



THE DICHOTOMY OF ACCULTURATION WITHIN FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION IN YIYUNG LI AND JHUMPA LAHIRI'S SELECTED SHORT STORIES *A THOUSAND YEARS OF GOOD PRAYERS* AND *HELL-HEAVEN*: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

The tension between preferring and resisting use of the Imperial language in contemporary writing has been widely engrossed. Language barriers and cultural impact are intertwined with each other for the purpose of analyzing the in-between consciousness of colonized inhabitants. The concerned article interrogates the expected contradiction of ambiguous language incarnation between first and second generation in Jhumpa Lahiri and Yiyung Li's short stories Hell-Heaven and A Thousand Years of Good Prayer, respectively. The comparative study under post-colonial critic Homi K. Bhabha's model of Hybridity allows the readers to accept the uncanny insurgence of multiculturalism in today's world. The second generation immigrants are most likely to face the "in-betweenness" space while living in superior country alongside holding the traces of colonial influence in the first generation. The paradoxical arrangement of central ideas: such as use of English language as a means of freedom of expression for second generation immigrants living in host country, on the other hand, host language as a strategic entrap in accordance of first generation immigrants, are explored to unveil the active resisting forces against colonial power in any terms.

Key Words: Homi K. Bhabha, Hybridity, Hegemonic Language, Identity Crisis, Identity of Immigrants, Language Barriers, Mimicry, Post colonialism.



1. Introduction

Postcolonial studies emerged into literary canon in 1970s by proposing such literature that criticize the authoritative or imperial class who has been invading colonized territories. The respective theory represents the effect of colonization on minorities and their cultures. Every writer of postcolonial era comes forward to examine cultural orientation in West of their native region for the purpose of highlighting the conspiracies or hegemonic attack over minors or analyzing it as it is. Homi K. Bhabha is preferred in this research to analyze the impact of cultural hybridity and its impact on immigrants, diaspora or exiled inhabitants. The infamous features of this model are hybridity, mimicry, use of hegemonic language, language as a resistance of acceptance of colonial authority etc. each concept is engraved within implicated interpretation that are present in the selected two short stories *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* and *Hell-Heaven* by Chinese American Writer Yiyung Li and Indian American writer Jhumpa Lahiri, respectively.

Li is a famous contemporary author who is currently living in USA and won multiple awards for her short stories collection *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* and other writings. She received Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and a PEN/Hemingway Award for this first short story collection. In this titled story, she encapsulates the Chinese father daughter relationship in America with other outside effects of being and individual or collective. The storyline of the short story projects Mr. Shi and his daughter meeting after many years in America and he intends to spend time with her divorcee daughter who has been isolated from her family long ago. And now she finds America as best place to entertain her dreams and desires rather than living in China would have been impossible for her to do. The Chinese Cultural Revolution is engrossed within the consciousness of every Chinese because they adore their traditions, language, privilege culture and historical influence but the contrary happens when Mr. Shi's daughter violates her innate culture and adopted American culture as a means of providing freedom and individual status.

On the other hand, Lahiri is famous contemporary Indian American author, living in America and she represents the cultural history of Bengali family and their encounter with American family create contradiction and tension between characters of both ethnicities. Further she elaborates the culturally relations between family members and outside of that in the light of ambivalent consciousness of Aparna, narrator Usha's mother, and relatively other characters. The establishment of cultural paradox in the story, she justifies the historical impact and hegemonic attack on characters. Bhabha's concept of hybridity in its different forms directly justifies the behavior and actions of every character in comparative method. The difference between cultures hijacks the mental stability of immigrants and mirrors new ideologies consisting personal freedom and freedom of entertaining their inner desires through linguistic control.

This paper intends to study the questions of maintaining or altering identity, language and culture while living in an alien land. A comparative study based on the difference in the attitudes of the first-generation immigrants and the second-generation immigrants will also be analyzed. And also



how all these features affect the choice of themes, subject matter and its complexity in representations.

2. Aims and Objectives

1. To investigate the contradictory and comparative perception of multiculturalism in first and second generation immigrants
2. To throw a light over ambivalent identities resultant from postcolonial criticism
3. To dig into individual's consciousness for resisting or accepting colonial language; English

3. Research Questions

- Q1. How does Bhabha's discourse theory of cultural translation applicable in these two short stories?
- Q2. How do the attributes of hybridity provide a platform to cover the experiences of immigrants in host country?
- Q3. How does the imperial language effect or disaffect the national identities or individual consciousness?

4. Significance of the Study

Post colonialism is a genre of literature that has its roots from late 1970s and emerged into the literary canon for the matter of giving voice to subalterns either their acceptance towards fixity or essentialist paradigm or resistance to create their own identities. Because of the fluidity of literature, the philosopher Homi K. Bhabha proposed his theory of hybridity to enhance and clarify the confusion within colonial authorities and colonized. This concept examines the experiences of real life characters or from fiction in the world of hegemony. The significance debate is undertaken to justify the inner conflicts or outer influences over the minds of immigrants in the selected stories. The universe created by both writer Li and Lahiri builds a distinction between acceptance or resistance and its reasons behind the characters' actions.

5. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this research is adopted a Model of hybridity (79) proposed by Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). The proposed research paper will analyze the certain attributes of cultural hybridity in the selected short stories *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2006) and *Hell-Heaven* (2008) by Chinese American writer Yiyun Li and Indian American writer Jhumpa Lahiri, respectively. The analysis will locate the constant linguistic tension between immigrant individuals by living in "in-between" (79) and following colonized culture to change the dynamics of their static identities and culture. And they refer to contradiction between first and second generation immigrants regarding their belongingness or betrayal towards inherited culture and language. The other attribute is "mimicry" (76); in order to defend or challenge the



stereotypes and fixities of colonialization on immigrants or diaspora, they fire back by creating “third space” and imitating colonizer’s culture. The resultant creates “ambivalence” within their consciousness of being either dislocated or native.

The following study will investigate the conflicted identities and contradictory acculturation within first and second generation immigrants by applying Bhabha’s discourse theory of multiculturalism, hybridity as a means of resistance or acceptance of host culture, use of English language as a tool for freedom of expression or hegemonic attack on immigrants and culture influence over individual representation. Both stories spotlight over these phenomenal attributes while entertaining globally famed postcolonial concept.

6. Research Methodology

The following research is qualitative, descriptive research. The primary sources for this study are two texts of short stories *A thousand Years of Good Prayers* and *Hell-Heaven* by Yiyung Li and Jhumpa Lahiri and noteworthy texts of philosopher Homi K. Bhabha’s theory by different critics. The secondary sources are considered from different journal articles, books, websites, interviews or other minor sources. The occupied method of analysis in this article is comparative analysis. The adopted attributes of the model will extricate in the short stories through close reading of the texts and note-taking modes will be pointed out to filter the applicable comparative evidences from both texts for analysis.

7. Literature Review

The theoretical approach over language and its role in a society has widely been subjected and its agency in the pattern of creating body of knowledge has conspicuous account. The striking attainment of certain linguistic patterns determine the psychological or hegemonic orientation of the subject or and individual. The substantial matter of the respective paper will conceived a good deal of history of language as a major attribute of post-colonial theory and its inculcation in colonized or migrant or diaspora boundaries. Postcolonial studies arose rapidly in late twenties with the “text of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1970s” by emerging the representation of controlling power as in imperial power (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin 163). Later on the conduct of various proponents of the theory moved forward with their analyses or critique about the discourse of postcolonial era. The noteworthy names are Spivak, Edward Said, Stuart Hall or Bhabha who contributed in studying the imperial agendas and their strategies to civilize the minorities for the purpose of invading their cultures and histories. Homi K. Bhabha’s discourse theory of Post colonialism is considered to measure the respective role of language in occupying individual’s physical, psychological, sociopolitical or emotional state, in particular.

In an article “Sociocultural and Linguistic Reflections on Post-colonial Studies of H.K. Bhabha” the writer inculcates the theory to analyze the role of “Self” and “Other” by intersecting



with racial, cultural or ethnic projection of individuals who are colonized by colonial powers. Bhabha is one of the major celebrated philosopher in contemporary scenario who devoted his life to studying and analyzing the caveats of postcolonial theory in his artistic work “Nation and Narration” and “The Location of Culture” (01). The cultural diversity and difference leading to the concept of mimicry and hybridity as a major attributes of his theory have proven the contradiction of fixities in a territory. He is of the view that the histories and cultural boundaries are established on the basis of the preconceived notions of a culture or tradition which question the identities or existence of an individual. The synergy of multiple cultures of both colonized and colonial under one roof put every individual in doubt of their native position or translated cultures.

The transcultural formation reveals the concepts of hybridity and mimicry as the definite terms to describe the visions from colonized point of view by creating caricature of both empowered and weak cultures. The colonized concept of “hybridity” sets the notion of amalgamation or interaction of multiple cultures in the world and on the other hand, “mimicry” defines the half-understanding of colonized about their background and cultures leads to copying or following colonizer in same but little bit different ways (2). Alexandra Milostivaya and et al proposed the hybridization of cultures to develop the status of the individual who acknowledges multiple languages and speaks in that way whenever it's needed. Such characteristics of language usage are engrossed in Bhabha's book *The Location of Culture* (3) that is devoted to answer the question about privilege cultures and their usage of language to damage and defeat the inferior cultures or that are less entertained.

Language tools provide an objective presentation of cognitive information, especially important for the scientific style texts, including monographs Usevalad Auramenka elaborates the significant serving of English language in her lecture “Introduction to the Literary Theory and Criticism” while suggesting powerful role of dominated language over combined cultures either native or host that depends on visibility of Master language in colonization territory (01). She favors Bhabha's concept of language in order to develop the struggle of colonized sections by transforming the importance of difference as in projecting inferior and superior states.

The colonial authority that is explained in “Chapter 3 Homi K. Bhabha,” is the one who differentiates the status of inferior and superior to assert the illusion between their individuality and identities. This concept posits tension and anxiety between colonized territories and opens up the contradiction of being different and same to colonizers. Bereft the colonial oppression, the colonized or migrants come to know about their exploitation and begin to defend their identities, individuality and placement in the society. Bhabha's concept of identifying one's identity and analyzing others' help to define the “world as other, different, inferior and threatening to your identity and interest” (73).

The Location of Culture (1994) is covered with Bhabha's seminal works that expatiates the cultural hybridity, in-betweenness, identity crisis, individuality, role of language, third space, multiculturalism and other postcolonial arguments. While spotlighting on diaspora identities, Jon McLeod (2000) describes the ‘in-between’ existence of immigrants writers and their existence is



carved by colonial power. He credited the position of an immigrant in a colonized society leads her/him to view the world in impartial ways for the matter of creating new dynamics about evaluating identity and their existence in the world. Being an immigrant, Bhabha develops an enthusiastic structure of confused and stressed state of mind of an immigrant or diaspora who crave for his identity or position being in-between. Moreover, he unveils the cruel reality that “migracy can expose the migrants and their children to displacement, fragments and discontinuity” (216). For them, concept of home or belonging becomes a problematic and the painful process of living in alien boundary, one can develop different perception or experiences from their elders or other native fellows. This is the proceeding thought for this research that exasperates the tension when second generation migrants or diaspora start questioning their native language or culture and being a resident of dominant culture, they start developing distance from his/her roots and considers himself/herself as the member of new society.

Ashcroft, Gareth & Helen (1989) writes about the stature of language within a society underlies the hierarchal position of power and through this medium dominant culture establishes the concepts like identity, reality, truth or agency. And Bhabha forsakes this orientation and develops the role of a language to create “postcolonial voice”. (As cited in Rizwan Ahmed and Sajib Kumar Ghosh 41). The establishment of English language works as a parameter to measure the viability of power and identity in a bilingual multiculturalism orientation that directly effects the migrant authors who choose English language to insert their thoughts. For them the adaptation of this language become politicized and criticized by native and host critics because this is considered as a threat to native or regional culture and language. The hegemonic establishment of this language over minorities most probably influences the inherited cultural and language of its users. Because the possibility is they will get ostracized by their native fellows and they will be banished for the matter of betraying their regional or native culture and language.

Edward Said’s Culture and Imperialism, posits the persisting continuity of cultures and traditions that no one can repudiate because the cultural boundaries are not more than a fear generating distinctiveness that reinforce to sustain native culture (as cited in Sabrina K. Khela 1). In the same article, “Intimate Alienation: Immigrant Fiction and Translation,” the Indian American writer Jhumpa Lahiri regards the multiculturalism as a mode to privilege one’s being. As further she defends her adaptation of host language and culture in her writings as, “Unlike my parents, I translate not so much to survive in the world around me as to create and illuminate a nonexistent one. Fiction is the foreign land of my choosing, the place where I strive to convey and preserve the meaningful” (1). She promotes the fact that either a writer is penning his writing in English or his/her native language, the only thing that matters to me is that “I translate, therefore I am” (120).

Therefore, for her the transcultural infusion in her writing is a fertile beginning to communicate with multiple cultures and their traditions and ideologies. In this she relates herself to Bhabha’s concept of cultures and use of imperial language as a negotiating techniques to balance the unbalanced in-betweenness of colonized to translate their permanent transition (2). Her narrative style



in her writings highlights the fragmented personalities of her characters that are living in an alien state and undergoing multiple outer conflicts. And being a diaspora or immigrants, the characters renegotiate their cultural identities on accordance of their belongingness (7).

Lynn Ruby Wang (2019) in her thesis for Honors program signifies Chinese American writer Yiyung Li's writing approach in English language as her personal choice and she serves it as her "private language" (146). Li is unconcerned with her cultural roots and prefers English language as a medium to convey her thought rather than as a medium to evaluate her piece of writing. As quoted (from "To Speak" 142) in this thesis, Li transcribes "Their concerns about ownership of a language, rather than making me impatient like Nabokov, allow me secret laughter. English is to me as random a choice as any other language" (24). She is indifferent from multiple other writers who consider English as a hegemonic power to take over the world and its literature but unlike Lahiri, Li implicates this language as her personal choice to write novels or short stories in English. Li is of the view that writing in English is neither purposely undertaken nor labelled as strategic hegemony by colonizers but she is a transnational author who disregards national boundaries and follows as per her convenience. Being an individual and independent writer who use English language as a vehicle to carve her perceptions and experiences related to native and host culture. Like other bilingual authors across the world Li and Lahiri are also criticized and accused of trapping into colonial hegemony and betraying their regional culture and language. They both face "accusations of disloyalty" (25) to abandon the adopted language by their native writers to engender the feelings of betrayal and guilt. But they are persistent with their technique and style of writing in English because it conveys comfort, freedom and feasibility to engrave multiple experiences.

8. Analyses

Post colonialism serves to unearth the thinking styles of both colonizers and colonized with certain measures as Bhabha's discourse model is adopted to discover the role of language, culture, relationships and individual identity in selected short stories. The revolution in the contemporary writings occurred after colonized territories gained consciousness for the matter of analyzing hegemonic world's perception. McLeod exposes the resultant fragmentation, displacement and discontinuity in migrants and their upcoming generations because of migration.

In "Pedagogical Crossroads: Dancing a Third Space" Bhabha builds a reaction against fixed notion of cultures and languages to identify an individual's identity. The third space conceptualized the disruption of hegemonic power and creates binary oppositions either culture is concerned or language. Positing challenges of cultural translation, Bhabha proposes third space in terms of "spatial politics that initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation." (199). Bereft the post-colonial tension over colonized countries, the immigrants face the burden of representation, identity crisis or cultural influences etc. The terms such as hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence are leading aspects towards comparing the actions of first and second generation experiences because they take apart in organizing once personality in an alien territory as



characters from the stories are living in America a place for fulfilling dreams.

8.1 Hybridity as a site for freedom of self-expression

The concept of hybridity refers to the amalgamation of multiple cultures within a society. As West is considered as a center that revolves around marginalized minorities as in *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* and *Hell-Haven* Li and Lahiri organize such characters that are true depiction of multiculturalism. Both stories develop such methodology of interacting within characters of first and second generation that resist and accept the cultural hybridity on their own terms. As the concept of hybridity comes from mimicking the colonial culture. While living in superior culture, one inclines towards appealing structure of colonizer's cultural orientation as happens in both stories. The daughter of Mr. Shi in Li's story prefers to adopt American culture that seems to provide her sense of acceptability and privileged. She is a kind of person who is always quiet and listening up her parents. Mr. Shi thought of her that way and let her be herself because of her newly divorced. Mr. Shi is a pure Chinese man who loves his country and its history of revolution. It is his first visit in America and he found it very interesting as he says "America makes him a new person" (ATYOGP 2). He discovered the American enthusiasm in every aspect because he likes to be known as "rocket scientist" and Americans think of him as a skilful artist. When he fails in bringing her daughter's charm back, he interrogates her the reason behind her calm and unaffected nature because it can create unhappiness and discouragement in a woman like her stature. She being unpredictable to his father questions back to him that how he can get the conclusive of her unhappiness just because of her quieter nature. Mr. Shi gets shocked with the answer as she says, "Baba you used to be very quiet, remember? Were you unhappy then?" (3). Her statement is less Chinese and more rebellious in tone that he finds awkward and unusual in her behavior. The Asians are very obedient to their parents or elders and the same thing made him worried about her as she has forgotten her values because Chinese children do not disobey their parents as in "He waits for her to apologize" (3). But there is no response but a deep silence.

With the every passing moment he is opening up new doors of American cultures as he meets up with an Iranian woman calls her "Madam" who does not know English or Chinese language but they talk a lot about their experiences. Mr Shi discusses about her daughter's invasion from happiness and he quotes a Chinese saying to her that she seems not understanding the meaning of it, "it takes three hundred years of prayers to have the chances to cross a river with someone in the same boat" (3). As china has history of long time communism and hard workers to meet the present state of it as being a powerful country. He reminisces over holy cultures and precious traditions of China that his daughter has completely forgotten and now she is more comfortable in American culture as she talks relentlessly with wide open eyes. And she also criticizes Chinese culture as in a dialogue as it is the reason of her divorce, "truly it was his mistake, never establishing a habit of talking to his daughter" (5). He was a typical Chinese man who used to work a long day and now accusing of her daughter to being quieter with him. The less talkative woman were accused to being quieter and got divorced from his husband who even shares the same culture. Later on it is revealed that he accepts the fact



that “A foreign country gives one foreign thoughts” (9) because the multicultural effect makes him realize different perspectives of a same thing and he accepts the fact that “In America we can talk anything” (4).

In *Hell-Heaven*, Lahiri encapsulates Bengalis from and Americans in this story to share her personal experiences whereas her parents usually feel satisfaction while following their own native culture and criticize them who enslave colonizer’s culture. As the story starts Aparna “wearing red and white bangles...Tangail sari and...vermilion powder...a typical Bengali woman” (HH 61) who aspires another Bengali immigrant Pranab Chakraborty. He later becomes a rebellious figures who abandons his cultures and values and falls for an American lady Deborah to whom he gets married. At the starts of the story he feels uncomfortable in host country and confessed “he took nothing for granted and doubted even the obvious” (HH 61). The audience witness the contradiction in his statement when he left his family and married with Deborah without getting validation. Aparna, mother of the narrator makes fun of “American hippies” (HH 62) and symbolize them with Pranab’s hair that are touching his forehead and slipping everywhere. Till the end of the stories, we witness that she does not accept American culture and tries to control her daughter Usha who is grown up now and considers herself one of Americans.

Aparna projects the Indian culture while listening classic music and Indian films. While spending her time with Pranab she feels like being transported back “to world she left behind” (HH 65). Her husband whom Pranab calls Kaku as in big brother. She dislikes the fact when Pranab distracts from his inherited cultures and tradition and proposes Deborah for marriage and then openly she expressed her thoughts to Usha that, “In a few weeks, the fun will be over and she’ll leave him” (HH 68). But he gets married to Deborah and has two kids. Usha is grown up now witnessing the American tradition in Deborah’s family and wishes to be liberal like them but Aparna works as a resisting force who does not allow her to entertain freedom of expression or liberty to hang out with male friends. Usha and Mr. Shi’s daughter being second generation admires American cultures and consider themselves as part of that culture. While Aparna and Mr Shi rejects the formation of colonizer’s culture and serve to entertain their native culture to prove being safe from entrapping of hegemonic country.

8.2 Cross cultures cause language barriers

For Mr. Shi’s daughter speaking in English language serves as a rebellious acts to undermine Chinese language because she becomes more confrontational in that language. When Mr. Shi listens her talking in English on phone “her voice shriller than he has known ever.... She speaks fast and laughs often” (ATYOGP 6). He caught her talking in non-understandable manners with some American guy and her voice seems to him too sharp and louder than ever she talked. In the other story Lahiri also proposes the gap of accepting the host language within first and second generation when Usha accepts the fact that for her English is a language “I spoke freely in English, a language in which, by that age I expressed myself more easily that Bengali which I required to speak at home”



(HH 69). In both stories, language barriers cause relationship deterioration within parents and children, stranger and commoner as in the case of Iranian woman and Mr Shi and even between same-rooted inhabitants. The adaptation of English language by both second generation children cause their parents to ostracize them and criticize the colonizers and their strategic role play in speeding their roots.

8.3 Practice of English Language as a catalyst for accepting or resisting ambivalent identity

Identity is a constant struggle for those who live in exile or immigrants. Jhumpa Lahiri's *Hell Heaven* (2008) deals with dilemma of every individual who tries to establish his identity in diaspora. Both stories highlight such thematic issues as displacement, accompanying loss of culture and the quest for identity of the (second generation) Bengali and Chinese immigrants. The concerned stories unveil the disputable matter in Bengali and Chinese family e.g. Pranab Chakraborty, Aparna, her husband and her daughter Usha, on the other hand Mr. Shi and his daughter, when second generation children chose to adapt the living style of host country despite of their rooted culture. The conflict lies when parents force to cling into their original culture and this adds fuel in the fire when second generation immigrants concede themselves as product of American culture. Usha and Mr. Shi's divorced daughter do not feel belongingness to Indian or Chinese culture as their parents are Bengali and Chinese who forced them to follow inherent cultures that appears alien to them.

They abandon Hindi and Chinese language and adapt English and strikingly ignore inherent values for the matter of adjusting in the host community that builds up conflict between children parents relationships. The cultural identity upheavals the cultural clash between holding rooted ideals and adapting American culture. Mr. Shi, Aparna and Kaku (Usha's parents) succeed in preserving their native culture from the time of immigration till now but Usha and Mr. Shi's daughter feel difference between their upbringing and Deborah's children (Pranab's wife). Usha refers to 'Thanksgiving' Dinner in Pranab's house, "as soon as I saw Deborah's siblings joking with one another as they chopped and stirred things in the kitchen, I was furious with my mother for making a scene before we left the house and forcing me to wear a shalwar kameez. I knew they assumed, from my clothing, that I had more in common with the other Bengalis than with them (HH 78).

In order to attempt American ideas, Usha and Mr. Shi's daughter becomes rebellion and conflict between parents-daughter enlarges and they not only discard Indian and Chinese culture but their ethnicity as well. The persistent struggle of Usha affects her cultural identity because she is not allowed to entertain Western ideologies.

9. Conclusion

The familial disintegration and inability to create connection within diverse cultures, assimilate the characters into quest for their identity and emotional satisfaction. By going through the



process of dislocation, nostalgia and demanding environment, characters encounter the difficulty of creating balance between indigenous and host culture. The immigrants make different convenient choices in host country and they face frequent challenge like quest for cultural identity that is an ongoing process. But in other, as a freedom of expression. Both are in contradiction. The Postcolonial key terms of proponent Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity and its impact on immigrants in terms of language expression and cultural implications are employed for the purpose of highlighting the colonial and anticolonial inclination on them. This article analyses the resistance or freedom of expression in Yiyung Li and Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* and *Hell-Heaven*, respectively.



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