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**Chetan Bhagat's One Night @ The Call Center: Depiction of Human Predicaments and Self-Revelatio**

**Abstract**

Chetan Bhagat is one of the most significant writers of the post-modern Indian English fiction. He created a new trend in Indian English fiction; as the Indian English literature can be distinguished before and after Chetan Bhagat. His fictional works elevate the youth concerns and the solutions. He deals with the human relationships and predicaments with a philosophical touch in his novels; which inculcates the values and shows a path in a new direction to the youth where one can find the secret of life. This paper throws a glance at the inner psychological predicaments of the modern young generation who longs for self-consciousness; inner consciousness. Bhagat portrays this inner consciousness of the individuals through his characters in the novel *One Night @ the Call Center* with the exposure of their predicaments. Bhagat narrates the story in a humorous way and ends it in a serious tone to reveal the inner struggle of the characters and finds a solution through spiritual forces that to be, from a machine. Here in this novel, God advices the characters over phone and resolve their predicaments and reminds their strengths and weakness to overcome the situations.

**Keywords: Predicaments, self-consciousness, young generation, God.**

Chetan Bhagat budes his narration from campus life at IIT to the Call Center; a symbol for the globalized world. After achieving great successes with his debut novel *Five Point Someone*, he tries to create another sensation in the Indian English fiction with a new ideology in his second novel *One Night @ the Call Center*. He is one of the best story tellers of the new generation. G. Swaminathan in his review on his novel comments; “if you want to really have a peep into the new generation, their jobs, life, attitude, values and their dreams please do not miss *One Night @ the Call Center*”<sup>[2]</sup>.

In this novel Chetan Bhagat tries to elevate the human predicaments with a group consisting of six characters; Shyam Mehra, Varun Malhotra, Priyanka, Esha Singh, Radhika Jha and Military Uncle, all these six characters have chosen the profession at a call center for their needs and fulfillments. The narration of the novel starts with a prologue, while the writer is in train journey from IIT Kanpur to Delhi where he meets a beautiful girl. She gives the stuff for his second novel *One Night @ the Call Center* with a simple story line; six characters - working in a call center - receive a phone call from God. Though it seems to be simpler, the story line has so many inner complexities with each character.

The main story of the novel *One Night @ the Call Center* revolves around the six characters during the span of one night. The story starts with the scene when the characters are trapped in a crisis of death. They are discussing the horrible situation of their dead bodies, their description goes beyond their expectations, the vultures might have eaten their eyes and their body parts etc. This serious conversation happens between Vroom and Esha, and then the chapter is left over to its continuation with the flashback story of the novel. The reasons for this terrible crisis are narrated in the story.

All the six characters have been struggling with their obligations. They work in a call center ‘Connexions’ located in the out skirts of the city Gurgaon. Their bay’s name is Western Appliances Strategic Group (WASG); they receive the phone calls from America for them they have to reply politely in American accent. The story comes to us through the narration of the protagonist Shyam, who seems to be in fears and frustrations with terrible night mares. In fact he doesn’t like this call center job, the only reason for his commitment is to get better salary. He is ambitious to become a team leader but his boss Bakshi avoids with his conspiracy. So Shyam hates his boss as he always criticizes and degrades him and opines he has to develop skills, he calls him go-getter. When Priyanka, his former girlfriend gets a proposal of marriage from an NRI Ganesh; Mr. Microsoft, Shyam becomes upset. Priyanka’s decision to marry a rich person makes him frustrated and comments, ‘Girls are strategic’

(ONCC 62). Moreover, he has some inferiority complex as he is a call center executive which is a lesser one among his relatives. He feels always insecure and feels himself a black sheep.

Varun Malhotra an aureate person, his friends call him Vroom as he is very much fond of wheels. Though he seems to be bright and smart, he is a man of angry and rebellious. Formerly he worked as journalist trainee as it is his passion. But now he joins in call center to make better income. He loves pizzas, drinking, riding bikes and thinking over social and global issues. He is innovative and designs a trouble shooting website for the benefit of the call center customers. He has some annoyance with his parents' arguments as his parents live separately. Because of this tension he cannot sleep at all. All day he lies in bed feeling sick.

Priyanka is Shyam's ex girl friend. She has broken up affair with Shyam after a long love. Her mother is over possessive and she wants her daughter to be married off to a rich chap. She wishes Priyanka to marry a person to whom she decides for her. She doesn't like Shyam as he is not getting much income and not yet settled. "However, in global era has changed its dimensions. It has become more practical and material possession has taken the place of true love" [3]. To make her mother happy, Priyanka accepts to marry NRI Ganesh. But later she comes to know the decisive nature of Ganesh regarding his bold spot in his head and so she rejects Ganesh. She becomes let down with that break up.

Esha singh, who is a modern fashionable girl, aspires to become a model. She has to earn money for her living and looking for a break in modelling. She joins in call center for this only. She is a victim of casting-couch; she loses her moral values to get a modelling chance. At its filthy conditions of the industry, it victimized an aspirant; Esha sleeps with a forty-year-old designer to get a break in a major fashion show. Later her agent tells her that she was too short to be a ramp model, moreover he priced for her virginity. She feels terribly betrayed and tries so suppress the mental pain by inflicting herself with physical pain by purposely cutting her skin. This shows her regrets for her wrong deeds and passion.

Radhika is the only married woman among the group. She creates her own responsibilities by marrying Anuj, who is from an ultra traditional family. She loves her husband very much and she has to take care of her mother-in-law. Instead of love, Anuj sends her SMS like: "Show elder's respect. Act like a daughter-in-law should. Good night" (82). As she learns that her husband refers some other girl's name for the gift from the Radio Jockey; a fake call made by Vroom for fun. She becomes shocked and decides to live separately along with Esha. While talking with Esha she tells that "being a daughter-in-law is harder than being a model" (83).

Military Uncle is the only person in the group who belongs to the old generation. He worked in Army and after his retirement, he chooses the call center job to supplement his meagre pension. He lives alone away from his son, for this condition he himself and his attitude is the only reason. While he was along with his son, he exhibited his ego. In turn, he is neglected by his son and daughter-in-law who live in America. But he has too much of affection towards his grandson. From his son Military uncle receives an email as a reply for his mail to his grandson, “Dad... you have cluttered my life enough, now what came over me that I allowed communicating 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” (150). This shows the miserable condition of an elderly man of a family who longs for respectable love and affection.

As the story moves on, the characters are in frustration, work pressure, despair and dismay. To get some relief from these unbearable psychological conflicts, they visit a night club, which is represented as a modern society and its life style they enjoyed there. On their return to the call center, their Qualis gets struck into a construction building pit. The Qualis hangs on the iron bars laid on the pit. They confirm that, they have no scope to survive further. Then everyone faces their inner struggle of real fear of death. The actual nature of human beings comes out from their feelings of regrets. Bhagat tries to make a change from the routine in the novel by introducing God, the invisible supreme authority over a phone only through his voice. Bhagat introduces the technique of ‘*deus-ex-machina*’ in the form of telephone call from God. *Deus ex machina*, this technique of the divine force from a machine, which directs the lives of the characters, is one of the narrating styles of post-modernism.

“The term *Deus ex machina* is a plot device used to resolve the unsolvable problem suddenly and abruptly by the inspired and unexpected intervention of a new event, character, ability or object. Aristotle was the first to use a Greek term equivalent to the Latin phrase *deus ex machina* as a term to illustrate the technique as a device to resolve the plot of tragedies”<sup>[4]</sup>. The voice of God from the machine is employed by so many Greek and Latin writers. In the horrible crisis of death trap, even the network of communication through mobiles is not available, to their surprise they receive a phone call which displays as God. God introduces himself to the characters in a polite manner with simple English. It shows the usage of vocabulary and word power of the modern generation. Until then each character maintains certain decorum in their attitude, when they hear the voice of the almighty, they burst out.

During their conversation with God, God asks about the number of phone calls every day they receive, for that Vroom replied a hundred and it may be two hundred on busy days. Then God poses a funny question that, which call they feel most important in the world. All of them can't get any answer and then to their surprise, God reveals it as, 'the inner call' which they cannot hear: "The little voice inside that wants to talk to you. But you can only hear it when you are at peace and then too it is hard to hear it" (203). On their request God makes a deal to save them from the death crisis. But on one condition, they have to reveal their inner voice to him. Vroom confesses that he wants a life with meaning. He needs to quit this call center: "Sorry, but calling is not my calling" (205). Priyanka wants to make her mother happy, but she doesn't like to kill herself for it. Her mother needs to realize that she is responsible for her own happiness. Further she stresses, her focus is only on her own life and what she wants. Military uncle wants to be with his son and grandson. He realizes he was wrong in judging them by his outdated values. He needs to get rid of his inflated ego and decides to adjust. Radhika wants to get rid of a dysfunctional marriage and her brutal mother-in-law; she wants to divorce Anuj, "I want be myself again, just like I was before marriage, when I was with my parents" (205). Esha accepts to give up delusions of glamour; modelling and she wants to get love and affection from her parents again. Shyam wants to set up a small web design company in collaboration with Vroom. He wants to be "worthy of someone like Priyanka one day" (206). Then God gives advices to them with his enchanting four mantras which reveal the secret of life and its successes.

Bhagat portrays their inner voice as voice of God. The motivational speech of God reveals the four mantras; one, a medium amount of intelligence, two, a bit of imagination, the third thing is self confidence and God explained the fourth thing as most painful one and everyone still needs to learn as it is the most important thing; failure. "To be really successful, you must face failure. You have to experience it, feel it, taste it, and suffer it. Only then you can shine... Never be afraid of failure. If it has come your way, it means I want to give you a real shot at being successful later, God said" (208).

God's call makes them realize that they will be happy only if they do what they like to do. Eventually they must pay attention to their heart and forget about the external pressures and forces. They must reply their 'inner call' to lead a comfortable and thriving life.

### **Conclusion**

Chetan Bhagat projects the realistic picture of the society within a small world the call center and also within the limited span of one night in his fascinating novel *One Night @ the Call Center*. He dramatizes the situation of the story as an interwoven

message of self revelation to the young generation surviving in urbanized global world with high aspirations. He elevates the positive and negative shades of the cosmopolitan atmosphere at BPO. Through the God's call, a philosophical touch, he stresses the need to find about them and know their capabilities to achieve anything in life with self confidence.

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