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PSYCHOLOGICAL TURMOIL IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S *ONE ARRANGED MURDER*

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Abstract :

The novel, *One Arranged Murder* by Chetan Bhagat describes the psychological trauma and turmoil of individual characters where they manifest emotional intensity and psychological distress through physiological responses and how they endure it against all odds.

Keywords: Chetan Bhagat, Psychology, Turmoil, Emotional, Trauma, Indian Writing, Fiction, History, Literature

One Arranged Murder eloquently describes the experiences of characters where they manifest emotional intensity and psychological distress through physiological responses. These bodily reactions showcase various emotions like fear, grief, guilt, remorse, etc. Saurabh's grief is often expressed with his action of uncontrollable crying by the author. This is evident right from the beginning of the novel when Prerna's body is discovered. He is found to be shaking violently portraying his inability to accept the shock. He is also found to be filled with tears whenever he revisits the memories of Prerna. Mrs. Malhotra is also seen to breakdown with tears when she realises the fact that Prerna's death is a murder. A similar reaction is seen with Bindu when she realizes that Anjali is the murderer: "No," Bindu screamed, as she broke down in tears" (Murder, 241).

Keshav, the protagonist of the novel, is found to sweat profusely during the times of anxiety and fear. This is observed when he confronts with Rishabh. It is noticed that his palms grow clammy and the beads of sweat are noticed on his forehead. He tries to be calm on many occasions to maintain his emotional state of mind, which can be seen through the words "I didn't respond as I swallowed hard to

keep my own emotions in check” (Murder, 229). Similar responses with Keshav are seen during the climatic confrontation. Trembling and shaking hands are other physiological responses which indicate a character’s nervousness and shock. Such response can be seen both with Keshav and Saurabh on multiple occasions. One such incidence is that Saurabh’s hands tremble violently when he realises that Prerna’s death is not an accident. A similar situation happens to Keshav when he narrowly escapes a dangerous situation. He finds his legs tremble and his hands shake portraying his emotional state of mind. It is also witnessed that his neck and back muscles tighten whenever he is frustrated during the interrogation. He is also noticed to have rapid breathing and raising heart when he stumbles upon a significant clue which enlists someone very close to him or Saurabh. Similar response is noted with Bindu, when she realized that Anjali is the culprit behind Prerna’s murder – “What are you saying, Anjali?” Bindu said, her voice trembling just like her body” (Murder, 228).

Similar physiological responses are noted with other characters in the novel too. For instance, the culprit’s eyes dart away and also her lips become thin portraying the signs of deception when Keshav interrogates her. Anjali’s body language changes after Keshav exposes her involvement in Prerna’s murder – “Her shoulders drooped. She kept her gaze down, avoiding eye contact with everyone” (Murder, 223). Pursued lips and narrowed eyes are evident with Mrs. Malhotra when she struggles to control her tears and maintain her pride.

Apart from exploring the psychological turmoil of individuals, the novel, *One Arranged Murder*, also explores the physiological response to the emotional imbalance. This could be witnessed on various occasions throughout the novel. Saurabh’s mourning for Prerna’s death results in him losing weight drastically and his eyes become bloodshot because of his sleepless nights. His sadness results in insomnia, weakened immunity and tremors. Keshav also faces stress-related digestive issues like acid reflux and loss of appetite. Also, during the course of his investigation, he is found to have nausea, and he feels dizzy when he confronts with Rishabh. This results in digestive distress, migraine headaches and fatigue. Mrs. Malhotra suffers from psychosomatic chest pains after the incident. She often complains that there is a tightness in her chest, and it is also witnessed that during the police interrogation, she clutches her heart and requests for water. She suffers from elevated blood pressure because of her emotional strain and strands of hair are found on her pillows as a side effect of the medicine that she takes. Bhagat also explains that a subtle twitch appears near her eye when she is pressurized. It is also noticed that Rishabh’s face becomes red during confrontations. He is noted to rely on alcohol to overcome his distress, and this obviously leads to slurred speech and shaky hands. This gives him the yellowing of eyes and the muscle tension that he suffers turns into a temporomandibular joint pain. In addition to this, he also suffers from adrenal fatigue because of which his energy crashes whenever he becomes emotional. Thus, the author takes his chances to masterfully illustrate how emotions affect the healthy lifestyle of individuals.

This novel serves as a fine example to reflect how emotions, relationships and expectations from the society ripple through the communities resulting in fractured social connections. Even though Karva Chauth is shown as a celebration in the early part of the novel, Bhagat takes this opportunity to criticize it through the following lines: “In some ways, Karva Chauth is such a romantic festival. The girl waiting for the moon and her lover. At another level, what a regressive, sexist celebration, considering only the girl stays hungry” (Murder, 224). After the loss of Prerna, Saurabh detaches himself from others and leads an isolated life. He is found to withdraw from his friends and found to become obsessed with finding out the real culprits. This results in doubting his own family members and others see him as an unstable person because of this reason. Another occasion where the author highlights the society’s impact is when the Malhotra family arranges for a performative mourning. They are forced to maintain dignity on this occasion rather than expressing their pain for the loss of Prerna. Destruction of female autonomy is portrayed by the author through the characters of Rishabh and Prerna. When Prerna decides to pursue a career of her interest, Rishabh starts belittling her and tries to control her. This showcases the societal situation of how patriarchal norms play against women.

Family honour serves as a major problem in Indian society, and this gets reflected when Prerna’s family refuses to acknowledge their flaws, and this becomes an aide for the culprit to hide the truth. Hiding the truth to maintain peace is also witnessed through Keshav’s behaviour of suppressing his feelings for Prerna. He also feels guilty over his emotions. Toxic masculinity finds its place in the novel through the uncontrolled rage of Rishabh which is noticed when he smashes the objects near him at the time of arguments. Similar situation prevails when Saurabh bursts out publicly due to his grief for Prerna, which

portrays him as a weak character. This pictures how the society approaches emotional men by certifying that they are weak. It is also evident that the love marriage of Saurabh and Perna is opposed by Perna's family prioritizing their social status. This best pictures the classist and casteist norms followed in the society. "Decision-taking in crucial family issues is still in the realm of men in most Indian families and women are expected to give mere formal consent without any choice to express their perspective" (Priya, 265). This gets highlighted through the decisions of Ramesh Malhotra on various occasions.

This murder mystery becomes a convincing platform for emotional outbursts, societal introspection and psychological exploration of the characters. The situations in the storyline create space for expressing numerous emotions like grief, love, anger, sorrow and betrayal through the conflicts and revelations. This framework lays the perfect foundation for Saurabh's grief over Perna's death with his emotional collapse. This grips the readers into the storyline preventing them from moving away from the book. The murder investigation serves as a catalyst to bring the suppressed emotions into light. Finally, Keshav too confesses his feelings for Perna where his voice cracks, and he was noticed to be filled with shame and vulnerability and avoids eye contact with Saurabh. In short, this work serves as a societal mirror to exhibit emotions of various characters.

The emotions in *One Arranged Murder* become universal by resonating across cultures. Even though the novel pictures typical Indian family dynamics, the depiction of human psychology transcends the boundaries and highlights the universal behaviour. Grief becomes the basic element of the work, and the novel exhibits the grief responses that is witnessed worldwide on many occasions. The tension between the personal desires of a person and that of the societal expectation reflects the universal phenomenon. The destructive toxic masculinity given in the novel also becomes a shared concern all over the world. The overall plot of the novel of pursuit for justice and fight for moral values serves as a cross-cultural narrative.

The novel immerses the audience in its emotional topography thereby creating an innate connection between them. It makes the readers relate themselves with the characters in the book and the situations pictured in the work serve as a replica of real-life incidents. The readers are gripped to their seats on many occasions where there are interesting revelations about the truth. The author describes the emotions of characters deeply and pictures the physical changes in their body in the form of sweat, shake or palpitations. The flaws in the characters are equated with the flaws witnessed in real-life characters. The story enables the readers to relive different situations of their lives and serves as a gripping mystery by providing page-turning suspense to the readers holding them tightly into the storyline. Bhagat also ensures that the readers are haunted with the compelling story even after completing their reading.

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