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Youth Strives For Life and Career: A Case Study Of Chetan Bhagat's Novel "*Five Point Someone*"

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Abstract

Youth consists of the major chunk of the country's population, say about 55%. They are the future of the country. They have to build their careers by studying various courses in colleges and institutes. They know that they have to study hard in order to achieve their goals, but it is hard for them to lose fun in life during the days of the studies. Therefore they may resort to find some alternative ways of studies to find some time for having fun simultaneously. If the alternative ways end up in disasters they have to succumb to the existing strict system of education. This sort of youth life sandwiched between fun and career is excellently narrated by Chetan Bhagat in his debut novel *Five Point Someone*. The story takes place in the lives of three best friends – Hari, Ryan and Alok – in the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. Though they strived hard for four years in the institute facing many hurdles to score more grades than five point someone they made up better careers having fun too. The story indicates the need of reviving the burdensome education system to allow the youth to flourish more, not at the cost of their pleasure interests.

Key words: Burdensome education system, Pressure, Alternative ways for studies, Youth fun culture, Professors attitudes.

Seen more as the voice of a generation than just an author, this IIT / IIM-A graduate Chetan Bhagat is making India read like never before. *International Herald Tribune* says "... Bhagat has touched a nerve with young Indian readers and acquired almost cult status". Whereas, *New York Times* affirmed that Chetan Bhagat is "The biggest-selling English language novelist in India's history". *Timesofindia.com* reasoned that "With the pace of an

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autobiographical account, the characters are simple people with whom one can identify with almost instantaneously”. And, *The Hindu* remarked that “Chetan is also responsible for a seismic shift in Indian writing in English”.

Such a unique novelist Chetan Bhagat made his debut in fiction field in 2004 with the novel *Five Point Someone – What not to do at IIT!*. It almost instantly drew the attention of readers of English fiction. *Hindustantimes.com* says:

“It’s easy to forget that *Five Point Someone* has been penned by a first time author... a compelling read...”

India Today reviewed it as “... a well-constructed book with great characters and a captivating plot. Definitely on the right side of five-point something on the 10-point scale”.

Outlook magazine rightly stated, “*Five Point Someone* could achieve cult status”. And, Times of India addressed Chetan Bhagat “a rockstar of Indian publishing.”

Not so late after its hit into market it got translated into a major Bollywood film¹. That shows its reception by the novel lovers and movie viewers.

The novel narrates the struggles of young students at IIT, Delhi in balancing between the burdensome education system and their pleasure loving life. The author divided the whole novel into 27 chapters and presented the hurdles faced by the three friends who wanted not to lose their fun life too.

The first chapter “Bare Beginnings” begins with the entry of three friends – Hari Kumar, Alok Gupta and Ryan Oberoi – into the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. They get the sought after seat in the IIT after toiling two years hard work, literally.

Unbearable Ragging

The three friends had bright background in their schooling. They excelled in arts and sports too. However, almost immediately, as soon as they enter the IIT-Delhi the students start facing several problems one after another. Even before the juniors start attending classes the ragging season starts and the seniors – Baku (boss), Anurag (smoker) and another demon-like senior – ragged the juniors during the midnight. Their happiness evaporated. The seniors made the juniors naked, all fours and Baku brought empty Coke bottles and said “Take a wild guess” as he clanged the bottles together, making suggestive gestures. Alok and Hari went close to tears and the thought of suicide, but Ryan grabbed the two bottles and stamped hard on Baku’s feet the seniors fled. Anurag pacified him saying, “Ryan, take it easy man. This is just fun”.

¹ Notes on Chetan Bhagat’s Novels.

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Though the juniors had seen each other ‘bare’ at their primary meet the troika had ‘beginnings’ at the IIT as best friends thereafter.

Burdensome course

The first class in the IIT was taken by Professor Dubey to the seventy students. He advised the students to

“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.”²

The introductory advise of the Prof itself sounded more like warning to the students, instead of the promise to rely upon the teaching faculty.

The second chapter ‘Terminator’ starts with explaining how burdensome the workload for the students in the IIT is... say, seven tests for each of the six courses meant forty two tests per semester. The students-expected fun was conspicuous by its absence.

Since the course was received to be boring by the three friends – Alok, Hari and Ryan – they initially felt suffered at the life at the IIT campus. Therefore they preferred going to watch a movie “Terminator”. Though they had good time at the Priya – the cinema theatre – it was blasting for them just by reaching their hostel Kumaon since they would have surprise quiz – strong rumour of one in ApMech (Applied Mechanics).

They could not do well in the surprise quiz the next day. In the results, out of 20 Alok scored 7, Hari-5 and Ryan-3. Prof Sen wrote the customary summary scores on the black board as the following:

Average: 11/20

High: 17/20

Low: 3/20

Feeling disgusted at their marks, two of the three friends – Alok and Hari – regretted going to watch the movie and Hari said,

“We should have a limit on the fun factor. You can’t screw with the system too much, it comes back to screw you – the quiz is an example.”³

Hari words make it clear that the students had to pay for having some fun.

² Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. P. 11.

³ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. P. 23.

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Love in between

The third chapter “Barefoot on Metal” narrates how friendship has taken place in between Hari and Neha, the only daughter of Prof Cherian, head of mechanical engineering department. One morning Hari on the advice of Ryan went for a jog to reduce his weight but he met with a mild accident by Neha learning driving Maruti car. thereafter they turned to be friends. Though Hari initially hesitated to become friend with Neha for she is the daughter of Prof Cherian, she gave him confidence by saying, “don’t be tense, he is the prof, not me. So relax.”⁴

Criticizing the system

The fourth chapter “Line Drawing” tells about the things happening in the lives of troika – Ryan getting a new scooter from his parents, Alok’s father falling ill and the troika going to help him, consequently failing their tests scoring only 2/20 and Ryan criticizing the IIT system in the following words.

“I mean this is supposed to be the best college in India, the best technology institute for a country of 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 bright kids to work in multinationals. I mean look at MIT in the USA.”⁵

Under pressure Hari suggested to go out to Sasi’s – roadside food center – for paranthas skipping the mess dinner since it isn’t found to be appetizing. There too Ryan criticized the system saying...

“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.”⁶

At Sasi’s they planned for the weekend to be spent at Connaught Place where they can have cheap dhabha with the best butter chicken and a good Hindi movie and may check out some girls in the market. They enjoyed their weekend at Connaught Place as planned.

There Ryan told his friends why he doesn’t love his parents.

⁴ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. P. 30.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 34.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 35.

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“I have been in boarding school when I was six. Of course, like every kid I hated it and cried when they left me... Just kind of outgrew them...I don't love them but I love my friends”⁷

The above paras made it clear that the students criticized the IIT system since it is burdensome. They try to evade it but it is inevitable to follow it. If the students miss parental love it becomes more horrible and then they may find alternative ways of reducing the burdensome education for having fun in life.

Alternative studies for fun

There at Connaught's Place Ryan proposed an alternative theory to study less to have fun:

“Anyway, my point is, these are our best years. So either we can mug ourselves to death, or tell the system to stuff it? ... I mean...let us draw a line. We can study two-three hours a day, but do other stuff, say sports, have you guys ever played squash? Or taken part in events – debates, scrabble and stuff, an odd movie or something sometimes. We can do so much at the insti...Let's just try, just one semester. Isn't it fair? A kind of decentralization of education”⁸

The other two friends – Alok and Hari agreed and followed the same.

Coming back from Connaught's Place Hari ran into Neha at the campus bookstore but she acted as if she didn't recognize him. As he was leaving for his hostel, Neha tapped behind his shoulder and explained that she had to behave so in the bookstore because the shopkeeper knew her and her dad for the last ten years and her dad was strict about her talking to boys. Hari was convinced and then they met again at the Cadbury's ice-cream parlor. There they became friends and shared each other about the things going on in their lives.

In the fifth chapter “Make Notes not War” the story narrator Hari tells us of the glory days of the short-lived ‘draw-the-line’ policy. He says,

“As per plan we studied for three exact hours every day, mostly late unto night, which meant we had the evenings free for fun”⁹.

Then he goes to describe how the three friends tried to play squash and could not do much with it, then they played chess, spent free time riding Ryan's scooter, caught every new movie, visited every tourist destination in Delhi, did everything, went everywhere.

⁷ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. P. 39.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 40.

⁹ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. P. 49.

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But when sometimes assignments took longer, leaving no time for revision Alok suggested increasing the limit of time to read.

Then came the American TV news channel CNN which is in colour unlike earlier black and white channels. The friends participated in the debate on the US – Iraq war, though Hari thought it was impossible to take sides in the Gulf war. He thinks,

“IIT cared about America. Most of our foreign aid came from rich American firms and quite a large percentage of our alumni went on scholarship there and for jobs, constituting a chunk of the brain drain. So, unsurprisingly our heart bled for the US”.¹⁰

“The aid to IIT was fine, but how can you justify bombing kids?” questioned Hari. Luckily, the war ended five days before the majors (semester final exams). America won big-time. Ryan did not eat for a day or so. The above paras show that during the period of ‘Glory Days’ the friends had fun time, love life and had debate over the international affairs like US-Iraq war. All these are important in life and necessary for society.

Youth interests vs system

However, Hari said that they had to study thereafter. In the five days before the exams the three friends dropped the three hour rule and studied until three in the morning every day. In the practical tests that followed Ryan in the group did well but because of the low performance of Hari Prof Goyal scribbled a C+ on their group experiment sheet and tossed it at them. As the majors started next day Hari had even postponed his next rendezvous date with Neha until after exams.

After the exams the friends enjoyed crossword puzzles, cryptic clues, rhyme words and anagrams, though their second semester had begun. Hari met Neha in the same ice cream parlour and fixed dates on 11th of every month when her parents visit the place of death of her brother.

In the results of the majors (semester final exams) the three friends scored lower grades than the average 6.5: Hari 5.46, Ryan 5.01 and Alok 5.88. Though all of them were five pointers Ryan proposed to celebrate the occasion since it was expected result only. Alok felt sad at the results, quarreled with Ryan and left for Venkat who studied 9 hours a day in addition to the regular classes.

In pressure Hari met Neha. Though she wasn't happy with Hari's grade she kissed his cheeks 5 times for he scored 5 points. Hari wished he had got higher GPA if only to get more

¹⁰ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. P. 52.

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of those ice-creamy kisses. Thereafter Hari and Neha started going to movies and Neha had grown comfortable with holding Hari's hand.

Ryan and Hari started drinking vodka on the roof of the 9th storied building of the insti (institute). Prof Veera who taught FluMech (Fluid Mechanics) was helpful to the students including Ryan and Hari by encouraging their talents. Alok had to sacrifice his hereditary interest in art. His father fell sick, yet his roommate and Venkat did not allow him to visit his father. Though they were not in touch with each other for an year Ryan helped Alok's father since he had scooter to visit him. Alok re-joined the old group of friends Ryan and Hari. Ryan celebrated this occasion by throwing a party to several of the wing mates in the hostel. However he criticized the system as a mice race:

“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 profs judge you every ten steps, with a GPA stamped on you every semester. Profs who have no idea what science and learning are about. Yes, that is what I think of the profs. I mean, what have IITs given to this country? Name one invention in the last three decades.”¹¹

To beat the unfair system Ryan proposes an unfair system to his best friends calling it C2D – Cooperate to Dominate. He read out to Alok and Hari at Sasi's (roadside hotel) how the IIT system is unfair:

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 you 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.

So, the only way to take on the unfair system is through unfair means – which is Cooperate to Dominate or C2D. The key contents are:

- 1. All assignments to be shared – one person will do each assignment by turn. The others will simply copy it. Saves time, saves duplication of effort.*
- 2. We will divide up the course responsibilities. For instance, if there are six courses in the semester, we will take care of only two each. One must attend all classes that one is responsible for, but can skip all others. (note: Ryan gets all Prof*

¹¹ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. P. 101.

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Veera courses) In each class you attend for your course – take copious notes. The rest will merely copy them.

3. We share lab experiment observations.

4. Our friendship is above GPAs. With all the new spare time, we live our lives to the fullest.

5. We combine our hostel rooms into one living unit – one common bedroom, one study room and one fun party room.

6. We split the cost of vodka regardless of how many drinks each person has had.¹²

As signed by Ryan the rest two also signed the sheet with their blood.

With the help of Ryan Hari made a special gift for Neha and met her. The gift was a lipstick box. Neha was impressed by the gift from Hari. The next time Hari and Neha met on insti roof and had vodka at 8:30 pm. While they were on the roof, Ryan came and spoke to Neha suggesting her to be liberal with Hari to satisfy his male expectations.

Neha birthday fell on December 1st. Hari and Ryan planned it to be special – Hari being the first one to wish her at 12:00 am. So the troika went to her house at night. They climbed the roof of her house silently and the Ryan and Alok slid Hari on the ledge from where he got into Neha's room. To Neha's surprise, Hari wished her when the clock struck 12:00 o' clock.

Prof Vohra didn't encourage Ryan's modified screw-jack drawing as it was not as per the one he instructed, where as Prof Veera called Ryan to talk about his innovative lubricant assignment.

In the mean time, Alok invited Hari over to his house for lunch. There Hari found that Alok's family was having good food which might be costly. Hari thought that had they saved their money instead of spending on expensive food, they could meet their problems such as medicine for Alok's paralyzed father.

In III year Prof Cherian had taken the course of Indem – Industrial Engineering and Management. Ryan didn't like Prof Cherian's classes for he did not see the strength in his project proposal. But Hari wanted to impress the Prof by scoring A grade in his subject so as to get access to his beautiful daughter Neha.

Neha took Hari to a temple where her brother Samir met with the train accident and lost his life. There they kissed and Neha told Hari that she could introduce him to her father as his course topper.

¹² Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. pp. 107-108.

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So Hari worked hard for scoring better grades in Prof Cherian's course. But when Hari feared to answer to his viva questions, Ryan suggested him to drink vodka and attend it in order to overcome his frigidity. As suggested by Ryan, Hari drank vodka and attempted his viva. But he was caught by Prof Cherian who hence fired at him.

Yet, since Hari wanted to score A grade in Prof Cherian's course Ryan proposed Operation Pendulum to steal the question paper from Prof Cherian's office. For that the troika needed duplicate keys from the bunch of Neha's keys. The job had to be done by Hari. In the pretext of meeting Neha Hari went to her house. Neha confided in Hari and showed him her brother's suicide note. Thereafter they had sex and Neha expressed her dichotomy over it:

"Thanks. I liked it too. I guess I am a bad girl now... it's so liberating... yet so sad... I have heard cigarettes are great after sex. Please get me one too".¹³

Since both of them wanted to smoke, Hari asked Neha for her car keys and in the pretext of buying cigarettes he drove her car to Jia Sarai (in Delhi) and got duplicate keys made. But he was caught red-handed by Prof Cherian as he was about to enter Neha Cherian's house. Prof Cherian warned Hari to stay away from Neha and he could ruin him if he would continue the same.

All of a sudden, Alok received a call from his house saying that his father was not eating. On the same day the troika planned to steal the question paper for the major exam. The troika entered into Prof Cherian's office using the duplicate keys. While Ryan was about to re-seal the gunny bag after picking up one question paper, Alok phoned his house using Prof Cherian's office phone. As the call alarmed the security guards of the institute, they came and caught the troika red-handed. For the offence they had to face the interrogation of the Disco - Disciplinary Committee – the next night. The troika was suspended for one semester. Alok jumped off the insti building out of shame. He was rushed to AIIMS, the biggest hospital in Delhi. Fortunately, Alok survived his big fall and returned to his hostel. Prof Veera visited him with a box of kaju barfi and advised the troika to resubmit the proposal of lube project contemplating to treat their suspension period as research period in order to impress Prof Cherian. They readily agreed and worked hard for four months and resubmitted their project to Prof Veera.

During the final semester, the troika sat in the front rows instead of the back. Prof Saxena who was teaching RAC – Refrigeration and Air Conditioning – warned the troika that the Disco might spoil their entire degree if they didn't study hard. They started taking the lectures seriously and penned down notes as the profs were teaching. Hari could not find enough time to spend with Neha. He said,

¹³ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. p. 169.

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“I met Neha a couple of weeks into the final semester. For the first time, I had to scramble to make it for a date.”¹⁴

Hari told Neha that they were spending 15 hours a day for studying and not working C2D – Cooperate to Dominate policy. Hari’s words read,

“It is about knowledge. And making the most of the system, even if it has flaws.”¹⁵

Neha gave Samir’s suicide note to Hari for keeping it safe in his custody. While they were chit chatting, Prof Cherian caught them red-handed and scolded Hari yet again but by seeing Samir’s letter Prof Cherian broke down into tears and Neha took him home. Hari criticizes parents – Prof Cherian and Ryan’s parents – if they love their children or pressurize them to kill themselves.

While the troika was in class, they were called to Prof Cherian’s chambers where Dean Shastri and Prof Cherian agreed to treat their absence period as the period of research work with Prof Veera. Though it was a relief, Hari was still unhappy as they fell short of 5 credits. Then Prof Cherian asked Hari to stay back and sanctioned a project work with Prof Veera and got them laboratory credits. He advised Hari to prepare for job interviews but not to behave in the interviews like he did in his viva.

Thereafter, the troika worked for 17 hours a day by reducing drinking. They attended for campus interviews conducted by Technosoft Software. Alok and Hari got the jobs. When Ryan was grief-stricken as he didn’t get through the interview, Prof Veera offered him to be his RA – Research Assistant. Hari concluded,

“So, we’re not just five-point somethings anymore, we are five-point somebodies.”¹⁶

But when Kamal of Technosoft Software asked Hari in the interview whether he liked IIT, he thought to say that he hated every living moment of it but replied,

“I met my best friends here, and hopefully this place will get me a job.”¹⁷

The above paras clearly show that though the youth is of the oscillating opinion on the burdensome education at the cost of their fun life, finally they need to agree that the educational institutions give them career and life too.

¹⁴ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. p. 236.

¹⁵ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. p. 237.

¹⁶ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. p. 253.

¹⁷ Chetan Bhagat. 2010 (2004). *Five Point Someone*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. p. 251.

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Conclusions

Youth knows the importance of education as the means of life, but during the period of studies also the students want to live life – love, food, entertainments, etc. When the burden of studies is found to be more at the cost of life they try to find alternatives to get through education for the sake of having fun. If they are caught while implementing alternative ways of studies they have to succumb to the existing system of education though it burdensome. Therefore the author Chetan Bhagat indicated through Hari’s dream how the education system should be – giving scope to students to have some fun also.

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