

Character Analysis of Maxine in The Namesake

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The story of “Namesake” is an interesting illustration of the conflicting emotions of generations that intensely affected the central characters’ lives. The story begins with the child of ‘Ashok and Shisha in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Lahiri).

The couple belonged to Bengali tradition which has the norm of naming the child in a ceremony, but in contrast to their traditions, they had to name the child soon after release from a hospital because of the formality of name filling in a birth certificate. This step is shown to be the first phase of the family turning their face from the root of their traditions. The couple named the child after the name of a Russian novelist because of an event that deeply impacted his father’s life. Hence, as an act of respect and gratitude, he named his child Gagoli. This is shown to be the second conflicting concern that confronts the family’s traditions as the name was completely new to the traditional and cultural heritage of the family.

Gogoli was raised as an individual born into a borrowed [culture that left him intensely inspired by American Pop](#) culture in contrast to his own. The inspiration from [American culture](#) made him rebellious towards his traditions and inspired him to adopt looks and attributes that could make him sound like an American. Hence, for this purpose, Gagoli changed his name to Nikhil when he was admitted to college. However, he was still called by his original name in the family. This specific point, sticking to tradition and trying to break all connections with the norm, is an element of confusion and conflict in the story. The effect of this dispute influences each of Gagoli’s relations. Firstly, it affected his relationship with his father with whom he started building distance as somewhere in his subconscious it was the thought in his mind that his connection with his father is the bond that has kept him intact with his traditional heritage and norms. He then started mating girls with Anglo-American girls just to cut the cord with his traditions by getting involved with a girl of an entirely different culture and background.

He started growing intimate with Maxine. She was also Anglo-African and had a completely different background than Gagoli’s. This point became the centre of interest to Gagoli, and he began getting involved in his family of Maxine. He started dealing with his family as if it was his family. However, in making efforts to be a part of Maxine’s family and getting close to them, he almost got disconnected from his family and left them unattended. His unnecessary inspiration with the American culture and intense desire to intermingle with a native culture made him close his eyes towards his roots. However, in this process, he lost his father and didn’t even spare some time to meet with him and say goodbye. At this point, the story focuses on the pain and suffering resulting from the conflict of reconciling different societal cultures. It displays the impact of this conflict on the personality of an

individual. Gagoli is shown to be overwhelmed with the thought of leaving his father in his life in an effort to get disconnected from his tradition.

Maxine's character and his father's nature are shown as the two polar zones of conflicting values and traditions, and the state depicts the essence of [American culture](#) versus Indian culture. The effect of this conflict led Gagoli to get close to Maxine in the earlier phase at a time when he was ambitious towards indulging in other traditions. However, as soon as he realized the strength of his tradition and values, he found the traditions of Maxine less important than his traditions. Thus, Gagoli lost interest in Maxine and left her after the demise of his father. This event made it evident that Gagoli could not reconcile or balance between the cultures; that is, from the one from which he belonged, and the one in which he was living.

The other measure for analyzing the impact of the influence of this conflict of culture could be witnessed with the study of Gagoli's relations with Moushumi. He met her after leaving Maxine. She was used to studying with her in college. She belonged to the same traditional and cultural background. He felt immediately comfortable with her and married her after a year of dating. Although marriage brought the two characters together, the conflict of traditions was still an evident factor as the different styles and preferences of the two people were profoundly influenced by it. The liberal attitude and open style of West took over Moushumi, and she started getting involved with another person by having an extramarital affair with a guy named Dimitri Desjardins.

Hence, the clear message of the story when considered from the perspective of cultural conflicts is that the essence of the two different cultures is quite contrasting against each other, While Indian culture is submissive, the American culture is liberal. Being called an American Indian is a sign of confusion and imbalance by default. Hence, the conformity of the two traditions with a single set of values is impossible. Only the conflict of conduct instigates when two cultures get mixed. He himself was the first example of this contradiction with subsequent imbalance and soon after getting married to Moushumi he had the same experience with her. Under the influence of Western traditions, she left him and carried an extramarital affair. However, at the end of the story, Gagoli is shown to have adjusted to the situation when he is presented to find the novel by his name. This novel was gifted to him by his father on his fourteenth birthday long before. His calm attitude and concentration while reading show that balance could only be achieved in such multicultural spaces with attention focus and dedication over personal values only.

Work Cited

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. 1st ed. London: Fourth Estate, 2003. Print.