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NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE AND STYLE IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S ONE NIGHT @
THE CALL CENTER

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Abstract

Chetan Bhagat has been acclaimed as one of the best-selling novelists of the Indian fiction. He has written about modern Indian youths and their need in his novels. He says that novels are entertainment tools through which one can express his views and opinions about society and the youth. In the modern India human behavior changed into lust, greed, hypocrisy, and hatred and these are the major themes of Bhagat's novels. His novels are incomplete without humour, friendship, love, family conflicts and marriage. The background in which Chetan Bhagat has written novels is predominantly of the society in the post globalization era. His novels are based on day-to-day happenings in the Indian society so ultimately he has written the problems of Indian society in a humorous ways. He has handled the modern situation in proper manner. His characters easily get involved in friendship and love and suffer a lot. He takes upon the sensitive issues which concern to the society in his novels ranging from romantic love story to a shocking condition of the Indian multiculturalism. Bhagat, in the novels describes about the Indian culture and trend using different

narrative technique and style. This paper aims to study the narrative technique and style used in his One Night @ the Call Center.

Keywords: Humour, Simile, Metaphor, Personification, Flashback technique.

Introduction

Chetan Bhagat is an Indian author, columnist, and speaker. He is the author of eight blockbuster novels, *Five Point Someone-What not to do at IIT* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *2 States* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), *Half Girlfriend* (2014), *One Indian Girl* (2016) and *The Girl In Room 105* (2018) and two non-fictions, *What Young India Wants* (2012) and *Making India Awesome* (2015). All these books have best-seller since their release and some bollywood films like *3 idiots*, *Hello*, *Kai Po Che*, *2 States* and *Half Girlfriend* took inspiration from these novels. Chetan Bhagat is seen more as a

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youth icon than just an author. This IIT and IIM-A graduate is making India read like never before.

Any narrative as a technique of delineation has two overlapping aspects, one refers to content, or the assemblage of material and the nature of the connections implied. The other is rhetorical. It is the mode of presenting the narrative to the reader, or audience. So the art of narration pertains to two basic queries- 'what' and 'how'. 'What' part of narration discusses the various recurrent themes at length. In the present paper, a study is undertaken to elaborate in details the 'how' aspect of narrative technique. As the realm of narrative technique is quite vast and endless, an attempt is made to limit the study to the use of various modes like humour, simile, metaphor, irony, symbolism, personification, hyperbole, repetition etc. as found in the '*One Night @ the Call Center*' of Chetan Bhagat.

Thus, humour is generally used by all the creative artists to provide a variety to the texture and also to relieve the atmosphere of tension and gloom. It helps the author to intersperse comic relief in an otherwise serious plot. Instances of humour abundantly abound in the novels of Chetan Bhagat. Most of them are available in '*One Night @ the Call Center*'. In the novel Chetan Bhagat describes the attitude of Indian women. Relatives of Shyam gather at

his house for his cousin's wedding. Everyone, particularly women, take a lot of time in getting ready for the marriage. One of the aunts after losing her one gold earring screams and says, "Has the maid stolen it?" (ON@CC, 14) Shyam thinks why the maid will steal only single earring. He says, "Wouldn't she steal the whole set?" (ON@CC, 14) Aunties at house struggle with each other to get bathroom and mirror. Shyam also wants to get ready for his night shift. He asks aunties to make bathroom empty, as he wants to take bath. His cousin after confirming his work at call center says to him, "Your work is through the phone, why do you need to dress up? Who is going to see you?" (ON@CC, 15) They suggest him to use kitchen sink.

Chetan Bhagat uses flash back technique in the novel. Shyam recalls his first date with Priyanka at Rail Museum Chanakyapuri, Delhi. Both are busy in talking but get disturbed soon with the entry of Priyanka's cousin with his family. They sit at different tables. One of the children with fountain coke in hand runs towards Priyanka, falls near their table and throws fountain coke on Shyam's shirt. Shyam is frightened again when he sees a three-year-old girl with a huge lollipop in her mouth running towards them and directly lands straight on Priyanka's lap. Shyam says, "I moved aside from the tornado to save another collision" (ON@CC, 48).

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Esha is ambitious and wants to become a model and for that, she spends half of her salary on cloths and perfumes. Shyam mocks at her hairstyle and says, “The result of expensive hairstyling job, which cost as much as a minor surgery” (ON@CC, 58). Her hair are light coloured and intensely curly towards the ends.

Shyam along with Vroom, Priyanka and Esha goes to disco to celebrate his third date with Priyanka. All the youngsters dance with beer pack in their stomach. DJ is in full volume. Suddenly a fight starts on the floor as gang of drunken friends thinks that someone touches a girl of their group. They accuse someone else and grab his collar. Both the gangs start fighting with each other. From the stage, they come on the floor. Shyam says, “As the dance floor was too noisy for vocal arguments, people expressed themselves only with fists and kicks” (ON@CC, 99).

Priyanka, after getting engaged with Ganesh, is happy. She takes Radhika and Esha to toilet to share her feeling. Shyam is jealous of her, as she leaves him. He wants to know more about Ganesh and for that, both Vroom and he go to toilet. They listen women’s conversation. While returning, Bakshi sees both of them coming out of same toilet. He stares at them. Vroom explains to him, “Sir it is not what you think” (ON@CC, 113). Bakshi does not care and tells him, “I am not thinking

anything, what you do in your personal lives is up to you” (ON@CC, 113).

Chetan Bhagat creates humour on people’s one of the most awkward situation. Bakshi, the boss of call center uses the general toilet where Shyam and Vroom are already using it. Shyam feels awkward and says to himself that “Is it okay to talk to him while he is doing his business or not?” (ON@CC, 114) He again says, “What are you supposed to do? Leave him alone or give him company and entertain him?” (ON@CC, 114) Later on Bakshi gives them clarification that he comes there to give a parcel to Esha.

Bhagat gives humorous touch to Radhika’s character. She does love marriage with Anuj and takes care of her mother-in-law. She has full faith in her husband. Vroom decides to check how much Anuj loves his wife Radhika. He makes a fake phone call and offers him to send a message and bouquet free of cost to anyone whom he loves. Anuj says, “I’d like to send it to my girlfriend Payal” (ON@CC, 157). Radhika becomes very furious and calls her husband an asshole. She says, “You talk to me asshole, what message were you going to send this Payal” (ON@CC, 158).

Simile is a figure of speech that makes a comparison, showing similarities between two different things. The language of a novelist has to be different in order to be attractive and appealing. Priyanka is

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jealous of Esha and tells Shyam many negative things about her. But whenever they meet and sit together they talk and behave “like long-lost sisters” (ON@CC, 16). Simile here presents the strong liking for each other when they are together. Vroom before working at call center, uses to work for newspaper agency where he discloses many political leaders’ scandals. He is thrown out from there but he takes the photos of political leaders and their wrong doings. Priyanka praises him and calls that he sounds “like an activist” (ON@CC, 29). Esha is a stylish girl. She comes to Delhi to become a model. So she keeps herself in latest look and uses different types of perfumes. At call center, she is always busy doing something with her hair. Shyam makes a comment on her hairstyle that naturally curly hair is one thing, but proceed curly hair looks “like tangled telephone wires” (ON@CC, 35). Simile shows that she always wastes her money on her hairstyle by making them tangle.

Shyam loves Priyanka and wants to marry her. He is not a permanent in job so Priyanka’s mother forces her to marry Ganesh, a software engineer in USA. When Priyanka tells her marriage news at call center all the girls in excitement scream in a loud voice. It causes shock and terror in the room. Priyanka’s happiness brings sadness on Shyam’s face. In such condition, he says that he has burning feeling “like someone had tossed a hot coal in my stomach”

(ON@CC, 36). The novelist tells Shyam’s intensity of disappointment in Priyanka’s happiness.

Priyanka shows everyone Ganesh’s picture. Shyam hates him most as he steals former’s heart by engaging with Priyanka. Shyam sees Ganesh’s picture from a distance and makes a comment that he looks “like a regular software geek, similar to the guy under the table, but with better cloths” (ON@CC, 37). Esha by seeing Ganesh’s picture is very much impressed. She praises him and circulates the picture to Radhika. Radhika says that he is so cute and looks “like a teddy bear” (ON@CC, 38).

Vroom is handsome and tall. In past he makes three girlfriends and now he looks for fourth. He makes Shyam more jealous by asking Priyanka about Ganesh’s salary. On listening to Vroom, Shyam starts calculating dollar in rupees. While discussing, Vroom catches Priyanka’s attention and stops. Shyam carefully sees Vroom’s eyes and says, “His eyes were wet like a puppy’s brown and kind to look at” (ON@CC, 41). The novelist comments on Vroom’s eyes, which attract girl’s attention.

News of Priyanka’s marriage makes Shyam unhappy. He loses his concentration on work, which causes pin to pierce in his finger. Priyanka helps Shyam to take out pin from the finger. Radhika and Esha discuss about Bakshi. Priyanka

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demands a band-aid from Esha. On hearing Esha's name Shyam clenches his teeth as it hurts him "like hell" (ON@CC, 47).

The novelist describes social evil like dowry in the novel. Shyam and Priyanka meet at restaurant for their second date. There they see an old woman who curses her daughter-in-law for giving birth to two girl children and for not bringing enough dowries from her parents. She blames her daughter-in-law that she dumps two girls "like two curses on her" (ON@CC, 52).

Priyanka opposes the old woman who humiliates her daughter-in-law. The old woman does not like Priyanka's interference in their family matter. She blames Priyanka and says that latter lacks manners. She ridicules Priyanka and says latter's eyes look "like a heroine" (ON@CC, 52). Shyam, Priyanka, Esha and Vroom decide to visit disco for enjoyment at 32 Milestone. These two girls do not want to go to other disco as door bitch does not allow them if their waist is not more than twenty-four inch. Door bitch raises an eyebrow at you "like you are a fifty year old aunty" (ON@CC, 59).

Vroom tells Shyam his intense desire to propose Esha. Shyam in return reminds him about his three girlfriends he makes before coming to call center. Vroom explains his reality that those girls are never

important and they are "like TV channels you surf while looking for the real programme you want to see" (ON@CC, 77). Bhagat here explains the mentality of today's boys what they think about the girls.

Vroom calls Esha for tea and proposes her. She declines his proposal on saying that he had three girlfriends in past. He tells her that other girls are just for fun. They mean nothing and are "like pizza or movies or something. They are channel surfing, you are more serious" (ON@CC, 79).

Bakshi is selfish. He sends Shyam and Vroom's webpage design to Boston on his name. He looks at Esha with suspicious nature. He does not try to save the jobs of call center employees. He is evil by nature. Shyam says that he is "like a blind snake: you feel sorry for it, but it still has poisonous bite" (ON@CC, 90).

Esha is ambitious and wants to become a model. In order to get the fashion contract she sleeps with forty-year man. She gets frustrated when she comes to know that he deceives her. Esha regrets on her foolish act and with knife starts cutting her shin. She shares her grief with Shyam and says to him that pain is so bad, the wound in her leg feels "like a tickle" (ON@CC, 93).

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To relieve themselves from tension all the group members take break and go outside of the campus for refreshment. They want to drink Pepsi and eat Pizza but unluckily the shop is closed. Therefore, Shyam and Vroom throw stones at the shop, which cause breaking of the glass. Due to pelting stones windows shatter and bits of glass fall down “like a beautiful ice fountain” (ON@CC, 123).

Personification is a figure of speech in which a thing, an idea, or an animal is given human attributes. The non-human objects are portrayed in such a way that we feel they have the ability to act like human beings. When one says, “Death lays his icy hands even on kings”, he means that great and powerful persons like king cannot evade death. But death is lifeless and it cannot be expected to have hands for keeping them on kings.

Chetan Bhagat employs instances of personification. The instances he cites not only convey the meaning but also evoke laughter. Shyam and Priyanka discuss about Vroom’s future. Shyam says, “Life will slap him (Vroom) into shape” (ON@CC, 101). Here life is represented as human being who can punish Vroom.

Time and space have their locations in memory and consciousness in the novel. In the novel the device memory is used at large extent. Shyam and Priyanka are

lovebirds. While performing his duty at call center Shyam remembers his past dates with Priyanka. He describes:

She came thirty minutes late. I had seen the whole museum twice, examined every little train model, stepped inside India’s coal engine ... I went to the canteen, which was on an island in the middle of the artificial pond ... I thought of lighting a cigarette, but I caught sight of the sign (ON@CC, 44).

Many pages of the novel describe the memory of Shyam and Priyanka’s love story. Shyam dates her five times at different places.

Military uncle lives separately from his son as he commits a mistake when he used to live with his son and daughter in USA. He remembers his past days and tells God his wish to live again with his son and daughter. He says:

I want to be with my son and my grandson. I miss them every moment. Two years ago, I used to live with them. But my daughter-in-law did things I didn’t like-she went parties, got a job when I wanted her to stay at home ... I fought with them and moved out (ON@CC, 219).

Some of the characters make mistakes in the past and regret in the present. Esha is one of them. She tries to cut her shin as her

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experience of sleeping with a designer to get modelling contract tortures her.

Every writer has his own style of narrating events and situations. Some allow in flights of fancy and provide their description as an imaginary theme. There are novelists who furnish facts and who are very practical in presenting them. There are novelists who refer to the ancient legends to show similarity or offer contrast in their claims. It is to the credit of Chetan Bhagat that he employs all these devices to make his description not only life-like but also living.

Chetan Bhagat in the novel uses Indian words related to food. These words are *samosas-chutney, idli-sambhar or rajma-chawal, rice, rotis, daal, gobi-aloo, mango chutney, raita and matar-paneer*. By using these words writer wants readers to understand Indian culture.

Shyam says Military uncle does not talk freely with him. When Shyam sits in the Qualis, Military uncle gives him an ‘it-must-be-your-fault’ look” (ON@CC, 19).

Conclusion:

Thus,
Chetan Bhagat in his novel, *One Night @ the Call Center* has tried to present the different narrative technique and style. He has used simile, metaphor, personification, repetition, hyperbole etc. In the novel the

author has given stress on humour and other techniques. Shyam, Priyanka, Vroom, Isha, Radhika and Military uncle used figurative language. Bhagat is successful in making the reader happy. New readers who don't know the literary language can also enjoy the writing style of Chetan Bhagat. Bhagat has succeeded here in describing all the things in beautiful manner. He has also succeeded in keeping the readers stick to novel up to at the end.

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