



Texting Trauma: Love, Grief, and Mental Health in the Works of Durjoy Datta

Mala Poria

Resource Person in Department of English, Sadhu Ramchand Murmu University of Jhargram, West Bengal, India

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Abstract— This paper investigates the interrelated themes of love, grief, and mental health in the novels of Indian popular fiction writer Durjoy Datta, with a focus on how trauma is experienced, expressed, and often silenced within the digital cultures of urban youth. Through a close reading of selected texts, the study argues that Datta's fiction serves as a cultural mirror to the shifting emotional landscapes of contemporary Indian society— where emotional repression, romantic disillusionment, and psychological vulnerability are deeply entangled with technology, gender roles, and neoliberal expectations of happiness and productivity. Using a multidisciplinary framework combining affect theory, trauma studies, and masculinity studies, the paper positions Datta's work as an essential yet underexplored contribution to modern Indian literature that demands critical attention for its portrayal of youth mental health and the affective labor embedded in love and loss.



Keywords— love, grief, mental health, trauma, digital youth culture.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Popular Fiction as Emotional Archive

Durjoy Datta, one of India's most commercially successful authors, has often been dismissed by literary purists for his use of accessible language, romantic tropes, and youth-centric themes. However, this very accessibility allows his work to function as a literary and emotional archive of 21st-century Indian urban youth. His novels chronicle the shifting emotional terrains of love, heartbreak, grief, and psychological crisis— making them not only culturally relevant but also psychologically significant. In a literary landscape that has long privileged elitist narratives, Datta's fiction brings to light the affective struggles of the millennial and Gen Z readers who grapple with digital intimacy, urban loneliness, and the performance of emotional stability. This study reframes his writing as an affective text, asking not what his work lacks in literary refinement, but what it offers in terms of cultural insight and emotional truth (Cvetkovich 13).

2. Romance and Rupture: Love as Loss

Romantic love in Datta's novels is never uncomplicated—it often acts as a catalyst for psychological deterioration rather than emotional fulfillment. In *The Girl of My Dreams*, for instance, the protagonist Daman experiences a traumatic accident that blurs the line between hallucination and memory, love and obsession (Datta, *Girl*). The narrative reveals how romance is haunted by loss, violence, and emotional disintegration.

Similarly, in *Till the Last Breath*, characters confront terminal illness and unfulfilled love, allowing Datta to reframe romance not as a trope of wholeness but as a site of grief, fragmentation, and vulnerability. These depictions challenge the myth of romantic closure, offering instead a vision of love as rupture—a recurring emotional wound that the characters carry within themselves, often without resolution. Such portrayals align with the view that modern love, especially within a capitalist and digitized society, is marked less by permanence and more by ephemerality and emotional risk (Ahmed 32).

3. Grieving Boys and Silent Screens: Masculinity and Emotional Repression

A striking feature in Datta's body of work is the consistent representation of emotionally repressed male characters. These are not traditional macho figures, but rather young men whose lives are marked by emotional fragility, heartbreak, and a deep inability to process grief. In *She Broke Up, I Didn't*, Deb is portrayed as a possessive and emotionally conflicted partner, whose heartbreak manifests not through tears but through denial, anger, and control (Datta, *She Broke Up*). This repression is symptomatic of a larger cultural malaise, where hegemonic masculinity, as theorized by R. W. Connell, discourages emotional openness and teaches men to equate vulnerability with weakness (Connell 77). Datta's male characters are often caught in the contradictions of wanting to feel deeply while being culturally forbidden from expressing such feelings. Their grief becomes internalized, surfacing in unhealthy relationships, self-sabotage, and a performative detachment that masks deep emotional scars.

4. Mental Health Matters: Depression, Therapy, and Social Stigma

Datta's novels also engage directly with the theme of mental health, challenging the stigma that still surrounds psychological illness in Indian society. Characters across multiple novels suffer from depression, anxiety, trauma, and suicidal ideation, yet these struggles are often minimized, dismissed, or hidden—both by those around them and by the characters themselves. In *If It's Not Forever*, the trauma of witnessing a bomb blast leads the protagonist on a journey of emotional unburdening, but also underscores the difficulty of narrating pain in a culture that discourages psychological vulnerability (Datta and Bhagat). Datta's fiction reflects the affective economy of neoliberal India, where young individuals are expected to be successful, attractive, and emotionally well-adjusted, even as they collapse under the pressures of romantic instability, academic failure, and family expectations. Drawing from Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, we see how unspoken trauma persists in characters' behaviors, dreams, and choices—repeating itself not as a memory but as a rupture in the present (Caruth 4).

5. Texts and Texting: Digital Intimacy and Disconnection

Perhaps one of the most innovative aspects of Datta's storytelling is his incorporation of digital technology as both a narrative device and a psychological metaphor. Text messages, social media posts, blog entries, and emails dominate his novels—not merely as modern forms of communication, but as emotional vessels and distancing mechanisms. Love confessions are sent over text;

apologies arrive via email; trauma is blogged, not spoken. In *The Girl of My Dreams*, memory and identity are mediated through online narratives and social media profiles, symbolizing the fragmentation of self in the digital age (Datta, *Girl*). This reflects the concerns of affect theorists like Sara Ahmed and Ann Cvetkovich, who argue that emotions circulate through media in ways that blur the boundary between public and private, intimacy and performance (Ahmed 43; Cvetkovich

58). Datta's use of digital communication dramatizes the affective dissonance of contemporary love—how we are constantly in touch yet deeply disconnected, always visible yet emotionally obscure.

6. Theoretical Frameworks

This study employs an interdisciplinary framework:

Affect Theory: Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* and Ann Cvetkovich's *Depression: A Public Feeling* help explore how emotions are socially constructed, historically conditioned, and politically charged.

Trauma Studies: Cathy Caruth's model of trauma as "unclaimed experience" helps examine how Datta's characters are haunted by what they cannot articulate (Caruth 3). - **Masculinity Studies:** R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Michael Kimmel's insights help interrogate the performance of manhood in Datta's protagonists (Connell 76; Kimmel 22).

Popular Culture Studies: Analyzing Datta's work as part of youth-oriented popular fiction helps bridge high/low literary divides and contextualize youth trauma and emotional labor.

II. CONCLUSION

Toward a New Masculinity in Indian Popular Fiction Durjoy Datta's fiction complicates the landscape of Indian popular literature by offering emotionally nuanced portraits of young men and women navigating the turbulent intersections of love, trauma, and identity. His novels may operate within the genre of commercial romance, but they offer valuable insights into the emotional lives of India's urban youth, many of whom experience love and loss mediated through technology, and often without the emotional vocabulary to process their pain. By placing Datta within the framework of affect, trauma, and masculinity studies, this paper argues for a critical reappraisal of popular fiction as a legitimate site of literary and psychological inquiry. Ultimately, Datta's work signals a shift toward a more vulnerable, fragmented, and emotionally expressive masculinity, and invites

readers to reconsider the costs of silence in a world that never stops talking.

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