

Multiculturalism in Chetan Bhagat's *2 States*

GARIMA SRIVASTAVA

Abstract. This paper deals with the concept of multiculturalism as presented by Chetan Bhagat in *2 States – the Story of My Marriage*. The various characters and incidents depicted in the novel give us a clear picture about the diverse culture and tradition prevailing in India. Through this novel Chetan Bhagat has tried to show the limitations of current Indian society. Culture in today's world is largely shaped by religious beliefs, political and social or economic systems and that is why culture seems to be almost inflexible in the roots as seen in rigid religious structure of society although the changing culture patterns are manifested in political and economic systems. The intra-cultural and inter-cultural patterns of behaviour recognize the universal elements in human cognition, emotion and perception. The couple Krish and Ananya come from two different states in India and thus they face hardships in convincing their parents for the acceptance of their marriage, because of generation gap, communication gap and cultural gap.

Keywords: Culture; multiculture; democraticism; inter-caste; marriage

The word “culture” refers to the capability of human beings to classify and inhibit the various experiences, to encode and imbibe them meaningfully. Chetan Bhagat's novel *2 States* concentrates on how a particular phenomenon, the concept of love is related to matters of culture and society with its customs. The novel *2 States* deals with the cross-cultural encounters complimenting the different experiences and imbibing them meaningfully. As ‘rose’ symbolises beauty, the soldier symbolize nation, the title of any work should symbolize its theme. Chetan Bhagat's *2 States*. A simple but realistic novel, brilliantly explores the encounter of two states - Punjab and Tamil Nadu.

India, the oldest secularist country, rich in its varied culture and heritage has paved way for the exchange of cultures since the Mughal rule to the modern democraticism. Born in Punjab in the most independent era, culture and diversity has been in the blood of Chetan Bhagat, which has influenced him to write about cultural diversity. The main characters cut their umbilical cord to get affixed with a new cord, the marital cord, “All is well, in love and war” said Shakespeare. The merging of two souls is the name of love. There is a blending of two cultures, religions, languages, traditions and practices. Thus, the major characters shed their umbilical cord, their maternal identity and require a new identity. *2 States* is divided into five acts, being set in the cities of Ahmedabad, Delhi, Chennai and Goa. It starts off with the main character Krish Malhotra in dire situations, hounded from

all sides by his Punjabi family, his girl friend and her South Indian (Tamil Brahmin to be precise) family. Chetan Bhagat in *2 States - The Story of My Marriage* deals with a very serious theme of cross culture, tradition and multi culture in a light way. This novel definitely gives us the cultural shocks.

Chetan Bhagat has touched some of the sensitive issues of cultural differences, father-son relationship and a lover-beloved relationship, corporate exploitation and two different cultures. He is of the view that love knows no boundaries whether it be of caste, creed, religion, state or country. To some extent this story seems to be of Chetan Bhagat, but he never claimed it. It's definitely love that triumphs against all odds. *2 States* is a story of interstate marriage in India.

The New Britannica Encyclopaedia defines culture as 'The integrated human knowledge, belief and behaviour'. (784) Culture thus defined, consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, institutions, techniques, work of art, rituals, ceremonies and other related components. This encyclopaedia also quotes a classic definition of "Culture" by Burnett Taylor, in his *Primitive Culture* (1871) as "Culture includes all capabilities and habits occurred by a man as a member of society". (784)

Multiculturalism is a study of multiple (two or more) cultures. Many scholars use the terms multiculturalism and cultural studies, socio-political, religious studies, media studies, etc. Likewise this paper analyses two different cultures. The people in this novel, both the older and the younger generation have a multicultural background. This provides ample scope to make a study on multiculturalism. *2 States* is a love story of a Punjabi guy Krish Malhotra and a Tamil Brahmin girl Ananya Swaminathan in her own style. Many families go through this condition in India. The novel deals with a complex human relationship. It portrays how the cultural differences can create problem in the matrimonial alliances and how hard the couple has to fight against the destiny to be in the wed-lock. Krish and Ananya have to make an extra effort to turn their dream into reality. Here we find love shining admits darkness and desire. Shakespeare once said that the path of true love never runs smooth and this is very true in the case of Krish and Ananya.

Basically cross culture tries to bring together such relatively unrelated areas as cultural anthropology which means social and cultural similarities and differences. The main focus is on cultural change. It argues that culture is "Human Nature". They believe that the human beings acquire culture through learning about people and their different places or different circumstances which may develop multiculture. In *2 States* cultural anthropology reveals about cultural differences of north-Indian families and south-Indian families. The story is about how to convince their parents for interstate marriage in India. *2 States* as the name suggests, is not about two states in India – Tamilnadu and Delhi but about the diverse state of mind of people hailing from the two states also. The plot is about two protagonists Krish Malhotra

from Delhi and Ananya Swaminathan from Chennai at IIM Ahmedabad and they are classmates.

In *2 States* Chetan Bhagat has portrayed the Indian marriage scenario and the grip of the youngsters in 21st century. The subtle style of Bhagat's writing will continue to win him accolades from all over. He sensed the nerve of the youth of the perfection. *2 States* is nostalgic as it brings back the old memories of one's own pre-wedding days. The struggles, conquests, religion everything is perfect and apt. Much like a formula film, it got emotions, sex, friendship, music, betrayal, exploitation, Indian families on the verge of break-up and then reuniting, elaborate weddings, tearful mother, nosy relatives, spiritually, office politics, just for laugh lines and a predictable ending.

The story starts in the college canteen. The first few pages reveal the campus life of IIM Ahmedabad where Krish sees Ananya and falls in love with her at the first sight. She is a real traffic stopper but she wants to be just a friend with Krish. He wonders why any boy can just be friend with any girl. He says, "Why would any guy want to be only friends with a girl? It's like agreeing to be near a chocolate cake and never eat it. It's like sitting in a racing car but not driving it. Only wimps do that." (*2 States* 9). Ananya is a bold girl. She dares to oppose the mess contractor because he provides bad quality of food to all the students. At that time Krish offers her his help and takes her to a restaurant. The friendship between both of them start meeting frequently. Krish proposes to her and she does not deny. They start to live in the same room and take liberty with each other which the Indian society is not accustomed to. Krish says, "You put a boy and a girl in a room for a week and add lots of boring books, and sparks are sure to fly" (26). As it happens in college life they start messaging each other and start hanging out. Time passes by very speedily and now it is the time of placement. Both of them are offered good jobs.

Both the lovers with intention to getting their families familiar with, decide to invite their parents for the convocation ceremony as it is very necessary in India that parents must approve one's love relationship. Here cultural anthropology takes place in this novel by mixing up of two cultures. We are introduced with Krish's mother and Ananya's parents. Krish's father does not come for it because the relationship of Krish with his father is very tense. The light friction between Ananya's mother and Krish's mother gets started in the ceremony itself and the dream of the lovers to get married shatters. There came a twist in the tale that, they want to marry with their parent's consent rather than choosing the easy way of eloping.

Intercaste marriages are still a taboo in India. The hurdles seem insurmountable in the begging-jarring differences between their parents, their cultures and the language barrier being the reasons. Krish gets himself posted in City Bank, Chennai, where Ananya is working with HLL and sets the ball rolling. After the

placement, Krish's mother wants him to take up a job in Delhi and wants him to marry a girl of her choice. She says that she can show him Punjabi girls as fair as milk. But Krish takes up a job in Chennai as Ananya has also accepted job in Chennai. Here Krish has to suffer a lot because of working in a new environment and hostel circumstances. Their carefully-crafted plans suffer occasional hindrances at one point of time due to cultural differences. The cultural divide in India is more than what meets the eye. Industry, infrastructure, transportation, modernistic in the last six decades our country has grown faster than we imagine. villages have grown into towns, towns into cities, and cities into metropolises. Three decades ago, telephones and cars were luxuries that many could ill-afford. Not anymore. Although the times have changed, our attitudes have remained rooted. With all this growth we aren't able to outgrow our mindset. We seem to be slaves to tradition that have long lost out on logic. Our so – called modernity hasn't erased ingrained ideologies. Although the caste system was abolished years ago, people in India still follow it blindly.

Racial discrimination also creeps in when anxious parents look for a perfect match for their children. In the best of times we are outwardly modern but inwardly we still live in the past. Set against the backdrop of an educational institution – this time IIM, the author has recited a love story on the "North-South Divide", currently in the markets. Highlighting the two different cultural diversities, Chetan Bhagat assures that it is possible. Krish and Ananya met in the canteen for the first time and eventually over a few days of combined study, fell in love. Life is great for them until their families meet each other. It takes some time before they realise that they may not be able to convince their families to support their marriage.

They have diversities in their languages (e.g. Tamil and Punjabi), customs, rituals (e.g. description of Punjabi marriage rituals in Duke and Minti's marriage and Tamil rituals in Krish and Ananya's marriage). The elders are not conservative but actually they are preventive in their point of view. They think they know the values better and they wish to preserve them. A wedding in India is a complex affair that involves more than just the bride and groom. It includes every member of both the families. Chetan Bhagat's *2 States* is the author's personal account of the challenges that he and his wife faced in convincing their parents to agree to their love marriage. The novel is a hilarious take on the complications that arise within Indian families, especially when youngsters from diverse backgrounds fall in love and decide to tie the knot. To be happily married they have to persuade their parents for this.

Krish must figure out a way to fit into a traditional south Indian household and Ananya must try and compete with her Punjabi counterparts. Bhagat utilizes the common stereotypes we all are familiar with. Be it the stress in the Punjabi household for marring a girl with a big dowry, or the importance given to education and success in a south Indian household. The girl is only slightly better. She is

unable to see how insulting her own parents are and refuses to say a word against them. She does not want to marry anyone else, but still allows her parents to fix up meetings with other men. It is not only unjust to the guy she is in love with, it is also unfair to the men who come to see her. In the midst of all this we come to know that there was a break in their relationship due to their parents. We come to know the reason of the tense relationship of Krish with his father when Krish visits Shri Aurobindo Ashram. He meets the guru and tries to seek his help for his restlessness in love.

Krish in meditation brings before us an incident that happen three years ago. He says when he was in IIT Delhi; he had an affair with his professor's daughter. The girl's father was against their love relationship and he was sending his daughter abroad. Krish wanted his father to go to the professor and set the situation right but instead of taking his side he started to scold his mother and also hit her in front of him, which he often did with her. Here Krish lost his temper and fought with his father. Krish says :

I slapped his face once, twice, then I rolled my hand into a fist and punched his face. My father went into a state of shock, he couldn't fight back. He didn't expect this; all my childhood I'd merely suffered his dominance ... It was a reaction to two decades of ... I punched his head until he collapsed on the floor... my mother sat on the bed, fighting back her emotions. we looked at each other. We were a family, but pretty much as screwed up as they come...I looked up my father and vowed never to speak to him again. (2 States 167)

This shows Krish's multidisciplinary action in his life. Krish didn't lose hope and carries on his desperate attempts to win the love of Ananya's family members. At first he helps Ananya's mother to present herself at a concert, organized by his own bank. Krish tries to convince his girl friend Ananya's parents and at last convinces them by helping Ananya's father to do his first PPT and later convinces her Mom by asking her to sing in a concert organized by Krish's office. She was convinced as she had her biggest dream of singing in a big concert comes to be true. To make her dream to be true Krish arranged a dinner party exclusively for Ananya's family. Here they propose to accept him as their son-in-law. The emotional appeal is really heart touching, "I, Krish Malhotra, would like to propose to all of you. Will all of you marry me?" (183) He finally was the consent of all the members of Ananya's family.

Now comes the turn of Ananya to win the love of Krish's family members. Then they tried to convince Krish's mother. The problem was Krish's mother's relatives who do not quite like this, they say that he should not marry a Madrasi but end up agreeing with them when Ananya tries to help one of Krish's cousins to get married. Ananya acts as fatalist in that marriage due to a problem in the marriage. No one likes her at first when she entered into the family. But first she convinces Krish's father who acts like a patriarchal (authority and responsibility in a senior man in the family. Kinship is restricted to the father's relatives) man. After that slowly with lot of hurdles she convinces Krish's mother and eventually they both get into good relationship. Thus, she was taken to Krish's cousin's marriage unfortunately there came a problem in the marriage, due to that people where in the marriage were tensed at that time Ananya solved the marriage in a soft way at that time she became fatalist which means people are accepted as inevitable, rather preventable and solvable because of that she succeeds.

Ananya also wins the heart of Krish's family but what about the families union? Krish arranges a meeting of two families in Goa, but there also Krish's mother verbally explodes and the relationship of Krish and Ananya is in jeopardy. Ananya decides to break of Krish and Krish tries his best to convince Ananya that everything can be fixed up again but Ananya has no affection for him. At that time Krish's 'bad father who is a fatalism' comes to his rescue and goes to Chennai and convinces Ananya's family without Krish's knowledge because now he does not want to miss the opportunity of helping his son. He missed the opportunity for once and still he pays a heavy price for that. When Krish gets a call from Ananya, he is very much surprised, and wants to hug his father. Father-son relationship is always incredible.

2 States has a series of some hilarious moments and instances that bring out the idiosyncrasies and dogmas practised by the two states. Also there are instances which would draw the thoughts of the reader to the notion of being an Indian before a South Indian or a North Indian. In a world, where borders are getting dissolved slowly with technology and development, such a thought carries a lot of weight. And in a country like India which has many India's in it, the magnitude of such a thought gets magnified. Through *2 States*, Bhagat exposes the backward mentality of Indians, nuances of regions and religions and how intercaste marriages are still seen as a social stigma. Indian love marriage scenarios, especially when they have to be sanctioned by the couple's families present a more complex scenario than love marriages elsewhere.

This novel is a humorous and witty tale on inter-community love marriages in India, citing the numerous awkward situations that both the couple in love as well as their families have to pass through before their wedding can be finalized. Chetan Bhagat has written some good funny lines about what the North Indians feel

about the South Indians and what the latter feel about the former. He takes a hard dig at the south Indians, in particular Tamil Brahmins, their traditions and their mentality. He brings out pretty well the contrast between South Indian vs North Indian cultures and the mutual disdain these two groups have for each other. The way Chetan portrayed the struggle to make his marriage a success never allows the reader to get his eyes off the book. The culture differences in north and south India has been scribbled with great effectiveness. The “larger than life” living style of Punjabi’s and the mellowed down south Indian life style has been put with lot of sincerity.

Tamilians have a great love for knowledge and education while Punjabis are more interested in money and wealth. Marble flooring is to a Punjabi what a foreign degree is to a Tamilian. South Indians have a love for rules, and feel safe when there are rules to adhere to. But the North Indians in general have a disdain for not only rules, but also the law and experience strange satisfaction in bending them, even breaking them. The elderly South Indians tend to speak in monosyllables while addressing the not so old and their great love for newspapers that they read from end to end, is a non-disputable fact. As Indian society is not liberal for mixed marriages between different castes, religion or geographies, this book takes us through the love and opposition from parents and relatives.

The narration is superb, sometimes while reading you will feel like watching a movie, also the book is full of great humour and lastly it also gives a message to the society that love and marriage is a bonding between two souls and not about what the society perceives of it. What with the high-brow culture of South, its love for knowledge, its hatred for showing it off, its early ways of eating food etc- Krish struggles to be accepted by his would be in-laws. *2 States* is probably Chetan Bhagat’s best novel so far and the author has agreed that a lot of what is there in the story is taken from his own personal experience. The author himself is a Punjabi Boy and his wife Anusha is a Tamilian; thus the book in some ways is inspired from real life. People from different cultures often have such radically different worldviews and what seems like common sense to one side is anything but sensible to the other. Different cultures and worldviews can lead to completely different understandings of frames of a conflict, making resolution a challenge.

The book is very humorous and takes a dig at both the Punjabi and the Tamil community. Most of the book is very realistic; a lot of people can probably connect to the Indian sentiments that are portrayed in the novel. The book tries not to be preachy and manages to maintain the humour quite consistently, thus making it a good light read. Finally, two families are reunited again after so many hurdles in their life period. Ananya and Krish get married to each other. The marriage ceremony held in Tamil style is also full of comical elements. It is really true that the love marriages around the world are simple but as mentioned on the back cover of the

novel the scenario is totally different when it comes to India. 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.

(*2 States, back cover*)

The novel ends with the practical solution, better communication, young generation's initiative and lastly the elders support. Finally it concludes with how Krish and Ananya, the representatives of new generation paved the way, to get married and to unite their families despite all the adversities they travelled through inevitably.

The New Britannica Encyclopaedia underlines the importance of marriage rituals and ceremonies as,

... [they] surrounding marriage in most culture are associative 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 understanding of the difficulties and sacrifices involved in making what is considered, in most cases, to be a lifelong commitment to a responsibility for the welfare of spouse and children. (872)

Chetan Bhagat also demonstrates a fine Punjabi skill of showing off their wealth as part of an innocent conversation. The story also dwells upon the relationship of father-son, son-mother, husband-wife, the in-laws, the typical Punjabis born and brought up in Delhi, the staunch Tamil Brahmins. The rest of the story is all about introspection, juggling personal and professional life, stealing moments to spend time with each other, and a strategic effort in convincing parents and make the North-South connection happen.

The book finds a perfect opportunity of depicting the typical Indian mentality of not accepting inter-caste marriages and the tradition of still living in 'age-old orthodoxal and impractical beliefs'. The book shows how the so called "Unity in diversity" tagged nation has so much diversity when it comes to inter cultural matrimony and love.

Chetan Bhagat brings out the subtleties that exist in the lifestyle and outlook towards the life of people from different states. As Indian society is not liberal for mixed marriages between different castes, religion or geographies, this book takes us through the love and opposition from parents and relatives. This couple cue from two different states in India and thus they face hardships in convincing their parents for the acceptance of their marriage. They suffer because of generation gap, communication gap and cultural gap. Bhagat depicts complex and deeply rooted socio-cultural problems of multi cultural India light heartedly. He wants the readers to laugh at their follies, their prejudices and their wrong doings. He doesn't attack them directly, but through fiction he attempts to make them realize their faults and gives a chance to rectify their mistakes in their real life.

From the cultural perspective, they believe they are the caretakers of their culture. One can compare Bhagat's dictum in the light of the above encyclopedia's concept of marriage and the rituals, and the ceremonies of it. One can easily think of the greater complexities of Indian culture as one compares India to the world around. The observations of the marriage of Ananya and Krish are recorded hereafter.

Garima Srivastava

M.A. (English)
Magadh University, Bodh-Gaya.

Works Cited

Bhagat, Chetan. 2009. *2 States - The Story of My Marriage*. India: Rupa Publication India Private Limited.

Britannica Student's Encyclopedia. 2007. Pakistan.

Milner, Andrew and Browitt Jeff. 2003. *Contemporary Cultural Theory*. (3rd edition), New Delhi: Rawat Publications.

Ryan, Michael. 2008. *Cultural Studies : An Anthology*. USA: Blackwell Publishing Limited.