

From Surviving to Overcoming: A Study of Post-Traumatic Growth in Chetan Bhagat's

*A Girl in Room 105*

Dr. M. Vaijo Latha

Associate Professor, Department of English, Arignar Anna College, Aralvaimozhi,

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli-627012)

Dr. M. Rashmi

Associate Professor, Department of English, Arignar Anna College, Aralvaimozhi,

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli-627012)

ABSTRACT

Chetan Bhagat is a renowned Indian author, columnist, and motivational speaker known for his bestselling novels. He is always known for his simple and relatable storytelling. Bhagat's novels are primarily contemporary fiction, often centred around youth, career struggles, and social issues of youth in India. His novels often focus on themes like youth aspirations, love, and relationships. His works are credited with making English literature more accessible to Indian readers, especially the younger generation. The novel *A Girl in Room 105* is a thriller published in 2018.

Keywords: Youth aspirations, Trauma, Hassles, Post -traumatic stress, Post-traumatic growth, Contextual intelligence and resilience

Keshav, the protagonist, has completed an engineering course at IIT Delhi. Saurabh is his close friend. Zara is from Delhi College of Engineering and has missed IIT by a few marks. She argues well in a debate and Keshav admires her argument. Zara is smart and a rational person and she believes in debates and activism. She says to Keshav, "Thanks for the cheering" (11). On hearing her voice, Keshav is frozen. Chetan Bhagat expresses it as follows:

Zara? I said, turning around.

Yeah! Nice college. Are you from here?

Yes. How about you? I said,

'Delhi College of Engineering. Missed IIT by a few marks.

Not smart enough'

'You demolished him in there. You are definitely smarter than me' (11).

Chetan Bhagat reflects Kashmir issues in the novel. Zara and fifty students protest against the Indian Army at Jantar Mantar. Then they come out of the Barakhamba Road and walk towards Parliament Street and try to show their protest against that. They have placards which consist of phrases like:

'Stop Innocent Killings in Kashmir'

'Pellet Guns Blind Protestors. Stop Using Them.'

'Indian Army, Stop Atrocities on Kashmiris.'

Zara walked ahead of me. She went up to a small group of protestors (24).

Keshav is not communal or racist, but he likes Zara and participates in the protest. Even though Keshav is not interested in political or religious issues, love makes him participate in such issues.

Keshav's hometown is Alwar, and his family never mingles with people of other religions. He falls deeply in love with Zara, a Kashmiri Muslim girl. He says, "My mother might have fainted seeing me in a crowd of Muslims! My father's friend circle is almost entirely from the RSS, we don't really know many

Muslims anyway" (25). He admires Zara's beauty and says that her "beautiful almond eyes shone bright" (289). He loves her sincerely, but she refuses him. Keshav and Zara's relationship breaks up because of their religious and cultural differences. Keshav is upset and cannot come out of this disappointment. He is stressed and disappointed as he finds it difficult to move on from his breakup with Zara.

Faiz, Zara's cousin and Captain, is deeply involved in Kashmir politics. He is very protective of Zara and hates her relationship with Keshav because of their religious differences. Keshav finds that Zara's behaviour has changed recently. He finds the chat secretly between Zara and Captain Faiz. He opens Zara's WhatsApp and scrolls up a conversation as follows:

'Are you tense?' Faiz said.

'Somewhat. Not in full panic mode yet.'

'Don't worry. It's nothing.'

'My periods are never this late.'

'I pulled out. You checked the calendar too.'

'I know... but... worried.'

'My darling, you are fine.'

Should I take a test? Prega News or something.

Don't overreact (289).

After the death of Zara, Faiz becomes a suspect in the case. Chetan Bhagat describes the novel *A Girl in Room 105* as an unlove story' with the elements of romance, thriller, and crime fiction. Unlike his other novels which primarily focus on love and relationships, this novel blends murder into romance. It is a thriller with the themes of love, heartbreak, and resilience with explicit focus on post-traumatic growth. Keshav cannot get over the breakup with Zara and finds himself entangled in a mystery when he visits her room. i.e., Room 105 one night. He then tries to solve her murder.

Post-traumatic growth refers to the positive psychological changes that occur because of struggling with highly challenging life circumstances. The protagonist, Keshav, struggles a lot and is unable to move on from his past relationship with Zara. Post-traumatic growth is the process of finding personal strength, new possibilities, and deeper meaning after experiencing trauma. If the protagonist, Keshav, is seen through the lens of post-traumatic growth, certain elements of it can be identified in his journey.

At the beginning of the novel, Keshav is deeply heartbroken and experiences deep emotional trauma due to his breakup with Zara, his ex-girlfriend. He struggles to move on, taking solace in social media and drowning in self-pity. His emotional state reflects his inability to accept change, which is characteristic of post-traumatic stress. His inability to move on from her creates emotional turmoil. However, the real trauma begins when he finds Zara murdered in her hostel room, dragging him into a dangerous investigation.

In the book *Psychology*, Robert A. Baron says that the death of a loved one is very stressful, and life is filled with countless minor annoying sources of stress termed hassles. Keshav tries to overcome his trauma gradually, and he investigates the case to reveal the truth about the real killer. This investigation provides him with a sense of purpose beyond his personal sorrow and disappointment.

As Keshav delves deeper into the case, he realizes that solving the mystery is more significant than his own suffering. This investigation brings about a great change in his journey of life. With great difficulty, Keshav and Saurabh find the true killer. Keshav says, "I am happy to say, we have solved the Zara murder case" (301). The murderer is Raghu Veradatch, Zara Lone's fiancé and owner of a tech company in Hyderabad.

Keshav realizes the value of life, and he says, "And thank you for also teaching me to never love someone too much... 'Goodbye, Zara. I unlove you" (301). Keshav tries to overcome the trauma and uses his contextual or practical intelligence. Finally, Saurabh and Keshav create a web page and detective

agency. Saurabh names the new agency "Z Detectives." In the book, *Psychology*, Robert Baron quotes Robert Sternberg's words as follows: "Sternberg terms the third type of intelligence as 'contextual or practical intelligence. He says, persons' high on this dimension are intelligent in a practical, adaptive sense-...solving the problems of everyday life" (415).

After discovering Zara's death, Keshav goes through emotional pain, and he feels guilty. He regrets his activities. Investigating her murder is a way to make sense of what has happened. Instead of completely breaking down, he channels his pain into uncovering the truth about her murder. His search for justice marks the beginning of his growth, as he learns to control his emotions and think logically. Throughout the investigation, Keshav gains a sense of purpose and responsibility. He transitions from being a self-absorbed, immature young man to someone who is resilient and determined. From his experience, he comes to know valuable life lessons about relationships, trust, and self-worth. By the end of the novel, Keshav emerges stronger.

Keshav gains a deeper understanding of love, loss, and the importance of letting go. As he comes across different problems in his life, he learns to cope with grief in a productive way instead of self-destructive habits. This proves his resilience. His journey increases his personal strength. The journey transforms him into a more mature and independent individual. Above all, he develops appreciation for life. He starts valuing his own life and future, rather than being stuck in the past. Thus, Keshav's journey of emotional transformation after the tragic death of his ex-girlfriend, Zara is beautifully presented by the author.

The protagonist, Keshav's transformation in *A Girl in Room 105* aligns with the concept of post-traumatic growth. His personal evolution, driven by adversity, showcases how pain and loss can lead to newfound strength, wisdom, and resilience. Instead of succumbing to despair, Keshav's trauma pushes him towards action. His grief turns into a mission – seeking justice for Zara's murder. As he investigates Zara's

death, Keshav encounters different perspectives on relationships, loyalty, and betrayal. This forces him to rethink his own emotional attachments. He learns that love is not about possession but about mutual respect and acceptance. Thus, the novel ultimately presents post-traumatic growth as a journey of self-discovery and emotional healing.

The story of *A Girl in Room 105* touches upon the issues of communal tensions in India as Zara is a Muslim and Keshav is a Hindu. Keshav's journey in *A Girl in Room 105* is a testament to how trauma can lead to significant personal growth. From a heartbroken, aimless young man, he transforms into someone with resilience, emotional intelligence, and a new sense of purpose. His story embodies the essence of post-traumatic growth, demonstrating that even in the darkest times, growth and healing are possible. The novel also highlights real issues like crimes against women and the challenges of seeking justice. It is structured to keep readers engaged with unexpected twists and revelations. Chetan Bhagat maintains his usual simple and conversational writing style, making the novel easy to read.

### Works Cited

Bhagat, Chetan. *The Girl in Room 105*. Harper Collins. 2022.

Baron, Robert. *Psychology*. Pearson.2011.

<http://www.ijmrset.com>