

THE REPRESENTATION OF SECOND-GENERATION INDIAN DIASPORA: A STUDY OF INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICTS AND HYBRID IDENTITIES

Dr. Yogesh M. Sarode

Associate Professor & Head

Department of English,

Antyoday Mahavidyalaya, Devgram, Dist. Nagpur (M.S.)

E-mail: yogeshmsarode@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The second-generation Indian diaspora occupies a unique and complex position, navigating between the cultural traditions of their ancestral homeland and the contemporary realities of their host nations. This research paper explores the representation of second-generation Indian diaspora in literature, films, and socio-cultural studies, focusing on themes of intergenerational conflicts, hybrid identities, and the struggles of cultural assimilation. It examines how second-generation individuals negotiate their dual identities, often torn between parental expectations and their personal experiences in multicultural societies. By analyzing works such as Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*, the paper highlights the challenges and opportunities of cultural hybridity. Additionally, it explores how these representations reflect broader issues of belonging, alienation, and identity formation. This study underscores the importance of intergenerational dialogue in fostering a nuanced understanding of diaspora experiences and contributing to contemporary multicultural discourse.

Key-Words: Second-Generation Indian Diaspora, Intergenerational Conflict, Hybrid Identities, Cultural Assimilation, Diaspora Literature

INTRODUCTION

The Indian diaspora, one of the largest and most widespread diasporic communities globally, has long been the subject of scholarly inquiry. Over successive generations, the diaspora has transitioned from being economic migrants to becoming permanent settlers, particularly in countries like the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. While the first-generation migrants often struggle with assimilation and cultural preservation, the second generation faces unique challenges that arise from growing up in multicultural environments. These individuals are often positioned at the intersection of two cultures - their inherited Indian

heritage and the dominant culture of their host country. In literary and sociological discourse, this group's experiences have been explored with particular focus on two central issues: intergenerational conflicts and the formation of hybrid identities. Writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Bharati Mukherjee often illustrate the struggles of second-generation Indians as they attempt to carve out a space of belonging in cultures vastly different from that of their ancestors.

This paper focuses on the second-generation Indian diaspora, analyzing how they are represented in literature, media, and cultural studies. The second generation's experience is marked by intergenerational conflicts, struggles for self-identity, and a sense of belonging that oscillates between two cultural spaces. Their identities are inherently hybrid, shaped by both the cultural practices of their parents and their socialization in the host society.

This study will examine how intergenerational conflicts arise due to differing cultural values, generational gaps, and identity crises. It will also explore how second-generation diaspora navigate their hybrid identities, embracing elements from both cultures while negotiating the challenges of cultural duality. By analyzing texts such as *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri and *Anita and Me* by Meera Syal, as well as drawing insights from contemporary critics, this paper will provide an in-depth understanding of the second-generation Indian diaspora experience.

SECOND-GENERATION INDIAN DIASPORA: AN OVERVIEW

The term "second-generation diaspora" refers to individuals born to immigrant parents in a host country. In the context of the Indian diaspora, the second generation often grapples with a dual cultural reality. This phenomenon arises from their exposure to two contrasting cultural frameworks - the Indian cultural values and traditions preserved within their households and the cultural norms of the host society they interact with daily. As a result, second-generation Indians experience a continuous negotiation of identities, belonging, and self-perception.

Characteristics of Second-Generation Diaspora

Cultural Ambiguity: Second-generation Indians experience cultural ambiguity, having to reconcile their Indian upbringing at home with the dominant cultural norms outside.

Identity Negotiation: These individuals often engage in identity negotiation, adopting hybrid identities that combine elements of both cultures.

Intergenerational Conflicts: Conflicts arise when parental expectations, grounded in traditional Indian values, clash with the second generation's desire to fit into the host society.

Cultural Representation: Literature, films, and other cultural mediums often depict the struggles and triumphs of second-generation diaspora, offering insights into their hybrid existence.

INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICTS: CAUSES AND REPRESENTATIONS

Intergenerational conflicts are a recurring theme in the literature and experiences of the second-generation Indian diaspora. These conflicts often stem from cultural differences, parental expectations, and the generational gap between immigrant parents and their children. While the first generation prioritizes the preservation of cultural values, language, traditions, and religious practices, the second generation often finds itself alienated from these expectations. For many parents, migration represents an attempt to secure a better future for their children. However, for the children growing up in a foreign cultural environment, the strict adherence to parental values may seem restrictive, leading to generational clashes.

These conflicts manifest in various ways, including disagreements over career choices, marriage (arranged versus love), and the importance of religious practices. In literary works such as Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, the protagonist Gogol Ganguli's identity struggle mirrors these tensions. While his parents cling to Bengali traditions, Gogol seeks to integrate himself into American society, rejecting his Indian name and heritage. Similarly, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Vine of Desire* explores the cultural rifts between generations through its Indian-American characters, portraying the friction between parents' expectations and their children's desire for autonomy.

Causes of Intergenerational Conflicts

Cultural Differences: Immigrant parents often strive to preserve their cultural traditions, while their children are influenced by the dominant culture of their host country.

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.32.01.91

Parental Expectations: Parents frequently impose traditional values, including arranged marriages, educational aspirations, and gender roles, which may clash with their children's personal desires.

Generational Gap: The differing life experiences of first- and second-generation individuals contribute to misunderstandings and conflicts.

Assimilation vs. Cultural Retention: While parents emphasize cultural retention, the second generation often seeks assimilation for social acceptance.

Representations of Intergenerational Conflicts in Literature

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) is a seminal text that portrays intergenerational conflicts through the story of Gogol Ganguli, a second-generation Indian-American. Gogol's struggles with his name, identity, and cultural heritage reflect the challenges faced by second-generation diaspora. The novel explores his attempts to reconcile his parents' expectations with his own identity. Similarly, Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) depicts the experiences of Meena Kumar, a second-generation Indian girl growing up in a predominantly white British town. The novel highlights the intergenerational tensions between Meena and her immigrant parents, as well as the pressures she faces to assimilate. Both texts illustrate how intergenerational conflicts stem from the juxtaposition of traditional Indian values and the cultural realities of the host society.

HYBRID IDENTITIES AND CULTURAL NEGOTIATION

The concept of hybrid identities is central to the experiences of second-generation diaspora. Unlike their parents, who often retain strong connections to their homeland, the second generation must navigate dual cultural spaces. This negotiation results in the creation of hybrid identities that incorporate elements of both Indian and host cultures.

Defining Hybrid Identities

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "hybridization" is particularly relevant to the study of second-generation diaspora. According to Bhabha, hybridity emerges in the "third space," where cultural identities are redefined and negotiated. For the second-generation Indian diaspora, this third space becomes a site of cultural fusion and self-discovery. The second-generation diaspora often develops hybrid identities as a coping mechanism to reconcile the cultural

disparities they encounter. Hybrid identity refers to a blending or fusion of cultural elements from both the ancestral and host cultures. Unlike the first generation, which maintains a strong sense of Indian identity, the second generation does not adhere to a singular cultural allegiance. Instead, they adopt hybridized practices, values, and beliefs that reflect their dual experiences.

For instance, cultural hybridity is reflected in the way second-generation Indians celebrate festivals like Diwali while also participating in Western holidays such as Christmas or Thanks-giving. Language further illustrates this hybridity, as second-generation Indians frequently code-switch between English and native Indian languages, such as Hindi or Tamil, depending on their social contexts. This hybridity, however, is not always free of tension. Many second-generation individuals feel a sense of alienation in both cultural spaces. They are often perceived as “not Indian enough” by their extended families in India and simultaneously “not American/British/Canadian enough” in their host societies. The inability to fully identify with either culture leads to a fragmented yet dynamic sense of self.

Hybrid Identities in Literature

In *The Namesake*, Gogol Ganguli’s hybrid identity is evident in his attempts to balance his Indian heritage with his American upbringing. His rejection of his Indian name and later reconciliation with it symbolize his evolving sense of self.

In *Anita and Me*, Meena Kumar navigates her hybrid identity by embracing both her Indian heritage and British upbringing. Her experiences reflect the challenges of cultural negotiation and the possibilities of cultural fusion.

Identity and Belonging

Second-generation diaspora often struggle with feelings of belonging. They may feel alienated in their host country due to racial or cultural differences, while simultaneously feeling disconnected from their ancestral homeland. Literature and films frequently depict this dual alienation, offering a platform for second-generation individuals to express their struggles and assert their hybrid identities.

REPRESENTATION IN LITERATURE, FILMS AND MEDIA

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.32.01.91

Literature and media play a critical role in representing the struggles and experiences of the second-generation Indian diaspora. Authors like Jhumpa Lahiri, Meera Syal, and Monica Ali offer nuanced portrayals of identity crises, cultural hybridity, and familial tensions. Through their characters, they depict the challenges of growing up in diasporic households, where expectations of cultural loyalty conflict with the realities of integration into a Western society.

The experiences of second-generation diaspora are also vividly portrayed in films and media. Movies like *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) and *The Namesake* (2006) highlight the challenges faced by second-generation Indian youth in navigating cultural expectations and personal aspirations. *Bend It Like Beckham*: Directed by Gurinder Chadha, the film tells the story of Jess Bhamra, a second-generation Indian girl in the UK who dreams of playing football. Jess's struggles with her family's traditional expectations and her passion for sports exemplify the intergenerational conflicts faced by many second-generation diaspora. *The Namesake*: Mira Nair's adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel further explores Gogol Ganguli's identity crisis and intergenerational tensions, offering a powerful portrayal of the second-generation experience. These films and others contribute to a broader understanding of how second-generation individuals navigate cultural hybridity and familial expectations.

THE ROLE OF FILMS IN CAPTURING DIASPORIC EXPERIENCES

The experiences of the second-generation Indian diaspora have been prominently reflected in films and media, which serve as powerful platforms to portray the complexities of identity, belonging, and intergenerational conflict. These cultural products articulate the struggles of individuals who exist between two worlds - their ancestral culture and the dominant culture of the host nation. Films, television shows, and digital media highlight the tensions, hybridization, and negotiation of identities experienced by second-generation Indians while offering nuanced perspectives on their lived realities. The most common themes explored in films about the second-generation diaspora include generational tensions, identity crises, cultural assimilation, and hybridity.

Bend It Like Beckham (2002)

Directed by Gurinder Chadha, *Bend It Like Beckham* is a groundbreaking film that explores the life of Jesminder (Jess), a young British-Indian woman who dreams of playing

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.32.01.91

professional football. The film beautifully captures the intergenerational conflict between Jess and her traditional Punjabi Sikh parents. While Jess is passionate about football, her parents disapprove, viewing it as inappropriate for a young woman who is expected to uphold Indian cultural values. This conflict highlights the tension between parental expectations rooted in Indian traditions and Jess's desire to embrace aspects of British culture. The film also portrays the hybrid identity Jess adopts as a way of reconciling these opposing influences. She negotiates her place in both worlds by honoring her Indian heritage while also pursuing her ambitions within the British cultural framework. This representation resonates with many second-generation Indians who struggle to balance familial expectations with their individual aspirations.

The Namesake (2006)

Based on Jhumpa Lahiri's novel and directed by Mira Nair, *The Namesake* is a seminal film that delves into the challenges faced by second-generation Indians in the United States. The protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, grapples with his dual identity as the child of Bengali immigrants. The film poignantly explores Gogol's struggle to reconcile his parents' cultural values with his desire to assimilate into American society. His rejection of his Indian name, his relationships with non-Indian women, and his eventual reconnection with his roots reflect the hybrid identity formation experienced by many second-generation Indians. Intergenerational conflict is a central theme in *The Namesake*. Gogol's parents, Ashoke and Ashima, maintain strong ties to their Bengali heritage, which creates friction with Gogol's desire for cultural assimilation. The film highlights the emotional toll of such conflicts while also showcasing the gradual acceptance and understanding that can emerge over time. By depicting the journey of hybrid identity and the complexities of cultural negotiation, *The Namesake* provides a powerful representation of second-generation diasporic experiences.

American Desi (2001)

A light-hearted yet insightful film, *American Desi* addresses the cultural struggles faced by second-generation Indian Americans. The protagonist, Kris, initially rejects his Indian heritage, preferring to identify solely with American culture. However, his interactions with fellow Indian-American students lead him to rediscover and embrace aspects of his cultural identity. The film humorously explores themes of cultural hybridity, intergenerational

misunderstandings, and the process of self-acceptance that many second-generation Indians undergo.

TELEVISION AND DIGITAL MEDIA

In addition to films, television shows and digital media have played a significant role in representing the second-generation Indian diaspora. Shows such as *The Mindy Project* and *Never Have I Ever* provide fresh perspectives on the lives of second-generation Indians, highlighting their struggles, achievements, and evolving identities.

Never Have I Ever (2020-Present)

Created by Mindy Kaling, *Never Have I Ever* follows Devi Vishwakumar, a high school student of Indian descent living in the United States. The show portrays Devi's attempts to navigate adolescence, grief, and cultural expectations, all while grappling with her dual identity. Intergenerational conflict is a recurring theme, as Devi frequently clashes with her mother, Nalini, over issues such as cultural traditions, dating, and academic performance. Nalini's strict adherence to Indian values contrasts with Devi's desire to fit into American society, reflecting the generational tensions experienced by many second-generation Indians. The show also explores Devi's hybrid identity, as she oscillates between her Indian heritage and American upbringing. For instance, scenes of Devi attending Indian festivals juxtaposed with her American social life demonstrate the coexistence of multiple cultural influences in her identity. Through humor and heartfelt storytelling, *Never Have I Ever* sheds light on the challenges and triumphs of second-generation Indians.

The Mindy Project (2012-2017)

In *The Mindy Project*, Mindy Kaling plays Dr. Mindy Lahiri, a successful Indian-American OB/GYN. While the show focuses primarily on Mindy's professional and personal life, it also subtly addresses themes of cultural hybridity and identity. Mindy's character represents a second-generation Indian who has fully embraced her American upbringing while maintaining a connection to her heritage. Her experiences reflect the confidence and adaptability often associated with second-generation Indians who navigate hybrid cultural spaces.

REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA: A BROADER PERSPECTIVE

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.32.01.91

Beyond films and television, media platforms such as YouTube, social media, and podcasts have emerged as powerful tools for second-generation Indians to share their experiences. Content creators like Lilly Singh and Hasan Minhaj have used their platforms to highlight issues of identity, intergenerational conflict, and cultural negotiation.

Lilly Singh and Hasan Minhaj

Lilly Singh, a Canadian-Indian YouTuber and comedian, frequently addresses themes of cultural hybridity and family dynamics in her sketches. Her content resonates with second-generation Indians who relate to her humorous depictions of strict parents, cultural festivals, and the challenges of growing up in immigrant households. Similarly, Hasan Minhaj's stand-up special *Homecoming King* delves into his experiences as a second-generation Indian-American. Minhaj candidly discusses intergenerational conflicts, racism, and the search for identity, providing an authentic representation of the struggles faced by second-generation Indians.

CONCLUSION

The representation of second-generation Indian diaspora in literature, films, and cultural studies highlights the complexities of their experiences, particularly in relation to intergenerational conflicts and hybrid identities. The second generation's struggles to reconcile their inherited Indian heritage with the dominant culture of their host societies reflect broader issues of identity, belonging, and cultural negotiation. By examining works such as Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*, as well as films like *Bend It Like Beckham*, this paper underscores the significance of diaspora narratives in shedding light on the second-generation experience. These representations not only highlight the challenges faced by second-generation individuals but also celebrate their ability to create hybrid identities that transcend cultural boundaries. Ultimately, fostering intergenerational dialogue and embracing cultural hybridity can help bridge the gap between generations, enabling second-generation diaspora to assert their identities and contribute meaningfully to multicultural societies.

REFERENCES

1. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
2. Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003.

10.48047/jocaaa.2024.32.01.91

3. Nair, Mira, director. *The Namesake*. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2006.
4. Syal, Meera. *Anita and Me*. Flamingo, 1996.
5. Chadha, Gurinder, director. *Bend It Like Beckham*. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2002.
6. Kureishi, Hanif. *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Faber & Faber, 1990.
7. Mishra, Vijay. *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora*. Routledge, 2007.
8. Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge, 1996.