

## Reflection of 'Multiculturalism' in the Selected Novels of Chetan Bhagat

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### Abstract

Chetan Bhagat born 22 April 1974 is an Indian writer, known for his bestselling English-language novels about young urban middle-class Indians. Bhagat is also columnist for newspapers such as *The Times of India* and *Dainik Bhaskar*, where he writes about the youth, career development and current affairs. Literature mirrors the society and no society exists without its culture. Hence, the literature depicts culture overtly or covertly along with its characters. Popular literature is one of the prime sources of the contemporary societal values, habits, and the daily life of the people. Cultural aspects are more superfluous in the genre of novel than other literary forms. The same finds reflection in the novels of Chetan Bhagat.

**Keywords:** multicultural, literature, globalization, domestic, multinational

Multiculturalism is study of multiple (two or more) cultures. Many scholars use the terms 'Multiculturalism' and 'Cultural Studies' interchangeably. Multiculturalism, socio-political religious studies, media studies, translation studies and many others come under the rubrics of cultural studies. The 'text' in multicultural study may be a novel or a film or rituals of certain culture. To study multiculturalism, there are different theoretical perspectives. It received more attention in the contemporary 'glocal' (global-local) era of cultural transmission.

Multicultural perspective becomes one of the ways of recognizing the need for resistance as well as a strategy to counter the neo-colonialism/globalization. There are thousands of ways, covert and overt, in which globalization has affected life and thus literature. The pattern that has emerged finds full expression in literature. Literature itself has become a lucrative industry. Just as multiplexes have replaced cinema houses, similarly so called literature has replaced classics in this era. It is against this implied or stated position of culture being considered synonymous with high/elite culture and the popular culture being only its absent/present other that the conceptualization of popular culture must be made. This fluid position makes John Storey go to the extent of calling popular culture an 'empty' conceptual category,

one which can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways, depending on the context of use. Besides, both the terms in 'popular culture' have multiple meanings which adds to the problem of getting at a generally agreed upon definition. Williams suggests four current meanings of the term 'popular' 'well liked by many people'; 'inferior kinds of work'; 'work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people'; 'culture actually made by the people for themselves' Different definitions of 'popular culture', thus, are inevitable depending upon the complex combination of the different meanings of the term 'culture' with the different meanings of 'popular'.

The novel, *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* by Chetan Bhagat is about an IIMA couple's struggle to marry over the cultural differences. It's a story of an inter-state marriage in India; a Love story of a Punjabi boy Krish, and a Tamil Brahmin girl Ananya and marriage of parathas and idlis, paneer and coconut. Krish and Ananya, the main protagonists, are lovers but contrary to the usual practice they do not elope. They, instead, choose to convince their parents to approve of their tying the nuptial knot. This book also dwells upon an age-old North India versus South India conflict.

*2 States: The Story of my Marriage* draws upon Bhagat's campus experiences and has autobiographical tones, if not a true autobiography. This is the story of Krish Malhotra and Ananya Swaminathan who fall in love, have a live in relationship at the campus, and decide to get married only with the blessings of their parents. The rest of the novel is narration of their effort to bring corrections in their parents' 'prides and prejudices'. Krish tries to get Ananya's parents approval by coaching her brother for IIT, helps her father make a power point presentation and facilitates her mother give her maiden performance with S. P. Balasubramaniam. Ananya comes to Delhi, lives with Malhotras for a few days, tries to get approval of his mother, his relatives, helps his maternal uncle come out of a tricky and sticky situation, and wins the favour of one and all for being intelligent and for earning a huge salary. The story is told in first person flashback moves through the multicultural Indian social space and variegated middle Language in India. The

families cannot come around and the lovers have to depart. Krish suffers nervous breakdown, comes to Chennai for a the last effort, fails to meet Ananya, has to be taken to a doctor for fever, is suspected to be suffering from nervous breakdown, referred to a psychiatrist, and tells the story of his life to the doctor. This forms the major chunk of the novel. Krish is given professional advice by the psychiatrist, follows it and everything falls in place. Krish and Ananya get married in the traditional Tamil style, Happy Ending. IIMA graduates working for multinational companies become the embodiments of traditional middle class values and 'unity in diversity' actually happening.

2 States is set in late 1990s. It takes us on a guided tour of the IIMA where love life of the young lead pair flourishes, inside the corporate world, lets us peep into the lives of two families representing the two important and dominant cultural constituents of Indian culture and several other thematic and descriptive possibilities. The popularity of the novel is clear from the fact that within a short period, its ninth impression has come out. The blurb of the novel summarizes both the theme and the plot aptly, precisely, concisely, and if we take the liberty of using hyperbolic terms, comprehensively and even completely. 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. Welcome to 2 States, a story about Krish and Ananya who are from two different states of India, deeply in love and want to get married. Of course, their parents don't agree. To convert their love story into a love marriage, the couple have a tough battle in front of them. It is easy to fight and rebel, but much harder to convince.

As expected, they do 'make it' and the larger part of the novel is the story of the couple's journey of 'making it.' The blurb establishes the fact that things happen differently in India. The 'Epilogue' suggests the possibility of resolving the internal, surface level difference of Indian culture. The comic and satirical manner begins with the 'tongue-in-cheek' dedication and numerous aphoristic maintain this spirit which give the novel a 'comedy of manners' or 'domestic comedy' form. The novel is divided into six acts, complemented with the prologue and the epilogue. The novel utilizes the broad 'cultural encounter' pattern - not through the comparison of the two locales one of India and another of a foreign country or two corresponding sets of characters either in outlook or in terms of origin and citizenship, but uses very much Indian

characters within the geographical boundary of India - the almost stereo-type North-South cultural encounter. Even a cursory reading suggests that some of these characters display a complex internalization of Western ethos and are a convincing portrayal of our cultural reality today. The novel has the form of a comedy of manners/ Restoration play form. The 'Prologue' sets the story rolling. Krish, the central character, sitting on the couch in a psychotherapist's office in Chennai takes the story from the beginning to the mid of the 'Final Act: Delhi and Chennai and Delhi and Chennai' and his reflective sentence in the delivery room of a hospital gives the novel a complementary close. They get married only with the approval and blessings of their parents. Krish expects their parents to be hostile to their plan but Ananya thinks that their parents would come round easily because they are their middle class parents' 'overachieving children'. Their effort to bring both sets of parents to spend some time together for a better understanding at the time of convocation ends in a fiasco.

The ironic representation of cultural angularities of both Panjabis and Tamils from the within and without the communities saves the novel from being biased one way or the other. The earlier perception of both the communities to view each other in hierarchal terms changes to adopting an ideologically more correct position of acceptance and appreciation of difference and also an effort to not to make any effort to dissolve the difference can be taken to be reflective of a multicultural point of view. Krish and Ananya are individuals as well as types and represent a community, howsoever small it may be-that is highly educated and resists the neo-colonialism at various levels.

Celebration of the marriage together free from any accompanying cultural burden becomes symbolic of mutual respect of each other's beliefs, rituals, conventions and lifestyle. The seemingly comic drama of the speeches delivered by Ananya's father and Krish's maternal uncle underlines the transformation of their outlook. The novel ends in the hospital where Ananya, in the presence of Krish, is in the very process of giving birth to their twin sons. The last words of the Epilogue are worth considering: The nurse cleaned up the two babies and gave them to me. 'Be careful,' she said as I took one in each arm. You are from two different states, right? So, what will be their state?' the nurse Said and chuckled. 'They'll be from a state called India,' I said.

The book finds a perfect opportunity of depicting the typical Indian mentality of not accepting inter-caste marriages and the tradition of still living in 'age-old orthodoxal and impractical beliefs'. The book shows

how the so called "Unity in diversity" tagged nation has so much diversity when it comes to inter cultural matrimony and love. Chetan Bhagat brings out the subtleties that exist in the lifestyle and outlook towards the life of people from different states. As Indian society is not liberal for mixed marriages between different castes, religion or geographies, this book takes us through the love and opposition from parents and relatives. This couple cue from two different states in India and thus they face hardships in convincing their parents for the acceptance of their marriage. They suffer because of generation gap, communication gap and cultural gap. Bhagat depicts complex and deeply rooted socio-cultural problems of multi cultural India light heartedly. He wants the readers to laugh at their follies, their prejudices and their wrong doings. He doesn't attack them directly, but through fiction he attempts to make them to realize their faults and gives a chance to rectify their mistakes in their real life. From the cultural perspective, they believe they are the care takers of their culture. One can compare Bhagat's dictum in the light of the above concept of

marriage in the encyclopaedia and the rituals, and the ceremonies of it. One can easily think of the greater complexities of Indian culture as are compares India to the world around. The observations of the marriage of Ananya and Krish are recorded here after.

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