



RESEARCH ARTICLE

**CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT IN *MADRAS ON RAINY DAYS*: A STUDY OF TRADITION AND IDENTITY**

Bhumika Devi

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Habraghat Mahavidyalaya

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Diaspora refers to a literary theory that addresses feelings of conflict, cultural dislocation, anxiety, and more. The post-migration period brings in significant cultural changes among the migrated population, especially for the second generation. The second-generation diaspora is under constant pressure to create identity in a new place. The culture they follow at home and the culture they feel close to are totally different; their identity is constantly under negotiation. However, for the first generation, it is a question of tradition. In a world where different cultures are practiced, they crave their native traditions. Therefore, they continue to celebrate their native tradition at home, even in a foreign land. Hence, there seems to be a significant gap between the first and second generations of the diaspora, highlighting cross-cultural conflicts. The parents protect and celebrate their native culture, whereas the children entertain the culture of the host land, which is more akin to them. Samina Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days* exposes the conflict by representing two generations in diaspora, and how the parents force Layla to submit to their demands leads to her anxiety. The novel presents a nuanced portrayal of cross-cultural conflict through the experiences of Layla, an Indian-American woman who returns to Hyderabad for an arranged marriage. Drawing upon Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity, this article examines how tradition, religion, family expectations, and personal agency shape Layla's fragmented identity. Hall's notion that identity is not fixed but continuously produced through history, culture, and representation provides an effective theoretical framework for understanding Layla's psychological and cultural conflicts.

Keywords: *Tradition, Identity, Cross-culture, Conflict, Negotiation.**Author(s) retain the copyright of this article. Copyright© 2026 VEDA Publications.*

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Samina Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days* is a beautiful text that explores the predicament of an Indian-American Muslim woman who has experienced an immense cultural shift due to her marriage. The novel explores the tension between the Eastern tradition and Western individualism, showing how identity is under constant negotiation within diasporic space. However, it must be understood that Ali has not represented these two as opposites. The novel sheds light on how identity is created through both, rather than choosing sides. Layla's realization that identity cannot be inherited unquestioningly but is created through multiple interactions brings Hall's theoretical framework into practice in this novel.

Layla was brought up in an American neighborhood where she saw freedom and individual identity as core values. Interestingly, Ali has presented tradition paradoxically: on the one hand, it gives a sense of connection and belonging; on the other hand, it imposes restrictions. These two contradictory meanings reside in the same house, thereby creating a complex force for the residents to survive. Layla has been brought up in a space that encourages individual freedom over everything. However, the weight of South Asian culture at home led her to compromise her choice and opt for familial responsibility over individual freedom. The stark difference between the countries was always confusing to her. "Having been raised in both India and the US, for me, these differences in cultures, slight as they sometimes might be, had caused much confusion. Each time I arrived in India or the US, after spending half a year away, it was like turning a page and not knowing whether to begin reading the script from right to left or left to right." (Ali 8,9).

The tradition they follow at home, even in the US, helps establish their connection to their ancestral land. Despite the distance, following the same rituals, both religious and traditional, made the parents feel more connected to their homeland. This connection is what they wanted to revive in their daughter, Layla. However, her life is a culmination of both the home culture and the host culture. Therefore, Layla's identity could not be defined as so and so. Rather, it was a combination of both or between both.

The institution of marriage plays a vital role in this novel. For a South Asian Muslim family, marriage is a divine bond. Like any typical Indian family, Layla's parents decided on her wedding, denying Layla's wishes. Interestingly, Layla, despite growing up in a different world and witnessing a more open, modern Western world, decides to follow the path her parents showed her. Despite her having an affair, the tradition demanded that she change herself from who she really is, what she really wants, and how she feels. Zooming out, the traditional interference made her compromise her identity rather than give her a sense of belonging.

Her mother took her to an alim for treatment before her wedding, and she admits that she never raised her daughter to be modern. However, Layla was a modern thinker who would never believe in superstitions over reason. It clearly indicates how much different everything was for her. The cross-cultural conflict is very much visible when Ali makes Layla get torn between the two: "it was as though each nation had its own uniform and I wore the shirt of one and trousers of the other, and both sides were shooting at me. ...India was backward and primitive, exotic. America was morally bankrupt, a cultural



colonizer" (Ali 26). Moreover, her mother's constant reminders of how they have raised their daughter traditionally and her defensiveness about her upbringing despite living in America are very intense. Despite living in the country, they wanted their daughter to be raised as a traditional Muslim girl, knowing the differences between genders and gender appropriate behavior, which are very traditional in nature.

Moreover, Sameer is homosexual but has agreed to marry Layla due to the fear of being rejected by society. His decision to marry Layla is not merely a deception of Layla but also of himself. Traditional values and demands have forced him to break his sexual identity and submit to the social command. By showcasing these two characters' struggle to fit into a traditionally conservative society and, in the process, how they lose their true identities, Ali has beautifully highlighted the struggles of the second-generation diaspora. Unlike the hybrid culture, a culmination of both the homeland and hostland, these two characters are forced to adhere to their parents' native traditions, thereby creating a conflict between what they have learned so far and what they have seen practiced by their parents. It is no longer a combination of the two, but rather a force that pushes one out of their identity.

Other important traditions that are talked about in the novel are religious orthodoxy, gender roles, patriarchy, etc. However, Ali has not criticized the religion but has shown a path to understand the difference between religious tradition and superstition. Ali carefully distinguishes between religious spirituality and rigid traditionalism. When Layla meets religious healers, she understands how

religious superstitions let people control others. Moreover, strict gender roles, especially for women, come in direct contrast with what Layla saw in modern America. Her family and everyone in her society in Hyderabad believed that women should conform to conventional ideals of womanhood and remain obedient, modest, and devoted to their families. All the women in her neighborhood were defined by their connections to men in their lives. This expectation from her hampered her sense of identity; however, her mother believed in it. Female characters such as Layla's mother also illustrate how women internalize and transmit patriarchal traditions across generations. The novel, therefore, reveals that tradition often affects women more intensely than men.

Owing to all these challenges, Layla's identity is constantly negotiated. As Stuart Hall writes, "Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.'" (Hall 225). Identity is never fixed; rather, it is constantly evolving. Moreover, especially in terms of diaspora, identity is something that is created and recreated over and over again through a common shared history as well as constantly shifting experiences. Layla's encounter with different people in Hyderabad contributes to her development.

Hall discusses two ways of creating identity. The first defines identity as a shared cultural heritage rooted in common history. The second, which Hall considers more significant, views identity as something continuously produced through cultural practices, historical experiences, and representation. Owing to this theoretical understanding, Ali's protagonist creates her identity through dialogue with tradition, producing a self that is simultaneously



rooted and changing. Without opposing, but also without accepting unquestioningly, Layla chooses to redefine herself. In the modern world, with a traditional upbringing and religious faiths alongside superstitions and unnecessary orthodoxy, Layla chose carefully which elements to use and which to defy. At the end of the novel, we see a better negotiation, very much different from the conflict in the beginning.

The novel is an epiphanic journey of Layla from a revolt to a more defined woman. The cross-cultural conflict becomes a negotiation rather than a competition. Ali ends the novel making a positive contribution in the culmination of tradition and modernity. Layla's self-discovery is not purely Western but has resulted from the dialogue between the two. Ultimately, Ali suggests that tradition need not disappear in order for identity to evolve. Instead, identity emerges through dialogue with tradition, producing a self that is simultaneously rooted and changing. The novel thus contributes significantly to contemporary diasporic literature by portraying cross-cultural conflict as a creative, though often painful, process of self-formation.

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