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THE THEME OF REALISM IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S FIVE POINT SOMEONE –  
WHAT NOT TO DO AT IIT

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**Abstract**

Chetan Bhagat has been acclaimed as one of the best-selling novelists of the Indian fiction. He has written about modern Indian youths and their need in his novels. He says that novels are entertainment tools through which one can express his views and opinions about society and the youth. In the modern India human behavior changed into lust, greed, hypocrisy, and hatred and these are the major themes of Bhagat's novels. His novels are incomplete without realistic touch. The background in which Chetan Bhagat has written novels is predominantly of the society in the post globalization era. His novels are based on day-to-day happenings in the Indian society so ultimately he has written the problems of Indian society. He has handled the modern situation in proper manner. One cannot deny the possibility of family conflicts in which Bhagat has described. His characters easily get involved in friendship and love and suffer a lot. He takes upon the sensitive issues which concern to the society in his novels ranging from romantic love story to a shocking condition of the Indian multiculturalism. Chetan Bhagat describes here about the Indian education system, culture and trend. This paper aims to study

the realistic views of Chetan Bhagat about Indian education system and Indian culture which he wants to tell Indian readers.

**Keywords** – Multiculturalism, monotony in Indian education, dowry system, caste system

**Introduction**

Chetan Bhagat is an Indian author, columnist, and speaker. He is the author of eight blockbuster novels, *Five Point Someone-What not to do at IIT* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *2 States* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), *Half Girlfriend* (2014), *One Indian Girl* (2016) and *The Girl In Room 105* (2018) and two non-fictions, *What Young India Wants* (2012) and *Making India Awesome* (2015). All these books have best-seller since their release and some bollywood films like *3 Idiots*, *Hello*, *Kai Po Che*, *2 States* and *Half Girlfriend* took inspiration from these novels. Chetan Bhagat is seen more as a youth icon than just an author. This IIT and

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IIM-A graduate is making India read like never before.

Realism in conventional sense presents stories, characters and background that are similar to anything that is found in the contemporary world. This requires incidents to have happened in the past and events are normally organized in a chronological sequence. The desire to paint contemporary day-to-day life entails and requires social details. In realistic writing, the author writes according to objective point of view. He gives place to his own feelings, explanation and emotions. He tries to give actual happening from the society. The writers of this movement painted the everyday situations and conflicts in an accurate manner. Realistic movement began in England in 18<sup>th</sup> century by Richardson, Fielding and Smollett. Introduction of realism into fiction proved to be a boon to the upcoming writers.

Indian literature has got worldwide popularity with the publication of *Midnight Children* by Salman Rushdie during the eighth decade of twentieth century. Writing skill of Indian writers was praised all over the world. During this period, many socially realistic novels were written. They include Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Ruth Pravar Jhabwalla's *To who she will* and *Heat and Dust*, Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins*. Social conditions and sex life are predominantly described here. People's life in metropolitan cities and their involvement in

sex are depicted in Shobha de's *Socialite Evenings*. Other work of Indian writers, which contributed in the field of realism, are Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, Rani Dharker's *The Virgin Syndrome*, Meena Alexander's *Nampally House*. The characters in fiction take birth in the writer's imagination, but they imitate uniqueness and reality in actual life. Chetan Bhagat is well known for his outstanding ability to join artistically social, political and personal events and incidents. Therefore, characters in Chetan Bhagat's novels represent the actual men and women in real life. We find in his writing a fusion of emotional and fictional autobiography. In a realistic novel, one sees characters that appear real and the reader visualizes so many things through the character's eyes. Chetan Bhagat portrays the life of men and women in totality. It is not just a piece of life, but also the whole life itself. He depicts character's life through its entire fortune, social, emotional, moral, intellectual aspects.

Chetan Bhagat's first novel *Five Point Someone- What not to do at IIT* is about ragging and education at India's top most college, IIT Delhi, student's attitude towards research work and GPA score and teacher's stickiness to old and traditional teaching pattern. Bhagat is an alumnus of IIT Delhi. He lived the life of student at one of the most prestigious colleges in India. The novel is set up during the ninth decade of twentieth century. The theme of the novel is boring education system and love

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affair of the protagonist Hari with Neha, the daughter of Professor Cherian, Head of the Mechanical Engineering Department. Main characters in the novel are Harikumar, the protagonist of the novel, Alok, a boy from a poor family and Ryan, a handsome and slim boy from a rich family, Neha, the daughter of Professor Cherian, Professor Veera and Professor Cherian. The novel depicts the monotonous education system and lack of encouragement by teachers for research work at IIT and the protagonist's love affair with Neha. The title of the novel *Five Point Someone*, suggests the scores of three friends who do not cope with the education system at IIT.

The trios, in the novel, fight against the old teaching method. They represent the modern students who want to do something new. The blend of tradition and modernity is observed in the novel. Details of education system at IIT are given here. Woman character like Neha is against her father's nature who wants his only son to admit in the prestigious college for engineering. She is a modern girl who does not want to live under the pressure of her father. The author here points out the real condition of IIT. He tells everything about the life of students from ragging to GPA. Students run behind score to get a job in foreign countries. Bhagat tells the drawbacks of Indian education system and wants to suggest our government and students that in education, creativity and interest are more important than marks. Hari, Alok and Ryan take admission to

Mechanical Engineering at IIT Delhi and become friends. They were topper in their respective school but here they struggle to score good marks, as they do not mug the given notes. The novel opens with the statement:

Before I really begin this book, let me first tell you what this book is not. It is not guide on how to live through college. On the contrary, it is probably an example of how screwed up your college years can get if you don't think straight.(FPS, 01)

The novel does not suggest the way to get admission in IIT colleges and live happily there but it tells that one will surely get failed if he does not follow the rules of the institution. In the beginning of the novel, the author tells us the real things like ragging of the junior students. During the ninth decade of twentieth century, ragging was on full swing. On the first day of admission in IIT Delhi, these friends have to face the ragging. Senior students, Baku and Anurag say to juniors:

Off your clothes ...  
Another demon grinned at us, slapping his bare stomach every few seconds. There seemed to be more choice so we surrendered every item

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of our clothing, shivering at unholy glee in baku's face as he walked by each of us, checking us out and grinning. Nakedness made the difference between our bodies more stark as Alok and me drew figures on the floor with deeply embarrassed toes, trying to be casual about our twisted balloon figures. (FPS, 03)

Among these friends, Ryan being bold opposes to do what seniors wanted. He becomes furious and does what juniors had not done earlier:

As Baku put the bottles in position, Ryan abandoned his pin-up pose and jumped. Catching him unaware, he grabbed the two bottles and stamped hard on Baku's feet. Baku released his hands and the bottles were with Ryan, James Bond style. (FPS, 05)

Indian government made the anti-ragging act for higher education in 1991 to check the ragging in colleges all over the India. In spite of the act, ragging was going on and many students committed suicide. Again, on 7 June 2009 UGC interfered and restricted the student from doing it. (ugc.gov.in)

Ryan represents those students who are interested in research work and want to do something new rather than following the old and traditional teaching methods. In IIT, students are taught how to score maximum marks by rote learning. Professor Dubey wants students to watch simply on blackboard and warns them not to ask him any question during the class. He tells students the definition of Machine as, "Anything that reduces human efforts"(FPS, 11). Ryan asks a question, "Sir what about gym machine, like a bench press or something. That doesn't reduce human efforts. In fact, it increases it"(FPS, 11). Professors at IIT inhibit the talent of students, want to stick to the traditional notes and writing and curb their potential of innovative techniques. Ryan is handsome and clever. He does not want to follow the traditional rules of teaching-learning process. He criticizes education system at IIT:

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

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stamped on you every semester. Prof who have no idea what science and learning are about. Yes, that is what I think of the Profs. I mean, what has IITs given to this country? Name one invention in the last three decades. (FPS, 101)

Professor Cherian teaches to third year students. Ryan does not like to face him, as he hates him most. Professor Cherian was a bright student when he was at IIT. His score was ten GPA. The author here gives him a touch of traditional thinker, who motivates students for rote learning instead of inspiring for creative learning. He also represents modern Indian father, who wants his only son to become an engineer from India's most prestigious college like IIT, irrespective of son's desire. His son wants to become a lawyer but to fulfill his father's wish, he prepares for the entrance exam of IIT. He fails in the first, second and third attempt and ends his life by committing suicide. In the words of Professor Cherian:

My son wanted to be a lawyer, hated maths. I hated him for hating maths. I pushed him just like I pushed students in my class. He failed to get in the first time and I made life hell for him. He

failed the second time and I made his life an even bigger hell. Then he failed to get in the third time. And this time, he killed himself. (FPS, 259)

Professor Cherian tells the students the real situations at India's top most colleges where students are treated according to their GPA score. In IIT, many Professors follow the traditional rules and methods and do not take interest in creative teaching process. They give stress on mugging and want students to tell them what they had given them in the form of notes. Professor Cherian, in his speech, tells the truth what teachers do in big colleges.

He says:

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. (FPS, 261)

Hari is the main protagonist of the novel. He is a blind follower of his friend Ryan

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and wants to be like him. He is average in study. Talking about Hari, Alok says:

Ryan is infectious and Hari is a perfect example of this infection. If Ryan wants something, Hari gives it to him. So if Ryan does not want to study Hari will close his books. If Ryan thinks GPAs are not important, then Hari will stop caring about them. (FPS, 74)

Ryan represents the upper class family students in the IIT. He also represents those students who are interested in creative thinking and innovative work but he does not get a chance to show his creativity. Chetan Bhagat gives a realistic touch to his character. Ryan does not like the teaching methods of Professors at IIT. Professor Vohra gives students homework on screw jack. He does not like Ryan's modified screw jack. He says, "Don't act smart in my class" (FPS, 118). Ryan calls IIT students the mice, as they blindly follow the teachers without using their own intelligence. Students spend day and night for mugging the notes to score maximum GPA, in order to get a job in foreign countries. Ryan for his fluid mechanism research takes out the engine of his scooter and makes research on it. Professor Veera, young and dynamic, represents those Indian Professors who encourage their students for new learning and innovation. He likes Ryan's research

attitude and suggests him to prepare a research proposal on lubricant. Professor Cherian rejects the proposal without reading it. However, Chetan Bhagat tells the real theme and message of the novel through the speech of Professor Cherian on the day of convocation. Professor Cherian says:

Anyway, this is my message to all you students as you find your future. One, believe in yourself and don't let a GPA, performance review or promotion in job defines you ... I, tell you what I was a useless father. It is great to get into IIT, but it is not the end of the world if you don't. All of you should be proud to have the IIT tag, but never ever judge anyone who is not from this institute—that alone can define the greatness of this institute. (FPS, 261)

Ryan dislikes the grading system at IIT. He realizes that IIT is the only place for muggers; no individual voice is heard with respect if it has something new and original to offer. He says regretfully:

This system of relative grading is overburdening the students. I mean it kills the best fun years of your life.

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But it kills something else too. Where is the room for original thought? Where is the time for creativity? It is not fair. (FPS, 98)

The author wants to tell the teacher to identify the students not only from their score on the mark sheet but from their all round performance. He gives a message to the students that they should not run behind the marks. Besides, they should not decry those students who are from other colleges. In India, in the past there were many social evils like *Sati* practice, child marriage, dowry system etc. rooted in the society and were strongly followed by the people. With passing of time, Indian social reformers with the help of British government banned such cruel traditions but dowry system is still continuing in Indian society. Many girls from poor families due to lack of dowry remain unmarried. Alok's sister is one of them. Groom, who comes to see her, demands car in a dowry. Alok is very optimistic about getting a good job after the completion of his graduation from IIT. He wants to fulfill all the urgent needs of his family. Hari describes the pitiful condition of Alok's family in the following words:

He was kind of poor, I mean not world bank ads type starving poor or anything, but his home had the barest minimum one would need for existence.

There was light, but no lampshade, there was a living room, but no couches, there was a TV, but not a colour one. The living room was where lived Alok's father, entertaining himself with one of the two TV channels. (FPS, 33)

Professor Veera identifies Ryan's talent and encourages him to do research work on the efficiency of lubricant. He unlike other Professors does not ask questions only to those students who sit in the front row. He is the one who helps these friends and saves them from being punished for stealing the question paper from the office of the Professor Cherian. On seeing Ryan, being captured for stealing, he says:

You Ryan Oberoi, I thought was one of the most brilliant students we had ever had. Your lube project was the best work I have seen come out of student. I don't care about your grades at all. But were stupid enough to risk your future for a stupid letter on your grade sheet. (FPS, 198)

Most of the parents in India force their children to study hard and not to keep any contact with other. Professor Cherian is one of them. Bhagat gives a

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message through the character of Professor Cherian how parents restrict their wards from mixing in the society. Professor Cherian does not want his daughter to have friends and for that, he warns her. Once she meets Hari at bookstore but she does not talk to him. She says to Hari, "My dad is really strict about me talking to boys and he will totally flip out if he hears I am friend with a student." (FPS, 43)

Bhagat also presents the love story of Hari and Neha. Neha is the daughter of Professor Cherian to whom Hari dreads. In the morning, Neha, while learning to drive a car hits Hari when he goes for jogging. From that day, both of them fall in love. She shares her thoughts with him. She indirectly helps Hari and his friends by giving a chance to make a duplicate key of her father's office to steal the question paper. She hates her father and does not want to give him the letter of Samir, Neha's elder brother. Bhagat gives a contrast in the character of Hari who fears Neha's father and wants to marry her. Professor Cherian forcibly takes her to foreign country.

The novelist's main concern seems to depict the reality in India's top most colleges and parent-wards relations in the modern Indian society. Chetan Bhagat, being a student of IIT, tells us the educational environment of the college. The way he describes the lack of interest for research work among the students seems real. His experience at IIT gives his writing a realistic approach.

Talking about the book Chetan Bhagat says:

The book is set in the IIT Delhi campus. Locations, places and venues are all very real. And the prices for *paranthas* are also too- though at one point in time in the past.(Bhagat)

Bhagat at IIT has seen the students from poor and middle class families and here he writes about their expectations. The writer is also from the middle class family so he knows about the society and culture. The lower middle class family in the novel is shown through the family of Alok. He looks at IIT as a job-giving factory. Bhagat writes the expectations of lower middle class family from higher education department. He writes in *The Times of India* about the change that may occur in India:

The cycle perpetuates itself and we continue to create a second rate society of followers rather than change embracing leaders. I have hope that the current generation will break this norm and start questioning the great Indian way. I have hope that the current HRD minister

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will acknowledge this problem and do something. I have hope that Indians will start questioning any politician they meet on what they are doing about education system at every place possible.(timesofindia.com)

**Conclusion:**

Thus, Chetan Bhagat in his novel, *Five Point Someone-What not to do at IIT* has tried to present the realistic situations being faced by Indian students in their day-to-day student life. He has used the language spoken by the students during their college life. In the novel the author has given stress on realistic things like family conflict, divorce, dowry, importance to grade. Ryan, Alok, Hari and Neha speak like real people not like merely bookish characters. Bhagat is successful in bringing realistic look to the novel by describing the present situation of Indian higher education and Indian culture. New readers who don't know the literary language can also enjoy the writing style of Chetan Bhagat. Bhagat has succeeded here

in describing all the things in beautiful manner. He has also succeeded in keeping the readers stick to novel up to at the end.

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