

The Other Side of IITs: A Few Aspects of Chetan Bhagat's 'Five Point Someone'

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Abstract

Chetan bhagat's *Five Point Someone: What Not to Do at IIT* is a fictional creation, following his own experience of studentship at IIT, which reveals the pain of academic exclusion relating to the marks-based grading system, CGPA. He sincerely depicts the plight of three students through the characters, Hari Kumar, Ryan Oberoi, and Alok Gupta, who got low CGPA. This novel contains an informal style of storytelling, having tragedy, funny, and touching elements. The plot follows a few occasionally dark twists through the families of the protagonists, and most of the story takes place inside the IIT campus. Bhagat explores the issues and challenges of students in a standard institution such as this background. This novel reflects some aspects of exclusion on the campus of IIT. He unearthed the other side of IITs that emphasized indirectly about academic reforms in India. The story begins with the ragging menace at the IIT campus. The unfair part of IIT is disclosed by the author, that the institution suppresses talent, individual spirit, and extracts the best years of one's life from the nation's brightest minds. Therefore, this work of fiction follows the modern and postmodern trends of the novel. This novel depicts contemporary society and engages readers in a narrative which emphasizes the complexity of life in globalized India.

Keywords: *Academic exclusion; grading system; IIT campus; academic reforms; ragging menace; talent; individual spirit; modern and post-modern trends; globalized India.*

Introduction

The present English-language novels, written by Indian authors, gained global acclaim, depicting the nation's cultural aspects, historical depth, and contemporary issues and challenges. These novels are mirrors of the nation and journey through vibrant landscapes, traditional systems, and Indian identity. These works ensure an enriching experience, amalgamizing the exotic with the global and the traditional ways, having the innovative style. One of the prominent Indian English novelists of the 21st century is Chetan Bhagat, who started novel writing with 'Five Point Something: What Not to Do at IIT', published in 2004.

Chetan Bhagat says, "This is a work of fiction, but fiction needs real inspiration. I love them all so much that I could literally write a book on them." Further he says, "It is not a guide on how to live through college." Bhagat represents distinct literary tradition and style, cultivating contemporary issues, cultural dynamics, and youth aspiration, following the early times of globalization. This paper aimed at explaining narrative technique, thematic choice, academic issues and challenges relating to dimension of exclusion in his novel, Five point someone: what not to do at iit, as literature. Indian popular fiction of the times of globalization has highlighted a dynamic change in recent times, depicting new literary landscape and new issues and challenges of globalized Indian society.

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This emerged as an influence at cultural power in India, following its accessibility, popular style, and reliability. This work of popular fiction reflects the contemporary society, containing a variety of theme styles and expressions, providing readers engaging into narrative which emphasize the complexity of life in globalized India.

This work of Bhagat explores the issues and challenges, relationships, and family issues of students in a standard institution such as IIT. Chetan Bhagat has made significant contribution to contemporary Indian English popular fiction and achieved global recognition for his literary works. The Five point someone: What not to do at IIT, written by him, explains various aspects of exclusion in IITs. He disclosed the other side of IITs, which needed academic reforms. The novel also reflected the system of IIT, the hostel life, hectic academic activities of students of IIT campus, which teach not to do at IIT.

Critical Insight of Features of Exclusion in Plot

This fiction depicts specially the problems of the students who get low CGPA. One of the problems of IIT, like other colleges, was ragging, which was narrated by the author following the experience of his friends and himself. This novel starts with this problem reflected in the first chapter, 'Bare Beginnings'. The senior student called Baku's harsh behaviour, through ragging activity, has been expressed through the dialogues.

In the chapter, he narrated ragging evil through the dominating nature of seniors, following an experience. Following the ragging menace in the IIT campus, the author exposed the issue through authentic conversation. The character Baku says, "you bloody refresh, dozing eh? Rascals, who will give an introduction?" Further he orders, "You bastards, off with your clothes." Therefore, all the four members—all the four members Alok Gupta, Ryan Oberoi, Harikumar—and removed their clothes and stood naked. Then he said, "Look at them, mothers fed them until they are ready to explore, little forex babies" (Chetan Bhagat, p-4). Thus Buku giggles at juniors Hari, Alok, and Ryan.

At last Ryan rebelled against Baku. But Anurag (senior) cools him and says that all it was for funny. This time in the campus is called as season in the IIT campus, which reveals the failure of administration of IIT and government in the then times of early 90's. Ryan's heroic deeds were enough to make these three students all bond faster than Fevicol. Besides, they were the same hostel neighbors and the same department—the Mechanical Engineering department. Among his friends, Ryan rebelled against Baku's order, saves Alok and Hari. The character Ryan reflects a rebellion and progressive thinker in the group of trinity. Ryan says,

"This system of relative grading and over burdening 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" (35).

All the teachers are very serious towards their duty and maintaining standards of the institution. The first class taken by Prof. Dubey, who is going to teach ManPro (Manufacturing Process). Dubey says, "that is it for today. Best of luck once again for your stay here. Remember, as your head of dept, Prof. Cherain 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 novel reflects the culture of IIT society, where the students are busy with heavy academic activity. Therefore, the author depicts this as the failure part of our IITs. In the story of the novel, Ryan says with his friends, "you know guys, this whole IIT system is sick." Further he questions, "Common, tell one, how many great engineers or scientist have come out of IIT?" Thus, the author exposed the social reality of our IIT, which are being praised by many as standard institution of India. Again, Ryon says

"See, it is not always the money. So IITs cannot do space research but we surely can cheaper products? and frankly money is just excuse. It there is value the industry will pay for research even at IIT". (52)

The character Ryan exposes the facts of our IIT system. Despite IITs are creating many CEOs and entrepreneurs, but not promoting original thought among its students and scholars. The author's description of the events follows wonderful dialogues among the friends. But Hari says to his girlfriend,

“Once you get a GPA in IIT, everyone has an opinion about you, even it’s a fashion design student” (73)

The author explains the system based on grading system at IIT decodes the future of students. All the characters in the novel get five point something grades. Therefore, all these three students, except Ryon, were afraid of academic exclusion, which leads to social exclusion, following unemployment in future. Alok’s family belongs to a poor family, having economic problems that the family hopes his help through his career. Alok says,

“And my sister needs to be married, everyone is connecting on me, and you guys don’t understand. Ryan wants to play cheers, see TV, enjoy his years. I hate enjoyment.” (82)

Alok comes from a poor family, which frightened his future following his GPA. Ryan compared his classmates, who got more CGPA, such as nine point something, as muggers. Alok requested Venkat, who got 9 GPA, for help in his assignments, but Venkat denied his help to maintain his GPA. This will be exclusive behaviorism towards the students of five point something CGPA. The students who achieved lower grades (GPA) will be treated as the outcaste in the campus, which humiliates them. Hence, Ryan, Hari, and Alok will sit at last bench, out of sight of the teacher. All this reflects social exclusion in the campus of IIT depicted in this novel by the author, that the institution suppresses talent, individual spirit, and extracts the best years of one life from the nation’s brightest minds. Therefore, Ryan says,

“And this IIT system is nothing but a mice race. It is not a rat race, mind you, as rats sound somewhat shrewd and clever. So it is not about that. It is about mindlessly running a race for four years, in every class, every assignment, and every test. It is a race where prof. judge you every ten steps, with a GPA stamped on you every semester. Professors who have no idea what science and learning are about. Yes, that is what I think of the professors. I mean, what have IITs given to this country? Name one invention in the last three decades.” (88)

Chetan Bhagat is one of the most popular contemporary Indian authors. The author applies a first-person narrative, in that the character Hari tells the story from his perspective. The novel follows an all-round view, reflecting a universal shape. Bhagat followed plain, simple, and casual English in view of more readers, which led to the best-selling novel. *Five Point Someone* began a new change in Indian English literature, in that it brought Indian fiction down from the higher-level language which could not be understood by the common reader. The story of the novel cultivates the first degree of realism, which thrills the reader. It also depicts various episodes of humanity, idiocy, cruelty, humour, wit, and sarcasm. However, the novel follows an impressive storyline.

Conclusion

This paper explores the other side of the IITs, which are being considered the standard academic centers of the nation or the institutions of national importance, on the basis of this work, *Five Point Someone: What Not to Do at IIT*. In fact, these institutions are encouraging brain-drain, which is a loss for the Indian indigenous industry. Moreover, the tough entrance examination pattern created many private coaching centers, which favour the students from the rich class. These many private coaching centers led to heavy pressure on students’ bodies and the financial state of their families. It is unfortunate that the quality of teaching and research is losing its standard in recent times. According to the report (2021) by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), the recently established IITs are not able to meet targets for faculty, research, student recruitment, student retention, and infrastructure. Unfortunately, in recent times, the number of students’ suicides has demanded a change in the functioning of IITs. Moreover, the students who are taking coaching are clearing the IIT-JEE entrance examination, whereas the talented poor students are not able to enter the institution. The author deals with some gravity in his theme as well and argues for changing the idea of a good student who gains more marks. According to the author, academic institutions must encourage students’ innovative ideas towards research, but not rely solely on the marks-based pattern.

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