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A Portrayal of Inter-caste Marriage in Chetan Bhagat's Novel '2 States: The Story of My Marriage'

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to understand the varied cultures and traditions existing in contemporary India which create impediments in inter-caste marriages for a young generation. Chetan Bhagat's novels are emblems of the true thoughts of contemporary young India. *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* is a love story of Krish, a Punjabi boy and Ananya, a Tamilian girl, and their attempts to convert their love into marriage with the endorsement of their parents. Author humorously delineates cultural aspects of Tamil Brahmin and Punjabi communities which are in sharp contrast to each other. The paper helps us to understand the cultural and social barriers between North-India and South-India and their impact on inter-caste marriages.

Keyword: barriers, cultures, contemporary India, inter-caste marriages, traditions, young generation,

Marriage is defined by The New Britannica Encyclopedia (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)". The history of inter-caste marriage in India is as old as arranged marriage, though it is still not widely accepted in the culture preserved Indian societies due to many sociological complexities prevalent in the various communities.

2 States: The Story of My Marriage, published in 2009 is a love story of a Tamilian girl, Ananya and a Punjabi boy, Krish and their efforts to renovate their love life into marriage

with the consent of their parents.— In this novel, Chetan Bhagat highlights the issue of inter-caste marriages. The novel is inspired by the author's personal experience of life. The depiction of various characters and incidents in the novel gives the reader a perfect image of varied culture and tradition existing in contemporary India. The novel perfectly depicts how the difference of culture between two states creates obstacles in the marriage of two lovers. The novel indicates the grim and depressing reality of Indian marriage system. It also gives a resemblance of the social reality to India.

This is a comical yet emotional story about the struggles of two lovers to convince their conservative parents who do not wish to marry their children beyond their cultures. They fight against all odds of their customary and traditional societies. The story begins in IIM Ahmadabad mess where Ananya is not happy with the quality of food being provided to students. Ananya and Krish fall in love with each other and spend most of the time together in the college hostel for late night study. The love turns into a serious relationship before the couple decides to get married. It could have been an easier thing for them but to convince their parents becomes a herculean task for them due to their different cultural backgrounds. It is like the clash of titans for them to get a breakthrough. On the Convocation day when both the families meet for the first time, the war of words just starts to unleash. Being a Punjabi woman it is absolutely hard to digest for Krish's mother that his son has chosen a Tamilian girl as her daughter-in-law. She calls Ananya's family members as Madrasis even though Krish tries to convince her that they are Tamilian. She even taunts them by making a racist comment:

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

One can scrutinize the example of racial discrimination from the conversation of the mother and the son after a phone call of Krish to Ananaya:

‘Madrasi Girl?’

‘Ananya.’ I said.

‘Stay away from her. They brainwash, these people’.

‘Mom, I like her. In fact, I love her’.

‘See, I told you. They trap you,’ my mom declared.

‘Nobody has trapped me, mom,’ I said as I thwacked a bhindi on the table. ‘She is a nice girl. She is smart, intelligent, good-looking. She has a good job. Why would she need to trap anyone?’

‘They like North Indian men.’

‘Why? What’s so special about North Indian men?’

‘North Indians are fairer. The Tamilians have a complex’

‘A complexion complex?’ I chuckled.

‘Yes, huge’ my mother said. (Bhagat 56)

Tamilians are no less than Punjabis when it comes to cultural preservation. It is revealed when Ananya introduces herself to Krish as:

‘She laughed. ‘I didn’t say I am a practising Tam Brahmin. But you should know that I am born into the purest of pure upper caste communities ever created. What about commoner.’ (Bhagat 7)

Families of both Krish and Ananya think themselves of better quality than one another and have ego clashes due to their dissimilar cultures.

Soon after Krish gets a job in Citi Bank in Chennai branch, being a Punjabi boy, he feels difficult to get adjusted in a different culture of Chennai. Krish’s first step to impress the culture-bound Ananya’s family was a big failure because he finds their lifestyle strange and hard to get adjusted to their culture and traditions. Such as, they eat their vegetarian food on banana leaves whereas they take their shoes off outside the home and so on. Krish starts to take tuition classes of Manju for IIT entrance exam to spend some time at their home though they do not like his stay there. They believe that marrying their daughter out of their caste or community will bring social disgrace to their family. Ananya’s father requests Krish as follows:

‘Don’t meet Ananya too much. We are simple people, we don’t say much. But don’t spoil her name in our community,’ he said.

‘Uncle But...’

‘I know you are classmates and you are helping Manju. We can be grateful, we can feed you, but we can’t let Ananya marry you.’ (Bhagat 109)

After trying tirelessly he finally manages to win over them by his likeable behaviour while making a power point presentation for Mr Swaminathan and providing an opportunity to Ms Swaminathan, a music lover, to share a stage and sing along with distinguished singers like S.P Bala Subramaniam and Hariharan, and making her dream come true.

Now during Delhi visit, Ananya’s turn to convince her potential mother-in-law begins. But she too finds it much difficult to get the job done. She even pleads to Krish that she cannot do this anymore as his mother is too hard to convince. But Krish manages to persuade her not to give up. Ananya takes initiative at Krish’s cousin Minti’s wedding, when the bride groom’s parents halt the marriage ceremony, demanding a more expensive car. She believes that it is very much unacceptable and cheap on part of the educated youngsters to demand gifts or dowry from the bride’s parents. She pressurizes the bridegroom Duke to accept Minti with respect with a small car or he would not get either. This works very well for her and the matrimonial knot is tied. This makes Ananya loving to all Punjabis present in the marriage ceremony. Even Kavita sheds her rigid perception about the South Indian girl Ananya and takes her into her good books.

When everything seems to be well settled, there is another setback for the couple in Goa at the parent’s second meet. Their cultural differences win over sensible understanding every time they meet. Their beliefs are completely different about marriage and before they come to any conclusion they divert to the marriage proposals that are coming from well-to-do families for both Krish and Ananya. And when Krish’s mother humiliates Ananya’s parents, it seems that all is done and dusted. But finally, Krish’s father, who is detested by Krish all the time, makes his presence felt by visiting Ananya’s parents in Chennai and convinces them for the marriage of their children.

The notion in India is that marriage is not only between a boy and a girl but also between the two families. The author rightfully describes it as:

Love marriages around the world are simple:

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

In India, there are a few more steps:

Boy loves girl. Girl loves boy.

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.

(From Author's blurb)

Even though the caste system has been legally put to an end in India for more than sixty years but inter-caste marriages are still considered taboo in India. Transforming a love affair into a wedding in India is considered the highest achievement of life. The matter becomes more special when two lovers are from two different communities. And in this case, it is not just a love story converted into a marriage of a Punjabi boy and a Tamil Brahmin girl but it is the marriage of two different communities. Racial bigotry still exists in the society and it is a grim reality that we are outwardly modern but inwardly we still live in the past stick of conventional system. The novel *2 States* depicts the true picture of the culture and tradition of contemporary India which create hurdles in inter-caste marriages for the young generation of India and how they manage to overcome these hurdles.

Conclusion

Chetan Bhagat has openly accepted wherein his community's slipup lies and has also exposed the girl's side but he does it humorously and also remains philosophical at times. Baghat's concern in all his novels is young India, which in other words can be said as modernism. He presents complex and entrenched socio-cultural problems of multicultural India. He points out that reasons for the widespread opposition of inter-caste marriages in Indian societies are social disrespect and social disapproval. He also rightfully notices that inter-caste marriages are opposed in India due to the communication gap between the two families of different communities. If the two families meet and exchange their ideas with one another frequently, narrow-mindedness can be transformed into broad-mindedness of the concerned people. The novelist criticizes both Tamil and Punjabi cultures and with an idea to put an end to inequality he reminds them that they live in one state called India. The author honestly campaigns national integrity, mirrors the concern of racism and puts forward it as a threat to national unity.

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