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## Depiction of Youth Culture in Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone*

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### Abstract

Chetan Bhagat is an Indian author, columnist, and speaker. Bhagat is the author of five bestselling novels, *Five Point Someone* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *2 States* (2009) & *Revolution 2020: Love, Corruption, Ambition* (2011). Chetan Bhagat's debut novel *Five Point Someone - What not to do at IIT!* is one of the highest selling English novels published in India and remained on the bestseller list until now since its release in 2004. The novel begins in an unique way where the author takes the liberty of sharing his opinion that the book is not a guide on how to get into IIT but it cite examples of how screwed up our college years can get if we don't think straight. Although treated in a mild and rather casual way, the story of the IIT contains in it matters deeper than can be seen on the surface. That our structure of technical education has become a lifeless system, and needs revitalisation has been amply clear. The need for understanding the oft-quoted phrase 'Human Resource Development' by our educators is pointedly, though obliquely, suggested. But the real appeal of the work is probably its faithful depiction of growing years under pressure of conventional ambition. The paper attempts to throw some light on the aspects of post modernist thought process where the engineering youth tries to stand against the conventional system of imparting technical education and traditional way of evaluating the cognitive abilities of a student on the basis of CGPA.

**Key words:** Human Resource Development and CGPA

### Introduction:

Novel readership in India is on an all-time high in the present times. The circulation of novels is gradually increasing by leaps and bounds across the length and breadth of the country. The major credit of this remarkable inclination towards English language novels can be attributed to the popularity and prominence of the cult of campus novels. Although the popularity of campus novels dates back to the *Inscrutable Americans* by Anurag Mathur, it is the phenomenal success of Chetan Bhagat's debut novel, *Five Point Someone* that is credited with the revival of popular readership in India. The success of Chetan Bhagat's debut novel paved way for an era of popular English Literature dominated by campus-based novels. Soon afterwards, the campuses of some of the most renowned universities and colleges of India such as IITs, IIMs, JNU began being featured in the pages of the upcoming novels. Following the footsteps of Bhagat, several other aspirants donned the hats of popular fiction writers and unleashed their potential by creating campus-based stories. A few prominent works worthy of mention include 'Something of a MockTale' by Soma Das, 'Above Average' by Amitabha Bagchi, 'You Desire: A Journey Through IIM' by Harishdeep Jolly, 'The Funda of Mix-ology' by Mainak Dhar. These works targeted youth and college-goers and came up with fresh

subjects that revolved around the glitzy college life that included campus love-affairs, student politics, joys and sorrows of friendship, drug and booze sessions, examination phobias, placement dreams, monotony of classroom studies and likewise.

Chetan Bhagat is an Indian author, columnist, and speaker. Bhagat is the author of five bestselling novels, *Five Point Someone* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *2 States* (2009) & *Revolution 2020: Love, Corruption, Ambition* (2011). All five books have remained bestsellers since their release and two have inspired Bollywood films. Bhagat, an alumnus of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi and IIM Ahmedabad, is seen more as a youth icon than as an author. Time magazine named Chetan Bhagat as one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World. Chetan Bhagat, an investment banker turned into a prolific writer and through his writings he always focused on youth, career and issues based on national development. The Five-Point-Someone-fever managed to create a strong foothold among a generation of youngsters, which had almost abandoned interest in novels and books. A highly technocratic generation that could hardly spare a minute off their mobile phones, television sets and laptops was rendered awestruck by the mere simplicity, effortless emotional connectivity and easy-to-understand language of this IIT-based campus novel. Almost every teenage youngster in the country couldn't help voicing out his admiration for Ryan, Hari and Alok, the then heartthrobs of the contemporary popular Indian literature.

Chetan Bhagat's debut novel *Five Point Someone - What not to do at IIT!* is one of the highest selling English novels published in India and remained on the bestseller list since its release in 2004. The novel begins in an unique way where the author takes the liberty of sharing his opinion that the book is not a guide on how to get into IIT but it cite examples of how screwed up our college years can get if we don't think straight. The author is more concerned about what to do after getting admission into an IIT than the admission process itself. He points out that getting into IIT is not all that difficult as is made out to be. As he puts it, "If you can lock yourself in a room with books for two years and throw away the key, you can probably make it here."

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the development of internet has helped humans go beyond the limitations of national boundaries, time and geography. In the era of knowledge – based economy, where knowledge is transmitted in a rapid pace, those who have the knowledge are the winners. In the age of globalization the competition is very fierce and if one wants to prove his/her talents there should be a combination of multifarious potentialities in a student like technology, innovation, adventurous spirits and initiative as these are key factors to success. Talents can be nurtured through education and culture - related aspects. It is evident that education is the cradle of talented people and human resources; it is also the cornerstone of civilization. Chetan Bhagat through his novel *Five Point Someone* indirectly conveyed a serious message in a humorous tone that it is a wake up call for the elite technical institutes to replace the traditional teaching style of "I teach; you listen" with an approach that develops students' own abilities to collect, select, filter and assimilate information ; that inspires students' creativity by developing their life - long abilities; and that teaches students how to learn efficiently and actively. The emphasis should be placed on learning methods instead of knowledge accumulation. And we need to help students turn their knowledge into innovative ability and knowledge application

ability, both of which are much needed in profit creation. *'Five Point Someone'* in a mild tone points out that our technical education has become a life less system and needs reformation.

### **The setting of the novel :**

The novel is set in the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, in the period 1991 to 1995. It is about the adventures of three mechanical engineering students, Hari Kumar, Ryan Oberoi, and Alok Gupta, who fail to cope with the grading system of the IITs. Ryan is a bit smart and outspoken, whereas Alok and Hari are mildly cry babies.

Chetan Bhagat gives a glimpse of the glaring effects of ragging which is infact quite common in engineering colleges through this campus novel. The freshers of Indian Institute of Technology including the three students Ryan Oberoi, Alok Gupta and Hari Kumar were called by the seniors up on the balcony for ragging at midnight. Baku and other senior students instructed them "Off with your clothes." Such kind of embarassing incidents in the name of ragging creates a great psychological effect on the minds of students which may increase the suicidal attempts. Ryan, good looking and a hefty man revolted against the age old tradition of ragging and the senior – fresher discrimination. He has saved Hari and Alok from the coke bottles at the very first day and they became good friends for all the four years of IIT and then.

The novel also touches an important chord the helplessness of the Professors' to handle the brilliant students who can pose challenging questions based on their common sense. Prof.Dubey, Mechanical Engineering Department, mentions

*"The definition of a machine is simple. It is anything that reduces human effort. Anything. So, see the world around you and it is full of machines."* (p 9)

*A student, Ryan asks: "Sir, what about a gym machine, like a bench press or something? That doesn't reduce human effort. In fact, it increases it."*

(p 10)

This is a clarion call for the teaching fraternity to equip themselves to handle the cream students of institutions like IITs and encourage the students to think beyond the textbooks.

*'Five Point Someone'* focused the friendship of the prominent characters of the novel: Hari, Ryan and Alok. It is of this trio's screwing the grades at the big time because of their over attachment with each other to have a fun and detachment from studies. In college life romance is like a harbinger which conveys the message of love in the tender hearts. The romanticism evoked with the love affair of Hari and Neha, the daughter of Prof. Cherian is noteworthy. Hari gets ready to do anything for his lady love Neha. Hostel life is all about friends, alienation from families, smoking cigars, drinking vodka and listening to Pink Floyd. Commitment to relationship overrules the fresh admitted undergraduates to such an extent that they are ready to do anything for earning name and fame. Ryan Oberoi always prioritizes his friends more than his parents. Alok , a resident of Rohini Colony, Delhi is a

sincere guy but he too gets ready with Ryan and Hari in mischievous acts to overcome the shackles of poverty.

Ostensibly IITs are known as Centres of Excellence but the institute could not succeed to win laurels for the country by making significant technical contributions. The grading system to assess the students performance has not only overburdened the students but also spoiled their originality. The limitations of the IIT system was intricately brought out by the remarks of Ryan Oberoi in a get together party:

*“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.”*  
(p 34-35)

Competition is so intense in IITs which has duly created lot of pressures among the students and one of the professors’s made a remark 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”*

(p 11)

Hari Kumar, Alok Gupta and Ryan Oberoi joined Indian Institute of Technology with good All India Rankings but gave lot of preferences to fun and friends instead of focusing on majors, quizzes and assignments. The consequences were inevitable that they became underachievers. Their GPA (Grade Point Average) came to the bottom line.

The three underperformers (Ryan, Alok and Hari) invent C2D( Cooperate to dominate) formula to save time and plan to share the assignments for the sake of fun. According to them today’s exams, quizzes, GPA are useless. Ryan, Hari and Alok are all five pointers. They blame IIT system as sick and for it’s not contributing to nation building, and for churning the most intellectuals of the country. They say IIT do not care for their creativity and original thinking. To rebel against this established norm, they planned paper theft of Majors from Prof. Cherian’s room (at 9<sup>th</sup> flour of Insti-building) and were caught red handed. Finally a disciplinary action was taken against them and they were terminated for one semester. Alok jumped from Insti-roof but was fortunately saved with thirteen odd fractures. They have changed thereafter. All worked hard then more than fourteen hours a day, got extra grades and degrees in time.

It will be unjustifiable to say about some Professors' attitudes like Prof. Veera who appreciated the creativity of the students. He loved creativity of Ryan though he was a five pointer and gave him an opportunity as Research Assistant of him. He tried his level best to save the three students from termination. Prof. Veera is a symbol of humanity who came to meet Alok in the hospital with a box containing 'Kaju – burfi' and disclosed the news of Ryan's Lube – project approval. Prof. Veera has set an example before us that a teacher should encourage his/her students and motivate them a lot. A teacher has a missionary zeal and an angelic motive to recognize the latent talents both in achievers and underachievers and also treat them humanely.

The crux of the entire novel lies in the last part of the drama when Prof. Cherian, Head of the Engineering Department, addresses the convocation ceremony and congratulates the graduating students. During this moment he becomes quite emotional and narrates his own story.

*“Once upon a time there was a student in IIT. He was very bright, and this is true, his GPA was 10.00 after four years. He didn't have a lot of friends, as to keep such a high GPA, you only have so much time for friends.”*

*“This bright boy thought his classmates were less smart than him, were selfish and wanted to make the most money or go to the USA with minimum effort. And many of his classmates did go to work for multinationals and some went abroad. Some of them opened their own companies in the USA – mostly in computers and software.”*

(p 258)

He confesses that this bright student was Prof. Cherian. Prof. Cherian was a topper with 10.00 GPA score. He also had a dream that his son will get into IIT but whereas his son, Sameer wanted to become a lawyer. Sameer killed himself for not fulfilling his father's dreams of cracking an IIT exam.

Prof. Cherian admitted that he called the three underachievers Hari, Ryan and Alok as students with low GPAs. Neha, his daughter defied him but trusted Hari Kumar and disclosed Sameer's letter to him. He adds,

*“And that is when I realized that GPAs make a good student, but not a good person. We judge people here by their GPA. If you are a nine, you are the best. If you are a five, you are useless. I used to despise the low GPAs so much that when Ryan submitted a research proposal on lubricants, I judged it without even reading it. But these boys have something really promising. I saw the proposal the second time. I can tell you, any investor who invests in this will earn a rainbow.”*

(p 261)

Through this novel the writer intends to convey a social message that GPAs are not the ultimate factor to decide students' potentialities and creativity. To become a topper with 10.00 GPA is a great achievement undoubtedly but there is something more in life which is yet to be achieved i.e. commitment towards family, friends and our internal desires and goals. Hari, Ryan and Alok had a dream to join Indian Institute of Technology which they fulfilled by taking admission into it but they screwed up for not taking the grading system seriously. As a result it landed them down to many unforeseen troubles and they had to remain satisfied with the little achievement they could manage with the support and encouragement of some well wishers like Prof. Veera.

Chetan Bhagat wrote the novel 'Five Point Someone' in a mild note and in some areas it has given an alarming call for the pedagogues to come out of their traditional text book theories and meet up the challenges posed by the intelligent students. Another most striking feature is that the whole background is set in an engineering institution where an engineering student should be encouraged to present his/her concepts in a creative way so that he can have hands-on experience only then a country can advance both technically and economically. Each and every student is bestowed with unique qualities and CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average) should not be the criteria to ascertain their future prospects. One who is a five pointer in college may reach the pinnacle of his career and set an example for all those who are striving to achieve success. The trio suffers ridicule of the teachers as well as the classmates. However, they avow to reform the patriarchal system of education. They dislike the teaching method, which is as old as the college itself. The students are asked to mug the subjects in order to score good grades. Bhagat puts emphasis on the observational teaching and hints towards a post modern thought of incorporating a technique called 'learning by doing'. He believes this technique must help the students in getting rid of mugging. It must support them to apprehend the things in a natural way. The observational technique makes the students to observe the things minutely and find out solution in the objects. After all, if they fail to make it out, they are invited to discuss the same with the teachers and other classmates. At last, the student finds answer to his query. Nonetheless, such method is a good for nothing in the big sci-fi institute. Bhagat grieves for the sterile dogmatism of the education system. He finds the professors bigotry not to allow any prolific change in the system. Bhagat is straightforward in his approach to life. He listens to the voice of his soul, which he strongly believes in, is ever true. The man listening to the inner voice may suffer a big loss but finally emerges out victorious. For instance, all three friends suffer ignominy at college campus. All the teachers as well as the students take them for nuts, idiots and losers only because they under perform in the exams and notch five points something. But like others they are not muggers, they are freethinkers, true lovers of life, harbingers of innovative ideas, icons of liberty and precursors of the youth-calling-approach. They never lose confidence, work harder on the lube project and consequently their project is approved and they succeed to achieve big fame and name.

#### Conclusion:

Thus, the novel finally puts lot of emphasis on oft-quoted phrase 'Human Resource Development' which is one of the objectives of technical institutes. The technical institutes should develop the technical skills, key competencies and enhance the organisational performance of an individual. A resourceful and skilled employee can enliven the achievement of an organisation where he or she is a part and for these the technical institutes should motivate the budding technocrats to think beyond the textbooks.

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