



THEME OF RACIAL IDENTITY IN JUMPA LAHRIE'S *THE NAMESAKE*

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Culture is not said to be just about the things we can see. It is not just about the national dish, the fashions or dresses people wear, the gods they worship, or even the places they live. Culture is for the most part invisible and vast; we hardly even notice it until we're forced to step outside and see it from a new perspective. When an Indian is residing in India he never gives importance to culture nor feels that without it he is incomplete, but once he moves to another nation he understands its value. It plays an essential role through which the Indians express their cultural identity in the United States.

Despite their condition as migrants in the United States, the Indians always endeavor to create occasions to promote their cultural identity through, for instance, wearing their home country costumes while holding dinners and wedding birthday parties. Such occasions allow them, especially adults, to wear their Indian costume. This wearing of Indian costumes makes the immigrant Indians to preserve their culture in the alien land. It represents the rich traditional culture of the home country of the immigrants. While Punjabi Dhoti are common dresses among men and women loved to wear *saree* and *salwaars*. The typical Bengali fashion for women can be seen in *saree* (sari). This is one of the topmost traditional and widespread dresses for ladies. Generally, the west Bengal *srees* are designed by silk or cotton. *Salwar kamessz* has also become a common dress among girls. These are available in various designs and colors.

In the works of Lahiri, Bengali costume is often hailed as the material mark of belonging to Bengali culture. At Gogol's birthday party, the Bengali guests, especially women, make sure that they wear their native dress. It is said that "women are dressed in saris" (TN72). However, in the more formal marriage ceremony native dress is given more prominence since every Bengali guest cares after dressing in the Bengali manner to the honor of the bride and the groom. This is the case with Gogol's and Moushmi's wedding. The groom wears "a parchment-colored Punjabi top,... a prepleated *dhoti* with a drawstring waist, a pair of *nargal* slippers with curling toes" (TN 220). This Punjabi top reminded him of his father and it was brought by his mother. Ashima wears a "pretty pale green sari" and "Sonia wears a sari, fuchsia with silver embroidery" (TN220-21). Moushumi too wears a bridal sari and twenty pounds of gold on her. Indians are very fond of gold jewelry, and many women wear simple gold ornaments like rings, earrings bangles, and necklaces daily, and more elaborate ones at special occasions. Jewelry is often passed down through the generations from mother to daughter or daughter-in-law.

The female relatives who come for the function wear *saris*. Men and women in Bengal are very religious and wear clothes according to festivals as well. We would argue that text and textile weave together in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, and clothing for her plays the role of cultural incorporator binding together members of the same culture. The Bengali characters of the novel seize each and every opportunity to wear Bengali costume as the fabric through which they weave their cultural belonging. In the short story "Mrs. Sen", the protagonist Mrs. Sen never wore any other dress other than *sari*, which was patterned with different designs and in different colours.

She flung open the drawers of the bureau and the door of the closet, filled with saris of every imaginable texture and shade, brocaded with gold and silver threads. Some were transparent, tissue thin, others as thick as drapes, with tassels knotted along the edges... she sifted through the drawers, letting saris spill over the edges. "When have I ever worn this one? And this? And this? She tossed the sari one by one from the drawers, and then pried several from their hangers. They landed like a pile of tangled sheets on the bed. (IOM125).

Mala, the wife of the protagonist in "the third and the final Continent" wears *sari* in Bengali way. She wore *sari* in a manner that "the free end of the sari did not drag on the floor, but was draped in a sign of bridal modesty over her head" (IOM191). She had brought two new pairs of drawstring *pajamas* for her husband, which is a costume of the Bengali culture.

In "The Blessed House". When the house warming party was scheduled and Sanjeev and invited about thirty people, "some of the Indian women wore their finest saris, made with gold filigree that draped in elegant pleats over their shoulders" (IOM 152). For this very same occasion Twinkle wore a beautiful costume named *salwar-kameez*.

Unlike costume bangles have a major role in the culture of the country; it complements the dress of women. Wearing bangles is like adding on more feathers to your cap. A very good fact about bangles

is that it can be worn with any kind and colour of dress. As per the Indian belief, it is a must for married women to wear bangles. It is one of the most important ornaments that an Indian woman wears. Bangles known as *Kankan* in Hindi, are an important ornament for all women, married as well as spinsters, since ancient times, there is a tradition of making bangles, from various metals, glass, conch, sealing-wax and ivory. In Punjab, bangles made of ivory and in Bengal bangles made of conch have special importance. In Uttar Pradesh, wearing of a red *sari* and red bangles by the bride at the time of the wedding is considered auspicious. In states like Maharashtra, Karnataka etc., wearing of green glass bangles by the bride at the time of the wedding has special importance.

For married women, bangles are considered a significant sign of their '*suhaag*'. Even for young and single girls exhibiting bare hands is thought to be quite inauspicious. Bangles have always been an inseparable part of Indian culture. In Bengal, the mother-in-law gifts her daughter-in-law an iron bangle which is usually plated with gold, the moment she enters her new household. They are thought to bring good fortune and sound health for the husband. This is believed to fill her married life with love and affection. Bangles are an inevitable part of an Indian woman Indian women wear and flaunt their bangles with pride. They are a part of her personality, rather than just a part of her clothing ensemble.

Married women never allow their arm to be completely bare. In Bengal, married women wear a pair of white color *shakha* (shell), *pola* (red coral) bangles and *loha*. *Shakha* and *Pola* are worn in both the hands, it is to be seen that within one year of the marriage, they do not break. If anything of that sort happens, it is not considered good omen for the married life of the bride. *Loha* is worn only in the left hand. It may or may not be covered by gold. Astrologically:- *Sakha* (for moon) keeps the mind cool, *pola* (for mars) prevents quarrels and *Laoha* (iron keeps off evil spirits) towards preventing an evil spirit tending to cause harm. In the story "Mrs. Sen", the protagonist Mrs. Sen wears red and white bangles. In *The Namesake* "Ashima" wears bangles and when Ashoke dies, she removes it as a Bengali custom. The character Mrs. Mala of "The Third and Final Continent" wears iron bangle for six weeks on her wrist. In "Hell-Heaven" Usha's mother Boudi, who is a typical Bengali woman, follows all the cultural norms and wears red and white bangles unique to Bengali married women. She sticks to Bengali culture without adjusting to American culture like Mrs. Sen.

In the Indian culture, bangles are not only worn as ornaments but they stand as a symbol of marriage. Seven married women put *shakha* and *pola* into bride's hands. It symbolizes as seven forms of God. There is an old believe that this *shakha* and *pola* custom belongs to poor fishermen because they can't afford expensive jewellery. The bride has to wear *pola* between *shakha* or iron metal bangles. It is said that iron metal bangles keep balance between positive and negative powers.

During marriage, brides are made to wear small bangles that are pushed into their hands with the help of perfumed oil. This shows how important bangles and costumes are for the Indians. Lahiri's protagonists are the continental immigrants but they suffer from their cultural introspection. They have their conflict of consciousness between two selves-the native and the acquired, the real self and the

community to which they belong. The writer has unraveled the modern man's facts of crises and despair in the pages of life existence and reality. They are always attracted towards, what belongs to their home country.

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