

THE IMPACT OF WESTERNIZATION IN INDIAN YOUTH PORTRAYED IN ONE NIGHT @ THE CALL CENTER

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Abstract

“The younger generation is surrounded by the Internet, apps and video games. But somehow, my books make them read” – Chetan Bhagat

The paper entitled “Impact of Westernization in Indian Youth in Chetan Bhagat’s *One Night @ the Call Center*” aims at exploring the ramifications of westernization in the lives of Indian people, especially Indian youth. It also presents the advantages and disadvantages of westernization and the many-sided problems faced by the Indian youth, when they internalize western concepts. *One Night @ the Call Center* is the study of contemporary India, where the spirit of non-aggression, modesty, brotherhood and fairness in life has been replaced by aggression, vulgarity, aversion and warfare.

Indian culture is rich and diverse and as a result, unique in its very own way. Western culture can also be referred to as advanced civilization. The globe is shrinking and all are getting closer to one another in many ways. So it is very natural for the Indians to adopt the Western culture and vice versa. Even though Indians have accepted the modern means of living and improved the life style, their values and beliefs still remain unchanged. People can change their way of clothing, eating and living but the rich Indian values in them always remain unchanged. This is because they are deeply rooted in their souls. But, Bhagat focuses on the other side, where the present generation is tempted to change entirely to the westernized trends.

Chetan Bhagat, the winner of Society Young Achiever Award, is an Indian author, columnist, screen writer and speaker. He is the author of the best-selling novels *Five Point Someone*, *The Three Mistakes of My Life*, *Two States* and *One Night @ the Call Center*. Bhagat is a prominent writer, who has popularized Indian writing in English with his themes that are appealing to the present generation. He has portrayed modern Indian youth, with all their potentiality, trying hard to become successful in their lives. In the words of Srinivasa Iyengar, “He is one of the few writers in India who takes his craft seriously... pursuing with a sense of

dedication...” (qtd. in Prasad 43). His common themes include problems experienced by youth, hardships of call center workers, westernization, problems in love and identity crisis.

One Night @ the Call Center (2005) is a novel based on the life of people in middle class families in India and their problems. It describes various aspects of human life. The novel reflects reality. Earnshaw states, “The realist novel represents stories, characters and settings that are similar to those commonly found in the contemporary everyday world” (27). It deals with the expectations of people and their frustrations, when they are not fulfilled. The plot of the novel revolves round six people, who work as a group in a call center. They are all different from one another, but are united by the fact that they are all fed up with their lives. The novel describes how a particular night at the call center changes their way to deal with the problems of their lives.

In the novel, Bhagat has patently portrayed the thwack of westernization. Westernization is a process whereby societies adopt Western culture in areas such as industry, politics, economics, diet, language, technology and values. To many, the call center has become a symbol of India’s rapidly globalizing economy. While traditional India sleeps, a dynamic population of highly skilled professionals works through the night, attending calls from the US customers. Bhagat sees them as soul-destroying sweatshops, soaking up the talents and energy, who could and should be doing better for them and for their country.

Bhagat portrays the western influence, which has both positive and negative aspects in the lives of Indians. Like the two sides of a coin, westernization has both good and negative influence on people. Compared to the negative side, the positive aspects are only a few.

Western culture is establishing a strong base in India and is gradually wiping the Indian culture. The impact of westernization can be seen clearly in the lives of Indians, especially in the lives of Indian youth. Bhagat captures the essence of western impact on India and records it in the novel. Though westernization has many adverse effects on Indian culture, it has some good aspects too. Indians are benefited from the westerners in the field of education. Literacy rate has increased and even women have access to knowledge. The development of call centers itself is a growth due to westernization. Women are bold enough to work with men in call centers even at nights. They are not voiceless and they are given equal rights as men. In the novel, Priyanka, Esha and Radhika work in the call center with men. They assert their individuality in every aspect of life.

Another advantage of westernization is the technological development. Development of IT sector, call centers, business tours, invention of electronic gadgets like mobile phones and computers all attribute to the positive aspects of westernization. With the development of technology, the world has shrunk into a global village. The call center people sit in front of the computers in India and attend customers from the US. They learn something day by day, while attending customers and they earn money for their living. On the other side, westernization has greatly affected our tradition and custom. It is unfortunate that the present generation has little knowledge about their culture, traditions and their roots. The young generation ape the western way of dressing, which at times becomes obscene. In the novel, there is a description of a “stick-thin” (89) model in a bar. “She wore a top without any sleeves or neck or collar. I guess the girls call it ‘off-shoulder’. Defying physics, it did not slip off, though most men waited patiently” (90). Esha is a model, who also imitates the western way of dressing and makes herself beautiful. She is a fine example to show how people are forced to satisfy men’s sexual desires in order to fulfill their dreams. Just to win a modeling contract, Esha yields to a man’s sexual urge. She

says, “The guy I slept with-a forty-year-old designer. He told my agent later I was too short to be a ramp model... Like the bastard didn’t know that when he slept with me” (142).

Westernization has given rise to pre-marital affairs. Before marriage, youngsters engage in pre-marital sex. The ancient Indian culture is degraded by such immoral activities and the lives of today’s youth are spoiled by such behaviour. In the novel, Priyanka and Shyam engage in pre-marital sex, which is not at all a big deal to them. They often visit clubs and pubs and enjoy the nights. At one point, Shyam says, “Clumsy sex is better than no sex” (96). Priyanka and Shyam have sex in the company of friends and they do not even feel ashamed of such mean behaviour. Extra-marital affair is portrayed by Bhagat through the character of Anuj, Radhika’s husband. Radhika is completely shattered when she comes to know that Anuj prefers Payal to her. Another instance of extra-marital affair is portrayed through Vroom’s father, who prefers his secretary to live with him. So, Vroom and his mother move to another place.

Westernization has increased the number of nuclear families. Marriages are fast breaking and the rate of divorce is alarmingly increasing. Due to such unsuccessful marriages, the new blooms are the most stressed and isolated in the new atmosphere. They are denied of love and care from their grandparents. It is very unfortunate that the new sprouts remain cut off from the moral values of society. In the novel, Military Uncle suffers isolation and depression because he is unable to be in touch with his grandson. His son has left him and when Military Uncle sends email to his grandson, he is humiliated. Military Uncle says, “I want to be with my son and my grandson. I miss them every moment” (205).

Due to westernization and modernization, the concept of semi girlfriends is at an increase. In the novel, Vroom describes Shefali as Shyam’s semi girlfriend. She uses terms like eddy teddy, curly wurlly to call Shyam. The impact of westernization has a strong base that youth have become materialistic and lead a materialistic life. At one moment, Vroom says, “I care for cars and bikes more than girls.... Those girls were never important. They were like TV channels you surf...” (116). He also says that he needs money more than anything else, to cope up with the life style of his friends. Vroom is outrageous when he talks about the government’s ineptitude towards the nation. He declares,

Look at our country, we are still so behind these Americans. Even when we know we are no less than them.... We should be building roads, power plants, airports, phone networks and metro trains in every city like madness. And if the government moves its rear-end and does that, the young people in this country will find jobs there.... But the government doesn’t believe in doing any real work and allow these BPOs to be opened and think they have taken care of the youth. (187)

Youth is the main focus of Bhagat’s novels. In an interview, he states the reason for writing this novel, “I felt there was a disconnection between the youth’s aspirations and their opportunities. I felt I should give voice to all those who read my books” (Bhagat). The young generation has its dreams sparkled with the glitters of hope as well as bruised with the tales of inabilities of achievement and helplessness against the corrupt system. Even though the youth force is said to be able to dislocate mountains, it faces its own problems, when it fights against a corrupt infrastructure. Bhagat shares the opinion of Mohamoud Abaza about youth, “There is such a high percentage of young people who see the future as totally black. Even if you open a small window for them to see the sky, it will be tremendous force for change. But they have to be able to see the sky” (Cultural Institutions). The victories and defeats of the youth are trademarks of Bhagat’s

novels. A young reader who sails through his novels will feel as if he is living and not just reading the novel.

Bhagat does not take to the bombastic style of writing. His language is simple, lucid and quite comprehensive even to the new bees of reading. Bhagat's main purpose is to convey the message to the readers and not to show off his mastery of language. The language, though very simple, exactly produces the impact that he intends. In an interview, Bhagat says, "I think that if a novel can transport its readers into a new setting, make the characters seem so real... and trigger three things in you- past, imagination and emotions- you have really got a good book in hand". Certainly, *One Night @ the Call Center* is one of those gripping novels.

Bhagat concludes the novel with a nail-biting climax. There is drama, emotion and twist in the climax. Bhagat has shown the ability to wind up the novel miraculously. Even if all hope is lost, God may make a call to someone's cell phone without a network. Although the story is over, the reader is left with the shadows. Shyam, Priyanka, Radhika, Military Uncle, Esha and Vroom are real life characters, whom the readers meet in everyday life. A report states, "There was a Pied Piper... who could mesmerize rats and children alike by playing his pipe. There is an author in India, who can make everyone- irrespective of age and gender- surrender themselves to the charm created by his words" (qtd. in Pathak). Though the western culture is versatile and has taught to be independent, this does not mean that we should derelict our culture completely. Through the novel, Bhagat suggests that the emulation of anything and everything is good, but, when it is within the limits and leads to the development of the society.

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