



SILENT REBELLION OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S ONE NIGHT @ THE CALL CENTER

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Bhagat has brought out a balanced view of the youth as well as their parents in his novels. Increased intelligence and exposure, several sophistications, mad chase for money and so on have brought out a major change in the outlook of the Indian society, resulting in the strained parent – adult relationship. Without understanding their children's interest and competence, parents try to reinforce their expectations on their children with parental authority. On the other hand, children, without proper guidance, take extreme decisions either react to it in a rebellious way or will end up in self destruction.

The present day scenario of the Indian women is paradoxical as they have accepted modernity as their way of life, but they are still standing at the threshold of transformation. Their outward appearance is in contrast to their inner consciousness. Rao says: "The inner consciousness of the Indian psyche and the social relations are based on the traditional image of the ideal womanhood even in the changed context" (159).

Today's cosmopolitan mother-daughter is in a way a contrast to the conventional relationships. Mother has an obsessive anxiety to find a suitable life partner for her daughter or son. According to them, matrimony is a purely mercenary connection, and they always feel that they are the victims of the marriage. These qualities are repulsive to her daughters and they show resistance. They react at times, when her mother admonishes them. Like men, they also experience the same kind of pressure and restrictions from their parents, resulting in a turbulent relationship with their mothers.

Bhagat points out how women in India are being incarcerated within families in the name of care, safety, morality, etc. Undoubtedly, 'Every girl in India deserves a journey of self-discovery'. His article, 'Wake up and respect your inner Queen' - (April 6, 2014, *The Times of India*) is a true picture on status of women in India:

We have trapped our women. We think we care for them, but we suffocate them in the name of security, safety, morality, tradition or culture. We are not comfortable with an Indian woman expressing herself. A woman has to be a good daughter, sister or wife. It isn't enough for her to be just, well, herself. In some ways, they endure disguised slavery. In the civilized, developed world, where women have choices, they do not choose to live like this (12).

In Bhagat's second novel, *One Night @the Call Center*, Priyanka has a lot of problems with her mother and almost every day they have an argument on one or other issue: "Oh, yes. She is the Miss Universe of melodrama. We cry together at least once a week" (*Night* 95). Her mother always grumbles about everything Priyanka does. The author brings out the turbulent relationship between Priyanka and her mother, using flashback technique, 'My past dates with Priyanka' narrated by Shyam. In their every date, she mentions about some fight or other with her mother.

They were not like this in the past. Till her eighth standard, they were good friends. As she grew older, her mother became strict. Added to that, her mother has different rules for her brother, which hassles her a lot. "She would comment on everything I wore, everywhere I went, whereas my brother... she would never say anything to him. I tried to explain it to her, but she just became more irritating" (97). She always feels that her mother needs a professional help to overcome her attitude towards Priyanka. Even petty things ended up in long arguments between them.

Though she tries to ignore her mother, her guilty conscience prompts her to develop a good rapport with her mother. Her mother wants her to select some settled Non-Resident Indian for marriage, but she was in love with Shyam. Plus Priyanka wanted to start a Nursery School. Priyanka loves her mother and is desperate to prove her love for her mother. Realizing how natural it is for her mother to show concern for her daughter, Priyanka consents to her mother's wish. Yet, at the same time, her sensitivity and wisdom enabled her to approach the issue in a practical manner, by which she moves one step ahead in her attempt to attain authentic selfhood.

On their way back to 'Connexions' from 'Bed' lounge and bar, Varun turned on the music. Somehow, the lyrics of the song played are too close to their heart. Innumerable thoughts rush to Shyam's mind and make him cry. He tries hard to hide his tears and he looks at Priyanka. To his surprise, he finds tears on her eyes. Even though, due to circumstances they get separated, they want and like each other's company.

Under her mother's compulsion, she decides to marry Ganesh, an Non-Resident Indian working in Microsoft, and settled in U.S. She finds it quite comfortable after talking to Ganesh over phone. But when her mother wants her to get married next month, she disagrees, saying that it is difficult to enter into a relationship without knowing each other completely. After knowing that Ganesh has done touch up work to cover his baldness, she changed her decision and re-proposes to Shyam. He thinks that her decision to marry him is out of sympathy.

She rejects it explaining him the reasons behind it. Firstly, she rejects Ganesh not because he is bald, but he lied to her and that shows his nature. Secondly, the most important one is that, she is confident that Shyam is the only person in the world who knows all about her flaws yet loves her completely and she can be herself with him, and it is not necessary to change herself after marriage. Lastly, though she appears to be a money-minded girl, beneath she is an ordinary girl who wants to live with her favourite boy, like any other girl.

When God asks what they need in life, Priyanka wants her mother to be happy, and at the same time she does not want to kill her wish in her life. She entreats to God: "My mother needs to realize a family is a support to have, but ultimately, she is responsible for her own happiness. My focus should be on my life and what I want" (205). Her mother fakes three heart attacks when Priyanka said no to Ganesh, a NRI bridegroom, but Priyanka yawns every time until she gives up. Finally, she gives a full stop to Ganesh's chapter. Though it upsets her Non-Resident Indian obsessed mother, rebellious Priyanka is prepared to accept it. In the end, Shyam informs the readers that she works at 'Connexions' then and she will join B.Ed. course in another six months.

Basically, Esha is from Chandigarh, and against her parents' she had wishes left for Delhi with a dream becoming a model. The call centre job helps her earn a regular income, but during the day, she approaches agencies and tries to get modeling assignments. She has taken part in some low-key fashion shows in Delhi. She is voted as 'the hottest chick' in house title. She chiseled herself in order to achieve her goal and she is very conscious of her stylish appearance. She never enjoys eating anything although she always asked for treats. When Priyanka gives her sweets, she takes the tiniest piece possible with human fingers in order to maintain her low-cut jeans figure (53). She also spends a lot over grooming herself. Shyam says that her hairstyling would cost as much as a minor surgery. She would adjust her hair at least ten times a night.

When Varun proposes to her, she rejects it. Yet, he stresses saying that he wants to move to the next level from being just friends. Her response is just the same. "I've told you before. I have to focus on my modeling career. I can't afford the luxury of making a boyfriend" (120). Esha feels that the emotional entanglements do not suit her as they may hinder her journey towards her goal.

In her chase towards her dream, she pays a heavy price. She sleeps with a forty year old designer in order to get a chance as a ramp model. Ultimately, she realizes that she is being physically exploited. A sense of guilt grips her. Unable to express their anger towards those who are responsible for injuring their pride and dignity, she becomes unfriendly with herself and develops a strong dislike for herself. In an excessive sensitive mood, she says: "I hate myself, Shyam. I just hate myself. And I hate my face, and the stupid mirror that shows me this face. I hate myself for believing people who told me I could be a model. Can I get my face altered?" (143).

Guilt can be a troublesome emotion at any age. One may feel a sense of guilt, if he or she violates their own internalized moral standards. Anagha P. Somwanshi puts it neatly:

This sense of guilt is a mixture of remorse, self reproach and apprehension over the fear of punishment. Adults tend to revise the contents of their conscience in keeping with their own sense of values and standards of right and wrong. The sense of guilt should appropriately reflect a more adult conscience. Hence, Esha's 'real hard, painful guilt' thus builds 'the dark side' of her life.' Her outer appearance is in contrast to her inner consciousness. (115)

Just then, Varun again proposes to her. Now, the situation is not favourable for the blooming of their love. She leaves the place in tears saying: "You chose a wrong time to talk about this" (120). Esha pays a heavy price for her dream to be a model. She finally realizes: "Any career that makes you compromise on your morals, or judges you because you are not an inch taller is not worth it" (205). Her traumatic state has made her turn over a new leaf in her life. But, as Wenche Ommundsen points out, the notion of conflicting desires remains strong: "reflecting the challenges facing young women as they navigate careers and relationships, independence and commitment, and commodity culture and traditional values" (108).

Her path towards her goal has given her such a disappointment that she shuns away from love. 'Love' for her becomes a mere word, and she is ready to get into another tangle, as she is totally shattered and haunted by the memories of her bitter experience. Having freaked out with many girls, obsession for one woman for so long a time comes as a new experience for Varun. In them, love entered quite slowly but passionately.

To God she says that she wants her parents to love her again and she does not want to be a model as that needs a compromise on her morals. She wants to find a better use of her looks. She gives up her model aspirations and continued to work at the call centre. During the day time, she works with an NGO raising funds with corporate. Shyam says that she is doing well. He guesses that looking at her hot looks, male executives find it hard to say no to her request for money that too for a good cause.

Radhika's relationship with Anuj, her husband, is not smooth all the time. They were married three years ago, after a brief courtship in college. She is the only daughter for their parents. She does as many sacrifices as possible in order to sustain their relationship. During the daytime, she does all the domestic chores and during the night time, works at 'Connexions' to save money for their family. Shyam feels that she is pretty with her high cheek bones and fair complexion with wispy eyebrows. The dark circle around her eyes is a clear indication of sleep-deprivation.

Anuj's parents are 'ultra- traditional parents' according to Shyam. Just before getting into the company Qualis, she grinds almonds and gives almond milk to her mother-in-law. This shows her commitment towards her relationship. She never murmurs about it to anybody. It is not difficult for Shyam to notice the difference in Radhika's grooming after marriage. Giving up her favourite jeans and skirts, after marriage she starts wearing saris, as saris were all she could wear in her 'ultra- traditional' in- law's house and always has to cover her head with sari. Like any other married woman, she is ready to accept and follow the culture as she took all these as a challenge. Anuj has already told her that he comes as a 'package' and she too likes the 'cozy family feeling'. Geetha Lakshmi's view about the compromises in relationship has to be registered here in order to understand the amendments made by Radhika:

In relationships, such as spousal relationships, it is certainly agreed that ability to compromise can enhance each partner's experience of the relationship. Since people are individuals, it is seldom the case that two people will agree on everything. The more reasonable among us are able to negotiate with partners in order to give up things that are not important, and to get the things that are simple. Compromises exist in daily living. (136)

Despite, all these, she is knitting a scarf for her mother-in-law as she feels too cold at night. When Anuj has left for Kolkata her mother-in-law called Anuj and told him that Radhika made a face when asked to crush the almonds little finer. He messages her: "Show elders respect. Act like a daughter-in-law should" (82). What else is needed to trigger her migraine?

Soon after taking an anti- migraine pills, she feels better. She has been given anti-migraine pills prescribed by her physician, so as to cure her depression. Without blaming anyone, she rules out that the entire mishap is due to a miscommunication between Anuj and her. She has sacrificed all her pleasures to sustain their love. Vikram Seth, in his work *The Golden Gate*, describes how love and marriage rarely combine:

Although they both are borne in the same clime
Marriage from love, like vinegar from the wine
A sad sour, sober beverage by time
Is sharpened from its celestial flavour
Doom a very homely household savour. (113)

A prank played by Varun reveals the true colour of Anuj. Faking as RJ.Max from Radio City 98.5 FM, Varun calls him, saying that he has won a prize from Interflora, and so he can send a dozen of red roses with a message to anyone in India. All of them expected that he would mention Radhika's name but are shocked on hearing the name of Payal, his girlfriend, who lives in Delhi. Is there any better substantiation required to prove his betrayal? This is too hard for her to digest this naked truth. The anti-migraine pill, her 'legal addiction' came to her rescue. Knowing that it has side effects, she has been taking it.

Next morning, she decides to move to Esha's place and with the help of the Military Uncle, she decides to divorce Anuj and lead her own life. For three years, she has sacrificed a lot to sustain their relationship. In fact, she has given up her identity, right from the way she dresses to the salient acceptance of all shackles imposed upon her in the name of the marriage and love. Being herself, is what she wants now, which is sure to give her complete relief from all her physical ailments. It is true, for women, the true quest is her deepest need – her identity.

Radhika had led a happy and carefree life in pre-Anuj days. Her love has a fairy tale beginning but towards the end it becomes a disaster. Her painful session of self education comes that night. Her husband's self centred nature shocks her. Her illusion gets shattered and a new regenerated Radhika is born, after the conversation with God. She realizes that she made a mistake by marrying Anuj. She wants to be herself, just like what she was before marriage when she was with her parents.

Bhagat, through his characters, tries to bring about a compromise between tradition and modernity. All of them are traditional right from the way dress up – except Esha - to their passive subservience to their parents. Yet they are silent rebels. Whether it is Priyanka or Esha or Radhika, they are not the specimen of traditional morality. Especially in, Esha does not mind sleeping with a big gun of fashion industry for getting a break to walk upon a modeling ramp and Priyanka tempts Shyam for physical relationship. They never feel guilty about their pre-marital sex. In fact, they find it liberating, and they drink and want to smoke too. As adults, they feel that it is possible for them to decide and lead their life.

Pinaki Roy states: "Any critical study of Bhagat's oeuvre is likely to identify him as a representative of the twenty-first century Indian youth with grievances against the seniors and the elderly. However, at the end of almost every novel, the rebellious young people are shown reconciled to their parents who had grown more tolerant and indulgent than what they have had been at the beginning of the stories" (70).

Like men, Bhagat's women characters in *One Night @the Call Center* are also utterly helpless, as they are unable to cope up with the expectations of their parents and are desperate to achieve their goal despite the fact they have their own nightmares and dreams. It is interesting to find that their reaction to it differs. They, up to an extent, accept it, but at a later stage, they resist to the subjugation – men overtly and women covertly. His women are silent rebels, as they are modern in the sense that their outlook and attitude towards life are

revolutionary. Yet, Bhagat emphasises on the family values which ultimately win the battle between individuality and family values.

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