



EXPLORING CULTURAL AND MIDDLE-CLASS MENTALITY IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S 2 STATES: THE STORY OF MY MARRIAGE

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Abstract

2States: "The Story of My Marriage" by ChetanBhagat is a semi-autobiographical story. The narrative follows the love story of Krish, a Punjabi boy, and Ananya a Tamil girls, as they navigate cultural differences and familial objections to their inter-caste relationship. Bhagat highlights themes such as middle-class mentalities, extravagant wedding expenses, parental possessiveness and societal racism. Through vivid character portrayals and realistic scenarios, the novel emphasizes the challenges faced by inter-caste couples in India. The story also critiques the societal obsession with status and material wealth, illustrating how chose factors exacerbate the already daunting process of seeking familial approve for marriage. Ultimately, Bhargat's work serves as a commentary on the evolving dynamics of love and marriage within the multicultural fabric of modern India.

Key Words: 2States, The Story of My Marriage, semi-autobiographical etc.

Introduction

In “2 States: The story of My Marriage,” Chetan Bhagat explores the intricacies of contemporary Indian society through the personal journey of a Punjabi boy, Krish, and a Tamil girl, Ananya, Published in 2009. The novel is a semi-autobiographical account that delves into themes such as cultural clashes, middle class mentality, extravagant wedding expenses, racism, and parental possessiveness. The story provides a poignant commentary on the challenges faced by inter-caste couples in navigating societal pressures and familial expectations, making it a reflection on the evolving dynamics of modern India. The novel, adapted into a Bollywood movie in 2014 starring Arjun Kapoor and Alia Bhatt, is based on Bhagat’s real life love story.

It narrates the challenges faced by a Delhi based Punjabi boy and a Tamil girl from IIM Ahmedabad in convincing their parents for marriage due to cultural differences. Bhagat skillfully transfer his personal story into a 269 page fiction.

The novel is meticulously structured into six acts, each with its own title, such as Ahmedabad, Delhi, Chennai, and so on, This division, along with 63 smaller sections, makes the story easy and engaging to read. The main focus in on Clashes between North and South India. Through the love story of a Punjabi boy, Krish, and a Tamil girls, Ananya, The author explores various facts of contemporary Indian society and the differing cultural behaviors within the country.

Depiction of Contemporary Indian Society in 2 States

Chetan Bhagat’s “2 States” offers a vivid portrayal of contemporary Indian society, showcasing middle-class sensibilities, multicultural conflicts, and the challenges of modern generations adapting to traditional social structures. The novel highlights the clash between modern beliefs and traditional mindsets, along with some corporate and public issues, reflecting the reality of current Indian Society.

The novel vividly portrays the cultural clashes between North and South Indian societies, highlighting their distinct traditions, customs, and social rituals. These differences often lead to conflicts when the two cultures intersect. The story delves into various aspects such as food habits, dress sense, language, and social customs, revealing the challenges faced by the younger generation in navigating theses cultural divides. The author also sheds light on social evils present in both cultures, making the novel a comprehensive social documentary of contemporary Indian society. The North Indian Punjabi society is depicted as more status-conscious and materialistic with strained interpersonal relationships exemplified by Krish’s parents.

Krish’s family dynamics are filled with tension and strife, particularly between his parents. His father avoids home, leading to a strained marital relationship. Krish’s own relationship with his father is also factored after a server quarrel. This reflects a common reality

in many contemporary India families, where traditional pressures and expectations create significant stress. Dowry remains a major issue, exemplified by Krish Kavita, who prioritizes material gains over the happiness and education of her son's prospective bride. The novel portrays the obsession with status and show-off culture North Indian society, highlighting the middle-class mentality where appurtenance often trumps genuine prosperity. The elaborate, often financially burdensome marriage ceremonies further emphasize the societal pressures to maintain family reputation, sometimes at great personal cost.

Major issue of Multicultural Indian Society in 2 States: Issues Related to Middle Class Sensibility

"2 states: The story of My Marriage" delves into the serious Issues faced by the urban middle class in contemporary Indian society. The characters, marked by their aspirations and challenges, struggle with financial and social instabilities, preventing them from living a simple life. Chetan Bhagat highlights the complexities and sensibilities of middle-class individuals through their experiences and conflicts.

Typical Middle-Class Mentality

The novel highlights the "show off" mentality prevalent among the middle class, portraying characters who flaunt their new found wealth to boost their ego and gain temporary appreciation. This behavior streams from a desire to appear richer or more modern than their peers. "2 States: The story of My Marriage" is filled with examples of this middle-class mentality in contemporary Indian society.

In the novel, characters like pummi aunty, Rajji mama, and Krish's mother Kavita display a tendency to show off their wealth and status. Pummi aunty, for instance, tries to impress Krish and Kavita by flaunting her luxurious lifestyle, even though she knows Kavita's life with her husband is unhappy. This scene, where pummi aunty struggles with knee pain while climbing stairs, underscores the superficial nature of their conversations and the societal inclination towards materialism.

" You are going for morning walk nowadays? My mother ased.

" WhereKavita-ji it is so hot. Plus, I have satang in the morning (...)

Actually, even if you walk to satsang, it can be good exercise, my mother said.

Six cars, Kavita-ji Drivers sitting useless. How to walk? Pummi aunty asked.

She had demonstrated a fine Punjabi skill- of showing off here wealth as p;art of an innocent conversation. My mother turned to me to repeat her comment.

Six cars?Krish, you heard, they have six cars. (...) Which ones?' I said

'I don't know, My husband knows. Just last week be bought a Honda.'

"How much for?" my mother asked (...)

“Seven Lakh, plus stereo changed for thirty thousand,” Pummi aunty said.

“Wow!” my mother said. ‘He has also got a job with Citibank, four lakh a year ‘To a non- punjabi, my mother’s comment would be considered a nosequiter. To a Punjabi it is perfect continuation. We are talking about a lakh. After all (Bhagat Two 61)

Indeed, Pummiaunty’s gesture of offering rich dry fruits to Krish and his mother Kavita highlights the middle-class inclination towards displaying wealth to impress guests. This act is a subtle yet telling example of the social behavior that underscores much of the narrative in *2 States*, reflecting the broader cultural obsession with appearances and social status.

Excessive Marriage Expenses

The novel sheds light on the extravagant expenses of middle-class marriages in contemporary Indian society. Highlighting how these events have become status symbols. Lavish decorations, Expensive clothing and elaborate catering are often prioritized to earn temporary appreciation leading to significant waste. This behavior contrasts starkly with the reality of widespread poverty and food scarcity in India. For the middle class, these expenses create undue financial strain as they try to keep up with societal expectations. Resulting in considerable stress and hardship. The novel captures this societal issue, portraying the senseless waste and the pressures faced by middle-class families.

“Frankly, it was a big deal for our clan. We had seen some over the top wedding, but never before did an engagement ceremony happen at a top end five-star hotel. Rajji mama had taken his one-upmanship among the relatives right to the top by booking the Taj” (Bhagat Two 199)

In “*2 States*”. Bhagat highlights the excessive wedding expenses among the middle class, vividly depicted through Minti’s marriage celebration. Many families, even if they can’t afford it. Spend lavishly on social events to maintain prestige, often taking loans to meet societal expectations. Bhagat uses Rajji mama’s character to critique this mentality, shedding light on the impractical social customs that pressure families into financial strain for the sake of appearances. This serves as a call for readers to reconsider these outstand traditions.

Prevalent Racism

The novel also highlights the issue of racism in contemporary Indian society. Racism, as defined by the Anti-Deformation League, involves hatred or the belief that someone is inferior due to their skin color, language, customs, or place of birth. Although less intense than in some European countries, racism persists in India, a nation with diverse races and religions. Northern Indians are generally fairer, taller, and stronger while southern Indians are darker shorter, and often considered more intellectual and better in administration. This racial discrimination has roots in the historical divide between Aryan and Dravidian Cultures. Additionally, people from the North-East, of Mongolian origin, face discrimination and are often mistaken for Chinese,

Tibetans, or Nepalese. This lack of integration into the mainstream contributes to ongoing prejudice.

Inter-Caste Marriages-Still a Social Stigma

“2 States: The story of My Marriage” Addresses the issue of inter- caste marriages, a significant social stigma in many Indian communities. Inter-caste marriages are often viewed as shameful by various societal groups. Ms.Rittu, in her article in Contemporary Researches in India discusses this prevalent issue. Bhagat’s novel highlights the struggles and prejudices faced by couples from different castes, reflecting the deep-seated societal challenges that persist in contemporary Indian society. Apparently, inter-caste marriages are still a taboo in India. Still it is not simple affair as it involves more than the bride and bridegroom. In India, marriage is considered marriage of two families by matching their financial status, ritual, language and of course, complexion. Though we are modern in outlook and life-style it is beyond understanding why we draw a lakshman Rekha (dead line) when we need to be more liberal and modern. It implies that we are modern outwardly but back ward inwardly.

People often prefer marrying within their own communities for perceived safety security, and support from relatives. However, this isn’t a complete solution, as many within-community marriages still face significant problems. Most arranged marriages in India occur within communities, while love marriage, inter-caste marriages still face social stigma due to fears of dishonor and insecurity. The socio-psychological complexities of these communities make inter-caste marriages rare and challenging. The writer Chetan Bhagat very interestingly describes the exact situation of love marriages in India with the consent of the parents and family members from both the sides as:

Love marriages around the world are simple:

Boy loves girl. Girl loves boy. They get married.

In India. There are a 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.

Krish and Ananya both struggle to gain their parents’ approval for their inter-caste marriage. Krish’s mother, Kavita, hopes to secure a significant dowry for her son, while his father has his own reservations. Despite Krish’s efforts, his mother remains stubborn, harboring cultural biases against South Indians and concerns about having a modern, educated and financially independent daughter-in-law. This highlights the deep-rooted cultural and societal barriers that inter-caste couples often face.

Ananya’s father requests Krish as:

“ Don’t meet Ananya too much. We are simple people, we don’t say much.

But don’t spoil name in our community, he said,

‘Uncle But.....

“ I know you are classmates and you are helping Manju. We can be grateful.

We can feed you, but we can’t let Ananya Marry you

(Bhagat Two 109)

Parental possessive

In 2 states, Bhagat cleverly exposes the issue of parental possessiveness burdens younger generation in contemporary Indian society. Both Krish and Ananya’s parents are highly possessive and make decisions for their children, creating significant obstacles in their relationship. This parental overreach is a major source of the couple’s struggles in getting married, reflecting a broader social issue.

The novel highlights how Krish and Ananya’s parents emotionally manipulate them to get their way. Krish’s mother rejects Ananya, hoping to secure a substantial dowry. Ananya’s parents fear social humiliation if they accept Krish. Both sets of parents constantly interfere in their children’s decisions and monitor their behavior closely, driven by insecurity and other mental barriers. This overbearing control frustrates Krish, who feels smothered by his mother’s possessiveness. The novel effectively illustrates the struggles faced by young couples in overcoming parental dominance and societal expectations.

He sighs as: Because they are parents. From biscuits to brides, if there is anything their children really want, parents have a problem’ (Bhagat Two 39).

Conclusion

In “2 States: The story of My Marriage,” Chetan bhagat skillfully weaves together the complexities of contemporary Indian society, exploring themes like cultural clashes, middle-class mentality, extravagant wedding expenses, racism, and parental possessiveness. Through the personal journey of Krish and Anany, highlights the societal pressures and challenges faced by young couples in navigating inter-caste relationships and familial expectations. The novel serves as a reflection on the evolving dynamics of modern India, urging readers to reconsider entrenched traditions and embrace a more inclusive and understanding approach to love and marriage.

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