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Novel NOTES

In the city to promote his book *Zero Percentile*, author Neeraj Chhibba talks about life beyond IIT...

■ Ashima Sehajpal

Two different worlds exist on the either side of the IIT gate. Inside the India's premium institute, life's tough, competition's immense, pressure to perform chokes, all that Chetan Bhagat told us through *5 Point Someone*. Life outside the IIT isn't better either and Chetan didn't tell us about this because he didn't get to see the other world. And someone who did is author Neeraj Chhibba, in the city on Saturday to promote his book,

Zero Percentile. Not that the once IIT aspirant scored zero in the IIT entrance but as Neeraj says, "If you aren't able to get through IIT even by a point margin, it nullifies every effort and any score is as good or as bad as zero percentile."

Self-inspired and a semi autobiography, Neeraj through the protagonist, Pankaj in the novel has tried to empathise with all such candidates whose dream to be an IITian remained unfulfilled. "Pankaj is a very bright student but couldn't get through IIT due to lack of

right guidance. He suffers from depression for some-time and has to deal with the taunts of his parents and friends," shares Neeraj about the novel with another fact, "The novel is not just about IIT failure just as life isn't."

The story then moves to Volgograd in Russia as Pankaj takes up an engineering course there. His academic struggle, cultural shift, best friend infected with HIV and ultimately his victory becomes the center plot. To show the real picture of Russia was another aim of his book, "Russia has bad image for its active

mafia. The rest of the damage was done by movies like *Rocky*, in which Sylvester Stallone, a good American guy has to defeat the bad Russian boxer." However, the real picture, he adds is different and pleasant, with no racism problems and quality educational institutes.

A software engineer by profession, it took Neeraj two years time to complete the book and almost

the same time to get it published as, "Publishers find it a risk to publish first time novelists books. Even the best of the literary works by world famous writers are sent as anonymous work would get rejected." Published by Rupa and Co, the book has already sold 7000 copies in its first edition and has gone for the second reprint after mere two-weeks of its release.

Neeraj is planning a sequel of the book, which will yet again be a semi autobiography on his post-college and professional life. A successful professional and an author, he still has an unfulfilled wish, "If I could travel back in time and get a chance, this time I would plan well to clear IIT." Still yearning for the IIT tag!

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