting and very direct. You won't find any long-winded paragraphs about people's emotions or too much suspense in the book. Everything is stated matter-of-factly. And it is this very peculiarity of his storytelling that captivates and entertains. This book illustrates how students waste their opportunities in college years if they don't think straight.

Through the story of three friends, the book describes various facets of IIT life – the academics, the professors, campus life and the rat race to get better grades. As the title suggests, the book is about the cruel grade and marks system which is being practiced and imposed on the students. The book is an honest self-experienced attempt to convey the message to young generation that what will happen if they fail to score good marks in educational exams. In fact the very book starts with the sense of repentance, in the sense that Harikumar talks about the experiences, in being IITs, that are not worth undergoing. "Welcome to *Five Point Someone*. This is not a book to teach you how to get

into IIT or even survive it. In fact, it describes how bad things can get if you don't think straight. Funny, dark and non-stop, *Five Point Someone* is the story

of three friends whose measly five-point something GPAs come in the way of everything - their friendship, their love life, their future. Will they make it?"

(Preface)

The lines quoted above are a clear indication of the way students are forced to think, act and behave. To put it simply, talent is imprisoned. It loses its freedom. As a result innovativeness suffers. The chief element that permeates in both the novels is conflict which pushes the characters into the cannon of disillusionment. Ryan with his rebellious nature protests against the existing system which later on turns into a form of conflict. Young people have far more options than their parents but their choices remain circumscribed by a traditional education system and overbearingly high expectations. Ryan compares the place with jail where they don't have „*freedom to think*“ innovatively, freely or in their own way. In great *fury* Ryan says, “I think this is a jail. It really is, Damn Jail” (14) The spirit of YOUTH is enliven in the major characters like Harikumar, Rayan Oberoi, Alok Gupta, Neha Cherian and Chetan Bhagat who created them. Harikumar is an over conscious young about what he tells or what he is going to tell? As he always infers the counter question and utters with „Reason“ of his own. Harikumar has a habit of self elaborating the views. Very easily he can pass the witty remarks on his friends. It clearly shows that he is very friendly and witty in his nature and use of language. Because Alok and Rayan have not undertaken the tasks to write the book, Harikumar considers himself as the most responsible person who has to swat himself of writing the book. As he states,

“But Alok cannot write for nuts, and Ryan, even though he could really do whatever he wants, is too lazy to put his bum to the chair and type. So stuff it boys- it is my story.”(V)

In the very beginning of the novel, Bhagat touches upon the most burning issue of two fold educational torture, the burden of teacher imposed syllabi and ragging. Bhagat, very intentionally, shows how this wicked practise is being practiced in the top most colleges in India like IITs. The very novel opens with the episode in which new comers, rather than fresher, are ragged at the hands of their seniors. Rayan saved Hari and Alok from ragging and it has been generally seen and believed that weaker go to stronger for their survival and hence this episode causes the friendship of Hari and Alok with Rayan. Raising voice against senior is a symbol of raising voice against the so called established dogmas and system. This can be considered as rebellious nature of Bhagatian characters. Rayan revolts against them and rescue his friend along with himself. When youth raises voice against established norms,

authority, or senior, tries to suppress their voice using his power of age or authority. As Anurag proclaims to stop Rayan by telling,

“Tell him to control himself. Or one day he will take you guys Down too,”

(10)

Moreover, Rayan’s description of his senior is monstrous and gruesome. Rayan compares him with the old mythological, overweight, darkly dark, large teeth figure who always invites terror. This is a symbol of wickedness which is symbolizes through his senior. But here wickedness stands for social and educational evil. Rayan describes his senior as,

“..., looked like a demon from cheap mythological TV shows – six feet tall, over a hundred kilos, dark, hairy, and huge teeth that were ten years late meeting an orthodontist. Although he inspired terror” (12)

This is a bitter satire on educational system. Because of throat cut competitions, colleges are employing more and more norms to keep the students engaged in syllabus based activity which does not give student to be original and creative. They are always engrossed with syllabus part rather than curriculum. Ultimately they feel burden of their study. Ryan also asserts the importance of creativity and said,

“ 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? It is not fair.” (104)

In the movie version of the book, Rancho, characterised by Amir Khan, asserts the same idea. He is of the opinion that student should not run after success instead they must work hard to cultivate skills as a result success will come after them. The limitations of IITs are brought out vividly in a get-together involving students. Ryan remarks,

“You know guys, this whole IIT system is sick. Because, tell me, how many great engineers or scientists have come out of IIT? I mean that is supposed to be the best college in India, the best technology institute for a country of a billion. But has IIT ever invented anything? Or made any technical contribution to India? Over thirty years of IITs, yet, all it does is train some bring kids to work in multinationals. I mean look at MIT in the USA... What is wrong in 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? It is not fair.”

Competition is intense in the IITs. The pressures which the IIT grading system puts on students are captured in one professor’s remarks at the end of his class: “Best of luck once again for your stay here. Remember, as your head of department Prof Cherian says, the tough workload is by design, to keep you on your toes. And respect the grading system. You get bad grades, and I assure you – you get no job, no school and no future. If you do well, the world is your oyster. So, don’t slip, not even once, or there will be no oyster, just slush.”.

The system is corporate to dominate. Ryan concludes that the IIT system is unfair because;

1. It suppresses talent and individual spirit.
2. It extracts the best years of one’s life from the country’s brightest minds.
3. It judges students with a draconian GPA system that destroys Relationships.
4. The profs don’t care for the students.
5. IITs have hardly contributed to the country.

In a nut shell, these all and many more reasons are responsible for the downfall of youth. India being a country of high morality and enriched cultural and religion heritage, such barriers don’t affect at grass root level. Still we have that inherited quality that prevents us from total destruction. We have the eternal bond of warmth and love. Fundamentally our hope and faith are not shackled. And Chetan Bhagat has practically depicted the picture of youth, with all their problems, agony, vows and traumas. It shows his ability to observe the happenings minutely. His treatment his comical but overtone contains high seriousness. Chetan Bhagat’s immense popularity among the young brains proves his deep understanding of the psyche of youth. First quality that strikes about Chetan Bhagat’s novels is the fact that this author writes about Indians and for Indians. His characters are young, ambitious and passionate and have the same moral, social dilemmas as many of the young Indians today. At the same time their context and sensibility, too, is Indian.

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