



"Life-Long Learning Initiatives and Modern Relationships: A Critical Study of Durjoy Datta's Perspective"

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Abstract

The concept of life-long learning has evolved significantly from its traditional association with vocational education and professional development to encompass broader dimensions of personal, emotional, and social growth. At the same time, modern interpersonal relationships have become increasingly complex because of globalization, digital communication, changing gender roles, and evolving cultural expectations. This study examines the relationship between these two developments through a critical analysis of the selected novels of contemporary Indian author Durjoy Datta. Rather than treating love as a fixed emotional state, Datta's fiction frequently portrays relationships as dynamic processes that require continuous learning, self-reflection, emotional resilience, and mutual adaptation. Drawing upon theories of life-long learning proposed by UNESCO, Mezirow, and Illeris, alongside sociological perspectives developed by Giddens, Bauman, Beck, and Illouz, this research argues that successful modern relationships depend upon the willingness of individuals to engage in continuous personal transformation. Employing qualitative textual analysis, the study examines recurring themes including emotional intelligence, digital communication, mental health, gender equality, long-distance relationships, and identity formation. The research further proposes the concept of Relational Life-Long Learning (RLLL) as a theoretical framework for understanding how contemporary couples negotiate changing social realities through continuous learning and adaptation. The study contributes to literary criticism by positioning Durjoy Datta's fiction within wider discussions of adult learning, relationship sociology, and contemporary Indian popular literature.

Keywords: Life-Long Learning, Modern Relationships, Durjoy Datta, Emotional Intelligence, Contemporary Indian Fiction

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The twenty-first century has witnessed profound transformations in the nature of education, identity, and interpersonal relationships. Rapid technological advancement, economic globalization, urbanization, and digital communication have fundamentally altered the ways individuals learn, work, and establish emotional connections. These developments have challenged many traditional assumptions regarding relationships, family structures, and personal growth. Consequently, scholars from education, sociology, psychology, and literary studies have increasingly recognized that the ability to adapt continuously has become one of the defining characteristics of contemporary life.

The concept of life-long learning emerged prominently during the second half of the twentieth century through the work of UNESCO and international educational organizations. Initially, it referred primarily to the continuous acquisition of knowledge and professional skills throughout an individual's life. As economies became increasingly knowledge-driven, governments and educational institutions encouraged citizens to update their competencies in response to technological and occupational change. However, recent scholarship has expanded the meaning of life-long learning beyond employment and formal education. Contemporary theorists argue that learning also involves emotional development, ethical awareness, interpersonal communication, and critical self-reflection, all of which enable individuals to respond effectively to changing personal and social circumstances.

This broader understanding of learning has particular relevance for modern interpersonal relationships. Romantic partnerships today exist within social environments characterized by unprecedented mobility, digital connectivity, shifting gender expectations, and increasing individual autonomy. Unlike earlier generations, contemporary couples frequently negotiate careers across different cities, manage relationships through digital platforms, balance professional ambitions with personal commitments, and encounter diverse cultural influences that continuously reshape their expectations regarding intimacy and partnership. These circumstances require far more than emotional attachment alone. They demand communication skills, psychological flexibility, empathy, resilience, and a willingness to reconsider previously accepted beliefs and behavioural patterns.

Anthony Giddens (1992) describes this transformation through the concept of the pure relationship, which exists primarily because both individuals continue to derive satisfaction from it rather than because of external social obligations. Similarly, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue that modern love is characterized by uncertainty and constant negotiation, as individuals can no longer rely upon fixed social scripts that previously governed marriage and family life. Zygmunt Bauman (2003) further observes that relationships in contemporary society have become increasingly fragile because consumer culture encourages temporary commitments and individual gratification. These perspectives collectively suggest that maintaining meaningful relationships in modern society requires continuous learning rather than passive adherence to inherited traditions.

Within the Indian context, these changes have been particularly visible among urban middle-class youth. Economic liberalization, rapid expansion of higher education, digital technology, and increasing workforce participation have transformed social expectations surrounding marriage, gender roles, and personal identity. Young adults increasingly seek relationships founded upon emotional compatibility, mutual respect, and individual fulfilment instead of solely familial or economic considerations. Consequently, contemporary Indian literature has begun documenting these changing experiences, providing valuable insight into the psychological realities of modern relationships.

Among contemporary Indian popular novelists, Durjoy Datta occupies a distinctive position because of his sustained engagement with the emotional lives of young urban Indians. Since the publication of *Of Course I Love You... Till I*

Find Someone Better! (2008), Datta has consistently explored issues including emotional vulnerability, mental health, career pressures, long-distance relationships, family expectations, and changing gender dynamics. Although often categorized as a commercial fiction writer, his novels address several important sociological and psychological concerns that remain highly relevant to contemporary discussions of identity and interpersonal relationships.

Rather than presenting romantic love as an idealized emotional experience, Datta frequently portrays relationships as evolving processes that require patience, communication, compromise, and emotional maturity. His protagonists regularly confront personal insecurities, unresolved trauma, social expectations, and rapidly changing life circumstances that compel them to reconsider their assumptions about love and commitment. This recurring emphasis upon adaptation and personal transformation makes his work particularly suitable for examining relationships through the theoretical framework of life-long learning.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although life-long learning has become an established field within educational research, its application to intimate human relationships remains relatively underexplored. Most existing scholarship concentrates on employability, professional competence, technological literacy, or adult education. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how continuous learning contributes to emotional resilience, relationship sustainability, and personal development within romantic partnerships.

Similarly, literary scholarship has devoted limited critical attention to Indian commercial fiction despite its enormous readership and cultural influence. Authors such as Durjoy Datta have significantly shaped contemporary understandings of romance among young readers, yet their works remain underrepresented within mainstream literary criticism. As a result, important insights regarding emotional learning, identity formation, and changing relationship practices have not received adequate scholarly examination.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating how Durjoy Datta's fiction represents continuous learning as an essential component of successful modern relationships.

1.3 Research Questions

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How has the concept of life-long learning evolved beyond vocational education to include emotional and relational development?
2. In what ways do Durjoy Datta's novels represent the changing nature of modern relationships?
3. How do Datta's characters acquire emotional competencies necessary for sustaining intimate relationships?
4. Can the principles of life-long learning provide a useful theoretical framework for understanding relationship development in contemporary Indian fiction?
5. What contribution can literary studies make to broader discussions concerning adult learning and emotional development?

1.4 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine the relationship between life-long learning and modern interpersonal relationships through a critical analysis of the selected novels of Durjoy Datta. The study seeks to establish that learning is not confined to educational institutions or professional environments but also functions as a continuous process within intimate relationships.

The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the concept and evolution of life-long learning from educational and sociological perspectives.
2. To analyse the representation of modern relationships in selected novels of Durjoy Datta.
3. To investigate how emotional intelligence, self-reflection, communication, and adaptability contribute to relationship sustainability.
4. To explore the influence of digital technology, career aspirations, gender roles, and mental health on contemporary romantic relationships.
5. To develop a conceptual framework that interprets intimate relationships as processes of continuous learning and mutual transformation.

1.5 Research Hypothesis

Although literary research is primarily interpretative, the present study is guided by the following propositions:

H₁: Durjoy Datta's novels portray successful modern relationships as processes of continuous emotional learning rather than fixed romantic ideals.

H₂: The principles of life-long learning provide an effective theoretical framework for interpreting interpersonal growth in contemporary Indian popular fiction.

H₃: Emotional adaptability, rather than romantic idealism, constitutes the central factor sustaining relationships in Datta's narratives.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this research extends across multiple academic disciplines, including literary studies, sociology, psychology, and adult education.

From the perspective of literary criticism, this research contributes to the growing recognition of Indian popular fiction as an important site for understanding contemporary social change. While commercial fiction has often been dismissed as entertainment literature, it reflects the aspirations, anxieties, and lived experiences of millions of young readers. Analysing Durjoy Datta's novels therefore offers valuable insights into changing notions of intimacy, identity, and emotional development in urban India.

From the perspective of adult education, the study expands the understanding of life-long learning beyond employability. Existing scholarship predominantly associates life-long learning with professional development and economic competitiveness. This research argues that emotional competence, communication skills, empathy, and self-awareness should also be recognised as important dimensions of continuous learning.

The study is equally significant for relationship studies. Contemporary relationships increasingly encounter challenges arising from career mobility, digital communication, changing gender expectations, and mental health concerns. Understanding these challenges through the lens of continuous learning provides a more comprehensive explanation of relationship sustainability than traditional compatibility models.

Finally, the research contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by integrating educational theory with literary analysis. Such an approach demonstrates how fictional narratives can illuminate broader questions concerning adult learning, emotional intelligence, and social transformation.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The present study focuses on selected novels written by Durjoy Datta between 2008 and 2018. Particular attention is given to works including *Of Course I Love You... Till I Find Someone Better!*, *The Boy Who Loved*, *The Boy with a Broken Heart*, *When Only Love Remains*, and *The Perfect Us*.

The research concentrates primarily on the representation of urban middle-class relationships in contemporary India. It examines themes such as emotional maturity, communication, mental health, gender equality, long-distance relationships, career aspirations, and identity formation.

The study does not attempt to analyse the entirety of Indian popular fiction. Instead, it uses Durjoy Datta as a representative contemporary novelist whose works consistently engage with the emotional realities of young adults.

Furthermore, the concept of life-long learning is interpreted broadly to include psychological, emotional, and interpersonal learning alongside formal educational processes.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

Like any academic investigation, the present study has certain limitations.

First, the analysis is limited to selected novels by Durjoy Datta and therefore cannot be considered representative of all contemporary Indian writers.

Second, the study employs qualitative textual analysis rather than empirical surveys or interviews. Consequently, its findings should be understood as interpretative rather than statistically generalisable.

Third, because life-long learning is examined through literary texts, the conclusions primarily concern representations of relationships rather than direct observations of social behaviour.

Finally, interpretations presented in this study remain open to alternative critical readings from feminist, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, or cultural studies perspectives.

1.9 Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative interpretative methodology, combining literary criticism with concepts derived from adult education and sociology.

Primary Sources

The primary sources consist of selected novels by Durjoy Datta:

* *Of Course I Love You... Till I Find Someone Better!* (2008)

- * She Broke Up, I Didn't! (2010)
- * When Only Love Remains (2014)
- * The Boy Who Loved (2017)
- * The Boy with a Broken Heart (2017)
- * The Perfect Us (2018)

These novels have been selected because they consistently examine emotional development, changing relationship dynamics, and psychological growth.

Secondary Sources

Secondary materials include books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, dissertations, and reports published by UNESCO concerning life-long learning.

The study also draws upon theoretical contributions by Anthony Giddens, Jack Mezirow, Knud Illeris, Zygmunt Bauman, Eva Illouz, Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, and Pierre Bourdieu.

Method of Analysis

The study employs thematic textual analysis.

Recurring themes such as emotional intelligence, communication, gender equality, identity formation, digital intimacy, psychological resilience, and continuous learning are identified and critically examined across the selected novels.

Rather than treating literary narratives as direct reflections of society, the study analyses them as cultural texts that both represent and shape contemporary understandings of relationships.

The findings are interpreted through established theories of adult learning and modern sociology to develop an interdisciplinary understanding of relationship development.

1.10 Chapterisation

The thesis is organised into five chapters.

Chapter One introduces the research problem, objectives, methodology, significance, and scope of the study.

Chapter Two reviews existing scholarship on life-long learning, relationship sociology, adult education, and contemporary Indian popular fiction.

Chapter Three analyses the selected novels of Durjoy Datta through the theoretical perspectives discussed in the previous chapter.

Chapter Four develops the proposed framework of Relational Life-Long Learning (RLLL) and discusses its implications for literary criticism and adult education.

Chapter Five presents the major findings, conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature (Part I)

2.1 The Evolution of Life-Long Learning: From Continuing Education to Human Development

Life-long learning has become one of the most influential educational concepts of the modern era. Although contemporary policy discussions often associate it with employability and workforce development, its intellectual origins reveal a far broader humanistic vision. The concept has evolved through several distinct phases, reflecting changing educational philosophies, economic conditions, and social expectations.

The earliest systematic articulation of life-long learning emerged through UNESCO's Faure Report, *Learning to Be* (1972). Published during a period of rapid technological and social change, the report challenged conventional understandings of education as a process confined to childhood or formal schooling. Instead, it argued that learning should continue throughout the entire human lifespan and should promote the holistic development of individuals rather than merely preparing them for employment. The report viewed education as a continuous process that enables people to adapt intellectually, socially, morally, and emotionally to changing circumstances.

Unlike traditional educational models that emphasized knowledge transmission, the Faure Report proposed that education should cultivate autonomous, reflective, and socially responsible citizens. Human development, rather than economic productivity, was regarded as the central purpose of education. This philosophical shift represented a significant departure from earlier industrial models of schooling, which primarily prepared individuals for predetermined occupational roles. As Elfert (2015) observes, the Faure Report established life-long learning as a global educational ideal grounded in democratic participation, social justice, and human emancipation rather than vocational training alone.

Nearly twenty-five years later, UNESCO expanded this vision through the Delors Report, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996). The report identified four interconnected pillars of education:

- * Learning to Know
- * Learning to Do
- * Learning to Live Together
- * Learning to Be

These pillars transformed life-long learning into a comprehensive philosophy of personal and social development. Particularly significant was the emphasis on learning to live together, which recognized that education should foster empathy, cooperation, intercultural understanding, and peaceful coexistence. Rather than limiting learning to cognitive achievement, the Delors Commission emphasized emotional maturity and social responsibility as essential educational outcomes.

From the perspective of the present study, the fourth pillar—learning to be—is especially relevant. It conceptualizes education as a lifelong process of identity formation through which individuals continuously reconstruct their values, beliefs, relationships, and sense of self. Such an understanding resonates strongly with the dynamics of contemporary intimate relationships, where individuals repeatedly negotiate changing identities throughout adulthood.

Recent scholarship has continued to highlight the enduring relevance of these UNESCO reports. Although educational policies have increasingly emphasized economic competitiveness and labour-market adaptability, many researchers argue that the original humanistic vision of life-long learning remains essential for addressing the social and emotional

challenges of contemporary societies. Elfert (2015), for example, contends that UNESCO's conception of life-long learning represented a political and ethical vision centred upon human flourishing rather than economic efficiency.

2.2 Transformative Learning Theory

While UNESCO established the philosophical foundation of life-long learning, Jack Mezirow provided one of its most influential psychological explanations through Transformative Learning Theory.

According to Mezirow, adults do not merely accumulate information throughout life. Rather, they periodically reconstruct their fundamental assumptions about themselves and the world. Transformative learning occurs when individuals critically examine beliefs that have previously guided their actions and subsequently develop more inclusive, reflective, and adaptable perspectives.

Central to Mezirow's theory is the concept of the frame of reference. These frames consist of cultural assumptions, personal experiences, and deeply internalized values that shape how individuals interpret reality. Adults frequently encounter situations that challenge these assumptions, creating what Mezirow describes as a disorienting dilemma. Such experiences may include divorce, bereavement, migration, career transition, illness, or significant relationship conflict.

Instead of viewing these crises as purely negative experiences, Transformative Learning Theory interprets them as opportunities for profound personal growth. Through critical reflection, dialogue, and self-examination, individuals revise their assumptions and develop more sophisticated ways of understanding themselves and others.

This theoretical perspective has considerable relevance for literary studies. Fiction frequently depicts characters confronting precisely these transformative experiences. Rather than simply narrating external events, novels often portray the internal psychological processes through which characters reconstruct their identities.

Durjoy Datta's fiction repeatedly illustrates such transformations. His protagonists frequently encounter emotional crises—including failed relationships, mental health struggles, career uncertainty, and family conflict—that compel them to question previously unquestioned beliefs regarding love, masculinity, trust, and commitment. Although Datta does not explicitly reference educational theory, his narratives often depict emotional development as a process closely resembling Mezirow's model of transformative learning.

2.3 Knud Illeris and the Three Dimensions of Learning

Another significant contribution to life-long learning theory is provided by Knud Illeris, whose comprehensive learning model integrates psychological and sociological perspectives.

Illeris argues that meaningful learning always involves the interaction of three inseparable dimensions:

The cognitive dimension, involving knowledge, understanding, and intellectual development.

The emotional dimension, involving motivation, feelings, confidence, identity, and psychological energy.

The social dimension, involving communication, participation, and interaction with other individuals and communities.

Unlike purely cognitive theories, Illeris emphasizes that learning cannot occur independently of emotion. Every significant learning experience involves emotional investment because human beings interpret new knowledge through personal experiences and existing identities.

This perspective offers an important contribution to understanding romantic relationships. Emotional intelligence, empathy, forgiveness, trust, and communication are not innate qualities but competencies developed gradually through repeated interpersonal experiences. Couples therefore learn not only about each other but also about themselves through ongoing interaction.

Illeris' framework is particularly useful for analysing Durjoy Datta's novels because his characters rarely experience emotional development in isolation. Their growth emerges through conversations, conflicts, misunderstandings, reconciliation, and shared experiences. Consequently, learning becomes simultaneously cognitive, emotional, and social.

From this perspective, intimate relationships themselves may be interpreted as important learning environments where adults continually acquire new emotional competencies throughout life.

Review of Literature (Part II)

2.4 The Sociology of Modern Relationships

The transformation of intimate relationships has become one of the central concerns of contemporary sociology. During the twentieth century, relationships were largely understood through the institutions of marriage, family, religion, and community. In contrast, scholars of late modernity argue that globalization, urbanization, technological advancement, and increasing individualism have fundamentally altered the meaning of intimacy. Modern relationships are no longer sustained primarily by social obligation; rather, they depend upon continuous negotiation, emotional communication, and mutual satisfaction. Among the scholars who have contributed significantly to this discussion are Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, and Eva Illouz.

2.4.1 Anthony Giddens and the Concept of the Pure Relationship

Anthony Giddens' *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992) remains one of the most influential works on contemporary relationships. Giddens argues that modernization has transformed intimate relationships from institutional arrangements into voluntary partnerships based on emotional fulfilment and mutual commitment.

He introduces the concept of the pure relationship, describing it as a relationship entered into for its own sake and maintained only as long as both partners continue to derive satisfaction from it. Unlike traditional marriages, which were often sustained by religious obligations, economic necessity, or social expectations, modern relationships depend primarily upon communication, trust, and emotional reciprocity.

According to Giddens (1992), democratization within intimate relationships has increased individual freedom while simultaneously increasing emotional responsibility. Since external authorities no longer dictate relationship roles, couples must continuously negotiate expectations, boundaries, and responsibilities. This process requires self-reflection, empathy, and effective communication.

Giddens further argues that intimacy has become increasingly reflexive. Individuals constantly evaluate their relationships, reconsider personal identities, and renegotiate commitments in response to changing circumstances.

Consequently, successful relationships require continuous learning and adaptation rather than passive acceptance of traditional norms.

The relevance of Giddens' theory to the present study is considerable. Durjoy Datta's protagonists rarely remain within fixed relationship structures. Instead, they repeatedly renegotiate expectations concerning career ambitions, family responsibilities, personal freedom, and emotional commitment. These narratives closely resemble Giddens' understanding of intimacy as an ongoing process of mutual negotiation rather than a predetermined social institution.

2.4.2 Zygmunt Bauman's Theory of Liquid Love

While Giddens presents a relatively optimistic interpretation of modern intimacy, Zygmunt Bauman offers a more critical perspective in *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (2003).

Bauman argues that contemporary society is characterised by liquidity, a condition in which social structures have become increasingly unstable and temporary. Employment, communities, identities, and relationships no longer possess the permanence associated with earlier generations. Individuals seek intimacy while simultaneously fearing long-term commitment because commitment may restrict future opportunities.

According to Bauman (2003), consumer culture has profoundly influenced romantic relationships. Modern individuals increasingly approach relationships with the same logic that governs consumer markets: seeking immediate satisfaction while avoiding long-term obligations. Partners become replaceable, and relationships are evaluated according to personal gratification rather than enduring commitment.

Bauman also emphasises the role of digital communication in transforming intimacy. Social media and online dating platforms have expanded opportunities for connection but have also created what he describes as "fragile bonds." Constant access to alternative partners encourages uncertainty and reduces the perceived permanence of existing relationships.

Unlike Giddens, who views reflexive relationships as opportunities for democratic intimacy, Bauman argues that excessive individualism often undermines emotional security. The freedom to leave a relationship at any moment may weaken the willingness to resolve conflicts through patience and dialogue.

Durjoy Datta's fiction reflects many of these concerns. His novels portray characters struggling with digital misunderstandings, insecurity, fear of abandonment, and the pressures created by social media. However, Datta differs from Bauman by suggesting that emotional maturity and effective communication can counteract these challenges. Rather than portraying instability as inevitable, his narratives emphasise personal growth as a means of strengthening relationships.

2.4.3 Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim: The Normal Chaos of Love

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim further developed the sociology of intimacy in *The Normal Chaos of Love* (1995). They argue that modernization has dissolved many traditional social structures, compelling individuals to construct their own life courses.

According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, love has become both increasingly important and increasingly uncertain. As traditional institutions lose authority, individuals expect romantic relationships to provide emotional fulfilment, identity, security, and personal meaning simultaneously. Consequently, contemporary relationships carry expectations that were once distributed across family, religion, and community.

The authors describe this condition as the normal chaos of love. Relationships are characterised by negotiation rather than certainty, flexibility rather than stability, and individual choice rather than collective obligation.

Career mobility represents another important aspect of their analysis. Modern professionals frequently relocate for employment, delaying marriage or maintaining long-distance relationships. Such circumstances require couples to develop new forms of communication, trust, and emotional resilience.

This perspective strongly resonates with Durjoy Datta's novels, in which protagonists regularly confront geographical separation, demanding careers, and conflicting personal aspirations. Rather than presenting these challenges as exceptional, Datta portrays them as ordinary features of contemporary urban life.

2.4.4 Eva Illouz and Emotional Capitalism

Eva Illouz provides another influential interpretation of modern relationships through her concept of emotional capitalism.

In *Cold Intimacies* (2007), Illouz argues that emotional life has increasingly been shaped by economic rationality and consumer culture. Romantic relationships are influenced by market principles, psychological expertise, and self-improvement discourses.

According to Illouz, contemporary individuals often evaluate potential partners using criteria similar to those employed in professional decision-making. Compatibility becomes measurable, emotions become subjects of psychological analysis, and relationships are managed through techniques borrowed from therapy and management science.

Digital technology has intensified these developments. Dating applications encourage individuals to compare numerous potential partners, creating the impression that better alternatives are always available. Such environments may reduce commitment while increasing anxiety and emotional dissatisfaction.

Illouz does not argue that love has disappeared. Rather, she suggests that love has become increasingly mediated by institutions, technologies, and market values.

Her work offers valuable insight into Durjoy Datta's portrayal of digitally connected relationships. His characters frequently experience insecurity arising from social media interactions, delayed responses, online visibility, and the constant possibility of alternative relationships. These narratives illustrate many of the emotional tensions identified by Illouz within contemporary digital culture.

Comparative Observation

Although these sociologists differ in their interpretations, they collectively demonstrate that intimacy has become significantly more complex in late modern society.

- * Giddens emphasises democratic relationships based on communication and mutual trust.
- * Bauman highlights insecurity and the fragility of emotional commitments.
- * Beck and Beck-Gernsheim focus on the uncertainty created by individualization.
- * Illouz analyses the influence of consumer capitalism and digital technology on emotional life.

Taken together, these perspectives provide a strong theoretical foundation for examining Durjoy Datta's fiction. His novels reflect many of the tensions identified by these scholars while also suggesting that emotional learning, adaptability, and self-reflection offer constructive responses to the challenges of contemporary relationships.

Review of Literature (Part III)

2.5 Psychological Perspectives on Modern Relationships

While sociologists explain how social change has transformed intimate relationships, psychologists focus on the emotional and cognitive processes that shape relationship quality. Two influential theories—John Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Robert Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love—provide valuable frameworks for understanding emotional behaviour within contemporary relationships.

2.5.1 John Bowlby's Attachment Theory

John Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) proposed that early interactions between children and caregivers influence patterns of emotional attachment that often continue into adulthood. Later researchers, particularly Hazan and Shaver (1987), extended attachment theory to romantic relationships.

Adult attachment is commonly discussed in terms of secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles. Individuals with secure attachment generally communicate openly and trust their partners, whereas anxious individuals often fear rejection and seek constant reassurance. Avoidant individuals may struggle with emotional intimacy and prefer psychological distance.

Attachment theory has considerable relevance to Durjoy Datta's fiction. Many of his protagonists experience emotional insecurity, unresolved trauma, family conflict, or grief. These experiences influence their ability to trust others and sustain intimate relationships. Rather than presenting love as a simple emotional experience, Datta frequently portrays intimacy as requiring emotional healing, self-awareness, and deliberate communication. Such representations support the argument that emotional development is a continuing process throughout adulthood rather than a fixed personality trait.

2.5.2 Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

Robert Sternberg (1986) proposed that love consists of three interrelated components:

- * Intimacy, referring to emotional closeness and mutual understanding.
- * Passion, referring to physical attraction and romantic desire.
- * Commitment, referring to the conscious decision to maintain the relationship over time.

Different combinations of these components produce different forms of love. Sternberg argues that consummate love, which integrates intimacy, passion, and commitment, represents the most complete form of romantic partnership.

From the perspective of the present study, Sternberg's model demonstrates that relationships require continuous maintenance. Intimacy develops through communication and trust, commitment demands conscious effort, and passion evolves throughout different stages of life. Consequently, successful relationships involve ongoing emotional learning rather than relying solely on initial attraction.

Durjoy Datta's novels frequently illustrate this developmental process. His characters rarely experience idealised romance. Instead, they confront misunderstandings, personal crises, career challenges, and changing life priorities that continually reshape their relationships. Such narratives reinforce the idea that mature love develops through experience, adaptation, and shared growth.

2.6 Indian Popular Fiction and Contemporary Youth Culture

Indian English popular fiction has undergone remarkable growth since the early twenty-first century. Writers such as Chetan Bhagat, Ravinder Singh, Nikita Singh, and Durjoy Datta have attracted large readerships, particularly among urban young adults. Unlike earlier generations of Indian English literature, which often concentrated on colonial history, nationalism, or diasporic identity, popular fiction has focused on everyday experiences including education, careers, friendship, mental health, and romantic relationships.

Initially, many literary critics regarded commercial fiction as formulaic and lacking artistic sophistication. However, more recent scholarship argues that these novels constitute important cultural documents because they reflect the aspirations, anxieties, and social realities of contemporary Indian youth. Their popularity indicates that they engage with issues that many readers recognise in their own lives.

Within this literary landscape, Durjoy Datta occupies a distinctive position. His novels consistently examine emotional vulnerability, family expectations, psychological trauma, changing gender roles, and the influence of digital communication on intimate relationships. Rather than portraying romance as escapist fantasy, his narratives increasingly explore the practical and emotional challenges faced by young adults negotiating rapidly changing social environments.

2.7 Critical Perspectives on Durjoy Datta's Fiction

Although Durjoy Datta has become one of India's best-selling contemporary novelists, academic criticism of his work remains relatively limited compared with scholarship devoted to canonical Indian English writers.

Existing studies generally identify several recurring themes.

First, scholars observe that Datta portrays urban middle-class youth negotiating tensions between traditional family expectations and individual aspirations. His characters frequently balance professional ambitions with emotional commitments, reflecting broader social transformations associated with globalization and urbanization.

Second, researchers note his increasing attention to mental health. Novels such as *The Boy Who Loved* and *The Boy with a Broken Heart* examine grief, depression, guilt, trauma, and emotional recovery. These narratives challenge simplistic romantic assumptions by suggesting that love alone cannot resolve psychological suffering.

Third, Datta's female protagonists are often portrayed as educated, professionally ambitious, and emotionally independent. Their representation reflects changing gender expectations within urban India while also exposing continuing tensions surrounding equality, marriage, and career development.

Nevertheless, relatively little scholarship has examined Datta's fiction through the interdisciplinary framework of life-long learning. Most existing analyses discuss romance, youth culture, or popular literature without considering how his characters acquire emotional competencies through continuous learning and self-reflection.

2.8 Critical Evaluation of the Literature

The literature reviewed above demonstrates that both life-long learning and modern relationships have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Educational theorists emphasise continuous personal development, while sociologists and psychologists explain the changing nature of intimacy in contemporary society.

However, these fields have largely developed independently.

Research on life-long learning continues to focus primarily on education, professional development, and economic participation. Although UNESCO originally promoted a holistic understanding of learning that included personal and social development, later policy discussions frequently emphasised employability and workforce competitiveness. Recent UNESCO work continues to reaffirm that lifelong learning should support human development and social cooperation rather than only economic objectives.

Conversely, relationship studies have produced extensive theories explaining intimacy, attachment, communication, and identity formation. Yet these studies rarely conceptualise healthy relationships as outcomes of continuous learning processes.

Similarly, literary scholarship on contemporary Indian popular fiction has expanded, but comparatively little attention has been devoted to analysing emotional growth through adult learning theories. Consequently, opportunities remain for interdisciplinary research connecting education, sociology, psychology, and literary criticism.

2.9 Research Gap

The present review identifies four significant research gaps.

First, scholarship on life-long learning remains predominantly educational and economic in orientation. Limited attention has been given to emotional learning within adult intimate relationships.

Second, sociological theories explain changing relationship structures but seldom integrate concepts from adult learning and transformative education.

Third, despite Durjoy Datta's popularity and cultural influence, his novels remain underrepresented within serious literary criticism, particularly in interdisciplinary research.

Fourth, no comprehensive analytical framework currently explains how contemporary romantic partners continuously learn, unlearn, and reconstruct emotional competencies throughout their relationships.

To address these gaps, the present study proposes the concept of Relational Life-Long Learning (RLLL). This framework interprets intimate relationships as dynamic spaces in which individuals develop emotional intelligence, communication skills, empathy, resilience, and adaptive capacities through continuous interaction and critical self-reflection. Rather than viewing learning solely as an educational activity, the study argues that learning is also a fundamental process through which contemporary relationships are formed, sustained, and transformed.

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