



Manifestation of Culture of Conflict in Chetan Bhagat's 2 States

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Abstract

In the contemporary time, the society witness many hazardous problems generated due to the cultural conflicts. Today, abundant of incidents where one can find that battles are fought due to the difference of cultural aspects. The hullabaloo between American and Islamic countries is one of them. In India, the same problems are seen between Islam and Jainism. These problems of cultural dissimilarity play an obvious role in some country like American, UK, Australia and India due to thousand of the migrants residing there. Here with, through the research, the issue of cultural variation, and how this variation wound human lives, is probed. Apartfrom this, the exploration also confirms, how with liberal values of Culture of Convenience, the problems of cultural divergence can be resolved. This research also draws an attention that, how the moderate quality of culture of convenience brings the global harmony. With special reference to very popular Indian English novel, 2 States by Chetan Bhagat.

Key Words: Culture, Conflict, Novel, Chetan Bhagat

Chetan Bhagat was born in New Delhi to a middle class Punjabi family. His father was in the army and his mother was a government employee in the agricultural department. Bhagat's schooling was mostly in Delhi. He attended the Army Public School (1978–1991), Dhaula Kuan, New Delhi and then studied Mechanical Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi (1991–1995). He graduated from the IIM Ahmedabad (1995–1997). After graduation, he worked as an investment banker in Hong Kong. He had been working in Hong Kong for 11 years before shifting to Mumbai to pursue his passion for writing. He has written five books, all of which are bestsellers. His first three novels were written during his tenure as an investment banker. Chetan Bhagat gave up his global investment-banking career in 2009 and dedicated his

entire time to writing and make change happen in the country. He lives in Mumbai with his wife Anusha, a former classmate from IIMA and his twin boys Shyam and Ishaan.

Chetan Bhagat has written five blockbuster novels – *Five Point Someone* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Center* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of my life* (2008), *2 States* (2009) and *Revolution 2020* (2011). Chetan Bhagat also writes columns for leading English and Hindi newspapers, focusing on youth and national development issues. He is also a motivational speaker.

The research concerns with culture of convenience. This, basically, is a very fresh topic of research. Culture of Convenience is come under the canopy of Cultural Study. Therefore, it is quick need to define the cultural study as well as culture. Cultural Study is a branch of Literary Criticism and poles apart from Cultural anthropology and Ethnic Study by its objectives as well as methodology. It explores ideology, Nationality, Ethnicity, Sexuality, Gender of the subject. M.H. Abrahams briefly writes about Cultural Studies:

Cultural Studies designates a recent and rapidly growing cross-disciplinary enterprise for analyzing the condition that effect the production, reception, and cultural significance of all types of institutions, practices, and products; among these, literature is accounted as merely one of many form of cultural “signifying practices.” A chief concern is to specify the functioning of the social, economical, and political forces and power-structures that produce all forms of cultural phenomena and endow them with their social “meanings,” their “truth,” the modes of discourse in which they are discussed, and their relative value and status (53).

These words significantly tells the meaning of Cultural study that the study is well grown analysis of the condition or circumstances which cause or affect the activities, outcome and cultural significance of all kind of well established institutions or social organizations. Here, Abrahams has given more emphasis on Literature as it is one of the activities or outcome of one or more institution of society, as it is well said that, Literature is reflection of the society. He also deliberately discusses power structure of the society. Power structure produces all the forms and truth about culture in the society. Cultural studies are a discipline wherein analysis of social institutes as well as the power structure is required to get the real truth and meanings of the culture.

Pramod K. Nayar defines cultural studies in his book *An Introduction to Cultural Studies* as:

Cultural Studies is interested in the processes by which power relations between and within groups of human beings organize cultural artifacts (such as food habits, music, cinema, sports events and celebrity culture) and their meanings. (4)

He proclaims cultural studies as a process. This process finds out power relationship between and within the human beings. The group of human beings is only, who manage cultural artifacts and their meanings. Hence, he also emphasizes on power structure of the society. The power structure of the society is responsible for the meanings and artifacts of any culture. Further, he elaborates his definitions, “cultural issues and themes are mediated though questions of economy (profit) and politics (power). Culture is therefore about power” (Nayar 7).

Hence, Cultural study is the study of culture or society reflected in the piece of Literature. Therefore, the term culture has to be defined.

The very first chapter of the novel confirms that the novel is about a love story of Krish, a Punjabi boy and Ananya, a south Indian girl. They develop die heart affection for each and see a dream of their united world, hence cultures come together to be mingled. The two cultures, Punjabi and Tamil, try to be one, and the couple wants to woven themselves in a single thread. One of the most often discussed topics in our country are that divides between the so-called South Indians and the so called North Indians. However, their union is not as easier, due to their

different culture and ultimately it creates a cultural conflict. One is Punjabi boy, and the other is Tamil. One, Punjabi culture, is from north axis of India while the other, Tamil, from South Pole of India.

When the differences are explored between south India and north India, it is found difference is primeval which has its roots during the when today's south Indian were known as Dravidians and north Indian were known as Aryans. From the very beginning, the Aryan had disregarded the Dravidian culture and gradually conquered the northern part of India, almost in every bit of the poles. Both, Punjabis and Tamils are thoroughly conflicting. They differ because of their language, customs, life style, attires, etc. Therefore, different aspects of Culture divide this chapter, as cultural conflict in this novel is located in different facets of their cultures. First, the very basic difference is the racial differences. The Punjabis and North Indians are termed as Aryans, and Madrasi and the South Indians as Dravidians. In physique as well, there are many differences between the people of the South and North. The North Indians are taller, and more strongly built than the South Indians. The South Indians are a bit darker than the North Indians.

A big difference can be seen in their dressing styles. Salwar Kamiz is the widely used dress by North Indian women. On the other hand, women in the South wear saris. While men in the North wear Salwar, the men in South prefer dhotis. Another difference that can be seen between North and South India is their food. When compared to the North Indian food, the South Indian food is spicier. The South Indians use more tamarind and coconut when compared to North Indians. The North Indians use more dairy products when compared to the people of South India. When talking about the culture, there is vast difference between North and South India. One can come across differences in their music (Northern Hindustani and Southern Carnatic), dance forms and folks. Chetan Bhagat, in his masterpiece *2 States*, expresses his real life experience of this cultural divide.

Here is relevance with the definitions given by Pramod Nayar. He defines cultural studies as:

Cultural Studies is interested in the processes by which power relations between and within groups of human beings organize cultural artefacts (such as food habits, music, cinema, sports events and celebrity culture) and their meanings. (4)

Therefore, he talks about the power relation in the society. Observation of power structure is essential for any cultural studies. However, *2 States* deals with Punjabi culture and Tamil. Both the cultures have their unique reputation in India. Equality of region, religion, language etc. is described in the Constitution of India. Therefore, no culture is powerful in India. However, the conflicts begin when they migrate to the other region because every culture has their unique meanings of each artifact in their own region. Hence, this is the issue of study.

- Conflict over Language:

Language is the first code or Identity of any culture. As observed by Chris Barker and Dariusz in *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis*,

Cultural studies has for sometime been a constituent part of the 'linguistic turn' in the humanities and social science with writers arguing that language is the central means and medium by which we understand the world and construct culture. (1)

Therefore, they show and emphasize on linguistic part of society in the construction of its culture. This statement says Language is the centre, and it is the most essential aspect to understand the world as well as to construct culture. *2 States* represents two different cultures of India. This means there are two different languages of both the culture. Sometimes though culture may not have unique or its own language but it is sure that every culture has its own

vernacular or colloquial dialect. Krish has been developed around Punjabi language, and Ananya has been grown up in the surround of Tamil language. However, the positive side shown in the novel is, they are well versed with English and Hindi Language. As their educational language is English, and national language is Hindi. Then even conflict can be seen because of language is throughout the novel. Their family and relatives are used to use native language. When some confusion is there in once life, s/he naturally speaks in native language or speaks mother tongue. Here, some examples of influences of both the languages from 2 States are expressed. When Krish is forced to see one Punjabi girl for his marriage, the influence of Punjabi language over English is visibly seen in the language. Two Punjabi families communicate in English, but Punjabi accents occur in between their natural talk:

‘Who knows ji about whose daughter she will become? (Bhagat 62).

‘Hello Aunty-ji,’ Dolly said and went on to give my mother a tight hug (Bhagat 62).

‘No Pammi-ji. This is enough,’ my mother said, obviously daring her to serve us more (Bhagat 62).

‘Nothing ji, just for tasting. You should have come for dinner’ (Bhagat 63).

No ji, we don’t make our daughters work,’ my mother said (Bhagat 63).

See ji, we are quite modern, actually,’ she said to my mother (Bhagat 64).

‘Modern is good ji. We are also not old-fashioned. Go Krish, enjoy,’ my mother said (Bhagat 64).

In these conversations, they frequently use ji. Ji is shown as necessary accent for Punjabis when they talk. No matter in which language they communicate, but this kind of Punjabi accents are natural and unavoidable. Almost every person in this episode except Krish uses this ji. Mrs. Pummi, her daughter Dolly and even Krish’s mother have used unnecessarily ji after many words of English like, “Knows ji”, “Aunty- ji”, “ Nothing ji”, “No ji” and so on.

These are the languages of two different cultures shown in the novel i.e. Punjabi and Tamil. Now the focus is on how conflicts can be occurred due to differences of language. Here is an example from novel wherein, conflict initiates due to disparity of Language.

My mother, not to be left behind in asking of questions, turned to the guide. ‘Why is it called Dandi March? Because he carried a stick?’ ...

Ananya’s mother turned to her father and spoke in Tamil. ‘Something something illa knowledge Punjabi people something.’

‘Seri, seri,’ Ananya’s father said in a cursory manner, engrossed in the map. Ananya’s mother continued. ‘Intellectually, culturally zero. Something crass uneducated something.’

I don’t know if Ananya’s mother realized her use of the few English words, or maybe she planted them intentionally. She had made her comeback. My mother heard her and looked at me. (Bhagat 51)

This incident is appeared at Gandhiji’s Satyagrah Ashram visited by Ananya’s parents and by her, along with Krish and his mother. It proves the conflict appears because of two different languages. The episode shows lack of knowledge of Krish’s mother about Mahatma Gandhi and his Dandi March. In this incident, Ananya’s mother mocks on Krish’s mother and intentionally or unintentionally, she insults the Punjabi culture and community. She uses more Tamil language so that non-Tamilian (Krish, his mother and Guide) cannot understand her manipulation. Something something in this example refers to weak knowledge of Tamil language of Krish. He is the narrator of this novel. When some unknown words of Tamil are spoken throughout the novel, he puts something something. Therefore, this ambiguity of language makes confusion in the mind of Krish, his mother as well as the Guide whom they have

hired. When somebody speaks weird language, it always creates certain doubts to others who cannot understand that language. Particularly in this incident wherein there is already a conflict arises between Ananya's mother and Krish's mother, bi-lingual conversation creates more doubts whether she abuses them or insults them. The use of English words (Consciously or unconsciously) by Ananya's mother confuses and disturbs Krish's mother and creates greater conflict.

The novel has also portrayed one Punjabi incident wherein non-Punjabi cannot get the meaning. When Ananya goes to Delhi with Krish to win her mother-in-law's heart, they all attend one Punjabi marriage ceremony. Marriage is of Krish's maternal cousin Minti. Ananya is a new face there for everybody. At that time, one of the maternal aunties of Krish comes.

I bent forward to touch her feet. I signaled and Ananya Followed. 'Kavita, teri noo hai?' Swaran aunty said in Punjabi, asking if Ananya was my mom's daughter-in-law. (Bhagat 200) If the novelist would not have clarified, non-Punjabi would not have understood.

Language is shown as a part of cultural conflict in this novel. Krish and Ananya both love each other intensively, but their parents do not concur with their love. Cultures of both families are like chalk and cheese. Thus, one common ground to reject their proposal of marriage is their dissimilarities of language. Therefore, languages become a hurdle for their marriage and prove to be a key factor of their cultural conflict. Language difference is uprooted in the history of both North Indian and South Indian culture i.e. respectively Aryans and Dravidians. Dr. David truly writes in his e-article:

The languages of South India are Dravidian, which is a different linguistic group than the Indo-European languages of the North of the subcontinent. The two groups of languages have many different root words (though a number in common we might add), and above all a different grammatical structure, the Dravidian being agglutinative and the Indo-European being inflected.

Dr. David accurately observes about basic difference of both the languages. He notes both the languages have different root words and different grammar structures. He reminds the remarks of Pramod K. Nayar about Language. Nayar appropriately remarks: Language and meanings are connected to issues of class, power, ideology and the material conditions in which the speaking/painting or interpretation occurs. All expression and use of language are situated in a context. (21)

It is noteworthy that, issues like class, power, ideology and the material conditions, which he talks about, are diverse in both the region. Therefore, the language and meanings of language are dissimilar in both the region. Moreover, he admits the significance of context. Hence, the context also varies, in Punjabi culture and Tamil.

Punjabi makes their meaning according to their cultural context and cultural issues, while Tamil creates their meaning along with their cultural habits. Thus, the conflict over the language is observed throughout the novel.

- Conflict over Traditions and Mindset:

This novel deals with two different cultures, Tamil and Punjabi. Both have their own traditions and customs and people of those cultures have their own mindset, convictions, psyche or attitude for everything around them. Money is the center of Punjabi mindset and Education is for Tamil. There are several points in the novel where tradition and mindset of both the cultures can be observed.

Tradition is the daily or regular activities done by people in their routine life. The way of doing something has existed for a long time. Customs are something that people always do. Therefore, customs and tradition are interwoven. Punjabi and Tamil traditions and customs are

reflected at many points in the novel. The novel is a story of the marriage of Krish and Ananya. Hence, traditions and customs related to marriage are given more importance.

Manju told me about Harish, the poster boy of the perfect Tamilian groom. Radha aunty had pitched Harish for the last two years. He fit every criteria applied by Indian parents to make him a worthwhile match for Ananya. He was Tamilian, a Brahmin and an Iyer (and those are three separate things, and non-compliance in any can get you disqualified). He had studied in IIT Chennai and had scored a GPA of 9.45 (yes, it was advertised to the Swamis).

He went on to do an MS with full scholarship and now worked in Cisco Systems, an upcoming Silicon Valley company. He never drank or ate meat or smoked (or had fun, by extension) and had a good knowledge of Carnatic music and Bharatnatyam. He had a full half-inch-thick moustache, his own house in the San Francisco suburbs, a white Honda Accord and stock options that, apart from the last three months, had doubled every twelve minutes (Bhagat 121-122).

The criteria of the groom for a Tamil bride are given here. Tamils love their community, so the groom should be of their own community. Moreover, they emphasize on educated groom. Carnatic music and Bharatnatyam are priorities, when art is concern. Tamil Brahmins are non-vegetarian and do not drink, so that is also desirable. In a whole, Krish does not have any criteria except he comes from IIT and IIM. Manju (brother of Ananya) discusses the other criteria or custom of marriage of Tamil, as he says:

‘Nakshatram what?’ I asked. The list of Tamilian hoops one needs to jump before getting married seemed infinite.

‘Horoscope. It is a must. If they don’t match, boy and girl’s side don’t talk. But they have matched for akka and him.’

I thought about my own family. The only nakshatram we think about is the division of petrol pumps when we have to see the girl.

‘You are a science whiz kid who wants to see Saturn rings. And you accept that people whose horoscopes don’t match shouldn’t talk?’ I said.

‘That’s how it is in our culture,’ Manju said, (Bhagat 122)

Tamil also believes in horoscopes and wherein Krish has a doubt about him. When he opposes the nakshatram system, Manju protests it as it is part of their culture. Krish, at the same time, compares Punjabi and Tamil cultures mentally. As he says, money (petrol pump is a symbol) is the only nakshatram to see at the marriage.

On the other hand, people of every culture have certain mindset and conviction about their own culture and for other cultures as well. This novel echoes the same condition of mind of the people. The novel depicts psyche of both Tamil and Punjabi people of this novel. Tamil represents as emotionless according to Panjabi in this novel. As Krish says in the prologue, “Do you South Indian even know what emotions are all about?” (Bhagat X). One another mindset is represented in the novel i.e. Tamil traps the North Indian people. They know some magic. Through which, Tamil girls always try to catch the North Indian boys. Moreover, they know some black magic, and they brainwash the people:

‘Mom, control,’ I whispered to her as I turned to leave.

‘I am under control. This South Indian doesn’t know how to control their daughters. From Hema Malini to Sridevi, all of them trying to catch Punjabi men’ (Bhagat 48).

‘Madrasi girl?’

‘Ananya,’ I said.

‘Stay away from her. They brainwash, these people’ (Bhagat 56).

‘Oh, some stuff. That she is very aggressive and clever and has you totally under her control. But South Indian girls are like that, no?’ (Bhagat 65)

‘Look at him, these black people have done their black magic,’ Shipra masi said. (Bhagat 68)
Shipra masi turned to my mother. ‘Your son is gone. I am sorry, but this boy belongs to Jayalalitha now.’ (Bhagat 69)

First three examples show the conviction of Punjabi for Tamil people. All three examples reflect that Tamils have some supernatural power or black magic through which they can control other people. The last example says that Krish has been controlled by them and now belongs to them. Jayalalitha in this example represents Tamil community, as she is an icon politician of Tamil Nadu. The other mindset is shown of Punjabi that they always believe south Indians are black complexion.

These all aspects culture explained here are prove to be the causes of cultural conflict when two different cultures comes together. Now if, they remain unsolved, cultural conflict cannot be solved. This cultural conflict represents a hurdle for the marriage of Krish and Ananya in this novel. Their marriage is not possible without solving these conflicts. Therefore, this is an enormous task to accomplish by Krish and Ananya for their own marriage.

- Conflict over Food and Attire:

The purpose behind both the thing put together under the single subtopic is both of them are related to life-style. Both food and attire are parts of everybody’s daily stuff. Food and attire concern with the way of life and they are habits of daily life in every culture of the world. In some culture, clothing is not used. People of some culture do not wear clothes. They are used to live naked like Xingu people of Brazil. Nevertheless, it also represents their culture. Therefore, not wearing any attire is also a kind of cultural attire, as it reflects a distinct culture. Pramod Nayar admits in this context as:

The ‘cultural’ is constituted by and constitutes the ‘social’. That is, the social realm – society – is constituted by the ‘cultural’ artefacts used by the people, even as the cultural artefacts are themselves produced and consumed by society. Cultural artefacts in the social realm can be studied through the analysis of everyday life. (28)

He noticeably mentions that, cultural objects and meanings can be studies through the analysis of everyday life of particular culture. Cultural studies relies on the process of analysis of everyday life. He emphasizes on analysis of everyday life by illustrating various aspects of everyday life. He admits many examples from everyday life like, clothes, eating habit, etc.

W.L. Guerin also indicates the same analysis as:

Cultural critics examine “the practice of everyday life,” studying literature as an anthropologist would, as a *phenomenon* of culture, including a culture’s economy. Rather than determining which are the “best” works produced, cultural critics describe *what* is produced and how various productions relate to one another. They aim to reveal the political, economic reasons *why* a certain culture product is more valued at certain times than others. (278)

He also remarks the need of examining ‘the practice of everyday life’ for cultural critics to find out the answers of ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’, asked above. Keen examination of ‘the practice of everyday life’ of any cultural is required to understand product of that culture, its relation with each other and its value.

Both the definitions ponder over the vital role of everyday life to figure out any culture in a better way. These definitions are too relevant with the novel. Everyday life of Punjabi culture and Tamil is a key aspect to apprehend both the cultures. Food habits and attires are the essential part of everyday life.

In this novel, Tamil and Punjabi cultures have reflected through their peculiar attire and food. To probe on Punjabi food, Food is tagline for Punjabi Culture. The novel says, “It is cruel to keep Punjabis away from their food” (Bhagat 215). The novel points out that Punjabi people soothe their worry if they get tasty food. Bhagat writes, “I ordered panner pao-bhaji with extra butter and a lassi on the side. Nothing soothes an upset Punjabi like dairy products.” (44) This is when Krish makes his mother upset and then he comforts her by these kinds of food. This statement also shows favorite food of Punjabi i.e. dairy products. They never worry about anything not even for any big problem if they are given proper food. Bhagat remarks,

Ananya’s mother tugged at Ananya and pulled her away. The guide noticed them leave and looked puzzled. I paid him off and came back to my mother. She finished the last spoons of Topaz’s paneer tikka masala under the tree. (52)

It can be easily noticed here that Krish’s mother is not worried and is only concentrated on the food. However, before this, Ananya and Krish declare their love and desire of getting marry to each other. This declaration bothers to Ananya’s parents, and they all leave the place. This is a tragic incident for Ananya and Krish. This incident is surprise for both family and creates tension. However, Krish’s mother is in another mood. Finishing the food is the only worry for her not his son’s love affair or the girl of another community. So, Punjabis always think about food and calories as it is clarified in the novel.

Unlike Punjabi, Tamils are crazy about rice-based food. It mostly contains Dosa, Idaly and Sambhar. Even the eating habits of Tamil are varied from Punjabi. Krish is been invited by Ananya to her house for the first time for dinner. This incident clarifies food and food habits of Tamil culture, more precisely of Tamil Brahmin.

On the other hand, Tamil women have kanjeevaram saris on. Men mostly wear white lungi (like round dhoti). When Krish sees Ananya’s father (Tamil man) photos in her room first time he says, “He wore a half-sleeve shirt with a dhoti in most of the pictures.” (Bhagat 13). When Krish enters in Chennai first time, he notices men, “Tamil men don’t believe in pants and wear lungis even in shopping disctricts” (Bhagat 77). Wherein, Tamil women prefer mostly to wear kanjeevaram saris. Ananya’s mother appears the first time wearing kanjeevaram in the novel; “Her magenta and gold kanjeevaram sari could be noticed from any corner of the lawn” (Bhagat 45). There is one another incident in the novel when Ananya’s mother appears with kanjeevaram saris. When she is going to give her performance as a singer for city bank, she so tense and asks Krish to help her in choosing a perfect sari for the occasion. “However, Radha had come early and laid out three Kanjeevaram silk saris for me to choose from” (Bhagat 173). At this point, she gives all the options as kanjeevaram saris. Now, this shows the importance of kanjeevaram in the life of Tamil woman. There is no option for kanjeevaram for Tamil women. Krish, his mother, Ananya and her parents travels to Goa for a mutual meeting for marriage. There, Krish’s mother gifts tussar silk sari to Ananya’s mother. At this moment, Ananya’s mother emotionally exclaims, “‘Silk is very popular in the South also, we have Kanjeevaram saris,’ Ananya’s mother said and she kept the sari in her bag” (Bhagat 221). This proves that kanjeevaram sari cannot be erased from Tamil woman’s mind. It is a part of their culture. Hence, attires of Punjabi and Tamil culture are an essential part of their culture.

Thus, attires become symbols of both the cultures throughout the novel just like language. Though food and attire are part of day-to-day life, they become inevitable aspects of both the culture. It is to observe here that foods and attires vary of both the culture in the novel. They clearly distinguish both the culture, Tamil and Punjabi, from each other. These distinctions of food and attire create conflict, which turns into cultural conflict.

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