

Delineation of Youth in Chetan Bhagat's One Night @ the Call Centre

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Abstract

Chetan Bhagat is the first Indian author to write English novels for the masses. All of his eight novels are skillful page-turners written in simple, colloquial English and their plots have a remarkably contemporary feel. He brilliantly tapped the market for entertainment literature with his keen understanding of shared cultural values as well as dreams, aspirations and vocabulary of Indian youth. People read his books not to derive aesthetic satisfaction but to gather knowledge and to learn English. For them Bhagat's novels serve as guide books in a confusing 21st century world which is evolving faster than they can understand. They reflect India's present in a most entertaining manner. Bhagat writes his books mainly for the youth of India. The young people read his novels avidly because they can easily identify themselves with the characters and situations depicted in them and with the issues articulated in a kind of English which they themselves speak and write like the proverbial pied piper, he attracts the young readers by weaving a magic charm with his words. In his novel One Night @ the Call Centre, he focuses on the growing call centre culture in India and the ever escalating ambitions of the Indian youth.

During one of his train journeys, the writer comes in contact of a lady traveller who with her curiosity inspires the novelist to make call centre as the central motif of his narrative imagination. The six members of the team of call centre are Radhika, Priyanka, Esha, Military Uncle, Vroom and Shyam.

Shyam as soon as looks at the watch, jumps out of bed with half-shut eyes unmindful of the hopes and dreams of the freshness. He is lost in dreams but these dreams are not significant in context of dry and dull routine to call centre life.

This novel distinctively suggests the rootlessness insecurity and the absence of a meaningful existence in the life of these young technocrats working in the call centers. Esha who is entitled as "Hottest chick at Connexions" wants to be a model but to meet her expenditures, for the time being, she joins this call centre job. Gradually the Qualis moves to Vroom's place. His full name is Varun Malhotra. He represents the young chaps of today in whose life 'fast ride' is the only passion. The fourth member in the team is Radhika who carries a large white plastic bag and her usual giant hand bag. The idea of giant handbag is suggestive of the pressure of family responsibility on her shoulders. All these members in personal relationships are happy and amicable but they have tire some attitude towards the Connexions in which they work.

As a foil to these four characters, there is a reference to the character of Bakshi who manages all the activities of the Connexions. He appears as a nomenclature of authority. He is equally aggressive and suspicious. He is a victim of self imposed ego and tries to impose his rational or irrational authority on the workers. His management is secretive and implies the activities that can't be trusted. Shyam reveals, "I wanted to know more about what was going on at Connexions. Bakshi was super secretive-

all he said was there were more confidential management priorities. I thought of asking Vroom to spy some more” (34).

The narrative in *One Night @ the Call Centre* moves in two different spaces – present consisting of the challengers of job conditions at Bakshi’s call centre and second is the private life of Shyam consisting of the memories of his dating and relationship with Priyanka. With the echo of the word ‘train,’ the image of Rail Museum Chanakyapuri echoes in Shyam’s consciousness. In this first recollection, he recollects the images of Priyanka’s choices of spicy food like ‘Potato’ or ‘Potato chips.’ However in the moments of romance they also reflect on the serious issue like corruption in politics. In his first dating with Priyanka, instead of making reflections on any romantic idealism, Shyam makes serious discussions on some serious problems of life.

Chetan Bhagat takes the two sides of the Problem-America’s domination in economic and simultaneously it’s attended sickness affecting the sensibility of those who are working in the call centers. Amid these anxieties, Priyanka, Esha, Vroom and Radhika Share their own pleasures of their own dreams of life. They have a private world of their own far away from the anxieties and tensions of their work place. In the activities like curling of hair by Esha, making comments on family life and celebrating the joy of the Priyanka’s marriage suggests that all these call centre workers are at mental level indifferent to their surroundings. They survive with the Psyche of loneliness. Everybody enjoys the news of Priyanka’s engagement. However, such relationships have no sanctity and seriousness that is essential for the stable social values.

Chetan Bhagat has a realization that marriage in the post modern societies is more a business deal than depending on the high standards of emotional bonding. In Shyam’s life, Bakshi and Priyankaseem to have become the two poles of his consciousness. The recollection of the dates with Priyanka at Gurgaon Highway, seven months before the occurrence of the crucial night around which the entire play is focused is of vital significance. They share their time in bar, smoke and beautiful girls. Esha intends to pass her time there to ‘de-stress’ herself. She reveals her mental condition: “I ran around like mad last month-chasing modelling agencies. Besides I have to wash down last week’s one thousand calls” (97). In the restaurant all of them are busy in drink and dance but none of them is ready to withdraw. It has become a way of life to release the tension.

In Priyanka and Shyam relationship, a new turn comes in the form of the proposal of Priyanka’s marriage with Ganesh. Ganesh had told Priyanka’s family that he was on the top of the world. With this confession there comes an elation and excitement in the life of Priyanka’s mother. Priyanka is disgusted with her mother’s formula of success and makes an open and rational affirmation of her own decision. She declares, “It is my life, and sorry, I can’t marry anyone I have only known for five weeks” (132).

Shyam has traditional likings and no longer prefers the ultra-modern haircut of Priyanka. Chetan Bhagat in his novels nurtures the image of womanhood only in context of Indian national sensibility. Shyam has a complaint: “I liked her with long hair, but she never listened to me” (137). Simultaneously there is a traditional conversation full of expectations and hostility between the mother and daughter.

From the isolation of the personal relationship of Shyam, the narrative shifts to the close circuit compartment of WAG. Chetan Bhagat one by one focuses on the mental conditions of the persons working at the call centre. Military Uncle keeps himself

busy to make a contact with his son through e-mail. Vroom develops his own theory to define the nature and boss like authority of Bakshi. He comments
 Okay, here is my theory about people like Bakshi...There are four kinds of bosses in this world based on two dimensions: (a) how smart or stupid they are and (b) whether they are good or evil. Only with extreme good luck you get a boss who is smart and a good human being. (148)

Chetan Bhagat then reflects on the crisis of Anuj and Radhika relationship. Radhika is married and dedicated to family responsibilities. But she joins call centre only to raise money to support the family. Similarly Military Uncle is desperate for his son but he gets a shocking clip on the screen and it says that he no more likes him to have any contact with his grandson even through e-mail. Vroom is more nervous as compared to Esha and Priyanka. He calls himself 'nocturnal:' "We, the nocturnal, rule the roads and the country" (188). But Esha looks at the positive side of the call centers. Vroom absolutely negates the thesis promoted by Esha. These centers can provide financial security but takes away the real pleasures of life. Vroom also contemplates on the condition how every night again and again they had to talk on phone without any substantial reasons. Priyanka defends that there are several professions like medical practitioners that people are bound to work day and night.

In this state of exhaustion in the darkness of night, Vroom moves the Qualis at a very high speed. The Qualis runs through fields and construction filled with materials like cement, bricks and iron rods. In the darkness of night, they find it difficult to find out the way and their Qualis gets fixed in the hole of a building. The foundation was a pit probably fifty feet deep and had a frame of reinforced cement concrete roads. It brings a serious risks in the life of these workers. It becomes difficult for them to maintain connectivity through mobile phone. No network, no connection.

In the next chapter, the idea of God's call to redeem the pain of the group of these six persons, gives a sudden turn to the plot. It is an unusual effort of Chetan Bhagat to communicate a spiritual message through his novel. His intention seems to establish that the faith in God is the only remedy to save humanity from being lost in despair and nothingness. Vroom contemplates the conditions of life at a higher plain and his observations reflect metaphysical brooding of the author to avoid the growing mania for money in which family values, social values and human values are disappearing fast. Shyam repeats that in the business world, life is full of commotion and it is hard to get rid of it Military Uncle is in great distress to share the innocent company of his grandchildren. Tears also starts floating from the eyes of Radhika who says that she wants to be herself again as before marriage and wanted divorce from Anuj. Esha possesses an identical longing for healthy personal life and family security. She says,

I want my parents to love me again. I don't want to be a dumb model. I am sure I can find a better use for my looks, if they are with anything. Any career that makes you compromise on your morals or judges you because you are not an inch taller is not worth it. (220)

What God dictates to all those six agents, is a message to the entire society where human beings are lost in their dreams of success sacrificing their human sensibility God speaks:

I think you need to understand how my system works. You see, I have a contract with all human beings. You do your best, and every now and then, I will come behind to give you a bonus push. But it has to begin with you. For otherwise, I can't distinguish who needs my help most. (224)

Shyam and others with renewed consciousness give the resolution not to work anymore in the system of Bakshi Vroom makes sharp reactions on Bakshis' idea of

shifting the office to Boston and also to flat a pornographical message on the screen. In aggression he gives a slap on Bakshi's face. Military uncle gets a visa for the USA and he goes there to make amends with his son and daughter-in-law. Esha gives up her modelling ambition and continues to work in the cell centre. She works for an NGO during daytime and raises funds for it. Radhika moves in with Esha and fights her divorce case against her husband. Priyanka works at Connexions too but she prepares to get admission in a B.Ed., college. The Ganesh chapter in her life is closed and she reflects Shyam as her life partner. They decide to defer the marriage for two years and focus on their career. Meanwhile Shyam writes a whole book to tell the story of the call centre which has taught him that (a) a man can do whatever he really wants (b) God always remains within us (c) there is no such thing as a loss.

Bhagat's writing is clear and simple and his style is natural, devoid of convulsed sentences or complicated words which keeps the narrative lucid and easy to follow. The passion for getting jobs in multinational companies is not a consolation for the youths today. It's the loss of national power. Brain drain is making India weak and insecure. The compulsive service conditions at the call centers are nerve stricken and they are yielding only frustration, insecurity, aggression and hostility among the youths of today. This novel is a saga of the agony and crisis existing in the life of new technocrats. Such a presentation of new subject matters in the novel, helps to expand the frontiers of English fiction. Thus this novel of Bhagat vividly depicts the temper of present day's youth in a heart touching way.

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