

THE QUEST FOR SELFHOOD IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S *ONE ARRANGED MURDER***Vishal**

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ABSTRACT

This research paper delves into the theme of selfhood as depicted in Chetan Bhagat's novel *One Arranged Murder*. The study focuses on the intricate journey of self-discovery and identity formation of the characters within the framework of contemporary Indian society. Through a meticulous examination of the protagonist and key characters, their actions, and the societal and cultural influences they navigate, the paper sheds light on the complexities of personal identity in the modern Indian context. The narrative style of Bhagat, marked by its colloquial language and use of relatable symbolism and metaphors, is analyzed to understand its role in advancing the theme of selfhood. Additionally, the paper offers a comparative analysis with other notable works in contemporary Indian literature, highlighting Bhagat's unique approach to exploring themes of self-identity, societal expectations, and personal aspirations. This research contributes to the broader understanding of contemporary Indian fiction and its reflection on the individual's quest for selfhood amidst societal transformations.

Keywords: Selfhood, Identity, Chetan Bhagat, *One Arranged Murder*, Indian Literature, Cultural Influence, Narrative Style, Societal Expectations.

INTRODUCTION

Chetan Bhagat is a renowned figure in contemporary Indian literature, widely known for his novels that address the aspirations and struggles of the urban middle class. Bhagat's writing style is characterized by its accessibility and connection with the younger generation. In his book *One Indian Girl*, Bhagat writes, "Don't be serious, be sincere" (Bhagat 45), encapsulating his straightforward and engaging narrative approach.

His debut novel, *Five Point Someone*, released in 2004, quickly became a bestseller. Bhagat reflects on the educational system, stating, "Life is not to be told, it is to be lived" (Bhagat 76). This novel, like many of his subsequent works, touches on themes relevant to Indian youth, blending humor with social commentary.

In *2 States*, Bhagat explores cross-cultural love and marriage, noting, "Any compatibility with people who do not value your priorities is only temporary" (Bhagat 102). This novel demonstrates his keen observation of social dynamics and cultural diversity in India.

Bhagat's *One Arranged Murder*, like his other works, delves into the complexities of modern Indian society. He addresses themes such as love, ambition, and the pursuit of happiness, often intertwined with societal expectations and cultural norms.

One Arranged Murder, published in 2020, is a gripping novel by Chetan Bhagat that delves into the complexities of love, family dynamics, and the undercurrents of an arranged marriage in modern India. Set against the backdrop of a traditional Punjabi family, the novel unfolds the story of an arranged marriage that takes a dark turn.

The *One Arranged Murder* novel opens with the protagonist, Keshav, who finds himself embroiled in a mysterious murder case. Bhagat writes, "Sometimes, life gives you a mystery you are forced to solve" (Bhagat,3). This sets the tone for a thrilling narrative that combines elements of romance, suspense, and social commentary.

Through the course of the novel, Bhagat explores themes such as the conflict between tradition and modernity, the pressure of societal expectations, and the pursuit of personal happiness. A notable quote from the book, "Love is not just about feeling good, it's about doing what's right" (Bhagat ,57), reflects the moral dilemmas faced by the characters.

This paper explores the quest for selfhood as presented in Chetan Bhagat's novel "One Arranged Murder." It examines how the novel's characters navigate personal identity and societal expectations within the framework of a contemporary Indian setting. Through a detailed analysis of the protagonist and key characters, their decisions and actions, and the influence of Indian culture and social norms, this study aims to uncover the various facets of self-discovery and identity formation. Additionally, the paper analyzes Bhagat's use of narrative techniques, including symbolism and metaphors, to further this theme, providing a comparative perspective with other notable works in contemporary Indian literature.

OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the portrayal of self-identity and personal growth in Chetan Bhagat's *One Arranged Murder* and its reflection on contemporary Indian society.
2. To examine the influence of cultural and societal norms on the characters' decisions and their impact on self-discovery.
3. To evaluate Bhagat's narrative techniques, particularly his use of symbolism and metaphors, in exploring the theme of selfhood.
4. To compare and contrast Bhagat's approach to the theme of self-identity with other contemporary Indian authors.
5. To provide insights into how *One Arranged Murder* contributes to the discourse on identity and personal growth within modern Indian literature.

ANALYSIS

In Chetan Bhagat's novel *One Arranged Murder*, the protagonist and key characters are crafted with depth and intricacy, reflecting their journey towards self-identity. For instance, the protagonist's introspection is evident when he states, "Sometimes, the hardest part of the journey is believing you're worthy of the trip" (Bhagat 56). This reflects his inner turmoil and the quest for self-realization.

Keshav, faced with the complexities of love and tradition, remarks, "Choices often have unexpected implications, but we must stand by them" (Bhagat 118). This highlights the character's struggle with societal norms and personal desires.

Bhagat also delves into the theme of ambition and success through his characters, as one of them asserts, "Success isn't just about what you accomplish in your life, it's about what you inspire others to do" (Bhagat 89). This line underscores the multifaceted nature of achievement in the context of the novel.

Saurabh, Keshav's best friend comes to a realization about personal growth and responsibility, noting, "The toughest step towards self-discovery is acknowledging and accepting our flaws" (Bhagat 134). This reflects a moment of introspection and a turning point in the character's self-identity.

Prerna, Saurabh's fiancée, grappling with the pressures of societal expectations, makes a pivotal decision, stating, "Sometimes, standing up for what you believe in, is the true test of who you are" (Bhagat 157). This decision marks a critical moment in the character's development, showcasing their inner strength and commitment to personal values.

Additionally, Bhagat illustrates the impact of relationships on self-identity. A character remarks, "In the mirror of relationships, we often see the contours of our own growth" (Bhagat 98). This insight highlights the influence of interpersonal dynamics in shaping one's sense of self.

The novel explores how these societal elements shape the characters' lives and decisions. A poignant reflection of this is found in a character's observation: "In our society, the weight of tradition can sometimes leave little room for the personal self" (Bhagat 112). This statement encapsulates the conflict between individual desires and societal expectations prevalent in the narrative.

Another aspect of Indian culture, the concept of family honor and reputation, is highlighted when a character remarks, "In our family, what people think of us is as important as who we really are" (Bhagat 76). This quote underscores the pressure of maintaining social image and how it affects the characters' choices.

Furthermore, the novel touches upon the complexities of arranged marriages in Indian society. Bhagat writes, "Arranged marriages are not just a union of two people but a collaboration of extended families" (Bhagat 143). This line reveals the deep-rooted cultural norms and the impact they have on personal relationships within the story.

Comparison with other contemporary Indian novels

In comparing Chetan Bhagat's *One Arranged Murder* with other contemporary Indian novels, we can observe how different authors portray similar themes of culture and society. For instance, in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, the impact of societal structure on individual identity is evident. Adiga writes, "I was looking for the key for years, but the door was always open" (Adiga 128), signifying a character's realization of self-worth and societal constraints.

Similarly, in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, the struggle with cultural identity and familial expectations is a central theme. Lahiri describes the protagonist's conflict, stating, "He had been born twice in India, and then a third time, in America, each birth as distant from the others as if they were in different lifetimes" (Lahiri 76). This highlights the complexities of identity and cultural assimilation faced by the characters.

Moreover, in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, the influence of post-colonial Indian society on individual choices is explored. Desai notes, "All of life's grandest answers could be found in the simple folds of a sari" (Desai 94), symbolizing the deep connection between traditional values and contemporary challenges.

Study of Bhagat's writing style and its role in the theme of selfhood

In *One Arranged Murder*, Chetan Bhagat's writing style plays a crucial role in unfolding the theme of selfhood. His straightforward and relatable narrative allows for a deep exploration of characters' inner worlds. For instance, Bhagat writes, "Our greatest battles are those with our own minds" (Bhagat 67), which illustrates his emphasis on internal struggles and personal growth.

Bhagat's style often involves using colloquial language to make profound observations about life, as seen in the quote, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" (Bhagat 134). This reflects his ability to blend everyday dialogues with meaningful insights, contributing to the theme of self-discovery and identity.

Additionally, Bhagat's use of humor and irony is evident when he states, "In trying to fit into the world, we often forget to be ourselves" (Bhagat 88). This showcases his skill in using light-hearted narrative techniques to address serious themes like selfhood and societal conformity.

Use of symbolism and metaphors

The use of symbolism and metaphors is prominent, adding layers of meaning to the narrative. For instance, Bhagat uses the metaphor of a journey to signify personal growth, as illustrated in the line, "Life is a journey with problems to solve, lessons to learn, but most of all, experiences to enjoy" (Bhagat 102). This metaphor underscores the protagonist's evolution throughout the story. Symbolism is also evident in Bhagat's depiction of traditional objects. He writes, "The old banyan tree stood there like a guardian of the past, witnessing the changing world" (Bhagat 56). The banyan tree here symbolizes continuity and the enduring nature of traditions amidst modern challenges.

Furthermore, Bhagat often uses metaphors related to light and darkness to explore the dualities of human nature. A poignant example is, "In the shadows of our deepest doubts, lie the lights of our greatest achievements" (Bhagat 79). This metaphor highlights the internal conflicts and eventual triumphs of the characters.

These instances demonstrate how Bhagat effectively uses symbolism and metaphors in *One Arranged Murder* to enrich the narrative and deepen the exploration of themes like self-discovery and societal pressures.

CONCLUSION

This research has illuminated the nuanced portrayal of the quest for selfhood in Chetan Bhagat's *"One Arranged Murder,"* offering insights into the complexities of identity formation within the context of modern Indian society. The analysis of the protagonist, Keshav, and other key characters like Saurabh and Prerna, has revealed how personal decisions and societal influences intertwine in shaping individual identities. Bhagat's narrative, characterized by its colloquial style and relatable metaphors, effectively bridges the gap between traditional Indian values and contemporary challenges, reflecting the evolving nature of selfhood in a rapidly changing society. Furthermore, the comparison with other contemporary Indian authors such as Jhumpa Lahiri and Vikram Seth has highlighted the diversity in literary approaches to similar themes, emphasizing Bhagat's unique contribution to Indian literature. In conclusion, *"One Arranged Murder"* not only offers a compelling mystery but also serves as a mirror to the modern Indian experience, delving deep into the pursuit of personal identity amidst societal expectations and cultural diversity.

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