

IITIANS: THE ELITE YOUTH IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S *FIVE POINT SOMEONE*

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Youth is a distinct and important period in the life cycle which marks the peak of the physical and mental growth of the individual. It is not surprising that youth is not only cherished, but that there is often a yearning in the later years to return to this phase of one's life cycle. "Psychologically speaking, this period has often been viewed as one of crisis which every individual has to face in various degrees." (Kakar, 56)

Defining youth is always a challenge. Life stages are defined as much by psychological and biological processes as by the social standards that mark age, such as symbolic rites, life events, laws, standards and social roles. The definition of youth has always been somewhat ambiguous, as the boundaries from childhood to adolescence or from adolescence to adulthood depend on a multitude of such factors. These standards change according to macro (socio-economic conditions, rules of law or policy), meso (group or community values), and micro-social contexts (family and personal values).

Eisenstadt (1972) has defined period of youth as the period of transition from childhood to full adult status of full membership in the society. In this period the individual is no longer a child (especially from the physical and sexual point of view) but is ready to undertake many attributes of an adult and to fulfill adult roles. But he is not fully acknowledged as an adult, a full member of the society. Rather he is being 'prepared' or is preparing himself for such adulthood. (Indian Youth: A Profile. 20)

There are many things that make Chetan Bhagat a wonderful writer who targets the Indian youth. He has always been famous amongst youth.

The novel *Five Point Someone* is highly gripping and shows what is not to be done at the IIT. The novel gets its title from the GPA system used in IIT to rank students. Students who get five points are considered average and don't usually get the choice of job offers. The novel centers primarily around three close friends at IIT, Delhi who are totally different from all other students in the institute.

Of the three leading characters Hari, who is not that attractive but smart enough guy to befriend the Head of the Department's daughter, narrates the story. Ryan Oberoi on the other hand is the handsome dude full of creativity, wealth, style and ideas. He hates the grading system at the IIT and has his own views on life. He also wants to discover something that will be path

breaking and he feels that the IIT system doesn't allow it. He feels that there is a life beyond books, grades and studies.

Alok is a fatso and glutton and positively irritating. But his character speaks of the troubles that the majority of lower middle class families in India face at a point of time. His father is crippled due to an accident, his mother supports the family and he has a sister to be married off. Sentimental and emotional, he is at the IIT, only because he can get a good job and support his family. But this book is not about family trials but more about student life, hazards of these three insincere students who want to study less and achieve more on the academic grounds.

Bhagat's intelligent characterization of the three boys as below average guys, among the crème of knowledge envisages the grim side of the IIT education system which is lauded by the elite group of people. The disdain of the three protagonists could be the experiences of several students who somehow passed out of several IITs. Bhagat's characterization of the three protagonists, Ryan, Alok and Hari fit the character of the present day youth.

The three guys have totally different personalities and they come from totally different backgrounds. But like all things magical about college life, a strong friendship develops between them. Ryan's heroic activities to save Alok and Hari from ragging on the first day of their life at the IIT made the three of them to bond faster to become close friends. Ryan, Hari and Alok stay together, gossip together, have fun and live their life to the full, as they live for today. They took life as it came. It was their perspective towards life which made it very interesting. Togetherness is their strength. Their friendship and how they make it together through the highs and lows of their four grueling years at the IIT dominate the book.

Today's youth are more technology oriented. That is why the demand for studying technical courses like engineering has increased. The number of technology oriented institutions has also increased. The IIT is the country's most prestigious leading engineering college and a graduate from IIT is on the whole expected to be brilliant and academically excellent.

For over four decades, Indian high school students considered admission into the portals of one of the IITs as their ultimate passport to success in life. With the same expectations and dreams Ryan, Hari and Alok also joined IIT, Delhi. Like every new student who enters the IIT, they too had a bundle of dreams and a vision about the life they were going to live. But everything collapses when they receive their grades. Despite their intelligence and their skill they always remained at the bottom of the class with their poor grades between five and six points. It is from here that the title is derived - *Five Point Someone*.

The three friends develop a great love for their friends. Especially for Ryan friends are everything. He was left at a boarding school from his childhood where he got everything he needed. He did well in studies, got noticed in sports, learnt how to have fun and live well and made his best friends. So he didn't miss his parents anymore. It is from his friends he learnt what love is.

Heck, no. I mean, for me my friends are everything, they are my family.

Mom and Dad are nice, but I don't love them the way I love my friends. I mean, I don't love them, but I love my friends (FPS, 39).

The three friends come together because they realize that they cannot fulfill the unrealistic expectations of people to prove that they are brilliant, and therefore plan to enjoy life as it comes. They develop their own way of living by forming their own rules. They had their short-lived '*draw-the-line*' policy. As per their plan, they studied for three exact hours every day, mostly late unto night which meant they had their evenings free for fun.

Ryan hates the IIT system terribly. He feels that the relative grading system is overburdening the students and it kills the best fun years of life. He also feels that there is no room for original thought and creativity. So he considers it unfair. He also thinks that the only way to take on the unfair system is through unfair means, which is ‘Cooperate to Dominate’ or C2D theory. And this is the plan that Ryan, Hari and Alok agree to for the rest of their stay at the IIT. The key tenets of this theory 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 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 (FPS, 108).

Young people are more fun loving and they like to enjoy a lot. They want to work less and enjoy more. The same attitude is found with the guys in the novel. They plan to study for just three hours a day apart from the classes, and the rest of the time they just enjoy. They consider it as decentralization of education.

Ryan having a scooter makes it easy for them to hang out at various places to have fun. They go to fast food places, cinemas, ice cream parlours and to play squash, chess, indoor cricket and also indulge in scrabble. They like to eat trendy food items like noodles, French fries, toast, soup etc. they even enjoy smoking grass, drinking vodka, listening to Pink Floyd on the institution roof. They enjoyed movies at Priya at night which is a completely different environment from the quiet campus. It is easy for them to go to Priya on Ryan’s scooter. It is considered illegal for three people to ride together on a single scooter but they would anyway do that.

Ryan was elated, and he drove us back to Kumaon at speeds that made the traffic police dizzy. No one stopped us, or rather, we didn’t stop. I covered the number plate with my foot, so that cops could not take it down (FPS, 41).

Not only the main characters in the novel dream about their future, but also other students like Surdy, Vaibhav and Anurag express their dream of wanting to be in The United States of America, owning a business and inventing a new computer etc. respectively. These friends not only spend their fun time by enjoying, they also spend it usefully by discussing current affairs like the Gulf war.

People would usually celebrate festivals or functions. But these young people celebrate every moment or event of their life. They even celebrate drawing a line for their study time as three hours. They do not allow any kind of care to imprison them. They are ready to sacrifice anything if only it would enable them enjoy life to the fullest. Nothing seems important to them than having fun. They see quality in living their lives they prefer and choose.

There is also Neha, a young girl in the novel, who represents the young women in India. Hari falls in love with Neha, who accidentally happens to be the daughter of Professor Cherian,

the Head of the Mechanical department. She belongs to the new era of liberated women and does not mind having sex with her boyfriend, even when her father is averse to her even talking to boys.

Hari feels that there are two kinds of pretty girls in Delhi. One is the modern type girls and the other is traditional type of girls. According to him, the modern type girls cut their hair short, wear jeans or skirts and tiny earrings, but the traditional type of girls wear salwar-kameez, multi-coloured bindi and large earrings. Among these two kinds of girls Neha was more the traditional type of girl, though it was not forced upon her.

As the novel is set up against the IIT background, the scenarios depicted are much similar to other engineering colleges in India and also similar to the situations young students face during their college life. The lingo used in the book is the same as used by the students in engineering colleges – “screw”, “nuts”, “fuck”, etc.

Usually young students develop a fear during practical examinations and also feel more uncomfortable during the viva-voce examination. They consider it a dreadful and grilling thing in their college life. In the novel, Hari experiences the same fear during the viva-voce examinations and hates these examinations, whereas Ryan feels more excited to attend these practical examinations than the theory examinations.

I hated practical tests. Most of all, I dreaded the viva-voce. I don't know if I told you about my condition; it strikes me whenever someone looks me in the eye and asks me a question. My body freezes, sweat beads cover me brow to groin, and I lose my sense of voice (FPS, 53-54).

Even though Hari knows the answer right, he fails to answer in the viva-voce because of his fear. At the time of the viva Hari finds his life miserable. In order to overcome this fear, he even goes to the extent of attending the viva after having vodka.

Ryan is crazy and does not care about anything in life. He advises Hari to have vodka before attending the viva-voce examination as he feels that vodka would make one less inhibited and help the person talk more.

“Vodka: the solution to all problems.”

“What? Vodka? I am talking about a viva Ryan, I am not organizing a party.” “I know. But you know how vodka makes one less inhibited and makes you talk more? Who knows, a couple of swigs and it may work for you.” “You are crazy. The viva is at eleven in the morning. It is hardly the time to drink...” (FPS, 150)

But in the case of Hari, even vodka did not help him overcome his fear, and everything ends up only in a mess making Hari to score only a zero in the viva.

Ryan considers the IIT system sick and hates it as the system judges a students' intelligence only based on their GPA. Ryan loses a special internship project which Prof. Bhatia promises to offer him, but after knowing Ryan's GPA, he refuses to give the project to Ryan.

...I gave him some ideas on how one could design suspension bridge and he got all excited. He told me to make a scale drawing and submit it, said he would give me a special internship project. Then he asked me my name and found out my GPA. So then he calls me and says to forget about the drawing and internship. Can you believe that scum? (FPS, 78).

Apart from the dull, strict and old-fashioned professors like Cherian, Bhatia etc., who are more concerned about the GPA, some professors like Prof. Veera are different and adored by

students. The three friends, Ryan, Hari and Alok never miss the fluid mechanics class in the fourth semester and the reason is Prof. Veera.

Prof. Veera is twenty years younger than other professors. No more than thirty, he comes dressed in jeans and T-shirts, which bears his US University logos. He holds five degrees from top Universities - MIT, Cornell, Princeton etc. He carries his CD player with him, and after class, he plugs it into his ears before he leaves the classroom. Prof. Veera makes it clear that he likes students who can think creatively and put the principles taught in the class into practice.

Unlike other Profs, he did not stick to the first row. In fact, he scavenged at the back. ‘Okay, I am not going to ask the studious kids all the questions. I want to ask the cool dudes at the back’ (FPS, 84).

Ryan likes Prof. Veera’s approach towards the five pointers in the class. He made the five-pointer Ryan to contribute to the class by asking him to write the navier-stokes equation on the board. He also appreciates Ryan for his paper on the impact of lubricant efficiency on scooter fuel consumption. Because of his liking for Prof. Veera, Ryan builds a special relationship with this professor.

Ryan is more creative and is more interested in his lube project. Even when he does not have enough time to finish his class assignments, he has time to do what he wants. He dares to use his scooter engine to do his experiment. He combined different types of oils to check mileage. He dedicates all his time towards the project and works in the fluid mechanics lab even in the midnight. Even when he gives his scooter to Alok and Hari, he insists that they note down the mileage without fail. Ryan is more focussed on what he does.

Generally youth have a liking for money. In the novel Alok has a great liking for money due to his family situation. He wants to land in a good job in order to earn a lot. Prosperity for him is the most important mark of success.

Hari wants to get an A grade in his major paper to impress Prof. Cherian, as he is his girl friend’s father. He works hard to attain it, but he literally fails in his viva. So in order to get more marks in the theory examination the three friends plan to steal the major question paper from Prof. Cherian’s office. They also name their plan to steal the question paper as “Operation Pendulum.” Hari gets Prof. Cherian’s office key from his house in the pretext of meeting Neha and prepares a duplicate key for it and replaces Prof. Cherian’s key without allowing any scope for suspicion. They execute all their plans perfectly but are finally caught by the guards because of Alok’s phone call to his house from Prof. Cherian’s office. They are suspended and their lives seem to be in ruins. But finally they complete their course with the help of Prof. Veera.

Nowadays, students are mostly forced by their parents to score high and get into the rigid IIT system. They feel that their life is secured when they join the IIT, as they can earn a lot after completing their course at the IIT. Due to this stress and pressure, many students who fail to enter the IIT, commit suicide. In the novel, this is expressed through the character of Sameer, Prof. Cherian’s son, who fails to get into the IIT. Sameer kills himself by running on to the railway track because of his inability to enter into an IIT.

Young people mostly tag with their friends often. In the novel Hari tags along with his friends Ryan and Alok. He has a problem speaking out his vibes. He blindly accepts and does whatever Ryan says.

Chetan has vividly brought out life in the IIT through this novel. Even the most serious scenes there are presented with undercurrents of hilarity and sarcasm. The descriptions of college life, bunking, roof top booze parties, grading etc. have been done well and it is sure to

make the readers indulge in a nostalgic trip. The characters are wonderfully developed, and all the youth can identify with Hari, Alok and Ryan.

There are students who feel sick when it comes to studies and their performance in college. There are also students who want to make a career out of their studies and their knowledge. There are professors who are strict to their students but there are also professors who support the students to extract the good out of them. His characters are simple, they grow with time, commit folly, act like fools but finally succeed in their life.

Chetan speaks on behalf of the present day youth. He satirizes rather strongly the rigid, straitjacketed education systems that seems to favour uniformity and frown on differences and deviations even when they are creative. The novel emphasizes that the youth should be given the freedom to choose which will allow to grow and achieve targets in tune with their passion. The novel may in fact be called an exhortation to the elders by a writer who emphatically identifies with the youth of today.

“The problems of youth are manifested in the form of depression, running away from home, involvement with bad peer group, alcoholism, drug addiction, suicidal tendency and involvement in different types of crimes.” (Renuka, 343) There is a need now for the society to pay attention and understand the youth of today. It would not be right if the elders simply take an attitude of moral superiority and put the blame squarely on the youth. Instead, attempts should be made to go to the roots of the problems manifested in today’s youth.

His novels do not have much psychological impact. There are no hidden ideas, they are only simple and plain stories. They are more related to the common man especially youth and neatly reflect what we experience or do every day in our life. His characters are just a reflections of characters we may come across in our own life and experience.

Chetan Bhagat’s success provides valuable insight into the needs and aspirations of a large readership whose engagement with literature is still at the grassroots level. This type of writing isn’t about opening the readers mind to new worlds and ideas, which has traditionally been one of the functions of good literature; it’s about reinforcing everything you already know about the world and your place in it, seeking comfort in the fact that there are others who have experienced the same things you have. Many of Bhagat’s readers are youngsters who have studied at IIT or worked in a call center, which are things he’s written about. Many of his other readers are people who aspire towards those experiences. (Jai Arjun)

Bhagat may not strive to present an ideal for readers to follow. But his readers are enabled to enjoy a reflective space in which they can think about and comprehend their condition. This is further enhanced by his characters who are effective approximations of real life ones.

There is a need to create increasing opportunities for youth to develop their personality and their fictional capability and thus make them economically productive and socially useful. If children are the future of a nation, its youth are its present resource. The dynamic role of youth in the growth and prosperity of any society is extremely vital. A constructive and active work of the youth lends a nation its integrity and character.

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