

GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL HOMOGENIZATION IN INDIA WITH REFERENCE TO CHETANBHAGATH'S *ONE NIGHT @ THE CALL CENTER.*

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Abstract

ChetanBhagat is the first Indian writer, who writes English Novels for the masses especially the present generation youth. He quits his job from an investment bank and dedicated his life time for writing something about the new India. Bhagat is undoubtedly responsible for setting off new trends. He has been recognized as one of the best writers and the changes brought about by him in India's literary as well as Publishing world is notable. The New York Times called him 'the biggest selling English Novelist in India's history' and Time Magazine named him as one of the most Influential people in the world.

One night @ the Call Centre is Bhagat's second novel, which offers a vision to young people who have ambitions, aspirations, exploitations and struggles. The book explains the nerve of India's call centre generation and presents a realistic life of the agents and their traumatic experiences. This paper is an attempt to reveal how Globalization has been exercised and influenced the local culture, and how the youngsters struggles to achieve their ambitions.

Key words: Globalization, western influence, post-modern aspects, labour exploitation, depressions, cultural barriers, cultural Homogenization, impacts.

Chetan Bhagat is one of the best selling novelist in India. He is also a motivational speaker, columnist and also good narrator too. Bhagat is completely a Stranger to the literary field but he is a voracious reader who reads novels of Jane Austen, Heminger, J.L. Salinger and so on. ChetanBhagat has his own way of telling stories. His language is so simple and he also says that most emotions are come from the simpler words. In 2008, The New York Times cited Bhagat as "the biggest selling English language novelist in India's history."*One Night*

@ the call centre is Bhagat's second novel which deals with the six characters and the hurdles they face around one night in a call centre called *Connexions* at Gurgaon.

All the six characters are teens and the way they are acquainted in the novel is fabulous as Shashi Tharoor says,

' ... pitch perfect ... keenly focused on nuances and detail One Night @ the Call Centre has struck a chord with India's young ...'

The novel opens with an epilogue explaining Bhagat's train journey from Kanpur to Delhi with a young pretty girl who wants Bhagat to write a novel that should focus on young people who face challenges in modern India. Then the novel starts with the narration of Shyam, the protagonist and five of his colleagues working in *Connexions*.

The title of the novel itself seems to be an impact of Globalization. Call centre cultures are new to India since 1980's. People merely seek the arrival of call centres as one of the solutions to the unemployment issues in a developing country like India. Globalization as Shiela L. Croucher argues that

" Globalization can be described as process by which the people of the world are unified into a single society and function together. This process is a combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural and political forces."

Globalization and its impacts on socio - cultural issues, development of economy and trade, per-capita income and technology are commonly discussed terms now and then. But regarding literature its impact can be categorized under post-modern aspects where everything can be discussed literally. As Manfred B. Steger states:

" Since its earliest appearance in the 1960's the term globalization has been used in both popular and academic literature... "

Though globalization and its growth are seen in every field, its impact on culture and cultural transformations are undoubtedly discussed in the novel. Culture is somewhat the knowledge, language, values, customs and practices that we knowingly or unknowingly adapted from one person to another.

Alternatively, culture as states in the Cambridge English Dictionary is:

“the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs of a particular group of people at a particular time.”

As the novel focussed in a call centre in India but its Head Quarters is situated at US, the economy, its rise and fall, globalization, policies and trade affects the job security of call centre agents all around the world. The role of US in the Global economy as Paul Hopper says:

“the US also plays a central role in the economic globalization as the global consumer of last resort.”

Bhagat as narrates in this novel that the characters are in a tension at Connexions that their boss told them about right sizing or cost cutting. Such is corporate life the nature of their in-secured jobs. The agents in the call centre are in an urge to find their sustainability there as Shyam says:

“... a lot is down tonight, not just the systems...”

Even though BPO's and MNC's offer job with high salary to the youths in India, they also deliberately insists the Western culture in them. The fusion of traditional or modern culture in another country can be called as cultural hybridization. Their way of customs, beliefs, and even food habits influence the other nations. Justin Ervin and Zachary Alden Smith calls cultural homogenization as,

“the process of decreasing cultural diversity and replacing it with cultural standardization and uniformity.”

The novel keenly focuses on the cultural homogenization among the agents, the way they modify to the new culture, which starts from the change of their Indian names to American names such as Shyam Mehra or Sam Marcy, Radhika Jha or Regina Jones, Varun Malhotra or Victor Mell, Esha Singh or Eliza Singer. This is just because the Americans troubles to pronounce the Indian names. The next thing that every agent should concentrate more is on the American slang. The complete strange slang will be imported on the new candidates during their training sessions. The protagonist Shyam rightly says:

“...their language are straight forward With them, each letter can be pronounced several ways... the vowels are another more painful story...”

Most of the BPO's are busy during the night times as their Head Quarters are in US or UAE so that it is night here but day there. The character in the novel calls themselves as nocturnal that they are all awoken hundreds of nights. In India, the population rises to billion and ninety percent of them felt asleep at night except few drivers, doctors, labourers and night shift call centre agents.

The influence of western culture can be viewed on even the food they prefer in the call centre. They calculate each and every calories rather than tasting it. Pizza, Maggi, Chocolate cakes all those fast food becomes their favourite dish since they started their career in the call centre.

“... coke ... eight spoons of sugar ... and nothing else. I like pizza. Damn well I do. I earn, I eat, and I die.”

Says Vroom regarding their adaptation of their food habits. The characters often discusses about drinks and justifies by saying that it helps them to get rid-off the harder

times in their shift. All the six characters are drunkard and especially Vroom becomes Chainsmoker.

Cultural homogenization can make a change in the life style but their spirit of nationalism cannot be questioned says the following lines:

"...America has a lot ... well, don't be so high on America. Americans may have many things, but they aren't the happiest people on earth by any stretch..."

Bhagat also provides a space in the novel discussing the importance of being united. Varun always says that he wants his dad and mom to be altogether. Priyanka needs her mother to be more friendlier because she pointed her daughter as unaffectionate and cold person. Esha runs away from home because of her passion to become a model but atlast she also wants her parents back. The eldest person among them is the Military Uncle who's longing to be with his son and grandson is clearly visible in his utterances such as

"... but I was wrong. It is there life, and I have no right to judge them by my outdated values and I need to get rid of my inflated ego and go the US to see them and talk it out.."

Labour exploitation is another great issue discussed in the novel. Vroom and Shyam feels highly deceived when they came to know that their web manual was stolen by their own boss. They felt ashamed that the sacrifices of the entire generations wasn't realized by the Indian Government. These youth earn money but they need to build something for their own future. Vroom calls call centres as

"An air-conditioned sweat shop is still a sweat shop. Infact it is worse, nobody sees the sweat. Nobody sees your brain getting rammed."

The salary they get is a prime concern here. The amount they spend for phones, pizzas, jeans, disco's, drinks etc., are counted and taken into account shows them as spendthrifts. The comparison between a graduate in India and an unlettered in US clearly pointed out by Vroom as:

".. fifteen thousand a month. That is almost twelve dollars a day, wow, I make as much a day as a US burger boy makes in two hours. Not bad for my college degree."

All the six characters wants to cheer up themselves from their anxieties and they decided to go and enjoy at a night club. After enjoying for a while, they leave from the club to Connexions. While returning, the Qualis suddenly skidded and all of them are in a life threatening situation. Their mobile phones are not working and they seek help from others. Everyone sprang to attention as Shyam's phone began vibrating. The screen says "God calling."

Dues Ex Machina is a device used in this novel meaning 'god from the machine' to solve the situation or to surprise, to bring a happy ending. The characters receive a call from God who speaks modern English. God also provides four things a person needs for success – intelligence, self-confidence, imagination and failure. The character are now confident enough and they successfully narrated their actual needs to God. The change, the little voice, the inner call really gives peace to them. Varun and Shyam started a new web design company, Priyanka continues her B.Ed, Esha went to meet her parents, Radhika divorced her husband and Military Uncle went to US. Connexion is now saved for atleast six months. The higher authorities at Boston postponed the layoffs to try a new sales-driven recovery plan for the call centre.

Bhagat clearly depicts the current situation of call centre culture, psychological depressions in youth, the influence of globalization in this novel. The youth are in the urge to accumulate themselves to the present scenario. Their love for the country, valuing human relationships, longings for self-respect are vividly narrated by the author. Cultural homogenization has both positive and negative aspects in its way. But it may vary according to the needs of the individual. Today people become aware of cultural homogenization, its occurrence, whether it is good or bad but it breaks the cultural barriers and paves way to a single culture as John Tomlinson says,

"it is one thing to say that cultural diversity is being destroyed, quite another to lament the fact."

The novel *One Night @ the Call centre* is undoubtedly an impact of globalization, that moved the traditional Indian culture to modernized Western culture which pertinently results in the progress or success.

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