

Mimicry of Indian Diaspora in America as Portrayed in Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte*

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Abstract: *This study aims to investigate how mimicry of the first-generation Indian immigrants who migrated to the United States is revealed in a novel Quichotte by Salman Rushdie. Deploying Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial concepts of mimicry, this study applies descriptive analytical method to analyze the processes and reasons of mimicry underwent by the five Indian immigrant characters in the United States: Ismail Smile (Quichotte), Dr. R. K. Smile, Miss Salma R., Awwal Sant (Evel Cent), and Brother (Sam DuChamp). The result of this study indicates that the mimicry of the five immigrant characters emerges from the process of assimilation and adaptations with the dominant Western culture as a consequence of living in Anglosphere society. The frequent attempts of imitation to achieve integration with the Western culture is represented in the form of mimicry. The mimicry attempts is also triggered in some characters with experiencing acts of discrimination and prejudice as they are seen as the Other by the dominant White society.*

Keywords: *Mimicry, Diaspora, Immigrant, Postcolonial, Indian American*

Introduction

Migration is a universal phenomenon and as old as humankind itself (Sharma, 2013). Stephen (2002) says that colonialism and migration are not dissimilar. That colonialism is just another form of migration, an institutionalized migration but its migrants still maintain strong links with their or their ancestors' former country. As both a noun there is a basic difference between colonialism and immigration. That colonialism is the colonial domination policy pursued by the powers of Europe, while immigration is the act of immigrating, the passing or coming into a country for the purpose of permanent residence (it is different to migration that is temporary in their movement).

It is obvious that postcolonial migrations will not exist in the first place without colonization. Postcolonial migrations is the inevitable consequence of decolonization. Ulbe Bosma in his book *Postcolonial Migrations and Identity Politics: Towards a Comparative Perspective* offers insightful and in-depth overview focusing on Postcolonial Migration. Western European countries were as ill-prepared for the Second World War to come as they were for its devastating consequences to their colonial empires. Even less did they anticipate the large-scale migrations that would accompany decolonization (Bosma, 2012). Since the era of decolonization starting from the end of the Second World War, transnational migration, the

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movement of human populations between states, is growing and has been changing in nature (Soguk, 1999). Transfers of sovereignty and constitutional changes (that were sometimes accomplished after serious armed struggles, sometimes after protracted negotiations, and often following a combination of both) from the colonizer to the colonized resulted in extensive, unforeseen movements of citizens and subjects to their former countries. According to Bosma, this wave of postcolonial migration affected the Western world as a former powers of colonizer as the result of decolonization, that liberates oppressed and colonized people as well as the liberation of land & territory.

In terms of their education, employment opportunities, and religion, postcolonial immigrants vary widely. Immigrants who have commonalities with the colonizer mostly in education and religion, also known as 'positive social capital' are more easily integrated (Bosma, 2012), while immigrants who do not possess this positive social capital tend to face more challenges. Many migrants, especially those who are skilled, economically secure, and welcomed in their host countries, do not share the struggle or the deep historical dislocation of the postcolonial. However, those many millions of immigrants who cross borders and live tenuous lives in inhospitable circumstances, facing issues of class, subjugation, and exploitation (Nair, 2013). Bosma also argues that the colonial background of immigrants did indeed carry some drawbacks. One cannot ignore the legacies of colonial societies with their racial prejudices. Many of this prejudices continued to exist as stereotypes in post-colonial metropolitan society.

In the present day, over 31 million people of Indian diaspora spread around the globe, who are Indian descent or origin (Williams, 2019). Since the early 20th century Indian people have migrated to the Western World, starting from the United Kingdom. Despite years of contact with Indians in Asia since the colonization era, it has only been in the last 20 years that British people have witnessed large settlements of Indians in England. This group of people is called British Indians or Indian Britons. People under this criteria are citizens of the United Kingdom whose ancestral roots are from India and includes people born in the UK who are of Indian origin as well as Indians who have migrated to the UK. British Indians comprise about 1.4 million people in United Kingdom, making them the single largest visible ethnic minority population in the country as well as making up the largest subgroup of British Asians and are one of the largest Indian communities in the Indian diaspora, (Chandra, 2013).

Not only to the United Kingdom, Indian people migrated to the to United States as well. Indians are among the largest ethnic groups legally immigrating to the United States. In the United States they are often referred as Indian Americans or Indo-Americans (not to be mistaken with the native Americans that is often called Indians as well). So in order to avoid confusion with the Native Americans, The United States Census Bureau uses the term Asian Indian to refer to this particular ethnic group. Indian Americans make up about 1.2% of the U.S population with a population of almost four million (Terrazas, 2010).

Since the first Indian came to the United States in the 1700s, the immigration of Indians has taken place in several waves. In the first decade of the 20th century, a major wave of immigration to California, mostly from the region of Punjab took place. Most of this early immigrants are Sikhs that became farmers and established their own community and farm in 1912 in Stockton, California. When the Immigration Act of 1917 was signed into law, South Asians, labeled as hindoos, were officially banned from immigrating to the United States. The

Supreme Court argued that the racial difference between Indians and whites was so great that the “great body of our people” would reject assimilation with Indians, as quoted from United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind (1923). In 1946 the Luce-Celler Act permitted only 100 Indians per year to come to America and gain citizenship. In the 1960s another significant large wave followed, mainly included college students and professional workers. It was in 1965 that a new Immigration and Nationality Act finally opened the doors of immigration for the Indian immigrants.

Has been used to discriminations in the past, these Brown diaspora unexpectedly found themselves was not the major target of racism in the United States (Rushdie, 2019). Many of these post-1965 immigrants started to adapt the American culture and lifestyle, hoping to assimilate with the majority and this practice is still apparent to this day. In postcolonial studies, this phenomenon is discussed further by theorist Homi K Bhabha (1994) who argues that the immigrants of the colonized often found themselves imitating the culture of the colonizer. In this imitating act in which he referred as mimicry, immigrants gradually adopted the colonized culture that ultimately lead to the possession of multicultural identities within them.

It must be reflected that research regarding diasporic phenomenon in literature is important to be conducted; to further improve the understanding of immigrant culture and the challenges they have to endure in the new foreign land.

Literature Review

In the simplest term, an immigrant means a person living in a country other than that of his or her birth. As defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, an immigrant is the one that immigrates, such as a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence. The term comes from the Latin word *migrare*, which means "wanderer". According to the Oxford dictionaries, immigrants are the person that moves to a destination country of which they are not natives or where they do not possess citizenship to settle as permanent residents or naturalized citizens.

The term "immigration" was coined in the 17th century, referring to non-warlike population movements between the emerging nation states. When people crosses national borders during their migration, they are called migrants or immigrants from the perspective of the destination country. In contrast, from the perspective of the country from which they leave, they are called emigrants or outmigrants (Bosma, 2012).

"Diaspora" originates from the Greek term (*diaspeirō*) that means "I scatter" or "I spread about". Bill Ashcroft (2007) defines Diaspora as the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions. He adds that diaspora is a central historical fact of colonization because colonialism itself was a radically diasporic movement, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlement of millions of Europeans over the entire world.

According to Mambrol (2019) diaspora refers to people who have been displaced or dispersed from their homelands, and who possess and share a collective memory and myth, and the nostalgic reminiscence of “home” or an inherited ideology of “home” becomes a personal identity as well as a collective identity of members of a particular community. They are not rooted in one location, and live in the memories of their “Imagined homelands.”

Salman Rushdie uses the term "Imaginary Homeland" to refer to this thing (the term is also used as a title of his 1991 essays). In her dissertation a German researcher Antje Missbach states that it was until the 1970s that the "diaspora" term was exclusively used to refer the Jewish, Armenian, and Greek diaspora that had been scattered all around the world for centuries.

Homi K. Bhabha is one of the important scholars of postcolonial studies. Bhabha is mostly well known for introducing the concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence into the postcolonialism. Being a concept that has been highlighted by many of postcolonial writers, mimicry is commonly seen as when members of a colonized society imitate the culture of their colonizer, in aspects such as language, dress, politics, or attitude. A desire for a reformed and recognizable Other, that is Mimicry as stated by Bhabha, "of subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 1994: 86). When the colonizer encourages subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening. This is because mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever, it mimics. The colonizers and the colonized are becoming alike because of the continuing practice of colonizer's culture in the form of mimicry. Despite of this, they are still different (Nabu,2009).

The novel *Quichotte* by Salman Rushdie explores in the depth about the Indian American immigrants and their processes of survival and adaptation in the United States. As an immigrant and a newcomer to the American soil, blending into their surrounding's culture through mimicry is important to penetrate the society and to be accepted. The process of mimicry is experienced in the novel by the Indian immigrant characters. They are the main character, Ismail Smile also known as "Quichotte", Miss Salma. R, Dr. R. K. Smile, Evel Cent (Awwal Sant) and the characters in the outer story, (this novel is a metafiction that there is a story within a story. Quichotte's realm is in the inner story), and Sam DuChamp or also called "Brother" (the writer who writes the story of Quichotte).

Methodology

The descriptive analytical interpretative method is used in this study to answer the research question and to analyze the data of the study. The data are in the form of selected quotations from the novel that represent the mimicry found on the diasporic characters. The data will be analyzed based on the interpretation. Then the data will be analyzed in the perspective of postcolonialism, utilizing Homi k. Bhabha's theory of mimicry. The results are interpreted to meet the object/purpose of the study. The conclusion of the study will be drawn based from the interpretation of the data.

Findings & Discussion

The immigrant characters in *Quichotte* that are Indian-Americans, show their experience as diaspora and constantly negotiated their identities by imitating their Indian and American cultures in order to be accepted by the majority population in their surroundings. They hope that as they attempt to do mimicry, they will not be seen as the Other anymore.

1. Ismail Smile (Quichotte)

The novel *Quichotte* portrays how the main character who was a first generation Indian American immigrant showed his multicultural hybrid identities by initially mimicking the American lifestyle and values to assimilate into the dominant culture.

As a foreign immigrant, living in the United States requires Ismail Smile to mimic the majority in order to be treated like one of them. Like every other immigrants living in a new cultural environment, Quichotte's efforts to be assimilated into the American culture encompass a number of specific lifestyle components such as ways of speaking, fashion, diet, personal relationship, behavior, and even political views (Singh, 2009). Quichotte's act of mimicry is part of becoming hybrid in identity of being Indian who is living in an American cultural space.

The protagonist's sign of mimicry is exhibited in the early part on the novel, on the narrations of the origin of his last name, Smile.

The unusual surname Smile, by the by, was the Americanized version of Ismail, so the old traveling salesman was really Mr. Ismail Ismail, or, alternatively, Mr. Smile Smile. He was a brown man in America longing for a brown woman, but he did not see his story in racial terms. He had become, one might say, detached from his skin. (p.10)

Quichotte's surname "Smile" symbolizes himself as a character of elderly Indian gentlemen with a charming, disarming smile as a salesman. The last name Smile is an Anglicization of the Indian personal name Ismail. Later it will be revealed in the novel that the Smile surname was adopted by Duleep Smile, the alleged ancestor of the Smile family who first came to the United States in 1896. The name Duleep Smile itself is an example of cultural hybridity in naming. Duleep is a Hindu Rajput name, derived from the name Duleepshinji, and Smile is a Western-style name. Upon his arrival in America, Duleep Smile adopted the Western-sounding name in hope to further assimilate with the American society.

Anglicization of personal name is the change of non-English-language personal names to sound nearer English sounds. It can be defined as substitution of equivalent or similar English personal names in the place of non-English personal names (Biernat, 2018). Here the Indian name Ismail was Anglicized into the more English-sounding word, Smile. Anglicization of personal names can be viewed as a form of mimicry. Homi K. Bhabha explains that mimicry is "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994). It refers to the determination of the Other to signify themselves as the colonizer. They may acquire certain qualities but they will never be 'them'.

Still related to the aspect of personal naming, Ismail Smile's decision to adopt his pen name "Quichotte" was affected by the mimicry of his father as it came from his father's favorite music. When the son and father lived in Paris, Ismail's father often played vinyl record of Jules Massenet's opera *Don Quichotte*. The artistic painter father's classical music taste can be interpreted as a manifestation of mimicry as they were living in France; attempting to adapt the dominant culture of the country, in this case its music preference.

Just think back to your favorite piece of music when you were a boy! I know, these days you prefer the warblings you hear on American Idol

or The Voice. But back in the day, you liked what your artistic father liked, you adopted his musical taste as your own. Do you remember his favorite record?" Whereupon the half-dream-Smile produced, with a flourish, a vinyl LP which half-awake-Smile recognized at once. It was a recording of the opera Don Quichotte by Jules Massenet. "Only loosely based on the great masterpiece of Cervantes, isn't it," mused the phantom. "And as for you, it seems you're a little loosely based yourself."

It was settled. He climbed out of bed in his striped pajamas—more quickly than was his wont—and actually clapped his hands. Yes! This would be the pseudonym he would use in his love letters. He would be her ingenious gentleman, Quichotte. He would be Lancelot to her Guinevere, and carry her away to Joyous Gard. He would be—to quote Chaucer's Canterbury Tales—her verray, parfit, gentil knyght. (p. 11-12)

One morning, Ismail Smile was having a monologue and recollecting his memories living with his father in Paris. As a kid Ismail Smile adopted his father musical taste as his own and Massenet's Don Quichotte as his favorite. This childhood memories inspired Ismail to adopt Quichotte pen name; just like the opera was loosely based on Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote, the Quichotte name was also loosely based on himself. Liking a Western classical music and adopting it as a name can be interpreted as an act of mimicry by Ismail Smile.

2. Dr. R. K. Smile

Dr. R. K. Smile is the protagonist's wealthy cousin. In the story the character is narrated as a successful first-generation Indian immigrant who had made fortune in America as an owner of a pharmaceutical company, the company where Dr. Smile hired his cousin Ismail Smile (Quichotte) as a chief salesman. At the character introduction section, mimicry of the character can be seen on the narration describing Dr Smile's house, that was built in the Colonial Revival architectural style.

He loved to play the games of Indian childhoods, was a whiz on the carrom board at his Colonial Revival home on Peachtree Battle Avenue, sponsored a team in the "hard tennis ball" Atlanta Cricket League ("We play casual cricket but we wear professional outfit!"), and from time to time organized informal kabaddi competitions in Centennial Park. (p.72)

Such architectural preference of the personal residence indicates the character's personality as well as his act of mimicry of the dominant Western Culture. Dr. Smile's act of sponsoring a cricket team and continued to play Indian childhood games was a sign of the result of his mimicry, as Bhabha (1994) said that the result is a blurred copy, not purely the same as hoped by the colonizer. While mimicking the Western culture in a blurred copy, he did not fully replace his original Indian identity.

In this passage Dr. Smile can be seen attempting to mimic the Southern American culture.

*The aircraft was his favorite toy. Sometimes on a still and sunny day he took it up from Hartsfield-Jackson just to potter about in the sky for a few hours, over Stone Mountain and Athens (pop. 115,452), Eatonton (pop. 6,555), and Milledgeville (pop. 18,933), the Chattahoochee and Talladega forests, or the route of Sherman's march. Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, Brer Rabbit, the Tree That Owns Itself, and the War between the States were all down there and he was above them, feeling at such moments like a true son of the South, which of course he was not. He had tried to read *Gone with the Wind* and to learn the words of "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah" and "Old Folks at Home," but fiction and music weren't his thing. (p.83-84)*

The entrepreneur doctor liked to take a flight with his personal jet, flying on the top of General Sherman's march route in American Civil War. It made Dr. Smile felt like he was a true Southerner, which is not, because he was bound to his Indian identity by ethnicity.

He tried to mimic the Southerner by reading *Gone With the Wind*, listening to Southern music like "Old Folks at Home", and learning Southern words like "Zipadeedoodah". But in the end he could not, as he was not into fiction and music. He once said that "I am a pharmacist, I make pills" to emphasize that he did not put really much detailed attentions towards culture things. As said by Bhabha (1994), when the colonized tries to imitate the colonizer, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy'.

3. Miss Salma R

Miss Salma R, whose Ismail Smile watched on *Salma* show and being his delusional love, was narrated as a successful former Bollywood actress who moved to Hollywood. Originally born as Muslim Bombay citizen, she came from a dynasty of stars; her mother and grandmother was a successful Bollywood actress. Miss Salma chose to move to Hollywood instead of staying at Bollywood after the death of her mentally-unhealthy mother.

"She had led a charmed life. She came from fame and money and made even more money and achieved even greater fame on her own, becoming the first Indian actress to make it big (very big) in America, to cross what might be called the -wood bridge from Bolly to Holly-, and then transcended even Hollywood to become a brand, a television talk-show superstar and titanic cultural influencer, in America and India too." (p.41-42)

Salma's departure from Bollywood to Hollywood, from East to West portrays the choice of identity that must be taken, as Stuart Hall said that Identity is the matter of is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. In his 1996 essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Stuart Hall argued that cultural identity is not only a matter of "being" but of "becoming", "belonging as much to the future as it does to the past". From Hall's perspective, identities undergo constant transformation, transcending time and space. As someone who comes from the formerly British colonized India, Miss Salma had chosen what she wanted to be. Leaving India for a promising career in Hollywood, Miss Salma established her new half-identity as an American, but not purely, because she still retains her Indian identity.

During her times in India after the death of her mother, she left her family residence at Juhu Mansion and resided in a new home. The Estate complex was named in the style of British residential area.

Westfield Estate, as this little group of villas and apartment blocks was known—this microscopic urban speck from which the entire universe was born!—was the creation of an Anglophile developer called Suleman Oomer, also the builder of the somewhat similar Oomer Park properties down the road. He gave many of the buildings majestic-sounding English names: Windsor Villa, Glamis Villa, Sandringham Villa, Bal Moral, Devonshire House, and even Christmas Eve. (p.45)

Naming villas and apartments with English style names, this passage can be interpreted as a form of mimicry. The villa itself was named by an Anglophile, Suleman Oomer, that can be seen as a result of cultural mimicry by the Indian society. In mimicry the members of a colonized society imitate the culture of their colonizer. A desire for a reformed and recognizable Other, that is Mimicry as stated by Bhabha, “of subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha 1994: 86). When the colonizer encourage subject to ‘mimic’ the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a ‘blurred copy’.

4. Evel Cent (Awwal Sant)

The sign of mimicry had already shown since the character is introduced into the story. Upon his arrival in America, he changed his original Indian name Awwal Sant into Evel Cent. The character appeared for the first time in the story when Quichotte watches the TV and saw a familiar Indian-faced entrepreneur on his favorite TV show, Salma.

What caught his attention on this occasion was not his typically favored fare, but an interview with the celebrated American scientist, entrepreneur, and billionaire of Indian origin Evel Cent. The name Evel Cent was itself an invention, perhaps derived, Quichotte surmised, from the more Indian sounding Awwal Sant, or something similar. (p.206)

Quichotte assumed that the name Evel Cent was probably an invention derived from an original Indian name Awwal Sant, and to assimilate himself in America he changed his name. The same assumption was also expressed by Quichotte's sister when she met Awwal Sant for the first time in her youth.

His name made an impression on me. Evil Scent. ‘You’ve got the right name for this world,’ I thought, but managed not to say. He probably heard variations on that theme all the time anyway. But he chose that name. Awwal Sant, his real Indian name, would have been just fine but he had rejected it. (p.261)

As the Other, and the immigrant, Awwal Sant changed his real name into Evel Cent in an attempt to integrate with the Americans. The practice of anglicizing personal names is not

something uncommon amongst the immigrants in the Anglosphere countries. Anglicization of personal name is the change of non-English-language personal names to sound nearer English sounds. (Biernat, 2018). Anglicization can be viewed as a form of mimicry. Homi K. Bhabha explains that mimicry is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994).

5. Brother (Sam DuChamp)

The mimicry aspect can be found when Brother continued to use pen name Sam DuChamp to veil his ethnic identity after reflecting Queen's vocalist decision to change his name from Farrokh Bulsara to Freddie Mercury. Reflecting racial discrimination and violence happened towards Indians in America that had intensified after the World Trade Center incident in 2001, Brother decided that his Western-sounding pen name was probably worth to wear.

Yes, the name on the books veiled his ethnic identity, just as Freddie Mercury veiled the Parsi Indian singer Farrokh Bulsara. This was not because the Queen front man was ashamed of his race but because he did not want to be prejudged, did not want to be ghettoed inside an ethnic-music pigeonhole surrounded by the bars of white attitudes. Brother felt the same way. (p.30)

....and suddenly it seemed to Brother that maybe the mask of a pen name was worth continuing to wear. There were too many hostile eyes looking at people like him now. Better to be Sam the Sham. The spy guy. (p.31)

Usage of anglicized Western name by Brother was meant to avoid racial discrimination and prejudice. Brother did not want to be known as an Indian just like Freddie Mercury did not want to be seen as the Other by the white people. Brother then proceeded to adopt the name 'Sam du Champ' (a reference to the French surrealist artist Marcel du Champ) to veil his ethnical origin. It can be seen that Brother had wanted to be known as a Western writer since he adapted a Western name instead of using his original Indian name. So in this case Brother can be classified as a person who does mimicry, to be a Western to avoid racial discrimination.

In his youth Brother was sent into an English boarding school, just like the protagonist character in his book Quichotte. At that time Pa and Ma had separated and had their own residence; Pa still living in the family house Soona Mahal while Ma had lived in a new house in Noor Ville.

And neither Soona Mahal nor Noor Ville felt like home anymore to a young man intoxicated by the sixties in the West. Meanwhile Sister, at fifteen, stayed in Bombay. At first, the siblings tried to preserve some sort of relationship by playing long-distance chess with each other like good smart Indian children (p.38)

It is said that Brother was intoxicated by Western culture in 60's. Brother was sent to a boarding school in London by his parents. Having a contact with the Western world made Brother feel his parent's home, as a strange place that he did not belongs to. A house should

feel as a home but Brother did not feel that way. This uncertain feeling about identity that started from mimicry will potentially lead to ambivalence.

Conclusion

A masterfully-told journey of Indian American immigrants life living far from the Indian homeland, *Quichotte* by Salman Rushdie portrayed struggles and life as a first generation Indian immigrant in the Western world, both in America and Great Britain. The immigrant characters' reaction to the cultural clashes in their surroundings and within themselves lead their question of identity caught between two opposing American and Indian culture.

All of the immigrant characters faced challenges in the foreign land to adapt with their surroundings, by the process assimilation and adaptations manifested in form of mimicry. Immigrants gradually adopted the colonized culture that ultimately lead to the possession of multicultural identities within them.

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