

Gender Negotiations and Urban Relationships in *2 States* and *Half Girlfriend*

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Abstract

This paper investigates gender negotiations and urban relational dynamics in *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* and *Half Girlfriend* by Chetan Bhagat, situating the novels within the socio-cultural context of liberalized, middle-class India. Both narratives foreground romantic relationships shaped by regional identity, class mobility, linguistic hierarchy, and patriarchal expectations. While *2 States* dramatizes inter-regional marriage as a negotiation between tradition and modern aspiration, *Half Girlfriend* explores emotional intimacy mediated by English proficiency, social capital, and masculine insecurity. The study argues that Bhagat's fiction reflects the tensions of urban modernity, where women appear increasingly autonomous yet remain embedded within familial and cultural constraints. Female protagonists such as Ananya and Riya embody aspirational agency, but their choices are circumscribed by social legitimacy and marriageability. Meanwhile, male protagonists grapple with fragile masculinity and the pressures of neoliberal success. Through accessible popular fiction, Bhagat captures the evolving grammar of gender relations in metropolitan India, revealing how romance becomes a site for negotiating identity, mobility, and belonging. Ultimately, the paper contends that these novels dramatize the contradictions of post-liberalization India, where urban relationships oscillate between egalitarian ideals and deeply rooted patriarchal structures.

Keywords

Gender Negotiation; Urban Modernity; Neoliberal Aspirations; Middle-Class Identity; Popular Fiction; Masculinity Crisis