

CHETAN BHAGAT'S ONE NIGHT @ THE CALL CENTER: REPRESENTATION OF QUANDARY IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract

Chetan Bhagat is a well known writer who is able to capture the contemporary society as it is. Contemporary society is filled with quandary for the people who could not hold on to their goals especially youth of India. In *One Night @ the Call Center*, Chetan Bhagat brings out the quandary of the contemporary society clearly. This paper is an attempt to throw light on how Chetan Bhagat has portrayed the problems of the people in the call center and how it affects them in their life.

Keywords: relationship, issues, identity, aspiration, modern life

Chetan Bhagat is a much celebrated contemporary Indian Writer, author, columnist, and speaker. He has written many novels unfolding the society that he has lives in. He has more than six novels to his credit. He has written on varied Indian themes with different subjects. He has portrayed his experiences in his novels to take a step ahead to reality. *One Night @ the Call Center* is his second work, based on the life of the middle class people in India and their struggle to sustain in the society. It is a story of pity, love, ambition and sorrow. It is an earnest effort of the novelist to bring out the issues of the modern social environment. The deeper analysis of the novel brings out considerable issues of the contemporary Indian society and how the people, especially, the youth of the society are affected by them.

Chetan Bhagat has narrated his characters in a way that the readers have no difficulty in accepting the characters for life. It is not possible for a writer to reflect his society in a perfect way. But, Chetan has done it through his characters in *One Night @ the Call Center*- Shyam, Radhika, Esha, Vroom, Priyanka and military uncle. The novelist is pitching perfect in reflecting the mindset of Indian society in terms of employment, lifestyle, problem facing, and relationship with other people. All the key characters in the novel have some sort of ill-fated incidents in life. They are not able to cope up with the stream of life. They are not pleased or satisfied in their at hand life. The social and psychological reality of contemporary Indian society is represented through every characters of the novel. The characters are the actual representations of the people of modern Indian society which has been dominated by the west. Westernization has brought comprehensive intimidation to the present structure of the society besides certain modern prospects.

In the contemporary society, most, if not all, of the youngsters aspire for great positions in their life. However, there are many aspects to take into account in the perseverance of their likings. Shyam, the protagonist of the novel, is an aspirant of becoming a lawyer. Despite his high ambition, he is not a happy-go-lucky boy, in other words, he is shy and less confident in his ideas. Shyam, the studious boy tries hard to become a lawyer. However, lack of money and other supporting tools act as an impasse to his aspiration. Chetan Bhagat has tried to convey that this happens in the life of many youngsters because of economical crisis. People vie for one thing and reach another in their life. He almost gives up his dream and opts for a call center just to earn money for his livelihood.

In another sphere, Shyam falls in love with Priyanka. Adding fuel to the fire, Priyanka loses her virginity to Shyam during the course of their conversation, in a car. Moreover, feelings and emotions are taken for granted here. Shyam and Priyanka, though have fallen apart now, work together in the call center just as colleagues. As one reads the novel, the love between two people is shallow and as Shyam has not yet settled in life, Priyanka has been convinced by her mother for getting another bridegroom from United States, who is settled economically. Chetan Bhagat has portrayed the shallowness in the relationship among the young generation of the society in the novel.

While talking about the relationship between a husband and wife, Chetan Bhagat, in *One Night @ the Call Center*, has narrated the life of Radhika and Anuj. The married couple, living far away from each other, is an embodiment of a typical Indian family where the mother-in law takes the upper hand. Though Radhika is trying to put

up with her mother-in law, she is much pained by her husband's dishonesty towards her by having an illegal affair with another lady. Radhika is unable to come over this obsession and decides to quit the life. Superficiality in the characters' relationship found in the married couple is yet another idea that Chetan Bhagat wants to nail his colours to the mast through the novel.

Radhika represents the married woman from India in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center*. Her husband is far away from her in Kolkata. Though the couple is moderately young, they live as the circumstances force, as forced bachelors. It is just because of the economical stress, the couple live in different places to earn money. Money plays the central role in the society where as the human emotions and relations are never taken care of. The economical condition prevalent in the society forces the couple to live separately.

Radhika lives, rather survives, with her mother-in law. The latter is one who orders former quite frequently. This is also the evergreen scenario in Indians life. The individuals may be good for their cast. However, when it comes to relations, especially, daughter-in law or mother-in law, they will become rivals, often ardent rivals for no reason. This is also clearly replicated by Chetan Bhagat in the novel. Anuj's mother kindles the fight between her daughter-in law and her son because of her affection towards her son. Chetan Bhagat portrays the relationship between the mother and son in the contemporary society through Anuj and his mother clearly.

With all the problems and for some ordeals, these people pose as happy ones in work place. In one of the worst cases though very, rather quite common in India, Esha, a model aspirant vies for becoming a model in fashion industry. She is truly loved by Varun but she convinces him stating in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center*: "I've told you before. I have to focus on my modelling career. I can't afford the luxury of making a boyfriend" (128). Though a fair looking girl in her late 20s, she is short. Her lack of height hinders her progressive to become a model. Her love for becoming a model makes her forget about her height and loses her virginity to an imposter with his false promises. After her loss of her virginity, she is given reason that she could not become a model as she lacks height. She becomes very much disappointed by her mistake. She realises her mistake and the penalty of being over ambitious in life. She regrets in front of Shyam for her blunder. She says: "I hate myself Shyam. I just hate myself. I hate my face and the stupid mirror that shows me this face. I hate myself for believing

people who told me I could be a model" (153). Her individualistic nature has ruined her considerably. She comes to understand the reality of life.

Esha is hasty in her attitude, as she is aspiring to become a model but lacks thinking over the reality of life in front her. Chetan Bhagat through his *One Night @ the Call Center* conveys the young people in the society are ambitious but they are not able to foresee the reality and thus become imprudent and loses the future. Only at the edge of the problem they realise the true nature of what the problem is which is ruined at the time.

Chetan Bhagat has beautifully portrayed the mind of young people in the contemporary society. Vroom is one such character presented in the novel *One Night @ the Call Center*, who wants to do some pleasant things which would help the society. In the beginning of the novel, one could see him as a typical youth of the society who is interested in automobiles. The prospect changes in him when the society needs his part to do. Though he wants to change the world in the positive side, his financial status makes him work in the call center. His parents are living separately is yet another stress for him to move away from his aspirations. He is yet another typical character who falls in love with Esha, his colleague. Though one sided, he seems to be sincere towards Esha. Despite his mad pursuance over Esha, Vroom wants to earn money. Understanding the reality, he could alter his mind and help his team from layoffs. One of the good natures of Vroom is that he wants to keep the group, i.e., his colleagues in the Western Appliance Strategic Group, intact. Vroom fights hard to make his wish come true. Chetan Bhagat has beautifully portrayed the fighting spirit in the minds of the contemporary youth through the character Vroom.

Chetan Bhagat also brings forth the problem of the Military Uncle who is suffered due to the decision made by his son. Military Uncle, who is on his 60s, is ill-treated by his own son and daughter-in law. This is another common scenario in India for age-old ones whatever positions they had had. The septuagenarian, despite his position in the army, is at the clutches of his daughter-in law, at whose behest the former's son sends military uncle out of the house. As time passes, he realizes his mistake of interfering in the individual life of his son and daughter-in-law. He wants to settle the matter with his son and he wants to live again with him. He is in touch with his grandson who is a school boy. He sends some e-mails containing various pictures of animals and birds. The son is still angry with the father and he comes to know that his

father sends useless emails to his son. He writes a mail to his father as:

Dad you have cluttered my life enough, now stop cluttering my mail box. I do not know what came over me that I allowed communication between you and my son. I don't want your shadow on him. Please stay away and do not send him any more emails. For literally or otherwise, we don't want your attachments. (160)

Being the odd one, the ex-serviceman joins himself with the young ones. Once again, in India, it is quite certain for old people to mingle with adolescents. In order to get things known, old age people move freely with boys of young age. In this case, the former resemble young ones in attires. Moreover the military uncle is with the young people with no purpose but to earn for his living.

Chetan Bhagat brings out the problem of old people who earns for their living even after their great service to their family. It has been brought out through the eyes of Military Uncle. However, the case is different with military uncle. He longs for love and affection from his grandson. Since he was in army leaving his family behind, his longing for talking, mingling with others, being listened to is quite apparent in the novel *One Night @the Call Center*.

Like Military Uncle who is unable to understand the probability of the situation and take steps for the living at hand, Priyanka too is not able to hold on his love and his aspirations due to the situation that surrounds her.

Priyanka, a female character in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @the Call Center*, has broken her love up with Shyam, one of her colleagues at the call center. When she is demanded a reason for leaving Shyam, her answer is "she said she has never liked you. Because you are not settled, and because since the day I started dating you I have changed and become an unaffectionate and cold person". (130) Here, one can confront that economical status is seen much important than the feelings or emotions. She breaks her relationship with Shyam stating the reason of her mother, as he is not settled in his life and less aspiring Indian youth. Priyanka, in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @the Call Center*, shares with Shyam, the reason for her mother's over conscious worries for her future as

She married my dad who was just a government employee only because he seemed like a decent human being. Her sisters waited better qualified boys and they are richer today. Her concern for me comes from there. She is my mother. It is not as if she does not know what is good for me. (131)

At the same time she is on her way to getting married a guy who works for Microsoft as he has got much wealth than her old boy friend. In the contemporary society, the relationship of a boy and a girl is materialistic and they are not able to withstand. Chetan Bhagat strikes the nail on its top addressing the situation through Priyanka.

Mr. Bakshi is a reluctant manager of the call center. He is not capable of running the call center. Actually he has become the manager of the call center because of his higher educational qualifications but he has no potentiality in running the call center in a profitable way. Shyam narrates the character of Mr. Bakshi in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @the Call Center* as:

Bakshi was around thirty but looked forty and spoke like he was fifty. He had worked in Connexions for the past three years. Before that, he did an MBA from some unpronounceable university in South India. He thought he was Michael Porter or something and loved to talk in manager's language or manages, which is another language like English or American (52).

He is only interested in saving his job as the manager, by claiming the work of Shyam and Vroom in building a troubleshooting website manual. He secures his job, gets recognised by the authorities and earn good name for him. Chetan Bhagat has narrated the workplace politics in the contemporary society through Bhakshi, who is getting other's work and claiming as if he has done it.

All the six major characters work at the call center under the mental pressure that they will be jobless sooner or later because of Bhakshi. It gives a considerable stress on their personal, professional and social life. Shyam has lost his self-confidence and self-esteem in life. His girlfriend Priyanka has ended their relationship because of his future job insecurity. His relatives and family members do not give him respect and taunt him on frequent occasions on his low profile job and limited salary. He remains mentally so disturbed that he prefers to avoid attending family celebrations. He has lost all his hope of becoming successful in life. Priyanka wants to open a school but she has to do the job. She has high expectations from life but she is not in a position to fulfil her dream because of limited income resources. Though Esha has not succeeded in the modelling career she does not leave her efforts to be a model because she finds a safe future as a call center agent. Vroom has all the calibre and capacity to run his own company. But he dares not risk of leaving the job because of the lack of self-confidence. Radhika and military Uncle are also not

contented with the present job and they want to try something different.

Kshirsagar, Bonde and Shinde rightly point out "Globalization and the Changing Urban Realities in India in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night@ The Call Center* and *2 States*":

The fictional works of Bhagat . . . reflects the changing urban realities in globalizing India. Through these works Bhagat subtly portrays the fast growing cities and urban zones along with all the global factors, affecting the life, experience, dreams, and attitudes of today's youth. Bhagat very comfortably depicts women empowerment as one of the positive effects of globalization, at the same time, consumerism, eroding values, and rising fears and anxieties of urban Indians as some of the negative offshoots of it cannot escape his piercing observations. (7)

Chetan Bhagat presents the struggling society as an actual representation of the hardships of the contemporary Indian society for getting success in real life. Thus the novel beautifully unfolds the many aspects of the contemporary Indian society. Chetan Bhagat is a master

story teller in the modern era with his precision to write precisely. He has thrown light on the contemporary society where the youngsters live a life without self confidence, the family people live an unfaithful life and old people live disowned life. Their struggle to come out of the clutches is the main focus of the novel.

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