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The Ethics and Aesthetics of Love and Marriage in Chetan Bhagat's 2 States

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Abstract

Chetan Bhagat writes novels for the youth. His works target the problems, confusions, and lack of guidance which exists in the Indian society. As a writer and as a person he believes that the youth of the nation must be aware of what they want in life. He wants to show that life is a series of struggles and hence one has to conquer it to win over. Bhagat has a strong conviction that life is not a bed of roses and hence he wishes to create in the minds of his readers, more humorously that they need to sweat it out to achieve something in their lives. The novel, *Two States: The Story of My Marriage* is itself self explanatory and enlivening. When a lay reader gets to browse the title, one is reminded of the variant cultures which India has been carrying over under the tag of unity and diversity. When it comes to marriage, in a country like India, it is always a big fat wedding. The paper looks at the facets of love and marriage in the eyes of culture and acceptance. Although the country boasts of modernity and development in all the spheres of life, there is still a lack and a pitfall when it comes to marriage. Caste and family still play a very prominent role in deciding the fate of marriages.

Keywords: Culture, Love, Marriage, Youth, Tradition, Indian Society, Independent

Love and marriage are two entities here where the former is considered the union of two hearts but the latter is a union of two families. In a cosmopolitan ambiance like IIT and IIM, the students are exposed to various vicissitudes of life. They are trained to study, work hard and at the same time stay away from the nuances of love. This is because, on the one hand, they are certain that they would certainly have many choices to get married because they are from one of the most prestigious institutions across the country. The other is, love, romance and aestheticism are something which do not interest a typical IIT student. Bhagat broke the barriers and wished to show the life at these institutions in a more jocular manner and also the endeavor of two people who are in love to get married after getting their parent's approval.

Many books and studies have explored the idea of marriage across the globe especially in countries like the U.S and the U.K. To be precise, the idea of arranged marriage is existent only in a South Asian country like India where even in the twenty first century, parents happen to choose the brides or grooms for their children. Even otherwise, not much research has been undertaken into the concept of arranged marriages and their impacts on the Indian society as a whole. Research suggests that marriages play a prominent role in gauging the happiness of a person. Compared to the widowed, divorced or cohabited, the ones who are married are happier. Although many different countries have different cultural practices, the novel looks at the way, two Indians, one from the north of India and the one from the south who unite to get married.

Rosemary Burger in her work, *Cross- Cultural Marriage: Identity and Choice* comments on the system of mixed marriages as a practice which defy long abided traditions. She says,

Mixed or Cross Cultural marriages are defined as a union between two people from different linguistic, religious or ethnic groups or nations. However the perplexities which constitute a different culture begin with something nearer to a home. It has always been taken for granted by the people concerned that tradition has always been an important factor and that it should continue. In the case of mixed marriages, the unit called tradition is oblivious. (21)

A lot of ideas get into the novel's beginnings when one is introduced to the characters of Krish and Ananya. The former is a Punjabi and the latter is a Chennai based Brahmin who comes from a conservative family. The novel begins in the mess which itself is a place where the students are not self conscious. They are themselves at the place and Ananya complains about the quality of food which is served in the mess. This is something which begins to hint on the ways by which food in the hostel mess becomes a very important part of the culture. That too in a place like IIT, the food must serve the needs of all who come to the mess because the students belong to different pockets of the country. Krish begins to introduce the girl of his life where he says by breaking the archetypes that a girl from IIT looks good which is something that is rare in these kind of eminent institutions. This is a kind of inverted sublimation. The society on the whole looks at a girl as someone who is good looking and when it comes to girls who are studious, it sees them as someone who do not care about being attractive. Even psychology says the same. It is natural for a girl to show herself as someone who is attracted by the boys. Beauty is an important entity and an integral aspect in gauging a woman. It is unfortunate that the society gives impetus to beauty than anything else. It is a common belief that a girl who studies does not look good and the girl who is weak academically spends time on augmenting her physicality. A girl who does not look good wishes to garner attention by some other means and hence they tend to focus their attention on sports or academics so that they do not get into the idea that

they are not beautiful and they do not have people from the opposite sex to admire her. Psychologists call this process sublimation where a negative energy is channelized into a more positive and a socially acceptable energy. The term sublimation is defined thus.

The basic meaning of the word sublimation is to change form. In psychology sublimation is a matured defense mechanism used to channel socially unacceptable behaviors or impulses such as aggressive drives into positive or at least socially acceptable actions like creativity. This process often originates from desires originating in childhood and can help individuals in certain situations, find healthier ways of handling troublesome urges. (www.betterhelp.com)

One of the reasons as to why the entire batch of IIT was attracted to Ananya was her beauty and her hair which touched her waist. The history of long hair in a country like India is something which is fascinating. Men usually prefer women with long hair because they feel that having a lengthy hair is a symbol of fertility. On the flip side, there is also a myth which says that women with long hair come from conservative families while the ones with short hair are modern in their thought and outlook. When the novel opens, one finds that the girl Ananya is a modern woman, a kind of new woman who is willing to take risks and question something when she feels that it is not right. She stands against the system in the mess when everyone eats the half baked food without questioning but she does not want to eat the food which is insipid. The rasagullas are also another important part of the culture where a set of people from the West Bengal eat this sweet as a part of their everyday routine and when she takes two sweets, one which is hers and the other from Krish one finds that she is willing to stand up for herself and resolve a problem whenever she confronts with one. She says, "Give me the rasgullas," she pointed to the dessert. That is after you finish meal, the mess worker said. "Who are you? My mother? I am finished. Give me two rasgullas" (5).

When one looks at the plot of the novel, it might seem as though it is a pop novel or a kind of pulp fiction which one can read during a journey or when one has a spare time. Deep down there is

a message which the author wishes to give it to the readers. One of the most important ideas which the novel drives home is that, marriage is a commitment than a sacrament. Although Krish and Ananya come from different family backgrounds, different cultures, different ways of life, they make it a point to authenticate their love through marriage. Another key idea which the novel drives home is that, career is as important as love and hence a student must not be in love at the cost of his career. Bhagat as a writer wishes to inform, instruct and enlighten his readers by giving a sugar coated message which becomes the undercurrent of the novel. The locale moves from Ahmedabad, Chennai and Bangalore where only Ahmedabad is explicitly portrayed while the other cities are left to the imagination of the readers. The author wants to bring to the forefront that career for a woman is important. Men also need to study hard, clear their backlogs before they sit for the campus placement interviews. Love is an integral part of the novel but more than that the novel also talks about career, jobs, working at different companies across different cities and more importantly to keep the spirit and fire of love alive. The quote below gives a sum up to the plot of the novel. The readers when introduced to the characters of Krish and Ananya are also introduced to the fact that they will get married and the suspense of the novel rests in the question, how and when. There is also a hint about the premarital sex which the author wants to present in the novel. The portrayal of the hostels, their leniency in allowing girls and the boys to meet with each other during night outs and other events at college are a part of the novel's humor but still there is a strong bond which the novel allows to emanate despite the struggles which they face in convincing their parents.

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. Can they convince their families that they are made for each other ? Can a Punjabi and a Tamil family forget their differences of culture, values and behavior and come together as a family?(88-89)

Chetan Bhagat harps on the idea of freewill all through his novels. The ambiance at the IIT, the jobs they choose, the behavioral changes at the campus and finally the love of their lives all come to comprise an important part of freewill or what one calls it a choice. The author has himself stated that the youth of today are given choices to create their future and at the same time they also have an option to destroy it. The government does not intervene in the life of any citizen to check whether or not he has used or tapped his opportunities in a more realistic manner so that he has become someone in life. It is therefore the duty of every youth to take care of his life. Another important message the novel wishes to pin point is the myth that life in IIT or IIM is easy because the moment one enters these campuses, their lives are settled. Bhagat is one of the very few authors who have given a firsthand experience of how life in these prestigious institutions would be. All through the novels, he has one key thought to propose, the youth of the nation do not have any guidance because India as a country does not provide platforms for exposure to come up in life or make someone independent. It is therefore mandatory that a typical youngster becomes discrete and tries to make all choices which comes to him with clear and thorough discretions. The author thus wishes to instruct and at the same time entertain his readers.

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