
PERMUTATION OF ARCHETYPES IN BHAGAT'S ONE NIGHT @ THE CALL CENTRE

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Abstract: The IT sector is the buzz today. It builds that system by which a society provides its members with those things needed or desired. 'One Night @ The Call Centre' — one of the best-sellers of our times— is about the most prominent phenomenon of our times: *outsourcing*. It is noteworthy that organizations are now-a-days increasingly sourcing their business processes through external service providers, a practice known as Business Process Outsourcing (BPO). Worldwide, the current BPO market could be as much as \$279 billion and is predicted to continue growing at 25% annually. The working of BPO decisions include independent variables associated with motives to outsource, transaction attributes, and client firm characteristics whereas BPO outcomes includes independent variables associated with contractual and relational governance, country characteristics, and client and supplier capabilities (cf. *Business Process Outsourcing Studies*, 2011).

Introduction: The picture of BPOs in India is remarkably interesting. The products and services are usually significantly cheaper in India as compared to U.S. or Europe. Consequently, companies get manpower in India which is definitely cheap as compared to the U.S. or any other developed nation; cheaper office space (typically, one sq. foot costs less than \$1 per month), highly skilled workforce (for example, Bangalore is said to have more number of IT engineers than Silicon Valley). Since the industry pays handsome salaries to the youth, spending power has increased which has resulted in good business in the retail segments of clothing and related accessories. What has resulted from this, is, bigger malls, better cars on roads, swanky restaurants, as well more and more brands. Therefore, working in a BPO — a call centre is like spicing one's life with 'green chillies, onions, lemon juice to intensify human emotions'. Chetan Bhagat youthfully goes about exploring the fun as well as the dark side of working at a call center in India.

To take an overview, the novel, *One Night @ The Call Centre* revolves around a group of six call center employees working in Connexions call center in the Delhi suburb of Gurgaon in Haryana. It explores a diverse set of characters — the self-doubting Shyam; his ex-girlfriend, Priyanka, whose mother would do anything to see her married to a rich NRI; the brash and impulsive Vroom; Esha, who is desperate to make it big in the world of fashion; and Radhika, a dutiful wife whose relationship with her husband takes a disastrous turn, a veteran member Military Uncle and a monster of a boss, Mr. Bakshi — a parasite, who always tries to show off his management skills. Many of the characters in the book like Shyam's temporary girlfriend Shefali, Mr. Ganesh Gupta, the Microsoft NRI, etc. are not too well developed, but the story is undoubtedly a page-turner.

The novel, is claimed to be based on a true story. The author chooses a person named Shyam Mehra (alias

Sam Marcy) as the protagonist. The story is narrated by Shyam and revolves around his team, which is also the gang he hangs out with. The young workers of the IT-brigade obviously have a poor opinion of those who call them for help. "Yeah, America has like 10 smart guys. The rest call us at night." (Chetan, 86) Yet the team is elite that sorts out problems and offers advice like purchasing a turkey that is smaller than the size of the oven.

The novel has three major female characters that also work in the call centre. All the three women characters viz. Priyanka, Esha and Radhika offer an interesting study of permutation of archetypes. Herein, it is important to understand the term archetype before the women characters are unraveled further. The term '*archetype*' draws from both comparative anthropology and Jungian archetypal theory. Though the origins of the archetypal hypothesis date back as far as Plato, developed further in the seventeenth century by Sir Thomas Brown and Francis Bacon and others in the league yet the concept of psychological archetypes was advanced by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung who says that archetypes are innate, universal prototypes for ideas and may be used to interpret observations. In other words, in Jungian psychology¹, archetypes refer to a collectively inherited unconscious idea, pattern of thought, image, etc., universally present in individual psyches.

Priyanka, is nice looking. She has a "cute round face" (Chetan, 24) and dimples. She also got nominated for the "call center cutie award" (24). Priyanka loves Shyam, the protagonist of the story, but later breaks up with Shyam because of difference of opinion and "too compromising" attitude. Shyam embodies the conventions of the patriarchy and is seasoned in the typical male psyche. Though, he is a mixture of East and West and he does not mind Priyanka enjoying cocktails and the disc-culture but he does not appreciate when Priyanka comes late especially as his date. Due to his incompetence and unsuccessful

vocation, he suffers from a low self esteem. He hates Priyanka and feels jealous when she approves to get married to Mr. Microsoft, Ganesh Gupta who is wealthy and affluent.

Priyanka is also piqued by her persistently nagging mother and her mother's constant disapproval of Shyam. The mother becomes an archetype of the *great mother*. To use a term from Trivers, Priyanka is an object of '*parental investment*' which he defines as: "any investment by the parent in an individual offspring that increases the offspring's chance of surviving..." (1972: 139) and since females invest more they continue to invest more in them postnatally in terms of childcare. Hence, Priyanka's mother feels that in order to wed her daughter, Shyam should at least be a team leader. Shyam tries hard to become a team leader, but his current manager Bakshi disapproves him saying that Shyam is "not a go-getter". The mother builds socio-emotional pressure on her daughter to marry Mr. Ganesh Gupta, a Microsoft NRI, who is all that what Shyam is not—rich, successful and great looking.

Priyanka is, thus, frustrated with her mother and she has a difference of opinion on almost everything :

"Me and my mom, she said, are incapable of having a rational, sane conversation."

Priyanka stands torn between the two feelings—of doing what her heart tells her and doing what her mother wants: "She wants me to show that I love her. She wants me to make her happy and marry someone she chooses for me." (Chetan, Nevertheless, Priyanka is also a woman who strongly stands against whatever she feels as irrational and wrong. One aspect of her persona manifests a pure form of a feminist who stands for women's liberation in society. There are two incidents that justify her behavior:

1. During a date with Shyam in a restaurant, she reprimands an old lady who curses her daughter-in-law. She immediately dons on a false identity of "Priyanka Sinha, CBI, Women Cell" (Chetan, 99) and starts at the mother-in-law making her and her son quiver:

"Three years. Harassing Women is punishable for three years. Quick trial, no appeal." (Chetan, 91) and "The young girls know how to talk and behave. It is you old ones who need to be taught a lesson." (Chetan, 90).

2. The second incident surges when she slaps Vroom for abusing Esha:

'Oh no. The monitor is totally gone,' Esha said. She put her hand on Vroom's shoulder, 'Are you okay?'

'Don't you dare touch me, you slut,' Vroom said and pushed her hand away. And ... Go pray for your jobs or whatever. Bloody bitch on her way to becoming a hooker,' Vroom said and moved his chair away from

Esha. (Chetan, 189)

When Vroom speaks even filthier and assassinates Esha's character before everyone since she had rejected his proposal, Priyanka teaches him a lesson and guards the respect of women:

"Priyanka went up to Vroom's seat. She stared at him, her face red. Slap!

She deposited a hard slap across Vroom's face.

'Learn how to talk to women you say one more nasty thing and I'll screw your happiness, understand?' Priyanka said. (Chetan, 190)

On such occasions, Priyanka can be seen in permutation of the *animus* archetype —emerging from her pure feminist personality. Besides, it is interesting to note that Shyam is astonished and taken aback on both the occasions when Priyanka exercises power.

Esha Singh and her Call Center has christened her as Eliza Singer. She is an icon of de Beauvoir's notion:

"It is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life" (de Beauvoir 1976: 38).

Esha is fashionable and stylish. She is a highly attractive girl with aspirations for a modeling career. She has trouble getting opportunity as she is considered not tall enough to be a good model. She gets exploited at the hands of a designer who had promised her a modeling contract. She feels terribly betrayed and tries to suppress the mental pain by inflicting herself with physical pain by purposely cutting her skin. Though she has feelings for Vroom (agent Victor Mell), she disapproves the relationship fearing that he might find out about her misdeed done in the past and he might eventually ditch her. This fear pullulates into reality when Vroom who is *phallocentric* (a term from French feminists Helene Cixous[2]) discovers her secret and abuses her. Even after all this, she is a person with inner strength. She is a warrior who knows to fight for her existence. She overcomes her weakness as well as all odds with a bold face.

A married woman trying hard to keep things together at her home is Radhika Jha (alias agent Regina Jones). She befits the notion Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) criticized — that women could only find fulfillment through child-rearing and homemaking. Her husband often works away from home. She takes care of her demanding and extremely traditional in-laws during the day and does her work at the call center at night. Although this tends to get too demanding, she never complains as she loves her husband. But is she really happy?

She is a character who is subjugated and oppressed by the hackneyed roles assigned by the society and her in-laws. As postmodern feminists of the late 1980s and 1990s have argued that gender roles are socially

constructed, she is always seen clad in a saree. Her eyes have developed dark eye-circles and she is never P light and speaks in collision with his mother to rebuke and censure her. Later she finds out that her husband is seeing another girl behind her back and she plans for divorce.

Observing the predicament of these major female characters, one is compelled to think whether by working in the call centre— a highly paid job—these women have earned their respect? Is this lure of a good job comes at a price of losing identities? Or has money proved itself a key equipping women? Call centre is definitely a place, which reduces people to mere voices. Bakshi calls his agents “resources”. Men and women can be seen toiling into the night and doing what it takes to make themselves successful. In such an environment, have women earned the status of being treated equally as ‘humans’?

The awakening of the conscious to all these questions triggers in the novel when the six of them after enjoying themselves in the nightclubface a life-threatening situation when their vehicle, Qualis, crashes into a construction site hanging over a mesh of iron construction rods. As the rods began to yield slowly, they start to panic. They are unable to call for help as there is no mobile phone network at that place. In such a situation, they receive a phone call from God. He speaks to all of them and gives them suggestions to improve their life. The conversation with God motivates the group to such an extent that they get ready to face their problems with utmost

at rest. Her husband also never understands her

determination and motivation. Meanwhile Vroom and Shyam hatch up a plan to throw Bakshi out of the call center and prevent the closing of Connections call center, whose employees are to be downsized radically, Priyanka decides not to marry Ganesh and later Shyam reconciles with her. Radhika is a new woman now since she hears her inner voice and decides to divorce her husband Anuj. Esha determines that she would quit modeling which made her to compromise while Military uncle regrets parting away from his son because his daughter-in-law used to work and go to parties at night and wants to go back to his family. Therefore, when they emerge out of danger, they have clear-cut goals in their mind.

It is here, that the paradigms shift. There is a transition. The internal power and self-confidence is revoked especially in the case of the female characters. There is a shift of power solidarity — in terms of the corporate, Bakshi, who cheated his staff and thrived by using the work done by them giving nothing in return, gets paid in the same coin; in terms of the individual, each of them regain control over themselves and break the hegemony. The ladies stand for themselves. They overcome their weakness. They make their own decisions and shun all external factors and forces. Even the old and patriarchal notions of Military uncle shatters and he happily accepts the new culture and social sanctions for the women of the modern world.

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