INDIANNESS: A SOCIO-CULTURAL CONFLICT IN 2 STATES: THE STORY OF MY MARRIAGE

Dr. Archana Kiran Deshmukh

Asst. Prof. Dept. of English

Jawaharlal Nehru Arts, Commerce and Science College, Nagpur

Abstract

The present study investigates the essence of Indianness through the socio-cultural conflict in Chetan Bhagat's 2 states: The Story of My Marriage. Indianness can be defined as the summation of the social and cultural life of India and is marked by an inherent socio-cultural conflict, which instigates creativity. Bhagat constructs realistic characters based in the heart of modern India and presents the true spirit of Indianness with all the intricacies of social and cultural facets. The theme and characters set in India create and represents a cultural identity along with the irrationalities, predispositions, and notions of multicultural India. He promotes liberal outlook, modernism and fundamental transformation in the cultural perception of common Indians. 2 States: The story of My Marriage, manifest Indianness through the clash of socio-cultural differences in Indian society.

Keywords: Indo-Anglian literature, Indianness, Socio-cultural, conflict.

Introduction

Indo-Anglian literature has immensely contributed to the world literature in English. Often denoted as Indo-Anglian literature, it encompasses the writings by the members of the Indian Diaspora. Indian literature is a creation of multilingual, multi-ethnic and socio-cultural blend and is a part of colonial as well as postcolonial literature. One of the most ancient and unique cultures in the world; India has her own socio-cultural identity and legacy which is replicated in the literature of the land. Indian literature is discernible by an exceptional sense of Indianness. Indianness can be defined as the summation of the social and cultural life of India. It is defined through the writer's awareness towards the tradition, ideologies, myths, and value system of India and the sense of being an Indian. Chetan Bhagat is a writer of modern, ambitious young Indian generation; the tech generation. The huge fan-following Bhagat entails, put an unprecedented stamp on his popularity. Majority of his novels has been adopted into films

and work around the theme of romance and realistic fiction. Simple language inevitably strikes the chord with the masses. He has painted realistic characters based in the heart of modern India and presents the true spirit of Indianness with all the intricacies of social and cultural aspects. The present study investigates the essence of Indianness through the socio-cultural conflict in Chetan Bhagat's *2 states: The Story of My Marriage.*

Methodology

This study is based on Primary and Secondary sources. Published research papers in various journals, articles and books are used as secondary sources. A comprehensive analysis of the available literature was undertaken by using both printed and internet sources.

Literature Review

Every individual is defined by the environment, socio-cultural and traditional parameters of his time and place. Indian English literature nurtures directly out of Indian life; and it is a reflection of Indianness and Indian sensibility. (Sawant 154) Indian authors have imagined and recreated in their works cultural identity and Indianness as well as vision of the narrative of the nation. (Dimitrova 5) Indian writers are always conscious about their Indian identity. (Rajbanshi & Patra 28) Gokak defines Indianness as a "composite awareness in the matter of race, milieu, language and religion." At times this identity with the Indian culture and a desire to be universal leads to a crisis as Vaghela and Mehta elaborates, "In Indian English writing, the problem of identity is linked with 'Indianness'. Especially the modern Indian English writers are predicament in the presentation of cultural identity, they are always in conflicting position to' locate' themselves." (21) Gokak writes, "An Indian, then, is a person who owns up the entire Indian heritage and not merely a portion of it. This cultural awareness is an indispensable feature of Indianness." (24) According to Meenakshi Mukharjee, this tendency is nothing but an "anxiety of Indianness". According to Diana Dimitrova Indianness is not a, "... scientific or existing, real category. It is rather a perceived,

fluid and ideologically coloured discourse that constantly changes over time and is being conditioned by the ideological orientations and positions of the specific period discussed." (1) Sahane & Shivramkrishna states that the Indianness is an awareness of the definite characteristics of societies and cultural patterns in India. "Indianness as a concept encompasses "… the specific cultural, historical, religious and socio-economic context." (Dimitrova 2) According to KRS Iyengar, "Indianness reflects in the choice of thought and play of subject, in the texture of thought and play of sentiments." (5-6) Vaghela and Mehta categorically points out that "In Indian English writing, the problem of identity is linked with 'Indianness' (21)

Socio-Cultural Conflict

The term culture is multidimensional and comprises history of human race, literature, sociology, political studies and is social in nature. Culture evolves and grows along with the history of humanity, hence is frequently used as a substitute for the social life, values, beliefs and behaviour specific to a particular civilization. The social science defines culture as amalgamation of all human traits and social structures and encompasses all forms of art, language and literature. Culture forms our social identity, creates perception, instigate social action and add meaning to human existence. However, culture is ever evolving and adds new magnitude with respect to social, commercial and dogmatic changes. Indian culture is indigenous with a variety of internal sects and differences of language, rituals, sensitivity and even every individual demonstrates a diverse characteristic and essence. As Dimitrova says modern societies are cultural hybrid, as they contain members belonging to different ethnic, religious and racial groups. (5) There is an intricate connection between numerous social, philological, ethnic and religious sub-cultures in Indian society. The variety of regional culture creates incompatible activities, rituals, intents and ideas between two people or regions. Indian culture is indigenous due to its multiculturalism. The characters in the novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* produces conflict on individual as well as social level. This conflict creates instability but is an essential part of relationship. The cultural traits of regional culture of North and South India are also institutionalised through the characters of the parents of the protagonist. They represent respective regions through beliefs, values, practices and social stratification and power structures prevalent in modern Indian society.

Racial and religious ideologies create Socio-cultural difference, which is an essence of Indianness. While presenting the story Bhagat comments on human relations and values of a society. In the novel the socio-cultural conflict works on individual, family and on regional level. The characters on individual level stand for difference of opinion and at the same time projects regional differences of respective culture: the south verses the North.

Bhagat is a writer of contemporary India and makes a commentary on inter-state and inter-regional marriages. The story revolves around the protagonist Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi guy and Ananya, a Tamil Brahmin girl. The contradiction in their languages, traditional rituals, food, and dressing is prominently commented upon by Bhagat, bringing out the cultural diversity that exists within India. Both Krish and Anaya are highly educated from the top B-schools, but adheres to their respective culture and points out the socio-cultural conflicts prevalent in modern India. Both are "…inevitably bicultural and lives within a bilingual or a multilingual cultural idiom". (Beulah 27) Krish and Ananya, in various circumstances try to modify their cultural inheritance as per the obligation of their social situation and lives in a multicultural framework. Both face difficulty in adjusting with the traditional and conservative beliefs of each other:

I didn't say I am practicing Tam Brahmin. But you should know that I am born into the purest of pure upper caste communities ever created. What about you commoner? To this Krish replies about Punjabi cuisine I am Punjabi I grew up in Delhi and I have no idea of my caste but we do eat chicken. And I can digest bad sambar better than Tamil Brahmins. (Bhagat 7)

Marriage in India is a family issue, has numerous dimensions and is defined by culture. Numerous families face the same dilemma of the protagonist. Differences between Panjabi marriage rituals and Tamil marriage are beautifully described which amounts to socio-cultural conflict. Bhagat's description of Ananya's father is ironic:

I looked carefully. A middle aged man with neatly Combed hair rationed his gin. He wore a half sleeve shirt with a dhoti in most of the pictures. He looked like the neighbour who stops you from playing loud music. No, nothing cute about him. I scanned the remaining pictures taken on festivals, weddings and birthdays. (Bhagat 13)

The dress etiquette of the North Indian Punjabi is described by the protagonist through the character of his mother and a comparison with the mother of

his girlfriend Ananya. He also describes the appearance of his roommate from the south, "I nodded and reached my apartment. Ramanujan (his roommate) saw me place? …. What's that, he wore a Lungi and nothing on the top apart from a white thread on his shoulder? (Bhagat 100) The racial remarks by Krish's mother strikingly brings out the socio-cultural differences, "These South Indians don't know how to control their daughters. From Hema Malini to Sridevi, all of them trying to catch Punjabi men." (Bhagat 48) There are many cultural differences between the South and North India. Tamilians are more disciplined and appreciates wisdom, whereas North Indians, especially Punjabis are fun-loving people. Krish face a number of difficulties when he joins City Bank in Chennai. The food and socio-cultural environment is strikingly different from the North Indian states:

The Tamil font resembles those optical illusion puzzles that give you a headache if you stare at them long enough. Tamil women, all of them, wear flowers in their hair. Tamil men don't believe in pants and wear lungis even in shopping districts. The city is filled with film posters. The heroes' pictures make you feel even your uncle can be movie stars. The heroes are fat, balding, have thick moustaches and the heroine next to them is a ravishing beauty. Maybe my mother has a point in saying that Tamil women have a thing for North Indian men". (Bhagat 77-78)

He takes efforts to reconcile with Ananya's family but ultimately fail to get result. The cultural differences between two states seem hard to merge. It's not only about a girl and a boy but families, regional, cultural and social differences are involved. Bhagat through speech and action of the characters highlights the socio-cultural difference between the two different states of India.

Indianness is not only about the cultural heritage, but also the conflicts of identity inherent in this multicultural and rapidly evolving society. Indianness is "characterised by "difference": they are cut through by different social divisions and antagonism which produce a variety of different subject positions—identities for individual." (Dimitrova 4) *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* presents Indian consciousness when there is reconciliation at the end and conflict between various multicultural heads for reunion as Bhagat remarks, "We kissed as Tamils and Punjabi's danced around us... only for the sake of uniting the nation... (Bhagat 267) Ananya's father sums up the theme, "...Yes, the Tamilian in me is a little

disappointed. But the Indian in me quite 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 266]

Conclusion:

Bhagat depicts Indianness through the intricate, profound socio-cultural problems of multiethnic India. He portrays and creates a cultural identity along with the irrationalities, predispositions, and notions of multicultural India through the theme and characters set in India. The conception of Indianness is marked by an inherent conflict of culture, which instigates the creativity and produce literature. Indian writing owes to the socio-cultural tradition and change from traditional to modernity. Chetan Bhagat through his work comments on regional, class and religious differences prevalent in modern India. He attempts to combine the cultural heritage of India with the contemporary realism of the modern society. His characters live in modern technology-oriented biosphere hence portray new experience and sensibility. Through his personal experiences, Bhagat delineates the predominant approaches, attitudes and socio-cultural problems of the contemporary Indian society. He promotes liberal outlook, modernism and fundamental transformation in the cultural perception of common Indians. *2 States: The story of My Marriage,* manifest Indianness through the clash of socio-cultural differences in Indian society.

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