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The Cultural Negotiation: A Shift of Paradigm between First and Second Generation Immigrants in Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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ABSTRACT

Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake explores the cultural negotiation of first and second generation Indian immigrants in America. They oscillate between two cultural spaces i.e. Indian and American searching cultural identity. This study makes an attempt to analyze the paradigm shift between the first and second generations in their cultural negotiation. Their experience of identity crisis, the process of assimilation in the host culture, the deculturation and acculturation processes, the reactions to the discriminatory practices and sense of belonging are examined. They are analyzed by using the theoretical concepts of Hall's cultural identity and Bhabha's third space. The cultural negotiation experienced by these two generations in diasporic hybrid cultural space renders fluid and unstable cultural identity. However, the differing approaches adopted by these two generations in their cultural negotiation results in diverse experiences.

KEYWORDS: Acculturation, being, becoming, cultural identity, deculturation, diaspora, third space

INTRODUCTION

Transnational migratory settlement is a recurrent phenomenon. It has got a significant impetus and momentum with advancement of cross-border interaction in trade, employment, education, transportation and information technologies. Such phenomena prosper diasporic settlement. Diaspora generally refers to the mass migration of people from the center (or homeland) to the foreign land, and creating settlement and identities in association with histories and causes of migration. The conception and perception of diaspora has undergone significant changes incorporating various transnational migration and community formation. Within such diversities of diaspora, the present study aims to explore the paradigm shift in cultural interaction of the first and second generation of immigrants.

Usages of the terms 'first generation' and 'second generation' in the context of immigrants are not uniform. There is relatively unanimity in defining the first generation. They are the people who come for the first time to foreign land and create their settlement. However, the difficulties lie in defining the second generation. The second generation is generally defined as the children of immigrant parents born in the host country. But this definition gives birth to questions: "what about children with one immigrant parent? How do we view children brought to a host country when they are

very young? What about those who are twice or thrice removed from homeland?” (Patel, 2016, p. 2). In such controversies, the second generations are considered as “those born in the country of immigration or...who arrived before primary school” (Crul & Vermuelen, 2003, p. 971).

The cultural interaction and quest for identity of both the first and second generation Indian immigrants are explored by Jhumpa Lahiri in her novel *The Namesake* (2003). She exemplifies the dilemma of belongingness of both first and second generation immigrants. Having multicultural roots, her characters strive to establish a native Bengali identity and simultaneously attempt to create a new identity in the Indian-American cultural context. Ashoke and Ashima are the first, and Gogol and Moushumi are the second generation immigrants. Their oscillation in the bicultural space problematizes their cultural identity.

The first generation immigrant Ashima, a typical Bengali woman who goes and settles down in the USA after getting married with an immigrant Ashoke and her son Gogol who is the typical second generation immigrant are the primary focus of the study. In fact, Lahiri has given ample space in depicting their dilemma and confusion. The different attitudes and approaches they have adopted to their host and native culture are primary areas of analysis. In order to analyze their cultural identity, Hall’s (1994) notion of cultural identity and Bhabha’s (1994) conceptualization of third space are used as analyzing tools. Besides, there is a brief survey of critical responses to Lahiri’s writing and *The Namesake*.

Ashima, the mother who is representative character of the first and Gogol, her son who stands for the second generation immigrants are the primary focus of analysis. The particular focus is given when they realize their unified sense of cultural identity is challenged and their responses in such circumstances. Similarly, their responses to the culture of host country i.e. the process of acculturation and deculturation and the quest for a sense of belonging are analyzed critically. The differential strategies and responses adopted by the first and second generation are mentioned separately for the sake of clarity.

CHALLENGES TO IDENTITY

The First Generation

The first generation immigrants feel that encroachment of the foreign culture threatens their cultural identity. Such invasion erodes their native identity and culture. So they attempt to reestablish their native cultural identity. These efforts reflect in seeking one’s own neighborhood, celebrating native festivals, imposing native customs on their children, keeping contact and visiting the native land. They want to reinstate one’s native allegiances more strongly. After reaching America, Ashima consistently manifests such attitudes. In fact, she is aware of, what Hall (1994) calls, her ‘being’, the shared history and common cultural practices.

The first generation allows a partial intrusion of the culture of the host country at home. As a defense Ashima and Ashoke search people of their origin in the USA. They develop contact with them, organize get together and observe native rituals. They know Maya and Dilip Nandi, Mitras, Banerjees and the young Bengali bachelors in the market who return from Calcutta with wives. Their common origin is the reason of their friendship. The formation of such diasporic community “is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history” (Patil, 2008, p. 150). Besides, Ashima tries to observe Indian ritual like naming ceremonies of children, marriages, death rituals and Bengali festivals like Navratras and Pujas. They generally

wear their traditional attires in such functions in order to “preserve their native culture in a new land” (Patil, 2008, p. 150).

The first generation does not only follow, but also imposes the native culture to their children. Despite their attraction to good English, American education and career, they force their children to follow Indian cultural practices. Ashima and Ashoke take their children to Indian cultural dance and musical programs. Gogol is sent to Bengali language and cultural lessons fortnightly in his childhood. Moreover, following Indian culture, Ashoke and Ashima consult elder members of their community to make any important decision as it is mentioned in the book, “Each step, each acquisition, no matter how small, involves deliberation, consultation with Bengali friends” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 64). So they expect the letter of grandmother to name their child. They have temporarily named “Gogol” to release from the hospital due to the delay of the letter. The first generation shows persistent attachment with their native culture.

Ashima’s preoccupation with the native culture manifests in food, dress, and her relation with her husband. She cooks Indian foods as “combining Rice Crispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl; she adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chili pepper, wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 6). Moreover, she prefers to read a tattered copy of Bengali magazine *Desh*. As a typical Indian wife, she does not even say her husband’s name. In the same way she continues to wear the Indian dress such as *sari*, a typical dress of South Asian female and *bindi*, an adornment on the forehead by South Asian woman. She tries to maintain her cultural identity by following such practices in the foreign land.

The Adherence to the native culture reflects in their dress, food, social life and manner of growing children. They are keenly aware not to get totally assimilated to the host culture. Moreover, their frequent visits to the native land in their vacations try to keep their contact with the native land intact. Despite such attempts, the cultural intrusion of the host country is irresistible. Such invasion of foreign culture interrogates their cultural identity.

The Second Generation

The sense of “self-preservation and identity crisis may also be seen in the second generation but in a different manner and degree” (Patel, 2016, p. 7). They are brought up by diametrically different cultures. At home, their parents force them to adopt Indian food, dress, festivals and rituals. Outside their home, they are exposed to the American lifestyle and values in schools and among peers. They start imbibing American culture and values. Moreover, they do not experience distinct past and present like their parents. They have only one home i.e. America, the host country of their parents. So they easily assimilate with American culture. However, they usually exhibit a dual cultural affiliation and identity because they are sandwiched between two different cultures.

The second generation’s attempts of escaping their parent’s culture are evident in the manner of Gogol. He likes more American foods like burgers, tuna sandwiches and festivals like Christmas than Indian food and festivals. Similarly, he opts architecture than subjects like chemistry, engineering, or biology which are generally selected by immigrants. Tripathy remarks, “such actions not only neglect the wishes of his parents, but also imply that Gogol is uncomfortable with his ‘being’” (Tripathy, 2003, p. 77). He gets fascinated by free lifestyle of his girlfriend Maxine and her parents. He spends, “his nights with Maxine, sleeping under the same roof as her parents, a thing Ashima refuses to admit to her Bengali friends” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 6). Thus, in the process of adopting American culture, he tries to disconnect himself from his parents.

The attempts of parents in indoctrinating their native culture do not get success as their children grow older. Despite their parents' resistance, Gogol and Sonia grow up under the influence of their peers and the surrounding culture. The children perceive themselves as Americans. They do not enjoy the time that they are forced to spend in India. Recalling the family's trips to Calcutta, Gogol admits that he has no sense of:

... nostalgia for the vacations he's spent with his family, and he realizes now that they were never really true vacations at all. Instead they were overwhelming, disorientating expeditions, either going to Calcutta, or sightseeing in places they did not belong to and intended never to see again. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 155)

Unable to associate with their parents' inheritance and their native country, Gogol and Sonia feel happy when they finally get back in Boston. They are, thus, distance themselves with the native culture of their parents. They feel themselves as part of the host culture.

The identity crisis of the second generation surfaces in a panel discussion about Indian novels written in English, which goes in this way,

When the sociologist on the panel talks about ABCD, Gogol learns that it stands for "American-born confused deshi". He thinks the word "confused" could be replaced by "conflicted". He knows that *Deshi*, a generic word for "countryman", means "Indian". His parents refer to India as *desh*, but he never thinks of India as *desh*. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 118)

Gogol wants to be seen as an American. He does not show any concern and affiliation with the condition of Indian immigrants.

Despite the second generation's adoption of American culture, they are questioned by natives because of their biological inheritance. Gogol experiences such a situation in his twenty-seventh birthday at his girlfriend Maxine's lake house. Despite Gogol's claim of being an American, a white woman Pamela insists on his Indian origin. She remarks that Gogol is adjusted in Indian climate and never gets sick when he visits there. When Gogol rejects it, she stresses that "but you're an Indian ... I'd think the climate wouldn't affect you, given your heritage"(Lahiri, 2003, p. 156). But asserting Gogol's American identity, Maxine's mother opposes Pamela. However, she questions herself whether he was actually born in America. His sense of belonging to America is threatened by such remarks.

The second generation immigrants are torn between two divergent cultures. Plurality in cultural values and practices is their reality. They cannot identify with their parents' native country. So they try to keep their distance with their parents' native cultural practices. They display more natural and stronger bound with the culture of the host country i.e. America. Moreover, they believe America as their own country. But the American society perceives them "as foreigners and sometimes discriminates with them, which lead them to a hyphenated identity" (Patel, 2016, p. 7). So they feel great difficulty in keeping balance between their inherited and adopted identity.

ALIENATION AND ASSIMILATION

The First Generation

The first generation immigrants are rather resistant in assimilating with the host culture. Their 'being' or their past obstructs their assimilation process. The past, Bhabha (1994) explains, does remain passive. Rather, it is quite active and keeps on influencing the present. As a result, they are more nostalgic to native culture and resistance to the host culture. In other words, nostalgia, reminiscences, shared and common ancestry, sense of loss and cultural dislocation afflicts first generation and result in cultural

alienation. In fact, their “close bonding with their homeland and culture does not allow them to follow the new land’s culture completely” (Patel, 2016, p. 6).

Feeling emotionally and spatially cut off from her parents’ home, Ashima yearns to get back to India in the initial years of diasporic life. She is agonized by homesickness. She often feels lonely and nostalgic and lives alone in her apartment. Her attachment to homeland is reflected in rereading short stories, poems and articles from the Bengali magazines which she has brought with her. Expecting her parents’ letters, she “keeps her ears trained, between the hours of twelve and two, for the sound of the postman’s footsteps on the porch, followed by the soft click of the mail slot in the door” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 36). Such nostalgia procrastinates her intermingling with the host culture.

The realization of losing her past goes beyond the sense of nostalgia. It damages her confidence and a sense of security. She is quite horrified in giving birth of child in an alien land in the absence of loved ones. It is quite “painful to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare” (Lahir, 2003, p. 6). It is beyond her imagination that a child is born “without a single grandparent or uncle or aunt, at her side, the baby’s birth, like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard... She never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived” (Lahiri, 2006, p. 25). So she wants to go back to her native country and raise her child among her family members and relatives, but for this she has to stop her husband for her career development. Such a fear and homesickness make her diasporic life a perpetual agony.

The strong attachment with the life and culture of the past agonizes her present life in America as she realizes,

being a foreigner... is a sort of lifelong pregnancy- a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect. (Lahiri, 2003, pp. 49-50)

Her reminiscences of the past and the problem of assimilation into new cultural milieu lead her to alienation.

Ashima spends her lonely time reading and rereading Indian old magazines, letters of relatives from India and devotes her time in preparing Indian food at home. These activities keep her contact with her past intact. However, they delay and obstruct the processes of cultural assimilation in the host country. Thus, the first generation immigrants manifest resistance and reluctance to external cultural impacts in their initial years of diasporic life. Besides, they attempt to be defensive to their native cultural identity.

The Second Generation

The second generation displays different attitude to their host culture than their parents. The idea of homeland, root, nostalgia and history is simply the matters of imagination for them. Such ideas cannot render attachment with native country of their parents. Rather the host country and culture is reality for them. Unlike their parents, they do not have any passionate past other than the host country to cherish. The host country and culture is their past and present. So they tend to “aim at total assimilation, by breaking away from the roots and traditions” (Patel, 2016, p. 6). However, their distinct socio-cultural upbringing influences their assimilation process.

Despite his bicultural upbringing, Gogol evidently desires to distance himself from his parents' cultural root and assimilate into American culture. In his girlfriend's house, he gets an opportunity to contrast the domestic life of Americans and his Indian family. The freedom and independence at the dinner table manner fascinate him too much. There is no insisting to empty the plate, to eat more and a sense of obligation like in the Indian family. He often gets irritated with such a sense of courtesy and obligation of Indian family. Such freedom and individualism trigger a yearning for an American way of life in Gogol.

Despite immersion in American values and practices, the second generation is not totally free from the influence of Indian culture and practices. Such dualism is quite evident in the case of dress of Gogol. In their childhood and adulthood, Gogol and Sonia wear western clothes despite their Indian background. Even in their trips to India, Gogol and Sonia retain their distinct appearance in their "bright, expensive sneakers, American haircuts, backpacks slung over one shoulder" (Lahiri, 2006, p. 82). But Gogol wears Bengali dress in two occasions of his life: in his rice feeding ceremony as a baby and in his Bengali wedding ceremony as an adult. Erasing out the influence of their parents' native culture is not an easy task even to the second generation. However, their attitude to both native and host culture is quite different from their parents.

Despite their adherence with the culture of the host country, the discriminatory behavior of American native people reminds the second generation about their distinct ethnic identity which is not an American. Gogol is outraged by the inappropriate treatments of the neighborhood children who mock his family name "Ganguli". Lahiri explains that

Back home on Pamberton Road, he helps his father paste individual golden letters bought from a rack in the hardware store, spelling GANGULI on one side of their mailbox. One morning, the day after Halloween, Gogol discovers, on his way to the bus stop, that it has been shortened to GANG, with the word GREEN scrawled in pencil following it. His ears burn at the sight, and he runs back into the house, sickened, certain of the insult his father will feel. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 67)

Obviously, the incident is painful to the second generation Gogol. He realizes that his family's different biological and cultural traits invite such racist treatment. Then he becomes aware that he cannot totally be a naturalized American because of his biological and cultural heritages.

The second generation has a hybrid socio-cultural milieu in their domestic and public sphere. Inside the home, their parents' adherence of their native culture influences their upbringing. They are totally exposed with culture, education and friends of the host country outside the home. The second generation, thus, gets caught in the bicultural situation. They seem more inclined to the mainstream culture of the host land than the unknown and distant culture of their parents' origin. They are more susceptible in the culture of the host country. However, the practice of othering, racial discrimination and cultural plurality jolt to the course of subsuming in the mainstream.

ACCULTURATION AND DECULTURATION

The First Generation

The process of acculturation takes place very slowly only up to subsistence level in the first generation. Acculturation is the processes of adoption of a new culture and environment. It can be defined as the process of learning and incorporating the values, beliefs, language, customs and mannerism of the new country. The first generations immigrants are often preoccupied in preserving their native culture. So their acculturation process limits only following culture of the workplace, observing certain

social conventions and festivals to keep connected with their own surrounding such as their own children. Besides, they are forced to adopt some aspects of the host country in order to maintain their life normally. Ashima learns and follows certain American practices and values in her lateral diasporic life.

Although Ashima resists American culture in the beginning, she starts to adopt it later on. A sense of relocation replaces her earlier feelings of homelessness in America. She enters the American culture of individualism by going out and buying her groceries and pushing a stroller like all American mothers. This step towards independence brings some “pride in doing it alone, in devising a routine” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 6). When she retrieves all her shopping items at “the MBTA lost and found... not a teaspoon missing” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 6), her trust in American system begins. Then she feels “connected to Cambridge in a way she has not previously thought possible” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 6).

Ashima’s contact with American lifestyle gradually transforms her. She starts inviting non-Indian friends to her home. Some of American women become her shopping companions. She also learns about other divorcee women living alone and dating in their middle age. This is the same Ashima who has a fear of Americanization of her children, cooks Indian food, against Gogol’s love affair with an American girlfriend and feels romantic putting her feet into the American-made shoes of Ashoke before her marriage. But now she becomes positive about an intercultural love affair and marriage: “from time to time his mother asks him if he has a new girlfriend. In the past, she broached the topic defensively, but now she even asks one day, whether it is possible to patch things up with Maxine” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 6). She, thus, becomes tolerant and flexible to American culture.

Ashima regains her self-confidence overcoming her initial fear with the American society as she gradually adopts American values. Gradually she becomes independent. She goes alone to the market, begins to communicate with strangers, and visits her husband’s campus. Moreover, she is proud of herself in rearing a child in the USA. Similarly, she learns how to celebrate Christmas and Easter and Thanksgiving ceremonies. She learns to roast turkeys but flavor it with Indian spices. Observing such activities, Silva (2014) succinctly remarks that it is “a matter of addition and negotiation, rather than loss and acceptance” (p. 115).

Children are one of the reasons for such accommodations and adoption of American culture of the first generation. Evidently in the absence of their children, Ashima and her husband do not bother to buy a turkey. It is for the sake of Gogol and Sonia that they start celebrating the North-American holidays. After her husband’s death, Ashima does not celebrate Thanksgiving at her home. Rather, she goes to New York to spend the holiday with Gogol and Moushumi, her daughter in-law. In New York Ashima with Moushumi’s mother goes to the butcher in order to buy goat meat instead of Turkey. Then they go to a concert of classical Indian music. Gogol recognizes at the end that it was for him and his sister that his parents “had gone to the trouble of learning these customs. It was for their sake that it had come to all this” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 286). While adopting the American culture, the mothers are concerned with keeping in touch with Indian cultural aspects, too.

Although Ashima adopts certain values of American culture for the sake of her children, she does not forget her Indian values and practices. Living in-between two cultures, she hybridizes American festivals merging Indian flavors in them. At their Christmas parties, their food is Indian, and the songs they play are Bengali. Ashima makes her own Christmas cards, decorating them with elephants and other typical Indian drawings. The Christmas cards are probably written in Bengali to their Bengali friends

who are abroad. It shows that although they accept the culture of the host land, they also maintain their own Indian customs in an act of negotiation.

The Second Generation

Deculturation is the process of distancing from the native culture after getting in touch with the foreign culture. It is the process of losing one's own cultural practices after coming into contact with the other culture. This process generally takes place when the people of one culture settle down in another cultural milieu. The process of deculturation takes place notably in the second generation. At first, it is seen as a form of disobediences and obstinacy to the commonly held cultural practices at home. Such process manifests in speaking English even in the domestic sphere, favoring American fast food than homemade Indian food and imitating American hair style and clothes. Later on, such process develops as a form of revolt against parents' cultural practices, adopting American values and practices and avoiding everything of the native land of their parents. In fact, Gogol has rapidly undergone in the deculturation process.

The second generation's avoidance of the native culture surfaces in the fourteenth birthday of Gogol. After the party, Gogol listens to American music in his room. Ashoke entering into his son's room finds many American music albums by John, Paul, George and Ringo. Gogol is crazy about them. But the cassette of classical Indian music that Ashoke has given to Gogol are "still sealed in its wrapper" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 78). Gogol's lukewarm response towards Indian classical music, demonstrates the second generation's indifference towards the Indian culture and tradition.

In order to be away from the Indian culture, Gogol avoids the company of Indian people. As a college student, he keeps away from people of Indian descent. He avoids his "ABCD" (American-born confused *Deshi*) friends and the people of the Indian community. Lahiri states that "He has no ABCD friends at college. He avoids them, for they remind him too much of the way his parents choose to live, befriending people not so much because they like them, but because of a past they happen to share" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 119). He dislikes going back home on the weekends since he has to go to Bengali parties with his parents. At the beginning of his college life, he tries to skip social gatherings as he was not able to positively accept his or his family's Indianness. Such attitude leads him to violate his parents' attempt of maintaining the Indian culture in the foreign land.

The process of deculturation as a form of violating the rules of parents becomes more visible in the adulthood of the second generation. Breaking the restriction of his parents, Gogol gives up the tradition of walking barefoot inside the house as soon as he reaches adulthood. Gogol "occasionally wanders through the house with his running sneakers on" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 75). When visiting his parents' home with his girlfriend, "he walks in with his shoes on instead of changing into a pair of flip-flops that his parents keep in the hall closet" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 146). Gogol refuses to walk barefoot at home, especially in the presence of his American girlfriend. Such resistance and disobedience gradually take the form of revolt in the manners of second generation.

The rebellious attitudes with the culture of their parents' native land lead the second generation to cut off contact and shun everything of their parents. Living in a hotel in New York and in the house of his girlfriend, Gogol tries to cut off with his parents and their Indian culture. He avoids everything of his parents and absorbs into the American culture. Lahiri depicts his condition as,

He did not want to attend his father's alma mater, and live in an apartment in Central Square as his parents once had, and revisits the streets about which his Parents speak nostalgically. He didn't want to go home on the weekends, to go

with them to pujos and Bengali parties, to remain unquestionably in their world. He prefers New York, a place which his parents do not know well, whose beauty they are blind to, which they fear. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 126)

In order to assimilate into the American culture and lifestyle, the second generation attempts to avoid the Indian culture and connection. For instance, Gogol concedes that he never thinks of India as his *desh*.

Othering

Both the first and the second generation face various discriminatory practices, rude remarks and hostile situations in their diasporic existence. The first generation seems to be habituated and pretends not to notice. Even if they notice, their reaction is rather normal and less upsetting. But for the second generation, it is a severe psychological anguish. Gogol's and his father's reaction to the deformation of letters "GANGULI" as "GANG" of their gate is quite different. Gogol is outraged while noticing that. But his father tries to normalize it by saying it might be the act of some bad children. Such differential reaction is the result of their psychological sense of belonging. The first generation feels as an outsider of the host society. Their minority existence and sense of outsider lead them to take it normally. But the second generation is born and brought up in the host country. They consider the host country as their native land. Therefore, when they experience discrimination, it hurts them.

QUEST FOR BELONGING

The First Generation

The first generation immigrants feel themselves as outsiders in their host country. Their stay in the host country is motivated with survival tactics or for the sake of their children's future prospects. So it is a part of compulsion and temptation not the spiritual sense of belonging. Moreover, the alien culture and racial discrimination often remind them their outsidership. Similarly, their prolonged absence from the native country creates a distance in their relationship with the natives. They cannot feel the warmth and intimacy with the new generation. Besides, they are considered as outsiders from the native of their homeland. The first generation Ashima suffers from such a sense of uprootedness.

Ashima does not see home in America. After the sudden death of her husband, she is disillusioned about her life in America. She decides to get back to India realizing that

For thirty three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she's worked. She will miss throwing parties, she will miss living with her daughter...she will miss the opportunity to drive...she will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband. (Lahiri, 2003, p. 279)

Such realization takes her to native land and people. But after getting back to India, she does not feel to be a part of the Indian culture and society.

Ashima does not feel herself as a part of either American or Indian culture. Lahiri depicts her situation in this way: "True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 276). Her previous attachment to her native culture and land takes a new dimension after the death of her husband. She ponders over her situation: "But for the first time in her life, Ashima had no desire to escape to Calcutta, not now. She refuses to be so far from the place where her husband made his life, the country in which he had died" (Lahiri, 2006, p. 183). So she vacillates between two geo-cultural spaces searching the sense of belongings.

The Second Generation

There are some similarities in both the first and second generations' experience in their diasporic life. Both groups suffer from the sense of uprootedness. They do not feel to be a part of either the host or native country and culture. Gogol's oscillation between two cultural spaces exemplifies such a situation. Gogol fully immerses into the American culture and lifestyle while he is in relationship with Maxine. He keeps his distance with his parents who symbolize the Indian lifestyle. He does not even come to bid goodbye to his father when he is leaving his town for his job. However, he realizes a sense of guilt after the sudden death of his father. He performs all the death rituals following Indian culture. Moreover, he gives up his American girlfriend Maxine. Instead, he marries Mausami, an Indian girl from whom he gets deceived. His journey in both American and Indian cultural space does not provide him the sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION

Both the first and second generation immigrants of Lahiri's narratives face cross-cultural dilemma and crisis of identity. They negotiate between two geo-cultural spaces, i.e. Indian and American. This in-between space of straddling between two worlds renders crisis of cultural identity in these characters. They neither solely identify themselves with the Indian nor with American culture. Similarly, they cannot leave either. Their attempt of finding their cultural identity in association with their being which Hall (1994) conceptualizes as shared past and common cultural practices become unsuccessful. Similarly, their present life and interaction with host culture and country which in Hall's term is "becoming" fail to provide a coherent and stable reference to their cultural identity. In fact their cultural identity, as Hall asserts, is part of both being and becoming.

They are living in, in Bhabha's term, "in-between space". This hybrid space deconstructs the bipolar notion of native and host culture. Rather, it is a fertile ground which opens of unstable and fluid cultural identity. So their cultural identity is fluid, unstable and in the process of making. However, the first generation and second generation adopt different strategies and approaches which lead them in slightly different output. In comparison, the first generation seems more dynamic and feels less exilic in their diasporic settlement. Besides, they are more worried about their economic stability, career and future prospects. But the second generation feels more exilic and worried about their cultural identity instead of survival strategies like their parents.

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