



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

A Critical Study On The Projection Of Emotional Imbalance In Chetan Bhagat's 400 Days

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Abstract

The overarching mystery of the novel serves as a major contributor for the emotional imbalance that is witnessed throughout the work. Emotional imbalance could be identified in the characters when they try to shift their emotions from one to another at an irregular pace. Emotions like anger, fear, despair and hope influence individuals to a great extent, and when a person shifts among these emotions rapidly and erratically, emotional imbalance becomes visible predominantly. Various factors contribute to emotional imbalance in 400 Days.

Keywords: Emotions, Emotional Imbalance, Feelings, Chetan Bhagat, Indian Writing, Fiction, English Literature.

The *400 Days* is a mystery novel by Chetan Bhagat where he grips the readers until the last line of the story. This plot is filled with a number of emotional situations where every character expresses their feelings and emotions to a large extent. "In *400 Days*, Bhagat shifts his focus to the realm of relationships, societal expectations, and the challenges of modern life. The novel delves into the complexities of human connections in the digital age, particularly highlighting the impact of social media and technology on relationships" (Kurupati, 66). Alia's desperate search for her missing daughter, Siya, serves as an emotional background to the entire novel, and this becomes an emotional appeal of a mother to the readers. Alia's fear and anxiety along with her unwavering hope of bringing her daughter back resonates deeply making the readers empathize her situation.

Keshav and Saurabh's strong friendship and loyalty in their work too provides a strong emotional backdrop to the novel. Their camaraderie and their nature of supporting one another in difficult situations best pictures the emotional appeal of true friendship. The strained relationship among Alia's family members adds an emotional depth to the plot. The author brings out an emotional appeal to the readers making them to be concerned about Siya's missing. He ensures this by adding tension and eventual revelations of the hidden secrets in the family. Romantic undertones in the work brings in emotional complexity to the story by picturing love, betrayal and reconciliation.

Another significant emotion is the intense fear and anxiety that is evident throughout the novel. The challenges faced by the detectives during investigation amplifies the emotional stakes. A sense of relief and catharsis is visible towards the end of the novel. The emotional journey finds its closure in the climax providing the readers with a satisfying conclusion. Emotional releases of every character with the instances of breaking down or showcasing their fears leave the audience to experience powerful emotional appeal. Different layers of emotional struggles are visible throughout the novel making the audience to get immediately connected with the plot at a deeper level. Further paragraphs of this research work will delve deep into various emotional situations in the novel and the response of the characters to it.

Joy and happiness can be seen as one of the rare moments in the novel *400 Days*. These situations come as a contrast to the ongoing despair and overarching themes of mystery in the plot. They also provide a sort of emotional relief to the readers and paves way for them to understand better about the struggles and triumphs of the characters in the story.

Excitement is basically showcased by the gripping mystery of the plot, several twists which have been craftfully designed by Bhagat and the personal dynamics that are depicted in the narrative. As discussed earlier, Siya's disappearance becomes the central mystery of the novel.

Satisfaction is one another primary emotion which every person seeks in the society. This emotion can be witnessed in this novel largely towards the closure of the plot. Solving the central mystery plays a prominent role throughout the novel for which the central characters strive from the beginning. The author provides answers for all the questions that was there in the reader's mind towards the end of the novel, which brings in a sense of satisfaction in everyone. Bhagat eloquently explains the reason for Siya's missing along with the motives and the culprit.

Chetan Bhagat's *400 Days* is an intricate novel that weaves the moments of anxiety in a delicate manner which in turn drives the plot seamlessly and also adds emotional depth to all the characters in the work. Each individual's struggles and the broader theme of the novel explores various anxious situations. One such situation that prevails throughout the novel is Alia's anxiety over Siya's disappearance.

Nervousness, stress and distress emotions are deeply woven into the narrative fabric of *400 Days*. Moments of uncertainty, participation and failure seem to create nervousness. This throws light on the psychological tension that is being experienced by every individual in the novel. This accounts as a result of navigating high stakes scenarios through due course of the novel. The protagonist of the novel, Keshav, showcases his nervousness on many occasions, especially while dealing with the clues in Siya's disappearance. He is found to be clueless many times, but he manages the situation by taking bold steps like revisiting the prior investigation and managing the characters with influential social background. There are scenarios where Keshav doubts his own abilities which bring in internal tension. These are the moments where the readers relate themselves to their own mysteries and nervous situations. Alia's fear about the progress of the case and fear of unfavourable outcomes also portrays her nervousness. This can be witnessed when she decides to hand over the case to Keshav, she is unsure about whether he will deliver the desired results. She is also found to be always

doubtful about whether Siya is alive or dead. Bhagat ensures that the same nervousness is being created in the minds of readers by building suspense and uncertainties throughout the plot of the novel.

One another pervasive emotion that is witnessed in the novel is stress. This has become a cakewalk for the author because of the grappling pressure that seems to prevail throughout the story. The personal struggles of the characters like Alia and Keshav, societal expectations and the pressure of investigation serve as the basis for building up stress among the individuals in the story.

Distress too finds its place in this work during the situations of loss, fear and anxiety. This ultimately intensifies the emotions of the characters and also drives the narrative with an emotional appeal. Keshav's negativity about becoming an IPS Officer is visible when he states "The problem is, the tough UPSC exam for civil services doesn't give a damn about nobility. Over a million people apply. Among those, a general category student like me has to achieve a top 500 rank if they want an IPS seat" (400 Days, 1). His distress is visible when Keshav states that "Maybe my life is a total mess, I thought, and fixing it is their life's biggest passion. My father wasn't happy with my career. My mother wasn't happy with my marital status. I had managed to disappoint both of them in different ways at the same time" (400 Days, 2). He even introduces himself as a disappointment to everyone around him.

Anger, frustration, disgust and contempt also play their role in this novel. The characters in the story express these emotions when they face situations portraying injustice, betrayal and struggles with societal norms. It is obvious in this novel that a sense of helplessness and betrayal is pictured through the emotion of anger. In addition to the moral outrage, it also serves to be a basic component triggering anger in the characters. The classic examples that one can quote are Alia's anger on the societal prejudice and the lack of support from her family members. She is also angry upon the fact that the progress of investigation of Siya's case is very slow. Her anger is prominent whenever someone questions about her parenting or when they accuse her of negligence. Keshav also expresses his anger during the investigation, specifically when someone refuses to cooperate or when he finds the suspects lie. Also, Alia's husband and her family members express their anger over the situation and often they blame Alia for the crisis. This portrayal helps the readers to resonate themselves with the characters in the novel especially during the situations where Bhagat reflects the universal frustration of being misunderstood.

The psychological depth of each character is portrayed by the emotions like sadness, shame, envy and embarrassment by the author. These emotions are seen as the result of confrontation of the characters with their self-doubt, prejudice and complex interpersonal dynamics. Among these emotions, sadness becomes a pervasive one as the individuals are always concerned with the disappearance of Siya. Alia's sadness becomes the central emotional thread in this novel. Alia's meeting with Keshav's family was purposeful, which gets revealed in their second meeting. She is desperately searching for her daughter, Siya, who was abducted nine months ago. The sheen in her face diminished and the sadness gripped when she revealed this to Keshav and requested him to help her come out of the situation. She often relives her moments with Siya during her absence. This incident creates a grappling effect in their family. It also results in Alia's husband distancing himself from all others in the family.

The emotions like anticipation and surprise also play a key role in 400 Days. These emotions were felt during the moments of suspense in the story and during the twists in relationships. Anticipation makes the readers to become eager about the next phase of the story. There are also many critical questions in the novel for which the readers anticipate answers, especially about the disappearance of Siya.

Boredom is another strong emotion which is witnessed in the life of many characters in the novel. A lingering sense of boredom becomes a part of his life for Keshav in the beginning of the novel. Alia too is seen to experience boredom in her repetitive household works. She feels that her life is unfulfilled because of this superficial existence. Overall, one can see that there are occasions of boredom in this story, especially when there are dead ends in the investigation, and these instances lead to the slow progress of the novel. The author has skilfully used this boredom as a narrative tool to highlight emotionally charged moments. It also adds a sense of realistic touch to the story.

The mystery serves as a major contributor for the emotional imbalance that is witnessed throughout the novel. The other contributors include internal struggles of individual characters and the interpersonal conflicts that prevail because of the emotional background of the story. Emotional imbalance could be identified in the characters when they try to shift their emotions from one to another at an irregular pace. Emotions like anger, fear, despair and hope influence individuals to a great extent, and when a person shifts

among these emotions rapidly and erratically, emotional imbalance becomes visible predominantly. Various factors contribute to emotional imbalance in 400 Days. Among them, uncertainty and lack of control occupies a prominent position in causing emotional imbalance in individuals. They are found to permeate every aspect of the scenarios and the lives of characters. For instance, lack of awareness about Siya's existence serves as an emotional rollercoaster for Alia's family. Uncertainty is also visible when Keshav doubts his ability to deliver the results in the case. The dead ends which he meets during the investigation and the false leads that he encounters leave everyone emotionally unsettled. Such unpredictable situations always create doubts in the minds of the characters and pushes them to react to the scenario creating an unpredictable behaviour.

Thus, 400 Days can be pictured as a novel that is rich in various emotional conflicts. The emotional depth that the author provides and the unfolding mystery in the book set the right stage for the emotional conflicts to occur. These conflicts can be categorised into three different categories such as social pressures, internal conflicts and interpersonal dynamics. Internal emotional conflicts mostly revolve around the insecurities of the characters and their desires. Tension prevailed at Navratna House after Siya's missing, which was visible in the dining room when everyone sat together to have their food. Siya's chair was empty, and a usual silence prevailed in the house. Rohit's question about Siya made the situation even worse and this served as an initial point to start the discussion about the police investigation.

After the press conference about arresting Sonu and Manohar, an emotional conflict entangled Alia and Manish. Both were unhappy about the press meet and that the statements given by them are depicted in different ways.

With the case of interpersonal emotional conflicts, most problems are identified because of unspoken emotions, social expectations and the differing priorities of every individual. This is well crafted by the author through the relationship between Alia and her husband. The priority of Alia is to find Siya, whereas her husband focuses mainly on taking care of the family's social reputation. Further, the complex relationship between Alia and Keshav is also marked with deeper emotional struggles. Family dynamics creates more pressure on Alia and her relationship with them. The investigation in the novel also becomes a source of emotional conflict. During investigation, it is noticed that Alia oscillates between her hope and despair. Professional commitment of Keshav also conflicts with his personal affinity towards Alia. The pressure to find the culprit quickly and the necessity to be emotionally stable heightens the tension in the novel. The criticism that Alia faced, and Keshav's professional failure leads to gossiping when he takes up the case.

Physiological responses of characters are intricately showcased by the author in 400 Days. The line, "Everyone in Navratna House sat with a sullen face, like someone had died. I hadn't seen such sadness even on the day Siya was abducted. Papaji clasped his hands and kept his gaze down" (400 Days, 83), best exhibits the author's capacity to picture the physical responses of people. These physical manifestations of emotions make the novel look interesting, relatable and realistic to the readers. Fear and anxiety seem to be the major contributors for physical responses. Increased heart rate is being experienced by different characters picturing their anxiety in the novel. Alia is witnessed to experience racing heart whenever there is an occasion of fear or tension. Alia is portrayed as a concerned mother and often she manifests difficulty breathing and a tight sensation in her chest. Her hands also trembled whenever she recalls her painful memories and during the moments of hopelessness.

Sadness is expressed through tears, and Alia stands as one fine example who is overwhelmed by the grief, and frequently, she bursts out with sadness. She is gripped with the sadness of losing her daughter, Siya, and she approaches Keshav requesting him to investigate the case and help her rescue her daughter. During revelation of her present condition, "A tear escaped her eye" (400 Days, 17) showcasing her profound emotional state of being.

All these emotional expressions of various characters at different situations showcase the image of emotional imbalances that occur in the minds of the readers. As a whole, Chetan Bhagat made 400 Days as the perfect place to search for the variety of emotions.

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