

An Inclusion of Societal and Cultural Sensitivity Inbhagat's *Two States*

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Abstract

This paper deals with societal and cultural sensitivities in the novel 2 States: The Story of My Marriage. Bhagat's novel Two States is partly an autobiographical novel focused on the theme of love and marriage, which relates cross-cultural encounters and explores two states, namely Punjab and Tamil Nadu. This story significantly represents issues related to the middle-class sensibilities and multicultural sensitivities of contemporary Indian society. The novel Two States also mirrors the Indian mindset; conflicts between South and North India point to inter-community and inter-state marriage. Furthermore, the paper sheds light on the socio-cultural clashes arising out of socio-cultural diversities.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Relationships, Marriage, Cultural Encounters, Traditions.

Through the chief characters Krish and Ananya in the current book *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*, Chetan Bhagat clarifies the prevailing issues of sociological and cultural sensitivities of contemporary Indian society and its consequences on the younger generation. Throughout their education and post-secondary education, the younger generation has been instilled with pride in being Indian and understanding that India is their nation. They get along quite well in the classroom, but as soon as they enter society, they discover that things are not the same. There would be no purpose in a society full of diversity and differences of all kinds, where the national ideas that have been ingrained are meaningless.

For example, Krish and Ananya never seriously minded their social status and cultural differences while studying in the same institute. Ananya, being a born Tamil Iyer, never felt any hesitation to eat non-veg food or even wine. She wears short clothes and moves with his boyfriend freely. Even Krish has lived mostly in hostels so he has never grown up with any cultural complexes in his life. He frankly tells Ananya: "I am Punjabi, though I never lived in Punjab. I grew up in Delhi. And I have no idea about my caste, but we do eat chicken. And I can digest bad sambhar better than Tamil Brahmins (7) Both Krish and Ananya never had any problem in their friendship or even their serious relationship because of their cultural or social differences.

They are delighted and contented with each other despite their different social and cultural backgrounds.

The real problems started in their life when they decided to get married with the consent of their parents. The parents of both Krish and Ananya are highly influenced by their cultural and social positions.

Krish's mother Kavita wants him to marry a Punjabi community so that she may get much dowry and a daughter-in-law who can be under her control. Ananya's parents, despite their decent mentality, feel that their daughter should marry in their Tamil community so that their social reputation may not be spoiled. Krish cannot accept the mean mentality of the older generation people. Then Ananya said 'They won't be Tamil or Punjabi. They will be Indian'. If all young people marry outside their community, it is good for the country too. The prevalent social and cultural differences in the present Indian society have taken the country's people nowhere.

The people seem to have narrowed themselves in the limited boundaries. Sometimes they know that there is no meaning in the activity they are doing even if they keep on doing it just to follow social traditions. They perhaps fear being rejected in society. Say, for example, Ananya's parents like Krish due to his educational and professional excellence but dare not accept him as their son-in-law because they think of social dishonour.

Chetan Bhagat has illustrated societal sensibilities in the present novel *Two States*. One can see that Krish and Ananya have to endure great mental turmoil because of the prevalent cultural and social preoccupations in the minds of the older generation. Krish has to convince Ananya's parents, which gives him a lot of mental pressure. He has to take more than equal mental stress to convince his mother to accept Ananya as her daughter-in-law. All this shows its effects on his professional life also. He can't fully concentrate on his job responsibilities and again he has to be humiliated in the job environment also. His mental stress was so poignant to him that he had to consult a psychotherapist for any possible solution to come out of the mental turmoil. The novelist seems to have given a solution to the contemporary issue of cultural diversity and its effects on society again through the modernized thinking of young minds.

At the end of the novel, in the epilogue, it is shown that it has been a couple of years since Ananya and Krish got married. Ananya is at the last stage of her pregnancy so she is admitted to the hospital for her delivery.

When the twin baby boys are delivered, Krish wants them to be identified as Indian first and then anything else. Krish narrates the incident in the last few lines of the novel:

The nurse cleaned up the two boys and gave them to me.

You are from two different states right/ so, what will be their states?

The nurse said and chuckled.

"They'll be from a state called India. I said". (259)

With that, Bhagat has put the ball in the court of the young generation of India to think out of the box and break the meaningless social or cultural traditions that keep on challenging the national value system in the present time. The above-cited expression of Krish can be understood as the echo of the inner voice of the novelist himself against the prevalent social and cultural diversities that challenge our national integrity or national peace and harmony as a whole.

The title of the present novel itself suggests that there are two states in the novel. One is Delhi which is in the northern part of India and the other is Chennai which is in the southern part of India. Both states have different people with their socio-cultural diversity. As it is generally observed, the people of the two different cultures earlier called the Aryan civilization and the Dravidian civilization have hardly tried to understand each other.

The food they eat, the language they speak, the clothes they wear, the religious and social customs they follow the way they think, and the way they behave are quite different in both cultures.

The real problem starts when the two different cultures meet especially the two different older generations. Cultural possessiveness and taking pride in one's own culture at the cost of others creates certain cultural conflicts. It may be right if people accept the reciprocal importance of the two different civilizations but clashes occur in society when one group of people tries to show off their own culture as higher or better than the other culture. This novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* represents the socio-cultural differences between the Punjabi culture and the Tamil culture.

The protagonist has also centered considerable focus on the socio-cultural clashes arising out of extreme socio-cultural diversities. In the present novel, the novelist has depicted two different cultures of contemporary Indian society with their diversities. As mentioned earlier one is the North Indian or the Punjabi culture and the other is the South Indian or Tamil culture. The people of both cultures have notable diversities in their language, food, attire, social traditions and customs, convictions and mindsets, and their ways of living life. The people of Punjabi culture use Punjabi accents like "Ji" frequently in their use of English, whereas the Tamil people frequently use the Tamil accent like *Seri, illa, Aiyo*.

There occurs no cultural issue due to language diversity if it is practiced in their respective cultural environment but when people of two different cultures are talking and they use their native language to share some secret things that the other cannot get their meaning, here starts the cultural conflicts due to language. When Krish's mother and Ananya's parents visit the Gandhi Ashram in Ahmedabad, Krish's mother Kavita doesn't exactly know the history of the Dandi March.

Here, the use of native language during continuous conversation puts the listener in doubt if something unusual is being discussed by the speaker which creates a sense of doubt for criticizing or insulting the other party. Krish's mother Kavita feels such a sense in her mind that she is speaking something unusual about her in a different language. The socio-cultural diversity between the Punjabi culture and the Tamil culture is reflected mainly in their food and clothing patterns.

The Punjabi people eat spicy food and use more dairy products. Krish, at the beginning of the novel, when with Ananya, orders Paneer pao-bhaji with extra butter and a Lassi. He accepts that nothing can soothe an upset Punjabi like dairy products. Krish narrates that it is very cruel to keep Punjabis away from their food. The food arrangement at Krish's cousin Minti's marriage ceremony reflects the fact how much the Punjabi's love food and drink. At the same time, the Tamil people eat rice-based recipes like Dosa, Idly, Upma, and Sambar.

They use more tamarind and coconut oil and they also use banana leaves for dishes. They generally do not prefer dining tables for meals rather they prefer to sit cross-legged on the floor for the same. Punjabi's are non-vegetarians who regularly eat chicken and drink wine whereas the Tamilians are depicted in the novel as pure vegetarians. They never drink wine or vodka. The cultural clashes start when the people of both cultures meet. The food pattern of the people of one culture cannot suit the other. When Krish goes for dinner at Ananya's house on the very first day of his job in Chennai, he feels very unusual to eat the typical Tamil food there. The cultural differences and clashes are observed even in the clothing styles of the people of both cultures.

Attire is one of the unique identities of any particular culture. Usually, Punjabi men wear pants and shirts or western attire which has become a common attire in Indian society. Especially in the Sardar community, men wear different coloured turban around their heads in a typical Punjabi style. The women occasionally wear sarees in a typical style.

The traditional attire of the Punjabi culture is the Salwar Kameez and lehenga-choli, but it has a much Western effect on it. Bhagat describes the traditional attire of the Punjabi culture in the marriage event of Krish's cousin Minti: "My mother sat with an eighty-year-old lady who wore a gold necklace. It had a pendant bigger than the Olympics medal" (200).

The Tamil culture has different typical attire which is quite different from that of the Punjabi culture. The Tamil men wear lungi like Dhoti on most occasions. The Tamil women wear Kanjeevaram saree. Ananya's mother wears a silk kanjeevaram saree on most occasions and her father wears a lungi and half-half-sleeve shirt.

When Krish sees the photos of Ananya's father in her hostel room he describes his attire as he wore a half-sleeve shirt with a dhoti in most of the pictures. Krish narrates Ananya's parent's attire when they come to attend the convocation of her daughter in Ahmedabad: Her father wore a crisp white shirt, like the ones in detergent ads. Ananya's mother walked behind in a glittery haze, her magenta and gold Kanjeevaram saree could be noticed from any corner of the lawn (45).

When Krish reaches Chennai, he observes the typical attire of the people of Tamil culture "Tamil women, all of them, kept flowers in their hair. Tamil men don't believe in pants and wear lungis even in shopping districts" (77). Ananya's mother wore a Kanjeevaram saree when she was to give her singing performance at the Citibank music concert. Even in Goa, Krish's mother gifts Ananya's mother a silk saree she says that silk is very popular in the South also and they have Kanjeevaram sarees. Ananya wears a nine-yard dark red silk saree for her marriage. The different attire in different cultures is an exclusive identity of that particular culture.

There is no scope for any cultural clashes but when the same attire is worn by a person of a different culture, there arises a problem. Krish wore a new rust-coloured silk kurta pajama which was brought by his mother for him on the day of his marriage yet Ananya's father forced him to wear traditional Tamil dress during the marriage. Here, Krish feels very embarrassed and much awkwardness about wearing a Tamil-style Dhoti.

The novel *Two States* is purely based on the marriage of a boy and a girl from a quite different cultural background, the novelist has pointed out some socio-cultural differences in the traditions and mindsets as well as the thinking and behavior patterns of both cultures. It is mentioned that money is given more importance in Punjabi culture whereas the Tamil culture gives importance to education.

Also, the novel depicts that giving or asking for Dowry is a natural custom that is widely practiced in society. Getting or giving expensive gifts on wedding occasions is a very common convention followed. Even when the Punjabi people visit any of their relatives' homes, they go with something in their hand to be gifted to the host. Krish also naturally follows this custom when he for the first time, goes to Ananya's home. "I had brought a gift pack of biscuits, as my Punjabi sensibilities had taught me to never go to someone's house without at least as many calories as you would consume there" (88).

When Krish's mother comes to Ahmedabad to attend Krish's convocation ceremony, she brings with her a suitcase full of sweets purchased from various shops in Delhi. When Krish asks the reason for bringing so many sweets, she says: "We will eat them, no? And we might meet people. They will say her son is graduating and she has nothing to offer us" (42). Krish's mother Kavita takes with her tussar silk saree to be gifted to Ananya's mother but there is no such custom in the Tamil culture.

So, a kind of cultural clash takes place here when Ananya's parents meet Krish's mother empty-handed, she feels insulted for not offering her anything though she is from the boy's side. The other sociocultural difference that is pointed out in the novel is about the nature and the ways of life of both the Punjabi and Tamil cultures.

The Tamils are depicted as more decent and docile people in comparison to the Punjabis who are ruder and rough and noisy in their day-to-day life. When Krish visits Ananya's home for the first time, he finds utter silence which he can never imagine, in a Punjabi home. He narrates it as: "The house had an eerie silence. A Punjabi house is never this silent even when people sleep at night" (89). The Tamil people believe in practicing very gentle behaviour in public.

Krish narrates the difference in the behaviour pattern when he goes back to Delhi: The people at Chennai airport, exchange smiles and proceed gently to the car park. In Delhi, there is a traffic jam of people trying to hug each other to death” (187). Ananya also accepts that the Tamil people are comparatively more reserved and introverted in expressing their feelings for other people: “We never talk. At home, my mom and dad, hardly talk. We’ll talk about the news, the food, and the weather. But never talk about our feelings. I only do that with you” (102). On the contrary, the Punjabi people are shown to be more expressive. They never even hesitate to communicate what is in their mind or heart. They hardly care for other people’s feelings or sentiments.

The end conversation between Krish’s mother and Anaya’s mother reveals the difference in nature between the people of the two different cultures. Chetan Bhagat has very ingeniously depicted complex and deeply rooted sociocultural problems of illustrations of cultural conflicts that are predominant in contemporary Indian society. The ultimate function of literature is to entertain and instruct.

Through the novel *Two States*, the protagonist mirrors the socio-cultural clashes and sensibilities of Indian society to realize their common errors and the ways to rectify them.

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