

**IDEOLOGIES IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S 2 STATES: *THE STORY*
*OF MY MARRIAGE***

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ABSTRACT

Indian authors distinguish themselves with a national identity that tends to redefine India as a nation in the process of rejuvenation. Being in a milieu of social transition, the conventional practices and ideologies co-exist with the new signifiers of cultural identity which the trend makers are in the process of producing. Thus, in Indian fictions in English we find certain ideologies of traditional India represented and reinforced. *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* commonly known as *2 States* is a 2009 novel written by Chetan Bhagat. It is the story about a couple coming from two different states in India, who face hardships in convincing their parents to approve their marriage. The present paper analyses Chetan Bhagat's *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* as representative of ideologies reflecting the collective consciousness of the nation.

Key Words: Ideologies, social transition, collective consciousness, karma, dharma, maya and moksha.

Indian authors distinguish themselves with a national identity that tends to redefine India as a nation in the process of rejuvenation. Being in a milieu of social transition, the conventional practices and ideologies co-exist with the new signifiers of cultural identity which the trend makers are in the process of producing. Thus, in Indian fictions in English we find certain ideologies of traditional India represented and reinforced.

The present paper discusses various ideologies behind the common beliefs that bind the whole nation into one. India is a land of diversities, and this aspect of diversity is one of the points of inquiry in global perspective of the nation. Indian authors belonging to various regions, religion, community, caste and class, and language group represent India in a similar outlook which defines the concept of Indianness. Nation is the focal point and the diversities are various orbits held by this central force. Considering the writings of Chetan Bhagat as representative of belief systems ideologies reflecting the collective consciousness of the nation are traced to discuss. The paper through the novel establishes that pan-Indic ideology of nationalism, and philosophical ideologies of karma, dharma, maya and moksha govern the socio-cultural life of Indians.

Nationalism, as a sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the nation, is a recurrent theme found in Indian fictions in English. In *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*, Bhagat reflects the ideology of collectivism when the protagonist questions: "... if our happiness makes so many people unhappy, is it the right thing to do?" (163). Though Krish and Ananya are in love with each other, their families insist on the regional disparities. Both of them are determined not to elope but to convince their family members and marry with smiles on their faces. Finally when they succeed, Krish is excited. He wonders: "Was it really happening? Was I finally getting married, with consent from everyone I shared my DNA with?" (254).

However the urban youth in Bhagat's representation adopt American culture of pizza and dating, and criticize Indian social values as outdated. In *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*, Krish's perception of Chennai as a "stuck-up city" (101), as none of his flat mates have a girlfriend and are repelled by his beer bottles, shows his westernized life style. Thus the underlying colonial subjugation and the conscious resistance to western supremacy are seen in the fictions of Bhagat. The decolonization of mind is hence a significant element in the ideology of Indian nationalism. The ideological mobilization of the idea of decolonization of mind begins with Indian elites and seeps into the Indian populace through politics, mass media and literature.

Bhagat's protagonist finds Chennai a "stuck-up city" (101), "almost ninety percent of the people were dark complexioned", among whom "eighty percent had dabbed talcum that gave them a grey skin tone" (76).

Chetan observes that “Tamilians love to irritate non-Tamil speakers by speaking only Tamil in front of them. This is the only silent rebellion in their otherwise repressed, docile personality” (101). In the fiction, Ananya is criticized by Krish’s relatives for being a South Indian. However, the fiction finally insists the birth of “a state called India” (269) and Bhagat in his acknowledgement to the fiction remarks, “I’d also like to tell all South Indians I love them. My better half will vouch for that. I have taken the liberty to have some fun with you just like I have with Punjabis- only because I see you as my own” (viii).

Indian social mores are constructed on the ideology of leading a life for spiritual liberation, mokshamarg. It sees the soul as trapped in worldly bondage, doomed to remain in a state of suffering and ignorance unless it can purify itself from defiling karma. The ideologies of karma, dharma and maya focus towards spiritual liberation. Fictions are seen as the texts representing and re-presenting the individual and cultural values and experiences. Thus representations of India and its tradition change according to the milieu but the underlying wisdom is static. In spite of practicalism, radical thinking and rationality they end up in traditional notions of living such as belief in God, destiny and need for emotional collective life.

The conceptualization of karma in popular mind is represented in the fictions of Bhagat. In *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* when Krish is not able to decide his future he just says “So let fate play out” (32). When he is exhausted by his attempts to win recognition in Ananya’s family he says “I’ve surrendered everything to God anyway” (171). When he is perplexed if he would get selected in his campus interview he connects his success with his assurance of marriage with Ananya: “Of course, my rational mind knew I was being completely moronic. Both the events were not connected. But there is only so much our rational mind knows. Maybe, events and karma are connected” (37). Krish tells his mother of he being posted at Chennai where Ananya is, his mother wants to meet an astrologer to know what phase he was going through (72). Thus the ideology of karma is persistent in Indian popular thought in the form of belief in destiny or fate.

In Indian thinking materialism is relatively an unimportant concept. The external world is seen as illusory, maya. Anything devoid of spiritualism is perishable and hence impermanent, an illusion. Hence maya holds key position in Vedantic teaching.

Indian populace link spiritual realization with the understanding of maya and hence they firmly believe that the worldly things are illusions. Hence materialism is seen as a lower truth. In current Indian scenario the disputed ideologies of social and political dimensions find expression in the fictions as they link the world of reality to the world of fiction. These ideologies are transitional and susceptible to changes as they are temporal and are represented in different perspectives depending on the personal attitude of the writers and the subculture to which they belong. Chetan Bhagat, a north Indian non-brahmin belonging to urban middle class represents a perspective of social ideologies pertaining to his own subculture.

Bhagat departs from the myth of chastity and questions the exploitation and gender bias stimulated by the ideology of pativrata. His women are independent and smart to take their own decisions in their life. His women and men question the authority of their parents in choosing a partner for them and daringly enter into pre-marital sexual relations with their paramour. His discourse normalizes it by excluding or giving a peripheral position to the reaction of the society.

The Indian ideology of Brahmacharya phase, which is the first twenty five years of regressive training, obedience, self-control and sexual abstinence, is vehemently protested in the novels of Bhagat. Krish is scorned as the one “on the path to becoming a man of low character” (157). However Bhagat emphasizes the ways these youth make it up with their licentiousness.

The ideology of honour, termed as izzat controls the social activities of Indians. The izzat of a family lies in their heritage, prosperity, moral values and the purity of the women in the family. Virginity in unmarried women and chastity in married women are associated with purity and are valued as an asset in traditional Indian families. The honour of the men lies in the chastity of their women folk. Both men and women embody notions of honour in totally different ways. Woman is the repository of the family honour as a daughter, wife and mother while man regulates it. The greatest threat to this honour lies in the woman.

In *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* Bhagat speaks of izzat in Indian families. Cancellation of marriage spoils the reputation of the bride in Indian society. When there is a misunderstanding regarding dowry in Minti's marriage, Ananya wants to inform the police and the narrator says that it is stupid to think so if she cares about Minti's "reputation" (211). The girl's father grovels at the feet of boy's family, pleads with them to proceed with the marriage rituals and the boy's side remains adamant about the car they had promised to give as a part of the dowry. Ananya holds a talk with the boy and the youth of his family and convinces them of their ignorance in behaving harsh for the sake of dowry. The boy realizes the truth and decides to marry the girl. Krish's aunt hugs Ananya and says, "Thank you beta. You kept our izzat" (216).

In Bhagat's perspective talking of purity of women is derogatory. When Ananya tells Krish that the Cisco guy who had been introduced to her by her parents to discuss the prospects of marriage hinted about her virginity: "are you still pure or something" (129), Krish mocks at him: "What a loser. What is he looking for- ghee?" (129). However, Ananya's reply that she would not top up if there is an entrance exam for virginity breaks the marriage prospects.

Ananya loves Krish, and her moving in with him creates a "mini scandal" (29). He says, "I earned the tag of a stud. And she earned tags ranging from stupidly-in-love to slut" (29). Thus by registering the mixed reaction of the society and by focusing on the support extended by youngsters, Bhagat discourages the control of society over personal affairs. By deemphasizing virginity and purity he rebels against the social ideology of kanya and izzat that bases the honour of a family on the sexual purity and reputation of their women folk.

Neha is a "bad girl" only after her affair with Hari. Ananya says that it is her first time, and if her mother finds out she will flip. When Ananya attends the wedding of Krish's cousin she asks for a drink and Krish says, "But stay a few steps away. I'll order the drink" (203). Tinki, Krish's cousin, asks for a drink for DJ and clarifies that she doesn't drink. Mothers are all typical Indian women putting up with the whims of their husband.

When Duke's parents stop Minti's marriage, Ananya tells Duke: "You are having an arranged marriage. That is why you are getting a girl like her. If you had to woo her, can you even in your dreams have a girlfriend like her?" (213). Similar inconsistencies in the text display the writer's struggle with the fetters of his moment and his intentions to liberate himself from certain ideologies to become more progressive and modern.

Gurubhakthi is another ideology deeply rooted in Indian society. A *guru*, can be a preceptor or a teacher and is considered greater than god. Devotion to *guru* is more meritorious than that to God. A *guru* who is wise, immaculate and pure is believed to be the best guide of a man to both worldly and spiritual success. Hence the status of *guru* in traditional Indian society is reverential. However it has been undermined in many ways in modern times.

2 States: The Story of My Marriage gives a different perspective of gurus. Having three hour of leisure in Pondicherry, the narrator gets into the Aurobindo Ashram on Rue de la Marine. The ashram building resembles a "quiet hostel" (161) to the narrator. When a forty-year-old Western woman clad in sari asks him what he is looking for, he goes philosophic. He tells her that though he had just wanted a day away from office, he wanted an answer to his problem too. She tells him that the answers are within one self and usually people introspect, attend satsang, the sermon of a *guru* and clarify their questions with them. She introduces him to a guruji. Guruji believes that they are "destined to meet" (163). Krish recounts his problem to guruji: he a Punjabi is in love with a Tamilian and is confused if they are right when their love can make his family members unhappy. Guruji asks him to shut his eyes and recall things that keep him awake at night. Krish lists out various things such as work, uncertainty about his girlfriend and his father. Guruji places his palm on Krish's forehead and he feels "a new lightness", feels "transported to another world" as if his soul has disowned his body (164). Krish recalls the painful moment of his life when he pleaded with his father to talk to his girlfriend's father to save his love, and was rejected as a worthless cause. Guruji hears him speak and gives him coconut water and Gita. He tells him to forgive his father even if he had been wrong because "forgiving doesn't make the person who hurt you feel better, it makes you feel better" (168). Guruji advises Krish to throw away the bags of anger, pain and loss that he carries with him, and surrender himself to God. Later Krish

tells Ananya that he feels better. He says, “Sometimes in life you just meet someone or hear something that nudged you on the right path. And that becomes the best advice. It could just be a bit of common sense said in a way that resonates with something in you. It’s nothing new, but because it connects with you it holds meaning for you” (170). He tells her that he has “surrendered everything to God” (171). *Guruji* is represented as a positive force of religious institution that could bring about transformations in confused minds.

The ideology of nationalism, and philosophical ideologies of karma, dharma, maya and moksha are seen in the discourse of the everyday life of Indians. It is devoid of class, linguistic or regional distinctions. Indian wifehood is defined by the ideology of pativrata and soubhgyavati, youth is guided by the ideology of kanya or brahmacharya, and family mores are determined by the ideology of izzat. Thus ideologies underlying the discourse of the selected fiction assert the sensibility of elite and middleclass Indians of present times.

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