

## **INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A PERSPECTIVE AFTER CHETAN BHAGAT'S 2 STATES: THE STORY OF MY MARRIAGE**

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It is needless to say that our Indian culture it is a mixture of different cultures. India includes different states, regions and people with their divergent culture, languages, attire, food and religious practices. Indian culture is a colourful consortium of each colour with its individual significance. The culture of a particular place is built as well as influenced with the source of earning; way of living including primary needs of fooding, clothing, education, besides others including entertainment, religious belief etc. Infact, culture resides in a group of human beings called society, while it is culture which moulds the society to a great extant.

Literature is considered as the mirror of society which serves as a root of understanding of any culture. Literary works namely fiction, poetry, drama, criticism etc. are considered to have permanent artistic values. Culture, on the other hand, includes different perspectives of survival including eating habits, lodging style and education and thus it is a wider concept than literature. In this context the relationship between literature and culture, i.e. the combination of literature and culture is required to be considered. Literature plays different roles in the presentation of a culture while culture plays a vital role in giving birth to literature.

S. Abid Hussain in his book *The National Culture of India* has said that the influence of climate and economic resources on the material aspects of culture, namely, food, dresses, modes of living, etc., is very much apparent. According to him no one can deny the fact that the material aspect of Indian culture is moulded by the pattern of its physical and economic environment. (Hussain.5)

India is a land of multiculturalism. In the book edited by Jagdish Batra, named, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Indian Novel in English: Emerging Issues and Challenges*, Priyanka Lamba, in her article "Beyond Barriers: Chetan Bhagat's *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*" has spoken about 'multiculturalism'. According to her the term 'Multiculturalism' refers to the recognition or advancement of various cultures for practical reasons and also for the sake of multiplicity. It is useful to the demographic set up of a particular place, such as, a business organisation, school, city or a nation (Batra 100). Literature, by its nature is a fiction. This article intends to look at Chetan Bhagat's *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* in order to found the presence of intercultural communication through the activities of the characters of the novel.

While defining culture, Albert Blumenthal in his article. "American Anthropologist", published in the book *A New Definition of Culture* has said that culture is used to signify the sum-total of human creations, the organised result of a set of experiences up to the present time. Culture includes all that man has made in the form of tools, weapons, shelter, and other material goods and practices. Besides, culture also includes all that he has expanded in the way of attitudes and beliefs, ideas and judgments, codes, and institutions, arts and sciences, philosophy and social organisation.<sup>1</sup>

It is said that literature is the reflection of society. Chetan Bhagat's *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* is a narration of the complexities involved in inter-community and inter-state marriage. While talking about the cultural identity Beena Agarwal in her book *Chetan Bhagat: A Voice of Seismic Shift in Indian English Fiction* says that cultural identity is a complex phenomenon and it includes all possible modes of habits and experiences. The reconciliation of two cultures becomes an enigma that seems to follow no conclusive end. (Agarwal 101)

The novel is the story of the love marriage between Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi boy and Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil Brahmin girl. The love marriage between Krish and Ananya becomes more difficult and complex as they belong to the two opposite poles of India, i.e. North and South India. The novel draws our attention to the cultural variances and the bigotries of the people from these two parts of India.

According to Priyanka Lamba, the cultural differences, between the North and the South India have their origins in the age-old concept of Aryan and Dravidian races and the theory of Aryan invasion. The rudimentary dissection of Indian society is the division of Aryans and Dravidians. The North Indians are considered the progenies of Aryans while the South Indians of Dravidians. Besides, the languages spoken in the four South Indian states are known as Dravidian and their script is entirely different from the Aryan languages of North India. Along with dissimilarities in language groups, there is a dissimilarity of complexion in between the two. While most of the North Indians are fair, the majority of the South Indians are black in their complexion. According to a common Indian legend, the Aryans reached in North India somewhere from Iran and South Russia around 1500 BC. Before the Aryans, the Dravidians used to reside there. The Aryans defeated them, ignored the local culture and pushed the Dravidians to South. This age-old concept of Aryan and Dravidian race has been found incorrect, but this theory of great divide has already done the great damage by creating rifts in the Indian society. (Batra 102)

Chetan Bhagat uses the curtain between North and South, traditional parents and their modern children as underlying foundation for the story of Krish and Ananya. The characters, as the title of the novel suggests are from Delhi and Chennai, the two cities representing two distinct cultures of North and South India. At IIM Ahmedabad, Krish Malhotra and Ananya Swaminathan meet each other and fall in love. After completing their MBA they decide to get married. They invite their parents to their convocation. But their parents show a series of predetermined notions and are intolerant against each other. So this meeting fails to bring any result. But both Krish and Ananya continue their effort to convince their parents for the marriage. In the novel it is found that Krish in one occasion while pursuing his mother regarding his love for Ananya, defends himself that he has not been entrapped. Rather, Ananya is so smart, intelligent and good-looking that she needs to entrap no one. It is his true love for her.

'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. He has a good job. Why she need to trap anyone?' (Bhagat. *2 States* 56)

Ananya on the other hand, tries to convince her parents for her marriage with Krish. In her effort she invites Krish one evening to her house at a dinner with her family members as Krish gets his posting in Chennai as he opted for that under Ananya's suggestion. In this way she tries to bring a positive state of mind for their marriage to her family members (Bhagat. 2 States 87). Krish also in his effort to impress Ananya's father in his favour helps him by preparing power-point presentation for his office after his own bank-hour is over till late night at Ananya's house with her father. (Bhagat. 2 States 134-35)

Beena Agarwal in her book *Chetan Bhagat : A Voice of Seismic Shift in Indian English Fiction* says that Chetan Bhagat in his presentation of his idea of marriages discovers the social issues like the idea of dowry in traditional marriage and the examples of matrimonial alliances in the developing form of conducts in multi-cultural and multinational societies. Bhagat cites an example. While mother is resolute to compel Krish to arrange a formal meeting with Pammi Aunty's daughter, but Krish makes a candid confession, "I allowed my mind to be trapped again by thoughts of my South Indian girl" (Bhagat. 2 States 60). Bhagat, through the difference of the attitude of Krish and his mother points out the cultural diversities in Punjabi and Tamilian families. (Agarwal 97)

In the novel, Chetan Bhagat, demarcates very entertainingly a series of cultural features of Tamil Brahmin and Punjabi communities which are in sharp contrast to each other. In one occasion it is found that Krish makes fun of Tamilian's habit of reading the newspaper *The Hindu* and he calls his father-in-law "Mr. Hindu-addict Grumpyswami" (Bhagat. 2 States 91). During the marriage ceremony too, Ananya's relatives are found to pass copies of the newspaper *The Hindu* to each other as they continue to gather information through the ceremony (Bhagat. 2 States 259). Krish's family has a fascination for "bright complexion" (Bhagat. 2 States 56), whereas the South Indians are dark and love wearing heavy bright coloured sarees with lot of jewelleries. Describing Ananya's relatives Bhagat says "Given their dusky complexion, everyone's teeth shown extra white. All old women wore as much gold as their bodies could carry and silk saris shiny as road reflectors (Bhagat. 2 States 14). In another occasion of the novel the novelist describes "Ananya's mother walked behind in a glittery haze. Her magenta and gold Kanjeevaram sari could be noticed from any corner of the lawn. She looked as if she had fallen into a drum of golden paint. (Bhagat. 2 States 45)

Reena Sablok in her book *The Emergence of the Best-Seller Chetan Bhagat and His Metro Fiction* has said that Chetan Bhagat has brought the theme of Pan-Indian identity to this novel. (Sablok 143)

There are frequent references to the food habits of the Punjabi community and Chetan Bhagat excavates at their obsession with food through his memorable one-liners – "Nothing soothes an upset Punjabi like diary products"(Bhagat. 2 States 44). To manifest her right on her son Krish, his mother took one biscuit and put that in his mouth to assert her maternal right on Krish (Bhagat. 2 States 50). For Punjabis food triggers an emotional response. (Bhagat. 2 States 222)

Bhagat also makes amusement of the Punjabi community's trait of giving importance to show, splendour, lavish spending and fashion. Krish's mother takes him to Pammy aunty's house, who

is the owner of six petrol pumps and also a proud mother of two daughters. She manifests her typical Punjabi feature of the habit of showing off her wealth as a part of her conversation with other. She cannot go for morning walk as there are “six cars” (Bhagat. 2 *States* 61). For the ordinary guests, she tells her maid to bring “cashews and those Dubai dates” (Bhagat. 2 *States* 61). But for the special guests, there is a “gigantic tray with samosas, jalebis, chole bhature, mik cake, kachoris and, of course, the red and green chutneys. Twenty thousand calories were plonked on the table. (Bhagat. 2 *States* 63). This type of welcome is in contrast to the Tamilian style of receiving a guest. For example, “Ananya’s mother came in the living room. She held a tray with a glass of water and a plate of savouries. The spiral-shaped, brown-coloured snacks resembled fossilised snakes”. (Bhagat. 2 *States* 90)

In the novel there is a description of the wedding of Krish’s cousin Minti. Minti’s sagan ceremony takes place in Hotel Taj Palace and by doing so Rajji Mama has to take his one-upmanship among the relatives right to the top (Bhagat. 2 *States* 199). In the wedding ceremony Rajji Mama holds the family name high (Bhagat. 2 *States* 200) by making elaborate preparations. Eight cuisines, like Punjabi, Chinese, Thai and Italian etc. are served. The venue is decorated with flowers from Thailand and Bangkok. He also gifts a Santro car to the groom. In this way, to uphold the social prestige of the family he has to take loan also. Despite all his efforts, he has to place his pink turban at groom’s parent’s feet (Bhagat. 2 *States* 211). However, Ananya’s intervention saves the bride and the marriage takes place happily without Hyundai Accent. (Bhagat. 2 *States* 216)

The so called Punjabi culture of flamboyant wedding is found contradictory to the simple Tamil marriage of Krish and Ananya in Chennai. The ceremonies are according to the religious rituals, the meals are simple – Rice, Sambar, Rasam, vegetable, curd with “no paneer here” (Bhagat. 2 *States* 256). Besides, the early morning six-thirty schedule for the marriage is shocking for the Punjabis as for them marriage is a late night celebration. “This is a wedding or a torture? It is like catching an early morning flight” (Bhagat. 2 *States* 255). But on the other hand, Ananya’s relatives congratulate each other on the formal setting of the time.

These differences in rituals, customs, dress and food have given birth to racial sentiments and led to prejudices against each other. Both Krish and Ananya’s family think themselves superior to the other and have ego conflicts because of different culture and value systems. Krish’s mother has a fixed view that Ananya being a ‘Madrasi’ (Bhagat. 2 *States* 55) girl has trapped her son as all Madrasi girls are obsessed with the bright complexion of the North Indian Punjabi men. To justify her observation, she brings the examples of Bollywood heroines Hema Malini and Sridevi too (Bhagat. 2 *States* 56). Ananya’s parents, on the other hand, are proud of their South Indian culture and think that their daughter will get her life-mate in their own community. But Krish and Ananya pursue to cross all the barriers. Krish wins over Ananya’s conservative parents through his chain of efforts, including, by giving tuition to her brother, helping her father by preparing power-point presentation for office and also by persuading his boss Bala to invite Ananya’s mother to share the stage with the famous singers Hariharan and P. Balasubramaniam and sing at the bank’s client’s appreciation dinner. Krish’s showing interest in Carnatic music, his wearing Ananya’s father’s ‘Lungi’ (Bhagat. 2 *States* 148), developing a taste for the South Indian food are symbolic of his efforts to bridge the North-South division that separates him from Ananya. Ananya, on the other hand, tries to impress Krish’s mother by attempting to cook dinner for them. She finally wins Krish’s family’s approval by sorting out the dowry problem at Minti’s marriage and thus saving their dignity. (Bhagat. 2 *States* 216)

In her observation of the novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*, Beena Agarwal says that it is remarkable that Ananya and Krish survive in their private worlds. But for the settlement of their marriage both are committed to their family traditions. For them the emotional bonding

with their parents is as significant as their personal relations. When Krish asks “What do you want to be?”, with a light hearted laughter she admits, “Well, I don’t know. My mother already feels I’m too ambitious and independent (Bhagat. *2 States* 17). For Krish, the greatest challenge is to make spaces in Ananya’s family where South Indian tradition of food and living dominate. Similarly, Krish manages all events in such a manner that Ananya can prove herself a dynamic and docile daughter-in-law fit to adjust in a North Indian Punjabi family. (Agarwal 165)

After a lot of uproar, emotional performances and also ego-clashes, the marriage of two states takes place finally. Chetan Bhagat, through the lips of Krish says, “I looked at Mr. Swami and his wife. They were no longer Ananya’s parents. They were my in-laws. I had done it. The two states had become one” (Bhagat. *2 States* 263). The message of the book is conveyed through the emotionally charged speech of Mr. Swaminathan: “Yes, the Tamilian in me is a little disappointed. But the Indian in me is 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. *2 States* 266). The conclusion of the novel is provided in the epilogue where the readers come to know that Krish and Ananya are blessed with twins who represent the two states of their parents but above all belong to one same state called India.

We may conclude with the words of Beena Agarwal. According to her in the novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*, Chetan Bhagat negotiates the issue of inter-community marriages in context of the synthesis of culture and solidarity of nations. The new perceptions of social relationship require the reorientation of the social system to ensure a balanced mode of relations to resist the forces that are creeping fast in the era of globalisation and multicultural constructs. It ensures that Bhagat observes human conditions entirety and no longer celebrates the idealised images of life. He looks forward to cultural combination and harmonious survival of man beyond social prejudices. (Agarwal 111)

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#### **Note:-**

1. Blumenthal, Albert. “American Anthropologist” *A New Definition of Culture*. New Series, Vol. 42, No. 4, Part 1 (Oct. - Dec., 1940), pp.571-586. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/663653>.