



Emotional and Behavioral issues among Urban Youth: Insights from 'One Night @ the Call Center'

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Abstract: This research article examines the portrayal of emotional and behavioral issues as depicted in Chetan Bhagat's novel *One Night @ the Call Center*. Through a thematic analysis of the novel, this study explores how issues of job security, professional development, personal aspirations, and relationship affect characters emotionally. The papers depict how these emotional conflicts shape their behavior and make them unhappy professionally and personally. The article sheds lights on universal appeal of the problems shared by common people also.

Index Terms - Emotional, behavioral, call center, corporate culture, work pressure.

I. INTRODUCTION

The advancement of science and technology changed the scenario globally and created many job opportunities for the people. It resulted in rapid migration of rural youth to the cities, resulting in urbanization of the cities. Indian cities are no exception to this phenomenon. Though urbanization becomes an instrument of rapid social, economic and political progress, it is also responsible for many socio-economic and behavioural problems of the people. Amongst many other issues, increasing urbanization leads to many psychological and emotional struggles of youth in cities. The present paper aims to focus on such issues of emotional and behavioural problems of urban youth as depicted in Chetan Bhagat's novel, '*One night @ the Call Center*'.

Published in 2005, the present novel depicts the lives of six characters working in a BPO call center named Connexions in Gurgaon. These characters share their experience of personal as well as first-hand experience of professional lives with each other. The novel throws light on the first decade of this century which brought positive change for urban youth of India and promising future for them. However, any change comes with some negative aspects also. Corporate culture, performance pressure and struggle to survive in this tough competition give tremendous mental pressure to this youth. This leads to certain emotional and behavioural issues that are represented by the characters in this novel also. The present paper aims to capture such issues that can lead to several problems at professional as well as personal level.

II.1 Work Pressure and stress:

As per the World Health Organization, stress is 'health epidemic of the 21st century' and is associated with workplace and corporate culture. Another researcher Walsh (2011) says, "A stress is a biological process resulting from an emotion or thought. In other words, stress is the outcome of demands made by experiences of tussle." The employees working in a call center go to work place with lot of stress. While offering financial stability, this job of call center was taken by many aspiring Indians at that time. It is obvious that

BPO industry and call-center jobs presented significant opportunity to middle-class urban Indians and changed the life style of urban youth. A scholar Varma observes, “An urban scenario, where new townships with giant malls and offices come up almost overnight, and youngsters tired of imitating western accents stagger out at dawn from call-centers spread across the country. The personal world of the middle class is in a phase of transition where the past and the present coalesce in strange and unpredictable ways”. (Varma 2007 pg. xxxiii) The characters in the present novel appropriately represent this phenomenon and undergo similar stress at the workplace and ultimately show behavioral issues. .

This call center work culture is responsible for change of attitude of urban youth. To match with the life style of European culture, these employees change food habits, communication style and enjoy late night parties in discos and pub. Even recreational activities undergo drastic change is quick time. It is obvious that the society was not ready for such rapid change. These call center executives in the present novel reflects the tendency to imitate youth culture at the global level. Their change of name to show western identity is evident. Therefore, Shyam Mehra is known as Sam Mercy, Esha Sing is called as Eliza Singer, Radhika Jha becomes Regina Jones and Varun Malhotra takes the name of Victor Mell. In spite of all these efforts, all these characters constantly face job security threat and are going through some kind of stress and facing pressure of this corporate world.

II.2 Emotional struggle of the characters in the novel

The novel captures a new emerging culture of ‘Call Center’ in India which opened new window to the western world. In this respect Shashi Tharoor observes: “To many, the call center has become the symbol of India’s rapidly globalizing economy. While traditional India sleeps, a dynamic population of highly skilled, articulate professionals work 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”. (Tharoor S) Thus the novel presents insights about work culture of call center jobs that leads to emotional and behavioral issues. It provides an interesting situation where a client call is expected by the employees of this call center. They receive a call, surprisingly from the God, and these characters narrate their personal experiences. These narrations of these employees reflect professional challenge faced by all of them which ultimately affects them at personal level.

Shyam, the main character and the narrator of the novel shows dissatisfaction with his work profile. He leaves his job in advertisement agency because of lucrative salary in the present job. His ultimate aim and aspiration is to become a writer. He finds that his dream of becoming a writer is like a distant dream that cannot be achieved now. He says, "You know, I've always had this dream of becoming a writer. There's something magical about putting words together, weaving stories that captivate people's imaginations. Maybe one day, I'll have the courage to pursue it." (Bhagat, 2005, pg. 33) It reflects his passion for writing and future ambition. However, increasing work pressure, target oriented work, mechanical way of living,

breaks his self-confidence and he gets frustrated with his job. He says, "I feel like I'm drowning in this never-ending cycle of calls, deadlines, and targets. It's suffocating, and I don't know how much longer I can keep up with it." (Bhagat, 2005, pg. 65) After working extremely hard on a website, when he comes to know that his boss, Mr. Bakshi has sold this website without giving any credit to Shyam and his colleague Vroom, he becomes furious. Simultaneously, his relationship with Priyanka does not show any sigh of happiness and pleasure and in the course of time, it becomes weak, likely to break.

Vroom, another character goes through similar issues at the work place. He is a team leader who is responsible for completing the targets in the stipulated time. However, he grumbles that management of the company never shows any appreciation of his team and he feels that approach of management is far from the reality. He leaves his previous job of a journalist because of low salary and is not complacent in the present job also. He says, "The management here is so out of touch with reality. They make decisions without considering how it affects us, the ones actually doing the work. It's like they don't care about our well-being or our opinions." (Bhagat, 2005, pg. 95) In fact, he observes that expectations are increasing gradually and he has to meet the expectations of the company, if he has to survive in the company. He confesses, "I can't keep doing this. The constant stress, the long hours, it's taking a toll on me. I've been getting these headaches that won't go away, and I just feel exhausted all the time. Something has to change, or I don't know how much longer I can handle it." (Bhagat, 2005, pg. 78) As per one article, "Job stress is not merely an individual experience; it's a collective issue that permeates the entire workplace ecosystem. It arises when there's a discord between the job's demands and the employee's capabilities, resources or needs." (NuGenomics, 2023) In this way, constantly increasing demands and work related pressure takes a serious toll on his personal life and he is unable to have any healthy relationship with everyone.

Another highly ambitious character is Esha in this novel. She represents a typical middle class girl who aspires to be a model. To pursue her ambition, she elopes from her home and compromises on many things. She takes this job as an adjustment and says, "I know this job is just a stepping stone for me. I have big dreams, you know. I want to travel the world, experience new cultures, and write about my adventures. This job is temporary; it's not where I see myself in the long run." (Bhagat, 2005, pg. 54) However, she considers male-dominated society doesn't allow her to excel in life. She feels that she is becoming a victim of gender bias and missing significant opportunity because of her gender. She thinks, "It's so infuriating how society expects women to fit into these narrow boxes. We're constantly judged, criticized, and held back just because of our gender. It's unfair, and it makes me so angry sometimes." (Bhagat, 2005, pg. 88) This affects her psychologically and demoralizes her emotionally.

Radhika, represents many working women of metropolitan cities finding it extremely difficult to balance office and home. She says, "I feel like I'm constantly torn between two worlds. At work, there's this pressure to perform, to meet deadlines, to excel. And then at home, there are expectations, responsibilities, things I need to take care of. It's a constant juggling act, and sometimes I wonder if I'm doing justice to either side." (Bhagat, 2005, pg. 115) Radhika represents many working women of metro cities who are doing this balancing act. She loves her husband and her family very much but gets upset when her husband selects

another girl over her in one of the radio programs. She feels humiliated in front of all because of her husband's this act. Her painful relationship with her mother-in-law creates further damage to her emotional well-being. She constantly says, "I try so hard to please her, but nothing I do is ever good enough. She's always finding fault with me, criticizing my every move. It's like I can never live up to her expectations, and it's making me miserable." (Bhagat, 2005, pg. 132)

Military uncle, the oldest member of the call center struggles to cope up with the new technology and shows signs of stress and pressure. He carries some kind of emotional burden of his past life and it affects his present. He says, "I may not always be here physically, but I carry each of you in my heart, every mission, every duty. Your laughter, your stories, they fuel my strength out there. And when I'm home, every hug, every shared meal, it's a treasure I hold dear, reminding me of why I serve." (Bhagat, 2005, pg. 173) Likewise, Priyanka finds it hard to satisfy her family and struggles to find complete satisfaction at personal level and professional level. Her family is pressurizing her to marry Ganesh, an NRI for the sake of financial stability. Shyam tries to convince her not to marry him. He says, "Priyanka, I know he's an NRI and everything, but do you really think he understands you? Your dreams, your passions, your quirks? I just don't want you to end up with someone who doesn't appreciate the real you." (Bhagat, 2005, pg. 105) Her relationship with Shyam undergoes many ups and downs because of such mental issues. All the characters have opted for this call center job because of lack of promising career prospect in other fields and face some kind of issues that lead to emotional struggle. They all work under the constant fear that this call center will either be closed or manpower will be reduced.

II.3 Remedial measures

Though the novel pervades with negativity and emotional issues, it ends on a positive note. While awaiting a call from the client, they receive a call from 'God' and this call gives new understanding to all of them. Conversation with 'God' changes their perspective and approach towards their work. They notice that their boss, Mr. Bakshi is the main reason behind this closure of the call center. Therefore, Shyam and Varun plan out the road map of saving this call center. Even if they are not able to save it, they plan to enter new business venture.

Symbolically, this call from 'God' emphasizes the need to listen to your inner voice which leads to identify your strengths and weaknesses. It reflects the need of introspection and self-analysis. This divine intervention leads these characters to positive transformation and personal growth in their lives. This call triggers awareness about real self and leads to happiness and complacent life.

III. Conclusion

This article tried to explore the negative effects on emotional and behavioral pattern of urban youth working in call center jobs across Indian metro cities. These jobs offered lucrative salary to aspiring youth and changed their life style. Simultaneously, it brought corporate culture of deadlines and target oriented nature of job. Emotional and behavioral issues are experienced by all characters of the novel. While offering

emotional struggles, the novel offers a ray of hope and call from ‘God’ serves as a catalyst for all of them. This pivotal moment in the novel prompts us to face the inner conflict of the mind and makes us aware of the fact that serious introspection can lead us to personal glories; hence the inner voice of the person is significant.

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