

Soul Dealing - “Friendship, Love, Sex, and Marriage” in One Night @ the Call Center

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ABSTRACT

Literature is not only a sedative pill, which calms down anxiety of mind. It also works as a proactive pill, which stimulates the mind to bring innovative changes in the patriarch society. Bhagat considers literature as a provocative pill, which works as a strong stimulant to the human mind. Bhagat enthuses the youth to purge sterile obstinacy of the social system.

Bhagat has introduced some elite trends in the Indian English literature. He has focused the attention of the adolescence. He has written about their aspirations. He has attempted to steer their developed energies into proper track. His novels are touching to the third generation. These demonstrate the goal of the youth, mixed with fears and tears. His men and women take life for pleasure. They enjoy even being called five pointers that is sort of insulting. Their concern lies specifically in the innovation of education system and the society as a whole. They believe in success comes to those who desire for achievability not for dampness in life. Bhagat has this quality to muddle up the past and the present so adequately that the readers don't get confused while correlating the events.

*First time in the history of Indian English literature, Chetan Bhagat introduced God as a cosy friend with mobile phone in his second blockbuster novel **One Night @ the Call Center**. A phone call from God is a Salient features, an additional element, of his works, in the novel. The author has represented god as a friendly figure rather than a boss.*

Full Text

Chetan Bhagat is one of the greatest novelists whose writings are primarily appealing and entertaining especially to the young readers. He is a novelist par excellence for the obvious reason that he knows the actual pulse of the youth and therefore he caters themes, trends and techniques according to their tastes and temperaments. **One Night @ the Call Center** is a tale of six people working in a call center termed as “Western Appliances Strategic Group” popularly known as WASG in Gurgaon. Written “at the most conscious point of the race”¹ to use a phrase of F. R. Leavis, Chetan Bhagat’s most popular novel **One Night @ the Call Center** presents a horrifying picture of the fast-changing facets of social scenario, particularly with regard to the present day dynamics of male-female relationship, in which the characters are all engaged in some kind of adventure knowing little or nothing of their surroundings. “Larder with scientific jargons and technical key-words like website, computers, Italian fistro, strategic variables, Brad Pitt, etc. The novel is an impression of the author’s flair for inventing a new idiom for fictional narrative that can keep pace with contemporary sensibility.”²

One Night @ the Call Center is Chetan's second novel, **Five Point Some One** being the first one, **The 3 Mistakes of My Life**, **2 States**, and **Revolution 2020** are the other novels. All the novels of Chetan Bhagat became popular and inspired Bollywood films. Amusement, campus life of the "IITians" the system of given grades, love, Marriage of two different caste people etc. are some of the ingredients of a good novel. They are abundantly found in these novels. But **One Night @ the Call Center** has something more. It is an in-depth study of male-female psyche, love and human relations are given the form of an interesting story. It touches the delicate cord of heart of the young generation because it beautifully expresses its vibrations, aspirations and ideology. The story of the novel sounds less a story and more a sordid reality.

The characters in the plot are lively, adventurous, good-tempered, sociable, frank and amiable. They are Shyam Mehra, Varun Malhotra, Esha Singh, Radhika Jha, Priyanka and a Military uncle. It is a vivid tale of their pain, sorrows, ambitions, love life, personal trauma and happiness they share together Priyanka Lamba observes : " we have not come across any advertisement of Chetan Bagat's novels on the television, on road-side bill boards or in news papers. Neither is he prescribed in any university nor does he grace any literary functions"³. And yet at he is what The New York Times says, "the biggest selling English language novelist in India's history." The International Herald Tribune has rightly praised Chetan Bhagat as a writer , " who touched a nerve with young Indian readers and acquired almost cult status" What could be the possible reason for his selling more than a daily news paper? Apart from the theme, his narrative style too holds the key to his immense popularity. Though his characters seem to be simple, they have certain ideas, views, attitudes and faced by everybody in day-to-day life. Added to this is the simple and lucid expression which immediately strikes a chord with the readers, as he uses appropriate and humorous stylistic devices-such as similes, personifications, metaphor, alliteration and so on.

One Night @ the Call Center has a dramatic opening. On over a night journey in the winter of 2004, from Kanpur to Delhi, the novelist comes across a young girl. The novelist beseeches her to tell him a story to kill time and the girl accedes to his proposal provided her story is given a book form. Of course, the story is all about human relations, love, sex, friendship and marriage. Shyam Mehra who is very much like Bhagat, narrates the story. Apart from the main characters, the secondary characters are Shefali, Ganesh Gupta, Anuj, Subhash Bakshi (the boss of all) and Payal. Bakshi, a womanizer and an in-charge of swindling nature is a very deceptive personality. The principal character of the novel is Shyam, a replica of the novelist. He is in love with Priyanka, the heroine of the novel. "Love is a universal migraine, A bright stain on the vision."⁴ Blotting out reason for Shyam's past dates with Priyanka are described in five successive chapters.

Each chapter reveals the curves of his delicate relationship with Priyanka, who is not as firm and decisive as her reliable lover due to the pressure and control exercised on her by her snobbish mother. Shyam Mehra's call name is Sam Marcy and he detests arranged marriages. "Shyam is very upset to learn that Priyanka, a colleague is engaged to a person called Ganesh Gupta, who works at Microsoft in the U.S. To add to his woes, he is horrified to learn that Bakshi had cheated him and Vroom by submitting the trouble shooting website to the Boston Centre as his

own without crediting himself and Vroom.”⁵ Priyanka’s happiness at her new found love turns into frustration when she learns of her parents plan to get her married the very next month. She feels that it is too early to get married. But Ganesh Gupta and Priyanka’s mother bring so much pressure on her and make her accept the proposal. Radhika jha, call name Regina jones, is the only married one in the group.

Trying to manage the household activities and her job, Radhika’s main aim in her life is to earn money and settle down on one hand, and manage her mother-in-law on the other. She wants please her in-laws by being helpful and affectionate towards them. She never reveals her family affairs to any one even though there are reasons for her to be worried and unhappy. She loved her husband deeply and intensely until she found out about his love affair with another lady. She forgives her hubby for time being.

To be precise, the heroine of the novel, Priyanka is Shyam’s ex-girl friend. Though Shyam and Priyanka had called it quits on their relationships a long time ago, her feelings for Shyam still longer. Military uncle is the oldest of the lot and the odd man out. A family feud forces him to stay alone even in his old age, an uncommon phenomenon in India. Military uncle’s heart cries out for his grandson. In the words of Sarita Veerangana: “Military uncle is a dotard. Family feud makes him cut off from the members of his family. He lives all alone in the evening of his life. But the memory of his grandson rends his heart.”⁶

The fate of Esha is somewhat different from that of Radhika. She loves a Philander who happens to be Shyam’s friend Vroom. Esha also Vroom’s obsession and the apple of his eye. He thinks about Esha day and night and day in and day out. Vroom says to Esha: “ I have been thinking about you a lot lately.” Esha enquires: “ Really?”. She looks sideways to ensure that Shyam is not eavesdropping the conversation which passes on between her and Vroom. But she knows well that Vroom has no steady track of mind. He is like a “butterfly roaming from flower to flower.”⁷ Vroom had no hesitation in admitting it. Yes, really Esha, I may have met a lot of girls, but no one is like you. His actual name is Varun Malhotra, call name Victor Mell. He is very smart and loves speed that is why his friends call him Vroom.

Varun hates the Call Centre and his American employers. Unfortunately he has to compromise for the simple reason that he has to keep up his standard of living. Otherwise he runs the risk of running his image in front of his friends. Esha’s call name is Eliza Singer. She refuses to love and marry to Vroom. Once she slept with a fashion designer as he promised to make her a role model. Though she lost her virginity, she plan ended in smoke. She took up a job at the Call Centre so that she could achieve her dreams. She works as a Call Centre agent by night and meets model coordinators in the day. But she fails to enter into the modeling world.

Chetan Bhagat creates such situations and events which are stimulating and delightful to the youth. “The onward march of the genre of Indian writing in English continues unabated, much to the amazement and, at times, envy of some western literatures and critics,”⁸ Chetan Bhagat received many awards at national and international levels because he combines love, sex, marriage, friendship, current burning social issues, humor and wit in his novels.

Vroom is a professed lover. He pretends to love Esha and Esha well knows that behind the artificial gesture of Vroom there are hidden treachery, duplicity and doubledealing. He does not understand as to why Esha is not interested in his proposal. But in no time, he understands, “if a girl hints she is not interested it is time to cut losses and quit. Never try the persuasion game.” Finally Esha declares: “I can’t afford the luxury of making a boy friend.” “The persons and all the girls who are attached to the call center are lovingly, mentally, alert, amiable, good-tempered, lively and high-spirited. The call center abounds in pleasant personalities who enjoys talking to one another, sharing their feelings and ambitions”⁹

The story of the novel is claimed to be based on the true story. The themes in this novel **One Night @ the Call Center**, the thematic concerns are – the anxieties and insecurities of the rising Indian middle class, including questions about career, marriage, family conflicts in a changing India, and the relationship of the young Indian middle class to both executives and ordinary clients, whom they serve in the U.S.A there is an aspect of self-help in the book as the author invites readers to identify aspects of themselves and their lives that make them angry and that they would like to change.

There are woes in the case of all the characters dealt with by Chetan Bhagat. Shyam: He is upset to learn that Priyanka is engaged to an NRI Software Engineer called Ganesh Gupta, because he has dated Priyanka for a long time, even before marriage he enjoys sex with her in the Qualis on Priyanka’s urge. Ultimately, Priyanka doesn’t marry Ganesh for the simple reason that he has concealed his real age even in the photograph. He is a slightly bald headed groom. Finally she returns to Shyam. Esha:Esha had earlier done a comprise by sleeping with a designer to obtain a modeling contract. However, the guy turned out to be opportunistic. He betrays her by telling her that she can’t become a model due to her inadequate height. He also tries to console her by sending her some money. Esha smells foul play in Vroom’s proposal. “She is no desperate nymphomaniac, like Lady Brett in Hemingway’s *The Sun also Rises*” who loves Jake and finding him physically incapable of making love, is obliged, in order to satisfy her imperious needs, to take for love now one, now another. Esha is not an unchaste girl and she cannot put up with an ever changing lover like Vroom”¹⁰

Vroom’s woes are many. He is shocked to learn that Bakshi has swindled him and Shyam by submitting their wok as his owns. To add to his miseries, he overhears Esha telling other girls that she had slept with a designer to get a modeling contract. Radhika suffers due to her unfaithful husband and teasing in-laws. Military Uncle tries to be nice to his son and grandson but when he sends some pictures via mail to his grandson, he loses his cool and asks him to keep out of his life. This leaves Military Uncle heartbroken.

“The phone call from God is one of the salient features in the novel. The author has represented God as a friendly figure rather than a boss”¹¹ He is shown as speaking in modern English rather than the stereo-typed pure English or Latin that one usually encounters God speaking or saying. All the lead characters during the night go in a Qualis and enjoy at a night club. After enjoying for a while, they leave for office midway through the journey, Vroom starts to feel nauseated after drinking alcohol and so they stop and venture out.

Vroom throws up and also breaks the window-pane of a shop thus spreading an alarm. They rush out of the place in fear. While returning, they face a life-threatening situation when their Qualis crashes into a construction site hanging over a mesh of iron construction rods. As the rods began to yield slowly, they began to panic. They are unable to call for help as there is no mobile phone network at that place. In this situation, shyam's mobile phone starts ringing. The phone call is from God. He speaks to all of them and gives them suggestion to improve their life. After that, God also advises them on how to get their vehicle out of the construction site.

The conversation with God motivates the group to such an extent that they get ready to face their problems with utmost determination and motivation. Mean while, Vroom and Shyam hatch up a plan to throw Bakshi out of the Call Centre and prevent the closing of "Western Appliances Strategic Group" or WASG. Call Center, whose employees are to be downsized radically, when they emerge out of danger, they have clear out goals in their mind. On returning to the Call Centre, they carry out their plans with dexterity, courage and dynamism.

All Chetan Bhagat's books deal with the problems of the Indian youth and how they tackle it successfully to reach their goals. If **Five Point Someone** delineated the life inside an IIT campus and the system of giving grades, **One Night @ the Call Center** featured an incident which happened in the life of six call centre employees on one night. The novelist beautifully and successfully depicts their problems and they handle triumphantly all their maladies with courage and conviction. Call center jobs are hot picks for India's youth brigade today as they can make some Quick bucks through somewhat non-risky jobs. You do not need to have a degree with high marks to obtain a Call Centre job. All you need is to have a melodious voice with clarity which can be moulded into foreign accent and some cool temper and patience with the help of which they can deal with the callers.

With meticulous attention to securing the right word in the right place, Chetan develops a brilliant prose style, simple, straightforward and direct. His mastery of language, his range of vocabulary, his power to create words and phrases and use them appropriately to attain the impact of sensation on the nerves and above all, his unique virtuosity, are everywhere manifested. Through words with their multiple associations, Bhagat endeavors to communicate a sense of simultaneity. He summons all meaning to judgment before a verbal apocalypse.

There are some critics who criticize and condemn Chetan Bhagat mainly for two reasons. First and foremost, he keeps some Hindi heroes and heroines in his mind and then begins to write a novel. Secondly he raises cross-cultural issues, illegal fornifications, the different aspects of modernizing India, the familial problems and pressures-but he does not give us clearcut solutions for all these.

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