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## Globalization and the Changing Urban Realities in India in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ The Call Center and 2 States*

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Ever since the time India opted to go global, sweeping socio-economical, political, and technological changes have moulded the face of India. The generations before 1991 who could look around and make sense of the world are lucky to see two different times: one quite sluggish and the other one full of vibrantly globalizing activities. As for India Globalization has become a buzz word after 1991 and day by day this buzzing is getting louder. It has touched all the domains of Indian life and experience. *"Globalization is no longer a theoretical concept; it is a glaring reality, impinging upon almost every aspect of human existence"* (P. Sam, and G. Sam. 1044-1045). If it is to be seen in the urban and rural context of India, the prior one is at the front, reaping advantages of it, at the same time facing the music of it. The fast growing cities and the overall urbanization that we have been witnessing across India are the direct effect of Globalization. The day-today experience, demands of the time, challenges posed by it, personal hopes, aspirations, and dreams in urban India have almost metamorphosed. Globalization has changed the blood and soul of all these things. This paper seeks to present how Chetan Bhagat through his fictional works cited in the title depicts the changing urban realities in India in this globalized world.

Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center (ON@CC)* published in 2005, revolves around a group of six call center employees working in 'Connexions Call Center, Gurgaon, Haryana. It takes place during the span of one night. The six persons: Shayam, Vroom, Esha, Priyanka, Radhika, and Military Uncle pass through a very troublesome night. Everybody is plagued with his/her own problems which they decide to settle at the end. *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* published in 2009, is a story about a couple coming from two different states in India, who face hardships in convincing their parents for approval of their marriage. The story begins in the IIM Ahmedabad, where Krish, a Punjabi boy from Delhi sights a beautiful girl, Ananya, a Tamil from Chennai, quarrelling with the mess staff about the food. They become friends within a few days, and get romantically involved thereafter. Both get jobs and plan for their wedding. At first Krish tries to convince his girlfriend's parents, and later Ananya goes to Delhi for some days and tries to get in good books of Krish's Parents and relatives. Ultimately overcoming all the hardships marriage takes place with the consent of both the sides.

Both the books have globalizing conditions at the background against which the stories happen. Globalization has brought in new things that have changed the living conditions of the country and the individuals. To make the point clear and possibly encompassing, the paper approaches Bhagat's fictional works mentioned in the title in a deductive way. First it talks about the aspects of globalization and thereafter relates them to the works under consideration.

Cities and the urban zones are at the core of development strategy of globalization. They are the grounds where all the factors conducive for globalization can handily come together and show results. In order to attain socio-economic and politico-cultural integration of the world's population, well developed cities are the demand of the time. Bhagat's fictions reflect the scene in globalizing cities in India. In his *One Night @ the Call Center* we come across fast growing city structures like Gurgaon (Haryana), where now massive apartments and commercial malls are under construction, where people feel that they are moving through the maze of construction sites. Here there are long and broad highways, making journey easier. A number of efforts to remove infrastructural constraints in order to facilitate the process of globalization are underway. The BPO sector rapidly developed in urban India and could create lakhs of jobs by the mid of first decade of 21st century (M.G. Basava Raja 1015). This BPO industry makes itself felt in Bhagat's Gurgaon. Here there is a BPO, 'Connexions Call Centre', People travel all the way from their homes in Delhi over to Gurgaon, because it offers jobs to them. Here from the calls of the customers in America are answered, and the ball is kept rolling in America and down here in India. Virtually the economy of two countries seems to have integrated at a point. Gurgaon keeps awake 24/7. It is a picture of a reality that almost all the Metropolitans and the cities on the way to follow in the footsteps, keep up likewise. The story of *2 States* takes us to Ahmedabad, Delhi and Chennai, the cities which are among a selected few as preferred career destinations in India. Ahmedabad along with traditional educational institutions, houses the institutional campuses such as; IIM and IIT, helping people avail themselves of global opportunities. This mushrooming of such institutions resulted due to liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation (LPG). Metropolitans and the potential urban zones are the places where Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as advocated by international community is being attracted, and provided the proper global atmosphere. For example Citibank in *2 States* makes its business here in India, hiring labour and resources from here only.

Globalization has increased the pace of movement of people, goods and the economy across the national lines. Bhagat very comfortably depicts this atmosphere in the above cited works. Therein we see people moving about quite frequently. The six people working in *ON@CC* are picked up by a call center's car every night from their respective homes in Delhi, and are dropped at their work place at Gurgaon, and vice-versa when their duty hours are over in morning. This commuting consumes near about five hours of their daily life. The Manager of the call centre, Bakshi, is almost dying to be promoted to work at Boston. The Protagonist, Krish Malhotra, and his beloved Ananya Swaminathan in *2 States*, working in multinationals (MNCs), find out reasons to travel from Delhi to Chennai, and vice-versa in order to serve for their organizations. Both the fictions show us the relatives living in US, and often visiting India for some family events, mostly for choosing their prospective brides. Even the parents look forward to marriage offers from NRIs for their daughters. In both the books we see businesses of one country doing quite well in other ones,

the economies of different countries can be seen to be pacing their ways with each other's help in a healthy manner.

The young generation shown in both the fictions possesses a sense of competition, at the same time it is quite ambitious and wants to do everything that is possible to climb up the career ladder as higher as possible. In *ON@CC* the protagonist, Shyam Mehra, named in office as Sam Marcy, as it sounded to be a globally suited name, earlier worked in an ad agency but due to low payment he left the agency, and joined this call centre. Now Sam aspires to become a team leader from being merely an agent, so that he could prove himself as having guts and also become worthy to marry Priyanka. Shyam is a fine web designer. For the main bay of his company that dealt with the computer related problems of the US based customers he designs a trouble-shooting web site. Vroom an ambitious youth, is also a trouble-shooter. In an effort to save the endangered job positions of the call center employees due to slack in computer and software industry, Vroom subtly strikes upon an idea, that he could scare the US based customers into calling them. Only that the customers were to be told that their PCs were hit by some virus, spread by evil forces, and only the experts of this company could save them out of this. Thus he buys time from the company authorities, and succeeds in saving the call centre from closing down. By the end both Shyam and Vroom decide to start their own web designing firm.

Growing awareness of technology and the use of it have definitely exposed India to a new environment. This change has come about due to strong wish of youths to participate in the technological revolution that is going on all around the world. Both the fictions of Bhagat show techno-friendly youths, participating in the development, use and the spread of it. All the people working at the call center in his fiction handle the calls and computers easily. Through certain episodes, Bhagat has underlined a palpable difference between the young and the old generation where the young generation in comparison with the old one is technologically more participative. Vroom and Shyam develop a trouble-shooting web site that could be helpful for their company. They tell so to their manager but the manager being an opportunist presents the said web site in his own name, however by the end he is taken care of, as the new generation is sharper than the old one. In *2 States* Krish helps his manager of Citibank in preparation of a Power Point Presentation. Likewise he also helps his would-be father-in-law to make a PPT to be presented at his job place.

Along with being competitive, ambitious, and techno-savvy, the generation in Bhagat's fiction is trendy as well. The global trend has not left the society untouched. Due to free incoming of values, costumes, dresses, and the living habits of western world, the basis of Indian culture has been greatly influenced. (P. Sam, and G. Sam. 1051) In *ON@CC* Esha wants to be a model that is why she maintains herself in figure and outlook, she has even worn a navel ring. Vroom for keeping in touch with the ongoing time logs onto net, and makes his choices based on it. These six people, when they go through a very troublesome night, visit a disco which is kept open even at dawn. There we see girls, carrying themselves in zero figure, clad in meagre clothes. A fully-clad female is scanned scornfully by others. Here young boys and girls dance to the tune of European music. In *2 states* Krish is made to go out with a girl by his mother, so that they could get acquainted with each other, and consequently would agree to marry. The girl even though only half-educated is a humble trend-follower in dress, design and manners. The female cousins of Krish, when they are in their family marriage event, secretly want to drink Vodka and other alcoholic drinks. They are

today's urban youths, and this behaviour of theirs shows us a new trend coming in female community.

In Bhagat's fiction the attitude of youths towards love, marriage, and sex is not at all emotional, on the contrary it is quite casual. Love, as it is an instinctual feeling, the young generation feels the vibrations of it every now and then but the expression of it and the carrying of their love relationships have definitely changed. As we see in his fictions, there are love proposals and rejections of them but everything is taken quite healthily or say in a matter-of-fact way. Vroom in the call centre loved Esha, and proposed her three to four times, and she kept rejecting him all these times. Even though it is so, they work together and maintain quite a healthy friendship. Shyam and Priyanka had been in relation ever since their college time. When they thought that they should break up, they formally come together and put a break to their relationship. Ultimately after all said and done they come together, and decide to marry but the things that happen in between show us the changed relation equations of our time. Shyam as he says wanted to '*move on*', a new terminology in the subject 'Love', develops a casual love relationship with another girl at the call center. A marriage proposal of an NRI working in Microsoft, entertains Priyanka's fancy for the time being but when she learns about the baldness of the guy, her affection turns once again towards Shyam.

Krish and Ananya in *2 States* fall in love with each other in a strange way. At IIM Ahmadabad, they started studying together in Ananya's room. Krish could not concentrate on his studies, as every time his attention would be caught by Ananya's looks. Out rightly he told her so and the relationship got started quite surprisingly. Particularly in this work, Love marriage and sex in case of Krish and Ananya come together in a more mature way. They love and want to marry each other because they share a mutual understanding, one of the major components in marriage. They look at sex as a but-obvious thing in love. That is why they indulge in sex every now and then. Thus both the fictions depict an urban reality that the young generation is more in favour of love marriages than in arranged ones. The attitude of this generation towards sex is not laden with guilt. They look at sex as a way of expressing their love for their partner. While depicting this acceptable reality Bhagat also shows us nonsense sometimes committed by fickle-minded youth. People are so much fancied by the word love, that sometimes love relations get started even between the people calling and receiving wrong numbers.

With growing urbanization and globalization a number of opportunities have opened up all around. Men and Women are no more seen through the old spectacle which marked men as superior and women as inferior. In this global atmosphere, so far belittled women are given their due place and respect. With their own intellect and abilities they are seen to be working shoulder to shoulder with men. Thus this 21st century is of all, men and women equal. Even in case of marriages, now girls assert their own opinions and choices. In *ON@CC* the number of men and women working in call center is equal. Women work even in night shifts. They earn their own living and make career choices. For example Esha for getting in Modelling left her home and came to Delhi to translate her dream into reality. Priyanka is a good daughter but in case of marriage she makes her own choice. Ananya, in *2 States* in order to marry Krish tries to convince her parents till the end. In her case her parents deserve a round of applause for their open-mindedness who show the heart to



accept the decision of the young generation. Steps towards women empowerment can be seen to be speeding up.

This new environment along with multiple boons has given birth to certain curses also, that are listed and discussed below:

*Consumerism:* With the ever growing global scene, among various offshoots of globalization, 'Consumerism' came out as one of the major sprawling things. In Bhagat's Call Center novel consumerism is criticized as an unjustifiable behaviour: a kind of craze to get hold of things, when you don't even need them. To inject and promote this behaviour sometimes advertisement agencies sell all kind of nonsense ideas. The subtle observation of the writer at one point definitely makes us to reflect on the nonsense fair that we have been wandering in. The six characters in the story, in order to relieve themselves of troublesome and painful night experience, visit a night club. On the return journey as Vroom feels like vomiting, gets down along with Shaym, where they see several advertising hoardings along the road:

*".... showing all kinds of people: a couple all smiles because they had just bought a toothbrush; a group of friends giggling over their mobile phones; a family happily feeding their kid junk food; a young graduate jumping with joy, clutching a credit card; a girl holding seven shopping bags and beaming. All the ads had one thing in common. Everyone looked incredibly happy"*

Upon it Vroom says, *"What the hell are they so happy about? .... Look at that toothbrush couple. My mom and dad, they are never that happy."* (Bhagat 211)

It is a reality, as Vroom says further, that nobody cares for anything, The channels who say they are for today's youth, say so, *"....because they want the damn Pizza Huts and Cokes and Pepsis of the world to come and give their ads to them ....we will be happy. Like young people don't have a fucking brain"* (213). In *2 States* not so emphatically but at times we see Cola and other soft drinks being consumed by new generation quite comfortably at the restaurants like Pizza Hut and Barista.

*Eroding values:* With growing urban mindset a grossly compromising attitude is seen to be sipping in human behaviour. Mr. V.R. Panchamukhi in his essay, 'India vision - 2020' rightly says: *"One dimension of development process which is totally ignored in the recent years is that of erosion of 'Values' in our society....As a result of excessive emphasis on cut throat competition for maximum acquisition of materialistic benefits, many cherished values of life are getting fast eroded....'value of contentment', 'value of cooperation', 'value of self-restraint in consumerism', 'value of unbiasedness', 'value of independence in thinking', 'value of providing ideal leadership', 'value of managing oneself before managing other', 'value of knowledge and commitment as prime movers of action', the 'value of duties as against right' , etc., are all getting eroded in the highly materialistic paradigm of development and structural changes that are taking place around us with immense speed and complexity."* The call center employee Esha for getting modelling assignments, gets ready to sleep with an influential person in the concerned field. When even after this compromise she doesn't get a way-in, she realises the horrible mistake she made. This example of hers reveals a disgusting reality in the world of modelling and fashion. At the same time it shows us a limitlessly compromising attitude that has come over today's youth.

*Rising anxieties, fears and stress:* The six characters in call center are constantly under pressure. Obviously they themselves are to be blamed for it but one can not deny that globalization is also responsible for it. Due to slack in software industry the call center wanted to cut down the number of employees in its main bay and that brings all the people under pressure. Actually this book talks about the anxieties, fears, and stress of call center employees.

Thus the fictional works of Bhagat: *One Night @ the Call Center* & *2 States* reflect the changing urban realities in globalizing India. Through these works Bhagat subtly portrays the fast growing cities and urban zones along with all the global factors, affecting the life, experience, dreams, and attitudes of today's youth. Bhagat very comfortably depicts women empowerment as one of the positive effects of globalization, at the same time, consumerism, eroding values, and rising fears and anxieties of urban Indians as some of the negative offshoots of it can not escape his piercing observations. The works cited above can be considered as the subjective fictional stories of the changing urban India.

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