

"South Asian Woman's Identity: A Comprehensive Analysis of Zara Raheem's "The Marriage Clock"

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Abstract: *Second-generation South Asian immigrants most often experience cultural hybridity where the task to balance between the home culture and the culture of the new world is gruesome for many. Understanding cultural hybridity signifies that transcultural relations are complex, processual and dynamic (Kraidy, 2002). This paper aims to find out the issues faced by South Asian women in embracing their home culture and its norms completely. It further notices how cultural diversity impacts a South Asian woman in shaping her identity and the perceptions of first generation immigrants with respect to the hybrid culture. The paper tends to observe how the traditional "matchmaking" process in association with marriage in South Asian culture works for a woman in the light of Zara Raheem's "The Marriage Clock" (2019). A qualitative study is carried out for conducting the research where Bhabha's "Theory of Hybridity & Third Space" (1995) is employed for interpreting the transcultural relationships present within the book.*

Key Words: Hybridity, Transcultural Relationships, Matchmaking, Marriage, Hybrid Identity, Cultural Diversity

Introduction

In the East, marriage is considered a sacred duty for a woman within the religious scriptures of every religion as well as in the list of obligations put forth by the culture. Asian Indian culture primarily is led by the belief that women are "born to be brides", as they get married only to save themselves from the shame of staying single. This, however, works differently in the western world where despite its absolute significance, marriage is still a decision fully developed on

a personal choice according to one's own compatibility and choice as the American women more often look for a potential mate in order to get married. (Rathor, 2011:117). When a person is subjected to such circumstances, where personal choice clashes with cultural as well as a religious obligation, a person finds a path to escape especially when the center is a woman who not only has to marry but to marry according to her parents' choice is another part of the home culture. This is often viewed with terrible strangeness by the west where the

thought of arranged marriages are questioned in terms of their genuineness. As BBC (2020) asserts that 90% of marriages in India are still arranged where the "onus of finding a suitable match for a person is on the family elders."

The novel under study *"The Marriage Clock"* (2019) is the debut work of a diasporic writer Zara Raheem. Zara received her MFA from California State University, alongside James I. Murashige Jr. Memorial award in fiction, and was selected as one of 2019's Harriet Williams Emerging Writers. She resides in Southern California where she teaches English and creative writing. (Harper Collins).

In her debut work, she paints a protagonist who is an American-Indian woman named "Leila Abid" who has a Muslim ethnicity and is sustaining her life successfully without any disturbance by sticking to her profession as a middle-grade teacher at the age of twenty-six. Everything remains normal, till the days of her peace end and her parents share their collective verdict of arranging her marriage because according to them, especially her mother, she is "getting too old to find a potential match suiting her age". When she resists this sudden decision, she is allowed to find a potential match for herself in three months who could match their standards of character, education, and wealth. Leila then randomly goes on a hunt for finding the most suitable groom just to satisfy her parents' needs and the taunts of the South-Asian community.

Throughout her quest, she attempts to find the ideal person of her dreams who could please her family as well as herself but she fails miserably every time. This is accompanied by the continuous interjection of her family who consider it as necessary thing to amend her decisions, no matter how many times she tries to make them understand that an arranged marriage is not what she wants they simply don't understand. (Brown girl Magazine, 2019) By

the end she comes to the realization that it is not her desire to get married but her parents' and this brings her to the

viewpoint that she needs to make her own decisions being a part of a world where women are free in terms of their choices. Fresh Fiction (2019) considers it a "humorous take on modern dating with the added caveat of finding someone traditional according to the choice of her South Asian parents." Hence, this work narrates the dominant problem of South Asian woman undergoes as she is adapting themselves to suit both cultures at the same time.

Background of the Research

The research is based on the place traditional cultural norms possess in American culture. The amalgamation of these two cultures later on give birth to the prevalent "third space" constituting a hybrid's identity. Often the hybrids seem to be placed within a battle ground where emotions clash with needs. (Crawford et.al, 2014). For the second generation, finding a balance between two different cultures is most often a gruesome task, since the "popular culture" of the new world is captivating enough that it tends to grasp their minds. In these cases, finding a balance between the norms of their home country and the new world becomes an issue of concern. More often, the second generation has a multi-faceted identity where they are in need of cooperation from their family and community to find their place in their native country. (Dusi.et.al, 2014:562).

The sense of belonging then seems to be a critical issue since the people believe that they have to abide by the traditions of their native culture as well as they have to adjust in their new lives by accepting their new culture with open arms. The identity thus established is often seen in crisis because of the difficulty to balance both at the same time. The prime cause are the blurred boundaries between the two cultures which

impact their social behavior and they are unable to fully grasp the norms of any one culture in particular. (Kim & Lee, 2014: 98) The people then initiates the process of "Othering" where the home culture sits at the lower tier because the norms relating to that are not usually welcomed or recognized in the culture of the new world. (Bolland, 2020). So, in most of the cases, the culture of the new world is crowned as the "ideal one". The expression then requires a mobilization accompanied by a "Third Space" where the knowledge of one culture disrupts with the performance within the mirror of another culture. (Bhabha, 1994:208). When the matter reaches the point of making important life decisions, the cultural restrictions once again resonate in the background, and deciding in the light of one particular culture seems an impracticable task.

This makes "*The Marriage Clock*" a perfect choice to explain a South Asian hybrid's mentality towards the norms of the home culture. The norms that are rigid and at the same time play a pivotal role in order to belong to the home culture, thus keeping the roots intact by maintaining the traits of a contemporary postcolonial work of a diaspora author.

Significance & Rationale of the Research

This study highlights the place of traditional marital norms of the South Asian home culture within the modern American culture and correlates them with the hybrid generation by specifically focusing on the South Asian woman. It attempts to disclose the impact of the rigid marital system on the South Asian woman's identity. The identities are in a recurrent process of reconstructing their selfhood, where the new self is constructed in retrospect to the hegemonic self (Haroon, 2015:63) are then modelled by

the influence of the norms which the South Asian second generation woman encounter in their community.

Problem Statement

Leila Abid as a South Asian woman tends to construct her identity based on American values and Indian norms of marriage. The transcultural relationship however gets complex as the absolute parental authority begins meddling with personal freedom.

Research Questions

1. How does the writer portray the identity crisis faced by the protagonist?
2. How the south Asian woman responds to the arranged marriage norms prevalent in the home culture?

Aims & Objectives of the Research

This research aims to find out

- The difficulties experienced by the South Asian woman in her identity reconstruction as portrayed within the novel by the characterization of Leila.
- The significance of matchmaking as a cultural norm and its correspondence with the American culture according to the novel.
- The description and discrimination of parental authority versus individual expression.
- The influence of the hegemonic culture on the protagonist.

Delimitation of the Research

The study is based on the events and the cultural settings as sketched within the novel. Hence, the study only focuses at the South Asian cultural context alongside the American context.

Within the South Asian cultural context, the study only deals with the Indian Muslim

culture. As the protagonist is depicted as a South Asian Muslim women dealing with the marital norms existing in the Indian culture therefore, the study reveals the issues faced by South Asian women only in terms of the institution of marriage primarily and the influences of its consequences on their lives secondarily as described within the novel.

Literature Review

Hybridity is a dynamic process influenced by the home culture level of exposure. It continues shaping up the identities of the second-generation immigrants who are alien to their own lands but still try to be a part of their home in order to connect themselves with their homelands. This has no exception to South Asian particularly Indian culture where the second-generation immigrant finds himself at a displacement from its culture and tends to connect to the roots. The displacement helps to contribute to the formation of a hybrid space that is neither Indian nor American. When we focus more on the lives of the women surviving in the hybrid space, we come to the realization that the second-generation south Asian women having an innate Indian identity are neither able to embrace the American norms nor accept the cultural values she inherits from the Indian culture. (Ladha, 2005) Thus, the intervention of this Third Space or the hybrid space within the life of a hybrid constitutes the structure, meaning and reference as an ambivalent process. (Bhabha, 1995:208) There are certain factors that paved the way for the acceptance of the powerful and popular American culture by second-generation immigrants. The most prominent of all was social acceptance as the cultural adaptations helped them in getting mixed up in the new world. This attitude was expressed to help their professional life where many of the South Asian men and women willingly adopted American work habits, clothes, manners, and lifestyles in order to behave like an American. But at the same time, many

strived to maintain the native cultural identities steadfastly along with the newly constructed ones at homes by the diverse Indian American groups.

The conformation of the native habits is reflected through their social, religious and dietary habits within the personal space. (Das, 2002:147). This attempt to balance their home culture during exposure of another culture seems an effort enough from them to save their identities. Though the second generation immigrants just like their parents want to regard the old world from which they came, however, Zhou (1997) argues that the children of the immigrants and the next generation lack any powerful connection to their homeland. For them, the native country is more like a foreign country which according to them is not connected to their new world but just exists in anecdotes and old accounts of their parents, thus they are unlikely to return to a country from which they feel a certain kind of cultural displacement. Thus women being the second generation immigrants in America are contrasting from the first generation women who are often reflected as the ones struggling with biculturalism and isolation lamenting over the loss of their childhood culture. (Thiagarajan, 2007). Das Gupta (1997) asserts that the first generation seems to distance itself from Americanization on purpose in order to be identified as "Indians". This attempt from them is deliberately intended to present a model for the second generation so that they can relate themselves well with the culture back at home and embrace their true identity without hesitation of being represented as "Others". The parents hailing from the first generation expect that the children are going to act according to their example and if the children are not flexible enough to accept the home culture openly and without reluctance, the parents often view this behavior as undesirable and totally "American" (580). This creates a rift between the first-generation immigrant parents and

their children who represent the second generation. This is especially disapproved when such habits come from the daughters primarily as compared to the men. This is because of the norms of the home culture where the concept of honour is rigid and shame within the society is often regarded as a bad omen especially when this connotation is linked with religious scriptures and teachings. When these factors are interlinked together, the family and community are the one who pass the verdict associated with honour and shame. Women are often subjected to condemnation and alienation because of behavior that is considered "ill for a woman". Thus, the community develops a certain kind of attitude towards women who are unable to act properly on the norms of the home culture and ultimately are abandoned or in extreme cases subjected to violence. (Mansoor, 2017).

Uma Narayan (2006) argues that despite the prevalence of domestic violence within the U.S, Asians and South Asians are more often labeled in the mainstream as real barbarians promoting violence. This condemnation of the entire South Asian "culture" works as a disaster in the western world in their approach to accept the norms coming from this culture equally as their own. (Qt. in Gupte, 2015). Thus, such stereotypes present within the home culture makes it hard for second generation immigrants to accept it with an open heart. When it comes to the lives of South Asian Indian women, the arranged marriage tradition is somehow favored more by the parents who associate themselves with the norms present back at home. The second generation despite having differences from this point of view tends to accept this ultimately because of the need to associate themselves with their parents' as well as their own native culture. Arranged marriage within the Indian context tends to safeguard the youth from "sexual promiscuity and premarital relations". For immigrant

children, the wish to place their parents' choices above their personal desires as well as to find a compatible partner by a suitable age, especially by women is one contributive cause that the arranged marriage system prevails in the Western world. (Ternikar, 2008).

Ralson (1997) states that though the prominent attitude within the first generation Indian women is a marriage of their children within the culture and with their approval, yet the marriage conventions are altering in contemporary times as the "educational experience and the family ideologies along with the personal opinions" are also influencing a woman's marriage. (53).

However, the majority of the immigrants prefer their daughters to marry with their own will and a little freedom is surely given to a hybrid woman to understand her life partner before marriage. Nanda (1992) asserts that as an American woman, "I considered the tradition of arranging marriage oppressive.... Had anyone tried to arrange my marriage, I would have been defiant and rebellious. (106) This tells that majority of the second generation immigrant woman consider arrange marriages as an outdated practice intended for woman's oppression hence we find women though originally agreed to the idea of arranged marriages in the western world for the sake of their families but later on rebelling and sorting out ways to get out of what they refer to as "familial oppression". Bina Shah's short story "The Optimist " (2005) paints one such picture where the protagonist "Raheela ", a hybrid Pakistani woman, eventually runs from an arranged marriage despite entering in it earlier. Her decision is based on her parents' desire as she says, "This will never work. You know I don't love you. I can't stand the sight of you, Adnan. I'm only doing this to make my parents happy. I'll be back in England before the year's out." (63). This shows that for the hybrid woman, entering into a marriage of their parents' choice is

more or less unacceptable to them as most of the second-generation immigrant women prefer individual freedom, a norm they have opted for from the American culture.

Shah (2004) claims that within the diasporic context, the Indian woman is considered as "the authentic figure of Indianness exhibiting the tradition and culture which is specific to the Eastern world only, so the fear of contamination of these values is a prime cause that the families of Indian women as worthy of marriage. (5) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1956) is another name that frequently discusses the cultural influences on the lives of hybrid South Asian women. Her collection "The Arranged Marriage" (1995) highlights the lives of eleven Indian women whose lives are linked both to the Indian traditions and the power changes when they settled into the new life in America who are consistently struggling for their identity construction balancing both the norms and the power. (Monika, 2016) She constructs the characters in a way that each one of the characters faces a constant battle between the poles apart cultures and tries to balance the relationship of their new world with the old man as they enter into a new phase of their life upon their parents' wishes. In all of the stories, one thing is very prominent and that is her accurate description of the plight of the women as they search for their identity, face discrimination on the basis of the cultural gap and at the same time experience hybridization of culture along with facing the stereotype associated with the tradition. (Pawar, 2019:6). Within the western world, matchmaking is also an established norm whose roots are concealed under Indian cultural soil. Parents who are willing to find a potential match for their daughters are more likely to rely on the matchmakers who actually form the backbone of a marriage arranged and blessed by the will of parents and the community in the west.

As the Hollywood reporter noted, "Indian Matchmaking doesn't shy from all the ways Indian (and Indian Diasporic) arranged marriage can seem strange to outsiders: the preoccupation with height and caste, first dates with family members tagging along, talking about parenting and moving across the country for the other person on a first or second date." (CNBC, 2020). The trend of relying on a matchmaker in search of a potential candidate for daughters has also influenced the mainstream media industry. "The Indian Matchmaking" (2020) by Netflix highlights how the Diasporic world is trying to hold to its roots by normalizing arranged marriages through professional matchmakers. BBC (2020) calls this attempt of the Indian Americans to rely on the wisdom of a matchmaker as "the will to try methods from the past" which somehow relates them to their native culture and in this way they want to belong to their very own culture other than the hegemonic popular American culture. In contemporary times when the traditions over all the cultures have become flexible, arranged marriages are getting welcomed by the newer hybrid generations because of the evolved arranged marriage concept where the hybrids are coming to learn the boundaries of their culture and family and then going for the search of a partner. This hybrid form of marriage then allows the hybrids to reflect both cultural aspects of their identities. (The Conversation, 2021). However, no one can disagree from the fact that in migrant communities' women are equated with traditions and therefore need to be protected which ultimately results in the enforcement of "notions of purity within the second generation" (Maira, 1999:52).

Within the Indian ethnicity, there is a difference in the religious norms of both the followers of Hinduism and Islam have a bit different attitude towards arranged marriage, though the norm is prevalent in both religions yet the criteria differs in view of the

respective scriptures. Systematic differences exist with respect to the interpretation of the meaning and content of their Indian identity creation within an American context. (Kurien, 2001:287). Asian Muslims endeavor to arrange children's marriage because of their inclination to protect their faith while maintaining their unique individual identity within the western world. Religious inclination serves as a part of their cultural tradition and hence they want to preserve their religion within a modern world dominated by popular culture. (Ahmed, 2013:32). This brings one towards the idea that within the western world, a hybrid woman's identity is based on the religious as well as the norms of the native culture in addition to the popular culture in practice. In order to ensure her belonging to the native culture, the hybrid woman is more likely follows the instructions of her parents when it comes to the significant decisions of life.

Theoretical Framework & Research Methodology

In order to carry out the study, Bhabha's "Hybridity & Third Space Theory" (1994) is being employed in order to investigate the relationship of the two varying cultures and their influence on personal identity construction and the resulting decisions as presented in the novel. According to Papastergiadis (1997), Bhabha (1994) defines hybridity as "a process by which the colonial governing authority undertakes to translate the identity of the colonized (the "Other") within a singular universal framework, but then fails to produce something familiar but new." This new hybrid identity emerges from the "interweaving elements of the colonizer and colonized challenging the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity." (Meredith, 1998:4) This borderline between the two cultures constitutes the identity of the hybrid while constructing a "Third Space". It is this third space "though unrepresentable in itself which constitutes the

discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity as they can be appropriated, translated, historicized and read anew." (Bhabha, 1994:208).

In light of the aforementioned framework, a qualitative character analysis is being done in order to understand the hybrid identity of the protagonist. In addition, a refined character analysis of her parents from the lens of first-generation immigrants assists to understand the basic differences between first and the second-generation immigrants. Apart from that, the stereotypes described within the novel are analyzed with respect to their cultural significance thus comprehending the phenomenon more finely.

Analysis

The central character of the novel is twenty-six years old Leila Abid who has an Indian American identity whilst "growing up in a semi-traditional Muslim household". It appears that her identity is heavily influenced by her familial bonding which has found a sense of nourishment within her Muslim background. She is shown to be a person who "believes in love wholeheartedly" because in her view her mother "left behind her entire life in India, to start afresh with her father-a man she barely knew -in America". (8) This view of her seems more like a personal fantasy because being a girl who has opened her eyes in a culture where potential compatibility is considered absolutely necessary criteria for marriage, she somehow seems to refuse this idea that her mother being a woman born with some desires of her own settled with her father as a result of the pact founded between the families and their marriage was not out of love of her mother but because of the sense of respect and honour her mother perceived towards her parents. Another interesting thing is noticed within her character that her own idea of

finding love and marrying someone out of love is backed by her craze for the Bollywood movies which she has seen despite being a part of America. As she says, "My years of dissecting on-screen Bollywood romances provided me with enough insight to know exactly what to look for when it would finally happen." (8) This is a bit strange that despite being a child of America, she relies on the idealistic notions portrayed within the Bollywood movies in her quest to find a perfect partner. It can be interpreted in a way that despite her exposure to the American culture, she still relies on the native Indian culture where marriages are considered a cornerstone. (Ternikar, [2008](#)).

Despite, her connection with her Indian identity, at points, she seems really infuriated by it as when she is "inquired by the South-Asian aunties about her marital status randomly." Just like any other hybrid Indian, her identity is based on contradictory opinions about both the Home and the new home. In her view, the religious background of her family as "conservative Muslims" somehow trapped her within the bubble of rules. She talks about her family and upbringing as, "Before I went away for college, I was a "never allowed to" dater. I grew up Muslim. My conservative parents made sure all my free time was occupied with homework from AP classes, community activities, and tennis." (9). These lines are significant enough to find the traces of binaries found in her life where she is not allowed to date as per the family law but she still calls herself "a not allowed to date" which suggests that in spite of the rules and regulations to which she has been exposed to throughout her adulthood, she still find herself hard to resist towards the American culture where dating is considered a common practice just to settle within the new culture and not to appear as an outcast resisting from something that is considered harmless in the popular culture and she even uses excuses for this. As she says, "My excuses to "hang out

with friends" were always met with their silent disapproval. My parents simply couldn't understand another purpose for dating aside from marriage." (13) Her view is just like every other hybrid who because of the intense generational gap as well as cultural gap thinks of her parents as the ones who never understand her point of view as well as the cultural needs in America.

However, she is still well aware of her affinity with her religious and cultural duties towards the land from where she belongs and this sense of belonging is what "subconsciously makes her look for someone who is an American-born South Asian man who is also a Muslim or willing to convert to Islam for the sake of her love" (10) This reflects the point of view that despite being a part of an independent western civilization, she knows that in the South Asian community, parents don't accept the relations who are not ethnically or religiously related to the same class as them. This makes her mold her opinion about finding the right kind of guy and she thinks of only marrying to a South Asian Muslim. However, as a second-generation immigrant we find the rule of personal authority over the conventions because she has a set criteria which she considers will help her to identify her "Mr. Perfect" in view of her native culture as well as matching her personal choices which make her stand at the borderline of the two cultures and enter into the "Third Space" where she tends to fulfill the social duties as expected by her native culture and at the same time she wants a compatible partner of her own choice to represent her personal authority being a part of the American culture.

Being an independent woman striving for a successful life in America, she prefers to find her match on her own. However, when her parents decide to arrange her marriage for her it shocks her to the core which again highlights a hybrid's approach towards the cultural practices which are normal within

the native culture but her considered ill practices within the West world. She expresses her views that "While the idea of my parents arranging my marriage might seem preposterous, I had listened in on enough conversations at the mosque and community gatherings to know that this was a pretty normal topic of discussion in Muslim American households like mine. In traditional South Asian culture, marriage was considered the climactic point of one's life. Most Indian parents equated marriage to happiness. Marriage was the ultimate goal. Once you reached this goal, you had not only attained happiness but had also completed the first half of your filial duties as an Indian son or daughter. (The second half is completed only after the successful birth of a grandchild.)" (14). we find an expression of her hybrid identity where she experiences cultural alienness towards her home culture where the idea of marriage is considered sacred both culturally and religiously and where the concept of making marriages arranged is the foremost duty of every parent. Hence, her own parents tend to fulfill this obligation of marrying her off. She being a hybrid shows her resistance to the idea of an entirely arranged marriage and therefore she asks for time.

During the entire time, she tries online halal dating sites, and speed dating, get together arranged by her family and community, visits the matchmaker's office in order to find a match that could match the standard of her parents but fails miserably alongside being pressurized by her mother continuously. This also adds a rift between her and her mother as in her view "even though she was trying to be helpful in her own annoying way. She didn't understand my views of marriage and gender roles differed from her." (81) It seems that within her hybrid identity finds it extremely difficult to choose her views over her mother's because and thus she enters into the "Third Space" where she tries to embrace both the realities

together and from her perspective tries to understand her mother's position. After incessant failures, when she goes back to India for her cousin's wedding, it becomes exotic for her and she starts noticing the cultural barrier between America and India. She expresses her encounter with her Indian identity as, "Being deficient both domestically and socially in a room full of strangers made me uncomfortable to enter either space, so I lingered around awkwardly trying not to get in the way. (143) This social awkwardness is cultural awkwardness as she feels herself a stranger in her homeland because of the distinctive lifestyle thus she initiates to seclude herself from the culture of her home because in her opinion "she is after all an American".

The burden of getting married sooner intensifies within the Indian world as she says, "My marriage clock was ticking on Indian time now, and Indian time was even more aggressive than I was used to. (144). Digging deep into the interpretation of this we come to know that within the American world, the social pressure is not as much as compared to the Indian context for the woman to marry and also because over here only her parents and certain South Asians persuaded her to get married but in India, people are more likely to question a girl if she doesn't get married soon because of the elevated status of marriage over here. As an American, she also considers Meena's marriage to Haroon "crazy because these were two strangers who have never known each other all along" (159). After her bitter experience in India, she starts reconstructing her identity influenced by her own opinions and this is why as the time period assorted to her by her parents ends, she refuses to get married and says, "I've realized that my life doesn't begin once I'm married. It's already begun—whether I'm married or not—because my happiness comes from within me as well as those around me, not from those whom I have yet to meet... I have decided I

will no longer spend my life waiting for someone to come along and 'choose' me. Nor can I allow you to choose *for* me. *I choose myself*. And that is a decision that I am okay with. I just hope that you can be okay with it too." (214).

This decision of hers seems an expression of her own identity with the deep influence of the American culture where concepts like personal freedom and personal happiness are present and are prioritized over everything else. She even declares that "Sometimes it's letting go of cultural expectations in order to pave our own paths for the future." (215). Through these lines, she tends to convey the idea that as a hybrid it is very difficult to stick to the native culture where the rules about life are stiff and don't allow individual freedom. So, as a way to escape from these norms tends to let go of them completely by following her choices and acting in ways favoring the influence of the Western culture over her identity. Though she is a hybrid, it seems that the complex process of matchmaking doesn't work effectively because she is unable to attach herself to that connotation, unlike Meena.

Meena's character within the novel is a foil to that of Leila and she is represented as a "perfect Indian girl". In comparison with Leila, we find her life led by the desires of her parents as they decided every single matter of her life from her career choice as she opts engineering "because her parents preferred engineering" (146) to the choice of her life partner Haroon. We find Haroon's marriage to her as a sheer arranged marriage in which she claims that they have "only met three times". She shows no resistance against her family's decision and approves of Haroon because "both the families approve this relation." She even understands that for "Indian girls life is different" because they "don't have the same privileges as American girls" (147). Meena portrays a picture that seems so bleak to Leila that she starts thinking about her own life in America. As a

hybrid, when she learns about this, she finds her attitude alien and frustrated towards her own culture because lifelong she has secretly taken her as a role model. It also appears that Meena somehow exists as a bridge for her between the two cultures and once she finds that how Meena's life has remained controlling throughout, she herself starts distancing herself from the norms of the Indian culture and finally seeks refuge in the American culture by not letting herself get pampered by her parents.

Leila's parents who are the first generation immigrants ``had grown up in India and were both practicing Muslims, but despite being religiously conservative, they had made great efforts to assimilate to American culture when they immigrated almost thirty years ago." (14) Despite their attempts to embrace the new culture in a world that was totally opposite from the world they had just left, they still want to hold on to their roots and this attitude is particularly depicted in Leila's mother who is just another South Asian woman stressing over her daughter's good match at a late age. She continuously makes Leila remember that "marriage is half her deen" which also signifies that her intentions of marrying off her daughter are not related to the cultural rules but it has a religious significance as well. Nida, her mother represents the traditional South Asian Indian women because of her sense of criticism over her daughter's attire and behaviour as well as her disinterest in marriage. At one points she rants, "Ya Allah! What will we do with a twenty-six-year-old unwed daughter? This is my life's curse!" (28)

Her attitude reveals that she despite spending years of life in America carries the norms of her native culture in her heart and therefore she associates those norms with the way her daughter behaves. As the story progresses, her pressure on Leila heightens with more rejections by Leila, and she becomes tensed but ultimately when Leila

clears out her decision before her parents, she accepts this and states that all she wants is "her happiness of her" (214). It can be speculated that this acceptance in one way is Nida's acceptance as an Indian immigrant mother that she cannot control her child anymore because of her exposure to the American culture and with this her resistance against her daughter's decisions ends because she locates herself at a borderline from the American culture of which the daughter has become a permanent part.

Leila's father, however, seems an easygoing parent who understands that in the American culture, Leila's choices and decisions in life have altered and amended as well so he never puts her through any trials, unlike her mother whose pressure seems exasperating to Leila. Leila's father eventually welcomes her decision by stating that "marriage or no marriage, they still love her as her daughter." (214). It appears that he accepts this because of understanding her influence with the American culture as he not only accepts her decision by saying this but he rather accepts her as an American individual living life at her own choices.

Findings

From the analysis conducted on the novel, the following deductions are obtained "*Leila's identity construction is highly influenced by the social and familial bonds existing in her native culture.*" As she tends to go for arranged marriage considering it a responsibility of her to stay loyal to her culture and "her people". She seems easily influenced by people around her and the statements made by them. She in her capacity tries her best to become a constant part of the home culture in order to amplify the notion of belonging.

"The hegemonic culture for Leila seems the utter refuge." Leila being a part of America relates herself to the American culture more

than she shares her affinity with the Indian Muslim culture. She unconsciously chooses the culture in which she is born because it makes her more comfortable and more at ease with no hard and fast rules.

"The norm of arranged marriage prevalent in America is considered a way to remain connected with the roots." Traditionally arranged marriages are a way to remain ethnically connected (Ternikar, 2008). This is why Leila's parents make sure that she enters into marriage with proper approval from them at the proper age for marriage. This serves as a way for them and Leila as well to relate to their very own culture and preserve their cultural identity as Indian Muslims despite being a part of a new world.

Conclusion

South Asian hybrid women feel the duty to connect themselves with their native culture in spite of accommodating themselves according to the prevalent American culture so, we find Leila striving hard to take the norms of her Indian Muslim culture along with her and therefore she originally accepts the idea of arranged marriage for she tends to stay loyal to her roots and the traditions prevalent in India. However, the hegemonic American culture's influence prevents her from accepting the practice completely as she identifies her individual freedom. Hence, she backs off from this cultural practice of arranged marriage which ensures the family and community interests as offered by the Indian patrifocal culture (Ladha, 2005). The hegemonic culture seems more benefitting and flexible to her though detrimental for native identity at the same time becomes a blessing in disguise for the preservation of her American identity. Thus the dilemma of identity construction within Leila's character seems to dissolve when she finally favours her personal preferences and deliberately let's go of the native cultural expectations.

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