

# **Redefining Womanhood Through Gandhian Philosophy: A Study of Chetan Bhagat's *2 States: The Story of My Marriage***

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## **Abstract**

Mahatma Gandhi played a significant role not only in India's struggle for political independence but also in the social awakening of marginalized sections of society, especially women. He regarded women as equal partners in social progress and emphasized their moral strength, self-reliance, truthfulness, and resistance to injustice. In the twenty-first century, despite remarkable advances in education and professional opportunities, women continue to encounter several forms of discrimination and stereotypical expectations. Literature, being a reflection of society, records these changing realities and provides insight into the status of women in contemporary times. Among contemporary Indian writers, Chetan Bhagat occupies a prominent place owing to his portrayal of young urban India and its social concerns. His novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* presents the character of Ananya Swaminathan as an educated, independent, and courageous woman who challenges traditional gender stereotypes while maintaining familial and cultural values. The present paper examines the character of Ananya through the lens of Gandhian philosophy and explores how Bhagat's representation of womanhood reflects Gandhi's ideals of equality, self-reliance, moral courage, and social justice. The study also highlights the continuing relevance of Gandhian thought in understanding women's identity and empowerment in contemporary Indian society.

**Keywords:** Gandhian philosophy, womanhood, women's empowerment, Chetan Bhagat, 2 States, Ananya Swaminathan, equality, social justice, contemporary Indian literature

## **Introduction**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi, occupies a unique place in the history of India. While his contribution to the political liberation of the nation is universally acknowledged, his efforts toward social reform and human emancipation are equally remarkable. Gandhi worked tirelessly for the upliftment of the marginalized and oppressed sections of society and advocated equality, dignity, and justice for all. Among his numerous contributions, the awakening and empowerment of women constitute one of his most enduring achievements.

The perception of women before Gandhi was largely shaped by patriarchal attitudes that regarded them as weak and dependent. Although many social reformers had raised their voices against various social evils, women were often portrayed as helpless victims requiring protection. Gandhi brought about a significant shift in this perception. He regarded women not as inferior beings but as embodiments of strength, sacrifice, patience, and moral superiority. According to him, women possessed equal intellectual capabilities and were entitled to equal opportunities and rights. He believed that no society could attain true freedom without ensuring the dignity and participation of women.

Despite constitutional safeguards and remarkable progress in education, employment, and public life, women in contemporary society continue to confront various forms of discrimination and prejudice. The conflict between traditional expectations and modern aspirations has made the position of women increasingly complex. While modern women actively participate in social, economic, and political spheres, they are often expected to

conform to conventional roles and responsibilities. Consequently, questions relating to women's identity, autonomy, and equality remain relevant in the twenty-first century.

Literature serves as an important medium for understanding social realities. It reflects the aspirations, anxieties, and transformations occurring within society and offers valuable insights into human experiences. The representation of women in literature has undergone significant changes over the years. Contemporary writers increasingly portray women as active agents rather than passive figures. Such portrayals reveal the changing dynamics of gender relations and the emergence of new definitions of womanhood.

Among contemporary Indian novelists, Chetan Bhagat has emerged as one of the most popular voices of modern India. His novels focus primarily on urban middle-class youth and address issues concerning education, career, family, social values, and relationships. His female characters are often educated, ambitious, and assertive, reflecting the aspirations of contemporary Indian women. In *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*, Bhagat presents Ananya Swaminathan as a woman who combines professional competence with emotional maturity and social responsibility.

The present study aims to examine the representation of womanhood in Chetan Bhagat's *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* through the perspective of Gandhian philosophy. It seeks to explore how the character of Ananya embodies Gandhian ideals of equality, self-reliance, courage, truth, and resistance to injustice. The study further attempts to evaluate the relevance of Gandhi's vision of women in the context of contemporary Indian society.

### **Review of Literature**

The question of women's empowerment has attracted considerable scholarly attention across disciplines such as literature, sociology, history, and gender studies. Mahatma Gandhi's views on women have been examined by numerous scholars who recognize his contribution to the advancement of women's status in India. Gandhi believed that women possessed immense

moral strength and emphasized their equal participation in nation-building. He advocated women's education, economic independence, and liberation from social evils such as child marriage, dowry, purdah, and gender discrimination.

Neera Desai, in *Women in Modern India*, discusses the evolution of women's position in Indian society and highlights the role of social reform movements in promoting gender equality. Madhu Kishwar, in her study *Gandhi on Women*, observes that Gandhi's ideas transformed the conventional understanding of womanhood and encouraged women to participate actively in public life. B. R. Nanda, in his biography of Mahatma Gandhi, emphasizes Gandhi's belief in women's moral and intellectual equality with men and his efforts to integrate women into the national movement.

Similarly, critics studying contemporary Indian English fiction have noted that Chetan Bhagat's novels reflect the changing aspirations and challenges of urban middle-class society. His female characters are generally portrayed as educated, confident, and professionally competent individuals. Several studies on *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* have focused on intercultural relationships, family values, and the conflicts arising from regional identities. However, comparatively little attention has been devoted to examining the character of Ananya Swaminathan from the perspective of Gandhian philosophy.

The present study seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing the ways in which Bhagat's portrayal of Ananya reflects Gandhian ideals and contributes to the redefinition of womanhood in contemporary Indian society.

### **Methodology**

The present study adopts an analytical and interpretative approach. The primary source for the study is Chetan Bhagat's novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* (2009). Secondary sources include books, research articles, and scholarly writings on Gandhian philosophy, women's studies, and contemporary Indian English literature.

The analysis is carried out through the framework of Gandhian principles such as equality, truth, self-reliance, moral courage, and resistance to injustice. The study attempts to examine how these values are reflected in the character of Ananya Swaminathan and how they contribute to the understanding of womanhood in the twenty-first century.

### **Gandhian Perspective on Women**

Mahatma Gandhi's views on women marked a significant departure from traditional patriarchal notions. He firmly believed that women were equal partners of men and possessed the same intellectual capabilities and moral potential. According to Gandhi:

“Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities.”

Gandhi rejected the notion that women constituted the weaker sex. Rather, he considered them symbols of patience, sacrifice, compassion, and moral strength. He maintained that if strength was measured in terms of moral power rather than physical force, women were superior to men.

Gandhi strongly opposed social practices such as child marriage, dowry, purdah, untouchability, and gender discrimination. He encouraged women's education and economic self-reliance, believing that financial independence was essential for human dignity and social progress. His advocacy of spinning and khadi was intended not merely as an economic programme but also as a means of empowering women and enabling their active participation in national reconstruction.

Truth (Satya), non-violence (Ahimsa), self-reliance, and resistance to injustice formed the core of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhi believed that women possessed a natural capacity to uphold these principles and could serve as powerful agents of social transformation. His vision of womanhood emphasized equality, freedom, dignity, and partnership rather than subordination and dependence.

Consequently, Gandhian philosophy provides a valuable framework for understanding the representation of women in contemporary literature. The character of Ananya Swaminathan in *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* may be examined in the light of these principles to evaluate the continuing relevance of Gandhi's ideas in modern Indian society.

## **5. Chetan Bhagat and Contemporary Indian Society**

Chetan Bhagat occupies a distinctive position among contemporary Indian English novelists. His writings primarily focus on the aspirations, dilemmas, and challenges faced by the urban middle class in a rapidly changing India. His novels deal with themes such as education, employment, family relationships, social expectations, and the conflict between tradition and modernity. Owing to his simple language and realistic portrayal of contemporary life, Bhagat enjoys immense popularity among readers, particularly the youth.

Bhagat's female characters differ significantly from the stereotypical portrayals of women found in traditional literature. They are educated, independent, and assertive individuals who actively participate in shaping their destinies. Through these characters, Bhagat highlights the changing role of women in Indian society and presents them as equal partners in personal and professional life.

Published in 2009, *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* explores the complexities of an inter-cultural relationship between a Punjabi boy and a Tamil girl. Beneath its humorous narrative lies a profound commentary on family values, social prejudices, and the evolving status of women. The character of Ananya Swaminathan emerges as a representative of modern Indian womanhood, whose actions and values correspond remarkably with Gandhian ideals.

### **6. 2 States: The Story of My Marriage**

#### **: An Overview**

*2 States: The Story of My Marriage* narrates the love story of Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi boy from Delhi, and Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil Brahmin girl from Chennai. They meet

while pursuing their management studies at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. Their friendship gradually develops into love, and they decide to marry with the consent of their respective families.

However, differences in language, culture, customs, and family expectations create several obstacles. Instead of eloping or rebelling against their parents, both Krish and Ananya undertake the challenging task of winning the approval of their families. Through patience, understanding, and perseverance, they ultimately succeed in bringing the two families together and solemnizing their marriage.

The novel not only celebrates love and cultural diversity but also presents a balanced picture of contemporary Indian society. It highlights the importance of mutual respect, equality, and family harmony. Among the various characters in the novel, Ananya Swaminathan emerges as a strong and influential figure whose personality reflects many of Gandhi's ideals regarding womanhood.

## **7. Ananya Swaminathan and the Redefinition of Womanhood**

### **Education and Economic Independence**

One of the most remarkable qualities of Ananya Swaminathan is her commitment to education and professional excellence. As a student at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, she displays intellectual brilliance, discipline, and determination. After completing her studies, she secures employment with Hindustan Lever Limited and establishes herself as a successful professional.

Gandhi strongly believed that education and economic independence were essential for the empowerment of women. He maintained that women should be financially self-reliant and should contribute actively to the progress of society. According to him, dependence breeds inequality, whereas self-reliance fosters dignity and confidence.

Ananya exemplifies this Gandhian ideal through her professional competence and financial independence. Her identity is not confined to domestic responsibilities alone. Rather, she successfully combines personal relationships with career aspirations, thereby challenging conventional notions regarding women's roles in society.

### **Love, Care, and Family Values**

Although Ananya is modern in outlook, she remains deeply attached to her family and cultural roots. She loves her parents and brother and desires their happiness. Likewise, she cares sincerely for Krish and supports him during difficult circumstances. Her decision not to elope with Krish demonstrates her commitment to family values and emotional responsibility.

Gandhi regarded love, compassion, and sacrifice as essential virtues of human life. He believed that relationships should be based upon mutual understanding rather than selfish interests. Ananya's desire to obtain the consent and blessings of both families reflects these values.

Her understanding of marriage goes beyond individual fulfillment. For her, marriage signifies the union of two families rather than merely the coming together of two individuals. This perspective reveals her emotional maturity and reinforces Gandhi's belief in harmony and mutual respect.

### **Courage and Resistance to Injustice**

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Ananya's personality is her courage and willingness to oppose injustice. During Minti's wedding, when the groom's family demands expensive gifts and additional dowry, Ananya boldly raises her voice against such unethical practices. She openly questions Duke and exposes the injustice inflicted upon the bride's family.

Her fearless opposition to dowry demonstrates moral courage and social consciousness. Gandhi consistently opposed social evils and emphasized the importance of standing firmly on

the side of truth. His doctrine of Satyagraha was founded upon resistance to injustice through moral conviction.

Although Ananya's methods differ from Gandhi's political struggles, her insistence on fairness and dignity reflects the spirit of Satyagraha. She refuses to remain a silent spectator and actively challenges oppressive social customs. In doing so, she emerges as a symbol of empowered womanhood.

### **Equality and Partnership**

Another important dimension of Ananya's character is her belief in equality. She does not view herself as subordinate to Krish. Their relationship is founded upon friendship, mutual respect, and shared responsibilities. She participates equally in decision-making and often motivates Krish to overcome emotional and familial difficulties.

Gandhi maintained that husband and wife are equal partners in life and that neither should dominate the other. He asserted:

“The wife is not the husband's slave but his companion and his helpmate and an equal partner in all his joys and sorrows.”

Ananya embodies this principle of equality. She supports Krish in his struggles and, in turn, expects the same support from him. Their relationship represents companionship rather than patriarchy, thereby redefining conventional gender roles.

### **Tradition and Modernity**

One of the most admirable aspects of Ananya's personality is her ability to strike a balance between tradition and modernity. She is ambitious and professionally accomplished, yet she respects her family and cultural values. She is independent without being rebellious and progressive without abandoning her roots.

This harmonious blend of tradition and modernity corresponds to Gandhi's own outlook. Gandhi advocated social reform while emphasizing the importance of preserving

cultural and moral values. He believed that modernization should not result in the destruction of ethical principles and human relationships.

Ananya successfully reconciles these seemingly conflicting dimensions and represents the aspirations of contemporary Indian women who seek both freedom and responsibility.

### **8. Relevance of Gandhian Ideals in the Twenty-First Century**

The twenty-first century has witnessed remarkable advancements in science, technology, education, and globalization. Women today enjoy greater access to education and employment opportunities than ever before. Nevertheless, numerous challenges such as gender discrimination, violence, unequal treatment, and social stereotypes continue to persist.

In such circumstances, Gandhian philosophy retains its significance. His emphasis on equality, dignity, truth, self-reliance, and social justice remains relevant to contemporary discussions on women's empowerment. Gandhi's vision does not advocate competition between men and women but rather cooperation and partnership based upon mutual respect.

Ananya Swaminathan's character demonstrates the continuing relevance of these ideals. Her independence, moral courage, and commitment to family values illustrate that empowerment need not imply the rejection of tradition. Instead, genuine empowerment lies in enabling women to make independent choices while preserving their dignity and individuality.

Through the portrayal of Ananya, Chetan Bhagat presents a new image of womanhood that harmonizes modern aspirations with ethical values. This representation resonates strongly with Gandhi's vision of a society founded upon equality, justice, and compassion.

### **Conclusion**

Mahatma Gandhi's contribution to the upliftment and empowerment of women constitutes one of the most important aspects of his social philosophy. He envisioned women as equal partners in society and emphasized their intellectual abilities, moral strength, and

capacity for leadership. His ideas concerning equality, self-reliance, truth, and resistance to injustice continue to inspire contemporary society.

The present study demonstrates that Ananya Swaminathan in *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* embodies many of these Gandhian ideals. She emerges as an educated, independent, courageous, and compassionate woman who successfully balances tradition with modernity. Her determination, social consciousness, and commitment to justice distinguish her from stereotypical portrayals of women and establish her as a representative of contemporary Indian womanhood.

Through the character of Ananya, Chetan Bhagat offers a progressive vision of gender relations based on equality and mutual respect. The novel affirms that women are not passive recipients of social change but active participants in shaping society. Thus, the study establishes that Gandhian philosophy continues to possess immense relevance in understanding the identity and status of women in the twenty-first century.

**Conflict of Interest:** The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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