

Bhagat Unfolds Multicultural Realities through *2 States*

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Abstract

‘Culture’ can be studied through literature and ‘literature’ can be well appreciated by cultural understanding, I propose. This paper focuses on the multiculturalism in fiction with reference to contemporary author Chetan Bhagat’s *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* (Published in 2009). It deals with how multicultural ground realities affect ‘Generation-Y’¹ greatly. Preliminaries and methodological considerations discuss the background, objective and the scope of the paper, then it clarifies the mono Vs. multiculturalism. Further, after Indian ‘unity in diversity’ sketch, it analyzes the fiction from cultural perspective and ends with the essence.

1. Preliminaries

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Let's start with the concept of the 'Culture' first. The New Britannica Encyclopaedia (2007: 784) put forth 'Culture' as,

'the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behavior. Culture, thus defined, consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, ceremonies, and other related components'

This Encyclopaedia (2007: 784) also quotes a classic definition of 'Culture' by Burnett Taylor, in his 'Primitive Culture' (1871) as

'culture includes all capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society'

The part '... and other related components' from the first definition and 'all capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society' from the second definition include almost every smaller aspect of society and its integrated or recurrent pattern. And no definition of culture can capture these and many more aspects entirely.

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.

Recently, the universities across the continents commenced the courses of cultural studies along with literature studies or separately. 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. So, the present study evaluates Chetan Bhagat's contemporary popular fiction '2 States: The Story of My Marriage.'



Chetan Bhagat

Singh and Sikha (2013: 351) rightly quotes Pawling's assertion regarding the connection with popular literature and social meaning, he believes, 'like other cultural products/creations, popular literature also reflects social meanings and mores and also intervenes in the life of society by organizing and interpreting experiences which previously (in Literature) might have been only partially reflected. To read popular literature in this way is to read it as a process of meaning creation.'

Facts sometimes are more hostile than fiction. We can reveal them from literature. May it be social novels or historical or realistic, something remains un-captured in all. Most of the part authors keep to readers to interpret and link to the possible realities. The aim of the literature is not to teach or preach the reader, but to help them to unfold the certainties.

2. Methodological Considerations

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As mentioned above, there are different theoretical perspectives to study multicultural novel. To stabilize readers on definite issues in this paper, at the outset I clarify, this novel will be assessed as how the author keenly depicted minute cultural details successfully and he kept rest there to actualize for the reader. The title of the novel '*2 States*' suggests two regions of the India; Punjab and Tamil Nadu (previously called Madras state). And the second interpretation of '*2 States*' is mentally chaotic state or confusions. Both the interpretations are observed throughout the novel. The paper also will assess Punjabi and Tamil cultures (former interpretation) and pride and prejudices of the people from both cultures and mental states of both – the older and the younger - generations (later interpretation). Undoubtedly, other aspects of multicultural studies will be out of the scope here.

3. Does Monoculture Exist?

The obvious question perturbs of mono-culturalism while studying multiculturalism. Singh and Shikha (2013: 1-5) discuss the advancement of monoculturalism and treated American as melting point from mono-cultural society to multi-cultural society. They believed the LPG (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization) policy is the reason for the same and further they studied Bhagat's this novel on the light of LPG at the center. They also mention the transmission of popular cultures and their reasons like modern means and advancements. But basically they ignored constant transmission of cultures in all ages and not only popular culture now. With some exceptions of remote island cultures, there is no monocultural society exists as such in the world.

We observe the cultures co-exist, some cultures affect others, cultures submerge in each other, and their transmission and diffusion, etc. So, the pure culture, pure language, mono-lingual society or mono-cultural society is nothing but idealism or exception in contemporary era. The researchers are then appealed not to take multiculturalism and monoculturalism as binary or relative concepts with equal emphasis.

4. 'Unity in Diversity' of Multicultural India

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India is multistate, multilingual and multicultural country. The country has twenty-eight states and twenty-two constitutionally recognized languages along with many other languages and dialects (roughly; 1576)². The people from different religions like Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, etc. live together. Each language has its society and culture for instance, in Maharashtra state, Marathi language, Marathi Culture and Marathi speaking people. Emeneau (1956) describes linguistic richness of India in his classic paper. Then the many linguists from the world were attracted to India and researched the languages from Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic language families. As it is linguistic laboratory for the linguists, it is cultural laboratory also for researchers.

Modern Indian Languages (MIL) sourced their most vocabulary from Ancient Sanskrit language. And each of MIL influenced by Sanskrit ranging from greatly to a little. It is the language of Vedas and Upanishads and practiced for religious purpose across the states of India. The Epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata are in different versions but with common core also serve the link. Sanskrit is also written in more than 14 different scripts. Sanskrit language, the epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, Gandhian philosophy, yoga, Indian freedom struggle, etc. kept India intact despite of all the diversities. They are also connected to each other because of Bollywood movies and sports like cricket now-a-days.

Bhagat has used these common grounds to put forth his philosophy through characters in the novel. He used Gandhian philosophy “Gandhiji strongly believed that all Indians are one” (Bhagat: 51) to unite Swaminathan and Malhotra families at Sabarmati Ashram on a trip arranged by Krish and Ananya. He also used Sabarmati Ashram and Aurobindo Ashram with equilibrium in different acts of the novel for mental peace. Suitably, the novel set in Ahmedabad, Delhi, Chennai and Goa; all the most populous metropolitan cities of India as they are full of different kinds of people. The novel brings out the complexities of multicultural societies and the people therein. We also compare setting of Bhagat’s previous fictions being metropolitan cities of India and his depiction of metropolitan youth culture (Jadhav, 2012: 1-5).

5. Cultural Realities of ‘*The Fiction*’

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5.1 Two Cultures

Though an Individual is the smallest part of the community and culture, the family is the most meaningful social and cultural unit. Bhagat chooses two families from two different cultures: '*Tamil*' and '*Punjabi*'. The characters from the later are seen fun-loving as compared to the characters from the former with the exception of Krish and Ananya. They are altogether radical (*See; 5.6 for more details*). Tamil Brahmins (Ananya's family) love classical Carnatic music while Punjabis (Krish's relatives) enjoy Bhangra in the novel.

5.2 Their Pride and Prejudices

Both admire their own culture and blame another's. Both look down upon each other for different reasons. Both enjoy each other's food, praising. They have no problem with different places, but people from these places. Both hate each other for the reasons unknown. Sometimes may be like their older generation hate each other so they still maintain the same habit of not trusting: South Indian to North Indian and vice versa. They never accept each other without prejudices and find reasons to blame always.

5.3 Diversities

They have diversities in their languages (e.g. Tamil and Punjabi), customs, rituals (e.g. description of Punjabi marriage rituals in Duke and Minti's marriage and Tamil marriage rituals in Krish and Ananya marriage), cuisines (e.g. rasam, dal, roti, idly, rice, chicken, dairy products, sweets, paneer, rasgullas, biscuits, pao-bhaji, etc.), attire (e.g. shorts, track suits, suits, coats, dhoti, crisp white shirt, kanjiwaram sari, salwar kameez, etc.), occupations, interests, comforts, motives, etc. and they turn boon and boom every other time for the protagonists.

5.4 Chaotic and Calm Mental State

Bhagat has depicted the psyche of the characters also in the novel. He has used stream of consciousness technique mostly for Krish, the protagonist of the novel. He tries to focus on study and thinks of Ananya instantaneously. He is sure about job and unsure of life. Ananya also becomes restless many times. Their parents are also impatient and disapprove the wedlock of

Ananya and Krish and are confused for a long time. They are also insecure about the relations in the future. Duke is also shown confused. Krish is always like a Hamlet of Shakespeare; in the dilemma of 'what to do and what not to do'. Other characters are also confused many times. Aurobindo Ashram also struggled to calm down Krish.

5.5 Two Generations; the Younger and the Older

Bhagat also throws light on issue of Generation gap. There is always miscommunication and indifferences in two generations. Both have their pride and prejudices. Both found another wrong. Both complain for not having concern about them. Both care each other still they turn away from each other because of misunderstandings and lack of better communication. The relationship between Krish and his father can exemplify that. As per Freudian concept Krish and his mother have better relation and Ananya and her father has closeness better than their counterparts. In the novel the younger generation (Krish and Ananya) is seen radical, creative, challenging, intellectual, adaptive and liberal while the older one (Krish and Ananya's parents) as submissive, conservative, conventional and stereotyped, typically.

The elder are not conservative but actually they are preservative in their point of view. They think they know the values better and they wish to preserve them. They do not wish to disturb life of Generation-Y deliberately, but they think what they are trying to do is right for both - the older and the younger - generation. From the cultural perspective, they believe that they are well care taker of their culture. The novel ends with the practical solution, better communication, young generation's initiative and lastly the elders support. Finally, it concludes with how Krish and Ananya, the representatives of millennial generation, paved the way to get married and to unite their families despite of all the adversities they travelled through inevitably.

5.6 Marriage; the Theme

'Marriage' is defined by *The New Britannica Encyclopaedia* (2007: 871) as,

'a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and the duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring (if any)'

Further, *The New Britannica Encyclopaedia* (2007: 872) underlines the importance of marriage rituals and ceremonies as,

'[they] surrounding marriage in most cultures are associated primarily with fecundity and validate the importance of marriage for the continuation of a clan, people or society. They assert a familial or communal sanction of the mutual choice and the understanding of the difficulties and sacrifices involved in making what is considered, in most cases, to be a lifelong commitment to and responsibility for the welfare of spouse and children'

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.'*

We can compare Bhagat's dictum in the light of the above encyclopaediac conceptions of marriage and the rituals, and or ceremonies of it. We easily thought of the greater complexities of Indian culture as compare to world around. The observations of the marriage of Ananya and Krish are recorded hereafter.

Ananya, the heroine of the novel, belongs to upper caste Tamil Brahmin upper middle class family. Trendy, choosy, stylish Ananya is the most beautiful and the most popular girl at IIM-A campus from the fresher's batch. She was not shown as typical Tamil Brahmin. In fact, she enjoys Chicken or Paneer with same excitement. She is not only choosy in food and attire but also much conscious in selecting her life partner. She is not at all an emotional fool. Rather, she has shown emotionally sound and rejects thirteen proposals of marriage or love unsympathetically. Gradually, she develops relation with Krish, an IIT-Delhi alumnus and her IIM-Ahmedabad classmate.

Krish, who did not do well at IIT-D wish to prove himself at IIM-A, eventually come across Ananya and fell in love with her. Then he deliberately grows his relation with her, helps Economics University Gold Medalist Ananya in quantitative papers to get good grades in Mathematics. He does not want ever to loss her and feels his life empty without her. He is good-natured, witty, intellectual, and fun-loving Punjabi guy perfectly balances the modern and traditional values. He suggest not to wear unsuitable dress at public places to Ananya, appeals to his mother to behave nicely with Ananya's parent, helps to Ananya's brother in IIT preparation being a decent person.

Millennial are rebellious in their whole life style; the language, foodstuffs, cloths, relations, etc. Ananya and Krish care none to make romance and love each other despite of knowing conservative parents. Their nudity, premarital sex and live-in-relationship is completely anarchist for older generation. But they never reveal it to anyone.

The fiction depicts the bondage between them and their intense love for each other. Both are loyal to maintain their commitments. But this is one marvelous side has another side of mental torture, uncertainty, melancholy, loneliness, etc. Krish's uncontrolled-unresolved mental conflict turns into his psychological distortion and reached the psycho-somatic stage. The older generation is totally careless to such kind of spoilage of younger generation.

6. Narrative Style and the Essence

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Bhagat depicts complex, deeply rooted socio-cultural problems of multicultural India, light-heartedly. He wants readers to laugh at themselves, at their follies, their prejudices, and their wrong-doings; not as a participant but as a distant observer. He doesn't attack them directly, but through fiction he attempts to realize their faults and gives a chance to correct in the real life. Bhagat's involving story telling technique and the humorous situations allure readers.

Endnotes

1. Generation-Y (Gen-Y) here refers to young generation. There are no uniformity on the exact dates of Gen-X, Gen-Y and Gen-Z, but are roughly believed from 1980s, 1990s, and 2000 A.D. onwards respectively.
 2. The Indian census of 1961 recognized 1652 different languages; while 1991 census recognized 1576 classified 'mother tongues'.
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