
CULTURAL SUBSERVIENCE IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE NAMESAKE*

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Abstract

An individual's identity depends upon his/her cultural practices. An individual's cultural and traditional practices will expose one's own identity. When an immigrant moves from one place to another place, he will be caught between the two cultures and will be in a dilemma; whether to follow their own culture or to accept the new culture. In order to survive among the others in the host land, one makes himself to adapt to the culture of the host land by sacrificing his own cultural and traditional practices of his homeland. Even though he adapts the culture of the host land, at certain occasions he tries to implement his own cultural practices of his homeland in order to expose his own identity and the homeland to which he belonged to. It is the nature of man that he will not lose his identity in any situation and will not give up his own culture of his homeland. The present article examines how the first and second generation caught between the two conflicting cultures of the homeland and the host land. As the first generation was imbibed with their native culture of the homeland, they feel traumatic to adopt the new culture of the host land. The second generation born in the host land was being inculcated and groomed up with the native culture of the first generation. As the second generation born in the host land, America, they are surrounded by the land of multi-culture. As they are born in a multi-cultural society, they are partly imbibed with the American culture and partly inculcated with the native culture of the homeland of the first generation. Thus the second generation was caught between the two cultures.

Keywords: *cultural practices, dilemma, homeland, multi-culture, .etc*

An individual's identity depends upon his/her cultural practices. An individual's cultural and traditional practices will expose one's own identity. When an immigrant moves from one place to another place, he will be caught between the two cultures and will be in a dilemma; whether to follow their own culture or to accept the new culture. It is well exposed by Jhumpa

Lahiri in her prominent novel, *The Namesake* in which an immigrated Bengali family had been entangled within the web of multi-culture in America. It portrays the Bengali culture and how it has been submissive in the multi-cultural land, America.

The present article is an analysis of how a culture has been made subservient to certain other cultures. It has been accentuated in accordance with Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel, *The Namesake*. It shows how the immigrant Bengali family struggles in the land of America in order to prove their own identity by practicing their own culture and reflects how they suffer in order to make themselves to adapt to the new American culture. It demonstrates how the first and second generation emigrants in America suffered in order to follow the culture of their motherland and also the culture of their host land. It has been well-knitted in this novel by the diasporic writer, Jhumpa Lahiri who had portrayed her own Bengali culture.

Culture and Identity are interlocked together in which one reflects the other. An individual's identity will be revealed through his cultural practices. An individual's identity will be exposed on the basis of an individual's custom, tradition and culture to which he gives importance and practices whole-heartedly as a token of respecting the homeland where his birth took place. In order to enhance one's identity, one would not step out of his culture and be firm in following his own culture and tradition in every occasion.

Even though the situation makes one migrate from one's native homeland to a host land, he keeps on following his own culture of his native homeland. At a state of juncture, he will be caught between the two cultures that are the cultures of the homeland and the host land. He will be in trauma to adapt to the new culture of the host land which he presently living in and to follow his own culture of the homeland which he belonged to the right from his birth. He will be in a state of dilemma, either to follow the culture of the homeland or to adapt to the culture of the host land.

In order to survive among the others in the host land, one makes himself to adapt to the culture of the host land by sacrificing his own cultural and traditional practices of his homeland. Even though he adapts the culture of the host land, at certain occasions he tries to implement his own cultural practices of his homeland in order to expose his own identity and the homeland to which he belonged to. It is the nature of man that he will not lose his identity in any situation and will not give up his own culture of his homeland.

Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist on diaspora, ethnicity, and identity, writes in his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*:

. . . diaspora experience as I intended here is defined not by essence or purity, but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through not despite, difference; by hybridity. (235)

As a first generation immigrant, one faces the trauma of following his own culture of the native homeland and making himself to adapt to the new cultural practices of the host land. But for a second generation individual, it is difficult to follow the culture of his parents' native land which had been inculcated by the parents to the children who were born in the host land. In order to maintain their own native identity, he emigrated first-generation parents inculcate their own native culture and traditional practices of their homeland to their children. Hence, the second generation children find it difficult to follow their parents' native culture and tradition of their parents' homeland in the host land which is the birthplace and the homeland of the second generation children.

The state of the first generation and second generation people living in the host land are well exposed by the prominent writer, Jhumpa Lahiri in her first novel, *The Namesake*. As Jhumpa Lahiri is a diasporic writer, she well portrayed the state of mind of emigrants who had left their homeland and migrated to the host land where they find difficult to adapt to the new culture and tradition. In the novel, *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri depicts the mental trauma faced by the first generation emigrants; the Bengali family, Gangulis - Ashoke and Ashima – husband and wife, who are emigrated from Calcutta to America. As they left their homeland, India and stepped in to live in the host land, America, their own native culture had been made submissive in the host land. They were alienated in the host land as they caught between the two cultures; the cultures of the native homeland and the host land – the Bengali culture and the American multi-culture.

The Bengali culture was well pictured through the depiction of the Gangulis' family that is the husband and wife, Ashoke and Ashima who struggles to maintain their own identity as Bengalis by following their own native culture in food, costume, language, rituals, ceremonies, and certain other customs and traditional practices. Even though they migrated to the host land, America – the land of multi-culture, they follow their own native culture in order to expose their own identity as Bengalis.

Bengali culture is well pictured in the novel through the naming ceremony, marriage celebration, funeral customs, and ritual practices. Even though the Gangulis immigrated to the host land, America, they struggled to follow their own native Bengali culture. But it became subservient. Their efforts to sustain their ethnic identity become futile as they couldn't follow their native culture in naming the newborn baby. According to their Bengali culture, the newborn baby should be named with two names – one pet name and one good name.

It should not be selected by the parents of the newborn baby. It should be given by the father's grandmother. As the newborn baby's great grandmother is in India, the letter which consists of the names selected for the newborn baby by its great grandmother hadn't received by the parents who were in America. And so, the parents called the newborn baby as Gogol, named after the Russian author, Nikolai Gogol, which became a namesake. Later it makes him feel as others without identity both in the homeland and the host land.

The present article examines how the first and second generation caught between the two conflicting cultures of the homeland and the host land. As the first generation was imbibed with their native culture of the homeland, they feel traumatic to adopt the new culture of the host land. The second generation born in the host land was being inculcated and groomed up with the native culture of the first generation. As the second generation born in the host land, America, they are surrounded by the land of multi-culture. As they are born in a multi-cultural society, they are partly imbibed with the American culture and partly inculcated with the native culture of the homeland of the first generation. Thus the second generation was caught between the two cultures.

Even though the children who belong to the second generation are inculcated with the native culture of their parents of the first generation by themselves following their own rituals, ceremonies, food, and costumes without giving up their own native customs and traditions of their homeland, the second generation children are imparted partially with the multi-culture of the host land, America where they born. Since they are partially imparted with the culture of the land in which they born, the culture which was inculcated by their parents had become subservient.

In the novel, *The Namesake*, even though Ashoke and Ashima struggles to inculcate their own native culture of their homeland by practicing the rituals and ceremonies as per their custom, tradition, and culture and also preserving their own culture by following the food, costume, and language as same as the Bengali culture, Gogol was imparted with the American culture of the society in which he born and groomed up. Though he was insisted by his parents to follow the Bengali culture in taking food, costume, and language, he fascinates over the American culture of taking food, wearing a dress and speaking language. Thus, it results in cultural subservience.

Works Cited

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