

Irony in Chetan Bhagat's Latest Two Novels *The Girl in Room 105* and *One Arranged Murder*: Developing Murder Mystery Arousing Suspense

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ABSTRACT

Irony is the contrast between expectation and reality. More or less irony is there in all the novels of Chetan Bhagat. Irony is predominant in his latest two detective novels 'The Girl in Room 105' and 'One Arranged Murder'. Though every type of irony is used in Chetan Bhagat's novels; situational irony predominates these two latest novels. Irony is applied here to develop murder mystery arousing suspense of readers to find out the real murderers of the two unfortunate girls in the novels who meet premature death by murder. Both the murderers of these cases are some unsuspected persons who were thought very innocent, near and dear to the victim of murder- either lover or close related person by blood. Detached observation and impartial investigation find out the murderers finally.

KEY WORDS: Irony, Detective, Situation, Murder, Mystery, Suspense, Investigation

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I. INTRODUCTION

Irony is the difference between expectation and reality. It is a complex phenomenon which makes its application more complicated. Though it is applied directly on any piece of writing, it is sometimes used in such an oblique manner that it becomes difficult to recognize irony in dual sense. In such cases, it is rather an ironic tone or ironic way of looking at the gap between appearance and reality. In order to see the contradictions in human experience, the ironist evolves a perception, which yields a detachment, and this detachment provides disagreement. However, it must be clear that this disagreement is not disinterested. Thus, the ironist keeps a strange blending of detachment and interest. Prof. Wright asserts:

.....his [ironist's] is an interested objectivity; he is detached but not indifferent, withdrawn but not removed. He may, as an observer of the human scene, be moved to compassion, disgust, laughter, disdain, sympathy or horror--.... (Andrew H. Wright *Jane Austen's Novels: A Study in Structure*, p. 38)

According to Kierkegaard, irony is the expression of the gap in the attempt to attain the moral or religious ideal (*The Concept of Irony*, 1968). Kierkegaard juxtaposes the attitude of an ironist with that of a prophet, who is in turn focused on the future, while the historian is interested in the past. Kierkegaard, like Novalis, asks: is irony more comical or more tragic? (Jankélévitch, *L'Ironie*, 130) Irony is "false modesty, false naivety and false carelessness," (*ibid.* 92) It is a "simulation per contrarian." (*ibid.* 80) As Jankélévitch points out, echoing Aristotle, to be ironic is to "speak evasively." (*ibid.* 81) According to Jankélévitch, irony could be called "pseudology" because words deliberately and intentionally contradict thoughts (*ibid.* 42). The ironist does not make an in-depth reflection, but rather touches upon "pathos of infinitely light and somehow elusive tangibility." (*ibid.* 33) Kierkegaard juxtaposes and compares irony with simulation, with some pretence, which would not be without ironic mediation. According to Ian Ousby, irony is "A mode of discourse, whether lyric, narrative or dramatic, which purports to convey a latent meaning different from – indeed, usually opposite to – the ostensible one. It works as a dissembling or dissimulation, which is basically meant to be perceived through. It follows the concealment of real meaning or exposing the discrepancy between two levels of reality in portraying characters or situation. According to Prof. Chevalier (as quoted by Andrew H. Wright) 'The basic feature of every irony is a contrast between a reality and an appearance.'

Thus, irony is an important literary device, which makes two types of experiences possible at the same time. It will be interesting to take a look at the way irony has evolved through the ages and the changing role it has played.

There are three types of irony generally- Verbal Irony, Dramatic Irony and Situational Irony. Verbal Irony is the use of words to mean something different from what a person actually says. Dramatic irony is reserved specifically for performance literature, like a play or movie. This is when the audience knows something, but the character doesn't. Situational irony is when one thing is expected to happen, but in fact, the exact opposite happens. In this present paper the third type of irony will be discussed with the special reference to Chetan Bhagat's latest two novels *The Girl in Room 105* (2018) and *One Arranged Murder* (2020). The study is based on primary data, collected from these two novels. A lot of secondary data have also been collected from some reputed articles and books. Narrative method of analysis is followed throughout the paper.

II. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The Girl in Room 105 and *One Arranged Murder* are two latest novels by Chetan Bhagat, one of the prominent English novelists of contemporary period. Actually, the novel *One Arranged Murder* (2020) is the extension of its previous novel *The Girl in Room 105* (2018). These two novels are greatly different from other novels of Chetan Bhagat in some aspects. Bhagat has followed the detective genre of novel writing here. In these two novels the lots of two unfortunate girls' who are murdered is witnessed- one is Zara Lone (in *The Girl in Room 105*), a Muslim Kashmiri girl who was ex-beloved of Keshav Rajpurohit, a young Hindu boy and the other is Prerna (in *One Arranged Murder*), who is the present beloved of Saurav Maheshwari, bosom friend and flat-mate of Keshav Rajpurohit.

Zara is murdered in her hostel room and the murderer plots keenly Keshav to be trapped as murderer. But Keshav is not a foolish and coward to be trapped easily. Rather he is clever and bold enough to investigate as a perfect detective and find out the real murderer Raghu, the present boyfriend of Zara. Now, he along with his friend Saurabh who helps him in his investigation leave the job of coach from Chandan Classes and starts their new profession as detectives opening an agency Z Detectives. The events of *One Arranged Murder* occur after starting their new profession in the agency Z Detectives.

As both are detective novels so, they pave the way for irony to appear in them. Both the novels are replete with irony; the most of which is situational irony. At the time of reading what the readers guess and think; happens opposite of it. The person who seems to be good proves worst and so the bad one proves the best later. Especially, in case of investigation by police officer, Keshav and Saurav for finding out the murderer of Zara and Prerna; many a times the readers face that the expected murderer is not the person whom they thought before but the person who was little thought, or was cancelled from the suspected shortlist of possible murderers. Both the murderers Raghu and Anjali are little suspected for their innocent activities and behaviours towards the victims of murder, their cooperation with the investigators like police, Keshav and Saurav keep the readers and investigators far from the suspicion that they are real assassins.

In the novel *The Girl in Room 105*, the irony starts when Zara Lone is found dead by her ex-boyfriend Keshav Rajpurohit in her hostel room. He first thinks Zara is in fast sleep and tries to awake her; then thinks Zara is pretending to be in sleep to have some more from him. Ironically, it is ensured that she is dead. When police and then Zara's father come; they think Keshav and Saurav are her murderers, of course, till then readers know the real fact that these two boys are innocent. This is dramatic irony used here.

*'Who is Keshav Rajpurohit?' Inspector Rana said in a rough baritone.
'I am Keshav, sir,' I said, extending a hand. He ignored it.
'You called us?'
'Yes, sir,' I said. 'I found my friend, Zara Lone, dead. Room number 105.'
The security officers looked at me, shocked.
'Who are you?' one of the security officers said. 'A student?'
'Ex-student,' I said. '2013 batch. Kumaon hostel.'
'2013?' said the same security officer. 'What are you doing here now?'
'I came to visit her,' I said and added, 'It's her birthday.'
'But how can you come into the girls' hostel?' His voice got louder. (p.50)*

Both the boys are taken to House Khas police station where they are treated earlier as criminal but the event ironically turns when Keshav's politically powerful father, senior RSS leader gets involve there.

*'Your parents called. They are trying to reach you,' Rana said. His voice seemed calmer than before.
'They are on their way from Alwar. Should be here in a few hours.'
'This case is big. National news,' Rana said.*

'Have you eaten anything since morning?'

Saurabh shook his head vigorously. Inspector Rana asked a peon to get us snacks. He came back with two cups of tea and aloo pakoras. The inspector ordered us to eat. I took slow bites as he spoke again.

'Your father spoke to me. He is, what, RSS pradhan sevak in Rajasthan?'

'One of the state pranth pracharakas.'

'Yeah. He also spoke to the south Delhi MP. Hauz Khas comes in the south Delhi area.'

I now knew the reason for Rana's new tone, not to mention the tea and snacks. The only way to make power behave in India is, well, more power.

'I won't go easy on you because of your political contacts. If at all, I will be more strict,' he said, as if reading my mind. (p. 65-66)

Watchman Laxman Reddy is arrested and sent to jail after a primary investigation. The event of Zara hitting Laxman, Laxman's threaten to her, his absence from his duty in gate at the time of Zara's murder are sufficient proofs against Laxman to be the criminal.

'Sir, are you sure it is the watchman?' I said.

Rana raised an eyebrow. He turned to Saurabh and laughed.

'Motive. CCTV evidence. He's from Telangana. Sent those goons to hurt Zara's fiancé. It is an open-and-shut case.'

'Is it?' I said.

However, I had to ask. 'Why would Laxman hurt Raghu?'

'Because Raghu had confronted Laxman too. It is he who encouraged Zara to file a complaint.' (p. 81)

After Laxman, Zara's research guide, professor Saxena is accounted as main suspect of her murder. Professor Saxena's lustrous behaviour towards Zara, his attempts to seduce her as proved by her own email to her boyfriend Raghu, his several visits to Zara's hostel Himadri, his intervention to investigate the hostel by police etc. make him doubtful to be her murderer. The email of Zara to Raghu:

Hey Love,

How are you? So far away from me in Hyderabad. Today is one of those days I really, really wish you were here. I tried calling you. Your secretary told me you are in meetings all day with people who have come from San Jose. Well, good luck with that. Hope they go well. Call when you can? I really need to talk. I have already told you about the creepy feeling I get from Prof. Saxena. You also know how many times he has asked me out for coffee. What I haven't told you are a few more things he has done. I thought they were inadvertent or harmless, but it has happened too often now. For instance, he often comes up behind me and touches my hair when I am working on the computer. Two days ago, he put his arm around my shoulder when I showed him a printout. When I wriggled away, he said, 'Why don't we get closer? Intimacy always helps people connect.' Raghu, I felt so creeped out, I wanted to jump out of his office window. I don't know why I didn't tell you about it right then. I guess I thought it was a one-off. But today, he did it again! I went to show him an Excel sheet on my laptop, and he kissed my right cheek and said I looked like a Kashmiri rose!!! Then I am not sure, but I think he pulled my hand towards his ... oh gosh maybe he didn't mean to, but Raghu, it was gross! I wanna quit, but how? What do I do? I am so confused. Call me soon.

XOXO

Z

As Laxman Reddy, the professor also is found innocent and both these two persons are proved innocent by Keshav and Saurav. The case is considered as 'Honour Killing' and therefore, Keshav and Saurav go to Zara's house for investigation. Of course, they found there some offensive items in Zara's room, like cocaine, pregnancy kit- PregaNews, a mobile set with Pakistani SIM card in it etc. but nothing more to accuse the family as killer of Zara. From this investigation, the investigators find enough clues to suspect Zara's step brother Sikander, a member of a Kashmiri terrorist group *Tehreek*. Now the investigators go to Srinagar in search of Sikander. They meet him two times and talk to him. The investigators do not believe Sikander whatever he tells them. Third time, they were with police to meet and arrest him. Foreseeing some danger to his group *Tehreek* and the leader Hashim Abdullah of it, if he is caught hold alive; he commits suicide with his own gun. A suicide notes as video from a link clears everybody present there including the police officer Saraf that he was not murderer of Zara but a true lover of her as her younger brother. After this the investigators suspect an army man Faiz, a family related person with whom Zara had some snapshots and who gives Zara a pair of valuable golden earrings of three-four lakhs worth of rupees. They meet him in army camp and talks with him. From the little information they get from Faiz, they enter his flat of Delhi where he lives with his small family but the family at present is in Dubai. They find some clues from here to suspect Faiz more that he had illegal relation with Zara for which she was pregnant. And may be that Zara did not want to fulfil his desire further for

which he kills her. At last, at the arranged party at Zara's house when Zara's father and Saurav were in the expectation to catch hold Faiz as the murderer of Zara, wonderfully and ironically Raghu is caught as the murderer. When readers read this novel, have suspense after suspense every time with every suspected criminal. They find some strong reasons behind them to suspect as murderer but surprisingly Raghu is found murderer who was less suspected or totally not suspected by the readers. This is a great irony of situation.

One Arranged Murder is already stated as the extension to the novel *The Girl in Room 105*. In this novel Perna Malhotra, the beloved of Saurav Maheshwari, who is the friend and flat-mate of Keshav Rajpurohit, dies on the very day of *Karva Chauth*. Saurav was going on the very day of *Karva Chauth* to her beloved's house with a sweet dream - how they will meet on the back terrace and enjoy there; when the moon would be visible how Perna would break her fast through some religious ritual performances etc. But ironically and surprisingly he finds the dead body of her lying on the road. In the novel irony and suspense begin from here. As just after Perna's death occurs, Saurav is found on the terrace from where she falls; police and some neighbours suspect him as her murderer.

'Malhotra ji,' he said, 'you better not let this boy go.'
'Go where?' I said, perplexed. (p.12)

But later it is proved that he is Perna's mad lover only, for whom it is not possible. With the handling of ACP Rana, Keshav and Saurav are able to get involved in the investigation of Perna murder case with inspector Singh. Keshav and Saurav make a possible list of eleven persons who may murder Perna. Putting reasons and arguments they cancelled seven and make a short list of four persons as main suspects as murderer.

'Eleven people so far. Too many. We have to narrow it down' I said
'Anjali,' Saurabh said. 'She was not in the house. The police have confirmed and checked her phone too.'
'Okay, strike her out too.
'How many do we have left finally?' I said.
'From eleven to four in this round. Anwar, Namrata, Neeraj and Aditya chachu.'
'Fine, let's talk to all of them,' I said. (p. 77 - 79)

Keshav and Saurav investigated all the four persons of the short list one by one but found nobody guilty. When the investigation comes to an end it is found that Anjali, twin sister of Perna is her murderer who was not included in the short list even. But the persons of the short list have nothing to do with the murder case. It is a pure irony.

III. CONCLUSION

Chetan Bhagat is successful in creating irony in his novel especially, in latest two novels of him i.e. *The Girl in Room 105* and *One Arranged Murder*. Situational irony predominates these two novels. He is known as black humourist who introduce humour even in serious situation also. Many times, it is found that he applies irony as the tool of humourous expression. These two novels are not exception to this. The murder mystery is solved in both the novels by the two heroes of two novels together with the support of police behind. In the ironic stories suspense of readers is consistent till the end. Readers are very happy as the outcome result of murder stories are satisfactory – the murderers are punished with imprisonment and the innocents get free.

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