

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY IN THE MAIN CHARACTER'S SELF-IDENTITY AS AN INDIAN IMMIGRANT REFLECTED IN *THE NAMESAKE* NOVEL BY JHUMPA LAHIRI****Anggun Febrina Pramudita**✉

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2015*Keywords:*name, cultural identity, self
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This study analyzed an Indian-immigrant's self-identity development. This final project was aimed at analyzing how society influenced the main character's self-identity development reflected in The Namesake novel by Jhumpa Lahiri. The objective of the study is answering the statement of problem: first, find out how the the society influences the main character's self-identity as an Indian immigrant as reflected in Lahiri's The Namesake; second, to describe how the main character's self-identity develops as portrayed in Lahiri's The Namesake. I used Jhumpa Lahiri's novel The Namesake as the object of this study. This study is a descriptive qualitative study with psychology of literature as the approach. It was because the data of the study are in the form of words, phrases, sentences, narrations, and dialogues. The data were gained by reading the novel thoroughly, identifying, inventroying, and clasifying; then the analysis was done by selecting and explaining. There were several findings as the investigation result. First, the identity crisis on the main character happened after he made his interaction with society that had a different culture to his own culture. This was because the different comprehensions about identities between him, his family culture, India, and the dominant culture environment, America. Finally, he changed his given name to another name that showed his changed self-identity at a whole. This changing name represented a change of culture that he chose. Second, after various conflicts regarding names and cultural identity that he chose, he knew that changing his identity because of the different societies' influences did not solve his problem. He realized that move dynamically would help him to live easier in two different cultures.

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Every human being lives in a community. He/she cannot live alone as human being that need each other. A human needs to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, regardless of whether it comes from a large social group or small social connections. In this social connections, Hall (1989) stated that someone need a process in the form of a relationship of the other to oneself. It called identity.

Identity is being necessary to identify one in his/her society. Woodward (1997:1) stated that “.... Identity gives us a location in the world and presents the link between us and the society in which we live.... Identity gives us an idea of who we are and how we relate to others and to the world in which we live....”. Identity becomes important for humans because it can provide clarity in their role and their position in the society where they live and in their relation to others.

Name is one aspect which has close links with identity. Name becomes so important because related to how humans interpret themselves (Prabasmoro, 2006:69). Name can be bound as a representation of self that have strong relationships with aspects of the social and cultural scope such as ethnicity, gender, social status, religion, and etc. It often becomes a problem, especially in a multicultural scope; it is when aspects related to the name contradictory and conflicting.

Every culture has an understanding and beliefs about different names. The name is not only an important issue for who being named but to also to who give the name and their social environment. This is reinforced by a statement from Deluzain (2008) that the names are a part of every culture and that they are of enormous importance both to the people who receive free and to the societies that given them.

The Namesake novel by Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the novels which raised an issued about name in relation to cultural identity in a specific and a depth way. I believe that we will see how society can influence name and cultural identity

present in this novel clearly; therefore, I wanted to investigate further how name and cultural identity become a source of conflict to a crisis for someone in a multicultural society.

Reason for Choosing the Topic

The Namesake is a novel which raised an issue about a name as a problem that faced by an Indian immigrant who live in America, Gogol. Gogol started to reject his culture, especially his name, when he feels that his name cannot be assimilated in American culture and considered it as a nerd name. The relation between someone and society is my main reason for choosing the topic.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- (1) To find out how the society influences the main character's self-identity as an Indian immigrant as reflected in Lahiri's *The Namesake*.
- (2) To describe how the main character's self-identity developed as portrayed in Lahiri's *The Namesake*.

Methods of Collecting Data

I use a qualitative descriptive reasearch because this study was describing and exploring the society influences towards the main character's self-identity as an Indian immigrant. According to Wilson (1993:216), qualitative research methods and qualitative analysis aspire to capture what people and their lives are about. In qualitative research, preconceived ideas are put aside.

I also use psychology in literature as my approach. In this research, I focuse on Sigmund Freud's theory about three systems of someone personality, they are id, ego, and superego. Id is insting impulsive which is eqquipped to the human when one was born and it works with the human pleasure. Ego is a part of realistic thinking which means ego arranging the plan, pleasing the needs and testing the plan. While, superego is commonly influenced by instruction and guidance of the society when the human was in childhood.

I use this theory because this research was focused on the main character's self-identity development that influenced by his society. His needed of a pleasure in assimilating himself in his society, make him change his self-identity when he faced that his society cannot accept his Indian identity.

DISCUSSION

Results of The Study

1. The Influence of Society towards the Main Character's Self Identity as an Indian Immigrant as Reflected in Lahiri's The Namesake.

- **Gogol and His Family**

The relation between Gogol and his family can be seen from 'Ganguli' as an Indian last name. According to ancestry.com, Gangopadhyay is an educated Brahmin class that has a job or profession as teacher. By his last name, he founds his Indian cultural root, but he also faces a conflict in understanding India as his self-identity.

As someone who was born and lives in America, Gogol faces conflicts in understanding his identity as Indian. Gogol does not fully feel his identity as an Indian because India is not his homeland. One day in the story, he felt very insulted when someone has done insult to his family's last name.

Back home on Pomberton Road, he helps his father paste individual golden letters bought from a rack in the hardware store, spelling out GANGULI on one side of their mailbox. One morning, the day after

Halloween, Gogol discovers, on his way to the bus stop, that is has been shortened to GANG, with the word GREEN scrawled in pencil following it. His ears burns at the sight, and he runs back into the house, sickened, certain of the insult his father will feel. Though it is his last name, too, something tells Gogol that the desecration is intended for his parents more than Sonia and him (page 67).

It is increasingly making Gogol feel isolated and began to question his identity, an Indian or American.

From the explanation above, we can conclude that Gogol's last name had an impact on the understanding his self-identity. On the one hand, he felt as an American, but his last name as identity markers showed that there is no association with the American.

- **Gogol and Ruth**

After changing his name to Nikhil Ganguli legally, Gogol has a serious relationship with an American woman named Ruth. Their relationship does not last well and doesn't last for a long time. Gogol does not want to bring Ruth farther into his family cultural environment because he thought that Ruth will not be able to fit to his family cultural environment that totally different with Ruth's cultural background, America.

... He cannot picture her at the kitchen table on Pemberton Road, in her jeans and her bulky sweater, politely eating his mother's food. He cannot imagine being with her in the house where he is still Gogol (page115).

He could not imagine the existence of Ruth in an environment where he is 'Gogol' because Gogol's environment is very different cultural environment with Ruth's, America.

They've even gone so far as to point out examples of Bengali men they know who've married Americans, marriages that have ended in divorce (page117).

His parents' responses to his relationship with an American girl, Ruth, make Gogol want to go further and separate himself from his family culture. Instead, Gogol's parents do not want their son left India as his cultural identity. This understanding has led to conflicts that marked by the end of Gogol and Ruth's relationship.

- **Gogol and Maxine**

In his relation with Maxine, Gogol realizes that Maxine looks him different from his parents that have more relevance to the Indian culture and consider India as their identity.

She is surprised to hear certain things about his life: that all his parents' friends are Bengali, that they had had an arranged marriage, that his mother cooks Indian foods every day, that she wears saris and a bindi. "Really?" she says, not fully believing him. "But you're so different. I would never have thought that." He doesn't feel insulted, but he is aware that a line has been drawn as the same (page 138).

Maxine does not want to go further in Indian culture and considers Gogol as a fully Americans.

Although Nikhil is a new name that Gogol used to shows his new identity, Nikhil is still associated with Indian culture. Instead, Nick can show the relationship with America. Maxine's family positioning and receive Gogol's identity with certain restrictions, as a person who was born in America and as a person who is fully American. The way Maxine's family treat Gogol, makes Gogol had to make a choice about searching his identity more. Finally, Gogol seeks to get closer to American culture as a whole by going deeper into Maxine's family and leaves his family who are always linked him with India.

- **Gogol and Moushumi**

Gogol feels the same culture between him and Moushumi can solve his problem he faced all the time. Beside their same culture, Gogol finds many similarities between them.

In a way, he realizes, it's true— they share the same coloring, the straight eyebrows, the long, slender bodies, the cheekbones, and dark hair (page 203).

Moushumi and Gogol eventually married, but their marriage did not run smoothly because Moushumi feels trapped in a marriage that curb her as an

independent woman because now she has to put her interests of her new family, especially her husband.

Finally, the relationship between Gogol and Moushumi ended. Because of Moushumi's felling to her marry, she feels bored because she is not a free woman anymore.

Moushumi gives a special meaning in Gogol regarding the formation of identity in two cultures that lie behind them, which is a third culture. After the divorce with Gogol, Moushumi move to France to overcome her disappointment of Indian and American culture.

2. The Main Character's Self-identity Development as Reflected in *The Namesake* Novel

- **'Gogol' as an Alienated Identity**

First name to Gogol is very influential in how he positioned and sees himself in his environment. He wants to be accepted in his environment and get recognition from others. The name 'Gogol', in fact, always raises questions of others.

"Was that really his name, was that the last name, was it short for something else He did not ask, as many foolishly did, "Was not he a writer" (page 89).

These questions always arise and reinforce the perception of how foreign is 'Gogol'.

If the last name shows Gogol's identity as an Indian, otherwise the name 'Gogol' did not show India at all because Gogol is a name that borrowed from Russian name. Another thing that bothered him with the name 'Gogol' occurred when he wanted to abbreviate his name to common names in America, but he cannot.

At times he wishes he could disguise it, shorten it somehow, the way the other boy in his Indian school, Jayadev, had gotten people

to call him Jay. But Gogol, already short and catchy, resists mutation (page 76).

In a class, he learned that apparently Nikolai Gogol has a psychiatric disorder. His teacher is more explaining about the negative side of the writers.

He was reputed to be a hypochondriac and a deeply paranoid, frustrated man. He was, in addition, by all accounts, morbidly melancholic, given to fits of severe depression (page 91).

By knowing this new knowledge, Gogol is more deny his name. He did not want to be associated with Nikolai Gogol because he was afraid other people will equate him with the writers.

We can see how name as an identity can create a quality of a personal perception. Gogol too fixated on Nikolai Gogol as a person; consider the relationship between Nikolai Gogol with his identity. Gogol was uncomfortable with his name along with his knowledge development and it makes him assume that 'Gogol' is an alienated name. It can be concluded that the id of Gogol is in the form of his psychic reality that he has a weird name which should be received. This feeling makes Gogol difficult to be assimilated with his society as he wish.

- **'Nikhil' as an Overcoming Identity**

Gogol seeks to eliminate the resistance in the name 'Gogol' as his identity. He follows his ego, a part of his realistic thinking and planning, to change his name become a different name because he wants to please his needed of his society perception about him. Gogol change his name to 'Nikhil' when he was about to enter college. In the case to change his identity, Gogol also change other efforts that can realize the formation of a new identity as a change in behavior, habit, and appearance. 'Nikhil' marks that a person changes into a different person than before.

.... that he's Nikhil it's Easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleasIt's a Nikhil, that first half, that he grows a goatee, starts smoking Camel Lights at parties.... It is as Nikhil that he takes the Metro-North into Manhattan one weekend with Jonathan and gets himself a fake ID that allows him to be served in New Haven Liquor bars. It is as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party at Ezra Stiles... (page105).

The new identity realized by increasing many different factors that created by 'Nikhil' and 'Gogol'. Those names are not only two different names, but also showed effort to establish a completely different person.

- **'Gogol' and 'Nikhil' as Double Identities**

Environment and interaction with others are instrumental in the formation of a new identity. What happened to Gogol shows how the formation of a new identity can only be done when he is in a new environment.

Suddenly since everything else is so new, going by a new name does not feel so terribly for Gogol (page 104).

Changing name that Gogol do is an effort to eliminate his past and his origin in the past. The fact, his identity as 'Gogol' cannot be eliminated entirely because his figure still have to interact and get back to his past neighborhood at a certain time. It shows change an identity become a new identity cannot be separated from the role of other people around.

He is aware that his parent, and their friends, and the children of their friends, will never call him for anything but Gogol. He will remain Gogol during holidays and in summer; Gogol will revisit him on each of his birthdays (page 103).

Gogol's conflicts show that he basically cannot put himself dynamically in a different space. The change of name to delete the identity before shows efforts to establish a new identity that is singular

may not be realized because it is not possible to leave the environment in which he has his identity before.

- **Accepted Final Identity**

Conflicts that experienced by Gogol in his understanding of cultural identity rise when his father died. Through his father's dead, Gogol began to feel guilty for having left his family and started to return to the family environment which is automatically followed by the family's culture, 'India'. The return of Gogol to 'Indian' culture makes him gradually reject 'American' culture. It is proved that the change of name cannot solve the identity crisis problem that experienced by Gogol.

In the end, Gogol is no longer showing his refusal to 'Gogol' names although he used 'Nikhil' as an official identity. He realized that the two names, 'Gogol' and 'Nikhil', cannot be removed from himself because it contains the meaning associated fully with him.

And in that case Nikhil will live on, publicly celebrated, unlike Gogol, purposely hidden, legally diminished, now all but lost (page 290).

Gogol realizes that the relationship between himself and his family will never be interrupted. The novel ends with Gogol who started reading 'The Overcoat' novel.

He turns to the first story. "The Overcoat." (page 290).

For now, he starts to read (Page 291).

Symbolically, it marks that eventually Gogol can accept back 'Gogol' which is given by his father to him and begin to understand the significance behind the name. With his understanding and perspective regarding the name 'Gogol' deeper than before, it was able to make him to move dynamically between the two cultures that are different, Indian and American.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the interpretation and description of the analysis, there are conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis. First, in the striking cultural differences, the society is very influential thing in the development of personality and understanding of one's self-identity. It showed through the main character, Gogol, in the process his of interaction with the society where he lives. When he was a child and had not a lot of interaction with American culture, he refused his 'good name' that gave by his parents when he would entered the school. However, along with the development of his interaction he had with the American people and Indian people, he began to find oddities in his name and began to feel discomfort to his cultural identity. It ends on changing his name to 'Nikhil' as changes his identity as American. From the explanation above, we can see that the society is very influential in the development of one's self, especially on his/her self-identity.

Second, from the analysis found that Gogol feels himself as a new individual - the American, when he is in a new society where the society do not know his past as 'Gogol'. This is contrast with the fact that he cannot be separated from the society where he is known as 'Gogol'. This fact makes him feel that he has two personalities and identities that are very different. However, after meeting with other character, Moushumi, he realized that he just needs to move dynamically to live in two very different cultures.

It can be inferred that changing identity cannot solve the problem. It is because of strong relation between an individual and his/her society, so he/she cannot move freely. We can see that move dynamically in two different cultures in a society is something which will make us be able to accept our self-identity.

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