

Technology and Social Media as Investigative Tools in Chetan Bhagat's Detective Fiction

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Abstract

Modern communication technologies play a crucial role in Bhagat's crime narratives, shaping both plot and character interaction. This article analyses the use of social media like Instagram, Telegram, and technology in Chetan Bhagat's *The Girl in Room 105*, *One Arranged Murder*, and *400 Days*, highlighting how digital networks facilitate investigation and reflect the realities of contemporary social life. The study demonstrates that Bhagat integrates technology seamlessly into narrative structure, showing how digital literacy and online interaction redefine amateur detective work in India.

Key words: Detective fiction, Modern Communication, Social media, Technology, Digital literacy.

Introduction

Chetan Bhagat's move into detective fiction represented a notable change in his career. He shifted away from his previous focus on love stories to explore crime and investigation. While travelling from Hyderabad to Delhi, Bhagat met a fellow passenger named Keshav Rajpurohit. After a brief exchange of pleasantries, Keshav revealed that he was also an alumnus of IIT, Delhi, and they both started enjoying their conversation. When Keshav mentioned that he might have a story for Bhagat, Bhagat impulsively replied, saying that he no longer wanted a story on love. He immediately regretted being obnoxious. Later, he listened to the story, and that encounter led to Bhagat's maiden attempt at writing detective fiction, resulting in the novel titled *The Girl in Room 105*.

Bhagat follows the conventions of classic crime novels, where a crime occurs, the central figure investigates, and the mystery is eventually resolved. Yet, he introduces his unique pattern of writing by incorporating elements of realism and highlighting the vulnerabilities of his detectives, as they are not professionally trained to solve a crime mystery. The detectives get themselves invited into the mysteries due to their emotional involvements in the cases. In the novel *The Girl in Room 105*, Keshav Rajpurohit feels suffocated by his inability to solve the case of Zara Lone. It is his quest for finding the killer of his lover that drives him on the

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investigative trajectory. Frustrated by the insults of Chandan Arora, the owner of Chandan Classes, Saurabh too joins him in his first investigative adventure. This also offers them an escape from their melancholic lifestyle

Similarly in the novel, *One Arranged Murder*, the investigative trajectory is driven by personal stakes, as Prerna who is betrothed to marry Saurabh in a few weeks dies unexpectedly. Saurabh is completely shaken up, as he has been from head to toe in love with Prerna and has been envisioning a life with her. In the last of the series, *400 Days*, Keshav gets himself involved in the case due to his growing attachment to Alia. When Keshav's parents meet her, unaware that she is married with two daughters, they imagine that she would make an ideal daughter-in-law. When she visits Keshav again and requests him to help her trace her missing daughter, he agrees. In the course of his investigation, he develops romantic feelings for her, intending to marry her once her divorce from Manish is finalized. In all the three novels, while personal motivations drive the investigations, Bhagat also incorporates contemporary tools and networks, including social media, which play a critical role in unfolding the narrative. Despite the personal attachment, Keshav and Saurabh ultimately succeed in resolving each mystery, demonstrating that intuition, persistence, and emotional intelligence can be as crucial as formal training in crime-solving. This article highlights how technology and social media play a pivotal role as investigative tools in solving the mystery.

Technology and Social Media as Investigative Tools

In the novel *The Girl in Room 105*, Zara's posts on Instagram of her visit to Karachi Literature Festival and her subsequent picture with Sikander, holding a gun, seem to direct the investigative trajectory. As Keshav and Zara have parted ways, he is unaware of her visit to Karachi. Such details are revealed only through her posts on Instagram. Sikander, who is initially believed to be the prime suspect in the murder of Zara, ultimately kills himself, leading the detective duo to realize that he is not the real culprit. Finally, when the identity of the killer is revealed, everybody is startled. No one can believe that Raghu could have committed such a heinous act. The police have actually absolved him after confirming his mobile location in Hyderabad and noting he had wished Zara exactly at 12 a.m. on the day of her murder.

However, Keshav's investigation reveals that Raghu had tipped the staff nurse named Janie at Apollo Hospital to send a message to Zara wishing her on her birthday. Janie admits,

Who will forget a patient who leaves a ten-thousand-rupee tip? I had night duty. He gave me his unlocked phone. He had already typed a happy birthday message. At exact midnight, he told me to just press send. I did, and Zara ma'am had the first wish from Raghu sir. Wasn't he the best boyfriend in the world? Janie said after I showed her Raghu's picture on the phone (*The Girl in Room 105*, 285).

Keshav also confirms that Raghu is the real killer after obtaining CCTV footage through inspector Rana. In this way, social media and technology play a significant role in helping the detective duo to solve the murder case.

In *One Arranged Murder* too, social media and digital technology again play a decisive role in unravelling the mystery. Saurabh, who is heartbroken at the death of his fiancée Prerna, vows to identify the killer, as he is pretty sure that Prerna's fatal fall was not an accident. When they probe further, they encounter numerous red herrings, which they carefully reject. Among these, Ramesh Malhotra's email to Prerna requesting financial assistance functions as a significant red herring. However, this clue ultimately proves to be misleading, illustrating how Bhagat employs digital communication not only as evidence but also as a means to complicate the investigative process. Ultimately, Keshav concludes that Anjali is the murderer. CCTV footage proves instrumental in confirming the killer here too. On the day of Prerna's death, Anjali reached home early by taking a metro, leaving her phone behind in the taxi. She then met Prerna, who was waiting on the terrace to see Saurabh and break her fast. Unaware of Anjali's intense jealousy and determination to eliminate her, Prerna was caught off guard when Anjali pushed her from the terrace before returning to her original location, where the taxi driver awaited. Keshav explains,

It took me a while to get the final confirmation. I have it in here. A CCTV video from 17 October 2019. It's a video from the Delhi Metro, Magenta line. Even though ACP Rana helped, it still took a couple of weeks to get it. I played a video on my phone. It had a black and white footage of a crowd in the metro train compartment(*One Arranged Murder*, 276).

Keshav deduces that Anjali is the murderer because there is no other DNA on Prerna's body, and they found the same DNA, as Anjali and Prerna are identical twins. Keshav remarks,

Other body parts come into contact in an intense struggle. Hair, nail, residue, dead skin. Gloves can't conceal everything. This is DNA, not finger prints. But the police found nothing. They found no other DNA. They found the same DNA as Prerna because Prerna and Anjali are identical twins and have identical DNA (*One Arranged Murder*, 276).

Armed with this concrete evidence, the detective duo finally identifies Anjali as the true culprit.

In the novel *400 Days* too, technology proves to be an omnipresent character, as it enables Keshav and Saurabh to identify and apprehend the culprit. The police consider the case of the missing child to be a cold one, as they are unable to trace the child or gather any substantial evidence. Meanwhile, the media puts the blame entirely on the family, accusing them of their negligence. This causes several setbacks in the family business, leading to a heavy financial loss. Under the mounting pressure, the family decides not to pursue the case, as it may further vilify the family. However, Alia, the child's mother, remains determined to pursue the case, as her maternal anxiety does not allow her remain at ease.

When Saurabh, a techno wizard, gathers evidence that the police have failed to obtain, it brings a ray of hope in Alia. When he retrieves the screenshot of Siya's chat with an unknown person and paedophile named Roy on Telegram, everybody is shocked. Siya had previously chatted with him and had even shared her pictures in exchange for gifts and rewards. Keshav, with Saurabh's help, decides to trap Roy by creating a fake account posing as a school girl on

Instagram to befriend him. Although Roy initially seems to fall into their trap by accepting his friend request and asking for pictures in return for gifts, he eventually slips away, which later helps to absolve him of suspicion.

As the investigation continues without success, the family decides to celebrate Siya's birthday by offering charity to the underprivileged children. Keshav and Saurabh too get invited, as they have become well acquainted with the family by then. When Keshav approaches the family priest, Pandit Shastri, to get the prasad, he notices many threads tied around his wrist and a tattoo partially hidden beneath them. Keshav becomes extremely shocked by the observation, as these details match the description given by Suhana, Siya's younger daughter, who had seen the man taking her sister away. Keshav's suspicion deepens when Pandit Shastri casually says, "chalo, keep moving" and the lingering smell of mustard oil reinforces his intuition.

In order to gather more evidence, Keshav and Saurabh initially decide to consider following Pandit Shastri's car but soon realizes that it may alert him. Saurabh devises a brilliant idea to hide a GPS-enabled mobile inside the car and track his location through it. Keshav is impressed and Saurabh comes with a spare phone and a big power bank to ensure continuous tracking for a week. Keshav remarks:

I walked up with him to Shastri's vehicle. I looked around to ensure nobody is watching us and opened the rear door with a simple press of the latch. Saurabh looked at me gobsmacked, as I smiled at him. I lifted the rubber mats. I slammed the Innova door shut (*400 Days*308).

With the help of the GPS, the duo is able to trace Shastri's secret location. As Keshav later explains:

Shastri's Innova had done the midnight trip from Hauz Khas to the same spot in Morta for the three consecutive nights. I had come to visit the spot in the afternoon. Located between Ghaziabad and Modi Nagar, Morta is a collection of several small villages. The spot's GPS coordinates, accurate within twenty metre radius, brought me to the middle of a sugarcane field (*400 Days* 312).

By tracking the GPS, the detective duo locates Pandit Shastri's secret place. Assisted by Sub-Inspector Viren and Constable Billu, they reach the site and Keshav confronts Shastri. Shastri, like a trapped animal, attempts to attack Keshav, but is eventually restrained by the constable. Seizing the opportunity, Keshav collects the bunch of keys from Shastri and proceeds to rescue Siya. Keshav narrates:

I found Shstri's bunch of keys at the bottom of the stairs. I tried them one by one, until one of them worked. I opened the iron mesh door. I stepped into the basement, which felt like a dark dungeon. I switched on my phone flashlight. "What was the noise upstairs, ji?" A soft female voice startled me. I turned around. The phone light fell on a folding bed in front of me. A girl sat on the bed, partially covered in a quilt. Her hazel eyes glittered back at me (*400 Days* 320).

Thus, Siya's rescue is made possible through the effective use of technology, particularly GPS tracking, which plays a crucial role in advancing the investigation and ensuring a timely intervention.

Conclusion:

The analysis of *The Girl in Room No. 105*, *One Arranged Murder*, and *400 Days* demonstrates that Chetan Bhagat effectively incorporates modern communication technologies into his detective narratives. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Telegram, along with mobile phones and GPS tracking, are not merely incidental elements but serve as vital investigative tools that help people unravel the mystery. These digital platforms enable the protagonists to access information, trace suspects, and uncover hidden connections.

At the same time, Bhagat's use of technology reflects the prevalence of social media in the contemporary society. The amateur detectives in these novels are distinguished not by formal training but by their digital literacy, adaptability, and ability to navigate complex online networks. Furthermore, the integration of technology enhances narrative tension and realism, as investigations unfold through chats, messages, and location tracking, mirroring the lived experiences of modern readers. In conclusion, Bhagat's detective fiction illustrates how technology has redefined both the method and meaning of investigation in contemporary literature.

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