

Cultural Moderation and Transformation in the Select Novels of Chetan Bhagat

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Abstract

Economic Liberalization began in India in the early 1990s after the establishment of numerous multinational companies. Most of them were American IT based call centres, bank and business based outsourcing companies. India's reputed educational institutions focussed on training graduates to cater to the needs of these companies, thereby making them employable in IT companies. Estimation states that 350000 employees work with IT companies in India, which makes one percent of India's estimated workforce. Chetan Bhagat is regarded as an icon of Indian youth. He is unparalleled in representing the problems, anxiety and threats of Indian youth. The paper analyses the cultural deconstructions happened post economic liberalization in India, with special reference to the works of Chetan Bhagat.

Keywords: culture, deconstruction, economic liberalisation, globalisation.

Chetan Bhagat, one of India's best-selling authors, is known for his accessible prose and stories that resonate with contemporary Indian society. His novels often reflect and comment on the cultural transformations taking place in India, particularly in the context of globalization, modernization, and socio-economic changes.

Culture is defined as an integration of ideas, customs and social behaviour. It is an entity that undergoes constant changes due to various influences. Traditional Indian youth, before globalization, centred on having a government job, getting married at 30s for men and at 20s for women, bearing children and having a house of one's own. Early to bed and early to rise was considered as the disciplined way of living. A sense of social interdependence was inevitable in the traditional India. People were inseparable from families, clans, castes, sub castes and religious communities. The members of the family shared psychological and emotional interdependence as well. The traditional Indian youth adhered to the family hierarchy. The eldest male of the family acted as the head of the family.

The globalization and economic liberalization of the 20th century brought in a cultural hybridity amongst Indians. The modern Indian youth are trained to follow the American working time, speak the American accent and live the western way of living. As Tharoor states,

To many, the call centre has become the symbol of India's rapidly globalizing economy. While traditional India sleeps, a dynamic population of highly skilled, articulate professionals works through the night, functioning on U.S. time under made-up American aliases. They feign familiarity with a culture and climate they've never experienced, earn salaries that their elders couldn't have imagined (but still a fraction of what an American would make), and enjoy a lifestyle that's a cocktail of premature affluence and ersatz Westernization (78).

Globalisation has hence changes the way of life and the thought process of the Indian youth. Its impact is explicit in the language, clothing and food habits of people. The mall culture has substituted the local markets. Brand consciousness has crept into the minds of Indians. These cultural moderation and transformations are explicit in the novels of Chetan Bhagat.

Through out the novels of Bhagat, cultural conflicts are persistent. Clash between the life style and value system of elders and that of the youth is constant in all the novels. Most of the demographic characteristics, socio-religious beliefs and practices had influenced the Indian family system which is patriarchal in nature.

Traditional Indian family system was patriarchal in nature. Marriages were mostly arranged by the parents. After globalization Boys and girls of different religion and caste work together, become friends, build relationship and end in marriages. *In Two States: The Story of My Marriage*, Krish from Delhi and Ananya from Chennai fall in love. They find success in convincing their parents and get married. The novel also depicts the various changes that happened in India post globalization.

Globalization in the process of the elision of social differences, it moved towards the norms and culture of the west. It had led Indians towards a cultural hybridity. Mirchandani states that "While Indian workers are taught to mimic American work norms, there is a slippage between the information they are presented about Americans and the ways in which they interpret this information. In this sense, mimicry involves not only the colonizer's construction of the Other, but also the Other's construction of the colonizer. (361)

One night @ the Call Centre presents a BPO named Connexions Call Centre, which operates 24 hours throughout the week. The calls of American customers are answered. The novel depicts the life of six workers namely Radhika, Priyanka, Esha, Military Uncle, Vroom, and Shyam, who work in Connexions Call Centre. They are picked by the Call Centre's car every night and are dropped at their work place at Gurgaon and are dropped at home in the morning. The consumers travel five hours every day.

Education in India is rendered through British English. School and colleges follow the British English. But graduates are trained to speak American accent in BPO and IT industries. It creates a conflict between education and job requisite. As a result, a creolized form of English is developed by the employees. Shyam states the difficulty in talking American accent as follows:

T. With this letter Americans have four different sounds. T can be silent so 'internet' becomes 'innernet' and 'advantage' becomes 'advannage'. The second way is when T and N merge —'written' becomes 'writn' and 'certain' is 'certn'. The third sound is when T is in the middle. There, it sounds like a D—'daughter' is 'daughte' and 'water' in 'waunder'. The last category, if you still care, is when Americans say T

actually like a T. This happens when T is the beginning of the word like 'table' or 'stumble'. Man, it drives me nuts. And this is just one consonant. The vowels are another, more painful story. (26)

Shyam adds, "I looked around; people were busy with calls. Radhika helped someone defrost her fridge; Esha assisted a customer in unpacking a dishwasher. Everyone was speaking with an American accent and sounded different from how they had in the Qualis." (24) Moreover, the workers are trained to be patient with their clients and not to lose their cool. In accordance, 35=10 theory is taught to them. Shyam explains,

'Remember,' the instructor said to the class, 'a thirty-five-year-old American's brain and IQ is the same as a ten-years-old Indian's brain. This will help you understand your clients. You need to be as patient as you are when dealing with a child. Americans are dumb, just accept it. I don't want anyone losing their cool during the calls...' (31)

The working time of the modern youth in IT sector is primarily night, as Nadeem states "Most employees, with the exception of those at the IT subsidiary, work the night shift so that they are able to communicate directly with Western customers and clients" (106).

The modern Indian youth prove to be highly conscious on money making. Towards catering to the needs of the American Customers, the protagonist Shyam Mehra converts his name as Sam Marcy. But he hates when someone calls him by his western name. Bakshi always calls him by his western name. Shyam states, "'Oh hello, Sam... please come in.' Bakshi liked to call us by our Western names. I hated it." (31) He aspires to become a team leader. Being good at web designing, he devises a trouble-shooting website. Vroom, another ambitious youth, is equally talented. When job positions of the call centre employees are endangered, Vroom offers a disreputable idea as to convince their customers that their computers are hit by some virus created by evil forces and that only their company could save them from the issue. Both Shyam and Vroom succeed in life as successful web designers but the ways they formulate to achieve their goals is different. The modern youth, as represented by Chetan Bhagat, are technologically sound and participative. Shyam and Vroom design a trouble shooting website for their company. In 2 states, Krish helps the manager of the Citibank to prepare PowerPoint Presentation. He also helps Ananya's father to prepare PowerPoint Presentations.

Love, Sex and marriage were considered to be entities of high significance in traditional India. Marriage was considered to be a religious right. In 1500 BC, during the Indo-Aryan period in India, the righteous father should arrange the wedding of his pre-pubertal daughter to ensure her premarital virginity. Self-chosen marriages were considered to be unrighteous, lustful and disrespectful to parents. Various factors bring together a couple in arranged marriage. The correspondence in the horoscopes of the bride and the groom is mandatory. Caste and religious similarities and the economic status of the families have to match.

In *One Night @ the Call Centre*, Shyam loved a girl named Priyanka from College days. When they found differences between them, they came together and formally broke their relationship. Shyam loved another girl at his work place. He is in love both with his ex-girl friend and a girl named Priyanka, who has been engaged to a rich man.

Vroom doesn't stick to one girl for date. The dialogue between Shyam and Priyanka portrays the postmodern tendency in Vroom.

'So, what else is happening? Met Vroom?' she said

';Was supposed to, but couldn't. he had a date.'

‘With who? New girl?’

‘Of course. He never sticks to one. I wonder what girls see in him. All hot ones too.’(28)

Vroom, another protagonist, is bored with the dull nature of his work. He is equally frustrated for having compromised his ideals for the good salary. Shyam states his anxieties as follows: “I used to work in the website department of an ad agency before this call center job. However, the ad agency paid horrible money. . . . I saved myself by joining Connexions, as with money in your wallet gives you some respect and lets you breathe. Connexions was also the natural choice for me, as Priyanka worked there” (15).

The novels of Bhagat touches on the changing dynamics of friendships and relationships among the youth, explore how globalization is reshaping urban India’s work culture and personal aspirations and illustrates the cultural transformation in terms of business aspirations and the impact of communal violence on personal relationships and societal cohesion.

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