

**Voices in the Void: Exploring Existential Alienation and Digital Disconnection in *One Night at the Call Centre***

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**Abstract**— *One Night at the Call Centre* by Chetan Bhagat (2005) overcomes the limits of the workplace genre to expose the existential alienation and digital disconnect that the middle-class young people in India face in the age of globalization, as well as accelerating technology. The novel takes place in the unnatural setting of a call centre, which highlights the irony of constant communication that, at the same time, destroys real relationships between people and further alienates them as well. Six protagonists, Shyam, Priyanka, Varun, Esha, Radhika, and Military Uncle, have been thoroughly explored in this paper, which represents the various levels of identity fragmentation, cultural displacement, and emotional disengagement as a very important outcome of corporate exploitation and technological systems of labour. The paper analyzes text and reads closely to reveal that Bhagat utilizes narrative techniques, which include the Deus ex Machina intrusion and symbolic dream sequences, to dramatize the conflict between the true self and the performative corporate identity. The results indicate that the novel can be seen as a criticism of the psychological effects of globalization and as a very important reflection upon the fight for meaning in a digitized, corporatized world. This paper places the text in the discourse of existential philosophy, technology, and globalization, as it is a valuable addition to the emerging discourse on the cultural and psychological impacts of the integration of India in the global economy.

**Index Terms**—Existential alienation; Digital disconnection; Globalization; Identity fragmentation; Indian youth

### INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century is a paradox: even though people have never had such unlimited access to digital communication tools, people report feeling lonely, disrupted, and disengaged more than ever before. A similar paradox can be seen in the development of call centres in India, where young professionals are everywhere in contact with customers around the world, but at the same time, their traditional interpersonal relationships are being eroded. These enterprises, which are neoliberal, reformed, and globalized, require not just long working hours but also foreign names, foreign accents, and scripted communicative practices, which in many cases come at the cost of cultural identity as well as personal well-being.

One of the first fictional descriptions of this phenomenon is Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Centre* (2005). Although it is a popular literary work that everyone reads, the novel is a stinging critique of the alienation of the middle-class young people of India in the digital economy. The text dramatizes the psychological cost of globalization through its portrayal of six call centre workers, their disintegrating relationships and unstable selfhood, and the replacement of communal values with performance standards and efficiency goals. Not a mere workplace comedy, the novel predicts the existential crisis of a generation that was facing choices between the traditional and the corporate, between the cultural and the modern. The themes in the novel are also very similar to the philosophy of existentialism, a philosophy that questions the human quest for meaning in an alienated, repetitive, and inauthentic world. Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, among other philosophers, opine that in our current technological life, it is a reality that people become estranged. These issues find reflection in the story of Bhagat, who depicts the role of technology-mediated labor as something that diminishes workers' performative subjectivities, concealing the authentic self. The call centre then becomes a symbolic location where the clash held between existential freedom and corporate conformity.

*One Night @ the Call Centre* takes up a special place in the Indian English literature. Whereas a significant amount of academic interest has been devoted to the role played by Bhagat as a popular writer in the construction of mass-market fiction, there has been less literature attempting to understand how the novel engages more profoundly with issues of identity, alienation, and globalization. Such oversight is noteworthy considering the fact that the text, in turn, can be viewed as a cultural document of early twenty-first-century India, where neoliberal reforms changed the economic aspirations and, at the same time, brought with them new psychological pressures. Through this dimension, the current work not only restores to serious critical consideration the work of Bhagat but also adds to the current debates concerning the intersections of post-liberalization literature, technology, and lived experience in India.

Although this novel has been a very important subject of regular popular media coverage, there has been little scholarly interest in its treatment of existential alienation, identity fragmentation, and digital disconnection. The gap demands a very long-term scholarly investigation into the ways in which the novel depicts the psychological and cultural costs of globalization within the post-liberalization setting in India.

Accordingly, this paper pursues the following objectives:

- To analyze *One Night @ the Call Centre* for its depiction of digital disconnection and emotional disintegration in relation to a technologically organized workplace.
- To examine issues of identity fragmentation, purposeless work and existential drift among Indian middle-class youth.
- To investigate how character relationships and narrative form articulate internal psychological conflicts.
- To situate Bhagat's work within the socio-economic context of post-liberalization India and the rise of call centre culture.
- To contribute to broader discussions on youth, mental health, emotional alienation, and Indian popular literature.

To achieve these objectives, the research is organized as follows: The literature review given in section 2 provides an overview of critical literature on Bhagat and examines theoretical approaches to work, identity, and digital alienation. The socioeconomic and cultural framework, given in section 3, provides a background of how the economic liberalization in India and growth in the outsourcing business have affected the country. The thematic analysis is given in section 4, which mainly deals with the major themes of the novel, such as mechanization, loss of communication, and identity crisis. The character dynamics given in section 5 deal with the way the six main characters are examples of different types of alienation. The literary devices and symbolism are given in section 6, which assesses the metaphor, irony, and narrative structure as tools of critique used by Bhagat. The social commentary is given in section 7, which contextualizes the novel against more macro-discussions of capitalism, cultural alienation, and generation. Lastly, the conclusion part is covered in section 8, which summarises the findings and highlights its application to the analysis of Indian youth literature and other discussions of globalization and existential alienation.

### Related Works

Chetan Bhagat exploded into the Indian-English literary scene with his easy writing and his direct appeal to college students and young professionals. Even when he is regarded as overly commercial by critics, his work still sparks serious scholarly debate. According to Biswas, in *One Night @ the Call Centre*, the so-called "Voice of God" performs both as a narrative element and as a:

“spiritual nudge toward self-awareness when everything else feels flat” (Biswas 72).

This is exemplified when Shyam recounts his dream of drowning:

“I was splashing my hands helplessly in the sea... while my boss Bakshi was in a boat next to me, he was pushing my head down in the water” (Bhagat, 2005, p. 6).

The surrealistic imagery is used to show the oppression of individuality by managerial power, which is what Biswas sees as the strategy of Bhagat putting philosophical questioning into an otherwise mainstream narrative.

Globalization and alienation have also been discussed by scholars in relation to the novels of Bhagat. Kalit defines the call centre as a mini-world of global corporate India where young agents can imitate the accents of Americans despite concealing their deep emotional exhaustion (Kalit n.p.). This is a clear contradiction that is very clearly expressed when Radhika thinks:

“At least everything was fine outside, and inside I had a burning feeling, as if someone had tossed a hot coal in my stomach” (Bhagat, 2005, p. 48).

Metaphor of the “hot coal” emphasizes the unspoken pain behind the smooth corporate facade, which is consistent with Vaishnav arguing that such contradictions cause “restless dissatisfaction now rippling through the metropolitan young”.

*One Night @ the Call Centre* has been compared and contrasted with previous work done by Bhagat. Vimal and Pillai claim that this novel provides a tighter challenge to the psychological impact of globalization than *Five Point Someone*. To them, the call centre acts as the nervous system of a generation that is connected to the global markets while not attached to family and place. This echoes the neoliberal labor policies that Vroom criticizes:

“We should be building roads, power plants, airports... But the government does not believe in doing any real work, so they allow these BPOs to be opened and think they have taken care of the youth” (Bhagat, 2005, p. 201).

His frustration not only expresses disillusionment over corporate outsourcing but also reveals the emptiness of purpose in the fast liberalization of India.

Similar arguments about speech and identity are made by Connel, who compels workers to mute their voices, avoid local references, and affix a customer-first identity. These are dynamic surfaces in the description of Bhagat of the impaired relationship Priyanka has with the consumer culture, as her friend sarcastically comments about the costly hairstyling:

“The result of [an] expensive hairstyling job, which cost as much as a minor surgery” (Bhagat, 2005, p. 58).

It goes without saying that the analogy of the work of beauty to surgery explains how much even the physical selfhood is subsumed into the realm of commodified performance.

Francis adopts a contrasting tone and argues that Bhagat's fiction is about self-management qualities, small spots of agency that remain intact despite the machine that is mercilessly grinding away (Francis). When Military Uncle admits:

“I want to be with my son and my grandson. I miss them every moment... I fought with them and moved out” (Bhagat, 2005, p. 219).

The new generation clash is not the only one expressed in the confession: it is also a desire to be reunited after alienation, which makes the otherwise pessimistic vision of modern estrangement more complex in the novel.

Other critics also analyze Bhagat's fiction in several texts to place *One Night @ the Call Centre* within a broader pattern. Joshi notes that the characters of Bhagat represent the high cultural cost of affluence through globalization. Correspondingly, Gauswami explains the multicultural conflicts in *2 States* as symptomatic of a current identity crisis in modern India. These readings support the notion that characters by Bhagat are always faced with the problem of dislocation, either at home or at work.

According to Kshirsagar, Bonde, and Shinde, settings associated with Bhagat, the cubicle, the campus, and the apartment are substitutes for the older structures of the family. This concept is acted out in the scenes in which the characters identify themselves with consumer items:

“Like TV channels you surf while looking for the real programme you want to see” (Bhagat, 2005, p. 77).

These metaphors are quite reminiscent of postmodern identity theory, in that subjectivity has become fragmented, interchangeable, and commodified.

With all this new scholarly output, Ali notes that there is also a notable gap in the critical literature: much of it remains in the simplicity of style with which Bhagat is explored, rather than grappling with his exploration of existential alienation or the techno-capitalist critique (Ali). As an example, the sarcasm with which Vroom comments upon politics tells us more than the cynicism of youth:

“Suicide is a horrible thing and people do it only because they are really hurt... politicians don't. So, basically, this country is run by people who don't feel anything” (Bhagat, 2005, p. 49).

As expressed by Ali, the passage is brought out to show just how Bhagat dramatizes not just personal hopelessness but also the general cultural state of emotional numbness in contemporary India.

As Ali (2024) points out, creativity and academic rigidity are the two very important main aspects of *Five Point Someone* and its cinematic adaptation that conflict, as Bhagat critiques the Indian education system, prioritizing rote learning over creativity. On the same note, Vimal and Pillai (2024) contrast *Five Point Someone* with *One Night @ the Call Center* to highlight the more extensive involvement of Bhagat with modern Indian society, especially in the context of revealing the plight of the middle-class youth under the influence of the system and the social order. All their analyses tend to suggest that Bhagat was influential in generating debates regarding reform in educational and social institutions.

At the socio-cultural level, Anagha and Merin (2024) investigate *One Night @ the Call Center* and *2 States* to reveal how Bhagat embeds cultural negotiations within his narratives, balancing themes of tradition and modernity. Gauswami (2013) reinforces this view by studying *2 States*, where inter-caste marriage serves as a microcosm of India's cultural conflicts. Joshi (2014) further deepens this argument by showing how Bhagat modernizes ethnicity, presenting characters that navigate both their inherited cultural identities and aspirations shaped by globalization. Together, these perspectives highlight Bhagat's nuanced representation of India's rapidly shifting socio-cultural environment.

The theme of globalization is a common thread between a number of critical studies. Kshirsagar, Bonde, and Shinde (2012) use *One Night @ the Call Center* and *2 States* to demonstrate how Bhagat understands the changes in urban realities and the stresses of a contemporary working culture. The role of call centers in projecting the identity of India to the world is also discussed by Connell (2017), who connects the narratives by Bhagat to the broader national imaginaries of economic development. Kalit also highlights the presence of the two opposites of globalized corporate life, opportunity and alienation, in *One Night @ the Call Center*. All these suggest that Bhagat places his characters at the intersection of globalization and Indian social reality.

Lastly, research on psychology and personal identity in novels by Bhagat gives us a micro view of his books. Francis (2014) traces the characteristics of self-management in *One Night @ the Call Center* and believes that Bhagat prefigures the resilience and problem-solving of the common youth. Biswas approaches it more spiritually and interprets the voice of God episode as the metaphor of inner awakening and the statement of personal agency. Vaishnav (2024) continues this investigation of psychology and speaks about the emotional or behavioral problems

the urban youth face in the stories of Bhagat. According to these readings, there are underlying anxieties about the young people in India, influenced by the rush towards modernization and the clash of values, which Bhagat targets in his popular appeal.

The present study thus places *One Night @ the Call Centre* in a multidisciplinary framework that includes literary analysis, cultural theory, and sociology. It reads the novel by Bhagat not so much as commercial fiction, but as a valuable source of information about how digital capitalism promotes alienation, fragmentation of identity, and seeking meaning in modern Indian life.

#### **Socioeconomic and Cultural Framework**

One of the best examples of the consequences of the post-1991 economic reforms is the emergence of the call-center industry in India. By opening tariffs and floating the rupee, the policymakers took advantage of the fact that there was a large English-speaking population in India and an upswing in the Indian IT sector to link India to the global supply chains. In nearly no time at all, American inquiries were being taken in the middle of the night in metropolitan centers such as Mumbai, Gurgaon, and Bangalore, making outsourcing a pilot project a headline item. But there was a social price to the economic novelty. Even the accents, emotions, and time itself became commodified. This phenomenon is dramatized in *One Night @ the Call Center* by Chetan Bhagat, who has transformed lifeless numbers of trade and contracts into the life experience of middle-class youth torn between aspiration and alienation.

The novel reflects the cognitive uncertainty that the new place of work generates. There is a moment when Shyam dreams of drowning as his manipulative boss Bakshi dips his head into water:

*"I was splashing my hands helplessly in the sea... While I was in the water, my boss Bakshi was in a boat next to me, he was pushing my head down in the water; I saw Priyanka drifting away in a lifeboat. I screamed as Bakshi used with his hands to keep my hand submerged.*

*Salt water was filling my mouth and nostrils when I heard loud beeps in the distance"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 6)

The feeling of being suffocated by outsourcing is captured in this metaphor when the workers feel overwhelmed by corporate demands and are denied the right to make decisions. The monotony of machine technology and images of drowning are mixed because the loud beeps are the phone calls that remind you that you are at the call center.

Bhagat is another author who exposes the intrusion of globalization into national domains. At the beginning of the novel, the characters debate the issue of trust in the house in an informal way:

*"Has the maid stolen it?" "Wouldn't she steal the whole set?"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 14)

A broader fear of the emerging middle classes can be found in the suspicion here, as workers become acculturated with Western lifestyles and accessories but cannot overcome their fears of cultural and economic distance. In much the same way, her mother asks Priyanka about how she looks in the workplace:

*"Your work is through the phone, why do you need to dress up? Who is going to see you?"* (Bhagat 2005, p.15)

In these lines, one can find a sense of disconnection between generations. To parents conditioned by more relaxed careers, the call-center world seems like a foreign land, with its emphasis on superficial appearance being incompatible with older modes of modesty and restraint.

Economic transformation further redefines identity. Vroom describes the toll of consumerist culture when he notes the cost of an

*"expensive hairstyling job, which cost as much as a minor surgery"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 58)

In this hyperbole, the author highlights the fact that globalization takes on the appearance of economic sacrifice. Meanwhile, the characters are themselves immersed in worlds where entertainment does not distinguish itself by the use of violence. In one nightclub episode,

*"As the dance floor was too noisy for vocal arguments, people expressed themselves only with fists and kicks"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 99)

Noise and aggression are the new norm of communication, and they replicate the disjointed conversations in the call center itself.

Another aspect of outsourcing that has been highlighted in the novel is the culture of surveillance and mistrust. After he is accused of acting inappropriately, Shyam cannot defend himself:

*"Sir it is not what you think." "I am not thinking anything, what you do in your personal lives is up to you"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 113)

As indicated in this dialogue, the power of managerialism destroys personal subjectivity, transforming employees into parodies of suspicion. In a similar way, there is another scene later that parodies the deprivation of privacy in male friendship:

*"Is it okay to talk to him while he is doing his business or not? What are you supposed to do? Leave him alone or give him company and entertain him?"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 114)

These purposely ridiculous situations satirically respond to how individual and professional relationships are emptied in the commodified world.

The negative effects of globalization spread to romantic life and family life. One scene shows Priyanka complaining that she is suffocated by her roles, and is torn between the expectations at the workplace and the expectations of her parents. Such emotional exhaustion is supported by the metaphorical images used by Bhagat throughout the novel: characters are compared to tangled telephone wires (35), a teddy bear (38), or TV channels that you switch on in search of the actual programme you want to watch (77). These similes demonstrate the colonization of the vocabulary of self-expression by technology and consumer culture, the transformation of human feelings into the language of things, machines, and short-lived distractions.

Vroom offers the most acute commentary on the political and economic priorities in India. He makes fun of the insensitivity of politicians by saying:

*"students, housewives, businessmen, employees and even film stars commit suicide. But politicians never do... So, basically, this country is run by people who don't feel anything"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 49).

His frustration later broadens into a generational manifesto:

*"We should be building roads, power plants, airports, phone networks and metro trains in every city like madness... But the government does not believe in doing any real work, so they allow these BPOs to be opened and think they have taken care of the youth"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 201).

These texts reflect a deep disappointment in the state that sends out its youth to the service sectors around the globe instead of investing in its own national development.

The sociocultural divide is also manifest in the generational divisions. In a different dialogue, older women are referred to as curses by the elders, and the younger women respond:

*"The young girls know how to talk and behave. It is you old ones who need to be taught a lesson. These are your granddaughters, and you are calling them curses"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 87)

This clash is an example of the contradictory values of post-liberalization India, where the globalized youths claim independence against older cultures. In a similar manner, intergenerational estrangement is expressed through a grandfather character who admits:

*"I want to be with my son and my grandson. I miss them every moment... I fought with them and moved out"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 219)

This sorrow sums up the emotional cost of modernization, in which personal freedom tends to tear the bonds of kinship.

In sum, Bhagat in *One Night @ the Call Center* describes not only a workplace drama, but the psychosocial turbulence of a country in change. The novel dramatizes the price of globalization on identity, intimacy, and intergenerational relationships through metaphors of drowning, alienation, and fragmentation. The call center, therefore, becomes a literal place of work and a symbolic cubicle, an emotional box in which the young people of India are trying to grapple with the contradictions of modernity.

#### **Thematic Core of One Night @ the Call Centre**

Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Centre* is more than a story about six employees working one shift amidst one crisis; it is a critique of the emotional, cultural, and moral effects of globalization. The novel conducts an investigation into the processes by which contemporary service economies empty out the individual, pervert communication, and disassemble relationships, and at the same time promises some vague prospects of self-discovery. Bhagat uses the daily metaphors and daily frustrations to transform the greater mechanisms of global capitalism into personal human plights.

#### **4.1 Alienation and Surreal Anxiety**

Another theme that appears in the novel is the feeling of being drowned, both physically and figuratively, that comes with the contemporary job. This anxiety is summed up in the dream sequence of Shyam:

*"I was splashing my hands helplessly in the sea. I can't even swim in a pond, let alone in the Indian Ocean. While I was in the water, my boss Bakshi was in a boat next to me, he was pushing my head down in the water; I saw Priyanka drifting away in a lifeboat. I screamed as Bakshi used with his hands to keep my head submerged. Salt water was filling my mouth and nostrils when I heard loud beeps in the distance."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 6)

The drowning is not only a nightmare but a symbol of the suffocation in the workplace, of bosses who exploit you, of loved ones with whom you fall out of touch, of technology (the loud beeps) which turns life into a machine of automatic signals. The process of alienation is depicted in a visceral manner, where the loss of individualism and interpersonal cohesion is depicted.

#### **4.2 The Mechanization of Communication**

It is clear throughout the novel that communication in call centres becomes mechanized and artificial. A customer service interaction is deprived of authenticity, which resonates with the burning discomfort of Shyam:

*"At least everything was fine outside, and inside I had a burning feeling, as if someone had tossed a hot coal in my stomach."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 48)

This metaphor of the hot coal symbolizes the mental price of obligatory politeness and rehearsed speech. Likewise, absurdities at the workplace make human contact a repetitive practice:

*"Your work is through the phone, why do you need to dress up? Who is going to see you?"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 15)

This summarizes the process of creating a professional identity based on surface appearances, which are not even needed. Bhagat condemns this emptiness by depicting the way even clothes are a part of a staged performance.

#### **4.3 Identity Crisis and Commodification of the Self**

Throughout the novel, characters are continually challenged by the loss of selfhood in the face of corporate pressures. Vroom is ridiculing the artificial glamour of the business:

*"The result of expensive hairstyling job, which cost as much as a minor surgery."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 58)

These hyperbolic comparisons stress the vacuity of commodified identities: workers spend money on looks, and their souls are rotting. Similarly, the weakness of personal integrity during surveillance is also revealed through romantic disputes:

*"Sir it is not what you think."*  
*"I am not thinking anything, what you do in your personal lives is up to you."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 113)

In this case, Bhagat demonstrates that privacy fails when it is controlled by managers, since employees are not only evaluated based on their professional performance, but also on personal decisions. The names of the characters, their actions, and their relations are constantly commodified.

#### **4.4 Emotional Violence and Social Disconnect**

Bhagat narrates the repressed feelings that burst out in violent or absurd expressions. At some moment, there is a stage of aggression on the dance floor:

*"As the dance floor was too noisy for vocal arguments, people expressed themselves only with fists and kicks."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 99)

This scene can be related to the promotion of distorted emotional expression due to noise and chaos in the world around people, both in crowds and in working environments: no dialogue sets off anger, no communication sets off violence.

Family dynamics are equally fraught. An elderly character laments:

*"I want to be with my son and my grandson. I miss them every moment. Two years ago, I used to live with them. But my daughter-in-law did things I didn't like—she went parties, got a job when I wanted her to stay at home ... I fought with them and moved out."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 219)

This conflict between generations is similar to the alienation of workers: at home, as well as in the call centres, true emotional attachments are substituted by broken expectations.

#### **4.5 Social Satire and Political Critique**

Bhagat also embeds sharp political commentary in his characters' dialogues. Vroom's cynicism targets systemic failures:

*"Well, the article said all kinds of people—students, housewives, businessmen, employees and even film stars—commit suicide. But politicians never do. That tells you something. ... Basically, this country is run by people who don't feel anything."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 49)

It is a satire of existential emptiness on both the national and individual levels. Leadership apathy is a reflection of apathy among the youth.

Equally, Vroom attacks government negligence and consumerist distractions:

*"So like, there is so much to do. We should be building roads, power plants, airports, phone networks and metro trains in every city like madness ... But the government does not believe in doing any real work, so they allow these BPOs to be opened and think they have taken care of the youth. Just as this stupid MTV thinks showing a demented chick do a dance in her underwear will make the programme a youth special. Do you think they really care?"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 201)

In this case, the call centre is not merely a place of employment but a manifestation of national misplacement: rather than infrastructure and development, superficial industries and entertainment are the order of the day.

#### **4.6 Gender and Generational Tensions**

In the novel, women are saddled with two sets of troubles, namely, professional impersonation and family expectations. This comes out in sarcastic remarks:

*"The young girls know how to talk and behave. It is you old ones who need to be taught a lesson. These are your granddaughters, and you are calling them curses."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 87)

This interaction editorializes the reinforcement of generational conflicts that empower young women in addition to stigmatizing them as they negotiate new identities. Similarly, the characters are subjected to body-shaming and ageist comments:

*"Like you are a fifty-year-old aunty."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 59)

These situations indicate the continuation of gender expectations even in allegedly modern environments, worsening the problem of emotional alienation.

#### 4.7 Symbolism of Disconnection

Bhagat frequently uses similes to highlight estrangement and fragmentation:

- "Like tangled telephone wires" (p. 35) symbolizes interpersonal confusion.
- "Like TV channels you surf while looking for the real programme" (p. 77) illustrates shallow connections.
- "Like a blind snake: you feel sorry for it, but it still has poisonous bite" (p. 90) reflects deceptive vulnerability.

These daily comparisons affirm the idea that the relationships, communication, and identity in the call-centre age are skewed and volatile.

*One Night in the Call Centre* has a thematic core of alienation, identity crisis, pseudo-connectivity, and political satire. The psychic cost of globalization is dramatized in Bhagat's novel using metaphors, generation clashes, and numbness of emotions. Through the use of mere but vivid similes, the story reveals how service economies reduce youth to voices without selves, trapped amid the global scripts and the local anticipation. The strength of the novel lies in its capacity to connect individual hopelessness with structural commentary, giving the reader a stinging insight into the alienation of the globalized middle-class in India.

#### Character Dynamics and Psychological Dissonance

In *One Night at the Call Centre*, Chetan Bhagat creates a small universe of globalization where six characters represent anxieties, conflicts, and contradictions of India in a state of transition. The call center turns into a workplace as well as a mythical non-place where voices are shared in the world, but identities are held at a local level. In this sterile environment, their lives intersect, unwind, and reflect the disintegration of a whole generation. The novel is not simply an expression of personal crises but traces a larger state of dissonance between technological empowerment and existential despair, between capitalist opportunity and human vulnerability.

##### 5.1 Shyam: The Hollow Core of Professional Identity

In his subconscious imagery, Shyam is the most alienated. His nightmare shows being crushed between the demands of the corporation and emotions:

*"I was splashing my hands helplessly in the sea. I can't even swim in a pond, let alone in the Indian Ocean. While I was in the water, my boss Bakshi was in a boat next to me, he was pushing my head down in the water; I saw Priyanka drifting away in a lifeboat. I screamed as Bakshi used with his hands to keep my hand submerged. Salt water was filling my mouth and nostrils when I heard loud beeps in the distance."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 6)

The dream is a drama of his two fears, corporate oppression (Bakshi drowning him) and emotional abandonment (Priyanka drifting away). His metaphysical disturbance also finds its way into expressions of the body:

*"At least everything was fine outside, and inside I had a burning feeling, as if someone had tossed a hot coal in my stomach."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 48)

These lines expose an underlying dichotomy of surface and inner fragmentation. Shyam is a symbol of the insecure middle-class worker, who is externally confident but internally alienated. His loss is not materialistic but existential: a vacuous professional self bound through acting as opposed to belief.

##### 5.2 Vroom: Anger without Resolution

Vroom (Varun) expresses the anger of disappointed youth with satire and cynicism. His remarks on Indian politics are as follows:

*"Oh yeah. It was called 'Why Don't Politicians Ever Commit Suicide?' ... people—students, housewives, businessmen, employees and even film stars—commit suicide. But politicians never do... basically, this country is run by people who don't feel anything."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 49)

This indictment has a connection between politics and emotional bankruptcy. Vroom also attacks world power systems:

*"'Americans are sick,' Vroom said, as he pointed to a US politician who had spoken out in support of the war. 'Look at him. He would nuke the whole world if he could have his way.'"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 199)

His nationalist frustration also targets India's misplaced priorities:

*"We should be building roads, power plants, airports, phone networks and metro trains in every city like madness... But the government does not believe in doing any real work, so they allow these BPOs to be opened and think they have taken care of the youth."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 201)

Although he criticized him, Vroom is not constructively angry. He reveals the faulty elements of the structure, yet he is still caught in the same system he criticizes. He is the paradigm of rebellion in the wrong direction: fire that burns and fails to change.

##### 5.3 Esha: Gendered Bodies and the Politics of Self-Worth

Esha Singh represents the trap of gender, body, and alienation. The dream of being a model crashes into the commercialization of beauty:

*"The result of expensive hairstyling job, which cost as much as a minor surgery."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 58)

This sentence brings into focus the feminine performance in the face of economic as well as social pressures. Her contemporaries use ageist insults:

*"Like you are a fifty year old aunty."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 59)

Esha is thereby degraded to body aesthetics, comparing, evaluating, and discarding on the basis of appearance. Bhagat relies on her as the embodiment of the contemporary female precarity: determined, yet quieted, in her pursuit of independence, but already predetermined as an object of the outside gaze. She is not only alienated by professional aspirations, but also by her sense of self.

##### 5.4 Priyanka and Radhika: Negotiating Tradition and Modernity

Both Priyanka and Radhika echo the conflict between agency in the modern world and patriarchy. The freedom of Priyanka is undermined by watching and condemnation:

*"'Sir it is not what you think.' / 'I am not thinking anything, what you do in your personal lives is up to you.'"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 113)

This dialogue displays the mediated nature of the voice that women have, which does not belong to them completely. In the meanwhile, Radhika goes through generational misogyny:

*"The young girls know how to talk and behave. It is you old ones who need to be taught a lesson. These are your granddaughters, and you are calling them curses."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 87)

Her crisis makes the process of peaceful enforcement of patriarchy by men and older women through internalized norms as dramatic as possible. The silence of Priyanka and the quiet suffering of Radhika in tandem explain the way globalization gives women new roles but does not eliminate structural subjugation.

### **5.5 Bakshi: Corporate Power as Structural Violence**

Mr. Bakshi epitomizes managerial exploitation, reducing individuality to functionality:

*"Your work is through the phone, why do you need to dress up? Who is going to see you?"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 15)

This statement dismisses self-expression, and this is a corporate logic where only output matters. The drowning nightmare of Shyam (p.6) is another allegorical suggestion of the oppressive role of Bakshi: he literally drowns his subordinate to death in water as a symbol of being choked by the hierarchy. Bakshi is not only a character villain but a representation of structural violence- an agent of alienation codified by bureaucracy.

### **5.6 Shared Estrangement: Fragments of a Disconnected Generation**

Though their struggles differ, the characters converge in collective estrangement. Bhagat employs metaphors of disconnection:

*"Like tangled telephone wires."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 35)

*"Like TV channels you surf while looking for the real programme you want to see."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 77)

These similes capture fractured identities and restless searching. Even leisure becomes violent alienation:

*"As the dance floor was too noisy for vocal arguments, people expressed themselves only with fists and kicks."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 99)

These images combine to explain how a generation exists in between consumer culture, globalization, and the dislocation of the self. Their crisis, of love, work or family is not an isolated event but a symptom of a more widespread cultural discontinuity. Bhagat portrait them as voices that call out of the same emptiness, alienated to self, society, and sense.

### **Literary Devices and Symbolism**

Although Chetan Bhagat uses a colloquial and approachable narrative voice, *One Night @ the Call Center* has symbolism, irony, and satire that add layers to the surface-level realism. The details of the everyday workplace gain metaphorical weight, revealing motifs of alienation, disconnection, and contemporary precarity.

### **6.1 The Call Centre as a Metaphor of Confinement and Disorientation**

The workplace is not as much a work setting as a jail in-between place, where daily routine diminishes the individual. This contradiction appears in the subconscious image of Shyam:

*"I was splashing my hands helplessly in the sea. I can't even swim in a pond, let alone in the Indian Ocean. While I was in the water, my boss Bakshi was in a boat next to me, he was pushing my head down in the water; I saw Priyanka drifting away in a lifeboat. I screamed as Bakshi used with his hands to keep my hand submerged. Salt water was filling my mouth and nostrils when I heard loud beeps in the distance."* (Bhagat, 2005, p.6)

The dream serves as an allegory of corporate choking. Bakshi as power that suppresses and subjugates Priyanka as inner space, and Shyam as the one who drowned in between. The call centre, therefore, represents alienation: a source of income and a psychic trap..

### **6.2 Bodily Metaphors of Anxiety and Estrangement**

Bhagat tends to find the alienation in physical sensations, where a mental disturbance has physical expression. The uneasiness of Shyam is expressed in a metaphor:

*"At least everything was fine outside, and inside I had a burning feeling, as if someone had tossed a hot coal in my stomach."* (Bhagat, 2005, p.48)

*"I moved aside from the tornado to save another collision."* (Bhagat, 2005, p.48)

The anxiety, as personified turbulence, is dramatized by the similes of "hot coal" and a "tornado". This inner and outer breakdown is a reflection of worker dislocation in dead-end jobs that also live psychologically out of place, unable to match exterior with interior.

### **6.3 Irony and Satire in Global Work Culture**

Bhagat thoroughly incorporates irony to satirize economic reliance on the world as well as cultural imitation. The irony of politics and globalization shows the disenchantment of a generation as follows:

*"Oh yeah. It was called 'Why Don't Politicians Ever Commit Suicide?' ... people—students, housewives, businessmen, employees and even film stars—commit suicide. But politicians never do. That tells you something... basically, this country is run by people who don't feel anything."* (Bhagat, 2005, p.49)

It is here that irony highlights exploitation: Indian youth are being placated with tedious work, and no systemic reform is being done. The satire of Bhagat is thus not a frivolity but one that is pointed, exposing hypocrisy in political and economic systems.

### **6.4 Humor and the Language of Disconnection**

Humor is both coping mechanism and narrative critique. Joking between characters may frequently be a mask of deeper alienation. In one instance, the workplace regulations deprive individuality::

*"Your work is through the phone, why do you need to dress up? Who is going to see you?"* (Bhagat, 2005, p.15)

What would appear as light banter is, in fact, corporate dehumanization, where identity is not needed beyond what is on the headset. Similarly, professional estrangement is indicated by the irony of practiced courtesy:

*"Sir it is not what you think. 'I am not thinking anything, what you do in your personal lives is up to you.'"* (Bhagat, 2005, p.113)

### **6.5 Similes and Figurative Language of Fragmentation**

Bhagat resorts to similes quite often to describe fragmented selfhood and precarious relationships:

- "Like tangled telephone wires." (p.35), signals confusion and disconnection in relationships.
- "Like TV channels you surf while looking for the real programme you want to see." (p.77), evokes transient, unstable attachments.
- "His eyes were wet like a puppy's brown and kind to look at." (p.41), humanizes vulnerability through an animal metaphor.
- "Like a blind snake: you feel sorry for it, but it still has poisonous bite." (p.90), conveys hidden threat beneath apparent helplessness.

All these figurative comparisons dramatize the disjointed reality of a generation that was never rooted. They make ordinary experiences metaphors of existential estrangement.

### **6.6 Violence, Gender, and the Body as Symbol**

There is also the symbolism of gender and social conflict. The physical battle in the nightclub reflects alienation in the form of physical aggression:

*"As the dance floor was too noisy for vocal arguments, people expressed themselves only with fists and kicks."* (Bhagat, 2005, p.99)

There is a replacement of speech with violence, which implies a breakdown of any meaningful communication. Likewise, the feminine identity is diminished to looks::

*"The result of expensive hairstyling job, which cost as much as a minor surgery."* (Bhagat, 2005, p.58)

*"Like you are a fifty year old aunty."* (Bhagat, 2005, p.59)

Through these remarks, it becomes evident that gendered pressures and social expectations are placed on the female body and that the female body is a symbolic location of alienation. Bhagat highlights the way modernity offers freedom but maintains the ancient hierarchies.

#### **Social Commentary and Philosophical Insight**

*One Night at the Call Centre* by Chetan Bhagat combines satire, realism, and allegory to criticize the Indian experience of globalization. With a popular fiction veneer, the novel touches upon the issues of alienation, consumerism, generational conflict, and loss of cultural identity. The novel, which is based on lived-in experiences and powerful metaphors, provides a simple yet multi-layered commentary upon the socio-economic state of Indian youth during the early 2000s.

#### **7.1 Labor, Capitalism, and Emotional Erosion**

The call centre symbolizes the way that global capitalism has turned people into replaceable units. The employees do not even identify themselves as they are confined to labor monotony. The oppressive power of authority is summarized by the nightmare that Shyam experiences:

*"I was splashing my hands helplessly in the sea. I can't even swim in a pond, let alone in the Indian Ocean. While I was in the water, my boss Bakshi was in a boat next to me, he was pushing my head down in the water; I saw Priyanka drifting away in a lifeboat. I screamed as Bakshi used with his hands to keep my hand submerged. Salt water was filling my mouth and nostrils when I heard loud beeps in the distance."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 6)

The drowning scene represents a symbol of mental suffocation by the workers under managerial authority. When Bakshi presses Shyam underwater, the act itself is an allegory of how bosses restrain personalities and autonomy in the name of efficiency.

Consumerism intensifies this erosion of self. Even small luxuries are depicted as excessive and hollow:

*"The result of expensive hairstyling job, which cost as much as a minor surgery."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 58)

In this case, the value is determined by looks, where the capitalist culture commodifies identity and devalues human beings to become surface-based.

#### **7.2 Fragmented Culture and Shifting Identities**

Globalization creates divided subjectivities- the youth are torn between the Western self and the traditional Indian-self. This detachment finds its expression in the similes of disconnection:

*"like tangled telephone wires"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 35)

*"like TV channels you surf while looking for the real programme you want to see"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 77)

Both images highlight confusion and restlessness, evoking lives pulled in multiple directions without stability.

This fragmentation also manifests in gendered expectations. Women's professional autonomy is trivialized:

*"Your work is through the phone, why do you need to dress up? Who is going to see you?"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 15)

That comment diminishes the work of women to invisibility and proves that even in a globalization-altered space, there are still patriarchal views. Meanwhile, generational suspicion is seen when there is domestic distrust:

*"Has the maid stolen it?" / "Wouldn't she steal the whole set?"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 14)

Class prejudices are here combined with cultural anxieties, and they show how modernization has not eradicated the old hierarchies but transformed them into new forms of tension.

#### **7.3 Technology, Disposability, and Dehumanization**

Another way that technology has transformed intimacy in the novel is that it turns interactions into a disposable and ridiculous commodity. Corporate scripts even invade bodily privacy:

*"Is it okay to talk to him while he is doing his business or not? What are you supposed to do? Leave him alone or give him company and entertain him?"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 114)

This moment shows the way that empathy is mechanized, reducing communication to robotic exchanges.

Technology increases distrust in relationships. At the moment of suspicion caused by a private message, intimacy collapses into confrontation:

*"I'd like to send it to my girlfriend Payal."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 157)

*"You talk to me asshole, what message were you going to send this Payal."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 158)

The intrusion of digital communication in this case is devastating, which depicts how relationships designed by devices crumble into surveillance and paranoia. Likewise, social places such as nightclubs turn into battlefields:

*"As the dance floor was too noisy for vocal arguments, people expressed themselves only with fists and kicks."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 99)

Technology, rather than increasing connection, intensifies alienation and diminishes workplace relationships, as well as personal connections to transaction or violent conflict.

#### **7.4 Generational Tensions and Cultural Estrangement**

Another theme Bhagat explores is the conflict between the generations, where seniority conflicts with the young generation. One of the grandmothers curses her granddaughters:

*"like two curses on her"* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 52)

This judgment reflects entrenched patriarchal disdain. Yet Vroom counters with defiance:

*"The young girls know how to talk and behave. It is you old ones who need to be taught a lesson. These are your granddaughters, and you are calling them curses."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 87)

This confrontation signifies how globalization empowers the younger generation to challenge oppressive norms.

The older generation's loneliness adds another dimension of estrangement:

*"I want to be with my son and my grandson. I miss them every moment. Two years ago, I used to live with them. But my daughter-in-law did things I didn't like—she went parties, got a job when I wanted her to stay at home ... I fought with them and moved out."* (Bhagat, 2005, p. 219)

This lament outlines the way gender role changes and shifting work patterns have thoroughly destabilized the traditional family structure, leaving generations emotionally isolated.

#### **7.5 Political Critique and Global Cynicism**

Bhagat implants harsh social commentary into speech, which reveals political apathy and hypocrisy. Vroom satirizes governance:

"Oh yeah. It was called 'Why Don't Politicians Ever Commit Suicide?'... Well, Vroom's point was that suicide is a horrible thing and people do it only because they are really hurt, this means they feel something. But politicians don't. So, basically, this country is run by people who don't feel anything." (Bhagat, 2005, p. 49)

This biting commentary exposes a system driven by callousness rather than empathy.

Frustration with international politics also surfaces:

"American's are sick... he would nuke the whole world if he could have his way." (Bhagat, 2005, p. 199)

And domestically, Vroom critiques misplaced priorities:

"We should be building roads, power plants, airports, phone networks and metro trains in every city like madness... But the government does not believe in doing any real work, so they allow these BPOs to be opened and think they have taken care of the youth." (Bhagat, 2005, p. 201)

These excerpts place the critique in the novel in a national and global context, which reveals how alienation is linked not only to individual conflict, but also to structural failure.

#### 7.6 Emotional Vulnerability and the Search for Meaning

Beneath satire, the novel portrays characters' deep psychological fragility. Anxiety manifests physically:

"At least everything was fine outside, and inside I had a burning feeling, as if someone had tossed a hot coal in my stomach." (Bhagat, 2005, p. 48)

"like someone had tossed a hot coal in my stomach." (Bhagat, 2005, p. 36)

This kind of imagery reinforces the idea that alienation is a corrosive element to emotional health. And in the same way, the relations suggest metaphors of tenderness and pain:

"His eyes were wet like a puppy's brown and kind to look at." (Bhagat, 2005, p. 41)

"like a blind snake: you feel sorry for it, but it still has poisonous bite." (Bhagat, 2005, p. 90)

Such comparisons indicate that individuals are seeking empathy in a world of consumerism and disconnection.

Even minor signs of solidarity, as "like long-lost-sister" (p. 16), hint at the fact that in the context of estrangement, there are still some moments of contact. However, the predominant mood is an atmosphere of dislocation, in which the characters are in conflict between work, family, and the demands of their emotions..

According to Bhagat, the true struggle of the youth is economic and cultural, but more existential: the struggle of the youth to find meaning in a world of changing identities, disposable relationships, and a lack of spirituality.

#### Conclusion

*One Night @ the Call Centre* tells us how globalization and the digital economy are changing not only labor structures but also the psycho-geographies of young Indians. In its most fundamental form, the novel is concerned with the state of existential alienation: people are tied up in a web of the whole world, but are completely uprooted and lost in self and loss of connection with others. The workplace and metaphor of the call center minimize humans to formal delivery of words, to a loss of tone and personality.

These six main characters represent the various aspects of this alienation. Their own issues, such as a lack of sense, frustration, and disappointment, broken family bonds, display the economic and cultural pressures at work in their interior lives. The atmosphere of continuous surveillance, customer placation, and role play connects to a feeling of invisibility where self-esteem is subject to external confirmation. They have voices in this sense, but they are in a vacuum, present but rejected. Simultaneously, the novel is a criticism of the cultural hypocrisy of a post-liberalization India. The characters have to struggle with opposing forces between tradition and modernity, consumerism and authenticity, individual liberty and family obligation. This tension is increased by the intrusion of technology: although it is brought in to create connection, it increases disconnection in the sense that relationships become transactional and intimacy shallow interactions. The arc of the story is not a grand resolution but a momentary resistance. The characters shift more or less out of paralysis towards assertion, which highlights the precarious prospect of reasserting agency within a system that is geared toward discouraging it. This is an experience that makes this study's name, *Voices in the Void*, because the struggles of the characters in this chapter drive the point home that people in the digital age is often screaming to find meaning in places that are able to echo but not respond. Therefore, *One Night @ the Call Centre* cannot be rejected as a popular fiction. Behind its casual writing is a deep contemplation of the way that globalization, digitization, and cultural fragmentation are coming to define emotional realities. The novel challenges everyone who is reading it, especially teachers and policymakers alike, to acknowledge the price of conflating progress with productivity, and the critical human requirement of authenticity, connection, and selfhood in a world that is rapidly becoming more metrics-driven, more screen-driven, and NOISIER as well.

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