

FIVE POINT SOMEONE DELUSION AND DISCOVERY AS FOUND IN ‘Five Point Someone- What not to do at IIT!’ BY CHETAN BHAGAT

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Abstract

‘Five Point Someone- What not to do at IIT!’ (2004) is an admirable novel written by Chetan Bhagat. As an upcoming writer and serious social commentator, his novels remained to be one of the bestselling novels in India. Bhagat relates the story of his novels to his life. His experiences at IIT New Delhi are the inspiration for his debut novel *‘Five Point Someone’*, the title reference to the struggle of five pointers in IIT. ‘The struggles to succeed are part of what is making India a vibrant, fast changing economy and society,’ Mr.Bhagat said in an interview, but competition has its limits he added. It has a well-constructed plot with captivated incidents taken from the life incidents happening in and around us. Though he doesn’t apply or create any theory he designs his stories from the slice of life incidents and presents as they are. As a result they look realistic, funny, humorous and sometimes very complex beyond human remedy.

Key words: illusion, delusion, changing economy and society etc.

The novel deals with the fears and insecurities of the students especially students in one of the country’s top institutions. The narrator takes up the issues of three students who have joined in IIT Delhi-a prestigious engineering college for pursuing their studies. They desired to fit into the institution. Yet their projected visions, wishes and hopes all shattered due to various reasons. As Tagore viewed ‘Illusion is the first appearance of the Truth’ these three students very soon realized that they have been chasing the world of illusion quite away from the reality where only academic scores are counted and students are pushed to perform and achieve all academic goals against all odds. The students

were set targets to achieve without considering the students plight. Those who fail to get the target percentage are considered to be failures. The system adopted by the management is not ready neither to understand the real situation of the students nor set right the unpleasant prevailing situation. As a result the IIT institutions slowly getting the status of factories where children are treated daily coolies carrying the heavy loads in factories. The writer has the capacity to narrate the life like incidents and successfully drives the theme home. Chetan Bhagat himself is the victim of this type of system and therefore very systematically and effectively narrates the troublesome atmosphere in IIT Delhi. He has graduated from this college and so his identity as an IIT ian is well exhibited in this novel. He reveals the dark and gloomy facts exist in the system through lighthearted manner and funny moments. The author has tried to bring into limelight the major issues related to the youth his prime notion with regards to education.

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 characters in his novel 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 name and fame.

From its beginning in the eighteenth century to the post-millennial era, Indian English Literature has travelled a long journey. As a true dynamic body of literature, it has always been in a state of flux adapting itself to the changing environs. The change has become more rapid after the 1990s. Excessive market play and the position of English as a *Lingua Franca*, make modern Indian English Literature receive wide recognition in the World Literature. Global economic prominence has inspired a fast-changing literary scene. Contemporary Indian English writers, especially novelists, have a variety of themes to experiment with - historical, thrillers, science fiction, chick lit, lad lit, crick lit, campus fiction, children's fiction, etc., to name only a few. The 1990s is an important decade in the history of Indian English Literature since it saw the emergence of many new and young voices. During this period, the boundaries of Indian English Literature were also expanded. In short, Indian English Literature became new both in form and content.

“The economic and social transformations of the 1990s and beyond have fuelled new kinds of job opportunities for an educated, English-speaking group of mostly urban Indians.....Talented urban Indians with the appropriate technical training can today enter the IT industry and realistically hope to advance far enough in their firms to travel far and wide”(Radhakrishnan, 1932, 223).

In mid-2000s India, it was evident that life for many Indians had been changing rapidly, especially Indian youth. *Young India* is a considerable part of the identity of post-millennial India. Thanks to globalization, urbanization, privatization, off-shoring, outsourcing, and so on. Indian youth has diverse opportunities in the economic world. It gets reflected in Indian English fiction. Contemporary Indian English explores these new lives of New India, of Call Centres, IT Companies and Corporate living. The narratives are about English speaking, hi-fi young urban Indians. The themes of new Indian fiction in English take a new turn in this post-millennial era. If *chick lit* is popular fiction by, for and about young women (or teens), then *lad lit* can be explained as a fictional genre with books written by men and focussing on twenty something male characters, particularly about those who are self-absorbed, non-conformist and afraid of commitment. (Koruth) *Tween-lit* (comprising both chick lit and lad lit), is a relatively recent sensation in India. Some of the common themes discussed in it are: *Bildungsroman*, relationships, travel, competition with work place, liberal use of “Hinglish”, sexual fantasies, drug addiction, heartbreaks, self-discovery and so on.

A dominant motif of New India is India’s urban centres, predominantly Mumbai, New Delhi, Bangalore, and Chennai - the country’s IT hubs. It paves way for a new kind of fiction depicting the lives of, mostly urban, protagonists who are ambitious, brand conscious, on a par with the impact of globalization. “The characters often find themselves at crossroads with modern day India, family’s expectations, the challenges of juggling career and a relationship as well as finding a life partner on their own initiative” (Vergheese, 1975, 96). The caprice of New India is often fixed in a sense of economic growth and prosperity. India is on its way to become one of the top most leaders of world economy. It owes part of this growth to its dexterity in BPO activity. “BPO activity ranges from call centres, film dubbing, business process analysis, academic journal proofing and editing, to IT support for some of the world’s biggest brands and corporations” (Ibid-98). One of the biggest success stories of post-millennial Indian English novelists is Chetan Bhagat, an investment banker turned one of the best-selling novelists of Indian English. He is an Indian author, a well known figure not only in India but also in abroad. He writes about the challenges being faced by the youth. Films were made based on this book

on Bollywood and Tollywood which gave a huge punch in the theatre. The language he used is original; the dialogues are fresh, youthful and eye-catching. The company of a rich girl student with another boy student is one such example. “We got into the car. I saw her sit carefully in the driver’s seat, as if she was running the starship Enterprise or something. Then she placed her bare foot on the accelerator. Now maybe it is because I am an engineer, but that was hot. Bare female skin on metal is enormously sexy. There was dark red nail polish on her toenails, with one or two toes encircled in weird squiggly silver ringlets that only girls can justify wearing. I just wanted to keep looking at her feet but she started to talk” (29). This kind of casual, easy-flowing style makes for easy reading. The novel highlights the pressure of studies of students in IIT and explores how they are able to balance their family problems without disturbing their human relations, love and friendship - the basic concept for humanity intricate the readers to move along with the story. The title of the novel *Five point someone* exhibits the theme concept of the story. Five point is the theme of the novel which eventually points out someone named- Hari Kumar, Ryan Oberai, and Alok Gupta the students in IIT who become friends and they together ironically prone to this dubious distinction. The novel reminiscent readers back to their student’s life - past is felt from the present.

The paper is an attempt to realistic presentation of India in the novel. Neither he eulogizes India nor does he dispraise it. He exposes the follies of the Indian youth in order to uplift India and the Indian youth. His concern for Indian youth and India is real and his ‘*Five Point Someone*’ stands as a testimony to it. ‘*Five Point Someone*’ is a story about three friends in the IIT who are unable to cope with its grade system. 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. The novel is designed in twenty seven chapters with subtitles. Each chapter has its unique quality and significance furnishes a lot of information about the theme, setting and situations connected to it. The three main characters namely Hari Kumar, Ryan Oberai and Alok Gupta hail from three different parts of Northern India, with different background and with diverse aspirations towards life. Hari is one of the important characters as well main protagonists of the story as it is evident from the prologue.

The author created a hospital situation where Alok Gupta was seriously injured. At that point of time Hari and Ryan showed care and concern for him and ready to render any kind of help within their reach. Hari the main protagonist of the novel at that time got an idea of writing a book on their puzzled and crazy life. At the same time, the novelist

candidly confesses that his book is not a guide for IIT students on how to live through in college but it is a fine and perfect example on how one can screw up in college if he or she doesn't think straight. "I had never been inside an ambulance before. It was kind of creepy. Like a hospital was suddenly asked to pack up and move. Instruments, catheters, drips and a medicine box surrounded two beds. There was hardly any space for me and Ryan to stand even as Alok got to sprawl out. I guess with thirteen fractures you kind of deserve a bed. The sheets were originally white, which was hard to tell now as Alok's blood covered every square inch of them. Alok lay there unrecognizable, his eyeballs rolled up and his tongue collapsed outside his mouth like an old man without dentures. Four front teeth gone, the doctor later told us. His limbs were motionless, just like his father's right side, the right knee bent in a way that would make you think Alok was boneless. He was still, and if I had to bet my money, I'd have said he was dead. 'If Alok makes it through this, I will write a book about our crazy days. I really will', I swore. It is the kind of absurd promise you make to yourself when you are seriously messed up in the head and you haven't slept for fifty hours straight ..." (i). This absurd promise results in realistic story of three engineering students who joined the Technology at Delhi. These Mechanical Engineering students used to live in adjacent rooms on the second floor of the Kumaon Hostel. Since they come from mixed background they are not only new to college but also exposed to new environment of grades, percentages, test points and so on.

Chetan Bhagat gives a glimpse of the glaring effects of ragging which is in fact quite common in engineering colleges through this campus novel. "As per tradition, seniors rounded us up on the balcony for ragging at midnight. I was still rubbing my eyes as the three of us stood to attention and three seniors faced us. A senior named Anurag leaned against a wall. Another senior, to my nervous eye, 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, he spoke little and was busy providing background for the boss, Baku, a lungi-clad human toothpick, and just as smelly is my guess" (2). The freshers of Indian Institute of Technology 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 embarrassing 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. Ryan expressed his sense of anger by smashing two cokes bottles and shouted at Anurag. Finally Anurag settled the ragging situation and told them it was just for fun. On seeing their bodies they got surprise of their

physic where as “Well, I have to start somewhere and what better than the day I joined the Indian Institute of Technology and met Ryan and Alok for the first time; we had adjacent rooms on the second floor of the Kumaon hostel” (126). Ryan saved Hari and Alok from them by his heroics attitude of protest against the seniors which made them good hostilities neighbours. These people are slowly exposed to college environment and academic curriculum. Prof. Dubey used to conduct the Mechanical Engineering Department. He taught them pro techniques such as welding, mechanizing, casting, bending and shaping. He also instructed them that the machines would reduce human effort.

Ryan bold, practical and courageous outlook questioned Prof.Dubey about the Gym machines which increase the human effort. “Sir, what about a Gym machine, like a bench press or something? Ryan interrupted the bonhomie. That doesn’t reduce human effort. In fact, it increases it” (10). Ryan inquisitive nature of questioning created a tensed situation in the class room, when Prof.Dubey’s find it hard to give reasons rather to end up in scolding Ryan and suppressing his intellectual ability in him. “What are you trying to do? the professor asked tight lipped as he came close to us again, “Are you saying that I am wrong?” watch it son. In my class, just watch it, was all Prof Dubey said as he moved to the front..... “Okay, enough fun. None, let us focus on Manpro, “he said as he rubbed off the word ‘Machine’ from the blackboard and the six underlines below it.....” (11).He advised the students not to miss the classes and asked them to be ready for surprise quiz. The writer makes an alarming call to the teachers to wipe out with the traditional text book theories and meet up the challenges posed by the intelligent students. The 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.

Bhagat through his protagonist Hari emphasized the fact that life in the institution is not a bed of roses. They understood that the college atmosphere is filled with strict rules and regulations. They are in the clutches of agony, sorrow and suffering between the seniors and the professors. While handling and understanding this kind of situations, Ryan seem to be bit smart and outspoken where as Alok and Hari to be placid. As the novel progresses we come to know much about the student’s life style in the college. All the students were busy with lectures, tutorials and labs. Its hectic schedule is beyond the reach for the students to cope up with the system. They could be seen swamping in and around the library for preparing reports and assignments and were as busy as the honey bees. Every student had to attempt forty two tests per semester. They feel monotonous and mechanical and sometimes they feel as if they were in the jail.

“Life in IIT College is not as smooth as we usually imagine or think. As distant hills are smooth the life in this field is insipid. THEY SAY TIME FLIES WHEN YOU ARE HAVING FUN IN THE first semester alone, with six courses, four of them with practical classes, time dragged so slow and comatose, fun was conspicuous by its absence. Every day, from eight to five, we were locked in the eight-storey insti-building with lectures, tutorials and labs. The next few hours of the evening were spent in the library or in our rooms as we prepared reports and finished assignments. And this did not even include the tests! Each subject had two minor tests, one major and three surprise quizzes; seven tests for six courses meant for-two tests per semester, mathematically speaking. Luckily, the professors spared us surprise quizzes in the first month, citing ragging season and the settling-in period of course; but the ragging season ended soon and it meant a quiz could happen any time. In every class we had to look out for instructor’s subtle hints about a possible quiz in the next class” (12). The detailed account of the happenings of the life in IIT proves time and again that it is not their bread. Of course, the deeds of ragging helped them to come closer and understand each other. But the conditions in which Hari, Ryan and Alok the sample characters didn’t fit into the shoes of this environment.

Ryan is a smart, confident, impressive and knowledgeable boy who lives for the moment and he can be called as the hero of the novel. His parents had handicraft business in hill town Mussoorie. Ryan parents were so busy in their business that he couldn’t share his feelings with his materialistic parents. Ryan stayed in boarding school in Mussoorie, lack of love and affection of parents left him as a dubious natured boy. He makes his entire life with studies, sports and friends. Thus friends are everything for him and he does anything for them. Alok’s family is poor, his mother is a biology teacher and his father is bed ridden, and half of her salary regularly went for his medical treatment. Alok’s mother makes all efforts to keep the wolf out of the door. His sister was studying in the college and attained marriageable age but no money or beauty to support her with. Alok secured the highest percentage marks amongst three in applied mechanic test. So, the only ambition of Alok is to pull his family out from poverty.

It is evident that this particular novel didn’t carry the happenings of the situation in coherent order. Yet, the novel caters the attention of the readers to understand the problematic life in IIT institutions. In one of the chapters “Bare foot on Metal” the author discussed about students enjoyment and also introduced a new character Neha Professor’s daughter. The three characters enjoyed themselves in food, new sci-fi-movies and sometimes spent their time for assignment. Apart

from their intimacy, close understanding of one another, the novelist discussed about their academic performance, their personal problems, their short comings and so on. They became slowly mutual and concern to one another.

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