

# Exploring Identity, Love, and Social Hierarchy: A Critical Analysis of Chetan Bhagat's "2 States: The Story of My Marriage"

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**Abstract**—Chetan Bhagat’s “2 States: The Story of My Marriage” offers a vivid portrayal of contemporary Indian society by foregrounding issues of regional identity, love, and social hierarchy through the inter-state romance between Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi from Delhi, and Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil Brahmin from Chennai. The novel dramatizes the tension between individual choice and collective expectations as the couple attempts to convert a campus romance into an acceptable marriage within an entrenched framework of caste, language, class, and patriarchal norms. This paper undertakes a critical analysis of “2 States” by situating it within postcolonial, multicultural, and sociological discourses on Indian modernity, arguing that the text negotiates the competing pulls of tradition and globalization in late liberal India. Drawing on concepts of hybridity, cultural negotiation, identity crisis, and social mobility, the study examines how Bhagat’s popular narrative both reproduces and critiques structures of power such as patriarchy, regional discrimination, linguistic prejudice, and consumerist aspirations. Methodologically, the paper employs qualitative textual analysis supported by close reading of key episodes—family negotiations, rituals of marriage, workplace scenes, and intergenerational conflicts—alongside secondary scholarship on Bhagat’s fiction and on multiculturalism in Indian English writing. The findings suggest that while Bhagat’s simple, colloquial style and formulaic romantic plot align with market-driven popular fiction, “2 States” nonetheless opens a productive space to interrogate the politics of “unity in diversity,” exposing the fragility of Indian pluralism when confronted with everyday prejudice and class privilege. The paper concludes that “2 States” functions as a cultural text that mirrors the anxieties of aspirational middle-class youth, revealing how love, education, and mobility are simultaneously

emancipatory and constrained by social hierarchies in contemporary India.

**Index Terms**—Chetan Bhagat, 2 States, identity, social hierarchy, multiculturalism, postcolonialism, Indian middle class.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Chetan Bhagat has emerged as one of the most influential popular writers in Indian English, known for his focus on youth, education, romance, and the contradictions of a rapidly liberalizing society. “2 States: The Story of My Marriage” published in 2009, narrates the love story of Krish and Ananya, who must negotiate the cultural distance between Punjab and Tamil Nadu in order to secure family approval for their marriage.

The novel is often described as semi-autobiographical and is situated within a body of Bhagat’s work that foregrounds the experiences of urban, English-educated, middle-class Indians confronted with issues of meritocracy, family obligation, and global aspiration. “2 States” in particular dramatizes the North–South divide, highlighting how language, food, ritual, and everyday stereotypes produce friction even among educated middle-class families. This makes the text an important cultural document for examining the interplay between identity, love, and social hierarchy in contemporary India.

This paper expands earlier readings of “2 States” by integrating perspectives from postcolonial theory, multiculturalism, and cultural studies to explore how the novel mediates between tradition and modernity. It argues that Bhagat’s popular narrative acts as a site

where questions of cultural difference, inter-state prejudice, patriarchy, and class mobility are negotiated, often in ambivalent and contradictory ways.

## II. RELATED WORK

Chetan Bhagat, born in 1974, revolutionized Indian English fiction with relatable tales of ambition, romance, and societal flaws. His bibliography spans 10+ novels, non-fiction, and screenplays, selling millions and inspiring Bollywood hits.

- ❖ *Five Point Someone* (2004) explores the lives of three friends struggling to cope with the pressures of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). It critiques the rigid education system and emphasizes the importance of friendship, creativity, and individuality amid academic stress.
- ❖ *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005) follows six call center employees who receive a divine call during a crisis night. The novel addresses themes of urban alienation, work-life balance, and the quest for purpose in corporate India's fast-paced environment.
- ❖ *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008) is set in Ahmedabad and centers on three friends navigating cricket, business ambitions, and communal riots. It tackles friendship, ambition, religious tensions, and the impact of socio-political unrest on personal dreams.
- ❖ *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* (2009) is a semi-autobiographical novel about a Punjabi boy and Tamil girl who face familial and cultural opposition to their marriage. It highlights inter-state cultural differences, identity struggles, and the clash between tradition and modern love.
- ❖ *Revolution 2020* (2011) explores the intertwining of love, corruption, and ambition in Varanasi. The novel critiques the erosion of ethics in education and politics while portraying a love triangle marked by moral and social dilemmas.
- ❖ *Half Girlfriend* (2014) narrates the story of a rural boy's imperfect relationship with an affluent urban girl. It raises issues of language barriers, social class divides, and the complexities of modern relationships in India.
- ❖ *One Indian Girl* (2016) offers a feminist perspective through the protagonist's struggles with career, love, and societal expectations. It

challenges traditional gender roles and advocates for women's independence and self-worth.

- ❖ *The Girl in Room 105* (2018) is a departure into thriller territory, chronicling a man's quest to uncover the truth behind his ex-girlfriend's mysterious death, set against communal tensions and personal loss.
- ❖ *One Arranged Murder* (2020) blends mystery with family drama, involving a murder investigation linked to an arranged marriage, exposing hidden secrets and social hypocrisies.
- ❖ *400 Days* (2021) continues the mystery series, unraveling deception in relationships and the dark underbelly of seemingly perfect lives.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in close textual analysis of "2 States," supported by relevant critical and theoretical literature on Bhagat's fiction and on multiculturalism in Indian English writing. The primary text is examined for its narrative structure, characterization, dialogue, and key motifs- including food, language, ritual, education, and space (Delhi, Chennai, Ahmedabad, corporate offices)- trace how identity, love, and social hierarchy intersect.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, it maps the representation of regional and cultural difference between Punjabi and Tamil Brahmin communities in the novel, paying particular attention to scenes of first encounters, family visits, and marriage negotiations. Second, it examines the dynamics of love and power in Krish and Ananya's relationship, including gender roles, negotiation strategies, and the impact of economic and educational capital. Third, it situates these narrative patterns within broader theoretical discussions of Indian modernity, postcolonial identity, and multiculturalism to understand how the novel reflects and critiques contemporary social hierarchies.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

### 4.1 Identity and Regional Difference

"2 States" constructs identity at multiple levels- regional, linguistic, caste-based, class-based, and gendered- using the romance plot as a narrative device to expose deep-seated prejudices. Krish's Punjabi family is associated with loudness, conspicuous

consumption, and emotional expressiveness, while Ananya’s Tamil Brahmin family is portrayed as disciplined, intellectual, and conservative, producing a series of contrasts that drive both humor and conflict in the story. These regional identities intersect with broader national discourses of “unity in diversity,” showing how pan-Indian belonging is repeatedly fractured by everyday stereotypes and mutual

suspicion. The novel’s settings-Delhi, Chennai, and the pan-Indian campus of IIM Ahmedabad-operate as spaces of negotiation where languages shift, food habits are scrutinized, and bodies become markers of community difference. As shown in Table 1, the text juxtaposes these spaces to highlight the shifting codes of behavior demanded from the protagonists.

Table 1: Key cultural spaces and identity dynamics in “2 States”

Space	Dominant culture traits (as narrated)	Impact on Krish–Ananya relationship
IIM Ahmedabad	Cosmopolitan, meritocratic, English-dominant campus culture	Enables romance and equal partnership
Krish’s Delhi home	Punjabi middle-class, status-conscious, patriarchal	Intensifies conflict, highlights gender and class hierarchies
Ananya’s Chennai home	Tamil Brahmin, ritual-centric, academically oriented	Exposes linguistic and ritual gaps, tests adaptability
Corporate workplace	Professional, performance-driven, pan-Indian	Offers economic mobility but reinforces class and gender pressures

4.2 Love, Gender, and Power

At the level of plot, “2 States” appears to celebrate romantic love as a means of transcending cultural boundaries, in line with popular Bollywood and commercial fiction narratives. However, a closer reading reveals that the couple’s ability to “win over” their parents depends heavily on their educational credentials, urban English-speaking habitus, and the economic security offered by elite degrees and corporate jobs. Love therefore operates within the framework of class privilege rather than wholly outside it.

Gender dynamics further complicate this framework. Ananya is portrayed as outspoken, academically brilliant, and professionally ambitious, challenging traditional expectations of docile femininity in both Punjabi and Tamil settings. Yet she is also repeatedly subjected to scrutiny regarding behavior, dress, and culinary skills, indicating that patriarchal norms remain deeply entrenched despite claims of modernity. Krish, meanwhile, struggles with expectations of masculinity-financial responsibility, emotional mediation, and loyalty to the natal family-revealing the pressure placed on men to act as bridges between tradition and individual desire.

4.3 Social Hierarchy and Middle-Class Aspirations

Social hierarchy in “2 States” is stabilized through caste, language, region, and class, but also

increasingly through the symbolic capital of elite education and corporate employment. Krish’s IIM credential and Ananya’s engineering background function as markers that make the match palatable to both families, even as other differences remain contentious. The narrative thereby reflects how contemporary middle-class India uses professional success to negotiate caste and regional boundaries without fully abandoning status anxieties.

Dowry, financial bargaining, and displays of wealth appear in the novel as sites where hierarchical relations are negotiated, resisted, or masked by the language of “gifts” and “custom.” While the protagonists voice discomfort with overtly transactional attitudes, their eventual marriage still takes place within a structure that privileges heteronormative union, parental blessing, and ritual conformity. As shown in Figure 1 (conceptual, for your paper), the text can be read as a diagram of intersecting hierarchies-caste, class, gender, and region-through which love must pass in order to be socially validated.

4.4 Popular Fiction, Cinema, and Cultural Circulation

The adaptation of “2 States” into a successful Bollywood film extends the novel’s cultural reach and further embeds its representations of North–South relations into popular consciousness. Scholarship on cinematic adaptations of Bhagat’s novels notes that

film versions often amplify melodrama, visual spectacle, and musical sequences while retaining key conflicts related to education, class, and romance. This intermedial circulation ensures that discourses of inter-state marriage, regional stereotypes, and aspirational middle-class lifestyles travel beyond literary readerships into mass visual culture.

Critical studies of Bhagat's narrative style emphasize his colloquial language, linear plots, and focus on first-person male narrators, which have attracted young readers while drawing criticism from some literary circles. In "2 States," this accessible mode paradoxically enables complex themes—such as cultural pluralism, patriarchal control, and emotional labor—to be explored in a form that appears deceptively simple. The novel thus participates in a wider shift in Indian English fiction where popular narratives become key arenas for negotiating social change and cultural identity.

#### V. CONCLUSION

"2 States: The Story of My Marriage" presents a layered narrative in which identity, love, and social hierarchy are intertwined within the everyday lives of India's aspiring middle classes. The novel dramatizes the negotiation of regional difference, caste pride, and parental authority through the romance of Krish and Ananya, showing that while education and economic mobility expand the horizons of choice, they do not entirely dismantle entrenched structures of power.

The analysis in this paper suggests that Bhagat's popular fiction, far from being merely escapist, offers a significant lens through which to examine the contradictions of Indian modernity, particularly the tension between "unity in diversity" as national ideal and the persistence of everyday prejudice. By employing frameworks from postcolonial studies, multiculturalism, and cultural sociology, "2 States" can be read as a text that simultaneously normalizes and questions the hierarchies shaping contemporary Indian relationships. Future research may extend this discussion by comparing "2 States" with other inter-regional or inter-caste love stories in Indian English fiction and their cinematic adaptations, thereby mapping broader patterns of cultural negotiation in post-liberalization India.

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