

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IDENTITY CRISES AND CULTURAL ROOTS IN SIDHWA'S AMERICAN BRAT AND DESAI'S INHERITANCE OF LOSS

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Abstract

The study investigates the dilemma of identity faced by Sai and Jemubhai in *The Inheritance of Loss* and Feroza in *An American Brat*. As immigrant novels continue to emerge from the South Asian diaspora across the globe, theories of gender and identity that mostly treat such novels as moral and psychological growth of the main character, that are often used to bring to light the precarious situation of literary characters caught between two different situations. Taking Bhabha's concept of hybridity as an analytical tool, however, this research will use mimicry, ambivalence, and homeliness, concepts under hybridity, to facilitate the understanding of Feroza's experiences in American and Sai in her own country or Jemubhai in UK. Besides, this work will also investigate whether they are responsible for their decision to choose to stay either in their own country or in the migrated land. The analysis shows that when the individuals are forced to leave their native lands to chase good fortune or due to some crises and to settle in a new land, the new cultural, economic and social values are not ready to accept them whole heartedly. Sometimes they are harassed on the bases of religion, sometimes on the basis of culture and sometimes on the basis of creed and colour. It brings out the psychological depression in the characters.

Keywords: hybridity; mimicry; ambivalence, homelessness.

Introduction

This paper will explore the Diasporas identities in both novels on the base of culture. As we know, Culture is a transmitted pattern of behavior. Culture has a permanent character through which the passage of time, changes take place. It's like a cannon, and in a real sense unfinished. Every nation or country has its own way of living & code of ethics to follow. So, to copy those codes or rituals in our life is called culture. Much of the research surrounding Bapsi Sidhwa's and Kiran Desai's work is based either on the 'trauma'. In postcolonial novels, the authors were used to discuss the theme of love, desire and belongings

to explore the political and cultural issues especially in the work of African and Indian sub-continent. But the dispute between transcultural, caste and race faced by immigrants in America or UK is under discussion in both the novels *An American Brat* and in *The Inheritance Loss*.

These two novels raise the terms, hybridity and diaspora with the identity crisis and trigger it time and again through the characters and their actions. The authors have given the true picture of damaged identity and racial prejudice. We see Feroza and Jemubhai as diaspora people who are dispersed from their homeland and cultural identity. The first one is their fear in a strange

land and the second is the problem of adjustment in a different and completely new environment. The last phase is to shape themselves in Diasporas existence with the large world of politics and national issues.

As a human being, we have some needs. And according to those needs, we shape our identities to create differences. Such type of shapes become part of our personality. We collect these identities as presenter from our ancestors and handover it to our generation. Our language, verbal or non-verbal behavior, socialization and conventional notions prove as a taboo in our public or private meetings. In this way, different uses of meanings or connotation in wrong way, creates misunderstanding. At a faster rate than ever before, people are immigrating to other countries, making possible a constant diffusion of language, race, and culture.

Research Questions

- What are the different techniques used by Bapsi Siddwa and Kiran Desai in their novels to present the religious, cultural and ritual clashes of two nations through their characters, Jemubhai in *The Inheritance Loss* & Feroza in *American Brat*?
- Did social, cultural and judgmental civilization of America/UK pressurize the characters (Jemubhai and Feroza) to forget their previous identity and to adopt the ways of the host society?
- Can we say Jemubhai in *The Inheritance Loss* and Feroza in *American Brat* illustrate that love, hope, happiness and pleasure is wrapped in white coffin of pain?

Literature Review

This section deals with reviewing some previous studies on the issues of identity, displacement and

the analysis of such subjects by using Homi K Bhabha's concept of hybridity and Said's theory of culture and Imperialism. South-Asian writers like Bapsi Sidwa, Kiran Dasia, Mohsin Hamid and Kamila Shamsie have put together influence through their writings about identity crisis and cultural differences on the basis of creed, race and religion.

This work, on the other hand, delves deeper into the concept of hybridity as theorists by Homi. K Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) to find out the mimicry, ambivalence, and homeliness in the character of Feroza and Jamubhai. These hybrid elements compel Feroza and Jemubhai to take decision, whether they should leave America/UK or stay in their own country? Bhabha (1994) refers to hybridity as an "in-between" or "interstitial" space that gives birth to new signs of identity through a negotiation of differences. (Pp.1-2)

Mimicry is derived from Greek word 'mimesis' use for imitation. It was used by Aristotle (384-322 BC) in the poetics. In 1973, Jacques Lacan, psychoanalyst, wrote an essay, "The Line and Light" (which is a part of his book *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*) in which he explained the connection between mimicry and camouflage. This essay greatly influenced Bhabha's concept of mimicry. As we see all these elements in the character of Jamubhai. He uses powder on his face to camouflage his actual identity and try to imitate the superiority of British. Bhabha (1994) explains it as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (p.122). Bhabha explains that culture consist of opposing dimensions and perceptions and that "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (Bhabha 1994, p.153). As Alghamdi (2011) says, of the multiple dilemmas that affected the post-colonial

subject, the interaction between home and personality is one of the most pervasive and probably the most profound... Home has become a contested concept, no longer predicted applicable to a discreet geographic set of cultural practices, given the formation of the novel, hybrid and liminal positions. (Pp.12-13) In both novels, we observe that young people so much idealize the culture and materialism of west, but they find themselves nothing more than a second-class citizens. They not only lost their homeland, identity and their wealth, which proves annihilatory.

Theoretical Framework

The current study is based on Homi. K. Bhabha's generic idea of cultural discrimination in preference and Edward Said's Culture and Imperialism. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) declares that the cultural differences are combined paradoxically, when time and space cross, complex figures of differences and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion are produced. The authoritative behavior or culture of dominant nation is not as complete as it seems. It only creates inferiority complex in the life of minority or mimicked. It always mark by anxiety. On the other hand, Ambivalence, to be found in the above basically refers a condition of mental, social and cultural conduct of people which comprise positive and negative aspects at all.

Bhabha explains the idea of ambivalence in the form of culture or culture itself from deconstructive standpoints. Hybridity has two forms of components, a person whose background is blend of two diverse cultures or traditions. It not only refers to any mixing of east and west culture, also gives rise to new form of identity as a consequence of instance of being unlike between cultures. But some researchers also favor the positive aspects of hybridity which gives rise to new forms of culture.

Research Methodology

The present research is qualitative approach. The text utilizes the extensive methodology based on Said (1993) and Bhabha's (1994) frame work. These two writers pour light on post colonialism. Said (1993) presents the idea of occupied nation promoted by settlers, while Bhabha gives his point of view regarding the displacement of the migrants and their stay in foreign lands. They make their strenuous effort to mingle the culture of migrated land but in doing so, their own culture and identities are distorted. By the result, it can give evidence that dilemma of identity is the key idea in diaspora literature and the main character of the undertaken text goes through particular alterations. The novels also highlight the cultural catastrophe regarding cultural individuality of these characters. They try their best to adjust in foreign culture but badly failed on the basis of their native culture origins according to Said's (1993) terminology.

Data Analysis

The stories of these two novels present the religious and cultural clashes which make the situation horrible & unbearable too for the suffering characters. The social & political chaos between two countries badly affects the individuals, their desires & dreams are crushed by the pressure of crises. Bhabha explains, ambivalence is the "slippage", "excess", and "difference" of mimicry (1994, p.122). They are compelled to follow the ritual of their society, even then if they are giving the turning point to their lives. In America, it is the painful process of losing & replacing homes. When protagonist tries to adopt the new culture then he/she becomes an alien. As Feroza was treated by American immigration officer at Airport. Manek, uncle of Feroza controls the situation by saying, "Look officer, I guarantee she'll go back at the end of three months, or whenever her visa finishes." Another incident shows her alien nest when

excitement gripped her by seeing the astonishing beauty of America for the first time after getting ease from airport. And it is noticed by Manek in such a way, “Vekh! Vekh! Sher-di-batia!” (see the enlightened beauty of the city)

Inter-faith marriage in the Parsi community is not possible. As Feroza Ginwalla the rebellious daughter of Cyrus & Zareen moves to Colorado from Lahore to improve her lot. But after going to USA, she intends to marry David Press, an American Jew. Through her character, we can peep into the Parsi psyche, & expose fundamentalism. While in the history of Parsi community, it is reported and claimed that when they were encamped at the Port of sub-continent from Iran, they asked permission to be inhabitant of this continent. The ruler of that time presented a glass of milk, which shows, this land is inhabitant of different cultures. Parsi community answered them by mixing the lump of sugar in the milk that means, Parsis have such a sweet religion that can mix up easily in any culture.

She presents realistically the reaction of the Parsi community towards the question of loyalties & Swaraj. The Parsi community also been presented a culturally hybrids in their faiths & mannerism whereas in “The Inheritance of Loss” history of novel is in India and UK. Jamubhai is an old, retired judge living at Cho Oyu in an isolated house away from the populated area in Kalimpong. He is eccentric and arrogant. As he was brought up in a very conservative family, where males were given all opportunities of life. His mother was used to massage his hair to stimulate his brain. Being superstitious, his father told him to throw a coconut into water of Indian Ocean before leaving for England in a ship for higher education. But he refused to do that.

In the beginning, he was unable to mix freely with the opposite sex due to hesitation and distinct Indian smell, though his mind was full of words unuttered. The Young and the beautiful girls held

their nose and said: ‘Phew, he stinks of curry!’ The way British domineeringly instructed impact, and regarding India locals as the second rate made Jemubhai copies them and endeavors to resemble them. “He even ate his chapattis with a fork and blade” (Desai 23) and lived like an “outsider in his own nation” (Desai 23) because he is accepted by neither British culture nor his own society. His only solace comes from the company of his dog, Mutt, and eventually his granddaughter. “The judge could live here, in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country, for this time he would not learn the language.” (Desai)

By living in Darjeeling, The judge remembers when he had left his own home at age twenty. He had been accepted at Cambridge to study for the Indian Civil Service. He was treated as an inferior and second-class citizen. Even this inferiority complex changed into psychological depression. He never had any attachment to his native place Piphit or homeland. He started to feel his own skin color odd, and his accent strange. After returning from England, his relatives were shocked with his behavior. His extensive use of powder puff worried his mother whether he has any skin disease. His sister commented that he had been sent England to be a gentleman, instead he became a lady.

To avoid this lower degree, he camouflages his identity by using powder puff. He becomes furious, if someone takes it. These extra dominant influences force him to treat his wife in the same way as he was treated by British. He insists his wife to speak English and follow English culture that she unable to do. He takes her bangles, throws away her hair oil, and pushed her face into the toilet. On the other hand, Judge’s frustration at not being able to have a proper teatime display how, even after so many years of living in India, he still aims to imitate British culture. The judge’s house is also the representative of colonialism. The house is built in foreign western architecture.

So that, Judge can feels himself as a foreigner in his own homeland because he has been steeped in British culture. Comparatively, the character of Biju (son of judge' cook) is positive. He recognizes his own values. He realizes that he needs to live according to the principles of his family and religion He travels to New York to earn money and in search of a better life. He moves from one restaurant to another due to green card inspection. While customer complaints his smell. He says, "One should not give up one's religion, the principles of one's parents and their parents before them. No, no matter what.... Those who could see a difference between a holy cow and an unholy cow would win. Those who could not see it would Loss." As Feroza's character seems in the novel *An American Brat*. After facing harsh thrill and whirl of differential race, she feels a different blood count in her body. From the beginning to till end, many times she bears insult, unable to convey herself in the words. As she tells her uncle Manek about a person, "O menu ghoor-ghoor ke vekh raha see. He was making big, big eyes and staring at me!" While Manek leaned towards Feroza and spoke in low voice, 'Civilized people don't kick men in the balls just because they happen to stare at them.' She can't follow the spoken style of the natives. They treat her as an 'other'. With the guidance & consolation of Joe, she is able to meet the lingual, social & cultural differences. Though, Joe seeks solace at every step. But she proves herself as a strong shade which provides shelter to Feroza. And guides her how to move in the American society where Feroza is nothing but an alien. Here she has to do the experience of split personality & split culture. To be the part of moving staircase of life, Feroza needs new identity, set of values to shape herself. To make it possible, she has to bury her previous identity & promises. Whatever, she did before her god Ahura Mazda by tiding a thread (Kusti) seven times round her belly. In a praying poster, she recites in hallowed Avastan language, "Come to

my help, O Ahura-Mazda! Give me victory, power, and the joy of life". She has to dash to ground all those oaths which she took as a Parsee girl in front of the holly fire. Same situation is faced by Sai, a young girl of sixteen years. She is an orphan living in mountainous Kalimpong with her maternal grandfather, Jemubhai Patel. Her mother was Gujarati and father a Zoroastrian. At the age of eight, Sai's parents were killed in a bus accident and she was sent to her grandfather to live, whom she never met previously. She spent her few years in westerns. These years totally changed her point of view as Feroza changes by living in American culture. She loves Gyan as Feroza has feelings for David. But cultural and religious clashes shut them into the nut shell of orthodoxical views; As Jemubhai is doing by shutting the door of Englishmen in his mind and living in a house that is far away from the society. While intensity of colonizer is undermined. This inner conflict shows that the mission simply doesn't work since it takes into account Anglicization, not the absolute change of "locals" into "British chaps". Jampa Lahiri, in his book "interpreter of maladies" defines identity problem as in the twentieth century because of the procedure of globalization and the formation of a worldwide homogenous community. These two characters, encapsulate the generational continuation of loss that these immigrants have experienced.

Conclusion

The present research aims at finding the elements of hybridism, cultural differences and identity crisis in *An American Brat* and *The Inheritance Loss*. The aim of this study is to explore the factors which show the problem of those, who are shifted from one culture to the other. They know the realities of the cultural differences and how they compete with the differences. The setting in America and UK influence the life of characters and give the birth of hybrid personalities. Both the writers conclude that the question of identity

is an exaggerated reaction which is difficult to understand not only cultural purity but as a process too. The concept of third space and hybridism prove that identity is separated into distinct part which is difficult to solve.

These two books propose that the topic of personality is tricky. It's very hard for the characters to attempt to fit in; they stay on the edges of American and British as legitimate outsiders and remote migrants. The suggestion is that the relationship of colonizer and colonized leaves impact that are difficult to delete. The position occupied by Feroza, jemubhai and Sai shows that whatever they do to make themselves suitable in the Americans or British society, they will be considered as "others". They are just losers who have lost their values, dignity, self-esteem and identity that is pathetic. Mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity contradicted their actual and bogus personalities in a ridiculous manner. The characters of the novels can never resolve the issues of identity raised by the writers. They are worthless and alienated in their own country and elsewhere. In fact, they are people without identity who are taken for granted to their inborn identity, and hankering after another that they cannot acquire because of cultural differences and otherness.

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