‘Five Point Someone: What Not to do at I.I.T.s’:
A Portrayal of Imperfections and Realities of the System.

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Chetan Bhagat is an Indian English writer. He is the author of the best sellers – *Five Point Someone: What Not to do at IIT, One Night @ the Call Center, The Three Mistakes of My Life, Revolution: Twenty-Twenty, Two States and Half Girlfriend*. He is also scriptwriter for ‘Hello’, the Bollywood movie based on ‘One Night @ the Call Center’. He studied at Army Public School, New Delhi and graduated from IIT Delhi and completed his M.B.A. from IIM, Ahmedabad.

His first book *Five Point Someone* is a novel about three boys who join IIT Delhi and try to cope with the notoriously heavy workload of the institute. The book has continued to stay on India Today Bestseller List ever since its publication. It won him the Society’s Young Achiever’s Award in 2004 and the Publisher’s Award in 2005.

Indian Institutes of Technologies (IITs) are our premier engineering institutions surrounded by an aura of hype. Chetan Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone* is an attempt to portray IITtians as they are. Graduates from these prestigious technology universities get good jobs and make great money but Chetan poses a question “Whether the students have to sacrifice their youth for the sake of their successful adulthood?” The book is not only about IIT and imperfect system in IIT but it can be about any other college that has grading system and has extreme discipline. The novel also discusses bond of friendship. In IIT a five and a friend is better than ten and a vacuum. It is about the guy Hari Kumar and his two friends Alok Gupta and Ryan Oberoi who consider themselves as underdogs because they have five point something – GPAs (Grade Point Average) and their misadventures into
four years they spend at IIT. It is about constant struggle to beat a system which judges everyone by their GPA and which they feel suppress the creativity of a person. So they decide to enjoy life in boyish adventures, roaming city, watching movies and trying to woo the Professor’s daughter, in short all that they should not do at IIT.

It is a tale of three friends who belong to different strata of society. Hari, the narrator of the book is a simple and confused personality. He wants to live like the one he admires. He is the simplest character representing every teenager. He loves Prof Cherian’s daughter Neha and is ready to do anything for her. Ryan is handsome, smart and confident, drinks and gets others to drink Vodka. His parents are abroad. Alok is a fat boy; his father is ill and a sister unmarried. He has so many family problems. He wants to make 9 out of 10. Alok wants both, to live comfortably, enjoying youth and to make grades. Hary partly goes with Alok but likes to mimic Ryan. Neha is Prof Cherian’s daughter. Although she is not one of the three friends, it is she, who indirectly causes all the major events in the story. So she is a special character in the novel. Hari and Alok are impressed by Ryan. The three crack jokes, enjoy, roam in the city, of course their grades are below six. At IIT it means you are nothing. Ryan’s idea C2D – ‘Co-operate to Dominate’ gets failed. Second brainstorming idea by Ryan - to steal Prof Cherian’s papers and reproduce them in the test also proved to a great failure. Alok falls off from insti’s roof, has 13 odd fractures; but lives. Hari’s dating with Neha is known by Professor. Hari’s being nervous for viava and Ryan’s idea to answer it having vodka and Profs trapping Hari, all these incidents depict a four years’ journey of the friends. Ryan’s lube project discovers that Ryan is a very creative genius. Finally they get credits. Alok lands a job even with five and odd. Hari gets a job and Ryan becomes a research assistant to Prof. Veera. They all make it not really big, at five and odd GPA.

The novel address that life is not only about grades; you come with imperfections. Each character has imperfections. Hari wants to be Ryan who is good looking. For Alok, IIT is a launching pad to get a job that will solve his family’s problems. He represents the many who enter the sciences purely to get a job which pays well not because they lust for money but because they struggle for survival. With a paralyzed father and an unmarried sister, his shoulders carry the weight of not only his future but also his families and friends whose priorities are starkly different. Alok represents that confused struggling youth. Ryan is a total antithesis - handsome, the proverbial cool dude, smart, with an eye for creative original work and sometimes irritating keeness to always criticize and
challenge the system. Venkat is the hard worker perfect IITian. Hari’s aspiring like to be Ryan, Ryan’s hating his parents and being sensitive towards his friends, Alok’s being angry with his mother, all this portrays imperfection in human life. Samir, Neha’s brother represents a stark fact, the drastic steps which many students take due to parental pressure. He represents the result of imperfect system. It is commonly held notion that IITians generally ‘have it made’. The reader gets to know that life at IIT is totally performance-oriented with never ending notes, assignments, lectures etc. The writer wants to prove that this GPA system is imperfect one as it kills the originality of students. The two teachers Prof Cherian and Prof Veera with contrastive personalities highlight the book. Prof.Cherian is every student’s nightmare. He is a father who is responsible to ruin his son’s life. On the other hand Prof Veera is every student’s delight, a teacher who encourages new ideas, who doesn’t believe in the stereotype and one who believe in befriending his students. Chetan Bhagat addresses a number of serious issues, the exaggerated importance and academic excellence, a child’s relationship with his parents, how a relationship is differently viewed at by the different genders and most importantly the highs and lows of true friendship.

The book besides having a humorous appeal, also deals with the fears and insecurities of the students in country’s top institutions. The author delves into the minds of the students, their motivations and aspirants.

The book is about our vulnerabilities and the search for friendship. Bhagat poses a question – ‘If you are a nine point someone and not happy but a five point someone and happy, who is better off?”

In March 2008 the New York Times called him the ‘biggest selling English author is Indian’s history’. It is interesting to note that although there are many books in English in the vernacular languages by Indian writers of top quality there are not many centering on colleges and universities. The book has a universal appeal that goes beyond the immediate plot. His novel deals with the realities of the system. Bhagat removes the mask of intellectualism with which the IITs are associated.

The limitations of IITs are brought out vividly in a get-together involving students. Ryan remarks, You know guys, this whole IIT system is sick. Because, tell me, how many great engineers or scientists have come out of IIT? I mean that is supposed to be the best college in India, the best technology institute for a country of a 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 bring kids to work in multinationals. I mean look at MIT in the USA... What is wrong in the system? 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.

Ryan comes up with the Mice Theory to explain the problems in the IITs:

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.

Ryan concludes that the IIT system is unfair because:

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 students 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.

_Five Point Someone_ can be described as youthful funny and highly original. Chetan Bhagat scores a perfect ten with this book – hilarious, rollicking account replete with witticism and unforgettable one liner.

The literary critics criticize Chetan Bhagat but he has touched a nerve with young Indian readers. Mr. Bhagat might not be another Vikram Seth or Arundhati Roy but he has authentic claims to being one of the voices of a generation of middle class Indian youth facing choices and frustrations that come with prospect of growing wealth. It directly as well as indirectly discusses the education system which results to form the character of present youth with his intelligence, indifference, irreverence, irresponsibility, irritating traits that could be seen through Ryan, Hari and Alok.

The narrative is interspersed with wonderfully funny incidents. The language is original, the dialogue is fresh, and the style is easy flowing and extremely informal, may be
referred to as modern English. The book expresses the realities, that at the apparent level are pleasant and fun-filled but at deeper level vaguely philosophical.

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