

Chetan Bhagat's *One Arranged Murder*: An Evaluation

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Chetan Bhagat is the best seller of his novels in present day India. He wrote many novels and got many rewards for his style of post-mortem of the social evils in present-day India, especially in the rich families. In this novel he tries to seek social concept and realism about love, dating, romance, family honour, money, flirting, arranged marriage and conflict in relations. The novelist does not seem against the arranged marriage as he has to cut the word 'murder' and entitled the novel by the above mentioned name. The plot of the novel focuses on the arranged murder though it finds place on account of an arranged costly marriage. The marriage does not take place and it does not reach beyond dating, romance and betrothal.

The novel starts with two IIT passed Engineers named Keshav and Saurabh who work in a Cyber Safe Company. Both of these live in an apartment on lease, and they run a detective company also. This is their side business. Saurabh, a boy of 96 kg., has a love affair with a fat and rich girl named Prerna who has her own business with her friend Namrata. Prerna's father Ramesh was a scooter mechanic in the beginning but at present he is a dealer of Porsche car along with a dealership in partnership in Amritsar related to Volkswagen car and auto part manufacturing. Ramesh and his wife Neelam have a son who is student, his old mother, younger sister Bindu, younger brother Aditya and one maid Gopika. Ramesh has two sisters; the elder one Geetu was married with a cab driver Jogi who lives in U.S. Ramesh is the head of the family. Today he is rich and careful for everyone in the family.

Ramesh's younger sister Bindu or Bindia became pregnant with a so-called boyfriend Param in the "empty classroom room at night and doing certain things" at an early age of sixteen. She says, "I didn't mind being pregnant. I foolishly saw it a destiny. Just like my sister one year ago, I too felt I'd find my soul mate" (P.164). Her boyfriend did not marry her and fled. This pregnancy came into light of family after seven months and Bindu procreated a twin named Prerna and Anjali. To maintain the 'honour of the family, it was decided that Prerna is to be called as the daughter of Ramesh and Neelam while the other one was given to Geetu who took her to U.S. Her husband agreed to accept her when Anjali was an infant but gradually Anjali started to retort with Geetu's husband Jogi. He could no more tolerate it and divorced Geetu. Anjali is the villain of the family though she does not believe in the false pretences.

Keshav and Saurabh are best friends and honest in the business life, yet they have many differences in their inclinations. Keshav does not believe in love and any kind of the relationship. He thinks every relation is based upon necessity and selfishness. Both of them sometimes have some differences yet it is "harder to break up with a best friend than with a girlfriend". He himself assumes that he is "not a nice guy. Not emotional either. I don't believe in love. I use Tinder to meet girls for the sole reason to have sex with them. Oh, I am quite good at it. I slept with ten girls last year" (P.2). No doubt that Keshav is not emotional for love and sex but he is emotional for his friendship and respectful to all he comes into contact. He is sincere to his duties. It is his emotional touch for friendship that he works hard to solve the mystery of Prerna's murder with Saurabh and sometime alone and that without any fees for the sake of friendship.

Saurabh has been betrothed with Prerna and gave a diamond ring to her worth Rs three lac. He seems deeply in love with her and wants to do an arranged marriage yet he says, "...people in arranged marriages don't have feelings" (P.93). Ramesh also spent Rs fifty lac on this occasion

and offered a costly car to Saurabh which for he denied. On the auspicious day of *KarwaChouth* Prerna kept a fast and invited Saurabh to see his face and moon at night. Anjali has been staying in the house since the time of betrothal and she has been working as an article writer worth low salary. Geetu, her aunt (so called mother) revealed this fact before Anjali that she was the daughter of Bindu and asked her to leave her house so that Geetumay marry again because Anjali's behave was not acceptable for her new proposer – Greg Davis. Anjali shared this mystery with her real mother and sister. Anjali does not like her poverty, her emigration to U.S. apart from her real mother.

Anjali is a villain in the family. She asks her mother Bindu why she dared to send her away why not to Prerna. She found Prerna in a nice big house with richness and a nicely flourished own business. She hated everybody. She plotted to kill Prerna and planned to go for the mountain trip, returned back by flight, booked a car, came to near the house, left the car with her phone and luggage on the way near house, took an auto, stealthily climbed on the terrace using back door where Prerna was ready and waiting for Saurabh, took her phone and *thaali* and pushed down Prerna from the third floor along with Prerna's mobile after breaking it, came down, took the same auto to go back to her car, and came to her house where everybody found Prerna dead in the presence of Saurabh and Police.

Anjali hates Ramesh and Neelam to conceal the reality of her birth and their love for Prerna. She hated her mother why she sent her to U.S. and not to Prerna. She knows that Keshav and Saurabh are detectives too, so she flirts with Keshav in the park, drinks with him and throws her head into his laps and shoulders. Anjali smokes cigarette, ganjha, marijuana, consumes beer and hard drinks. 'Fuck' and 'asshole' are her favourite abuses and she uses these words frequently. She is not respectful to anybody because she retorts and argues with elders too. She is full of venom against her sister and mother. For Anjali her selfishness for money is all she needs and for this purpose she can go to any extent. She assumes before Keshav that, "...my job should be safe. I sleep with the boss" (P.56). After pushing Prerna from the roof, she allured her real uncle Aditya to take the diamond ring from the finger of Prerna's dead body to buy drugs. Anjali has physical relations with her maternal uncle. Aditya is also in the list of suspected persons. Ramesh went to his room and slapped him many times. Anjali thought that at the call of Ramesh, the Police will catch Aditya. Lest Aditya should reveal everything before Police, Anjali slept with Aditya at night, gave him overdose of heroine. Next day Keshav took photos of 'love bites' and scratches on the body of Aditya and searched his room stealthily.

Both of the detectives were working to search the murderer with Police. At one point they come to know that Ramesh and his business partner have a loan of seventy crore. Namrata assumed to lend the money while her partner Prerna had declined the demand of Ramesh for money. The detectives and Police come to conclude that it was the motive of murder. It seems here that it was the climax of the story when Ramesh was sent to jail. This climax is incomplete because there is no evidence to prove it in the court. Inspector Singh wants to close the case while Saurabh and Keshav think that the Inspector has taken bribe. This shows the emerging image of the Police in our Indian societies while he did not take bribe. ACP Rana also suspects on the activities of Inspector Singh. This is mutual misunderstanding of the Police.

Though Saurabh was not married with Prernayet he is committed to find out Prerna's murderer and in the meantime another murder takes place. Saurabh is a gastronome who always cares for good food and he is 'emotional fool'. It is ridiculous that he cooks good food whenever he is in distress. He thinks that he is the nearest relative of Ramesh-family and cares enough for their honour. Keshav is his 'Bhai' and the best friend but he does not like that Keshav should nourish any kind of the relationship with Anjali. For the sake of friendship Keshav provokes

Anjali to come her close to him. It seems in the beginning that he has been transformed; hates philandering and truly loves to Anjali but, “True love doesn’t exist. The world is selfish. Nobody really cares about anyone” (P.83). In the absence of Saurabh he invited Anjali to his apartment in Malviya Nagar, smoked cigarettes, and drank beer and whisky with Anjali. Anjali was in love with Keshav. This time she seems truly honest in love with Keshav or it may be that she wanted Keshav not to move forward to solve the mystery of both cases of murder but it was Saurabh’s trick to entrap her that he did not stop Anjali to make love with him. Anjali loved Keshav with the same scratches and ‘love bites’ as on the body of Aditya. This was her biggest mistake that she was exposed by Keshav in the presence of the whole family of Ramesh.

Ramesh is the hero of the novel as he sacrificed for the sake of the family. Both of his sisters proved vagrant in the youth. Geetu too had become pregnant before marriage. Ramesh married her with Jogi and contributed him to by a car for good earnings for the sake of his vagrant sister. Again, Bindu also committed the same mistake and she became resolute to fruit out her pregnancy of bastard children. She becomes a school teacher. This was the plan of Ramesh that one daughter he took himself and second one was given to his sister Geetu for the sake of the family. He is kind enough for his wife and mother too. He never tells any trouble to his old mother. He gives fifty thousand rupees per month to Bindu without telling anybody. He is ‘god’ and ‘angel’ for Bindu. He always tries his brother to leave odd jobs and participate in his own business. Ramesh treats his maid Gopika and driver Anwar like family members.

Chetan Bhagat has portrayed his characters in interesting way. No two characters are the same in the novel. Ramesh’s mother believes in the God and likes to go on the pilgrimages. She always thanks God for the progress of his son. She proves to be a good Indian woman remembering her dead husband. Out of four, her three children except Ramesh created problems; and Ramesh always solved them like a hero but the villainous Anjali ruined everything.

One arranged Murder has been entitled as *One Arranged Marriage Murder* on the cover page but on the title page and on the last page the word ‘Marriage’ is either cut or deleted. The plot of the novel seems to fall into murder which took place due to be arranged marriage. Both, Aditya and Perna are victim to it without meeting Poetic Justice, though Ramesh gets it in the end of the novel as he has not to go to jail after bail. The story is full of suspense, thrill, breath taking and hypnotizing. With the beginning of Chapter 36 the mist of suspense seems to evaporate when Bindu confesses her past story. Keshav is the narrator of the story. The novel has 61 Chapters. In some chapters Singh also becomes narrator when he takes the statement of some family members. Anjali confesses her conspiracy and evil deeds. Anjali is straightforward, though she utters abuses yet she admits her evil deeds without any repentance – an embodiment of rudeness, hatred, vagrancy and selfishness.

One arranged Murder starts with a farce that follows even in the tight corners as Keshav asks Saurabh, “Where did the milk go?” Saurabh replies, “Back in the cow” (P.1). After eating too much he needs, Kayamchurna, Pudina Hara and Eno as he has ‘three stomachs’ (P.77). Actually Saurabh eats too much. He mixed the carton of biscuits in one litre milk and drank it and he can enter in the ladies’ toilet by mistake than visit to gym. Keshav narrates, “When Saurabh is confused, stressed or tense, he turns to one solution. He decides to cook. Somehow, all his remedies to life’s problems are linked to food. The more difficult the situation he is in, the more elaborate the dish he chooses to cook” (P.137), and “attains nirvana from perfect tandoori kulchas” (P.219). He is an IIT but on the weekends he can continue to “sleeping for two days straight” (P.4).

Saurabh loves Perna and both of them express their love by calling to each other as ‘laddoo’, ‘jalebi’, rasgulla syrup’, and ‘gujja’ etc. (P.6) In his betrothal ceremony, “Saurabh

moved his hips like sunny Leone did in the original” At this dance Keshav says,” And that is not the step. You have to move like a serpent”(P.51). Farcical names have been used to name the quality of dance as, ‘cockroach dance’ (P.58).Both of the detectives anyhow take shelter in the house of Ramesh so that they may search the house and in the morning in the absence they started to search the room of Aditya. Keshav narrates, “For a while, all we could hear was our own breaths.And then nothing else – a fart. Yes, my best friend farted, in the worst place at the worst time” (P.128). They can amuse in the extreme of tense situation. Though Keshav does not believe in any kind of the love and relationship yet in the end of the novel he asserts, “I want to be in love again. And for someone to love me We had friendship, which in many ways is even more beautiful than love” (P.303).

Many of the Hindi words have been used in the novel as it is usual for any writer to use some words from his mother tongue so that the real touch may be brought. After question mark the sentence is continued with small letter while mark of interrogation is also a full stop. At some places the repetition creates monotony’ “I had four missed calls. Saurabh had called me multiple times” (P.20).

The novel becomes melodramatic at some places when Saurabh slaps Neeraj because he has been ex-boyfriend of Prerna and at present he is suspect of murder. Love affair between Anwar and Gopika is abnormal as she is unmarried girl of twenty-four and Anwar a married man of fifty. The novel shows the real hollowness of modern Indian rich families – family honour.

REFERENCES

All of the quotations have been taken from:Bhagat, Chetan: *One Arranged Murder*, Harper Collins Publishers, Gurugram, Haryana, India, 2023.

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