



# LITERARY QUEST

An International, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Monthly, Online Journal of English Language and Literature

## **An Anthro-Archetypal Study of Chetan Bhagat's *2 States***

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### **Abstract**

In joint family system the male members live together even after marriage, and it includes not only parents and their children but even distant relations. Since this system was present from the ancient times on, it is seen in the deep psyche of the people, making it an archetype. As far as an Indian father, who lives by the principles of the joint family system, is concerned he enters his son's life only in the latter's later years of life. This sometimes results in a conflict between the father and the son, for by that time the latter would have created his own identity, and attachment to some people who care him, which makes the father a distant figure to the son. In Chetan Bhagat's *2 States*, such a conflict can be seen between Krish and his father. During his childhood his father completely neglected him as a result of which he got

attached to his mother, which is quite normal with reference to the attachment theory in which the child gets emotionally attached to a person who loves him.

### **Keywords**

Collective Unconscious; Archetypes; Joint Family System; Attachment Theory; Chetan Bhagat; *2 States*.

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In the words of I. P. Desai, “We call that household a joint family, which has greater generation depth than individual family and members of which are related to one other by property, income and mutual rights and obligations.” With the end of the pastoral age people started a settled life by accepting agriculture as a major stake. Due to the difficulties in communication and travel all these people started living together jointly. Apart from this, kinship ideas and similar religious beliefs glued them together. This is considered to be the beginning of the joint family system. As all of them lived together they had common experiences which are still present in their deep psyche, thus making the joint family an archetype.

With his study on the unconscious, Carl. G. Jung suggested that the unconscious can be divided into two layers; the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. According to him the deepest level of the human mind is the collective unconscious which contains the experiences common to the human race; that is it contains the archetypes. Archetypes are images with universal meanings, and not memories. They are seen in particular cultures and propagate the cultural meanings. Thus the archetypes are present in the psyche of all human beings, even in those of the present generation.

While studying the Indian culture, it gets clear that the traditional Indian family was a joint family system where, “brothers remain together even after marriage and bring their wives into the parental household. It is governed by the ideals of fraternal loyalty and filial obedience which stipulate common

residence and common economic, social, and ritual activities” (Kakar). With the coming of industrialization, better forms of communication and transport, and the impact of the West, the joint family is in the process of degeneration. But even then, it is not completely dead, because even in the nuclear families, the joint family is a psychic reality, which is “a reality, internalized and based on fantasy, wish, fear, memories and anticipation” (Psychology Dictionary).

The head of the joint family will be the eldest male member who acts in such a way that, the other members follow those rules and regulations put up by him for the jointness. This man considers the other members in the family as children, even when they become adults, which is a hindrance to the development of personality. However, the joint family is considered to be the best system for people, especially children in the Indian context.

Patriarchy in its literal sense mean, “the rule of the father”. This system prescribes the roles of men and women in the society. Men are compelled to go out to work, as they are ascribed the role of ‘the Provider’, and their only function was to bring the necessary things to the family. Thus the father’s competence came to be determined by checking how successful he has become economically. The father’s attitude also changed; he thought of himself as a working man and his family should understand that they had a secondary position in his life. Thus the boys started a life without a father, which resulted in a search for the father and finally to a father fixation.

Attachment theory studies the reactions of human beings when they get hurt or separated from loved ones. One of the major opinions suggested by the attachment theory is that for an infant’s social and emotional development, it should have a good relationship with at least one caregiver. This theory is now used in the fields of infant mental health, treatment of children and so on. A child will sometimes be attached with more than one person, which he will arrange in a hierarchical order with the primary attachment figure at the top. 2

*States: The Story of My Marriage* by Chetan Bhagat is such a work presenting before the readers a conflict between a father and son.

When the story begins Krish is a student at IIT, and he gets into a relationship with Ananya. His dad is an ex- military officer and Krish says that for the last three years they have not spoken to each other, and for the last ten years he had been telling his mother that “her son will reach nowhere in life” (Bhagat 48). The conflict had such a great depth that when Krish phones home and when his mother asks him to say ‘hello’ to his father first he replies that he is not interested. Krish’s hatred towards his father gets completely revealed when he mentally reacts, “I hope you leave this world soon” (Bhagat 59).

Both Krish and his father are in their adulthood. During the early adulthood the development is mainly focused on maintaining relationships, which is a behavior from the part of the protagonist, Krish. He tells Ananya that he is close to his mother; it was in order to maintain his relation with his mother and Ananya that when he fills the Citibank form he writes Delhi and Chennai as the places which he prefers. As an Indian the fragments of the joint family system are seen in Krish’s deep psyche and so, to a certain extend he gives importance to the hierarchical order. That was why, three years back, he asks his father, who is the head of his nuclear family to support him in marrying the daughter of an IIT professor. But this demand resulted in increasing the depth of the conflict between the son and the father, the latter saying in the middle of the conversation “.... All reputation I have built, you’ll destroy it” (Bhagat 165). The father comes to know that Krish had already told this to his mother, which enrages him, who calls his wife many abusive names. This reaction erupts as a result of the working of his collective unconscious, storing the fragments of the joint family principles as per which, it is the senior-most member who takes important decisions in the family, which is to be followed by the other members without questioning. But his son is not

allowing him to do so, for he is more attached to his mother, and in his conscious mind he is living in a nuclear family.

The mother is able to understand Krish and tells his dad that, “he is growing up” (Bhagat 166). According to the father, Krish is growing up with all the wrong values for which the mother is responsible. Later, Krish hears the sound of slapping, which burns him with rage as a result of which he beats his father. The working of the joint family archetype is present here also because, in the joint family system, a child begins to learn that “he must look after the welfare of those subordinate to him in the family hierarchy so that they do not suffer... at the hands of outsiders” (Kakar). For Krish, his father is an outsider, for he was and is not with his son when the latter wants his support. The mother, even though she is older than Krish is seen as his sub-ordinate due to the patriarchal principles in Krish’s mind, and the thought that in order to maintain his relationship with his mother he should protect her. Also it is during the middle adulthood that a boy becomes a man, and wishes to handle the same powers that his father has. When it does not become practical he becomes aggressive and showers all his rages upon the father who is an obstacle to his development. Thus the greed for power is one of the reasons why Krish fights with his father. He wants to give his mother what her husband had denied her; protection.

In the life of a son more than a mother, it is the father who should have a major influence on him. “What goes on between the father and son... is surely the most important determinant of whether the boy will become a man capable of giving life to others or whether he will go through life ashamed and pulling back from exposure to intimacy with men, women, and children” (Psychology Today). It is the father who should impart with his son the virtues like justice, fairness and discipline, through his actions. But this should begin from the boy’s childhood with the proper degree of parental warmth and control. Parental warmth means the degree to which the parent accepts the child’s

behavior, and parental control means the degree to which the parent controls the child's behavior. This should go in a balance. In the case of Krish, in his childhood, his father's parenting style was that of rejecting parenting in that he was completely neglecting Krish as a child, and was unsupportive. That is, during Krish's boyhood his father had no role to play, as a result of which he was in a frustrated search for his father. When his search for a loving father continued, he saw the sorts of father figures in his boss Bala and Ananya's father, Swaminathan. While father fixation in Swaminathan was a deliberate activity, that in Bala came automatically.

"Bala... smiled at me like the father I never had" (Bhagat 86), says Krish. Once his boss told him "I see myself in you. You are like me" (Bhagat 86). These events were enough for Krish to fall head over heels for Bala. It was the port of father whom he wanted; one who considers him as a companion. His biological father was very much unwilling to do that. Bala was, in many ways, a great personality for Krish. When Krish was about to leave his office early one day, Bala advised him not to leave before the boss. This, Krish accepted, as Bala, unlike his father, had the right to guide him. Bala had many fishy intentions behind the nice treatments given to Krish.

Under the order of Bala, the bank sold Internet stocks to housewives, which finally resulted in many people withdrawing their money from Citibank. The Chennai branch started its way to a great loss as a result of which the officers from the headquarters decided to visit the bank. "Bala shivered a little at the news" (Bhagat 111). At this juncture, Bala wanted Krish's support. He asked his subordinate to take the blame of the sale of internet stocks, or otherwise Bala will lose his job, which is everything to him. Krish first refused. "The boss- subordinate relationship had change. Bala begged me for help" (Bhagat 114). Krish said 'yes', not directly, but through his body language. The secret behind Krish saying 'yes' may be that, in Bala he saw his father. When Bala begged him Krish got a somewhat strange pleasure, by imagining his

biological father in the place of Bala. This is a sort of ‘displacement’ as suggested by Sigmund Freud. In displacement “one person or event is represented by another, which is in some way linked or associated with it...” (Barry 94). This usually takes place in dreams, but in the case of Krish displacement took place in reality.

The second figure in whom Krish saw his father was Swaminathan. It was rather a forceful feeling in that Krish could marry Ananya only if he is able to create a good impression about himself in Ananya’s parents’ minds. Swaminathan was at first aloof to Krish; he did not encourage Krish coming to see Ananya. Whenever the boy made an attempt to speak to him he continued reading the newspaper. One day Swaminathan even folded his hands in request to keep Krish away from his daughter. But later Krish got a chance to get close to Swaminathan’s mind, when he helped him prepare slides for presentation. After the preparation Swaminathan told Krish that it will be presented by another person for, he is not comfortable with the machines and has only little confidence. At this point Krish tells him not to do that, because it is unfair for another person to take the credit of a work done by someone else. Even though Krish had done the same- preparing slides himself and Bala taking the credit- he boosted Swaminathan’s confidence and the latter was able to make an excellent presentation in Delhi.

During the nights when the slides were being prepared, there was no one in the house; only Krish, Swaminathan, and Ananya’s brother. It was then that Krish became too much intimate with Swaminathan who even had a drink with Krish and allowed him to play CDs in the music system. One night Krish was allowed to sleep in the house, for it was nearly dawn when the preparation was completed. Swaminathan started considering Krish as his good companion, which a father wants his son to be. Krish longed for such an attitude from his biological father, but did not receive it as a result of which Swaminathan

became a father figure for him, not in the sense of Ananya's father, but his own.

The problem faced by Krish was that, when he was on his way to his adulthood his father started asserting power over him in the form of authoritarian parenting where, there is less parental warmth and high parental control. Instead of being loving and affectionate, Krish's father always disapproves his activities. But Krish needs encouragement and support from his father, and the latter is unable to realize it.

In Bhagat's work Krish applies for a job at Citibank for establishing his superiority over his father. For him, he is doing it for power, and while he calculates his annual income, it reaches to an amount of four lakh rupees which, according to him his father was not able to gain even though he served in the army for thirty long years. To establish his power as a man in the family, he sends his first salary cheque to his mother, which creates another problem for the father who thinks that his superiority is under risk. That was why he says, "You have no qualities I can be proud of. These degrees mean nothing. Just because you send your mother money, you think you can boss around..." (Bhagat 115). In his unconscious mind Krish sent the money to his mother in order to erase all the principles of the joint family system from his father's mind.

The content of the letter that Krish receives from his father is another evidence that shows how his father has formed the worst picture of his son. He has come to know about Krish's relationship with Ananya, and the joint family idea dormant in his mind makes him say that, "...We should choose the girl for you, not you. For you are on the path to become a man of low character" (Bhagat 156). He blames his wife and her siblings for this, as it were these people who had such an influence on Krish in his childhood, for his father was not with him then. This would have made him think that his father's life is his work and that there is no relation between himself and the family. As a result



of this he got attached to those who cared for him which may be his mother and aunts. The father's hatred towards his wife's relatives is revealed when he gives back the bag of sweets that Shipra masi had bought for Krish's family. He goes to the extent of saying, "I would appreciate it if you don't interfere in our family matters" (Bhagat 69).

Krish presents his father as powerless and incapable when he thinks of his father starting various business ventures and becoming a failure in each. To him, it is the father's "short temper and inability to come out of his army work" (Bhagat 190) that makes him a failure in the ventures. In the Indian context the mother-son relationship has great bonds in the joint family. When a father tries to create a warm relationship with his son, he often encourages, unconsciously the son's separation from his mother. In *2 States* there comes a situation where Krish becomes cold and indifferent to his mother as well. The first thing that father asks Krish when he notices the strange silence between the mother and son is, "Have you decided to stop talking to your mother, too?... Why are you upset with your mother?" (Bhagat 235) when he asks these he is unconsciously happy. He is curious to know what is going on in between Krish and his mother so that he can make use of that opportunity to get close to Krish. His mature mind has started considering his family as his business field where he should not become a failure.

By the end of the novel, Krish experiences a change in his father's attitude. He becomes more considerate to his son. When his father rings the doorbell it is Krish, who had never welcomed his father, who opens the door. When his father asks him about his job he says that it is good and that the authorities say that he has a good future. Krish himself gets confused as to why he said the latter part of the sentence. "Somehow, I felt the need to tell my father I was doing well" (Bhagat 235). The following day the father tells him about his pension papers stuck in the government offices. This was an unusual behavior from his part. The father somehow wanted to patch up the conflict

between himself and his son, and as a first step towards it, he asks Krish if he could type some letters for him, in an indirect manner, without allowing himself to stoop down in front of his son, at the same time not infuriating him. He never forgets to thank Krish when he promises to type the letters and get them printed. But Krish is again suspicious of his father; “when my father had to suffer, he forgot his own vocation- of making others suffer” (Bhagat 241). It is during his middle adulthood that the father realizes the importance of authoritative parenting where there is enough parental warmth and control. He shows another feature of middle adulthood as well. He wants to do something good for others around him, which is his son and tells him “it is good that we talk sometimes” (Bhagat 242).

The night when Ananya calls Krish and tells him about his father’s arrival at her house in Chennai and fixing their marriage, Krish goes to his parents’ room and slide “right into the middle and put an arm around them both” (Bhagat 245). Soon he fell asleep and when he woke up in the next morning he was a changed man, trying to understand his father. Till the last night Krish was a boy and the proper care from his father made him a man. His father also became an adult in the right sense, understanding and caring his son. Here, the roles are reversed. Earlier it was Krish who wanted the support from his father but now, the father wanted his son’s support. He realizes that to achieve it he should give him a helping hand to him at least once. That was why he goes to Chennai, for he understands that his son needed help. When Krish asks him how he knew that he wanted help, the father says, “because I am your father. A bad father but I am still your father... And even though you feel I have let you down in the past, I felt I should do my bit this time” (Bhagat 245). However, here also the fragments of the joint family system are seen. It is the father, the senior- most male member of the family, who takes the decision as to whom Krish should marry. So, on the one hand the father maintained the hierarchical order of the joint family

and on the other helped his son. Finally he tells Krish “I’m not perfect. But don’t deprive me of my son in my final years” (Bhagat 245).

Even though it was the father who fixes Krish’s marriage, he was not willing to attend the ceremony. But to the surprise of all the other relatives the father, who did not attend his son’s convocation ceremony due to the lack of a personal invitation, attended the son’s marriage without any kind of invitation from the latter’s part. For the first time in twenty years, Krish slept with his father that night. This shows a change in the mind of the father. The father who acted according to the logic of the joint family system realizes that it has changed its path into the nuclear family whose success is based on the co-operation of its few members. The father asks Krish not to deprive him of his son because he wants to maintain the mental bonds created by principles of the joint family system. Thus at the end the father who was a distant figure to Krish becomes one to whom he is attached. The search for the father attained results by getting a father who may always be his mature companion, to whom he can say anything, and ask doubts in a dire situation just as members in a joint family asking the head of the family. Thus the North Indian proverb was made practical at the end by the father: “Treat a son like a king for the first five years; like a slave for the next ten and like a friend thereafter” (Kakar). Even though the father was not able to do the first two things, he became successful in making practical the third aspect; of considering his son like a friend.

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**MLA (7th Edition) Citation:**

Koshy, Reeba Sara, and Roshin George. “An Anthropo-Archetypal Study of Chetan Bhagat’s *2 States*.” *Literary Quest* 1.12 (2015): 16-27. Web. DoA.

**DoA – Date of Access**

Eg. 23 Aug. 2015. ; 05 April 2017.