

**Segregation and Silence: A Look into the Call Centre
Syndrome in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center***

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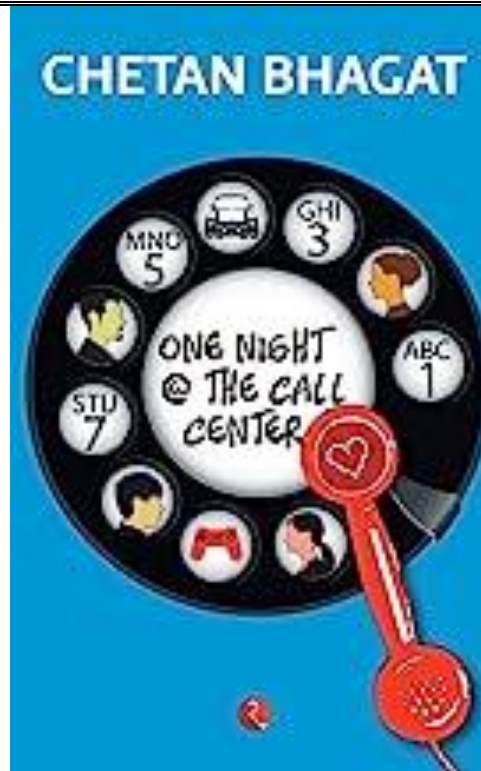
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Abstract

Globalization has made the world small. When the tag, think local, make global was circulated all around, little did the people in India imagine that they would have to work for the overseas capitalistic masters leaving them work for peanuts. One of the reasons as to why the customer service and other outsourcing jobs come to a country like India is because, it is a country with cheap labor and cheaper market. Chetan Bhagat has chosen the pressures of the youth who work with the outsourcing industry is because; he wants to make his readers understand the plight of the youth who are not so much fortunate to step into the IIT. The novel, *One Night @ a Call Centre* centers around six youth who work night shifts. The paper is an attempt to look at the youth of the country who wish to scale great career heights with aspirations. They do not know the way to reach their zeal and goals.

Keywords: *One Night @ the Call Center*, Call Centers, Youth, Career, Exploitations, God, Self-confidence, explore

The novel brings to light the problems of underemployment, which is even worse than unemployment. The novel written in the year 2005 marked the beginning of call centre jobs which recruited people who had the gift of the gab. They were given good salaries with little scope for career growth. The novel highlights the problems of youth who choose call centre jobs because they do not find anything else more constructive. Although they know fully well that the job will not offer them a career, they still choose it for money and fashion.

The characters in the novel are six in number, they all have different tastes and different sensibilities but still they are all connected by one single determinant, that is, they all sacrifice their night's sleep and work for the U.S. despite knowing fully well that they have taken their lives and health to a toll. The icing in the cake in the novel is when they get a call from God which they take it as an opportunity to change themselves and their fates.

The following quote from the novel is an inspiring message to the youth who have no idea as to what to do with their lives. God's entry is more pleasing and the most satisfying because the characters now understand to come out of their problems and learn to live their lives with a more optimistic temperament.

One of the important pieces of advice which the author wishes to give the youth of tomorrow is that they must learn to fail because it is the only quality which gives them the audacity to take risks. The novelist says,

There are four things a person needs for success: a medium amount of intelligence, a bit of imagination, self-confidence, and failure. For once you taste failure, you have no fear. You

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Sabeena D., PhD Research Scholar and Dr. P. Parthiban, Assistant Professor

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can take risks more easily. Then You don't want to snuggle in your comfort zone anymore-you are ready to fly. And Success is about flying, not snuggling, God said. (8)

Every novel of Bahgat has a unique beginning. This is the second novel of the author where he is asked by one of his fellow travelers in a compartment to write a story in her name. After the publication of his first novel, he was bloating in success when he realized that he is doing nothing much for the welfare of the youth of the country who have no proper guidance about their life and career choice. The select few come to the IIT, and the rest of the other youth are left to their own fates. The novel is an address to that specific section of the youth who aspire to come up in life but have no clue as to what they have to do to reach their ladders of success.

The novel begins as an icebreaking between himself and a beautiful girl whom he met during one of his overnight journeys between Kanpur and Delhi. He was just returning home after having a discussion with some of his friends in the IIT Delhi about the ways in which his earlier novel was catching up. After having had some initial success and a launch pad into the writing career, the novelist decided that his next book will have to be something which would be better than the first one. He wanted to write on a topic which has not been explored until now. He thus chose the subject as call center, something which is not much known to the people back in 2005. The girl whom he meets on the train is an employee of an ITES firm called Connexious call centre at Gurgon, Haryana. Initially the author was hesitant in accepting the story of the girl for she had asked him to publish her story as it was said to him. Soon enough, he felt that the story would help a lot of youth who are confused as to what they would do in life.

These young people who are six in number represent the modern Indian mindset which is a repercussion of globalization. All the six people are drawn from various sections of society. The irony of the novel rests in the fact that they are able to provide solutions to the problems of customers offshore, but they cannot fix up their lives. The girl on the train asked the author one pertinent question as to, "If you want to write about the youth, shouldn't you talk about young people, who really face challenges. I mean yes, IITians face challenges, but what about the hundreds and thousands of others?" (6).

The rest of the novel is an attempt to uncover the reflections of the characters about their lives and their career prospects. God in the novel is much like a fairy god mother who tries to give them what they want in life. Once their lives change after God steps in, these characters begin to think over as to how they can be self-sufficient and independent without having to ask God and harp on him for anything and everything.

All the experiences of the characters are told from the eyes of Shyam, a person who has the same sensibilities as that of the author. The characters have their own names and the faked American names which form a part of their problems.

To begin with one could talk about the character of Radhika Jha, who has an American name, Regina Jones, a name to make the Americans believe that they are being called from the

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U.S and also an idea that would make them pronounce their names with ease. Esha Singh is called Eliza Singer.

It is the story of three boys and three girls who amount to six young people who have enormous ambitions to take over but are always in the dark about how to go about it and make their lives a success.

Another important idea that the author wishes to record through the novel is the thought that the success of a person is measured through the quantum of money he earns in his life or the office he holds on to. Bhagat is fully aware of the fact that all the youth of the country do not have the privilege which he enjoyed by being a part of IIT and IIM but still he wishes to make the novel his medium of motivation to the prospective young minds.

Another character, Military Uncle is also introduced in the novel apart from the six youngsters. He is fifty plus and works at the call centre to support the extra income which the job offers. He is shown as an introvert who speaks only when asked and even if he does, he does not utter more than what is required. The character Military uncle is a foil to the young people who speak their minds and have a jolly good life. Shyam says, "At fifty plus, he is the oldest person in the call centre. I do not know him well, and I won't talk about him much. But I do know that... The pension was meager, and he tried to supplement his income by working in the call centre. He rarely speaks more than three words at a time" (20).

Radhika is another character in the novel who has to balance work life with the family. She got married to Anuj, her college buddy and since then she has been earning the wrath of her in laws who come from a traditional family background and do not women to work night shifts by forsaking their safety for the sake of money. She is one such women who is a representation of all the conservative set of women in larger families. To the people, marriage is a bottle neck for a lucrative job and hence these women are forced to put their papers down for they are not allowed to work against the wishes of the male members in their family. Radhika still wishes to work for she feels that she could offer financial assistance to her husband and help him save some more money so that they could use it for their rainy days.

The character of Radhika reminds one of the employment problems which the youth of the country confront. Although the Indian government knows it pretty well that the Indian youth are exploited by the American companies in the name of lower salaries and lower offs but high layoff but still there is not much effort and contribution from the Indian government to make the lives and salaries of these employees better.

Reena Patil in her book, *Women in India's Call Centre Industry* comments on the key issues faced by the women employees in this realm. She says,

At present women workers constitute about one third of the total call centre and BPO workforce in India. However, despite such a major economic contribution of women to the

industry, several challenges faced by them still remain to be addressed. There is a general lack of confidence among women at junior levels to speak up against issues such as graveyard shifts and lack of adequate safety and security measurements. (23)

The call centre jobs offer a stop gap to the youth which is in itself a positive sign to confront but still, there are other risks involved in choosing a job which does not contribute to goal setting or ambition acquiring in the job market.

Esha is one such example in the novel. She is seen as a girl who is extremely beautiful and attractive. She hails from Chandigarh and has a strong passion for modeling. She loves wearing fashionable outfits. Esha is a novice in the world of fashion and modeling. She uses the job at the BPO as a stop gap to fulfill all her aspirations and needs.

The rest of the novel brings to the forefront the nature of a job which all the six people have to foresee. They are called customer support assistants and their job is to resolve the queries of the customers abroad and offer them feasible solutions.

Every character has his own battle to fight out and explore. He has his own aspirations and dreams. The author wants to say that the youth of the nation do not get support from the government, guidance from their schools and colleges as to how to choose their career paths. The six characters are representations of the youth of India who wish to soar but have to end up going low key because they are confused and confounded as to what they would wish to be in their lives. Esha is one such character who represents a lot of women who are prepared to go to any extent to realize their dreams in modeling. Although the path to fame is tough, they understand that they need to stoop before the corrupt Indian society which tries to exploit girls in the name of giving them offers and opportunities to realize their dreams.

The novel is more of an ambivalent texture when the author wants the youth of the country to gain great heights without being and becoming a victim of any kind of financial snare.

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