
Impact of Globalization in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Centre*

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Abstract

Literary genius of Indians has been widely appreciated all over the world. The prestigious titles starting from Nobel Prize to Booker Prize, Pulitzer Prize are bestowed to Indian writers. It becomes very common phenomenon to nominate Indian writers for such honors in the world literature. Chetan Bhagat emerged as youth icon to contrive undercurrents of transformation evident in young generation of India. This paper is a modest attempt to trace out impact of globalization in Bhagat's novel *One Night @the Call Center*.

Keywords- Globalization, Corporate Culture, Perpetual Identity

Introduction

Indian English Literature has been reflecting sensibly and creatively the sociocultural, political upheavals in the Indian society. Indian literature especially fiction provided a platform to record social evolutions resulted as outcome of the then political, historical policies and events. The effect of globalization is very much evident in the writings of Indian fiction after 1990. The Indian novelists were received and appreciated with applause all over the world for their freshness in theme and style.

Phases of Indian English fiction

Indian English Fiction can be divided into two broad phases on the basis of themes primarily discussed. The first phase depicts the colonial and post-colonial India and the second phase reflected transformation in the contemporary Indian society. Indian independence and acceptance of LPG are to be taken as turning points in the history of Indians and Indian English literature. The first phase presented India under the British rule and issues prevailing in the then Indian society. Most of the novels delineates with social issues of caste and class ridden hierarchy. This initial phase was more nationalistic fervor as the freedom struggle of

India was either pointed out or used as a setting or backdrop to foreground fictitious characters. R. K. Narayan flourished the love story of Bharati in his fiction *Waiting for Mahatma* in the similar fashion. Several other examples can be quoted which directly or indirectly, marginally or centrally, deeply or at surface utilized the then sociopolitical happenings in their creative writings.

The second phase of contemporary Indian English Fiction was a literary response to radical transformation in the context of globalization. India accepted LPG policy i.e. Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization to boost Indian economy. In order to compete with the world economy and to optimize business opportunities, India gave consent to it. Globalization is a multidimensional and ongoing progress which deeply influence on every aspect of your life. Globalization opened up many avenues for progress to remote and undeveloped as well as developing countries for business. At the same time these nations opened up their doors for sociocultural interactions with the entire world. It is a mutual process in nature. It was inevitable that Globalization led easy and frequent exchange of ideas, cultures, and languages through business opportunities. Previously it was possible only when an Indian or foreigner visits other nation and vice versa. No nation will exclude herself aloof from this turmoil. It will be old fashioned to safeguard one's orthodox, nationalistic identity and attitude in this globalized era.

Though globalization primly intended to business or economy, it is not confined to these spheres only. It deeply interacted rather intervened the sociocultural network or ties. Anthony Giddens points out that globalization is the process that shapes worldwide social relations "The intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens, 1990:64)

Although globalization is disguised under different nomenclature like internationalization, liberalization, universalization, westernization, modernization and so on, the impact is deep and unavoidable too.

Now a day, Indian English Fiction became a core part of world literature. Indian novelists secured a distinct place by contributing their literary genius. From 1990, the world literature was enriched by the Indian novelists like Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Kiran

Desai, Arvind Adiga, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri and recently the youth icon Chetan Bhagat.

The contemporary Indian English Fiction very minutely observed these transformations. The sensible writers voiced the issues of identity, hybridity, transculturalism, multiculturalism etc. through their literary works. In other words, Indian English Fiction transcended national, social, cultural boundaries through their literary expressions.

Chetan Bhagat

Chetan Bhagat stands apart from the tradition of his predecessors in terms of expression and issues selected for exposure through his fiction. Bhagat represented the generation resulted from the complex process of globalization. Chetan Bhagat needs no special introduction to the contemporary reader community due to his popularity as youth icon. Despite his high profile, he ventured into full time writing profession. His novels are widely read for freshness in style as well as theme. He explored his fictional world without losing the ground reality. He is highly praised not only in India but abroad for his communicative style of writing. The young generation correlates themselves with his characters at ease. Even TIME Magazine honored him by placing in the list of 100 most influencing people in 2010. The world recognized rather realized and appreciated the pen craftsmanship of Indians in the form of Chetan Bhagat.

Globalized Culture

L P G paved the way to extreme social, cultural interactions ever before in the history of mankind. The advancement in the field of transportation and communication shrank the entire world into a globalized village of cultural variation. Geographical boundaries and distance became lines on map and numbers respectively. Internet bridged remote corner of the world on a single click. The virtual reality is none the less than reality in conventional mode. India tempted the super economies as the most potential market for their business expansion. The new terms like MNC (Multi-National Companies) or BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) became buzz words. India emerged as potentially efficient human source for MNCs. So a large number of BPOs were established to provide 24*7 assistance at lower wages. India adapted a new culture popularly known as ‘corporate culture’ as an outcome of globalization especially in metropolitan cities.

Night Life

The concept of night life is an imported concept for Indians. Due to globalization, all time assistance through call center was a novel idea or work culture for conventional Indians. The infrastructure, dress code and business hours were fully westernized. Obviously the night life has its own pros and cons from Indian scenario. The protagonist and his colleagues ridicule their job profile as truck drivers. Shyam condoles his disapproval a little bit by comparing himself with doctors performing their night duties. The protagonist Shyam narrates:

By now we had left the call center and were now on the highway. Apart from a few trucks, the roads were empty India has a billion people, but at night, ninety-nine percent of them are fast asleep. This land then belongs to a chosen few: truck drivers, later shift workers, doctors, hostel staff and call center agents. We, the nocturnal, rule the roads and the country. (Bhagat: 2005, 175)

However Priyanka bursts into sarcasm as she opines, ... hell, even that does bitch works at night (Bhagat:2005,187)

Perpetual Identity

Chetan Bhagat very minutely observed cultural traumas of young generation working in BPOs. The call center became the meeting ground for East and West cultures as well as lifestyles. Majority of characters in this fiction are true representatives of culturally baffled youths. They have to perform dual role which is very contradictory in nature. Esha looks her job as an opportunity to live a new life full of freedom from the clutches of social taboos. On the contrary, Radhika is in dilemma to choose either her role of typical Indian married woman or to follow Esha. This identity crisis is vividly expressed in their communication.

‘They don’t make me do anything, Esha. I am willing to follow their culture.

All married women in their house do it,’ Radhika said.

‘Still it is a bit weird,’ Esha said.

‘Anyway, I took it as a challenge. I love Anuj and he said he came as a package. But yeah, sometimes I miss wearing low waist jeans like you wore the day before.’(Bhagat: 2005, 52)

The word ‘package’ is no more indianised connotation for a family. It is a term introduced as a part of commercialization. The word package also implies a notion of terms and conditions associated with it.

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Esha is ready to compromise at any cost to establish her ambition as a model. Priyanka's decision to leave Shyam is highly practical. She prefers Mr. Ganesh Gupta, a software engineer with better prospects for marriage. Her decision of rejection and selection of her life partner discard the role of sentiment. Her attitude and behavior do not resemble Indian culture and temperament.

The Indian employees working in an international call centre have to adopt a new identity by discarding their original identity. For the sake of American customers, they have to pretend like American by concealing their natural tone and mother tongue and accent. For instance Shyam Mehra becomes 'Sam Merci', Varun Malhotra becomes 'Victor Mell', Esha Singh has to become 'Eliza Singer' and Radhika Jha is called 'Regina Jones'. Thus they have to live in a dual identity in their own nation.

The novel begins with the issue of identity when Shyam introduces himself to the readers,

"Hi! I am Shyam Mehra, or Sam Marcy as they call me at my workplace, the Connexions call center in Gurgaon. American tongues have trouble saying my real name and prefer Sam. If you want, you can give me another name too. I really don't care. Anyway, I am a call center agent. There were hundreds of thousands, probably millions of agents like me." (Bhagat, 2005, 11)

They have to lead their life with this dual identity. The guilt of hiding one's real identity and to live with a perpetual identity is very painful.

Social Taboos

Bhagat projected rebellious attitude of his characters against social and cultural taboos prevailing in India. Their views and actions are far away from Indian social code. Premarital sex is no more a moral lapse to them. In the conventional Indian culture, sex is associated with marriage and its legitimacy or social acceptance is a delicate issue. The sexual intercourse between Shyam and Priyanka on her initiative is astonishing. They got inspired from the movie 'Titanic'. They adopt this so called new trend to prove their modernity against Indian ethics. This paradigm shift in morality norms is the result of cyber culture and the impact of globalization.

Love has different connotations for this modern young generation. It varies as per the situation and intents. Shyam loves Priyanka but when there is a part time break up issue with her he flirts Shefali, a call center agent. Vroom has started feeling something about Esha. When

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Shyam asks what's about his ex-girlfriends, Vroom says, "those girls are not as important as Esha. They are like TV channels you surf while looking for the real program you want to see (Bhagat: 2005, 116).

Their expressions and opinions about life partners are more of fashion rather than passion. Girls are looking at boys as ladder to success whereas boys treat girls as objects of exploitation and merry making. Bhagat's characters prove the fact:

His characters are social rebels and stands for their vitality. Men and women are no more seen through the old concept which categorize men are superior and women as inferior. As by product of globalization and modernization men and women are given their due place and respect, in their own intellect and abilities, they are seen to be working or studying shoulder to shoulder. (Nusaiba, 2015:193)

Food Culture

Food habits are closely interlinked with culture as India has been reputed for her variety of cuisines all over the world. The place of India has been treated as a rich source of spices in the history of cooking. However the said fiction projected an entirely different picture of India indulged in Pizza Hutt, McDonald, coffee houses, vodka etc. under the influence of globalization. A new era of junk food, fast food eclipsed *desi* cuisines from the menu of young generation of India. In order to support their choice, Vroom explains the nutritional value of Pizza with the help of internet bites.

'No way. Pizzas are the ultimate balanced diet. Look at the contents: grain in the crust, milk protein in the cheese, vegetables and meat as toppings. It has all the food groups. I read it on the Internet—pizza is good for you.' (Bhagat:2005,98)

Conclusion

In nutshell, Globalization is an ongoing mutual process occupying almost all spheres of your life. The shades of local uniqueness are under the dark shadow of globalization. Literature is no more confined under regional, linguistic or national labels. The impact of globalization is vividly reflected through characterization, selection of themes and style of new Indian novelists. Chetan Bhagat presented undercurrents of transformation evident in young generation of India.

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