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**Literary Theories**

**Love, Loss, and Emotional Vulnerability in Durjoy Datta's Of Course I Love You...Till I Find Someone Better**

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**Abstract:** This research paper examines the representation of love, loss, and emotional vulnerability in Durjoy Datta's novel *Of Course I Love You*. Frequently categorised as popular or commercial fiction, Datta's work has often been marginalised within academic literary discourse. This study argues that *Of Course I Love You* offers a psychologically nuanced and culturally significant portrayal of contemporary Indian youth grappling with emotional insecurity, fear of commitment, and the instability of modern romantic relationships. Through a close reading of the protagonist Deb, the paper foregrounds emotional vulnerability as a defining condition of modern intimacy. Drawing upon theoretical perspectives by Zygmunt Bauman, Anthony Giddens, and Ann Cvetkovich, the study situates the novel within broader discussions of liquid love, modern intimacy, and affective experience. By analysing narrative voice, character psychology, and key textual moments, the paper positions *Of Course I Love You* as an emotional archive that reflects the anxieties, losses, and emotional contradictions of urban Indian youth. The novel's urban setting and colloquial narrative style capture the influence of globalization, consumer culture, and digital communication on young adults' emotional lives. The text reveals how romantic relationships are shaped by impermanence, emotional risk, and self-protective detachment in a rapidly changing social landscape. In doing so, Datta's novel challenges the dismissal of popular fiction by demonstrating its capacity to document lived emotional realities and contemporary cultural transitions.

**Keywords:** Love, Loss, Emotional Vulnerability, Youth Identity, Popular Fiction.

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## Introduction

Durjoy Datta is among the most widely read contemporary Indian English novelists, particularly popular among young adult readers. His novels focus on romance, heartbreak, emotional confusion, and the lived experiences of urban Indian youth. Despite his popularity, Datta's fiction has often been dismissed by literary critics for its accessible language and mass appeal. Such dismissals overlook the cultural and emotional relevance of popular fiction, which frequently serves as a record of everyday emotional experiences. As Ann Cvetkovich argues, emotions such as anxiety, heartbreak, and emotional loss constitute important cultural texts that deserve critical attention (7). In this context, *Of Course I Love You* (2008) emerges as a significant novel that captures the affective realities of contemporary Indian youth navigating love and intimacy.

Unlike traditional romantic narratives that idealise love as stable and enduring, Datta presents love as uncertain, fragile, and emotionally risky. The novel centres on Deb, a young man who desires intimacy but fears emotional commitment. His confession, "I was afraid of promises because I didn't know how long I could keep them" (Datta 44), foregrounds emotional fear as a defining condition of modern relationships. This emotional instability resonates with Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid love," which describes modern relationships as fragile, temporary, and marked by a fear of long-term emotional bonds (Bauman 3). Deb's reluctance to commit reflects this liquidity, where emotional attachment is perceived as a potential threat to personal freedom.

Love in *Of Course I Love You* is inseparable from loss. Emotional detachment, casual relationships, and the avoidance of responsibility result in emotional emptiness and repeated heartbreak. Anthony Giddens' idea of the "pure relationship," sustained only as long as it provides personal satisfaction, helps explain the instability depicted in the novel (58). Deb's relationships are driven by emotional convenience rather than commitment, leading to the gradual erosion of trust and intimacy. Datta thus portrays love not as a source of security but as an emotionally negotiated experience shaped by individual fear and uncertainty. The theme of emotional vulnerability runs throughout the novel and shapes the construction of youth identity. Deb's admission, "I wanted her close, but not close enough to see my weaknesses" (Datta 67), captures the paradox of modern intimacy, where closeness is desired, but vulnerability is resisted. As Cvetkovich suggests, such everyday emotional struggles often remain culturally unacknowledged despite their deep psychological impact (7). By integrating love, loss, and emotional vulnerability, *Of Course I Love You* functions as an emotional archive that reflects the anxieties and contradictions of contemporary urban Indian youth.

This study employs selected theories of modern intimacy and emotional life to analyse *Of Course I Love You*. Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid love" is particularly relevant. Bauman argues that in modern societies, relationships are increasingly fluid and disposable, as individuals fear long-term emotional attachment (Bauman 3). Deb's reluctance to commit emotionally reflects this liquidity, as he repeatedly avoids permanence to protect himself from emotional pain. Anthony Giddens' concept of the "pure relationship" further illuminates the novel's depiction of intimacy. Giddens describes modern relationships as sustained only as long as they provide individual satisfaction rather than being anchored in obligation or permanence (Giddens 58). Deb's relationships exemplify this instability, as emotional engagement is constantly negotiated and easily withdrawn.

Ann Cvetkovich's theory of affect and everyday trauma provides another useful lens. Cvetkovich argues that experiences such as heartbreak, anxiety, and emotional loss constitute forms of trauma that are often culturally silenced (Cvetkovich 7). Datta's novel gives narrative space to these quiet emotional struggles, particularly male emotional vulnerability, which is rarely articulated in popular discourse.

### **Love as Emotional Conflict**

Love in *Of Course I Love You* is portrayed as an emotionally conflicted experience rather than an idealised romantic state. Datta presents love as a space of negotiation between desire and fear, where emotional attachment is constantly threatened by insecurity. Deb's understanding of love is shaped not by trust but by anxiety and emotional self-preservation. His statement, "Loving someone meant giving them the power to hurt me, and I was never sure I was ready for that" (Datta 71), reveals how intimacy is perceived as emotional risk. This perception closely aligns with Zygmunt Bauman's notion of "liquid love," where relationships are fragile and individuals avoid permanence to protect personal freedom (Bauman 3).

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Rather than portraying love as unconditional, Datta depicts it as conditional and unstable. Deb admits, "I loved her, but love alone never seemed enough to make me stay" (Datta 96). This emotional uncertainty reflects what Anthony Giddens describes as the instability of the modern "pure relationship," which exists only as long as it provides emotional satisfaction to both partners (58).

In such relationships, emotional responsibility is easily withdrawn, resulting in fragile bonds that collapse under emotional pressure. Datta also highlights the gendered dimension of emotional conflict.

Deb suppresses vulnerability to maintain emotional control, reflecting societal expectations that discourage men from expressing emotional fragility. This repression leads not to strength but to emotional fragmentation, reinforcing the novel's critique of modern romantic ideals. The fear of emotional permanence is central to Deb's understanding of love. Commitment, for him, is not an assurance of stability but a loss of emotional control. This fear transforms love into a conditional emotion, where attachment is carefully measured and emotionally limited. Deb's reluctance to define relationships reflects an underlying anxiety about emotional dependence, which aligns closely with Bauman's argument that modern individuals fear "being tied" because attachments restrict personal autonomy.

Datta illustrates how this fear prevents emotional fulfilment. By refusing emotional permanence, Deb remains trapped in repetitive cycles of desire and withdrawal. Love becomes emotionally incomplete, producing dissatisfaction rather than happiness. The novel suggests that the avoidance of emotional risk ultimately results in deeper emotional loss, as the absence of commitment erodes trust and intimacy. Deb's emotional world is structured around fear rather than fulfilment. His repeated hesitation to emotionally invest reveals a psychological pattern where love is experienced as anticipation of loss rather than emotional security. Instead of viewing relationships as spaces of emotional growth, Deb perceives them as potential sources of emotional damage. This anticipation of emotional pain governs his choices and reinforces his emotional withdrawal. Love, for Deb, becomes an experience that must be carefully controlled to avoid emotional exposure.

This pattern reflects what Ann Cvetkovich describes as the internalisation of emotional trauma in everyday life. Emotional vulnerability in the novel does not emerge through dramatic events but through quiet moments of hesitation, regret, and emotional distance. Deb's emotional fragility is thus cumulative, built through repeated acts of avoidance that gradually intensify his sense of loneliness.

Datta presents vulnerability not as a momentary weakness but as a sustained emotional condition shaping the protagonist's identity.

### **Loss as Emotional and Psychological Experience**

Loss in *Of Course I Love You* is not limited to physical separation but emerges as an emotional and psychological condition. Datta portrays loss as a recurring consequence of emotional avoidance and incomplete intimacy. Deb's reflection, "I kept losing people not because they left, but because I never truly held on" (Datta 123), illustrates how emotional withdrawal results in repeated loss. This form of loss resonates with Ann Cvetkovich's argument that everyday emotional pain, such as heartbreak and abandonment, constitutes a form of cultural trauma that often remains unrecognised (7). The novel suggests that emotional loss is intensified by the refusal to acknowledge vulnerability. Relationships end not because love is absent but because emotional engagement is partial and unstable. Datta thus critiques a culture that normalises emotional detachment while ignoring its psychological consequences. Loss becomes an internalised experience marked by regret, emptiness, and emotional dislocation.

Loss in *Of Course I Love You* is gradual rather than sudden. Datta portrays loss as the cumulative outcome of emotional negligence and partial engagement. Each avoided conversation, each emotional withdrawal, contributes to an invisible erosion of intimacy. Deb does not experience a single moment of devastation; instead, he lives with a continuous sense of emotional depletion. This slow accumulation of loss intensifies his emotional vulnerability and reinforces his fear of intimacy.

This portrayal aligns with Cvetkovich's idea that everyday emotional pain functions as a form of unacknowledged trauma. Deb's emotional losses remain largely internal, unexpressed, and unresolved. As a result, loss becomes an enduring psychological state rather than a recoverable event. Datta thus redefines loss as an emotional condition embedded within modern romantic relationships.

### **Emotional Vulnerability and Youth Identity**

Emotional vulnerability is central to the construction of youth identity in *Of Course I Love You*. Datta presents vulnerability as a deeply contested emotional state, shaped by fear of exposure and loss of control. Deb's confession, "Being vulnerable felt like giving away control, and control was the only thing I had" (Datta 154), reveals how emotional self-protection becomes a survival strategy. This resistance to vulnerability reflects Bauman's observation that modern individuals fear emotional dependence because it threatens personal autonomy (Bauman 9). At the same time, the novel exposes the psychological cost of suppressing vulnerability.

Emotional repression leads to isolation, anxiety, and fractured relationships. As Cvetkovich suggests, such everyday emotional struggles form an “archive of feelings” that documents collective emotional experiences often ignored by dominant cultural narratives (7). Datta’s novel gives voice to these silenced emotions, particularly male emotional vulnerability, which remains underrepresented in Indian English fiction. By linking emotional vulnerability with youth identity, *Of Course I Love You* captures the emotional contradictions faced by young adults negotiating love in a rapidly changing social environment. The novel thus aligns with contemporary critical discussions on affect, intimacy, and emotional well-being.

Deb’s resistance to vulnerability operates as a form of emotional self-protection. He equates emotional openness with exposure to hurt and betrayal, choosing emotional distance as a defence mechanism. However, this strategy fails to provide emotional safety. Instead, it isolates him from meaningful connection and intensifies his internal conflict. Vulnerability, when denied, transforms into emotional numbness rather than strength.

Bauman’s concept of liquid love helps explain this paradox. In attempting to avoid emotional pain, Deb adopts emotional fluidity, refusing stable attachments. Yet this fluidity does not eliminate suffering; it merely postpones and multiplies it. Datta’s narrative suggests that emotional vulnerability, though painful, is essential for authentic intimacy. The refusal to be vulnerable results in emotional fragmentation and identity confusion.

The emotional conflicts depicted in *Of Course I Love You* must also be understood within the context of cultural transition. Contemporary Indian youth inhabit a space between traditional values that emphasise commitment and modern ideals that prioritise freedom and self-interest. This cultural tension generates emotional anxiety, as young individuals struggle to reconcile personal desires with emotional responsibility.

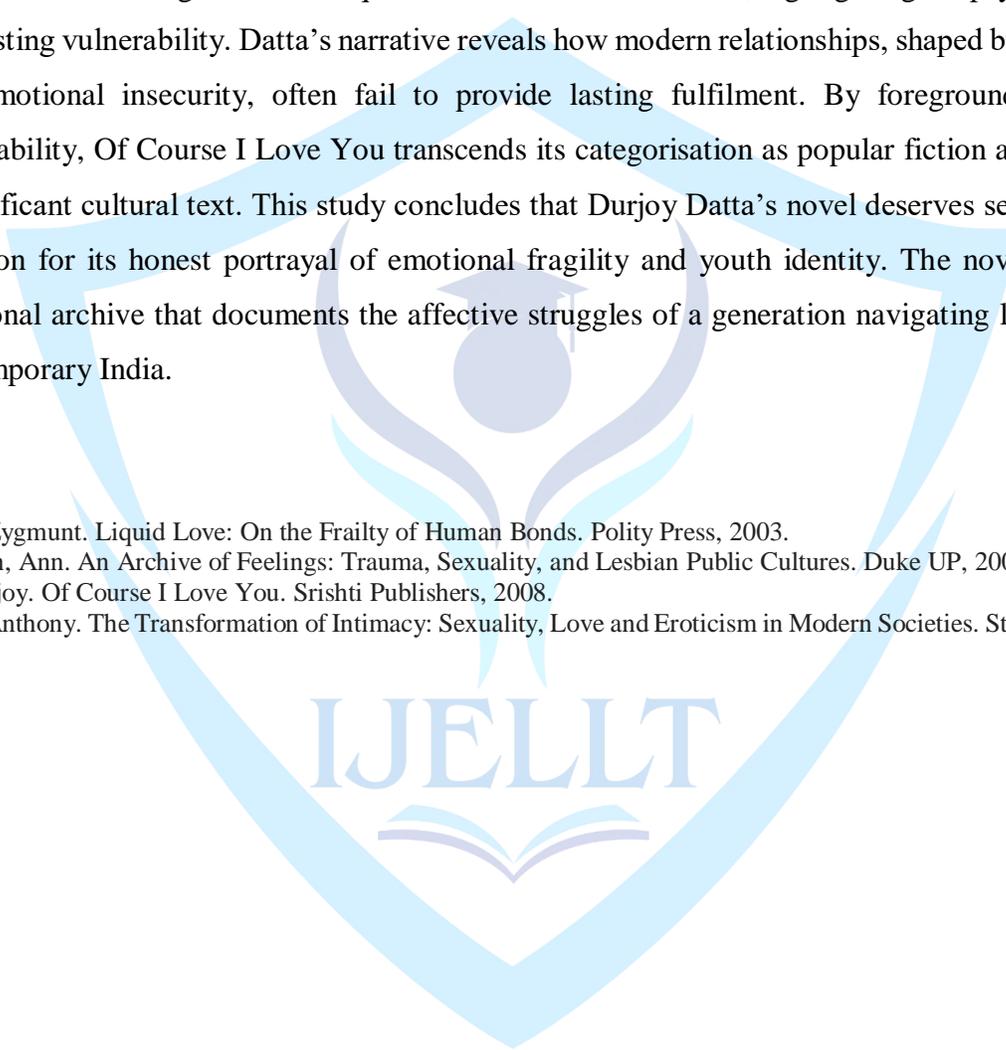
Datta captures this transitional moment by presenting characters who are neither entirely traditional nor fully modern. Their emotional confusion reflects a society in flux, where stable emotional frameworks are replaced by uncertainty. The novel thus serves as a cultural text that documents the emotional consequences of rapid social change, particularly for young adults navigating love and identity in post-liberalisation India.

## Conclusion

Of Course I Love You offers a nuanced exploration of love, loss, and emotional vulnerability in contemporary Indian society. Through the character of Deb, Durjoy Datta captures the emotional contradictions faced by modern youth—desiring intimacy while fearing commitment. The novel challenges romantic idealism by presenting love as fragile, emotionally demanding, and deeply uncertain. Loss emerges as a consequence of emotional avoidance, highlighting the psychological cost of resisting vulnerability. Datta's narrative reveals how modern relationships, shaped by individualism and emotional insecurity, often fail to provide lasting fulfilment. By foregrounding emotional vulnerability, *Of Course I Love You* transcends its categorisation as popular fiction and functions as a significant cultural text. This study concludes that Durjoy Datta's novel deserves serious academic attention for its honest portrayal of emotional fragility and youth identity. The novel stands as an emotional archive that documents the affective struggles of a generation navigating love and loss in contemporary India.

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