

# Science, Technology and Supernatural Elements in Chetan Bhagat's One Night @ the Call Centre

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## Abstract

Indian society has witnessed number of socio-cultural changes over these decades. After World War II, not only Indian society but also the global society has experienced tremendous change in science and technology. The Modern Literature, may it be a local or global, has the great influence of these two elements of human life. Indian society has accepted all these changes as a part of their culture, tradition and life. Chetan Bhagat, a very popular writer in Indian English, writes about Indian society and the various aspects of it. *One Night @ the Call Centre* is a story of six employees working in a call centre in Gurgaon, Haryana. The present research paper tries to explore the changes that have been brought in the Indian society with the revolutionary changes in science and technology. It also focuses on the supernatural elements that have been used along the scientific and technological developments.

**Keywords:** Science, Technology, Society, Supernatural Elements, Beliefs etc.

Chetan Bhagat is well-known for his writings on the life, aspirations and predicament of youth in Indian society. In almost all his novels, he has depicted various aspects of social, cultural, psychological and physical life of youth in modern Indian society. His language, writing-style, plot, themes and characters have attracted the attention of his readers. He has motivated reading habits in the Indian society and made them realize the essence of Indian culture. Chetan Bhagat was enlisted as "World's 100 Most Influential People" by the Times Magazine in 2010. His first novel *Five Point Someone* (2004) became very popular and he was acknowledged worldwide as one of the best Indian English Writers of the contemporary age. *Five Point Someone* was adapted by theatre and film directors. Blockbuster films like '3 Idiots' in Hindi and 'Nanban' in Tamil are based on the plot of this novel. His second book *One Night @ the Call Centre* (2005) was also a great success. A Hindi film 'Hello' was an adaptation of this novel and Chetan Bhagat was recognized as a script director of the film. He won Publisher's Recognition Award in 2005.

*One Night @ the Call Centre* opens with a frame story. Chetan Bhagat tells about his train journey from Kanpur

to Delhi. He comes across a beautiful girl in his train compartment and becomes happy. When he starts talking with the girl, he becomes nervous. A girl passes on her negative remarks about Chetan's previous book. She tells the writer that she has an idea for his next book. Chetan is not so convinced with the girl's suggestion but he feels that it would be the best way to spend some hours of his train journey. Before she starts telling her story, she puts one condition to the author. She suggests that the author should write his next book on her story. The author denies initially but then becomes ready to have a glimpse of it. The writer has adapted characters and some incidents/details from the girl's story and incorporated in the novel *One Night @ the Call Centre*.

The story of *One Night @ the Call Centre* moves around six characters- Shyam, Priyanka, Vroom, Esha, Radhika and Military Uncle. They all work in a call centre named "Connexions" in Gurgaon, Haryana. The setting of the novel is a winter night at the call centre in a metropolitan city of India. All the characters have one or other challenge in their personal and professional life. They are running behind their big dreams while working at the call centre. Their lives are interconnected but the biggest turn takes place when they meet an accident. They receive a call from God. They listen to the God and the entire scenario of their life gets changed.

Chetan Bhagat introduces modern generation which is enabled with science, technology and works at call centres, banks, or Business Process Outsourcing companies (BPOs). A generation which knows how to handle computer, mobile or other technologically advanced electronic devices. In this novel, Chetan Bhagat has depicted the age where science and technology have been flourishing. The youth of Indian society have big aspirations and dreams in the field of electronically mediated communication. They want to earn more money and set their lives with this new avenue in the service sector. They want to fix their personal and family problems/issues, achieve different goals, get social and economic status and live a peaceful life. To validate his point, he has shown all the six characters of this novel work at call centre- Connexions- an American based company.

Shyam, a team leader, is known as Sam Marcy. He uses this name when he telecommunicates with his customers in America. In fact, all other characters have their American names (given to them by company). They use it when they attend phone-calls from any American customer. Shyam is deeply in love with Priyanka but Priyanka, on the other hand, in the hope of better future accepts to marry an Indian man working in Microsoft in Seattle. Vroom is a happy-go-lucky man. He prefers to meet girls and proud to be a single man. He loves Esha but she wants to be a model of a silver screen. The love between Vroom and Esha, until the end of story, remains unexpressed. Radhika is a married woman. She loves her husband but he is unfaithful to her. She tries to be a good daughter-in-law but unable to get love and affection from her mother-in-law. Military uncle and his son lives apart physically and mentally. Uncle wants to meet his grandson but does not get Visa to visit his son and grandson. Mr. Bakshi, their boss, is an idiot but takes credit for the works of his employees. Chetan Bhagat portrays all these characters as a typical representation of working class in Indian society. They have number of problems in their personal and professional life. The writer has shown the characters with their realistic appearances. Stress, tension, burden of work and frustration are some of the characteristics of youth in Indian society which are clearly depicted in the novel.

A 'Connexions' provides telephone support to the American customers who are intellectually challenged with the handling of electrical devices like refrigerator and oven. In one incident, Shyam criticizes American people by saying, "Remember... a 35-year-old American's brain and IQ is the same as a 10-year-old Indian's brain. This will help you understand your clients... Americans are dumb, just accept it" (31). The best use of technology is shown when Priyanka guides her customer in America. In fact, to the meet the technological needs of their American customers, all these call centre employees use their technical knowledge. Military Uncle who is comparatively an old man tries to catch up the modern technology. He wants to be in touch with his grandson so he sends an email containing the pictures taken at zoo to his son's email address. When he finds difficulty in sending those images, he takes help of Shyam. It proves that an old man like Military Uncle also has good knowledge of computer, science and technology and he is trying to make best use of it. Unfortunately, what he gets as a reply to his email from his son is very harsh and shatters an old man.

Radhika is unhappy in her relationship with her mother-in-law. Being an Indian daughter-in-law or wife, she tries

to meet the expectations of her mother-in-law and husband. She desperately misses physical and emotional presence of her husband. To get her out of anxiety and help her in knowing how much her husband loves her, Vroom calls her husband in disguise as RJ Max. He tells Anuj (Radhika's husband) that you are the lucky winner of Interflora- a flower company- and you can send a bouquet and dedicate a song for your loved one. All are expecting that he will dedicate a song to his beloved wife, Radhika and also send a bouquet to her. But Anuj wants to send a pretty bouquet to his girlfriend, Payal who lives in Delhi. Not Only Radhika but all her friends at call centre get a shock with Anuj's request. Radhika cursed Anuj and break down in tears. It can be said that technology is not always used for the betterment and happiness of human life but sometimes it spoils it too.

During that night, when everyone is busy in attending phone calls from their clients, the server gets hanged. A technical person looks after it and makes them sure that it will resume in half an hour. Shyam who is in love with Priyanka wants to know the relationship status of Priyanka and her fiancé- Ganesh- who is working abroad with Microsoft. Vroom gives him an idea to tap a phone call between Priyanka and Ganesh. Shyam denies the idea initially but his love for Priyanka makes him to do so. He taps a phone call of a couple. He gets an idea of their relationship. He understands that Priyanka still has soft corner for him. Thus, connecting with the people living abroad, tapping calls, managing technological assistance and helping the people become possible with the technology. There are many incidents where it has been shown that technology is used for the benefit of human life.

After one distressing situation late in the night, they decide to take a break and visit a night club. They enjoy their drinks in the club and try to relax their nerves. While returning to the call centre, Vroom drives the car. He drives it speedily and they meet an accident. Their car (Qualis) tumbles and rests on the floor of iron rods. It is a construction site. They are unable to get down and car cannot be taken back on the road from iron rods. They cry for the help but it is in vain. It is around 4 O'clock early in the morning and no one is around. They want to contact police, fire brigade or call centre for the help but no one has mobile network. They decide to wait for a help. Suddenly Esha receives a call. All are surprised because Esha's mobile phone does not have network. She picks up the call and hears someone saying, "Do you know someone called... God?" (129). With the trembling fingers, she puts a call on loudspeaker. Everyone wants to have a proof that it is a God who is talking to them. God replies

that he is their "inner voice". He asks them whether they are happy in their life. They reveal their miseries, secrets, wishes and plan of their future life. God guides them to come out of that life-death situation. His guidance is not only for that situation but that is for their entire life.

This is an incident in the novel where Chetan Bhagat has used supernatural element. In the modern age of science and technology, it becomes very hard to believe that God calls human beings and talk to them. It also seems impossible that someone calls on a mobile phone when there is "No Network". They want God to show his superpowers to prove His existence. God refuses to break the rules of Physics/science and show any kind of supernatural powers he has. To achieve the climax of the novel, Chetan Bhagat must have created this turn-taking moment in the lives of his characters. Though the 'Calling of God' seems to be supernatural element in the novel, he justifies it by saying that it is the "Inner Voices" of human beings.

Chetan Bhagat, in the end of novel, claims that he had asked the same question to a girl who narrated this story to him. He asked her that it would be very difficult to convince his readers that God calls human beings. A girl very politely replied to him that he could change the version of it. He could use Military Uncle as a mouthpiece to God. Bhagat was convinced with that version. Bhagat, just out of curiosity, looked at the book which girl was reading. He was completely stunned when he read the

lines- "Always think of Me, become My devotes, worship Me and offer your homage unto Me. Thus you will come to Me without fail. I Promise you this because you are my very dear friend"- on the pages of a book which a girl was reading. When he reached to Delhi railway station, he could not see the girl around. He thought that she would be an angel of a God. This can also be considered as supernatural element of the novel. Disappearance of a girl like an angel of a God is clearly depicted in the film version of the novel.

In the end, it can be said that the "Calling of God" would be supernatural element of the novel but it can be interpreted as per the understanding, knowledge or beliefs of Indian society. Science and technology have captivated human life and that has been well-portrayed by the writer in the novel. A word "Call Centre" in the title itself suggests that it is the age of science and technology and the people who live in it have to believe in their "Inner Voices" too.

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