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### The Parasexual Cultural Generativity and Second Generation of Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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#### ABSTRACT

The current study of (Parasexual) cultural Generativity will help us to understand the human relationships apart from the sexual, biological and hereditary generativity among the second generation of the expatriates. It will give us new lenses to peek into the life of the immigrants, who are in dilemma of their own identity, existence and the generativity of different social and cultural traits, altered from their heredity, especially in the second generation of diaspora. The dilemma of belongingness and the hybrid nature of second-generation immigrant population provoke them to question their existence in adopted homes. This research paper will also focus on changing beliefs, thoughts and the feelings of the expatriates in their adopted lands. Jhumpa Lahiri has nicely portrayed the generativity of new social and cultural traits among the second-generation immigrants, the generativity of uniqueness, not only from the host society but also from their ancestral cultural traits in her well-known novel *The Namesake*.

**Keywords:** Parasexual, Generativity, Second-generation diaspora, Expatriates, Cultural Traits.

Every society has a unique identity, which they want to preserve and wish to transfer from one generation to next to sustain their uniqueness by maintaining their social, cultural, moral and traditional legacy and values. However, being a diasporic population, maintaining their own cultural and social beliefs is not an easy task in adopted lands, because of the different environment, laws and social dogmas. The tenacities of old cultural beliefs and the demands of new social milieu for the first and second generation, creates a kind of chasm between two generations due to their different social and cultural ambiance and different perspective of adopting new situation with old legacy. The ability to adopt with new society and maintaining its ancestral tie-ups gets more complex for the second-generation diaspora population because of the rootlessness with their ancestral social and cultural values. Being born and raised in different cultures, it is

not an easy task to feel same as their ancestors are feeling for their culture and social values. The dilemma of identity and the possibility of cultural clash is so common among the immigrants in their new homelands because of their different perspectives of pursuing life in the new homeland. The generativity of (Parasexual) new cultural traits among the second-generation immigrants, which make them unique, diverse from the ancestral cultures, and adopted lands as well. Parasexuality is relating to or being reproduction that results in recombination of genes from different individuals but does not involve meiosis and formation of a zygote by fertilization as in sexual reproduction (the Parasexual cycle in some fungi, Merriam Webster 1928). It lacks the coordination between two sexual partners to produce new offspring and the outcome of this lack of the coordination is the production of progeny with many variations from their parents. **Generativity** is a concern for people besides self and family that usually develops during middle age; especially: a need to nurture and guide younger people and contribute to the next generation (Merriam Webster 1928). In the ultra-modern age, people are worried about their regional, social and cultural values, which are degrading day by day due to the globalisation and the cosmopolitanism.

Transforming ancestral cultural traits to the next generation is the biggest challenge to the people who are living in the adopted lands in this ultra-modern world. Second generation of diaspora, who were born and raised in the very different social milieu from the first generation (parents) do not have much knowledge about the environment and the social values which their parents want to follow them. However, some parents to some extent successfully transform their cultural traits and legacy to their children but their kids cannot feel same as their parents are feeling for their roots, which is pushing them towards the duality and in-between-ness. Duality of identity and creation of cultural hybridity in second-generation is not a sudden shock but it is because of their past and present, the journey from homeland to adopted land and roots to rootlessness which moulds them in a unique form in both the lands. The alienation among their own people is due to the lack of communication and lack of cultural attachment. The chaos and confusion remain same in first and second generations, one feels alienated in adopted homeland and other in their ancestral homelands.

Gogol and Sonia know these people, but they don't feel close to them as their parents do. Within minutes, before their eyes Ashoke and Ashima slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles wider, revealing a confidence Gogol and Sonia never see on Pamberton road. Goggles, "Sonia whispers to her brother in English, seeking his hands and refusing to let go (The Namesake p. 81-82).

Jhumpa Lahiri has projected the same mechanism with two different perspectives of the first and second generations of diaspora. Gogol and Sonia are feeling strange with relatives in India because they consider themselves only American as they were born and raised there while Ashima and Ashoke became bolder and confident with their Indian counterparts because they never felt American in America even after spending thirty years there. Nationalism, cultural attachment with new adopted land has different views for first and second generations, for first generation, nationalism is something sacred, which they can only have with their country of origin while for second generation, adopted land is their home by birth and want to adopt everything whatever make them fully socialise and a part of new society. Gogol wanted to change his name because of its uniqueness from his other western counterparts. He wanted to be an American, no matter at what cost. He is ready to quit his ancestral treasure and identity by quitting his name to resemble with new American society shows his desperation and dilemma of identity. His dual

life in and outside home indicates duality, confusion and identity crisis with his friends and family as well. Gogol's changing personality and uniqueness from his parents, pushing him towards the in-between-ness and crisis of belongingness.

Humans are unique in both (a) their reliance on cultural information in addressing environmental and social adaptive challenges, and (b) the extent of their ability to acquire, use, improve, and transmit information from conspecifics, processes that, aggregated over time, generate a progressively larger corpus of useful cultural information (Daniel M. T. Fessler<sup>1</sup>, Anne C. Pisor<sup>2</sup>, Carlos David Navarrete p2).

The concept of survival to the fittest is best applicable to those human beings who have the ability to adjust in the newly adopted environment for their survival. Gogol's parents, they have to celebrate Christmas and other western festivals for the sake of their kids. Ashima and Ashoke are celebrating Christmas and other Christian festival only because of their kids but for Gogol and Sonia it was the way to assimilate with new society and with American culture. At first, they were reluctant to allow and accept the relationship between Gogol and his American white girlfriend, Maxine but they could not resist because of the multicultural life style of their adopted homeland and the nature of American life style in which Gogol wanted to adjust fully for his own identification. Novel also portrays the glimpses of first generation struggle to preserve their ancestral culture by transforming to their next generation. Gogol and Sonia have to learn Bengali language and Bengali history at home, the main purpose to teach them Bengali and Indian history was to safeguard their native religious, social, moral, and cultural values. Gogol have to memorise lines from Tagore's poetry was the symbol to stick to their native country; however they enjoy the life in America.

Being a second-generation immigrant, Jhumpa Lahiri explores the rifts between native and foreign-born family members. Second generation immigrants want to explore and enjoy their life with new culture and new friends but their parent want them to follow their own traditional cultural values. "I wanted to please my parents and meet their expectations. I also wanted to meet the expectations of my American peers, and the expectations I put on myself to fit into American society. It's a classic case of divided identify" (Mira Nair). Gogol tried his level best to keep his outside life private and separate from his parent but failed. Before taking Maxine to his home Gogol was constantly instructing her about the do's and don'ts yet they fail to impress Ashima. "...Ashima does not want her for a daughter-in-law. She had been startled that Maxine had addressed her as Ashima and her husband as Ashoke" (The Namesake p.166). It was not Maxine's fault to call Ashima by her name because it was her part of culture same Ashima got offended because calling elders by name in India is a taboo, both were following their part of culture which lead Ashima to dislike her. Even after spending thirty years in America, Ashima still expecting Indian traditions and cultural traits from the American born girl. It shows her attachment to her roots, difference from her off springs who love new American life and reluctance to accept her adopted country wholly and solely.

The uniqueness of the second-generation immigrants is not only limited from their first generation (parents) but also from the host society too. "I've often felt that I am somehow illegitimate in both cultures. A true Indian doesn't accept me as an Indian and a true American doesn't accept me as an American" (Barbara, 61). It is very complicated question to explain that which part of the world they belong to, they enjoy every moment in their birth place but being ethnically different they have to face questions regarding their belonging-ness and have to prove their loyalty towards the host society by following their way of life and to sacrifice their parental cultural traits. "...Ashima knows that Gogol spends his nights with Maxine,

sleeping under the same roof as her parents, a thing Ashima refuses to admit to her Bengali friend” (p.166). There are many things, which can be allowed in one culture and prohibited in other e.g. like live-in relationship is a common trend in the western developed nations of the world but for some conservative countries like India it is not that much common. Sex before marriage is a kind of taboo in India, so taboo for Ashima and her husband also but for their kids, Gogol and Sonia it was the part of their culture and they were just following their part of life style. However, sleeping and spending nights with his girlfriend, Maxine, Gogol knows that these acts may offend his parents and was trying to separate his personal life from his family to prove his loyalty both the parties . He wanted to enjoy his American life as his other friends were enjoying but he knows the limits and his roots from the different world, he knows his hyphenated identity and blur existence in his own birthplace due to his different origin and different ethnicity.

Jhumpa Lahiri highlights the issues of duality and in-between-ness among the second-generation kids in the novel. Gogol changed his name from Gogol to Nikhil was actually switching his identification and belongingness from his traditional Indian to modern Indian-American but changing names was not enough to switch completely to other world. He used to drink, smoke and have many relations but he has to pretend as an Indian in front of his parents due to his different ethnicity and roots, even after changing his name and identity he was not feeling confident with his adaptation of his new name; he was not sure about his new identity because of his parents. Second generation immigrants have to compromise with both the worlds, because of their ancestral background and adopted land. Gogol have to change his name to prove his loyalty to his new homeland by assimilating completely and at the same time, he was not feeling confident with his sudden adaptation and betrayal of his past.

“I am Nikhil,” he says for the first time in his life. He says it tentatively, his voice sounding strained to his ears, the statement turning without his meaning it to into a question . . .he feels once quality and exhilarated, protected as if by an invisible shield” (The Namesake. P. 96).

Due to his dual identity, Gogol stuck in between two different worlds, one from his ancestral world and other from his adopted world. The dilemma of identity and the betrayal of their past is so common among immigrants in the adopted lands that they want to create a kind of harmony between two different worlds by adopting both the cultural traits from the land of origin and the land of adoption which lead them towards the cultural chaos and in-between-ness. Gogol’s marriage with Moushumi was not his first choice but because of his mother, he went to see her and luckily fall for her interesting look. They got married but for both it was a kind of compromise with their past and their family, even after marriage, Moushumi started dating to her college friend, Dimitri. Her extramarital affair shows her inner consciousness about her present and conflict with her past, she is enjoying her days with Dimitri but still thinks about her husband and family. No doubt, it is painful to left out past experiences and parental cultural traits but its more confusing and chaos to adopt both the worlds for the sake of someone else even for parents. Creating a kind of harmony between two different worlds for the sake of traditions or to save ancestral cultural traits are very menacing and can create a kind of mental trauma among second generation immigrants. Moushumi’s thoughts and care about her family and comparing her personal life with other relatives shows her mental trauma. While dating her college friend even after marriage she was in great confusion whether she should divorce her husband or not because no one in her Indian family does have divorced. Betrayal, and extramarital affairs may be common in west but in India marriage is a kind of sacred ritual which is decided by gods not by humans, so it was again showing the clear case of cultural shock and dilemma.

She wonders if she is the only women in her family ever to have betrayed her husband, to have been faithful, this is what upsets her most to admit...after the first time, washing up in the bathroom, she had been horrified by what she had done, at the sight of her clothes scattered throughout the two rooms (p 266).

Association with new life and disassociation with past is not an easy task for the immigrants, like Gogol and Moushumi, both want to live free life as typical Americans do but their parental cultural roots, duality and in-between-ness keep always haunt them. Gogol's love affair with Maxine but he has to compromise because of his family and Moushumi's extra marital affair, which she is enjoying outwardly but the typical Indian-ness remains their even while taking the decisions about her personal life. Moushumi love to spent days with her boyfriend but thinking about her husband and her family brought her again in to the chaos and trauma of self-identity.

There is a fear of identity, belongingness and fear of self- exile from their own roots among the immigrant population. Parents fear that they are failing to transfer their inherited culture to their kids and the second-generation fear about their own existence in their own place of birth. Fear and the question of belongingness among the immigrants is a genuine situation because of their rigidness towards the past and reluctance towards the new adopted homeland. Gogol changed his name to adjust in new multi-cultural land. Moushumi seeks divorce from his Indian origin husband for her own existence; Ashima wanted her son to get married with an Indian origin girl (Moushumi) to keep her Indian legacy in her adopted home. There is a curious case of identity crisis among the second-generation immigrants because of their nature of duality and multicultural legacy.

The question of identity, belongingness and nationality remains always in the minds of the immigrants. To justify their relationship with both the countries sometimes they use hyphen in their nationality to prove their belongingness towards both the countries, which is actually a symbol of in-between-ness citizen of nowhere. Hyphen, which they use as a bridge between two worlds, is actually working as a space and differentiation and a big question mark over the existence of the immigrants in both the places. "The immigrant experience is complicated as a sensitive immigrant finds himself or herself perpetually at a transit station fraught with memories of the original home which are struggling with the realities of the new world" (Dubey, 22-6).

Second generation of immigrants are often confused with their existence in new homeland with traditional cultural traits of their parents, which they want to follow with their multicultural society but often ends with cultural chaos and confusion as Gogol is confused about his existence and his duality. Identities are made in, and by cultures, both these interrelated phenomena are changeable not fixed. According to Charles Altieri, "the effort to construct identity gets transformed into a celebration of participating in multiple identities, and sophisticated theory provides a self-congratulatory alternative to the kind of cultural work that requires aligning the self with specific roles and fealties" (qtd. in Heinze 199). Despite all his freedom and new life in his birthplace, his quest for his own identity remains there in his psyche. He changed his name to give himself a new identity. He wanted to stay with his mom but also want to enjoy his personal life too with his American friends. Gogol is suffering only because of his different origin who want him to be a person, which is very different from his instinctual desires. To be identified, as a pure American subject does not save him from his psychological captivity, neither does his symbolic return to his supposed identity associated with his parents' life- roots in India at the end of the novel.

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