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## Chetan Bhagat's *2 States: The Story of My Marriage: A Study*

**Talluri Mathew Bhaskar**

*Lecturer in English, A.P.R.J. College*

*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. 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.*

*(From Publisher's blurb)*

### **ABSTRACT:**

*Chetan Bhagat is the icon of popular fiction. He catapulted to spectacular fame with the publication of his debut novel, **Five Point Someone** in 2004. **2 States: The Story of My Marriage** (2009) is Bhagat's fourth novel. The author reflects on the conflict of love. The story tells us about a couple from two diverse states in India whose parents do not yield to their love bond. The seeds of love conflict are sown. The major reasons for this conflict are that they hail from two different states and speak different languages besides the fact that there is a clash of civilisations and cultures. The boy Krish hails from Delhi whereas Ananya belongs to Chennai. Krish Malhotra is a Punjabi boy and Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil Brahmin girl. Their story is not typical western love. It is an Indian marriage which involves a few more difficult steps. They belong to two opposite poles of India i.e., North and South India. The novel draws our attention to the cultural differences and the prejudices of the people of these two parts of India. India is a multi-cultural nation. The two protagonists of the novel are highly educated, independent and live according to the new set of mores which their parents are still rooted in traditions. The novelist uses the veil between north and south, traditional parents and modern children as the*

*underlying foundation for the story of Krish Malhotra and Ananya Swaminathan. After a lot of commotion, raging emotion and ego clashes, Krish and Ananya get married. The emotional speech by Swaminathan sums up the novel. The need of the hour is the understanding that cultural variations give richness to Indian society. It was at IIM-A that Bhagat met and fell in love with his future wife Anusha Suryanarayan. The experiences would supply the plot of his novel **2 States: The Story of My Marriage**. The novel with its cinematic beginning, judicious mix of love, sex, music, spirituality, tearful mothers, loved mouthed relatives, emotional breakdown of hero following apparent break-up-of marriage and a predictably happy ending, is a formulaic novel.*

Chetan Bhagat is a writer with a mission. He does not believe in art for art's sake. He does not care about literary snobs and their biased criticism that often smacks of jealousy. He has no pretention of literary merit and can easily shrug off vicious criticism. He knows and admits that he writes popular fiction—stories of contemporary India that his readers can easily relate to, and not stories that are of literary merit. He is the first Indian writer who writes English novels for the masses. His books provide quick, pacy read and their plots have an unmistakably contemporary feel, although they do not employ any sophisticated style. He catches the pulse of the nation by using a language that the youngsters swear by. All his writings became best sellers and ensured him a huge readership. His fourth novel is a largely autobiographical book that narrates the story of his marriage with Anusha Suryanarayan and the socio-cultural barriers he and his wife faced coming as they did from two different regions of India. A major Hindi film bearing the same title was made from this book in 2009. He believes that a work of art should have an aesthetic appeal for a common man. The novel has given a great impetus to the popular romantic novel. It takes the readers round the metropolitan hub, Ahmedabad, Delhi and Chennai, the destinations of the career-dreaming young people. It is a tale of interstate marriage between a Punjabi boy and a Tamil Brahmin girl. Chetan Bhagat has experimented with the traditional concept of campus novel in at least two of his novels—*Five Point Someone* and *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*. Adam Begley says about campus novel:

*On every campus in every decade, there's the urgent need for new funds, issues of academic freedom, worries about hiring and admissions quotas, petty jealousies,*

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*endless inter and intra-departmental squabbles. Descriptions of the scholarly temperament are amusingly constant. It seems they've been stamping out social scientists with the same cookie cutter for half a century. Ditto for English professors. The students are elemental, as unvarying as earth and fire.*<sup>1</sup>

The introduction of Ananya by Krish Malhotra on the opening page sets the love of the campus-culture:

*Girls like Ananya, if and when they arrive by freak chance, become instant pin-ups in our testosterone-charged, estrogen-starved campus. (p.3)*

The story is narrated in the first person by Krish Malhotra. It is presented in the autobiographical mode. The title is based on the author's own love life and his marriage with IIM-A classmate Anusha Suryanarayan. Their first meeting takes place in the campus mess where they are found agitatedly arguing with the mess workers about the poor quality of food served to them. Krish Malhotra glances at Ananya in the IIM, Ahmedabad mess where she is complaining against the quality of food. She is called the best girl. Within a short period of time, Krish and Ananya become intimate friends. They decide to study together at night. They are romantically drawn to each other. With the passage of time, this proximity matures into love. Love between Krish and Ananya crop up in a strange way. They study together in Ananya's room and every time Krish's attention is caught by Ananya's looks. In candid terms, Krish tells her about his love and thus starts their love relation. For them love, marriage and sex come together in a mature way. The novelist employs almost always, stock situations and stereo typical characters to bring his points home and he constantly cites examples from hit Bollywood films which his readers can easily recognise. The cultural differences between north and south India have their roots in the legendary concept of Aryan and Dravidian races and the theory of Aryan invasion. The north Indians are considered the descendants of Aryans and the south Indian states are called Dravidian. Along with differences in language groups, there is a difference of skin colour from north to south of India with the southern people being darker in skin. The narrator says:

*My flight landed in Chennai at 7p.m. We had a six-hour delay in Delhi because a psycho called the airport and said the plane had a bomb. My bags took another hour*

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*to arrive on the conveyor belt. As I waited, I looked at the people around me. The first thing I noticed, excuse my shallowness, was that almost ninety percent of the people were dark complexioned. Of these ninety percent, eighty percent had dabbed talcum that gave them a grey skin tone. I understood why Fair & Lovely was invented. I couldn't understand why people wanted to be fair so bad. (p. 76).*

The novelist very amusingly, delineates a series of cultural features or markers of Tamil Brahmin and Punjabi micro communities which are in sharp contrast to each other. Krish's mother argues with her son about the racial differences:

*'Stay away from her. They brainwash, these people.'*

*'Mom, I like her. In fact, I love her.'*

*'See, I told you. They trap you,' my mother declared.*

*'Nobody has trapped me, mom,' I said as I thwacked a bhindi on the table. 'She is a nice girl. She is smart, intelligent, good-looking. She has a good job, why would she need to trap anyone?'*

*'They like North Indian men.'*

*'Why? What's so special about North Indian men?'*

*'North Indians are fairer. The Tamilians have a complex.'*

*'A complexion complex?' I chuckled.*

*'Yes, huge,' my mother said.*

*'Mom, she went to IIMA, she is one of the smartest girls in India. What are you talking about? And not that it matters, but you have seen her. She is fairer than me.'*

*'The fairer ones are the most dangerous. Sridevi and Hema Malini.'*

*'Mom, stop comparing Ananya to Sridevi and Hema Malini.' I screamed and pushed the bhindi bowl on the table aside with my arm. The bowl pushed the knife, which in turn*

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*rammed against my mother's fingers. She winced in pain as drops of blood flooded her right index and middle fingers.*

*'Mom, I am so sorry,' I said. 'I am so sorry.'*

*'It's OK. Kill me. Kill me for this girl,' she wailed. (p. 56)*

There are frequent references to the complexion of their skin, and food habits of Punjabi community. Punjabis give importance to splendour, lavish spending and fashion. These differences in rituals, customs, dress and food have given birth to stereo types and led to biases and prejudices against each other. Both Krish and Ananya's family think themselves to be superior to the other and have ego clashes because of different cultures and value systems. In India a marriage is not between a boy and a girl, but between two different communities. Even though caste system has been legally abolished in India for more than sixty years, caste is cast in stone. Inter caste marriages are still considered taboo for the orthodox Indian mind set. The novel tells us their struggle to marry over the jarring cultural and religious differences. This hiatus between the generations is the cause of concern in Bhagat's novels. The novelist takes digs at both Tamil and Punjabi cultures and points out that they belong to the state called India with an idea to put an end to inequality. Shashank Chauhan opines:

*In that, Bhagat is talking to the countless love-torn Indians who have been left heart-broken because of their family's "Izzat".<sup>2</sup>*

Krish Malhotra has a tough time convincing his mother who is prejudiced against dark skinned madrasi girls and wants her son to marry of the wealthiest fair-as-milk Punjabi girls. He has to figure out a way to fit into a traditional south Indian Brahmin family. At the same time Ananya Swaminathan's parents wish their daughter married off to a well settled Tamil Brahmin boy. She has to compete with her Punjabi counter parts. The two lovers do not elope. But they choose to seek the consent of their families. The differences of these two are again highlighted. The lovers seek to cross these multiple barriers and fulfil their dream of bridging the gulf by getting married to each other. Krish and Ananya do not want to elope or get separated from their families. They made up their minds to convinced their respective family members for the marriage and get their approval. They invite their parents to the convocation so that they might get to know each other.



As their parents adhere to their traditional notions and prejudice against each other, their meeting becomes futile. They arrange a tour to Sabarmati Ashram of Mahatma Gandhi. But even in the presence of the Mahatma their cultural and attitudinal differences are not removed. These cultural collisions which create hindrances for national integration and the younger generation of educated India that tries to move beyond the petty barriers which divide people and keep them apart in the major thematic preoccupation of Chetan Bhagat in this novel. Aurira Nihit comments on the cultural situations of Indian families:

*Such a situation is common in the country especially if the families are from two different cultures as it happened in his case and they need to come on a common ground in various cultural social, personal as well as family matters before discussions about the wedding can proceed further. Situations are often very excruciating and a lot of friction can happen if matters are not handled with a delicate hand.*<sup>3</sup>

After completing his MBA, Krish the only south Indian trainee is posted at Citibank in Chennai. As Krish lands in Chennai, he encounters the first prejudice against himself (A North Indian), when the auto driver tries to fleece him by asking rupees 500 for the ride to his Chummy. When he resists his overcharging, he is surrounded by three other auto drivers who support their fellow Tamilian. He is taken out of this situation by a Sardarji. Sardarji comes to the rescue of Krish:

*I looked down the street, for anybody, anyone who would get me out of this mess. 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' I shouted as loudly as I could. Uncle looked at me. He saw me surrounded by the autos and understood the situation. He came towards us. The drivers turned, ready to take him on as well. 'Enna?' the uncle said. 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 Tamil. Like Sun TV's merger with Alpha TV. 'Where are you coming from?' he said. 'Airport.' 'Airport cannot be five*

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*hundred rupees. Hundred rupees maximum,' he said. The four drivers started speaking simultaneously with lots of 'illas'. However, they had softened a little due to uncle's Tamil. After five minutes, we settled for a hundred bucks and disgusted glances from the drivers. My driver took my luggage and dumped it on the street as he sped off. (pp. 79-80)*

Krish keeps making comparisons between Punjabi and Tamilian life styles and practices which are very amusing. The novelist digs at both Tamil and Punjabi cultures and points out that these two protagonists belong to the state called India. Both are employed after their studies. But they find it difficult to convince their parents. Krish doesn't remain a silent spectator, but he carries on his efforts to convince their parents about their love marriage. He persuades Ananya's parents by assisting her father to do his first power point presentation. He gives tuition to Ananya's brother, Manju. A big concert was organised by his office i.e., Citibank he encourages Ananya's mother to sing in that big concert by sharing the stage with famous south Indian singers Hariharan and S.p. Balasubramaniam. He develops a taste for Tamil food and he shows a keen interest in Karnatic music. He also wears the lungi. The narrator humorously describes the great excitement among Ananya's family members on hearing the academic achievement of Ananya's suitor, Harish, a Tamil Brahmin boy working with an MNC (Multi National Company) in the USA:

*'Welcome, welcome,' the greetings had started at the entrances even before I could leave the house. A crowd had gathered at the main door—Ananya's dad and mom, Shobha athai, three other Kanjeevaramcla aunties and two random uncles in safari suits became the welcome party. They received Harish like an astronaut who had returned from the first Indian lunar mission. The only time grown-ups get excited about young people is when young people are getting married and the old people control the proceedings. I had come to Ananya's house several times, and I had received a welcome no better than the guy who came to collect the cable bill. But Harish had it all. Aunties looked at him like he was a cuddly two-year-old, only he was fifty times size and had a moustache that could scare any cuddly two-year-old. He wore sunglasses, quite unnecessary at seven in the morning, apart from showing*

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*off his sense of misplaced style. He had come with his parents, a smug Tamilian family who walked into the room with their overachiever in shades. Fortunately, he removed them he sat on the sofa. (pp. 123-124)*

Krish Malhotra's mother has a preconceived notion that her son has been trapped by Ananya as all Madrasi girls are obsessed with Punjabi youths. To prove this observation, she gives the example of Bollywood heroines Hema Malini and Sri Devi. She thinks that her son deserves to marry the daughter of Pammi aunty, a rich woman. Pammi's daughter is as white as milk. Ananya's parents also have great expectations about the future husband of their daughter. They are confident that their daughter will get one of the best boys of their own community. At the end of the novel, Krish and Ananya crossed the multiple barriers. Krish succeeds in his efforts in winning the consent of Ananya's parents. He helped her father in the task of a power point presentation. He gives tuition to Ananya's brother and arranges a concert by allowing Ananya's mother to prove her singing talent by sharing the stage with noted south Indian play-back singers. Ananya too wins the favour of Krish's parents by cooking for them. Nikki, Tinki and Minti like Ananya very much. They are the cousins of Krish. Ananya comes forward to help one of Krish's cousins to get married. Finally Krish's father intervenes and convinces their relatives and makes the way clear for the wedding of Krish and Ananya. After a lot of commotion, raging emotion, ego clashes, Krish and Ananya get married. The emotional speech of Ananya's father sums up the novel:

*He paused to have a glass of water and continued. '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. (p. 266)*

The Punjabi culture of expensive and ostentatious wedding is pitted against the simple Tamil marriage of the protagonists at the end. Krish and Ananya, two representatives of modern Indian youth who have grown up in an atmosphere of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, refuse to carry the old baggage of cultural differences and racial discrimination like their parents. Because they realised that these barriers and biases create serious problems for national integration. And the tail piece is delivered in the Epilogue where the readers are informed that Krish and Ananya



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are blessed with twins who represent the two states of their parents but belong to a state called India. The author conveys brilliantly what happens when two states, as representatives of two different cultures, meet. The novel is a hilarious take on the complexities involved in inter-community and inter-state marriages in India.

#### Notes

- i. Begley, Adam. 'The Decline of the Academic Novel.' *Lingua Franca*. Sept. 1997: p.40
- ii. Chauhan Shashank, Book Review. *2 States: The Story Of My Marriage*. Page 3 No. 20, 2009.
- iii. Nihit Arora, "Chetan Bhagat's New Book- *2 States: A Story of My Marriage*. [http// Ezine articles.com/expert.Arora.Nihit](http://Ezinearticles.com/expert.Arora.Nihit)

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