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Delineation of self-consciousness and job inadequacy affecting youth in modern India

Chetan Bhagat's "One Night @ the Call Center"

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Abstract

The aim of present research paper is to portray the self-consciousness and job paucity affecting modern Indian youth, in contemporary society. Chetan Bhagat attracts reader's attention on various social issues through his writings. He inculcates social values in youth and enables them to solve problems. The author has presented exploitation of corporate sector in a realistic manner through his novel *One Night @ the Call Center*, which critically examines call center workers lifestyle. This is a story of thwarted ambition, lost love, patriarchal pressure and middle-class anxieties and insecurities about career and inadequacy of marriage with modern family conflict. All the characters in this novel are modern youth who are open minded. Bhagat makes a keen observation of prevailing surrounding and as it presents in his works. His writing gives a realistic portraiture of harsh realities of life. The workload and busy schedule of modern youth in corporate sector compel them to ignore their self-consciousness. In *One Night @ the Call Center* author hints through God call to focus on their inner call, which has been ignored due to work pressure and job

Insecurities. Through this novel Bhagat represents the life struggle and sufferings of middle-class youths, who are exploited by higher authorities. They are not given credit for their hard work. All characters feel happy and relaxed only after getting call from God. In India financial crisis create great obstacles in the way of students and make them to join call center job, which pays them best. Thus, Bhagat has presented middle class youth's problem in realistic way.

Keywords: Job inadequacy, self-consciousness, pressure, obstacles, corporate environment.

Chetan Bhagat is one of the popular novelists among postmodern young generation. His writing attracts middle class youth, because it focuses on their problems. He unfolds various social issues through his novels and follows different themes on reality based for his writing. He brought a new trend in Indian English fiction writing. He is famous as a best story teller on national level, and column writer. According to Chaudhari, through this novel Bhagat has depicted themes best suited to contemporary society work

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environment. He has written many novels all have been bestsellers. Chetan Bhagat's second novel *One Night @ the Call Center* came in 2005. Through this novel Bhagat has revealed flourishing call center profession in India and modern youth's life in this profession. A. Gayathridevi and Dr. T. Deivasigamani describes, Bhagat has presented social imbalance prevailing in society through this novel in a realistic way. The story of this novel not only reveals the adventures of employs at call center but also their pains, exploitations and their goals for future. This novel obtained enormous commercial success in country being a saga of Indian authority in globalized environment. This is a story of six characters who work in a call center Gurgaon. This novel presents how country plays an important role in commanding over business process and information technology. In this book writer has made a realistic portraiture of India's call center and a very tough schedule of employees who works at night shift. "The book touches the nerve of India's call center generation and presents a realistic picture of BPO life which is very tough as the employee have to work daily at night shifts with the constant threat of downsizing hanging over their heads like Damocles' sword and the continuous cursing by clients from USA who holds the Indian responsible for the shortage of jobs in their own country." (Dhawan P-36)

In *One Night @ the Call Center*, Bhagat presents a realistic portraiture of a contemporary educated society working in a

communication center. The concept of this novel involves the anxieties and uncertainty of career rising in Indian middle-class society. He stresses through this novel on the prominence of education how it plays an important role in human beings' life to earn their living. Seriously speaking, a call center, like any other job, has its pros and cons. In modern age, youth are attracted towards this field on a large scale, because it is like a heaven for those who are under-performers but have good speaking skills, or for those who need money to complete their education. Shyam Mehra is the main protagonist and agent of call centre in this novel, including Shyam there are six characters who work in night shift. The story of this novel begins, Shyam gets up early from his horrible dream, he wants to think more about his dream but he is getting late for his night shift. He tells us there is a marriage function at his home so some relatives are at home to attend the function. The environment at his home is like typical Indian marriage function, where all his aunties are busy in making themselves beautiful, nobody lets Shyam use his bathroom besides it there is nothing to eat at home all are to eat outside. His aunties have no time because they are busy in applying cosmetics on their face for making themselves beautiful. He could not use bathroom and find food in kitchen nobody is free. He says good bye to all his relatives but nobody cares him. Because his cousins are doctors and engineers but he works in a call center so nobody cares him, if he has

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somewhat respect it is only due to call center. The author represents the worries of Indian youths in contemporary society regarding their career and education. In modern society people get respect on the basis of their salary and education. There are many youths like Shyam who are compared with their cousins and other siblings, this comparison loses their confidence and they become frustrate. They start to feel themselves black sheep for the family in comparison to well-educated and well earner cousins. There is no respect of such youths in family in modern age.

Other characters of this novel are: military uncle who is punctual and hates to those who comes late. Radhika, Esha from Chandigarh, works in call center to be a model, Vroom and Priyanka, she is ex-girlfriend of Shyam. Through this novel writer reveals the reality of call center work place where millions of educated young men and women earn their livelihood and face the challenge of private sector. Bakshi is their boss who is a cruel, bad and incomplete boss. He never wants to do work but always takes the credit of other's work. He takes the credit of Shyam's work of website design getting a transfer to Boston in the deal. He takes the credit of Shyam and Vroom's work. They both prepare a manual after six months hard work on it but Bakshi takes its credit. They can't clarify it for the fear of expulsion from job. He exploits employees in the name of promotion. There is much corruption in job field, first people don't get placement, if they

get surviving is painful. Bakshi assigned to Shyam for training and other work which is not his duty, besides it he imposes his own work on him, due to overburden Shyam gets depressed. Through this novel Bhagat has presented the harsh and painful reality of modern youths who have to listens the jargons and abuse of their boss without their fault, lest they should be fired from their job. They face humiliation from customers also as well as from their boss. It all is happening on account of corrupt politicians and lack of employment because corrupt government is not creating any job opportunities for youths. This is the reason why they are being exploited. They work hard day and night to make their plan but the people like Bakshi take their advantage. Thus, we see youths in frustration and overpressure are becoming addict to smoking and drinking. Either it be the field of education or call center job. On the other hand, Esha who wished to be a model puts her virginity at stake, but more pathetic is that in spite of losing her virginity she is rejected;

“The guy I slept with-forty-year-old designer told my agent later I was too short to be a ramp model and that son of a bitch sends some cash as compensations after words. “She further says “I hate myself, Shyam. I hate myself. And I hate my face and the stupid mirror that shows me this face.... Can I get my face altered?” (Bhagat, P-142,143).

Thus, women have to face many obstacles in modern contemporary society. They are asked

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to loss their purity to fulfill dreams. Esha becomes a prostitute for one night instead of becoming a model. Modern men are becoming morally corrupt there is too much inhumanity. One exploit and other abuse the same women. Priyanka the chief modern female protagonist of this novel belongs to a middle-class family. She is a modern girl in her outfits who does not like other's interference. She works in a call center in night shift, wears clothes which give modern look to her without caring other's comment. In starting she follows her mother's instructions but when grows young she starts to protest that her mother is trying to dominate her without any reason. Later on, we see she is disturbed about her future life if she marries with Shyam because he is not well settled. That is why Priyanka agrees to marry with NRI boy Ganesh who earns more. She does not want any one's interference in her marriage and wishes for a safe and comfortable life. She is a girl who needs time to understand her fiancé before getting married with him and protests his mother's hastiness for marriage.

All the characters of this novel are unhappy and unsatisfied with their life. Shyam is struggling hard to be well settled in life so that he may marry with Priyanka, because in modern age profession is given more importance than human being. When Vroom and Shyam meet Priyanka's cousin Anurag who is a doctor, he becomes less interested in talking after knowing their call center profession. Thus, we see modern youth are in

more tension about their settlement, if they work in call centre they are not respected in society, taking to their career they are always in frustration. Through the character of Vroom author has presented the reality of call center job where agents have to face daily insult from customers. Vroom is angry with political leaders who don't create job opportunities for youths so they have to opt such fields like call center. This is the reason behind India being so poor in spite of being more than seventy years of freedom. We are still not able to get good job and education in our country. All the characters hear the news of job cutting and get more disturbed about their future expenses. In 'Changing Construction Career', a study by Aileen Watson suggests, "that for the majority of call center agents, their occupation was not part of their career strategy" (Watson 158-160).

Shyam, wants to earn money to complete his B.Ed. Priyanka just does the job for time pass until she gets married with a well settled man, Esha earns money to be a model, Vroom opts because call center pays more than journalism, Thus, we see all work in call center only to meet their needs not for their passion. N. Velmani says, global capitalism in India can be achieved only by accepting privatization. To solve this unemployment issue government should take initiative steps by constructing roads, power plants, airports, phone networks and metro trains in every city so that youth can find employment easily. All these characters take

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liquor their dressing sense, talking and eating manners show how people are changing their culture. Themes of this novel deals with contemporary social issues as; unfair treatment in job sectors, depression of youth, parent child relations, intersecting relations and the state of old ones in modern age. This novel of Bhagat calls attention to contemporary issues of society and human beings as they are completely bewildered about life and goal. They are quite different, never sticking to single goal and constant change can be seen in their objectives of life. Their notions change speedily in matter of family, colleagues and friends. All are frustrated whether they are married or bachelor. It represents the true picture of the contemporary society. Shyam is a modern pessimist character who is in love with Pryinka, his colleague, though there is a break up in their relation, he is envious about her engagement. He becomes agitated, inside feels jealous when he hears about her fiancé profession. In modern age people gives importance to income more than humanity.

Pryinka is not cheerful about her NRI fiancé but for her mother, she is extremely happy with Ganesh's profession. Shyam and Pryinka's break up takes place only due to her mother's great expectancy of getting her married with prosperous wealthy man. Her mother is very happy since she has been engaged with Ganesh. On the other hand, we see Military uncle is also ignored by his son and daughter in law for his irritable and

interfering nature. His strange behavior is not liked by them. It is due to his short temper and strict discipline at home, that his son and daughter in law live separate from him. They also don't let him talk with his grandson with whom he is closer and more attached. In spite of knowing his arrogant nature all colleagues feel pity for him. Through his nature, writer portrays people's problem about family adjustment after their retirement. Some pictures are sent to his grandson by him but he is warned by sending an email from his son not to be in touch of grandson, these lines show the value of Military uncle in the eyes of his members of family;

"Dad... You have cluttered my life enough now stop cluttering my mailbox. I don't know what come over me that I allowed communication between you and my son. I don't want even your shadow on his life also. Please stay away and do not send him any more emails for literally or otherwise we don't want your attachments." (Bhagat, P-150).

Through the mail of Military uncle's son, clearly the attitude of our young generation is expressed. Children are becoming indifferent for their parent's struggle and hard work, what they faced in bringing up them. In old age parents are unable to carry on their own burden but children also hate their miserable conditions. This is the result of their western influence. Indian culture teaches us to serve and respect our parents.

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In this novel all the aspects of modern society have been presented in a realistic way, nobody is faithful towards his relations. Modern youth are engaged in extra marital affairs in spite of having sensible partner, no one is satisfied with life. Anuj is in relationship with Payal though he is married with Radhika a beautiful girl. Varoom's father is in love with his secretary. There are six character in this novel four out of them are facing financial problems. They are facing exploitation by their boss without making resistance only for pursuing their dreams. This is the reality of society; our youth have to obtain second option for earning money so that they may fulfill their main goal. Esha who wants to be a model and Shyam's aim is to be a teacher but they work at a call center for earning money to achieve their goal. Shyam wants to be a well settled in life for Pryinka because her mother wants to get her married with a prosperous and well settled boy. Shyam is working there only for meeting his financial need. He is not liked by Pryinka's mother but he works honestly to win her heart. On the other hand, Radhika's husband expects her to lead a simple and traditional life always scolds her to serve his parents but he himself lives in company of modern girl Payal forgetting his own culture and values. Thus, it is clear that no one is faithful in his or her relation in contemporary society. Children start to consider their parents as burden in old age.

Through the God call in this story the purpose of the author is to portraint the busy and hectic schedule of the modern men with their frustration and mental dissatisfaction. The call from God has been presented in a symbolic way for inner voice of human being for which they are quite ignorant and have no time, inner voice or voice of soul always guides us on path of truth, but contemporary men don't pay heed to it being busy in comforts of life. In the words of **Valarmathi**;"The great Indian sages demonstrated and inculcated sense of spiritual activity in the minds of its people for achieving enlightenment of the soul." (P- 214-215).

The root cause of all suffering of human being is not to hear their inner voice. The author next presents that people are following western culture in order to be called modern, but this modernism has influenced their culture and tradition to a great extent. We see a great change in family relationship, its structure and people's attitude towards it. People have become quite changed in modern age there is no love for family and human being. All are becoming selfish and greedy; this is why dowry system is prevailing in society. In modern India people are becoming modern in the sense of family conflicts, career insecurities, ignorance towards their culture etc. All characters of this novel are insecure and dissatisfied with their life. Bhagat recounts episode of 'God' when all characters are near death, they are advised to listen their

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inner soul because only then they can get peace, the way which they have followed is another feature of modernity which take them towards irresponsibility and nugatory. This is the effect of westernization how people are forgetting their own culture and stare their colleagues. Culture is co-related with art form. Wikipedia defines tradition as; “tradition is a belief or behavior passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past”.(Green). These all things are roots in our society on account of westernized effect because people are forgetting their own culture. Through Radhika writer has represented the perfect model of Indian culture and tradition. She works at call center to support her family financially; along with it she performs house hold duties, look after her in laws. According to Verma; “Culture is the source of the more or less spontaneous actions and reactions of a people and their mode of dealing with objective reality and subjective formations” (*Culture and Modernity*).

Thus, we see everywhere is anxiety and frustration which create obstacle in the way of self-consciousness.

Conclusion

All the six character in *One Night @ the Call Center* are under mental pressure. They have fear of becoming jobless sooner or later because of their cruel, rude boss named Bakshi. This pressure of job cutting, affects their personal, social and professional life badly. The effect of this

can be noticed on Shyam’s life who has lost his self-esteem and confidence, nobody gives him value in family and relation. His family members and relatives compare him with his cousins who are in best jobs, and also taunt him on several occasions for his call center low job and less salary. On the other hand, Pryinka his girlfriend breakup with him because of his job insecurity. These all things make him frustrate and depressed, and he avoids attending celebration. Pryinka does call center job only to fulfill her high expectation which can be performed only by earning money, though she has limited resources. We see Esha does call center job to earn money to be a model, and Radhika to support her in-laws financially. Vroom has caliber to start his own company but he does not want to take the risk of losing call center job. Military uncle is here to meet his needs. Through the study of all character, we see all are disturb and without confidence. They lose their confidence considering themselves black sheep of the family because they don’t learn properly. People don’t give them respect and no one notices them. Financial problem is the main problem in the country like India, where many students have to opt job rather than going for further study or higher education, Vroom wanted to be a journalist but had to leave student life. On the other hand, Shyam wished to complete his B.Ed. but had to do job for gathering the money for doing B.Ed. In this second novel we see

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students are unable to get higher education due to poor financial condition.

Thus, we see job inadequacy affects their life and compels them to listen abuses from their boss. All characters are disturbing and not satisfied with their life. The social and psychological condition of contemporary society has been presented by Bhagat in this novel. All character goes out to recreate their mind and enjoy outside. On the way while returning their office they face a life-threatening situation, when their quails car crash into construction site hanging on iron rods. There is no network to make a phone call for help all are frightening, but they are surprised when Shyam's phone rings and a call is from god. Through conversation god guides them to listen their inner call and follow it. Their goal should be clear-cut in their mind and they should carry out their plans with dexterity and confidence. They should not ignore their conscience but should listen it, because this is the source of true peace and happiness.

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