



RESEARCH ARTICLE



A STUDY OF MULTICULTURALISM IN SELECT WORKS OF CHETAN BHAGAT

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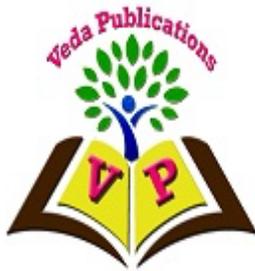
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ABSTRACT



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This research focuses on the theme of multiculturalism as depicted by Chetan Bhagat in *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*. The novel presents a realistic portrayal of cultural diversity in India through the relationship between Krish, a Punjabi, and Ananya, a Tamil Brahmin. Their struggle to gain parental approval highlights challenges rooted in cultural rigidity, generational gaps, and societal expectations. Bhagat reflects on how deeply ingrained traditions, religious beliefs, and social norms shape Indian society, often resisting change despite growing modernization. The novel underscores how love and individual choice clash with conservative mindsets in a multicultural setting. Through the lens of intercultural and intracultural relationships, Bhagat reveals universal aspects of human behavior, such as emotion, identity, and acceptance. *2 States* thus becomes a critique of the cultural and emotional hurdles faced by youth in contemporary India, and a call for greater tolerance, understanding, and adaptation in an increasingly diverse society.

Keywords: *Multiculturalism, Contemporary, Communiqué, Perception Systems, Pluralism.*

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 HISTORY OF MULTICULTURALISM

Multiculturalism refers to a concept that holds various meanings within sociology, political philosophy, and everyday usage. In sociology and common usage, it is often synonymous with *ethnic pluralism*, with both terms frequently used interchangeably. For example, multiculturalism can describe a form of cultural pluralism in which multiple ethnic groups coexist, collaborate, and engage in dialogue without having to sacrifice their distinct identities.

It can refer to a diverse ethnic community in a specific place—such as New York City or Trieste—or to a single nation where multiple cultural traditions coexist, like Switzerland, Belgium, or Russia. Discussions of multiculturalism often focus on relationships between indigenous, aboriginal, or autochthonous ethnic groups and those descended from settlers.

Most debates surrounding multiculturalism centre on whether it is an appropriate and effective way to manage diversity and integrate immigrants. One key argument in favour of multicultural education is that it demands recognition of a group's cultural background and collective experiences, in contrast to the “melting pot” model or other non-multicultural approaches.

The term is most commonly used in reference to Western nations, which had developed relatively unified national identities during the 18th or 19th centuries. Since the 1970s, multiculturalism has been adopted as official policy in several Western

countries, driven by various factors—one being the increasingly diverse cultural makeup of major global cities.

Supporters of multiculturalism view it as a fairer system that allows individuals to openly express their identities within a more tolerant society. They argue that culture is not a single, fixed element tied to one race or religion, but rather a dynamic blend of influences that evolve as the world changes.

1.2 MULTICULTURALISM AND CULTURAL ISSUES OF SOCIETY IN 2 STATES; THE STORY OF MY MARRIAGE

This chapter focuses on multiculturalism in Indian society and offers a critical analysis of Chetan Bhagat's novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*, with specific reference to the research tool outlined in the first chapter of this thesis. A close reading of the novel brings to light several significant and pressing multicultural issues prevalent in Indian society, which Bhagat effectively highlights through his narrative. The chapter also examines the impact of these societal issues on contemporary Indian social structures. It concludes with key research findings, suggestions, and a final analysis.

The terms “multiculturalism” and “culture” derive from the Latin root *colere*, meaning to inhabit, cultivate, or honor. They refer to the human capacity to engage with diverse worldviews, assimilate them meaningfully, and navigate social complexity. Chetan Bhagat's *2 States* delves into the intersection of love, culture, and societal norms, portraying how romantic relationships are influenced by deeply rooted cultural traditions.



The novel centers on cross-cultural encounters, reflecting diverse lived experiences and demonstrating how individuals internalize and adapt to cultural differences. Much like a rose symbolizes beauty and a soldier represents duty to the nation, a novel's title is expected to reflect its central theme. In this regard, the title *2 States* aptly symbolizes the convergence of two distinct cultures—Punjabi and Tamil—and the emotional journey of the protagonists.

Bhagat sensitively addresses several key cultural concerns in the novel, including intergenerational conflict, father-son dynamics, romantic love, corporate exploitation, and the nuances of cultural identity. At its core, *2 States* is a love story that triumphs over the barriers of region, language, and tradition. It is a narrative of an interstate marriage in India—a theme that resonates with many modern Indian families.

Multiculturalism, as studied in sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies, refers to the coexistence of multiple cultural identities within a society. Scholars across disciplines—including political science, religious studies, media studies, and education—have used the term to examine the implications of cultural diversity. Similarly, this chapter analyzes the interplay between two distinct cultures portrayed in the novel.

The characters in *2 States*, both from the older and younger generations, embody multicultural backgrounds. The protagonists, Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi, and Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil Brahmin, represent the emotional and cultural tensions many

Indian couples face in cross-cultural unions. Their story reflects the social reality of intercultural marriages in India and the challenges such couples must overcome.

The novel explores the emotional struggles of Krish and Ananya as they attempt to reconcile their families' expectations with their personal desires. Their relationship demonstrates how cultural differences can pose obstacles to matrimonial alliances and highlights the persistence and effort required to transform love into marriage. As Shakespeare famously wrote, "The course of true love never did run smooth"—a sentiment that holds especially true for the protagonists of *2 States*.

In essence, cross-cultural experiences in the novel underscore the importance of understanding and bridging social and cultural differences. They bring together diverse domains, such as cultural anthropology and social psychology, to explore the commonalities and distinctions that define Indian multiculturalism.

The central focus of *2 States* is the theme of cultural exchange. The novel suggests that culture is not static but an evolving aspect of *human nature*. People absorb and shape culture through interactions with individuals from different regions and backgrounds. This cultural learning contributes to the expansion of multicultural understanding.

In *2 States*, Chetan Bhagat uses cultural anthropology to humorously expose the differences between North Indian and South Indian families. One of the most striking aspects of the novel is its portrayal of the human dimension within these



cultural distinctions. At its core, the story revolves around the protagonists' efforts to convince their parents to approve their interstate marriage—an issue that resonates deeply in Indian society.

As the title *2 States* implies, the novel is not merely about the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Delhi, but also about the vastly different states of mind of people from these regions. The plot follows Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi from Delhi, and Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil Brahmin from Chennai, who meet and fall in love while studying at IIM Ahmedabad.

Bhagat skillfully portrays the complexities of Indian marriage and the evolving mindset of 21st-century Indian youth. His subtle and relatable writing style has struck a chord with younger readers across the nation. The novel evokes nostalgia, especially for those who have experienced the emotional highs and lows of pre-marriage struggles. The narrative captures love, friendship, parental conflict, cultural clashes, and reconciliation with a cinematic quality—complete with humor, drama, and emotional depth.

Like many college romances, Krish and Ananya begin their relationship through casual messaging and dating. Time moves quickly, and soon they face campus placements. Both secure good jobs, and they decide to introduce their parents to one another during their convocation ceremony—a significant milestone in Indian culture where parental approval of romantic relationships is often sought.

It is at this point that cultural anthropology comes into full play in the novel, as Bhagat presents the meeting of two very different families. Krish's father

does not attend the ceremony due to a strained father-son relationship, and tensions arise between Ananya's mother and Krish's mother during the event itself. This initial friction foreshadows the many obstacles the couple will face.

A key twist in the story is the couple's firm decision to seek their parents' consent for marriage rather than eloping. This conscious choice highlights their respect for family, culture, and tradition despite the challenges posed by deep-rooted cultural differences.

2 States offers an insightful and humorous look at intercultural relationships in modern India. It reflects how love must navigate the complex terrains of tradition, regional identity, and generational expectations. Through its relatable characters and vivid storytelling, the novel brings forth a compelling narrative of multicultural negotiation in contemporary Indian society.

Inter-caste marriages continue to remain a taboo in India, and an interstate union—such as that between a Punjabi and a Tamil Brahmin—is often met with even greater resistance. In *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*, love blossoms between Krish and Ananya, but as they decide to marry, they are confronted with seemingly insurmountable challenges. These include the sharp cultural contrast between their families, regional stereotypes, and a significant language barrier.

After completing their studies, Krish secures a position with CitiBank in Chennai, while Ananya begins working with Hindustan Lever Limited (HLL). Despite pressure from his mother to return to Delhi



and marry a Punjabi girl of her choice—who, as she puts it, would be "as fair as milk"—Krish chooses to remain in Chennai to be near Ananya. His decision to work in an unfamiliar city and adapt to challenging hostel conditions reveals his commitment and the sacrifices required in navigating cross-cultural relationships.

Bhagat uses these personal struggles to highlight a broader truth: the cultural divide in India is deeper than it appears. Though the nation has witnessed rapid advancements in infrastructure, education, and technology over the past six decades—with villages transforming into towns and towns into metropolises—societal attitudes often remain rooted in outdated ideologies. Technological progress has not necessarily led to social progress. The caste system, though officially abolished, continues to influence marriage decisions and social interactions.

In *2 States*, the South Indian society—particularly the Tamil Brahmin community—is portrayed with relative nuance and subtle humor. The Tamilians, as depicted in the novel, are shown to be peace-loving, reserved, and deeply respectful of their customs and traditions. They value education highly, often more than wealth, and have a strong affinity for classical music and cultural refinement. At the same time, they are portrayed as being rigidly attached to their cultural identity and social norms.

Ananya's parents, for instance, appreciate Krish's academic background and intellectual capacity. However, they are initially resistant to the idea of their daughter marrying outside their community. For them, an ideal son-in-law would not only be well-

educated but also a Tamil Brahmin, preferably an Iyer. Their hesitance stems from concerns about cultural compatibility and maintaining social status within their community.

Bhagat vividly depicts these tensions. Ananya's mother, for example, rebukes her daughter for publicly kissing Krish, emphasizing how such behavior might tarnish the family's reputation. This incident reflects the generational and cultural expectations placed on Indian youth, especially within traditional communities.

Ultimately, *2 States* is more than a romantic story—it is a social commentary on India's deeply entrenched cultural divides. The novel showcases how young Indians must often navigate a complex web of tradition, family expectations, and personal aspirations. Through the lens of Krish and Ananya's relationship, Bhagat critiques the rigidity of social norms and calls for a more open, understanding, and inclusive society.

Chetan Bhagat's novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* draws upon the research methodology outlined in Chapter One and critically examines how the novel portrays cultural complexities and societal dynamics in contemporary India. Bhagat's novel brings to light several intense cultural challenges rooted in India's diversity and highlights their influence on interpersonal relationships, particularly in the context of marriage. The chapter concludes with significant research findings, observations, and implications.



MULTICULTURALISM IN 2 STATES

The novel is a vivid portrayal of the cultural, linguistic, and ideological divide that persists in Indian society, especially in matters like marriage. Bhagat tactfully uses humor and satire to illustrate these differences. As roses symbolize beauty and soldiers symbolize courage, Bhagat uses his title and characters to symbolize cultural convergence. The storyline blends emotional nuance with cultural critique, making it both relatable and revealing.

Krish and Ananya's love story represents many young Indians' struggles to balance personal desires with traditional expectations. As they try to gain their families' approval for marriage, the reader is introduced to various layers of societal issues: patriarchal dominance, linguistic prejudice, community pride, and generational conflicts. Bhagat's depiction of cross-cultural encounters underscores the importance of understanding, tolerance, and compromise.

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND FAMILY DYNAMICS

The novel offers deep insights into cultural anthropology by revealing the contrasting traits of North and South Indian families. Punjabi families, as portrayed through Krish's background, are expressive, status-conscious, and socially loud. In contrast, Tamil Brahmin families, as represented by Ananya's parents, are soft-spoken, reserved, academically oriented, and deeply rooted in tradition.

Krish's mother wants him to marry a Punjabi girl and criticizes his preference for a Tamilian bride.

Meanwhile, Ananya's parents, despite valuing Krish's education and intellect, initially reject him because he does not belong to their caste or linguistic group. Their reluctance reflects the rigidity of cultural norms, especially around caste and community affiliations.

Bhagat carefully portrays both parents' attitudes as reflections of deeply rooted cultural beliefs rather than villainous intent. Through interactions between families—especially during convocation and subsequent family visits—Bhagat showcases the subtleties of Indian middle-class life, where social status and reputation often outweigh personal happiness.

CULTURAL CONFLICT AND SOCIETAL COMMENTARY

Despite India's progress in infrastructure and technology, Bhagat argues that mindsets remain largely unchanged. The caste system, although legally abolished, still governs many social interactions. Inter-caste and interstate marriages are viewed with suspicion, and marrying for love is often seen as rebellion. In this context, Krish and Ananya's relationship is a rebellion against these ingrained ideologies.

Krish's relocation to Chennai, against his mother's wishes, highlights the extent to which individuals must adapt and compromise for love. Despite facing cultural alienation and professional stress, Krish remains committed to bridging the cultural divide. Their decision not to elope, but to win their families' approval, reflects a desire to honor tradition even as they challenge it.



Bhagat's treatment of Tamil culture is both respectful and satirical. He presents Tamilians as peace-loving, deeply musical, and rooted in educational excellence. However, he does not shy away from critiquing their rigid expectations and societal conservatism. For example, Ananya's mother scolds her for public affection, emphasizing how actions perceived as normal in some cultures are deemed inappropriate in others.

CONCLUSION

Shakespeare once said, "The course of true love never did run smooth." In *2 States*, this is especially true. Krish and Ananya's journey symbolizes countless similar stories unfolding across India—stories where love must navigate the labyrinth of tradition, caste, language, and parental approval. Bhagat's novel, though written in a simple style, serves as a sharp social commentary on India's multicultural reality.

Ultimately, *2 States* emphasizes that true multiculturalism lies in the acceptance and celebration of difference. Through the lens of a personal love story, Bhagat challenges the rigidity of Indian society and advocates for a more inclusive, understanding, and progressive cultural mindset.

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