

**The Costs of Success: Psychological Trauma and Class Satire in Razdan's
*Death of a Gentleman***

Dr. P. Sasikumar

Assistant Professor (English)

Department of Social Sciences

SRM College of Agricultural Sciences

SRM Institute of Science and Technology

Baburayanpettai, Chengalpattu – 603201

Tamil Nadu, India

sasiteach89@gmail.com

Abstract

This study analyses Riva Razdan's *Death of a Gentleman* (2025) as a hybrid story that combines a psychological thriller and social satire to scrutinise the unstable costs of ambition in modern Indian culture. The novel focuses on Yuvraaj Khanna, a self-made entrepreneur whose rapid ascent in the start-up industry is undermined by paternal estrangement and the enigmatic death of his father, illustrating the psychological consequences of success. Razdan places Khanna's personal breakdown within the broader contexts of class privilege and top achievement in Mumbai's elite society, highlighting the unresolved pain of abandonment. The novel employs incisive satire to reveal the vanity, ethical compromises, and emptiness of status-oriented relationships. At the same time, suspenseful narrative techniques highlight the vulnerability of identity among the forces of globalisation. Through the amalgamation of genre clichés, Razdan broadens the horizons of Indian English fiction, presenting a narrative that examines personal ambition and structural injustices. This study contends that *Death of a Gentleman* illustrates how modern Indian literature navigates the convergence of psychological anguish and class satire, finally exposing the moral and emotional repercussions of prosperity in a culture where allure masks treachery.

Keywords: Riva Razdan, *Death of a Gentleman*, psychological anguish, class satire, culture

Introduction

Riva Razdan is a screenwriter for Dharma Productions, Balaji Telefilms and Alchemy Productions. She is the author of the books *Arzu* (2021) and *The Naani Diaries* (2023), which is in development as a feature film by the Oscar-nominated Meralta Films (Indian Matchmaking, I Am Ready Warden) in Hollywood. *Death of a Gentleman* (2025) is a major turning point in Razdan's creative body, as it represents a transition from the romantic-feminist themes that she explored in her earlier works to the combined domain of psychological thriller and social satire found in her most recent work. This change is known for its thematic depth and its genre. In contrast to Razdan's earlier works, which focused on topics such as love, gender, and self-discovery, *Death of a Gentleman* digs deeper into the more sinister sides of ambition, alienation, and social privilege in a world that is becoming increasingly global.

Set against the backdrop of Mumbai's aristocratic circles, the story depicts the inconsistencies that exist within the start-up sector of India's innovation industry. Yuvraaj Khanna is at the centre of this movement. His company's approximately billion-dollar valuation exemplifies the aspirations of a growing economic elite, making him a self-made entrepreneur whose rapid climb is indicative of his success. Yet, unresolved trauma, such as the paternal and the mysterious death of his estranged father scars Khanna's psyche, leads him into a murder investigation. This is the source of this character's inability to be successful. The novel weaves together personal anguish and structural criticism, illuminating the ways in which ambition, despite being praised as a symbol of progress, can simultaneously erode psychological stability and ethical immaculateness.

Razdan's satire enhances the potency of this critique by revealing the superficiality and vacuity of Mumbai's elite society. Khanna's engagement to Sanjanaa Gandhi and his involvement in the affluent milieu of Malabar Hill exemplify the tendency for relationships to become transactional, wherein ethics are compromised for social standing. The story highlights the performative nature of wealth and privilege through these events. The thriller's premise employs tension to underscore a social critique, exposing the fragility of identity amid the demands of globalisation.

Razdan places *Death of a Gentleman* into the dynamic world of Indian English literature by incorporating psychological profundity and piercing sarcasm into the character of the literary work. When it comes to examining human ambition and structural inequality, the work is an example of the fusion of genres, since it combines aspects of thrillers with social commentary. Razdan enhances postcolonial discourse by emphasising the complex repercussions of success, which are not only

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financial or social but also fundamentally psychological, in a society grappling with tradition, modernity, and global ambition.

Ambition and the Fragility of Success

Yuvraaj Khanna's meteoric rise in the start-up industry is illustrative of India's burgeoning entrepreneurial class, which is renowned for its inventiveness, disruptiveness, and ability to challenge traditional wealth hierarchies. The worth of his company, which is getting close to one billion dollars, places him fully into the idealistic framework of global capitalism. This framework regards entrepreneurial performance as both a personal victory and a national icon of growth. In the framework of this discussion, Khanna is a paradigmatic example of the 'gentleman entrepreneur', a contemporary model whose achievements are measured not just by financial measures but also by social mobility and cultural capital.

On the other hand, Razdan downplays this accomplishment by highlighting the inherent weakness of the feat. It is not shown as a solid or stable attainment in *Death of a Gentleman*; rather, it is portrayed as a flimsy construct that is susceptible to psychological trauma, familial alienation, and the scrutiny of high society. The desire that Khanna has, although it appears to be empowering, is obscured by the uncertainties and unresolved problems that are a result of her father's absence. His ascension is overshadowed by the conviction that achievement cannot completely atone for emotional deprivation, nor can it destroy the identity rifts caused by abandonment and treachery. This view continues to make his ascent difficult to comprehend. Razdan investigates the paradoxical nature of ambition, which, while it can be a source of empowerment and recognition, can also lead to feelings of vulnerability and isolation.

The novel aims at the uncompromising pursuit of achievement, arguing that it is a destructive influence that degrades human integrity. In Khanna's business, the quest for valuation and status takes precedence over considerations of morality and emotional well-being, which results in Khanna's commercial identity being entangled with ethical compromises. A performative act is an outward representation of achievement that masks interior fragility, according to Razdan's theory, which states that when ambition is pursued without ethical accountability, it transforms into a performative aspect. The mocking portrayal of Mumbai's elite contributes to the play's performativity as they extol Khanna's achievement while remaining blind to the psychological ramifications of his success.

Razdan contextualises Khanna's story within the larger framework of postcolonial discourse by highlighting the vulnerability of ambition. Typically, this discourse depicts success as a clash between local identities and global objectives. Razdan's *Death of Gentleman* highlights the fact that

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ambition in a globalising India serves not just as a method of empowerment but also as a site of vulnerability. It is a place where the demands of valuation, acknowledgement, and class mobility show the cracks of identity, revealing how these pressures can lead to feelings of estrangement and psychological trauma for individuals navigating their ambitions. At the end of the novel, *Death of a Gentleman* reveals that the consequences of success extend beyond the areas of finance and society and that they fundamentally disrupt the fundamental aspects of an individual's character.

Estrangement and Psychological Trauma

The central heart of *Death of a Gentleman* is alienation, which serves as both a personal wound and a narrative catalyst. This theme is at the centre of the story. The fact that Yuvraaj Khanna's father abandoned him when he was a youngster has left scars that have shaped his psychological landscape. These scars have an impact on his aspirations, relationships, and sense of identity. As a result of the untimely and suspicious death of the elder Khanna, these scars are reopened, and the protagonist is forced to confront feelings of loss, bitterness, and trauma that have not healed. This familial rupture is not merely a private concern but rather a structural condition that destabilises the ascension of the protagonist. This episode demonstrates how unresolved emotional fractures may undermine even the most recognised success stories. Razdan uses this trauma to his advantage.

The novel transforms personal loss into a narrative of suspense and moral reckoning through the prism of a psychological thriller. It accomplishes this feat by emphasising the estrangement experience. The process of negotiating identity in the shadow of treachery is not merely an act of mourning for Khanna; rather, it is a confrontation with the loss of his father. The thriller's framework, which situates the traumatic experience within a broader context of secrecy, peril, and mistrust, intensifies its impact. Razdan underscores that estrangement is not a static phenomenon, but rather a dynamic one that resurfaces at critical junctures to undermine the protagonist's self-perception.

The story portrays a scenario where the demands of social performance intensify psychological trauma. While Khanna's fragmented identity makes it difficult for him to assimilate into Mumbai's elite circles, he is required to adapt to the standards of wealth and privilege to access these circles. To highlight the mismatch that exists between social recognition and internal security, the conflict that exists between outward achievement and inward vulnerability is brought to light. According to Razdan, traumatic experiences cannot be obliterated by ambition or fortune; rather, they continue to exist as an underlying stream that influences decisions, relationships, and moral choices within an individual.

The fragility of identity in civilisations that are bargaining between tradition and modernity is reflected in Khanna's alienation, which is viewed from a postcolonial-era perspective. As a result of the demands of globalisation, mobility, and class aspiration, familial relationships, which were formerly seen to be the foundation of cultural continuity, are currently experiencing strain. As a result, estrangement becomes a symbol of a more widespread cultural state, in which individuals are caught between the inherited structures of belonging and the dislocating pressures of modern aspiration. The story told by Razdan indicates that psychological trauma is not only a personal experience but also a systemic one. It also sheds light on the vulnerabilities that come along with the quest of achievement in a culture that is characterised by rapid development.

Satire of Mumbai's Elite

Razdan's insightful satire of Mumbai's elite, which serves as both a narrative device and a social commentary, is one of the most standout aspects of *Death of a Gentleman*. It is also one of the most striking elements. In the story, the inconsistencies of high society are brought to light through Yuvraaj Khanna's engagement to Sanjana Gandhi and his subsequent entrée into the glamorous circles of Malabar Hill. Wealth and privilege are often used as indicators of success, but they frequently disguise insecurity, vanity, and moral compromise instead, revealing the underlying emptiness and disconnection from genuine human values that characterise this high society. The satire targets a class obsessed with appearances yet detached from the realities of emotional and ethical obligation, using incisive, sardonic, and tongue-in-cheek humour. It highlights the absurdities of its members.

Razdan portrays the elite as being tone-deaf to the struggles of people who are outside of their privileged environment by using exaggerated dialogues, fake social rituals, and the quest for status as a means of accumulating power. The elite continue to be preoccupied with reputation, gossip, and the upkeep of social hierarchies, while Khanna is struggling with grief and mistrust on a daily basis. The investigation into the murder transforms the narrative prism into a reflection of the superficiality of privilege. This juxtaposition shows the hollowness of such connections by highlighting the fact that allegiance and morality are sacrificed for the sake of prestige in relationships that are motivated by status.

The novel's satirical feature also critiques the performative nature of achievement in a globalising India. Khanna's success as an entrepreneur is hailed by the top elite not for its innovativeness or impact on society but rather for its symbolic significance as a ticket into their exclusive circles. In this particular setting, Razdan says that success is less about accomplishment and

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more about assimilating into a society that is characterised by vanity and show. By exposing the narrative of ambition's cooperation with a class system that places a higher value on appearances than sincerity, the satire creates a sense of instability in the narrative.

Razdan's satire places *Death of a Gentleman* within the context of a tradition of social critique in Indian English fiction, where narratives frequently question the contradictions of modernity and privilege. Razdan reveals the ethical decay that lies beneath the sparkling facade of Mumbai's elite by combining humour, irony, and exaggeration. She thus demonstrates that the quest for status is not only pointless but also detrimental to human relationships and the integrity of morality.

Genre Hybridisation and Postcolonial Discourse

The purposeful blend of psychological thriller and social satire in *Death of a Gentleman* is one of the most intriguing aspects of the novel. This combination challenges the conventional categorisations that are prevalent in Indian English literature. The story told by Razdan defies easy categorisation: the suspenseful investigation into the death of Yuvraaj Khanna's father serves as the framework of a thriller, while the scathing condemnation of Mumbai's elite infuses the acerbity of satire into the story. Razdan's fusion of genres is both stylistic and thematic, allowing him to explore ambition's internal landscape and privilege's external social frames.

The elements of the thriller heighten Khanna's psychological breakdown by dramatising his sense of alienation and agony through suspense, secrecy, and ethical ambiguity. The genre's defining characteristics, including elements of mystery, investigation, and tension, reflect the uncertainty surrounding Khanna's identity. In addition to this, Razdan highlights the unstable nature of riches in the face of unresolved heartache, illustrating how wealth can exacerbate emotional turmoil and lead to further alienation. By exposing the link between ambition and vanity and performativity, the use of comedy simultaneously weakens the narrative of ambition. The difference between the two genres leads to the development of a multilayered story that reflects both human striving and society's injustices. This work serves as an illustration of the intersection of personal tragedy and social criticism in modern Indian writing. The contrast between the two genres causes this intersection.

Through the lens of postcolonial theory, Razdan's hybridisation serves as an illustration of the dynamic relationship that exists between local reality and worldwide literary standards. The suspense novel, which is traditionally associated with Western crime and suspense traditions, is reinterpreted in the context of Indian culture to emphasise the alienation of families and the tensions between social classes. On the other hand, satire makes use of indigenous traditions of irony and social critique to address the paradoxes that are associated with India's elite within the context of a globalising

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economy. When taken as a whole, these genres shed light on the tensions that exist between aspiration and ethics, tradition and modernity, and local identity and global ambition.

Razdan broadens the frontiers of Indian English literature by combining elements of satire and thriller in his novel *Death of a Gentleman*. This places the novel into the larger context of postcolonial discourse. This piece of work exemplifies how genre hybridisation serves as an important tool, enabling authors to investigate the complexities of ambition, alienation, and privilege in societies that are undergoing rapid change. In addition to highlighting the implications of achievement as both personal vulnerability and structural critique, Razdan's work contributes to the growing canon of postcolonial literature.

Conclusion

In the novel *Death of a Gentleman*, written by Riva Razdan, the author depicts the direction that Indian English fiction is taking as it develops. In this novel, themes of ambition, alienation, and identity intersect with strong critiques of class and ethics. Through Yuvraaj Khanna's deterioration, the story shows the psychological toll that success has on individuals, highlighting the vulnerabilities that are connected with achieving success in business in a modern India that is becoming more globalised. When success, which is typically praised as a symbol of empowerment, is revealed to be precarious, it is overshadowed by grief that has not been addressed and moral compromise. The author Razdan investigates the paradox of ambition, which is that it can lead to advancement and recognition, but at the same time, it can undermine the foundation of one's identity.

The scathing criticism that the novel offers of Mumbai's upper-class citizens sheds light on the vanity, emptiness, and performative features of wealth. Razdan attacks the superficiality of status-orientated relationships by employing sarcasm and hyperbole. He does this by situating Khanna's personal anguish within a larger debate about the moral deterioration of elite culture. The narrative is strengthened by the combination of psychological thriller and social satire, which exemplifies how the hybridisation of genres may highlight both personal vulnerability and structural inequities. From a postcolonial perspective, *Death of a Gentleman* contributes to the ongoing conversations that are taking place about globalisation, privilege, and the fragmented identities of individuals. Razdan incorporates elements of a thriller with social criticism into her work, placing it within a worldwide literary context while ensuring she is aware of local themes like class, ambition, and the separation experienced by families. In the end, the work indicates that the cost of achievement extends beyond the areas of finance and society. It penetrates profoundly into psychological dimensions and reveals the weakness of ambition that lies beneath the flashy veneer of wealth and praise, illustrating how the

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pursuit of success can lead to personal and familial disintegration. As a result of this, Razdan expands the spectrum of themes that may be found in Indian fiction written in English and brings attention to the moral and emotional complexities that are associated with success in contemporary society.

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