



ISSN Print: 2664-8717
ISSN Online: 2664-8725
Impact Factor (RJIF): 8.36
IJRE 2025; 7(2): 536-538
www.englishjournal.net
Received: 15-08-2025
Accepted: 17-09-2025

Vijay Shankar
Ph.D. Research Scholar
University Department of
English, BNMU, Madhepura.
& Senior Assistant Professor
Department of English
H. P. S. College, Nirmali,
Supaul, Bihar, India

Corresponding Author:
Vijay Shankar
Ph.D. Research Scholar
University Department of
English, BNMU, Madhepura.
& Senior Assistant Professor
Department of English
H. P. S. College, Nirmali,
Supaul, Bihar, India

International Journal of Research in English

Cultural Interactions and Social Practice of Endogamy in Chetan Bhagat's 2 States

Vijay Shankar

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648717.2025.v7.i2h.515>

Abstract

India is a country with diverse cultures, languages, religions, ethnicities, and social practices. It is a land with a rich tapestry of socio-cultural aspects shaped by its long historical background, multiple religions, languages, and ethnicity. This paper aims to present the traditional practice of endogamy, which is still prevalent in Indian society and tries to analyse the cultural interactions found in Indian society while arranging a marriage between two individuals who belong to different socio-cultural backgrounds and ethnic groups. In traditional Indian society, marriages are arranged not just for the union of two individuals but as a bond between two families. In Indian families, marriage is a social arrangement that chiefly depends on caste, culture and family background. In Chetan Bhagat's 2 States, endogamy is presented as a major social problem. The story revolves around Krish, a Punjabi boy, and Ananya, a Tamil Brahmin girl, who fall in love during their study period at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. Their relationship has to face many significant challenges due to their socio-cultural diversity when they want to get married. They have to struggle to convince their parents of their proposed marriage plan. Their families are rooted in their cultural traditions and expect their children to get married within their caste, class and community (endogamy). This expectation is deeply rooted in preserving their cultural identity, traditions, and social status.

Keywords: Arranged marriage, Caste, Cultural interactions, Endogamy, Society

Introduction

India is a country having diverse cultures, languages, religions, ethnicities, and social practices. It is a land with a rich tapestry of socio-cultural aspects shaped by its long historical background, multiple religions, languages, and ethnicity. In Indian families, marriage is a social arrangement that chiefly depends on caste, culture and family background. Undercurrents of Endogamy and Cultural interactions are deeply found in Indian society. In Indian English fiction, many fiction writers have presented the cultural interactions of two different communities in perspectives of marriage-related issues. Indian literature often presents the interactions between two ideologies, whether to maintain traditional norms of marriage (through endogamy) or break up traditional norms of marriage through exogamy (cross-cultural marriage of two different communities). Indian English literature, ranging from the early 20th century to the contemporary, often tries to explore the intersection of caste, community, and marital customs, which have been prevalent in Indian society. Endogamy refers to the practice of marrying within one's own religious, social, ethnic, or caste group, while excluding others from different backgrounds as unfit for marriage. It is a traditional matchmaking choice that has persisted over generations within specific cultural or ethnic groups. Various forms of endogamy exist, including caste, class, sub-caste, race, and tribal endogamy. In Indian society, the predominant forms are caste and class endogamy, although other types may also be present. Chetan Bhagat, a renowned Indian author, addresses social and cultural issues in his novels, largely reflecting the realities of Indian society, including class, caste, and regional disparities. His works include themes of cultural interaction and endogamy. In "2 States: The Story of My Marriage," the narrative centers on the love between Krish and Ananya from different cultural backgrounds, focusing on North-South Indian differences and familial resistance to their relationship based on cultural divides. "Half Girlfriend" explores the romance between Madhav and Riya, highlighting urban-rural divides and social class distinctions, with implications of endogamy relating to class.

"One Indian Girl" follows Radhika, a modern woman facing cultural expectations around marriage, emphasizing pressures to marry within her caste despite her independence. Lastly, "Revolution 2020" features a love triangle while illustrating interactions between characters of diverse economic and social backgrounds, touching on societal preferences for endogamous marriages. Chetan Bhagat's novels examine the conflict between traditional values, such as endogamy, and modern individual desires in urban India. His characters, typically from a privileged middle class, grapple with societal expectations to marry within their caste or community while seeking personal freedom in love and marriage. Bhagat highlights the growing tension between personal choice and social norms, illustrating a gradual change in attitudes towards inter-caste and inter-community marriages, despite the enduring influence of endogamy in many families.

Literature Review

Literature is the mirror of the culture and society of a country. Culture and Endogamy are closely linked to society, emphasizing caste purity and social hierarchies of caste structure. Louis Dumont in his book, *Homo Hierarchicus*, discusses the importance of caste purity and how endogamy reinforces social hierarchies. In Chetan Bhagat's novel, *2 States*, the theme of family honour in marriage is prevalent in Indian society, as explored by scholars like Veena Das, who points out the societal pressure to uphold family reputation through an endogamous marriage. Bhagat humorously conveys the conflicts faced by Krish and Ananya due to the traditional mindsets of their parents. Research reveals that intercaste and intercultural marriages are increasingly found in urban India but still encounter significant familial resistance or disapproval. Chetan Bhagat is recognized for addressing social themes like marriage and cultural identity in his popular writings, contributing to contemporary discussions on these issues. Chetan Bhagat's novels, while often criticized for their simple language and predictable plots, are acknowledged for addressing significant societal issues. His novel, *2 States*, in particular, presents a clash between traditional family expectations and individual freedom in marriage. Critics highlight that Bhagat captures the struggles of the contemporary Indian middle class amid globalization and modernity, making his work relevant to discussions about modern Indian identity. Additionally, critics claim that Bhagat oversimplifies complex social issues like endogamy and cultural interactions by providing overly optimistic solutions that may not often happen in the harsh realities faced by intercultural couples in India.

2 States: The Story of My Marriage by Chetan Bhagat is a contemporary novel centered on the romance between Krish Malhotra, a Punjabi student, and Ananya Swaminathan, a Tamil Brahmin. The story delves into their differing cultural backgrounds and the societal expectations tied to marriage in India. Krish, who studies at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Ahmedabad, is ambitious and carefree, while Ananya is serious, disciplined, and holds strong traditional values. Their friendship soon blossoms into love, but cultural clashes arise as they realize their families may not accept their relationship. Krish struggles with Ananya's traditional customs, and she finds it challenging to fit into his boisterous Punjabi lifestyle. When Krish proposes, they must convince their families of their

intercultural relationship. Their journeys to meet each other's families highlight misunderstandings and resistance due to cultural differences. Despite the challenges, Krish and Ananya are determined to bridge the gap between their families. Their experiences teach them more about each other's customs and values, strengthening their bond through comedic and poignant situations that showcase the complexities of love and acceptance in a diverse society. The text discusses the main themes and resolution of the novel "*2 States*" by Chetan Bhagat, which centres on love, family, and societal expectations.

"These stupid biases and discrimination are the reason our country is so screwed up. It's Tamil first, Indian later. Punjabi first, Indian later. It has to end. National anthem, national currency, national teams – still, we won't marry our children outside our state. How can this intolerance be good for our country?"

(from *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*)

After months of negotiation and tension, Ananya and Krish's families agree to their marriage, uniting two distinct cultures. The wedding is a vibrant blend of Punjabi and Tamil traditions, marking a positive resolution as the couple moves forward happily. In the epilogue, Krish shares his reflections on life after marriage, mentioning their child and humorously noting how their son embodies the unity of North and South India. The story follows Krish and Ananya as they navigate their intercultural relationship and seek their families' approval. Ultimately, after humorous and emotional challenges, both characters gain their parents' support for their marriage, illustrating that love can overcome cultural barriers with understanding and compromise. The novel explores cultural differences, the importance of family in relationships, and the necessity of mutual love and effort. Overall, it provides a relatable look at the challenges faced by young couples in modern India while addressing societal pressures regarding love and marriage.

Cultural Interactions and Endogamy

Cultural interactions and endogamy are important sociological concepts, notably in multicultural countries like India. Cultural interaction stands for the Exchange of ideas, values, and behaviours among different cultural groups. In modern globalized societies, these interactions have become more frequent and complex due to the urbanization of the population, technological progress, and increased mobility of people. Cross-cultural relationships also involve cultural interactions where friendships of individuals from different cultures often result in a fusion of customs and values. Educational institutions and Workplaces also serve as hubs for cultural interactions, where individuals from various cultures learn to coexist and cooperate.

Cultural interactions in the novel, *2 States*

2 States: The Story of My Marriage is a novel by Chetan Bhagat, published in 2009. The book explores the cultural differences and challenges faced by a Punjabi boy and a Tamil girl in their inter-cultural marriage. In the novel, Chetan Bhagat examines cultural interaction and the practice of endogamy through a cross-cultural love story. The novel illustrates the contrast between modern individual desires and traditional norms of marrying within one's

cultural and social group. It focuses on the differences between North and South India, represented by the story of two Punjabi and Tamil families showcasing varied cultural, lingual, and social norms. The Punjabi family, represented by Krish Malhotra, presented as stereotypes of being loud and materialistic, with a focus on social status and an expectation for Krish to marry within his community. In contrast, Ananya Swaminathan's Tamil family is presented as intellectual, reserved, and proud of their heritage and culture, emphasizing education and cultural values. Tensions between them arise due to cultural misunderstandings and prejudices, such as Krish's mother's mindset against Tamils and Ananya's parents' disliking of Punjabis. The love story of Krish and Ananya presents the difficulties and negotiations involved in mingling two different cultures with a broad theme of endogamy, emphasizing its prevalence in Indian society despite modern influences. The preference for marrying within specific social groups or communities remains a strong customary expectation in Indian society. The novel discusses how families often prioritize cultural, caste, and religious identity in marriage, adhering to social practice of endogamy to preserve inherited traditions. It points out the challenges of arranged marriages in India through the relationship of Krish and Ananya, a Punjabi boy and Tamil girl, showcasing the emerging trend of cross-cultural love, particularly in urban areas. Despite their strong feelings for each other, their families initially resist the relationship due to social pressures and fears of deviating from established cultural norms of arranged marriage. Krish's mother prefers a Punjabi bride for status reasons, while Ananya's parents are susceptible about Krish's ability to fit into their Tamil Brahmin lifestyle. The novel underscores the belief that in Indian society, marriages within the same community are perceived as more suitable and stable by Parents. Chetan Bhagat's *Two States* offers more than just a love story—it serves as a powerful commentary on India's diverse and often divided cultural landscape. Through the characters of Krish and Ananya and their journey to gain acceptance from their families, the novel exposes the deep-rooted cultural prejudices, stereotypes, and rigid social expectations that persist in modern Indian society. Bhagat illustrates how intercultural interactions, especially in the context of marriage, are shaped by language, cuisine, rituals, values, and ego-bound regional pride. However, the novel does not dwell solely on conflict. It also presents a constructive and optimistic pathway forward—one in which the younger generation refuses to be limited by outdated norms. Krish and Ananya become symbols of a changing India, where love, reason, and mutual respect can bridge regional and cultural divides. Their willingness to understand and embrace each other's backgrounds reflects the potential for greater national integration and social harmony. The humor and satire employed in the narrative gently encourage readers to reflect on their own biases without feeling alienated. *Two States* promotes a vision of unity through diversity, advocating that personal happiness and love should not be compromised due to cultural differences. It suggests that true progress in Indian society lies not in erasing cultural identities, but in learning to coexist with empathy, open-mindedness, and mutual acceptance. The novel, in its light-hearted yet insightful way, champions the idea that India's strength lies in its pluralism—and that embracing this pluralism can pave the way for a more cohesive and compassionate society.

Conclusion

The novel *2 States* explores the cultural interactions and endogamy in India, particularly in the context of modern love marriages contrasted with traditional norms of marriage. The story reflects the North-South cultural divide through the different backgrounds of Krish's Punjabi family and Ananya's Tamil Brahmin family. Krish and Ananya's relationship signifies the potential for diverse cultural groups in India to unite despite their differences, illustrating a broader cultural negotiation amongst educated urban youth who challenge conventional barriers in romantic pursuits. The novel celebrates India's cultural diversity, showcasing how personal relationships can transcend caste, community, and geography. The social practice of Endogamy is a key theme, as both families prioritize marrying within their communities, reinforcing the ongoing significance of this practice in Indian society. Ananya's family expects her to marry within her high-caste circle, while Krish's family emphasizes maintaining their Punjabi customs. The couple faces familial resistance but ultimately advocates for love marriages, challenging entrenched expectations and highlighting the tensions between individual choice and societal norms. In *2 States*, Chetan Bhagat explores the love story of Krish and Ananya to address themes of cultural interaction and endogamy in Indian society. The novel recognizes the persistent barriers of culture, caste, and region in marriages, but also presents hope for overcoming these through love and understanding. Ultimately, it conveys that while strong cultural divisions exist, intercultural marriages are increasingly common in a modernizing India, symbolizing potential social change.

Acknowledgement

I express my deep sense of gratitude to my respected Research Supervisor, Dr. Rajiv Kumar Mallik, Professor, Univ. Dept. of English, BNMU, Madhepura, whose invaluable guidance, encouragement, and constructive criticism shaped this research into its present form. I am equally thankful to my colleagues and fellow researchers, whose critical discussions gave me insightful deeper understanding of the topic. Their criticism of topic not only refined my understanding of the subject but also inspired me to approach the topic with clarity and critical insight. I am indebted to the library staff and digital resources that granted me access to essential texts and scholarly materials which enriched this study.

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