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THE THEME OF REALISM 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 realistic touch. 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. He has handled the modern situation in proper manner. One cannot deny the possibility of family conflicts in which Bhagat has described. 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. Chetan Bhagat describes here about the effect of globalization on

Indian educated youths. This paper aims to study the realistic views of Chetan Bhagat about the condition of people who work for other companies during their night shift, conflict between mother and daughter-in-law, wife and husband and the social evils like dowry.

Keywords: BPO, dowry system, employer-employees relation, globalization

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*

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Girlfriend took inspiration from these novels. Chetan Bhagat is seen more as a youth icon than just an author. This IIT and IIM-A graduate is making India read like never before.

Realism in conventional sense presents stories, characters and background that are similar to anything that is found in the contemporary world. This requires incidents to have happened in the past and events are normally organized in a chronological sequence. The desire to paint contemporary day-to-day life entails and requires social details. In realistic writing, the author writes according to objective point of view. He gives place to his own feelings, interpretation and emotions. He tries to give real happening from the society. The writers of this movement painted the everyday situations and conflicts in an accurate manner. Realistic movement began in England in 18th century by Richardson, Fielding and Smollett. Introduction of realism into fiction proved to be a boon to the upcoming writers.

Indian literature has got worldwide popularity with the publication of *Midnight Children* by Salman Rushdie during the eighth decade of twentieth century. Writing skill of Indian writers was praised all over the world. During this period, many socially realistic novels were written. They include Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Ruth Pravar Jhabwalla's *To who*

she will and *Heat and Dust*, Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins*. Social conditions and sex life are predominantly described here. People's life in metropolitan cities and their involvement in sex are depicted in Shobha de's *Socialite Evenings*. Other work of Indian writers, which contributed in the field of realism, are Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, Rani Dharker's *The Virgin Syndrome*, Meena Alexander's *Nampally House*. The characters in fiction take birth in the writer's imagination, but they imitate uniqueness and reality in actual life. Chetan Bhagat is well known for his outstanding ability to join artistically social, political and personal events and incidents. Therefore, characters in Chetan Bhagat's novels represent the actual men and women in real life. We find in his writing a fusion of emotional and fictional autobiography. In a realistic novel, one sees characters that appear real and the reader visualizes so many things through the character's eyes. Chetan Bhagat portrays the life of men and women in totality. It is not just a piece of life, but also the whole life itself. He depicts character's life through its entire fortune, social, emotional, moral, intellectual aspects.

Chetan Bhagat in *One Night @ the Call Center* shows his growth as a novelist. The novel describes metropolitan city life and the problems of youngsters. The novel is pre-dominantly youth oriented

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and discusses the contemporary nuances existing in Indian society. Through the novel, Chetan Bhagat describes a realistic and disillusioned picture of modern India. The novel depicts six people's story of struggle in metropolitan city. Action of the novel takes place at the beginning of twenty first century when foreign companies came to India, opened their BPO and hired Indian educated unemployed for working. This sharply imagined and skillfully plotted novel contains love story, husband-wife relationship, family problems and longing for unfulfilled desires.

Since the beginning of the novel, the novelist gives a serious tone to the each character. The novel projects the failures, frustrations and exploitation of young generation by the company manager and other rich people. In the acknowledgement, Bhagat says that for writing this novel he took the help of his cousin who works at call center. The novel reflects modern Indian culture of twenty first century where daughter-in-law does not like to keep father and mother-in laws with them, Indian parents want big salaried groom for their daughter, husband-wife's clashes and modern girls who leave their families to fulfill their aim.

The behavior of the characters in the novel is modern but their parents are stuck to traditional conditions. So Chetan Bhagat here shows the blend of modernity

and old culture. The women characters in the novel want to escape from the traditional culture. Bhagat succeeds in presenting the problems of Indian youths who are struggling for job. He tried to cover the main aspects of society by describing different types of characters. Protagonist Shyam and Priyanka are lovebirds and represent middle class family, Vroom is an angry young man, Radhika represents an ideal daughter-in-law, Isha represents those Indian girls who left their home to fulfill their aim and Military uncle represents the strict man who wants his daughter-in-law to follow the Indian traditions. Bhagat, through these characters, reveals out the truth of Indian culture and metropolitan life lived by Indian people.

All the members of Shyam's group hate Bakshi, the manager of the Connexion call center. Shyam and his friend, Vroom always think negatively about their boss. Even the novel starts with hating Bakshi by Shyam in his dream. Shyam Says:

I was in the water while my boss Bakshi was in a boat next to me. He was pushing my head down in the water. I saw Priyanka drifting away in a lifeboat. I screamed even as Bakshi used his both hands to keep my head submerged. Salt water filled my mouth and nostrils as I heard loud beeps at a distance.(ON@CC, 12)

The author beautifully narrates the story of *One Night @ the Call Center*,

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which happens on a single night. The novel depicts the struggle of six people viz. Shyam, Priyanka, Vroom, Esha, Radhika and Military Uncle and deals with the various personal and professional problems they tackle and their success in solving them with the help of God i.e. "Inner Voice". The characters, the places and the situations seem real with the contemporary Indian society. Six people work at the Connexion call center, Gurgaon, nearby Delhi. They work under pressure of their selfish boss who wants to take the credit of the website designed by Shyam and Vroom. Suddenly Bakshi tells them the breaking news that company reduces the number of employees all over the world. All of them get shock. They decide to save not only their own job but of all those employees' jobs who work at call centers. They decide to teach Bakshi a lesson and for that, Vroom makes a fake email from Bakshi's account to Isha's mail and traps him. Bakshi in reverse allow them to use his office telephone and makes contact with the company's chairperson at Boston. Vroom and Shyam convince the chairperson and save the job of thousands of employees working in the call center.

Shyam Malhotra or Sam Marcy (Americans call him Sam) is the main protagonist of the novel and a leader of the group. He represents the boy from the metropolitan city, Delhi. He calls himself 'Black sheep' as his all the cousins become

doctors and engineers and he remains a call center agent. He loves Priyanka, one of the members of their group and wants to marry her. While working in the call center he remembers his past dates with her. Both of them are in love relationship since last one year. Initially, she is ready for marriage but as the time passes, she feels inconvenience with him, as he has no permanent job. Her mother warns her not to meet him and calls him 'loser'. Talking about her mother Shyam says:

And tell your drama queen mom to come say it to my face that I am a loser. And she can send you off with whichever fucking settled annuity income earner she likes. I am what I am. (ON@CC, 106)

Priyanka likes Shyam but due to her mother, she changes her choice and becomes ready to marry Ganesh Gupta, an Indian software engineer in America. Priyanka's mother believes in materialistic and luxurious way of life. She is not ready to give the hand of her daughter in the hands of such a person who does not have a permanent job. Chetan Bhagat through her character predicts her two natures. First, she is a care-taking mother and second, she is an opportunist as she is attracted towards the luxurious life of Ganesh. Priyanka passes through the stage of conflict as to whom she should listen. She reveals before the God:

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I want my mother to be happy. But I cannot kill myself for it. My mother needs to realize a family is a great support to have, but ultimately, she is responsible for her own happiness. My focus should be on my own life and what I want. (ON@CC, 219)

Many pages of the novel describe the love story of Shyam and Priyanka. Chetan Bhagat uses the real name of the places in Delhi where Shyam and Priyanka meet. For their first meeting they meet at Rail museum Chanakyapuri where they take breakfast. They celebrate their second love meeting at Havemore Restaurant, Pandara road where Priyanka acts as a CBI inspector and saves a woman from being humiliated by her mother-in-law and husband. For the third meeting they meet at 32nd Milestone, Gurgaon Highway, Delhi where they enjoy their first sex in the car. On their fourth meeting, they meet at Mocha Cafe, Greater Kailash, Delhi where she tells him about her mother's dislike for him. Their last meeting takes place at Pizza Hut, Sahara Mall, Gurgaon where they declare their breakup. Bhagat depicts all these meetings with the touch of realism. In writing, he creates such an environment,

which seems real. Shyam strongly feels miserable after hearing the news of Priyanka's engagement with Ganesh. He tapes her conversation with Ganesh. Despite her discard for him, he likes her most. His desire for her can be seen from the following line when he tells his aim to God. He says:

And I want to be worthy of someone like Priyanka one day. I do not deserve her as of today and I accept that ...But one day I'd like to be worthy of someone like her- someone intelligent, witty, sensitive and funny, someone who can seamlessly merge friendship with love. And yes, one day I want to be successful too. (ON@CC, 220)

Many writers in the past tried to give a message to readers through the intervention of God. Bhagat here uses the same technique and succeeds. This divine intervention or God's call is the salient feature of the novel. It comes at a very crucial point in the life of all the characters when they are fed up with their problems. As Radhika asks a universal question, "It is

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awful. Like what we did wrong? Why is our life in these pits?"(ON@CC, 212) The author provides the apt and morally correct solution, not just to the characters of the novel but also to the readers in the form of a call from God. This call acts as a ray of hope in their darkness of life. With death staring at the characters, when the Qualis meets with an accident, God calls them. Shyam's cell phone begins to ring and God introduces himself as, "the little voice inside that wants to talk to you... the voice that tells you what you really want"(ON@CC, 217). God's call makes them "capable persons" and tells them that there are four qualities required to become successful. Here Bhagat through the character of God gives a message to his readers what one should do in one's life to become a successful person. He tells the qualities that one should follow. They are a medium amount of intelligence, a bit of imagination, self- confidence and failure. In this way, God provides practical solution to their problems. He makes them realize their mistakes and shows them the path they need to follow. Bhagat through the God says individuals need not peep here and there to solve their problems as the solution lies within us, "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 push" (ON@CC, 224). All the six people inspire from the short speech of God and decide to teach their boss a lesson to refine their personal lives and to pursue

what they wanted in life. This way of life is in fact nothing but ethical and one, which adheres to basic human values of what is right or wrong.

Through the novel, Bhagat touches the pulse of the young generation. He tries to put the situation through which young generation may have to pass. Isha is the girl who leaves her home at Chandigarh and comes to Delhi to become a model. She represents thousands of Indian girls, who want to become a model. Isha does everything and even sleeps with a designer to get a modelling contract. However, he rejects her on the account of her short height. He sends her ten thousand rupees as compensation. She feels terribly betrayed and tries to suppress the mental pain by inflicting herself with physical pain by purposely cutting her skin. She says to Shyam when he tries to stop bleeding from her wound, "This pain takes my mind away from the real pain" (ON@CC, 151).

Bhagat shows here how generation gap and traditional thinking make man apart. Military uncle lives with his son and daughter-in-law in America. He does not like late coming of his daughter-in-law from the party. He asks her the reason of late coming, which she cannot tolerate. Since then he lives lonely in Delhi. Radhika is an educated woman. Her mother-in-law is ultra traditional. She always finds fault in Radhika and makes her complaint to her

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son Anuj. Bhagat here depicts a traditional thinking of educated people in joint family. Radhika's mother-in-law does not try to understand her daughter-in-law who works at call center. She is loyal with her husband. She did love marriage for the sake of Anuj. Due to the effect of westernization, modern Indian youths start keeping relation with other woman and Anuj is no exception. Vroom through the telephonic conversation offers Anuj sweets and bouquet and asks him to give it to someone whom he loves most. Anuj, instead of his wife, Radhika tells the name of Payal, his girlfriend who lives in Delhi.

Vroom plays an important role in the novel. He represents the angry young man of today's world. His parents always quarrel on each other. They show husband-wife relationship in the modern Indian society by living separately. Vroom proposes Isha three to four times but she always rejects him. Vroom thinks Americans get to act superior to us "not because they are better people but because their country is rich and ours is poor. That is the only damn reason. Because the losers who have run our country for the last fifty years couldn't do better than make India one of the poorest countries on the earth." (ON@CC, 234) Vroom and Shyam want to save the job of Indian call center employees and they succeed in it. Vroom being fascinated by fashion, starts smoking and eating tobacco. Chetan Bhagat writes articles on the corruption in the newspapers.

He through the character of Vroom finds fault with the system. Vroom writes an article, "Why don't politicians ever commit suicide", in which he says:

All kind of people—students, housewives, businessmen, employees and even film stars commits suicide. But politician never do. That tells you something. Suicide is a horrible thing and people do it only because they are really hurt. This means they feel something. But Politicians don't. So basically, this country is run by people who don't feel anything. (ON@CC, 47)

Chetan Bhagat also focuses on the relationship of the young Indian middle class people with both executive and ordinary client whom they serve in America. Indians, who work in the call center, have to bear them. Foreign companies want Indians to work more by paying less money. These six people represent those Indians who work under pressure of losing the job. Bhagat, in the

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novel deals with lost love, thwarted ambition, absence of family affection, pressure of a patriarchal set up and the work environment of a globalized office. God's entry makes the novel of a new type. He makes them realize their mistakes and shows them the path they need to follow. Besides, he also shares his opinion on the problems of young people.

Bhagat shows the effect of globalization on developing countries like India. The title of the novel *One Night @ the Call Center* itself represents the effects of globalization in the field of call center. In India, Gurgaon is developing fast as a place of BPO. Many massive apartments and commercial malls are under construction. People here feel that they are moving through the jumble of construction sites. Writer, Chetan Bhagat through this novel gives a message to the Indians who work at call centers that though they are getting there good salary, they must find good opportunity somewhere else. Their skills and creativity are not noticed at the call center.

The effect of globalization can be seen on all the characters. Among them Military uncle is the worst sufferer. He hates his daughter-in-law for coming home late after party and she hates him for hating her and forces her husband to keep his father away from them. Radhika in good faith makes love marriage with Anuj but he

deceives her by loving his girlfriend more than her. Priyanka is ready to marry Ganesh who is richer than Shyam. Isha being fascinated by modelling leaves her home and is cheated by the designer. The effect can also be observed when writer writes Sam Mercy instead of Shyam Mehra, Victor instead of Varun Malhotra, Regina Jones instead of Radhika Jha and Elisha instead of Esha Singh.

The phone call from God is one of the salient features in the novel. Many critics criticize Chetan Bhagat that God does not make phone call. Bhagat had foreseen such criticism and in the epilogue, he offers an alternative scene for those who do not believe in God. He says it may not be God but Military uncle, talking to his juniors in their frightful condition. He advises them about the inner voice and courage of conviction. Bhagat also says that he is not the God of theism but the voice of idealism that resides in every human heart.

Conclusion

Thus, Chetan Bhagat in his novel, *One Night @ the Call Center* has tried to present the realistic situations being faced by Indian educated people in their day-to-day life. In the novel the author has given stress on realistic things like family conflict, divorce, dowry, boss and employee's relation and wife-husband relation. Shyam, Vroom, Military uncle,

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Priyanka, Radhika and Isha speak like real people not like merely bookish characters. Bhagat is successful in bringing realistic look to the novel by describing the present situation of Indian culture. 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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