

**Resisting the Resistance: A Collaborative Feministic Perspective of  
Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center***

V. Sathish (Research Scholar, M.S.University) Assistant Professor of English, St. John's College, Palayamkottai

**Abstract**

*The movement, Feminism, expands its political significance in the twentieth century. It achieves its pinnacle in the contemporary arena after a two long centuries' struggle to negotiate the cultural ideologues and socio-political rights. Feminism is women living with men on equal terms by law and culture and not being pushed down by patriarchy. When women live in close mutual understanding rather than wanting the superior position, the yield would be high. Hence the collaborative feminism should be celebrated and encouraged. Hence, this paper attempts to present the collaborative nature imbibed by the women characters in Chetan Bhagat's One Night @ the Call Center. It also be seen how these women characters tend to resist and be productive and creative amidst the pressurizing factor of the patriarchal structure.*

**Keywords:** Resistance, Feminism, Collaborative, self-realization

Feminism has emerged as a worldwide movement to secure women's rights on the one hand and love, respect, sympathy and understanding from the males on the other. It focuses on the women's struggle for recognition and survival and makes them realize that the time has come when they should stop suffering silently in helplessness. Ultimately, feminism places woman on a high plinth from where she is in the limelight and her mind, heart and soul has been screened with utmost depth as finesse in literature.

Feminist situation in India possess a dissimilar dispensation. Indian society has always been highly hierarchical. The several hierarchies within the family concreting age, sex and ordinal position, congenial and fine relationship or within the community referring to the caste lineage, learning, occupation and relationship with ruling power have been maintained very strictly. Indian novelists have powerfully focused light on the psyche of women of different strata in modern times of never- ending existential struggle in their life.

Chetan Bhagat is a distinguished novelist of Indian origin who is known for his gripping style to bring young urban towards his novels. His works include *Five Point Someone, One Night @ the Call Center, The Three Mistakes of My Life, Two States, Revolution 2020, Half Girlfriend* and few other non-fiction works. Chetan Bhagat has understood the world of an Indian Woman with all their religious, emotional, cultural and also modern ins and outs. He has also studied the Indian minds especially the women under all influences. His depiction of women characters in his fiction varies from all backgrounds. He has intensely noticed and concerned about the social milieu of each and every women characters in the fiction.

*One Night @ the Call Center* is published in 2005, focuses on the six employees who are working in the Connexions call center in Gurgaon Haryana. The plot covers the span of a night in which the characters tend to change their confronting situation they would like to change. The story takes a remarkable and significant twist through a literal *deus ex machina*, when the characters get a phone call from God. The story is told through the character named Shyam. The other major characters with whom Shyam travels in the story include Priyanka, Military uncle, Radhika, Esha, Vroom and Bhakshi. In the novel, every character has some ambitions which they want to fulfil during the course of life but unaware of the right path to fulfil their ambitions. The author has presented God in friendly manner rather than a boss. Bhagat has introduced the episode of God's calling to fulfill their ambitions and to show them the right path to achieve their goals. Hence the story of the book is about thwarted ambitions, lost love, absence of family affection, pressures at home and the work environment at a call centre. All their problems are resolved when God gives a call and advises them to improve their lives. As Tapan K. Ghose Dhawan says:

**The book touches the nerve of India's call centre generation and presents a realistic picture of BPO life which is very tough as the employee have to work daily at night shifts with the constant threat of downsizing hanging over their heads like Damocles' sword and the continuous cursing by clients from the USA who holds the Indian responsible for the shortage of jobs in their own country. (36)**

In *One Night at the Call Center* the part of women characters play a crucial role. The female characters are in perfect resemblance with the postcolonial feminism. One could see Priyanka having her own identity, views, likes and dislikes. She is a woman of substance who strongly opposes whatever she feels irrational and wrong. One can witness the pure form of feminism in her character. This stance is showed by Priyanka when she during one of the dates with Shyam reprimands an old lady who curses her daughter-in-law by saying, "You call this a family? Doesn't look like a family to me I just see an old shrew and a loser wimp who are troubling these girls. Don't you have any shame? Is this you married her for?"(58). Priyanka pretends herself to be a C.B.I. officer and warns the husband of the woman and the mother-in-law of the woman. This instance shows Priyanka's protest against the marginalization of women. In another such event, Priyanka slaps Vroom for tormenting Esha. Though Vroom's idea is not meant for Priyanka, she responds it very strongly as it hurt her. The insult made by Vroom on Esha is being considered by Priyanka as the abuse to all womanhood. Like a real feminist she addresses Vroom, "Just because we don't make noise doesn't mean it is easy."(72) Alka Saxena remarks, "These days more and more women are becoming conscious of their rights. They have risen in revolt and are raising their voice against their exploitation." (52)

Priyanka doesn't neglect women being given marginal treatment. She supports and favours equal place and equal right for women in this post modern society. This becomes the

exquisite underlining fact that she has differences with her mother's biased treatment to her. One could understand this when Priyanka says, "She had different rules for me and my brother. And that began to bother me. 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 becomes more irritating and by the time I reached college, I couldn't wait to get away from her." (65) Priyanka revolts against her mother's biased treatment in her style. She further states, "all through college I ignored her and did what I wanted. In fact, this whole doesn't care phase was born out of that...." (65) Her contend against the marginalization goes to such an extent that she continues to love her boyfriend Shyam, despite her mother's disapproval of him. Thus Priyanka's mother, though a woman, represents patriarchy by operating all the restrictive forces on her daughter. Priyanka is seen as the woman of substance who strongly resists the patriarchal hegemony in the entire novel.

Radhika, another character represents the problems of working woman. She is keeping a very delicate balance between her professional and familial life. She is a married woman living with her husband Anuj and ever droning mother-in-law. She tries hard to keep things together at home. Radhika's chief objective is settling down through earning money on one hand and takes care of her mother-in-law on the other hand. She marries Anuj in a love marriage and she loves him deeply and sincerely. As Anuj works in a marketing company he is often out of town, and hence Radhika has to take care of her whining mother-in-law on the days. She has to work in the office during nights. The hard work she puts in to balance both objectives is seen through her black dark circles around her eyes. She never complains to her husband as she loves him very much. It is this sincere and deep love for husband, which gives her strength and zeal. It is the love that makes her a lot of adjustments and sacrifices. But, it is the irony of Radhika's fate that the person for whom she makes a lot of adjustments and big sacrifices turns out to be treacherous to her. When Anuj is found to be in love with Payal, a modern type of girl, Radhika is shocked. This tragic and humiliating reality turns out to be a great jolt to Radhika's mental world. As long as Radhika submits meekly to the oppression she represents a subalternity who cannot speak since the bind of patriarchy silences her. When the moment she decides to divorce Anuj she empowers herself as a postcolonial woman who resists all exploitation that results from comparative poverty or powerlessness.

Esha, the character Chetan Bhagat creates in *One Night at the Call Center* is to portray the modern and career conscious girl. She is obsessed by her ambition to become a model as she is beautiful in her appearance. The ambition makes her run away from Chandigarh from her parents to realize her dreams and also to work in a call center in Delhi. She works as a call center agent by night and meets the model coordinators in the days. She gets trouble in getting an opportunity as a model. She is unaware of the fact that her height is an hindrance in becoming a model. Due to her obsession in becoming a model, she goes to such an extent that she sleeps with the designer to get the modelling contract. Here the designer becomes an opportunist and betrays her by telling that she could not become a



**International Journal of Tamil Language and Literary Studies**  
*A Bi-Yearly Peer-Reviewed International Journal*

E-ISSN: 2581-7140

Vol. 2, Special Issue 3, Vol. 2 February- 2020

Available at: [www.ijtlls.com](http://www.ijtlls.com)

model due to her height. Esha is terribly upset and tries to suppress the mental pain by inflicting herself with physical pain by purposely cutting her skin. Thus Esha can be situated at the intersection of repressive structure of sexism at the hands of oppressive patriarchy. But Esha doesn't succumb to the circumstances, she doesn't lose hope. On the contrary she redefines herself, rediscovers herself, sets new goal and starts a fresh life with new vigour because she knows as Robert Young says,

**For all feminists, the transfer of power at independence and achievement of sovereignty, though desirable, was not the end. It was simply a stage along the way.(98)**

To sum up, achieving the national sovereignty is not a full stop to women's oppression, suppression and subjugation. Bhagat's female protagonists are still struggling against the patriarchal hegemony. Earlier woman struggled against the 'double bind' of colonialism and patriarchy, now it is against the patriarchal sphere in the same nation state. In the colonial structure, woman silently submits herself to the oppression where as in the postcolonial structure she starts to protest herself by registering it. Her resistance is no doubt a combination of diverse factors like wide exposure to feminist movement and western sociological phenomenon. It is through these characters the plight of Bhagat's women characters tend to behave from silence to resilience towards a collaborative feminism.

## References

1. Abidi, Azra. "Feminism in Indian English Literature: An analysis" *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities*, Vol V, No. IV, 2017.
2. Bhagat, Chetan. *One Night @ the Call Center*. Rupa & Co, 2005.
3. Marder Herbert. *Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf*. Chicago Press, 1968.
4. Saxena, Alka. *Women and Political Leadership*. Adhyayan Publisher, 2011.
5. Sinha, Sunita. *Post-colonial women writers New Perspectives*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributers, 2008
6. Young, Robert J.C. *Post Colonialism: A very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2003.