

## **Globalization & Changing Face of Literature – With Special Reference to Chetan Bhagat’s “One Night @ Call Centre”**

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Globalization is the process of international integration arising from the exchange of views, products, ideas and other aspects of culture. It is the process under which, we can see both individual interest and common good. Globalization not only affected trade within countries but it has been affecting the culture and literature. The era of globalization is generally viewed by world economists and social scientists to have emerged after 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of United States in 1990, as lone remaining super power.

The process of globalization in India started with the introduction of new Economic Policy in 1991 after pursuing the import substitution of nearly 40 years. The globalization, liberalization and privatization are inter-connected. Thus it is defined as a period in which the sovereignty of nation states has declined and modes of exchange – of money, technology products, and people – operate with increasing ease and speed across national boundaries, producing configurations of power that exceed the boundaries of the nation state. The socio economic activity of individual decides the outcome of literature and culture. The globalization as an economic activity has not remained detached with other cultural canons of the society. The deep-rooted influence of globalization is inseparable in modern English writings. Attachment of globalization and literature is a complex matter of study and research.

Paul Jay claims, “Our awareness of the complex ways in which English and American identities have been constructed historically through migration, displacement, colonialism, exile, gender relations and cultural hybridity has radically restructured our sense of what Paul Gilroy has dubbed the “roots/routes” of these identities.

Globalization have affected literature in two ways 1) Readers or Authors point of view, 2) Authors point of view. Globalization has gifted readers and audience with the access to the world class, knowledge and literature. The growth of technology played an important role in this field. Globalization drives the innovative use of resources to promote new ideas across nations and cultures, regardless of geographic location.

In case of Author’s point of view, the ideas and beliefs are no more restricted within the boundaries of one geographical or communal area. What has been traditionally defined as ‘Culture’ and ‘Literature’ begins to undergo change as newer understandings are integrated into traditional conceptions of good. This creates a new vision of what culture envelops and how literature is reflected. With globalization, it is nearly impossible to stop the spread of ideas, for its very nature brings to light the inter-connectivity of all individuals.

In recent years, Indo-Anglian popular fiction has undergone a thematic shift. Shobha De’s

tales of Bollywood starlets and Page 3 Community are facing tough competition from less glamorous novels. The language too has undergone change. The flowery, grammatically correct and heavily laced phraseology has been replaced with energetic slangy English peppered with Hindi. Authors like Chetan Bhagat, Neelesh Misra and Swati Kaushal address the complexities and doldrums of life within a globalized India of liberalized markets. Transnational novels tend to flourish in the post colonial world; call-centre literature appears for now to be an Indian phenomenon. Born in as a part of loan from the I M F, in the early 1990's as well as sweeping economic reforms and liberalization initiated by The Congress Party, the Indian transnational office is depicted as call-centre which functions as a microcosm of the vexed transformations in labour, identity and culture that globalization enacts. S. Prasannajaran, editor of India Today, says, "The glitz of globalization provides its own cultural clichés. The call-centre is the most widely shared temptation among the chroniclers of the new India.

Among the current glut of pulp fiction situated in the Call-Centre, Chetan Bhagat's one night @ the Call Centre (2004), is probably the most popular book in the genre. He can also be credited for the runaway success of the Call-Centre literary genre. Neelesh Misra's once upon a Timezone (2006). Swati Kaushal's Piece of Cake (2004) and Brinda Narayan's Bangalore Calling (2011), testify to this surprising trend. In their ambivalent accounts of outsourcing and transnational work, these novels display a troubled and often a Contradictory attitude towards globalization, Particularly in terms of their

critical representation of the new found valorizing of a "neutralized" form of English. This paper will be focusing primarily on Chetan Bhagat's representation on Call Centre and English language in one night @ the Call Centre. The Novel is at once a romantic comedy, a self-help book with spiritual undertones, and a motivational management guide that critiques positive neoliberal narratives around globalization and capitalism just as it champions them with nationalist rhetoric. The main story, which in the framing narrative is told by a mysterious woman to Bhagat, relates (unsurprisingly) to one night in the lives of six call-centre employees. During the night they field phone calls from Americans, who are always represented as either racist or deeply stupid, squabble with each other and, finally, receive a revelatory phone call from God. With the intervention of the God character, the unhappy call-centre workers are able to achieve personal and professional success and ultimately save their call-centre-with which they have a love hate relationship—from being closed. The novel's combination of social critique, suspense, romance and humour have made it a hit.

One Night's simple and readable form of English may have also worked to increase its sales of readers. Although in 2004 only approximately one-third of the Indian population could speak English, a proficiency in the language is increasingly being perceived as integral to achieving some measure of success in the country. Probal Dasgupta writes that India is caught in a diglossic situation in which English is seen as the most prestigious of the languages spoken in the country. This is despite the fact that Hindi has been deemed by lawmakers as the official language of

India, while English has been given the less important-sounding title of “assistant” language. English education in India is the result of deep divisions in class and caste, English can also be perceived by the nation’s subalterns as a democratizing influence that wrests a measure of linguistic power from higher caste Indians located in the north of the country, where Hindi is most widely spoken.

We can trace the beginnings of India’s diglossic situation with English- to the British colonial government’s infamous Minute on Education address of 1835 in which Lord Babington Macaulay told a rapt audience that “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect”. This speech marked a watershed moment in India , where the East India Company’s erstwhile relatively hands-off approach of “mere” economic exploitation was replaced by economic exploitation and more explicit forms of cultural intervention. Accordingly, the language of instruction in India at the university level became English, and a class of English speaking middlemen government clerks--- often described as “Macaulay’s children” constituted a new Indian elite.

Macaulay’s legacy of English in India is also, of course, an important reason why companies were drawn to India as an outsourcing hub. Multinational Corporations consequently settled in the country with surprising speed, offering members of the English-speaking middle class and a newly emerging “digerati” elite relatively lucrative outsourcing jobs compared with traditional middle-class

positions working for the Indian government.

Bhagat’s book signals the rise of a new genre in Indian popular fiction that treats issues surrounding different kinds of English, as well as globalization and transnational labour. The novel focuses especially on the valorization of a neutralized or globalized English, which is basically synonymous in Bhagat’s terms with American English, the central characters are forced to adopt Westernized English names and participate in language and accent “neutralization” classes. Bhagat’s work can accordingly be seen- and has been seen by the author himself appealing not only to call-centre workers, but to ambitious readers wishing to enter such a globalized workplace. This may also serve to explain a paradox that underlies *One Night’s* success. With its themes of upward mobility and the achievement of the “American dream,” capitalism inevitably informs the contents of the pulp novel, offering the reader a sense of optimism that he or she may rise from his or her current economic situation and a utopian happy ending, and a concurrent feeling of frustration that he or she has not yet attained the promised horde of treasure at the end of the capitalist rainbow. By reading the pulp text and empathizing with the protagonists, the Indian reader is encouraged to shape ideas of his or her own ideal future. The protagonist’s boredom with life inside the capitalist workplace becomes enthusiasm, solitude and alienation are replaced with solidarity and community and fragmented subjectivity becomes whole again.

The workers described in call-centre lit undergo a profound transition within the call-centre or transnational, assuming a hybrid identity not quite “Indian” and yet

not “Western” – an identity we may only be able to describe, vaguely, as “globalized”. On the other hand, their alienation from their given societies indicates that in some sense they also work from within a heterotopia of deviation, where their globalized identities are regarded as deviant by their families, therefore forcing them to create families out of their colleagues.

The problem with the call-centre (and thus globalization), Bhagat suggests, is that, it has resulted in a new materialistic culture in India that mirrors American consumerism. Relatedly, working at the call-centre is tantamount to a betrayal of the nation-state and its anti-consumerist social idealist founders. This newly materialistic culture and nationalist betrayal are linked closely to, and perhaps even rendered possible by, the accent neutralization and renaming practices of the call-centre, which undermine, erase, and distort a sense of “authentic” Indian-ness. These issues point to a deep-seated concern that globalization is homogenizing (or Americanizing) Indian identity. And, signaling their prevalence, these anxieties can also be detected in a number of other works within the “call-centre lit” genre.

The workers are, for instance, forced to change their names to Western ones – Shyam becomes Sam, Vroom (or Varun) is transformed into Victor, and Radhika turns into Regina. Shyam is so deadened by this process of effacement that he passively relinquishes all control over his identity, saying, “American tongues have trouble saying my real name and prefer Sam. If you want, you can give me another name, too. I really don’t care”. The connection between identity and name, and the call-centre’s power to rename its Indian workers, is a common trope in the call-center lit genre: in Neelesh Misra’s *Once Upon a Timezone*, for

instance, accent training coach Ms. Lily tells “Neil Patterson,” formerly Neel Pandey, that “the most precious acquisitions you will have to sacrifice at the workplace will be ....your identity and your name” In changing Indian names to American ones, the call-centre and accordingly globalization upend all that has been known before-including names, meaning and identity – thereby demonstrating a terrifying, god-like power.

Chetan Bhagat suggests in *One Night* that the call-centre, in forcing the characters to assume new American versions of their names and speak in a form of English from which the Indian accent has been carefully removed, develops in its workers a breed of consumerism which mimics that seen in the West. In one important scene, for example, Vroom attacks a billboard featuring a Bollywood actress selling soda. “”This airhead chick is supposed to be our role model. Like she knows a fuck about life and gives a fuck about us. All she cares about is cash. She just wants you to buy this black piss” (236). Vroom is not immune from this materialism, however: he leaves his job at a newspaper to work at the call-centre because the latter pays its workers a better salary; and his oft-mentioned addiction to pizza is linked to a sense of moral turpitude in the character.

*One Night* can be seen not only as a guide to the call-centre that is geared toward Indian call-centre workers and aspiring call-centre workers, but it may also model behavior to this group: Bhagat calls upon his readers to exert the same anti-imperialist power that India’s founders did, replacing their materialistic and mimetic ways-in the call-centre, and outside it – with political resistance and nationalist solidarity.

This theme of globalized India's betrayal of its postcolonial founders can be found in other texts within the call-centre literature genre as well. In Swati Kaushal's work of chick-lit *Piece of Cake*, for example, Minal Sharma –who works at an Indian multinational—is the great-granddaughter of an Indian freedom fighter, who, she is told, would not have approved of her job as her Mahatma-worshipping mother says, "In our time, it was enough to be good. Nowadays you youngsters want too much..... Just look around, everywhere there's greed and misery. This was not Bapu's vision"(130). In contrast to other works of call-centre literature, however, which rarely offer solutions to these problems, Bhagat posits a nationalist politicization of India's youth as a remedy to the forces of globalization, cultural homogeneity, materialism, and American imperialism.

Interestingly, Bhagat's representation of the call-centre as a dead end for India and Indian youth abruptly ends once this nationalist victory over the United States is won, suddenly the call-centre –though still officially run by Americans, and still catering to American callers--- is no longer such a terrible place to work. While Vroom and Shyam leave the call-centre to start their own web design company, their female colleagues Esha, Radhika, and Priyanka continue to work there: despite the office's problems, it provides them with the money to begin their journeys of upward mobility and independence. At the end of the novel Bhagat no longer seems to have qualms about globalized labour, he merely wants India to dominate the global markets. When we last see Shyam and Vroom in the novel, they are trying to find international clients for their web design company (309), and it is

only a matter of time, Bhagat hints, before they will reign over their own multinational firm, striking a blow for Indian nationalism and market domination. In *One Night* the protagonists' agenda is more in keeping with their participation in a globalized marketplace than in engaging in any sustained resistance to neo-imperialism.

The theme of the call-centre ultimately providing its workers with community, upward mobility and a happy ending is echoed in other works of call-centre literature, highlighting the ambivalence with which outsourcing and globalization are seen in India. In *Piece of Cake*, Minal finds a new family in the form of her multinational office colleague, which replaces her sanctimonious social idealist family. The call-centre can in this light be seen positively as a place where, through the power of communal action, one's erstwhile family can 'be rejected and a new and improved family gained. As the economy changes with processes of liberalization and globalization, so does the Indian family.

While Bhagat does not criticize the use of Indian Standard English in *One Night*, a certain ambivalence can nonetheless be discerned in the novel's linguistic borrowing of Hindi at several significant moments, which troubles the book's English linguistic utopia and sheds insight into an intriguing incongruity one the part of Bhagat, who writes exclusively in English.

This conflict between English and Hindi is mirrored symbolically in *One Night*, with the novel's love interest Radhika offered a symbolic choice between a relationship with Shyam, represented by the dhaba (a small, very informal restaurant on the side of a highway usually frequented by truck drivers), and with Ganesh, a wealthy

American of Indian heritage, who is represented by a five-star restaurant (165,301). While the dhaba, significantly referred to in Hindi (instead of, say, the English word “truckstop”), is described as bearing greater emotional appeal, the English-signified five-star restaurant is elite and promises comfort—but lacks the cultural significance and pleasures of the dhaba. As we have seen, English is valorized in *One Night* as a tool with which to achieve a nationalist victory and upward mobility. However, Bhagat’s occasional use of Hindi in the text relates English not only to wealth and comfort, but also to cultural alienation and to the replacement of a more vital linguistic hybridity with a homogenizing English. Just as Bhagat

displays ambivalence towards globalization, then, so does he reveal more generally his uncertainty about English as compared with a native Indian language.

## REFERENCES

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