

Chetan Bhagat's *2 States*: A Study of Cultural Contradictions

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Abstract

This paper deals with the culture issues in Chetan Bhagat *2 States – the story of my marriage*. He is one of the most popular contemporary Indian novelists in Indian English Literature. He has represented young, modern Indian youth and culture. Different characters and incidents portrayed in the novel gives us a vibrant picture about the different culture and tradition prevailing in India. Chetan Bhagat's novel *2 States* focusses on how a particular phenomenon, the notion of love and marriage related to the concept of culture and society with its customs. The novel *2 States* deals with the cross-cultural encounters and deals with different experiences.

A simple but realistic novel, brilliantly explores the encounter of *2 States*, Punjab and Tamil Nadu. *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* is partly an autobiographical novel. The story is about a couple, Krish and Ananya, who hail from two different states of India, Punjab and Tamil Nadu respectively, are deeply in love and want to get married. The novelist while talking about marriage also explores the social issues like dowry in traditional marriages and the shifting paradigms of matrimonial alliances in multicultural and multinational societies. Chetan Bhagat also expresses the cultural diversities.

Keywords: Contemporary, Modern, Incident, Culture, Issues

Chetan Bhagat has touched some of the sensitive issues of cultural differences. He is of the view that love knows no boundaries whether it be of caste, creed, religion, state or country. Culture comprises of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, work of art, rituals, ceremonies. Multiculturalism is a study of two or more cultures. This offers abundant opportunity to study on multiculturalism. *2 States* is a love story of a Punjabi guy Krish Malhotra and a Tamil Brahmin girl Ananya. Several families go through this situation in India. The novel deals with cultural contradictions. It depicts how the multiculturalism can create problem in the matrimonial alliances and how hard the couple has to fight against the destiny for the union. Krish and Ananya also have to do work hard to make their dreams true. Through this we can find how love shines amidst darkness and despair. The main emphasis is about cultural contradictions.

In *2 States* cultural anthropology reveals about cultural differences between two states i.e north-Indian families and south-Indian families. The story is not only about the young couple who is trying to convince their parents to make them agree for the wed-lock. The story starts in the IIM Ahmedabad mess hall, where Krish, a Punjabi boy from Delhi sights a beautiful girl, Ananya, a Tamilian from Chennai, arguing with the mess staff about the food. Ananya was labelled as the "Best girl of the fresher batch". They become friends within a few days and decided to study together every night. Within the time, they become romantically involved. They both get jobs, and have serious plans for their wedding. Chetan Bhagat is well known for his representation of reality in the contemporary society. Chetan Bhagat's *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* creates the experiences of the social reality. In this novel, Chetan Bhagat mirrors on the issue of inter-racial, inter-state marriages. The novel is grounded on the novelist's personal experiences of his life. The portrayal of various characters and incidents in the novel gives the reader a perfect picture of the diverse culture and tradition existing in

contemporary India. In *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*, The novelist has tried to reveals the realities of modern Indian society. The novel represents the difficulties involved in inter-community and inter-state marriage. Chetan Bhagat's novel is a social document of contemporary youth's issues. The novel shows how the cultural differences of two states create obstacles in the wed-lock of two lovers. They fight against the customs of an traditional and conservative society. The novel also indicates the grim reality of Indian marriage system. The back side of the novel covers the realistic image of contemporary Indian society concerning the love marriages.

Chetan Bhagat depicts an realistic account of his own love affairs leading to marriage and all the difficulties that are faced by them in this whole procedure. Both Krish and Ananya represent two different cultures and two different states. Krish is a Punjabi boy, belongs to Delhi and Ananya Swaminathan is a Tamilian, and belongs to Chennai. Both fall in love with each other and also become romantically involved with each other. But their destiny does not seem in their favour as they faced a lot of barriers to convert their love story into marriage.

Two opposite poles

– one is Punjabi and other is Tamilian –become a obstacle in their marriage. Krish's mother is no longer ready to accept Ananya. She finds herself uncomfortable after hearing his relationship with a Tamilian girl. Both Krish and Ananya try to persuade their parents in favour of their marriage. Krish's mother wants to select the bride for her son according to her own choice. It shows how the variations in two culture create problem in the matrimonial alliances and how the couple has to fight against the fate to be in the wed-lock. Here we can see the hurdels in love and this is very true in the case of Krish and Ananya. The main focus is about cultural contradictions, Inter-caste marriage is still a taboo in India.

Chetan Bhagat's *2 States* is the author's personal experiences of the challenges that he and his wife faced in persuading their parents to make them agree for theirl marriage. He deals

with the grim realities of life and the difficulties faced by the young generation for the love marriage.

Parents of both admire their own culture and blame another's. Both look down upon each other for different reasons. They enjoy each other's food, but hate each other for the unknown reasons. They have diversities in their languages (e.g. Tamil and Punjabi), customs, rituals.

“Marriage’ is defined by The New Britannica Encyclopaedia (2007: 871) as,

‘a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and the duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring (if any)’”

Further, The New Britannica Encyclopaedia (2007: 872) underlines the importance of marriage rituals and ceremonies as,

“ [they] surrounding marriage in most cultures are associated primarily with fecundity and validate the importance of marriage for the continuation of a clan, people or society. They assert a familial or communal sanction of the mutual choice and the understanding of the difficulties and sacrifices involved in making what is considered, in most cases, to be a lifelong commitment to and responsibility for the welfare of spouse and children”

Marriage is considered as a sacred union under the influence of custom, traditions, rituals. “For the past five or six years, it is seen that youngsters get jobs in different big projects and multinational companies where they meet and interact with different religions, caste and various people from different states. Sometimes they maintain their relationship as friends or colleagues but sometimes, with same interest, habits and various similarities between two, they get closer and decide to get married.”

Marriage is mainly associated with these superfluous terms. Bhagat gives his insightful dictum (See; back cover page of the novel) on marriages in India as, “Love marriages around the world are simple:

Boy loves girl. Girl loves boy. They get married.

In India, there are few more steps:

Girl’s family has to love boy. Boy’s family has to love girl.

Girl’s family has to love Boy’s family.

Boy’s family has to love girl’s family.

Girl and Boy still love each other. They get married”.

We can compare Bhagat’s dictum in the light of the above encyclopaedic conceptions of marriage and the rituals. Indian culture has more complications as compared to the world around. The observations of the marriage of Ananya and Krish are documented hereafter. Bhagat presents complex, deeply rooted socio-cultural problems of multicultural India. Through his work he attempts to point out the faults and gives a chance to correct those in the real life. Racial discrimination also still existing in the society and it is a grim reality. We are outwardly modern but inwardly we are still live in the past cling to orthodox system. Krish tried his best to fit into a traditional south Indian family and Ananya also tried to adjust with her Punjabi counterparts. exposes the common stereotypes we all are familiar with. In the Punjabi household for marring a girl with a big dowry while in a south Indian household the importance is given to education and success.

Both of them have to struggle and faced a lot of problems in order to convert their love affairs into marriage. In the first scene in the novel reveals obvious distinctiveness between South and North India in the mess where Krish Malhotra sees Ananya and she starts a argument about the cuisine: “She stood two places ahead of me in the lunch at IIMA mess. I checked her

out from the corner of my eye, wondering what the big fuss about this South Indian girl was” (2 States 2).

And when Krish offers her to go for the lunch, now the cultural clash becomes even more obvious from this conversation of Ananya and Krish:

“She laughed. ‘I didn’t say I am a practicing Tam Brahmin. But you should know that I am born into the purest of pure upper caste communities ever created. What about you, commoner?’ To this Krish replies about Punjab i cuisine ‘I am Punjabi, though I never lived in Punjab. I grew up in Delhi. And I have no idea of my caste, but we do eat chicken. And I can digest bad sambar better than Tamil Brahmins”. (2 States 7)

Cultural clash between North and South is again explained by Chetan Bhagat with a tinge of humour. He arouses a comic situation at the time of convocation when Krish’s mother makes racial and ironic remark on Ananya’s family by addressing them as ‘Madrasis.’ Through this remark, Chetan Bhagat tries to uncover the conventional mentality of Indian people. The hero Krish tries to make his mother understand the sensitivity of the situation and suggests her to call them Tamilian,. Krish’s mother shows the conservative and low mentality for Krish girlfriend Ananya because according to her, she is trying to trap her son. She makes a racist comment:

“These South Indian don’t know how to control their daughters. From Hema Malini to Sridevi, all of them trying to catch Punjabi men” (2 States 48).

Chetan Bhagat also highlights the linguistic and cultural alienation that North Indians feel when they go to southern region of India. He also points out the feeling of cultural contradictions which Krish feels when he is exposed to South India: “I saw the city. It had the usual Indian elements like autos, packed public buses, hassled traffic cops and tiny shops that sold groceries, fruits, utensils, clothes or novelty. However, it did feel different. First, the sign in every shop was in Tamil. The Tamil font resembles those optical illusion

puzzles that give you a headache if you stare at them long enough. Tamil women, all of them, wear flowers in their hair. Tamil men don't believe in pants and wear lungis even in shopping districts. The city is filled with film posters. The heroes' pictures make you feel even your uncle can be movie stars. The heroes are fat, balding, have thick moustaches and the heroine next to them is a ravishing beauty. Maybe my mother has a point in saying that Tamil women have a thing for North Indian men". (2 States 77-78)

Racial discrimination towards North Indian is clearly revealed when Krish reached Chennai and is grasped in the quarrel and argument that is raised by a taxi driver who called other taxi drivers and talk to each other in Tamil so as to snatch money and valuables from Krish, a Sardar came for his rescue:

"No five hundred. Fifty," I said.

"Ai, another driver screamed. The four of them surrounded me like biddies from a low-budget Kollywood film.

"What? Just give me my luggage and let me go," I said.

"Illa luggage. Payment . . . make . . . you," the Shakespeare among them spoke to me.

They started moving around me slowly. I wondered why on earth didn't I choose to work in an air-conditioned office in Delhi when I had the

chance. "Let's go to the police station," I said, mustering up my Punjabi blood to be defiant. "Illa police," screamed my driver, who had shaken hands with me just twenty minutes ago.

"This Chennai . . . here police is my police . . . this no North India . . . illa police, ennoda poola oombuda," the English-speaking driver. One man came out of the next building. I saw him and couldn't believe it. He had a turban – a Sardar-ji in Chennai was akin to spotting a polar bear in Delhi.

He had come out to place a cover on his car. Tingles of relief ran down my spine. Krishna had come to save Draupadi. . . .

Uncle looked at me. . . . The drivers gave their version of the story to him. Uncle spoke to them in fluent Tamil. It is fascinating to see a Sardar-ji speak in Tamil. Like Sun TV'S merger with Alpha TV. (2 States79)

In this sequential series of cultural criticism, there is another episode in which a minor character mocks on North Indian

“Why do they send North-Indians here? (2 States 91).

While a North Indian officer comments on South-Indians:

“What do you mean waitlisted for business class? I am not coming back like I did this morning sitting cramped with these ‘Madrasis’”.

Another South Indian character in the novel shows his hatred towards North Indian by saying:

““Off course, sorry, this whisky...Anyway, Krish I had offers. Ten years back I had offers from multinational banks. But I stayed loyal to my bank. And I was patient to get my turn to be GM. Now, I have five years to retire and they send this rascal North-Indian” (2 States 79).

Through these examples, Chetan Bhagat sincerely advocates national integrity, mirrors the issue of racism and submits that this is a threat to national unity. Despite all these Chetan Bhagat stand at every place to criticize and mock the narrow mindedness of typical Indian whether it is of South-Indians or North Indian.

The speech of Ananya's father conveys the real message of the novel. He states,

“...Yes, the Tamilian in me is a little disappointed. But the Indian in me is quite happy. And more than anything, the human being in me is happy. After all, we've decided to use this opportunity to create more loved ones for ourselves” (Bhagat 266). The real message of the novel is to give more importance to human relationship based on human emotions and

sentiments. The main objective of the novel is to show that in the era of globalization, caste, religion or region are less important than the human relationship. The conversation between Krish and Ananya while dancing in their marriages determines the novelist's concept, "We kissed as Tamils and Punjabis danced around us... 'Only for the sake to uniting the nation...'" (Bhagat 267).

Krish and Ananya, two agents of modern Indian youth, grown up in an atmosphere of cosmopolitanism and globalisation and, refuse to carry the old, conventional baggage of cultural dissimilarities and racial discrimination like their parents. *2 states* is a typical novel which forecasts the cultural contradictions between two different states of India. This contradiction is found almost in every corner. Only the degree of arrogance has been slightly reduced due to education.

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