

Unity in Diversity: a Study of '2 States: The Story of My Marriage'

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Article Received: 06/06/2022, Article Accepted: 11/07/2022, Published online:
18/07/2022, DOI: 10.36993/RJOE.2022.7.3.69

Abstract

The novel '2 States: The Story of My Marriage', written by Chetan Bhagat, the much-celebrated Indian author writing in English deals with the cultural differences existing in India, especially with regard to its influence in inter-caste marriages. While talking about the institution of marriage, the novelist also explores the social issues like dowry in traditional marriages and the paradigm shift of matrimonial alliances in multicultural and multinational societies. This paper focuses on the typical Indian mentality of not accepting the inter-caste marriages. This paper makes a note of the cross-cultural encounters and deals with different experiences of the protagonists. This paper speaks of different cultural shocks that prop up in the lives of the protagonists. This paper attempts to analyze the theme of the novel in the framework of India's 'Unity in Diversity'.

Key words: inter-caste, cultural shock, unity in diversity.

Introduction

Chetan Bhagat is, arguably, the most read Indian author writing in English. He is a columnist and motivational speaker besides being an author. Among other things, Chetan Bhagat has defined the

literary taste of budding book lovers in India since his first novel.

'2 States: The Story of My Marriage' is considered an autobiographical novel. It is considered to be inspired from the real story of the author Chetan and his wife Anusha who belong to Delhi and Tamilnadu respectively. The main theme of the novel is love, friendship, spirituality and religion. The situations are narrated in a humorous tone, often taking a dig at both Tamil and Punjabi cultures to which the protagonists belong.

The Setting

The story starts at a hospital in Chennai where Krish Malhotra meets Dr. Neeta Iyer, a psychotherapist, and speaks of the reason for his mental illness and abnormality. The main course of the novel is set up at IIMA. A vivid picture of life at IIM Ahmedabad was presented.

The Chance Meeting-Cupid Strikes

Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi, sights Ananya Swaminathan a Tamil brahmin girl from Chennai, by chance, at a mess. It is love at first sight for him. He falls for her beauty. Ananya, a bold girl, is seen fighting with a mess worker for the poor quality of food which is being served to them.

'That's not rasam. Whatever it is, it's definitely not rasam. And what's that, the dark yellow stuff?'
'Sambhar,' the mess worker growled.

'Eew, looks disgusting! How did you make it?' she asked. (3)

Ananya is presented as a modern girl who faces all the challenges with confidence and courage. This chance meeting leads to a lasting friendship and both of them decide to study together every night. They jointly take mess in the hostel.

"The entire mess stared at us, wondering what I had done to merit sitting with her. I have made a huge sacrifice - my dessert - I wanted to tell them... A collective sigh ran through the mess. We had become everyone's matinee show". (5)

Both Krish and Ananya enjoy the company of each other. Within no time, this friendly proximity matures into love. As the days pass by, their friendship changes into a romantic love story on the campus and within no time both become one in sexual life.

"Needless to say, one thing led to another and within two weeks we had sex.". (26)

When their campus life is going to end and when they are getting ready for campus placements, Ananya felt that she had to take a decision of her life.

'You know it baffles me,' Ananya said, 'how you men need so much time to think about commitment, but how you need no time at all to decide when you have to sleep with the girl.' (32)

On the day of the interview, Krish rushes to meet Ananya and storms into the interview chamber and pleads the panel members to give permission for a minute to speak to Ananya.

'Yes, I only need a minute,' I said and signaled to Ananya to come out...(37)

Ananya comes out, and Krish says:

'Ananya Swaminathan, I, Krish Malhotra, am deeply in love with you and want to be with you always. Apart from where we go to office, of course. Will you marry me?' (37-38)

In this way, Krish proposes to Ananya. Later on, they get jobs. They wish to get married after taking the consent of their parents. However, they forget about the ritual formalities associated with the institution of marriage in India, more so if the marriage in question is an inter-caste marriage. Life is not so easy for them.

On any given day, marriage in India is associated with many superfluous rituals and elegant formalities. Bhagat gives his insightful dictum (See; back cover page of the novel) on marriages in India as,

"Love marriages around the world are simple.

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

In India, there are 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".

Ananya and Krish have their own plans. They wish to make their parents meet on the day of the convocation. Ananya's parents are attending the convocation but the issue comes with Krish's father. He doesn't show interest in attending.

On the day of the convocation, they introduce each other to their parents. Ananya's parents and Krish's mother exchange warm greetings. The protagonists make an attempt to create a good impression. But this doesn't work out as Krish's mother passes cynical comments about Tamilians in general, at the convocation.

'These South Indians don't know how to control their daughters. From Hema Malini to Sridevi, all of them trying to catch Punjabi men.'(48)

After the completion of the convocation, they to go to Sabarmati Ashram. But, they carry the baggage of pre-conceived notions and prejudice against each other and even the father of the nation failed to remove the cultural and attitudinal differences between the people of the two states.

Krish goes home for a vacation of two months before joining Citibank. Ananya is posted in Chennai for HLL and she forces Krish to prefer Chennai as the job location. Krish falls in dilemma in choosing Chennai or Delhi as his job location. He leaves it to god as he mentions Chennai and Delhi have equal weight.

Meanwhile, Krish tries to convince his mother. But his mother insists him to marry a rich Punjabi girl, Pammi aunty's daughter who has six petrol pumps, rich cars, and marble flooring house.

Krish is posted in Chennai. Ananya calls him and asks him to join dinner.. Krish goes to Ananya's house at Mylapore. Ananya's father Swaminathan is a bank employee who works in Bank of Baroda. Ananya's mother Radha learns Carnatic music with the help of a guruji. Ananya's brother is a bookworm whose aim is to study in top ranked institutions of the

country. Ananya identifies her father's problem with power point presentations and requests Krish to sort it out. Krish makes use of this opportunity to befriend Ananya's father by solving his problem and soon they share drinks. So the last hurdle now is to impress his mother.

At a meeting of City Bank, headed by Bala it was decided to organize a music concert for the priority banking group customers. Now Krish takes this opportunity. Ananya's mother has a long-cherished dream to become a good singer which is known to Krish. He goes to Ananya's house in the office hours and persists her to perform. She hesitates to accept as she has been rejected by her own Guruji. On the motivation of Krish, she accepts the offer, but both of them kept it as a secret without revealing it to the family members.

Krish and Ananya go to Pondicherry and visit Aurobindo Ashram. Krish meets Guruji and on his request, Krish closes his eyes and tells him about the relationship with his father and Ananya.

Guruji advises Krish to forgive his father and apply the principle for the rest of his life. Krish meets Ananya and tells her about the concert and invites her. At the concert, on hearing Radha sing, everybody appreciate her for her performance. The ice is now completely broken.

Krish invites Ananya's family members for a treat at Taj. After the delicious meals, he gathers the attention of Ananya's family members and proposes to marry Ananya.

'Hi,' I cleared my throat.
'Uncle, aunty, Manju...' And we thought our love is enough reason for us to get married...

'I, KrishMalhotra, would like to propose to all of you.
Will all of you marry

me?’

‘If you promise to take care of my daughter,’ Ananya’s father said, ‘then it is a yes from me.’...

‘I know he will take care of you.

But will Krish’s parents treat my daughter with respect?’(182-184)

Now, it is the turn of Ananya to impress Krish’s parents and both Krish and Ananya move to Delhi. Krish introduces Ananya to his mother at the railway station and tells the purpose of her coming. Ananya greets his mother. She ignores her.

‘You could have booked a car. I would have paid,’ I said.

‘I didn’t know you’ll bring extra luggage from Chennai,’ my mother said. (190)

All the attempts to make Ananya get close to his family members seem to go in vain. However, when they go to Minti’s wedding, there is a problem with regard to dowry. It is smartly solved by Ananya with her managerial skills. Ananya is welcomed by Krish’s relatives and her mother also got impressed and welcomed her by presenting bangles to her. It’s time for the two families to unite.

Krish and Ananya take their parents to Goa. Krish’s mother verbally explodes. Ananya and her parents overhear the conversation between Krish and her mom. Everything ends on a sad note.

Krish becomes a workaholic. His love failure makes weak, unshaved, depressed. As a final attempt, Krish flies to Chennai to make it clear to Ananya that everything could be cleared. Ananya makes it clear that he is going to marry Harish

which makes Krish blood boil. He becomes frustrated and goes away.

Krish’s Tryst with His Father

However, it is the unexpected behavior of Krish’s father that saves Krish. Krish’s father, who suspects that there had been a fiasco between Krish and Ananya goes to Chennai, meets the family of Ananya and solves the problem. Ananya’s parents give signal for their marriage. Krish meets his father, and asks:

‘Dad, you went to Chennai?’

‘News travels fast,’ he said...

‘My son needed help,’ my father said as he pulled out the weeds from the soil.

His voice had been plain, yet I felt a lump in my throat...

‘How did you know?’ I said.

His eyes met mine, he said, ‘Because I am your father. A bad father, but I am still your father.’(245)

So Krish wants to hug his father. The relation between father and son is incredible.

‘Thanks, dad,’ I said, fighting back tears.

‘You’re welcome,’ he said. He gave me a hug. ‘I’m not perfect. But don’t deprive me of my son in my final years,’ he said. I hugged him back. Tears slipped out as I let go of any self-control. The world celebrates children and their mother, but we need fathers too.(246)

The two families are reunited and muhurtam for their marriage is set. Krish’s father refuses to attend the marriage.

'You have my blessings. Don't expect my presence,' my father said.(247)

So all the relatives of Krish land in Chennai and enjoy their time with disco, drinks, midnight chat. The muhurtam is at 6:30 am, but his relatives are not going to bed. The arrival of his father changes everything. Everyone go into their rooms to sleep.

'I love you, son,' he said, his eyes closed.

I choked up. The words meant as much as to me as when Ananya had said

them the first time.(258)

At Krish and Ananya's wedding. The speech given by Ananya's father, reflecting the spirit of unity in diversity, is heart touching.

'Welcome everyone,' Ananya's father started.

'Yes, the Tamilian in me is a little disappointed. But the Indian in me is 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.'(266)

At the end of the novel Ananya gives birth to twin babies and they says that they belong to a much larger state 'India'.

'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.(269)

The writer gives a happy ending to the story and the humor in the story is situational. Through these examples, Chetan Bhagat advocates national integrity and unity in diversity. Chetan Bhagat criticizes the narrow mindedness of typical

Indians- whether it is South-Indians or North Indians.

The writer conveys this message emphatically through the speech of Ananya's father who states:

'Yes, the Tamilian in me is a little disappointed. But the Indian in me is 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.'(266)

Conclusion

The real message of the novel is that in the era of globalization, caste, religion or region are less important than the human relationships. Krish and Ananya refuse to carry the old, conventional baggage of cultural dissimilarities and regional feelings like their parents. '2 States: The Story of My Marriage' is a typical novel which describes the cultural contradictions between two different states/regions of India. Yet, the fact remains that despite the differences, India is one country, one people and one nation. India 'truly' is a country testifying to the eternal notion of 'unity in diversity'.

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How to cite this article?

Dr.Ashok Vardhan Garikimukku “Unity in Diversity: a Study of ‘2 States: The Story of My Marriage’”, Research Journal Of English(RJOE) 7 (2), PP: 510-515,2022, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36993/RJOE.2022.7.2.69>