



*The Alchemist, Alice in Corporateland and One Night at the Call Centre :  
Novels as Young Adult Fiction within the Genre of Corporate Fiction*



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**Abstract :**

*The present paper is an attempt to explore whether the peculiar characteristic features of Young Adult Fiction could be observed in the novels *The Alchemist*, *Alice in Corporateland* and *One Night at the Call Center* and whether they could be placed as a subgenre under the category of fictional narratives in Corporate Fiction. The narrative has been analyzed with a focus on the narrative of characterization. Certain models that have been proposed by*

*researchers such as Hoorn, Murphy, Medin and Griswold have been used to analyze the potential of narrative transport that the characterization exudes to help categorize the similarities in the selected novels.*

**Keywords:** *Alice in Corporateland, The Alchemist, One Night at the Call Centre, Young Adult Fiction, Corporate Fiction, Narrative Analysis, Genre Studies*

## Introduction

Nelson Phillips in his article titled 'Telling Organizational Tales: On the Role of Narrative Fiction in the Study of Organizations' has argued for 'the benefits of using novels, short stories, songs, plays, poems, and films as legitimate approaches to the study of management and organization.' He says that 'organizational researchers and writers of fiction share important interests and use complementary methods in investigating social phenomena'. Along the same lines of discussion the paper analyzes selected novels that come under narrative fiction but present the corporate setting or thematically represent quest for wealth and success. There are a number of books from this category that focus on training the youth for their careers as their intention unlike the novel *The Monk who Sold his Ferrari*.

While considering the effect of Fictional characters on readers, Hoorn has departed from identification and empathy hypotheses and discussed a new context-sensitive model that draws upon similarity studies, empirical aesthetics, persuasion, emotion and social psychology. He states that people learn about the outside world from information mediated through stories and build up affective relationships with them. Mediated personalities and fictional characters perform educated tasks and help to acquire emotional competence. According to Oatley and Cupchik, readers respond to fictional characters because of the identification and empathy of observers with the presented fictional characters. The three selected novels, *The Alchemist*, *Alice in Corporateland* and *One Night at the Call Centre* have been analyzed on the basis of Hoorn's model for their characterization and the narrative elements that enforce educational motivation.

## Analysis of Characterization

According to Hoorn's model the three phases of the reader appreciating a fictional character are encoding, comparison and response phase. The first phase of encoding involves an appraisal of the ethics, aesthetics and epistemics of the character and the situational context. During the comparison phase the observer evaluates specific features relevant to his/her own goals and concerns, identifies resembling features that includes and assigns a valence to it that is subjective. Although the similarity approach overlooks certain phenomena such as the fascination for the unknown or the superheroes and the exotic, the phenomenon is explained by Von Feilitzen and Linne as "wishful identification" to be desired and admired. It is also affected by the similarity and dissimilarity of the surrounding stimuli. In the third phase, the response phase, there is either an involvement or a distance that the readers maintain with the characters.

Applying these methods to the analysis of the fictional characters in the novels *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho, *Alice in Corporateland* by Tulika Tripathi and *One Night at the Call Center* by Chetan Bhagat this paper attempts to present them as a subgenre of Young Adult Fiction within the genre of Corporate Fiction.

Hoorn has stated Griswold's analysis that publishers tend to over-represent certain novels because of which a particular genre takes shape. He presents Griswold's observations regarding the creation of the genre of Nigerian village novels that offer a high frequency of Nigerian village

settings and conflict creation with regard to that culture. Similarly one can note the creation of a genre of self-help books and within that the novels that combine fictional elements and a narrative style to expound the concepts of self-help books. The examples would be the novels such as *The Monk who Sold his Ferrari* by Paulo Coelho and *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Bachman or shorter stories such as *Who moved my Cheese* by Spencer Johnson and *The Parable of the Pipeline* by Burke Hedges. Within such a corpus one can find a similarity in certain works that are particularly significant for the young aspirant.

According to G. L. Murphy and D. L. Medin subjects classify on the basis of elements that activate many relations (causal relations and inferences) , rather than elements without such relations. *Alice in Corporateland* has for its protagonist a young girl named Alice. She has just graduated and is eager to find herself a job. This characterization resounds with the youth in general who after their education aspire to get a job. The introduction of the character is described on an emotional plane with the description of great happiness at graduation, excitement while looking up newspapers for job openings, and great dejection at being rejected the appointment. This description makes the character relatable. The young adult reader finds similarities with the character and empathizes with her. This introduction makes it easier for the young reader to tag along with the character with enthusiasm and explore the possibilities that open up for her in the fictional world.

*The Alchemist's* protagonist is a young shepherd boy named Santiago. Although his age is not mentioned, yet his innocence and his concerns would place him as a young adult. Being a shepherd boy he is described as someone who is adjusting to his simple situation. 'He swept the floor with his jacket and lay down, using the book he had just finished reading as a pillow' (Pg 3). This creates an empathy about him as he is depicted adjusting to his constrained circumstances. He is also immediately shown as a young boy considering whether he should make a marriage proposal to the merchant's daughter and is also wondering about his dream for finding treasure. These would be the kind of thoughts occupying a young boy's mind, employed in a meagre job and aspiring for better fortune and love.

*A Night at the Call Center* has an epilogue that is very significant. The young girl in the train asks her fellow passenger who is supposed to be a famous writer whether he ever thought about what the youth in general are facing. The writer had written a book about the campus life in IIT Kanpur that is a college where only the brightest students could reach. According to the girl, IITians and students of IIMs do not represent the general youth. She proposed to tell him a story about an event at a call center, a BPO. At the time when this novel was published, the BPO industry was booming in India and a vast number of youngsters who had hardly even graduated could get a job that paid them comparatively very well. However, they suffered great work pressures because they had to work the nights losing on their family time. Apart from these problems they had to cater to the clients of the developed country's companies who treated them below their dignity. There was cut throat competition they had to face and the employees were always in dread of a layoff. The youth of the country took to these jobs because they paid better than other jobs with minimum educational qualifications. She tells the story about six persons working at a common bay in the BPO and described the problems they faced. Except for an old man the other five were

young adults, two boys and three girls. They were an assortment of youth habits such as those having a craze for fast bikes, fashionistas, a girl who aspired to be a model but couldn't get her break, a modern girl who married and slogged for her family and a girl who had the fieriness of a social activist. The protagonist however was a boy who had been rejected in love and had lost all his confidence in himself. These characters immediately relate to the youth of the age.

The second phase was a comparison of the situation that the characters were presented in. Apart from the descriptions of the characters stated above, the characters were facing problems that are similar to what the youth in general face. The novel *A Night at the Call Center* tells the story of youth in situations that youth in general could find similarities in. Shyam was facing a problem of very low self-confidence. He had a very condescending boss who regularly belittled him. Shyam was not given his promotion in time. He was made to do chores that were not a part of his job designation and was always made to feel that he was not capable of the jobs that he did. He was not financially stable and so the girl whom he loved would not be allowed to marry him. He felt utterly dejected. He was also considered as the black sheep of the family as everyone else had higher qualifications and was at better employment levels than him. Esha was exploited sexually with promises that she would be selected for her dream positions. Radika's husband had an extramarital affair and her mother in law continuously complained about her in spite of her adjusting to all the family traditions and slogging hard for the family at home and at work. Priyanka had a mother who emotionally abused her. *The Alchemist* describes the situation of Santiago as a boy who had dreams and had to struggle through opposing ideas. He had to resist his parents to take on his dreams. He had to sell his sheep to pay his guide. He was robbed of the only money he had. He had innovative ideas while he worked at the Crystal shop but he had to persuade his employer to use those ideas as his employer did not want to change and the employer was afraid of increasing the potential of his business. He fell in love with Fatima but he had to leave her in order to be able to go to his destination. He depended on her faith in him and that she would wait for him till he returned. He had to prove himself capable through many tasks that destiny set out for him. He was robbed of his money two times again. *Alice in Corporateland* presents Alice in a comparable situation where she is shown dejected at not being selected at jobs. She was eager to learn and progress in her career. These situations are peculiar to youth who are at the threshold of their careers.

The third phase is that of the response that characters give to their situations. In the *A Night at the Call Center*, after the intervention of the supernatural element of God who speaks to the youngsters stuck in a car wreck, they think for themselves and decide to work towards changing their lot in life. Esha decides to quit the job and accepts the realities regarding the prospects she had at a career in modelling. She continues to work at the call center to earn her income and also works at an NGO using her personality to bring about happiness at the orphanage. She comes to terms with her parents. Radhika decides to divorce her husband and does not go back home, instead moves in with Esha. Priyanka stops being affected by her mother's tantrums and stands by her belief in herself and her judgement. Shyam and Varun start their own website development company. Varun realizes that only money does not bring power. He realized that a job that may pay less but help him to use his talents, learn and grow would be better for him. He realizes that youth were being used by the corporates of other developed countries to create a market for their

wares that were in reality not good for the youth. In *The Alchemist* Santiago learns his lessons well. Although it was very difficult for him, he learnt to control his emotions and give them a proper direction so that he could achieve his goal in life. He many a time feels like becoming a shepherd again, as it was his comfort zone. He was resilient even after being robbed three times. He is able to make himself practical enough to move away from situations and people that he started to become emotionally attached to. He learned the alchemy of life in the process and was able to practice it in the trying situations that came his way. He was finally successful in finding his treasure and could go back to the girl he loved. Alice in the story of *Alice in Corporateland* also learnt her lessons well and used them in the events and situations that were presented to her as tests. She learnt the values of cooperation, consideration, kindness, taking responsibility and sacrifice that was important for leadership and team work. She learnt how to make proper judgements and understand the proper perspectives of situations and also the importance of patience, focus and many such skills important for her to keep herself motivated in her career.

### **Conclusion:**

The response between the narrators and the readers of these three novels have been constructed through the narrative in line with what Hoorn stated and the narrative is designed to help the reader (assumed to be youth in general) learn about the corporate world or the aspects of career success from the information of the fictional characters created, their character traits and the situations that they are placed in. These features induce the readers to build up affective relationships with them through the three phases as given by Murphy & Medin as the stages of identification, empathy, similarity, comparison of situation and response to the situations. The fictional characters have been presented with educational tasks and mentors that come their way to guide them finally acquiring emotional competence, spiritual maturity that would give them self-confidence and values that would help them achieve a holistic wholesome long lasting success in their careers and entrepreneurial endeavors. Thus, these features of the narrative are common to the selected novels and their peculiar paradigms point to the features of Young Adult Fiction within the genre of Corporate Fiction.

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