

## SHIMMERING CULTURAL CONFLICT IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S 2 STATES: THE STORY OF MY MARRIAGE

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**Abstract:** The Indo-American Society's The Society's Young Achiever's Awardee, the Publisher's Recognition Awardee, who was called by The New York Times as 'the biggest selling English language novelist in India's history', ChetanBhagat, (an IITian cum IIMAite), has to his credit, five novels, of which **2 States: The Story of My Marriage** (2009) is the fourth. The theme is rooted in myriad Indian environment, ranging from the cosmopolitan IIT and IIM atmosphere to the tradition-bound, presbyopic and provincial inter-state marriage-atmosphere in India. The underlying reality of Indian oneness with the layer of diversity that can be amicably de-layered, is the main proposition premised with an intermingled humour peculiar to Tamilnadu and Punjab, each state respectively representing the South and the North.

This paper examines the idiosyncrasies of the young and the adult alike, the numerous banal and trite elements in post-colonial India, along with zeal in the young to fuse and bond the country together as one whole. This is seen interspersed all through, and particularly at the end of the novel; the protagonist, Krish, tells to the nurse in the hospital, when his wife, Ananya, who has just delivered twins, these children belong to one state called INDIA. This is something valuable to be treasured and cherished by every Indian

**Introduction:** The English literary scenario in India from 1980s is post-modern when the yardstick of post-modernity is applied to it. There are many rationales that have gone into the labeling of Indian literary canvas as postmodern. It is not a mere historical period but it is a part of socio-cultural and historical development and can be seen as a specific way of a depiction of the postmodern life and culture. It also shows a crisis of identity of human being, be it ethnic or sexual or social or cultural, and its struggle for legitimization in a hypocritical society.

A feature of postmodernism is that it is closely connected with the development of advanced information and communication technologies and media such as television, film, video, computer, internet, mobile phones, etc., which have contributed to the globalization of the capita, consumerism and popular culture. It is the presentation of the popular and the realty in a clear, uncomplicated, explicable, and understandable style. There are also novels where the narrative technique is non-linear or magical realism. The umbrella of postmodernism extends its shade to the responses to modernism and its ideas, to technological advances, societal and historical reconceptualization, and greater diversity of cultures leading to cultural pluralism.

The outcome of this is multi-directional, and a genre called Indian Writing in English evolved and continues to flourish. Besides, cultural pluralism is the result of greater diversity of cultures. This happens when small groups within a larger society maintain the identity of their culture. This feature fits the Indian context aptly, with the larger Indian society with its common culture and tradition, also comprises of the societies (of each of its 29 states and 7 Union Territories), each struggling and braving to preserve, protect and project its unique culture. It is

this cultural pluralism, dwindling into Indian oneness that ChetanBhagat depicts in his *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*. Under this backdrop, this paper documents the above mentioned Indian English novel highlighting its variety treatment of the age-old issue of inter-communal marriage, and driving it to success.

Indian readers found a writer of mass appeal in the young, post-modernist ChetanBhagat, who feels that *it is more about what is being said and communicated that strikes a chord* (RanaAshwani, P.1). Whether writing for columns for the leading newspapers or drawing out the themes for his novels, this postmodern writer focused on the issues the youth face and those of the national development. He proved in his five novels that he means what he says, by a simple linear narrative and a vivid story-telling style, and above all, delves into the common concerns of the youth, by which they are drawn towards his writings.

ChetanBhagat's novels remain the best sellers, since their release and four of his novels are adapted into Bollywood films, making him a screenplay writer. Further he is a motivational speaker. He is considered *the biggest selling English novelist in India's History*, by the *New York Times*, one of the most influential people in the world, standing among the top one hundred, in the *Time Magazine's* survey, and also one of the *100 most creative people in business*. The language used is straight forward.

Chetan's *Five Point Someone* or *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* (called as *2 States* in short) deal with the youth culture in common, and in the latter, it tells of the inter-community marriage. He speaks of the vision he cherishes: India as a homogeneous society. Though love and marriage is a very routine theme, the style of presentation is unique, fitting the

postmodern style. He has apparently showed the difference in the mentality of the youth and their thinking between the past and the present; the presentation of the present youth brings to mind, the famous essay of John Barth, entitled *The Literature of Exhaustion*. He also elevated the personality and the thinking of the real educated youth, while gently touching upon frivolities.

The story is about two students, Ananya and Krish, from IIM Ahmedabad; it all starts when they meet for the first time at the dining hall of IIMA. By then, Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil Brahmin (TamBram, in short throughout the novel) an Economics postgraduate from Chennai has created a ripple among the young, beauty-thirsty-looks of the (in the language of the novel) *testogen-charged* IIM male students, with her good looks, pretty features, fair complexion, charm and boldness. This heart-throb of the country's top blue-blooded Management institute made friendship with her classmate Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi Delhi-based IIT Mechanical Engineering graduate. Their intimacy developed when they started combined studies late night.

During their successful completion of studies at the IIM, Ahmedabad, Ananya secures a job in HLL in Campus placement. At the time of their campus selections, Krish, who was also facing an interview panel, had some barrier; as he reflected upon it, he felt an inner surge to admit his love for Ananya, and his guilty consciousness pricks him for not assuring her his love for her. He goes to her during her interview, as she is presenting before the panel, stuns them all, irritates Ananya by gate-crashing and confessing his love for her, kneeling down by her side. Later both of them had Himalayan hurdles to cross, to get united in marriage: to convert their love into love marriage.

Region, religion and culture are the insurmountable barriers in the beginning of the ordeal, but they emerge triumphantly, with patience, intelligence and persistence. They take every opportunity to impress upon their respective in-laws, many times even undergoing humiliation. Chetan Bhagat presents the story from the present mature-educated-generation's view point. Krish and Ananya do not want to get married without the parents' consent; they do not want to elope; they do not wish to compromise with either of the parents' but firmly want acceptance from both of the sides. Ananya says that the parents must be equally happy along with them at their wedding.

Both the families are on the two farthest points on the Indian scale of 'tradition'. The protagonists are well aware of this; knowing that their families are entirely different in their cultures and customs, they decide to convince them to accept their marriage proposal. As an initial step, Krish and Ananya arrange

a meet between the Swaminathan couple and Kavitha Malhotra (Krish's mother). Gandhi being a symbol of National integrity, the place of meet was Sabarmati Ashram. But this did not work well and the idea miserably failed.

Krish got into Citi Bank, and opted Chennai branch, during his probation; being a Punjabi Delhite, feels difficult to get adjusted in the South - Chennai - as they start their next attempt of getting a nod from the parents, from Ananya's side. Mr. Swaminathan, his wife Radha. When he met his would-be father-in-law in Chennai, he notices that *things have to be different with Mr. Hindu-addict Grumpswami in front of (him)* (P.108). In the process, Krish preliminary steps to impress the tradition-bound Ananya's family were a big failure. He struggles a lot to comprehend her family; faces the threatening silence of the TamBram family, eat their *spirals*, their appetite-repulsive vegetarian food in banana leaf, etc; he had to cross many hurdles, take tuition classes for Manju for IIT entrance, make a power point presentation to his *grumpswami*, provided an opportunity for Radha, a music lover to share stage with noted singers S.P. Bala Subramaniam and Hariharan, and make their dreams come true. His 'operation wedding' is successfully cleared from Chennai side.

Now the scene shifts to Delhi and Ananya's turn to woo her would-be mother-in-law begins. This too starts with a failure, with Krish's mother hurting her and humiliating her. But the young IIM post-graduates don't give up. Ananya takes initiative at Krish's cousin's (Rajju mama's daughter) wedding when the bride groom's father stalls the marriage proceedings, demanding more expensive car.

She musters up all the young cousins from Krish's side and calls the counterparts from the groom's side and friendly but firmly tells that it is very undignified and cheap for the educated youngsters to oblige to parents' meanness in grabbing gifts from the bride's parents. This works very well among the younger blood and the nuptial knot is tied. This makes Ananya a favourite to Rajji mama and his wife. Even Kavitha sheds her preconceived notion about the South Indian girl Ananya, and takes her into her good books.

When everything seems to get along smooth for Krish-Ananya, there is yet another set-back in Goa, at the parents' second meet. The South and the North have their prejudiced views; the misconception of Radha and Ananya when Krish was trying to convince his mother on her own terms, drifts both the parties further. The cultural differences win over the sensible understanding every time they met. With Krish's father whom Krish considers as an 'unnecessary interference' deftly handling the situation, all the differences are amicably resolved and the wedding is

performed in Madras in Tamil Brahmin tradition, which is considered as a *torure* by the Punjabis.

There is an irony when Krish's mother, in the telephonic conversation, in his initial days at IIMA, asks if his friend is a Punjabi, and immediately reverts to saying that they are modern:

*I looked at Ananya's face outside the booth. She looked at me and smiled.*

"Who? What's their name?"

"An...Anant"

"Punjabi?"

"Mom!"

*"I'm sorry. I just thought you could have a friend who likes the same food. It's OK. We are very modern. Don't you know?"*

This same modern lady belittles the Tamil Brahmins for being dark complexioned, vegetarians, and trapping Punjabi men. All the members of Krish clan pass criticism at the way the Madrasis have wedding *Muhurthamin* the wee hours, the way they perform the rituals, their religious culture and the liking of the South for golden jewelry and *Kanjeevarampattu saris*. The same ladies feel elated when they are gifted with a *Kanjeevarampattu sari* worth Rs.3000 each!

The novel is interspersed with jokes about Punjabis and Tamilians. But chiefly, the value of the novel lies in treating the inter-community/inter-state marriages not only for the sake of the couple in question but also for the greater good of uniting the country: in tying the nuptial knot between the Punjabi boy and the Tamil girl, the nation is knitted, and a lot of Indian couples can relate to it, not just these two states, or, not just the novelist couple alone. *According to Bhagat, homogeneity is important for a country to move forward (MunMun Das, P.72).*

It is not just the culture and traditions, but the emotions are also played upon. Even when the young think they let everything let go, the parents still have the remote control when it comes to emotions, of which both Ananya and Krish were badly hit

temporarily at the instances of parents arranging their wedding proposals with highly educated Tamil boy from the USA for Ananya and the beautiful milk-white daughter of the six petrol bunk owning Punjabi for Krish. Ut they overcome these setbacks with verve and level-headedness.

This means in no way that the young is all balanced and that the elders are to be blamed. The young have their own flaws. When Krish and Ananya kissed and lived together at the IIM dorm, it looked promiscuous. Krish tried to evade his answer to Ananya about making their love to marriage. When Krish's mother humiliated Ananya's parents, she left Krish; it seemed it was once and for all, had not Krish's father, who is detested by Krish all the time, interfered. As Krish says, *the world's most sensible person and the biggest idiot both stay within us. The worst part is, you can't even tell who is who (P.287).*

Never-the-less, the deep-felt thought of the writer through the characters about uniting the country by discarding the narrow regional feelings and prejudices is seen when Ananya asks Krish teasingly if he had loved her for the sake of the country; the same is highlighted, and may safely be called as an epilogue when Ananya gives birth to twins: *You are from two different states, right? So, what will be their state? The nurse said and chuckled. Krish answered her, They'll be from a state called India'(P.321).* These are the last lines of the last page in the novel.

The young India has much potential within, and the female lead, intelligence and the modern liberated and educated views are the most needed requisites. Most of the modern generation, when it comes to their marital decisions, feels bold enough to approach parents to discuss their inter-state, inter-religious and inter-cultural marriages; they are confident of making their parents accept the ones they want to marry. They are patient and thoughtful of making the parents happy at their weddings, as Ananya-Krish couple did.

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