

## ALIENATION AND ASPIRATION IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S NARRATIVES: EXAMINING MODERN INDIAN YOUTH AND CULTURAL DISSONANCE IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

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### Abstract:

This paper explores the thematic evolution in Chetan Bhagat's narratives, focusing on the portrayal of modern Indian youth against the backdrop of globalization. Through a detailed analysis of Bhagat's major works such as *Five Point Someone*, and *One Night @ the Call Center*, the study examines the recurring themes of alienation, aspiration, and cultural dissonance. Bhagat's ability to connect with young readers through relatable themes and simple language is juxtaposed with his critique of the educational and professional systems that shape their lives. This paper delves into Bhagat's realistic portrayal of the challenges faced by the youth in a globalized India, including the impact of the BPO industry on their personal and professional lives.

**Keywords:** Chetan Bhagat, Globalization, Indian Youth, Cultural Dissonance, Alienation, Modern Indian Literature

### Introduction

Contemporary Indian and English writers are keen on depicting the intellectual and spiritual emptiness that contemporary man experiences. There are a lot of issues that contemporary man faces. Under these circumstances, he would not have a chance of survival. The themes of estrangement, rootlessness, monotony, disappointment, and grief brought on by "conflicts" are explored by numerous contemporary "Indian English novelists, including Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, Kiran Desai, Aravind Adiga, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Arundhati Roy, Chetan Bhagat," the likes of which are numerous. All these authors are deeply invested in the contemporary man's fight for existence in this hyper-accelerated, hyper-restrictive environment. The universe of Chetan Bhagat is grounded in realism. Differentiating himself from earlier writers, he understood the time he wrote about, portrayed the plight of youth, had the gift of capturing the audience's imagination, used simple, unassuming language about everyday life, and gave hope to people through his works. His works may be considered "literature in making" by critics, yet he is now essential to readers of the younger age [66]. The books written by Chetan Bhagat depict modern Indian life.

College life, young entrepreneurs, love, and premarital sex are all themes that run through Chetan Bhagat's books. These themes bring back memories of his own college experiences and the love tales that inspired him to create fiction. It was Chetan Bhagat's books that shook up the idea that novels can only be written by those with formal training in literature or by academics. *My Friend Sancho* by Amit Verma, *Anything for You Madam* by Tushar Raheja, *A Romance with a Chaos* by Nishanth Kaushik, *Nothing Can Be as Crazy* by Ajay Mohan Jain, *Of course I Love You* by Durjoy Datta, and *I too Had a Love Story* by Ravinder Singh are all fresh perspectives from modern India; each of these works draws inspiration from Chetan Bhagat in its own unique way.

As far as Indian English literature goes, Chetan Bhagat's first book, *Five Point Someone*, is still considered a bestseller. It is a watershed moment in the evolution of narrative fiction. Even in India's most illustrious educational institutions, the circumstances of the education system are deplorable, as Chetan Bhagat's book reveals. The author identifies five conventional teaching approaches that stifle students' creativity. *Five Point Someone*, was a best-selling book that shocked and delighted readers. Chetan Bhagat becomes famous suddenly because he writes about young people and their hopes, dreams, and struggles. Chetan Bhagat, who previously had success touching the lives of young people on college campuses, is now turning his attention to the rapidly growing contact centre industry in India and the lives of young people today who work as executives in this field. The influence of global exploitations on their life is intricately intertwined with their personal intrigues in Chetan Bhagat's book, *One Night @ Call Centre*, in an astonishing manner that captivates readers. In critiquing these books, G. Swaminathan says;

“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*. [67]”

As a testament to Indian pride in an increasingly globalised world, *One Night @ the Call Centre* has become a huge commercial hit throughout the nation. In 2005, Rupa Publications of New Delhi was the first to publish the book. The 2008 Bollywood film adaptation of the book, *Hello*, was directed by Atul Agnihotri.

“‘The biggest-selling English – language novelist in India’s history’, proclaims the blurb on the jacket of the book quoting the *New York Times*. We are told that Chetan Bhagat, as an Indian novelist, had achieved the distinction of having sold maximum copies – more than 2, 50, 000 of each of the novels - *Five Point Someone*, (2004) and *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005). The figure is higher than that of any other novel falling in the category of Indian English novel. [68]”

According to Chetan Bhagat, India is able to play a significant role in BPO because of its command of information technology.

“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 employs have to work daily at night shifts with the constant threat of downsizing hanging over their heads like Damocles’ word and the continuous cursing by clients from the USA who holds the Indian responsible for the shortage of jobs in their own country. [69]”

Although it seems like a romance book, *One Night @ Call Centre* really depicts a true culture in India. This chapter delves into the realities of urban life and how they are used in today's interconnected society. The video attempts to bring this sardonic dark novel to life in the outsourced city of Gurgaon, where six individuals work in a call centre. It shows the employees' daily routines and their interactions with customers regarding household appliances like refrigerators, ovens and Hoover cleaners. All of this unfolds in the course of a single night, interspersed with thoughts of their hopes, dreams, emotions, frustrations, exploitation, and fight for survival in an increasingly interconnected world. Then, out of the blue, they receive a phone call from God, an inner voice that gives them the strength to face and conquer their challenges.

The narrative of the book is structured by Chetan Bhagat into the prologue, chapters 1–38, and the epilogue. During his intriguing train ride from IIT Kanpur to Delhi, Chetan Bhagat meets a young, attractive lady and shares her unoccupied cabin in the prologue. During their chat, she said that she was interested in commissioning a call centre narrative from him, but only if he could include it into his second book. His initial reluctance to accept her condition is driven by his curiosity, but he eventually comes around and asks about the storyline. The only thing he receives is a call from God one night and six persons at the contact centre.

“Bhagat enthrals and lures by the phone call and paves a path to the main story. he narrates story for his second novel *One Night @ the Call Center*.

It is a story about six people, three guys and three girls who worked at the Connexions Call Center... the story through Shyam’s eyes...The rest of the people and what happened that night - well, I will let Shyam tell you that. [70]”

The novel's storyline swiftly advances to chapter 29, when the six characters are trapped and unable to escape. Because there is no way out of this predicament and their death seems imminent, they are anxious. The storyline swiftly shifts to focus on the details of the terrible situation.

When writing, Bhagat stays away from coded metaphors and fantastical literary allusions, unlike authors like Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, and Amitav Ghosh. Bhagat's language is straightforward, easy to understand, and quite thorough. Simply said, Bhagat's use of simple language is the only reason his books are popular among college-going youngsters. The narrator Shyam states upfront in *One Night @ Call Centre* that he

intends to utilise plain language in his narration; this reveals Bhagat's preference for this style of writing.

“My English is not that great - actually, nothing about me is great. So, if you are looking for something posh and highbrow, then I'd suggest you read another book which has some big many-syllable words.... I told the author about my limited English. However, the pain-in-the-neck author said big emotions do not come from big words. (ONCC, 12)”

As a rule, Bhagat leaves readers hanging at the conclusion of each chapter with a few mysterious sentences that make them want to keep reading.

To the reader, Bhagat's characters stand in for young Indians from the middle class today. By focusing on the struggles faced by his main characters, he highlights societal issues that affect people today.

Most of Bhagat's main characters are average people who stand out in a way that anybody can relate to since they represent a microcosm of society.

Bhagat introduces his characters—Shyam Mehra, Priyanka, Varun Malhotra, Esha Singh, Radhika Jha, and Military Uncle—in a unique manner. Bakshi may not play a pivotal role, but his actions have an impact on the others. Along with this, there are supporting characters named Shefali, Ganesh Gupta, Anuj, and Payal.

“The novelist does not crowd the novel with a galaxy of characters as Dickens often does, but in the manner of Zola and Turgenev, concentrates on a few characters focusing on their tastes, ambitions and aptitudes. [71]”

Although Shyam Mehra, better known as Sam Marcy, is competent and quick on his feet, he isn't confident in his abilities. Shyam is stuck in a job he hates in a contact centre because he can't afford to pursue his dream of getting a Bachelor of Education degree and opening a school. He aspires to be the team captain not because he is ambitious or even interested in the position, but because he wants to marry Priyanka, the only daughter she has, and her mother wants her to have a stable husband. His job is making him very unhappy. His disinterest and, more importantly, his dire financial situation, are to blame. Because of his miserable existence, he is wanting to wed the same girl. He makes significant changes to his life and achieves his goals by the book's conclusion.

All of Shyam's attention is on his duties. Shyam is rushing to go to his workplace as soon as the story starts. Even though his house is in utter disarray due to his cousin's wedding, he is determined to go to work on time. Everyone would anticipate a certain level of carelessness and unwillingness to go to work while a party is taking place at home from a guy of his age. Shyam is really insistent about wanting to work, even if it's only a call centre job. "Law firm?" Do you not intend to attend the wedding? No, I'm working right now. Is it okay if I use the tub? (“ONCC”, 13)

Leaving his position at the internet to join the Connexions contact centre, Shyam hopes to disavow his black sheep label while also boosting his reputation among his clan. "Connexions was also the natural choice for me, as Priyanka worked there," he says abruptly, explaining why he decided to join the contact centre in Gurgaon, Haryana. Obviously, that justification was irrelevant now. the Oncogene Network, 15

Varun Malhotra, aka Victor Mell, is the second protagonist introduced by Chetan Bhagat. His friends nicknamed him "Vroom" because of his passion for motorcycles and fast speeds. His character is symbolised by his name alone. His businessman father and his estranged mother cohabit his home. Varun Malhotra, better known as Vroom, has a burning ambition to become a journalist but must work in a contact centre just to make ends meet. If he doesn't, he could embarrass himself in the eyes of his buddies. Vroom is a great metaphor for the difficulties that young people have with their parents. Vroom is let down by his parents' frequent bickering and eventual divorce. Vroom rides his bike at an excessive speed in order to relax. This was Vroom's new way of compensating for his melancholy. He is really irritated by the subject. He tells Shyam, "I couldn't sleep at all," which makes his mental and physical health clear. All I did today was lie in bed, and now I'm ill. I really need recharge my batteries. according to the ONCC, 21

Unfortunately, workers working in contact centres often face insults from consumers who insist on speaking politely despite their rudeness. Vroom has been there, done that many times; sometimes he gets riled up and explains why he acts in such a shameful way. Even while he blames crooked politicians, the young people of our nation are the ones who suffer from poverty and a lack of employment possibilities, which he laments. Additionally, he explodes in anger whenever his supervisor claims the glory for their collective efforts.

The female characters are shown by Chetan Bhagat as quite contemporary. On one hand, kids have the desire for independence and freedom; on the other, they have the weight of responsibility to satisfy their parents and find common ground with their opinions. This also occurs in the life of the novel's female protagonist, Priyanka, who was Shyam's ex-girlfriend. Priyanka and Shyam's relationship ends after a lengthy extramarital affair. However, she finds herself in a state of confusion due to her mother's possessiveness and her own ambitions. Her intention is to make her mother happy, but she is also compelled to obey her mother's desire due to circumstances. She seems pleased to be marrying Mr. Microsoft, an NRI, even though she has never met him before; she accepts the marriage. Priyanka believes her mother always considers her promising future, so the joy isn't for her own benefit—she already knows Ganesh is the best option—but to make her mother happy. Her mother considers Ganesh to be a respectable spouse candidate, so she accepts to marry him despite her feelings for Shyam. This exemplifies the Indian parental style of micromanaging their children's life choices, especially when it comes to marriage.

Two distinct lifestyles coexist in contemporary Indian society: that of the West and that of traditional India. Chetan Bhagat uses Radhika, a contemporary lady, to symbolise the hypocrisy in our society. Out of all the women in the book, Radhika Jha is the only one who is married. Her parents do not approve of her marriage to her boyfriend Anuj. Currently, she lives with Anuj and his very traditional family, adhering to all of their traditions. At the same time, Radhika is juggling two responsibilities. While working in a contact centre, she plays the dual character of a kind and submissive homemaker and an independent and self-sufficient breadwinner.

In an effort to help his mother, Radhika does all he can. In this passage, Bhagat seeks to highlight the plight of the Indian lady who, in order to be a perfect wife, must give up her own ambitions and goals. By giving her life for her spouse and children, Radhika exemplifies the principle of tolerance. She learns her husband's ruthless character and makes a tough choice—something she never thought would happen to her. After deciding to end her marriage to Anuj, Radhika moves in with Esha.

Eliza Singer, portrayed by Bhagat as Esha Singh, is the most attractive and stylish female in the gang. She has big dreams of being a model and is very driven to achieve them. "Her life exemplifies the aspirational youth of the middle class who are rushing headlong into the materialism race" [72]. For today's young girls, she represents the ideal of the independent spirit that drives them to follow their dreams of being a fashion model. Esha joins call center job to get livelihood. Passionate about pursuing a career in modelling, Esha is driven to extremes. She always tries to seek the opportunities. She mentions that in four months there will be the Lakme fashion week. My agent is trying to get me an assignment.' (19) (ONCC)

"The guy I slept with – a forty-year-old designer. He told my agent later I was too short to be a ramp model... and that son of a bitch sends some cash as compensation afterwards... I hate myself, Shyam. I just hate myself. And I hate my face, and the stupid mirror that shows me this face... Can I get my face altered? (ONCC, 142-143)"

Whenever she feels the pinch of guilty conscience, she tries to slash her flesh with a sword. She regrets taking advantage of others, even if it isn't her purpose to do so. Because she abandoned her family and home to pursue a career in modelling, Esha is in an especially precarious position. For Esha to make her big break as a model, she must give up her virginity. Still, it's tragic that she lost her virginity without receiving any benefit. Within the pages of the book, Chetan Bhagat lays bare the modelling business.

Through the figure of Military Uncle, an old man employed in a contact centre, Chetan Bhagat reveals the nature of the parent-child bond in modern society. His irascible character forces him to live a life of austerity. His domineering personality makes his daughter-in-law refuse to let him live with them. It is a

perfect reflection of the contemporary day, when the majority of individuals bear the brunt of their suffering. Everyone knows he's reserved, yet he has a soft spot for his grandchild. When he sends him photos of wild creatures, it's easy to see. However, even his own kid does not value his worry. Rather of being happy, he writes the following email to his father, reprimanding him.

“Dad... You have cluttered my life enough, now stop cluttering my mailbox. I do not know what came over me that I allowed communication 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. (ONCC, 150)”

What the younger generation thinks of their elders is shown in the email of the son of a military uncle. Chetan Bhagat reveals the apathy of today's educated youth. Every member of society is moved by Military Uncle's tragic story and must reflect on the mental health of older people like him.

Bakshi is usually portrayed in a bad light by Chetan Bhagat. All of the novel's characters are vulnerable to Bakshi's make-suffer mentality. At the Connexions contact centre, he serves as the boss. In Shyam's dream, Bakshi attempts to drown him in the Indian Ocean, and he splashes water all over his body, feeling powerless, forlorn, and the dream has no significance. "Bakshi had told me I don't have the required skill set yet," Shyam said of his elevation to team leader, suggesting that Bakshi controls the process. Bakshi said I wasn't "a go-getter" in my evaluation. ONCC, page 12. According to Bakshi, Shyam should get his "leadership skills up to speed." (29; ONCC) "Bakshi was super-secretive - all he said was there were some confidential management priorities" (ONCC, 30), as shown by Shyam and Shefali's conversation concerning Shyam's advancement aspirations. Overuse of management jargon causes Bakshi to reinterpret his own statements in a certain light.

In *Connexions*, Bhagat adds the minor character Shefali, who works the shift before Shyam's. She plays the role of Shyam's girlfriend for a while in the plot. Shyam views their connection only as a way to "move on" from his previous romance with Priyanka. She often refers to Shyam by his pet name in their discussion. Their names are "eddy teddy" and "curly wurly," respectively. The protagonist, Shefali, is shown as a normal, youthful, idealistic, and narcissistic girl who believes that her thoughts dictate reality. Her demeanour and actions may be forthright and irritating at times.

There will be profound changes in India's social fabric, economy, government, and technology landscape as a result of globalisation. India has been making tremendous strides in every area of life since the beginning of globalisation. The notion of globalisation has transformed from a theoretical one into a stark reality that affects almost every facet of human life, including the economy, politics, the environment, culture, and more [73]. India is experiencing widespread urbanisation and the fast expansion of its cities due to globalisation. The urban India of today has undergone a metamorphosis in order to fulfil the requirements, expectations, challenges, goals, and desires of modern society. These shifting urban realities of India in today's globalised world are depicted in Chetan Bhagat's writings. Conflict arises in the lives of the characters as a result of old behaviours and conventions resisting change.

In *One Night @ Call Centre*, we see how call centres have been impacted by globalisation. The young people of India need to reevaluate their reasons for working in call centres and ask themselves whether the salaries they are receiving are commensurate with the value they are adding or if this is all just a fruitless endeavour. They need to look for ways to improve their life, such as finding more job satisfaction, more joy in their profession, and more motivation. They find fulfilment in their inner awareness, rather than in fleeting material goods. The identification of the workers reveals the exploitation. In order to fit in with the contact centre employment, they are forced to alter their names to Western ones. For example, Shyam Mehra becomes Sam Mercy, Varun Malhotra becomes Victor, Radhika Jha becomes Elina, and Eshasingh becomes Regina Jones.

Chetan Bhagat thinks that “On a different level, I began to think about the number of individuals who sacrifice their creativity and skills and join call center merely because of the fact pay packet on offer.” [74]

Mr. Vyomesh Bakshi represents a corporate setting that is in a terrible state of affairs. He is the stereotypical exploitationist employer. In the hopes of being promoted, he assigns additional responsibilities to some agents. He uses management lingo in an effort to seem refined. In an effort to elevate them, he regularly takes credit for the work of his juniors while ignoring their efforts. Employees fear their employers because of the rampant exploitation they experience on the job. Although it may be humorous, this is the truth for those who work in the private sector. From Bakshi, Shyam receives a fax. It is not Shyam's responsibility to teach new recruits on accents, since that task has been allocated to him. Shyam is irritated because Bakshi has given him too much work. He will undoubtedly be completely sapped of vitality by this workout. This is a very graphic representation of workplace exploitation.

Given the interconnected nature of the novel's characters, *One Night @ Call Centre* seems as a record of the ways in which globalisation takes advantage of young Indians. Esha is required to have an affair with a designer before she can accept the modelling offer. He tells her she is too short for the chance, but in reality, he is simply taking advantage of her for his own pleasure. Esha cuts her flesh on purpose since she is so distraught at the betrayal.

### Conclusion:

Chetan Bhagat's literary contributions significantly reflect the societal changes and challenges faced by modern Indian youth. His narratives not only entertain but also provoke thought about the effects of globalization on individual lives and relationships. Bhagat's works serve as a mirror to the aspirations and disillusionments of young India, offering insights into the struggle for identity and acceptance in a rapidly changing world. This study underscores the importance of Bhagat's writing in the context of Indian English literature and its appeal to a generation navigating the crosscurrents of tradition and modernity.

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