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## DREAMS VS. DEMANDS: THE EMOTIONAL COSTS OF PARENTAL ASPIRATIONS IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S FIVE POINT SOMEONE AND REVOLUTION 2020

A. Velumani ✉  
Assistant Professor, Department of English, NGM College, Pollachi, T.N, India

### ABSTRACT

Chetan Bhagat's novels, particularly *Five Point Someone* and *Revolution 2020*, vividly capture the emotional turmoil resulting from parental aspirations imposed on children. These works reflect the complex interplay of love, expectation, and the pursuit of success within Indian middle-class families. This paper examines how Bhagat portrays the psychological impact of parental pressure on young individuals and their relationships. Drawing from textual evidence, secondary sources, and critical analyses, the paper discusses how Bhagat critiques the Indian education system, societal norms, and the generational conflict between parents and children. The findings reveal that such pressures often lead to strained relationships, emotional distress, and identity crises.

**Keywords:** parental pressure, Chetan Bhagat, Indian education system, generational conflict, aspirations, middle-class families, emotional distress.

### Introduction:

The Indian middle-class dream is often centered on upward mobility, with education as its cornerstone. For decades, parents have pressured their children to excel academically and pursue "prestigious" careers in engineering, medicine, or government services. Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* (2004) and *Revolution 2020* (2011) delve into this theme, illustrating the emotional and psychological consequences of such expectations. Bhagat's narratives resonate with a generation grappling with parental demands and personal aspirations. This paper investigates the portrayal of parental pressure in these novels and its impact on the characters' lives and relationships.

### Parental Aspirations in 'Five Point Someone'

In *Five Point Someone*, Bhagat presents the lives of three IIT students Hari, Alok, and Ryan who struggle under the weight of the rigorous academic environment and societal expectations. The novel begins with a critique of the education system, as Hari narrates: "This is not a book to teach you how to get into IIT or survive it. It describes how screwed up things can get if you don't think straight." This sets the tone for exploring the emotional costs of conforming to a rigid system.

Alok's backstory is particularly poignant. His family's financial struggles and his father's paralysis make him the sole hope for economic stability. His mother's constant



reminders, such as, "You must study hard; you are our only hope," underscore the suffocating burden he carries. Alok's resulting stress leads him to contemplate suicide, reflecting the dire consequences of extreme parental pressure. As Anjali Singh notes in her critique of Bhagat's works, "Alok's plight mirrors the plight of countless students in India who are forced to prioritize familial expectations over personal well-being" (*Journal of South Asian Literature*, 2).

Ryan, in contrast, rebels against the system and criticizes the blind pursuit of academic excellence, stating, "What is the point of cramming things you don't care about?" His strained relationship with his parents, who value tradition and compliance, highlights the generational gap and the clash between modern values and conventional expectations.

### **Parental Aspirations in 'Revolution 2020'**

Revolution 2020 deepens Bhagat's exploration of parental aspirations through its protagonist, Gopal. Coming from a humble background, Gopal's father's dream of seeing him succeed in engineering becomes an obsession. Despite Gopal's repeated failures in entrance exams, his father's insistence drives him to depression. Gopal laments, "My father believed in me even when I had stopped believing in myself." This tragic irony underscores the destructive potential of misplaced parental faith. On the other hand, Raghav, Gopal's childhood friend, represents a contrasting narrative. Raghav's decision to pursue journalism instead of engineering defies societal norms and familial expectations. Yet, his path is not free of conflict, as his parents express disappointment over his "unconventional" career choice. Bhagat uses Raghav's journey to challenge the notion that success is confined to traditional career paths.

Aarti's character provides additional depth to the theme. Torn between her ambitions and familial expectations, she struggles to assert her independence. Bhagat's nuanced portrayal of Aarti reflects the gendered dimensions of parental pressure, as women often face compounded challenges due to societal expectations of conformity and sacrifice.

### **The Emotional Toll of Parental Aspirations**

Bhagat's characters endure significant emotional distress as they navigate their parents' demands. Gopal's descent into moral corruption and Alok's attempted suicide are stark reminders of the psychological toll such pressures can exact. According to a study by Kumar et al. (*Indian Journal of Psychology*, 2016), "Over 70% of Indian students report experiencing high levels of stress due to academic expectations, often leading to mental health issues." Bhagat's narratives align with these findings, offering a literary lens to understand the widespread phenomenon. The novels also highlight the strain on parent-child relationships. In *Five Point Someone*, Alok's interactions with his mother are marked by guilt and resentment. Similarly, Gopal's relationship with his father deteriorates as he fails to meet expectations. These dynamics underscore how excessive pressure can erode familial bonds.



### **Critique of the Education System**

Bhagat's critique extends beyond individual families to the systemic flaws in India's education system. In *Five Point Someone*, the rigid curriculum and emphasis on rote learning are depicted as stifling creativity and individuality. Ryan's frustration is evident when he says, "Degrees are useless if they kill your dreams." Similarly, *Revolution 2020* exposes the commercialization of education, as Gopal's eventual success comes not from academic merit but from exploiting the system's corruption.

### **Conclusion**

Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* and *Revolution 2020* serve as poignant critiques of the societal and familial pressures that define the Indian middle-class experience. Through relatable characters and compelling narratives, Bhagat sheds light on the emotional costs of parental aspirations, challenging readers to reconsider the values they uphold. The novels call for a balance between ambition and empathy, urging families to support their children's individual dreams instead of imposing their own.

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