

AN ANALYSIS OF CHETAN BHAGAT'S 2 STATES: *THE STORY OF MY MARRIAGE*

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Abstract

The present paper aims at analyzing Chetan Bhagat's famous novel 2 States from different angles whether it is theme, social criticism, and stylistic techniques. Hence, the critical estimation has been divided into different segments. The first part is devoted to the introduction of the writer's writing acumen and craftsmanship of drawing the attention of a large readership and thus understanding how he has been canonized as a favorite writer of young generation. The second part deals with the assessment of the major themes and motifs of the novel aligned with a reflection on social evils pervading in this society like conservative attitude of parents towards cross-cultural and inter-state marriages, dowry, generation gap, cross-cultural-clashes. It has also been reviewed as to how Chetan Bhagat has dealt with these sensitive issues with objective approach and makes the readers laugh and understand the gravity of the matter and he also provides prospective solutions to all the problems raised by him. The third part handles the linguistic and cinematographic elements employed in the novel and finally the concluding assessment is drawn in the last part of the paper.

Keywords: Social Criticism, cross-cultural clashes, cinematographic element, kinetic narrative technique.

Chetan Bhagat's fictional pieces of writing have restored to him remarkable success and this would not be an exaggeration, if it is said, that these have put his name at the top of the world's best seller writers. That Chetan Bhagat has earned the huge popularity is also discerned in literary debates ascribing on him such status as is mentioned in "*the New York Times* [which]

called him ‘the biggest-selling English-Language novelist in Indian history.’ *Time* magazine named him as one among the ‘100 Most Influential People in the world’ and *Fast Company*, USA, listed him as one of the ‘100 most creative people in business’” (“Prefatory Note” 2 *States*). The critical and theoretical discourse on Chetan Bhagat’s status as a fiction writer writing in English and the popularity he has acquired in a couple of years has made him a legendary figure and the best seller English language author all over the world.

The critique of his writings has revealed that in almost all his fictional and non-fictional pieces of writing, he touches the sentiments of young generation because whatever he writes is about them and the life depicted in his novels, more or less, if assessed, without any prejudice towards his style of writing, is identical to that of youths to a considerable extent. That he has changed the point of view of young generation and is a writer of youngsters can be canonized with the point of view that he deals almost all issues pertaining to their life-situation because his sensibility along with his minute observation towards life led by modern generation, and specifically, educated ones, enables him to write. Apart from this, he has reflected himself to be an alert and expert writer who has done experiment with the genre and techniques of novel writings, be it theme, narrative techniques, plot construction, and language and there is no dearth of romance, background music, political and sentimental issues in his writings. The experimental and innovative literary canon propounded by Chetan Bhagat has almost altered the taste budding book lovers since the publication of his first novel *Five Point Someone* in 2004. In almost all his novels, be it *Five Point Someone*, *Three Mistakes of My Life*, *One Night @ Call Centre*, *Revolution 2020* and *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*. He has explored almost all aspects pertaining to young generation ranging from romance, adventure, social issues, education system, nature of work done in multinational companies affecting their life along with their substantial solutions.

Chetan Bhagat has adopted the creative appropriateness of writing novels in English like his predecessors such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, but this inclination of Chetan Bhagat to portray Indian reality can be considered even an extension and partially extermination of his immediate predecessors like Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Arundhti Roy who changed the face of Indian English novel with their persist practice of shattering the standard of westernized looking as ‘other’ and ‘substandard’ discussed in Edward Said’s famous treatise *Orientalism* because he seems to be adopting cosmopolitan standard of writing, eradicating all the linguistic and geographical barriers.

The present novel *2 States* too, is one of the best sellers of Chetan Bhagat, firstly, because the writer admits that this is the imaginative reconstruction of his own life and secondly it touches the sentiments of young generation. Both the factors make this work even more authentic and magnify his own popularity among his fans; however, he also maintains the ascendancy of creativity over biographical exposure. He himself has magnanimously dedicated this novels to his in-laws and also avers in the Acknowledgement to *2 States* that it is an outcome of his personally lived experiences:

I also want to make a couple of disclaimers. One, this story is inspired by my own family experiences. However, this book should be seen as a work of fiction. Also, for authenticity, I have used names of some real places, people and institutions as they represent cultural icons of today and aid in storytelling. There is no intention to imply anything else (*2 States* vii)

The theme around which this novel moves is the love story of a Punjabi boy and his South Indian beloved Ananya. Both of them have to struggle a lot in order to convert their love

affairs into marriage. This is because Krish is a Punjabi boy and Ananya hails from a typical Tamil Brahmin family. Both of them belong to two opposite regions and this is what makes the matter even more complicated and tricky because both the halves of the couple love each other and want to marry. The novel begins in IIM Ahmadabad where Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi boy, meets Ananya Swaminathan in the college mess. It so happens that Ananya gets into an argument with the mess worker, but Krish comes in between to settle the matter and to win the heart of Miss Popular of the college. Quite predictably, they come close to each other and what the novel deals with is the constant struggle of both of them to convince their parents to have their consent for marriage. What is the most interesting part of the novel is the choice of the couple not to elope to get married and be estranged from their respective families but to opt a new way of convincing them to be ready for marriage with their happiness. Both Krish and Ananya take their turn at their own end to win the favor of each other's families and in turn to make them like each other because they know that in Indian society nuptial ties are not bound between bride and groom but between families. Chetan Bhagat writes on the back cover of the book that love marriages are simpler and less complicated all over the world but such is not the case with Indian society.

Love marriages around the world are simple:
Boy loves girl. Girl loves boy. They get married.
In India, there are a few more steps:
Boy loves girl. Girl loves boy.
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.

First of all Krish gets a posting in City Bank of Chennai so that he may remain in close proximity of Ananya and her parents because Ananya and her family are based in Chennai, though he has to suffer a lot because of working in a new environment. Moreover, Krish tries to win her parents heart first by organizing a concert of her mother with his own bank and also by helping Ananya's father to prepare his PPT and finally arranging a dinner party to propose Ananya's family members with gold rings. Thus, he convinces Ananya's parents to accept him as their son-in-law. Krish utters: "I, Krish Malhotra, would like to propose to all of you. Will you marry me?" I said and held the four boxes in my palm" (2 States 183). Then it is Ananya's turn to win the favor of Krish's family. The main problem is the attitude of Krish's mother and her relatives who suggest that Krish should not marry any Madras girl. When she comes with Krish and attends the marriage party of Krish's cousin Minti with Duke, no one likes her at all but when she solves the problem of dowry that occurs from groom's side as they demand a bigger car in marriage, everyone starts appreciating her. Thus, Krish's mother gets ready to accept her as her daughter-in-law and after lots of frictions; they finally succeed to accomplish the task of family reunion and eventually get married in the end.

The very story of the novel reveals a significant factor regarding Chetan Bhagat's writing and selection of theme is that he has raised the crucial issue of love-affair of middle class Indian youth. Though it is a fictitious work yet it realistically snapshots the life and problem of Indian youth who fall in love with someone hailing from different religious and cultural background and more specifically from different caste system and want to marry each other because they have to face various mental and physical atrocities if they take step against the willingness of their

parents. Since the novel as Chetan Bhagat himself admits in the ‘Prologue’ of the novel is based on his real life story of marrying a south Indian girl, it certifies its authenticity and ascribes onto this the realistic tinge of sentimentality and that this must have enabled him to portray the real life condition. The novel revolves round two main characters named Krish and Ananya. Krish belongs to a Punjabi family based in New Delhi while Ananya is a Tamilian. Both of them fall in love in IIMA. Since both of them belong to cultural extremities, so the whole novel is woven in the fabric of cultural extremities and what follows in a continuum throughout the novel unless it culminates in their happy marriage and cultural assimilation, is full of tensions. This is a drama of frictions and counter-friction but it attaches an element of surprise and curiosity to this work and maintains its spell bound impact on the mind of the reader and he is swayed by what the writer evokes in his mind. The lovers do not elope to get estranged from their parents but receives their blessings. They are not conservative and orthodox in their perspective rather product of cosmopolitanism and set model for young generation that they should try to convince their guardians and thus propagate new models of ethics and family values.

In close proximity of this very issue of love-affair, Chetan Bhagat has raised a parallel issue which pervades throughout the novel is of generation gap by writing about inter-caste love marriage and hence he has touched upon such a topic which is considered a taboo in India. The generation gap is discerned from the fact that Krish and his father are poles apart from each other as regards their relationship and usually do not talk to each other; the reason being his father is very strict and frustrated and sometimes goes beyond limits even to beat Krish’s mother like a typical husband in Indian families. On the other hand, Krish loves his mother and shatters the taboo that man is dominant in relationship as he falls in love with Ananya and gives equal respect to her as her better half and despite knowing the fact that to get married outside his own caste is very difficult, he determines to deconstruct the stereotypical image of so-called son in conservative family and goes ahead to convince his in-law to win their heart. He does not accept the marriage proposal of a girl belonging to high strata of society due to greed for money, rather marries a well-mannered and educated girl of his choice. He sets up model for modern generation that dowry is a social evil and be uprooted from the society.

In this novel, Chetan Bhagat has emerged as writer having his axe to chisel the society full of the weeds of evils. He has tried to fill the gap of generations by revealing the fact as to how evils in society exercise their meticulous and covert impact on the behavioral pattern of people of the society. He demonstrates that inter-caste marriage in this 21st century is not acceptable by Indian parents and they do not accept a boy /girl hailing from different communities as their son-in-law and daughter-in-law. In rural areas, this mentality takes its most weird and crude form of honor killing where girls are brutally killed by their own brothers and parents. Sometimes, boys and girls undergo enormous mental and psychological trauma and take step to commit suicide. In this novel, Chetan Bhagat has given love-marriage as a prospective solution to various social evils like dowry, honor-killing and suicides. The episode of Minti’s marriage with Duke is a living example of dowry but Ananya solves this problem by handling the matter meticulously. In this novel, Chetan Bhagat gives a message to Indian society that love marriage is not to be considered as a taboo, rather it should be practiced as a better solutions to eradicate various social problems.

The cultural confrontation is the key issue which lies embedded in the very fabric of the love story of Krish and Ananya. This cultural difference emerges with the very blurb on the selection of the title of the novel *2 States*. The title of the novel is suggestive of the peculiar ethnic distinctiveness of North and South Indian culture. On the first hand, the matrimony of

Krish and Ananya is not acceptable by their respective families because of cultural distinction. This cultural confrontation is exemplified from the beginning till the very end of the novel. The very 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 tiff 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 out for lunch, this cultural clash becomes even more obvious from the 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 Punjabi 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)

This cultural confrontation between North and South is further illustrated by Chetan Bhagat with a tinge of humour. He evokes a comic situation at the time of convocation when Krish’s mother makes racial and sarcastic remark on Ananya’s family by addressing them as ‘Madrasis.’ Through this remark, Chetan Bhagat tries to expose the stereotypical mentality of Indian people who do not come out of regionalism and do not hesitate to criticize one another. The hero Krish tries to make his mother understand the sensitivity of the matter and suggests her to call them Tamilian, but this attempt of his is completely shunned by his own mother. Moreover, throughout the very gamut of this very novel, she has such a conservative and low mentality of contempt 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). Moreover, Chetan Bhagat also points out the linguistic and cultural difficulty which North Indians feel when they go to southern region of India. He also highlights the feeling of cultural alienation which Krish Malhotra 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)

Moreover, the racial discrimination towards North Indian is revealed when Krish Malhotra reached Chennai and is entangled in the argument and dispute raised by taxi driver who called other taxi drivers and talk to each other in Tamil so as to snatch money from Krish and 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 States 79)

In this sequential series of cultural criticism, there is another episode in which a minor character satirizes 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, as a sincere and avid advocate of national integrity, reflects on the issue of racism and suggests that this is an overt threat to national unity. Despite all these divisive forces working meticulously in the novel, Chetan Bhagat’s Krish and Ananya stand at every place to criticize and ridicule narrow mindedness of typical Indian whether it is the contempt of South-Indians and that of North Indian. Both of them are cosmopolitan and have modern outlook and are exceptions to their respective North and South Indian cultural clan. What makes this novel a work of par excellence is the objective attitude of Chetan Bhagat who has portrayed a true and realistic picture of South and North and delved deep into the cleavage between the two. He also provides solution of this cultural confrontation in inter-state-cross-cultural marriages. The novel ends with the marriage of Krish and Ananya and this is how he restores the national integrity.

As regards the technique of writing novel, *2 States* draws attention of a large readership not only in India but also from all over the world. The very title of the novel has been aptly and judiciously chosen so as to maintain the rhythm in the novel because both the main characters keep on moving from one state to another. This technique of shifting location, dislocation and relocation gives an impression that the novel is having kinetic element and this does not let the novel have dullness in its intonation. As regards the setting of the novel, it keeps on shifting its location from Ahmadabad, Delhi, Chennai with its brief stay in Goa. These snapshots of different cities of India give this novel a move and portray different phases of the life of

protagonists and maintain spell-bound impact on the readers mind as to what will happen next. This technique of shifting the locations reveals how minutely Chetan Bhagat has observed the cultural differences of North and South because he does not simply give the glimpse of these cities but reflects the pulse of the nation by describing them as full of vigor and enthusiasm. The characters and episodes depicted by Chetan are common middle class fellows who can be easily found in Indian middle class families. If Krish's mom and aunt are identical with stereotypical aunts in North Indian society, so are Ananya's conservative Tamilian parents. The best part of this portrayal of northern and southern culture is that the writer is impartial in vivid depiction of both the cultures and nowhere seems to glorify one culture and condemning its counterpart rather a tinge of realism is sensed because he brings out both the good and bad aspects of these cultures.

Chetan Bhagat's novel contains cinematographic elements such as theme, context, characters, and dialogues. It seems that almost all scenes in this novel are meant for Bollywood. We are directly transported to Bollywood movie where students are seen moving around a university campus. The plot of the novel begins in the campus of IIMA with a typical cinematographic scene which begins with the entry of Krish and Ananya when Krish initiates to end up the tiff between Ananya and the mess in-charge. This is a typical cinematographic scene. Then again the main theme of the novel is the love story and the twists which are seen in Bollywood movie are very much there when two lovers from different communities fall in love and they have to face various problems to marry each other not only at familial stage rather at societal plain too. It also reveals a fact how love remains at the mercy of societal and ethical plain and how a man has to cope up with the situation when he has to make a patch up between his girlfriend / wife and mother. M. Aarthi in her article titled "Multiculturalism in Chetan Bhagat's 2 States" has rightly demonstrated the cinematographic element in this novel: "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" (556). Like Bollywood movie, both the characters have so much intimacy with each other that they start sharing single room which is considered taboo in Indian society. Krish like a Bollywood hero utters: "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). Then what follows throughout the novel are various twists which are seen in Hindi Cinema where lovers desirous of getting married in interstate and inter-caste have to face and finally after a lot of struggle they succeed to win the heart of their parents and at the end the movie ends with a happy note. This novel with its theme and setting is quite appropriate for film making and with this end in view a movie with the same name *2 States* based on Chetan Bhagat's novel was made and it earned great success on Box-Office.

As regards linguistic acumen of Chetan Bhagat in this novel, he uses simple and direct sentences as are seen in day to day life. Though he is criticized for using non-literary language, but Chetan Bhagat has shattered such kind of criticism on the ground that language has its cultural association and meanings are contextual; hence he does not bother about verbosity rather uses those words which can be easily understood. He has kept himself away from verbosity and figurative language and what is but overt in his most of the novels is that he uses the language as it is used by people all around us. His style of writing is clothed with Desi / Indianess. At a close textual study of this novel, it gets revealed that Chetan Bhagat makes his book a fun reading for his fans by using the language of the young generation. See a general conversation from the

novel between Krish's mother and Masi: "I say, meet Pammi once again and close it,' Shipara masi suggested 'What are you thinking?' She said after a minute. 'Did you know Pammi bought that phone, the one you can walk around with everyone?' 'Cordless . . .' my mother said" (2 *States* 68).

To sum up, it can be stated that *2 States* is a wonderful work of Chetan Bhagat. In this work, he has laid bare various social issues pertaining to young generation ranging from love marriage, generation gap, dowry etc and also provides with a solution of these problem. He has emerged as a realistic writer with objective opinion but leaves his readers to contemplate the prospective solutions of the problems they are grappling with. The narrative technique, language selection, episode selection and cinematographic treatment of the subject content are par excellence and the readership is moved at each and every turn of the twists coming with the progression of the novel till the very closing of the novel when it ends with the positive note of happy married life of Krish and Ananya. "The narration is superb, sometime while reading you will feel like you a 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" (A. Aarathi 569).

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