Character Analysis of Maxine in The Namesake

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The story of “The 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).

Naming Gogol and the First Break with Bengali Tradition

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 filling in a name on a birth certificate. This step is shown to be the first phase of the family turning their faces away from the roots of their traditions. The couple named the child after 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 Gogol. 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.

Americanization and Rebellion Against Cultural Roots

Gogol 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, Gogol 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 Gogol’s relations. Firstly, it affected his relationship with his father, with whom he started building distance, as somewhere in his subconscious was the thought that his connection with his father is the bond that has kept him intact with his traditional heritage and norms. He then started dating Anglo-American girls just to cut the cord with his traditions by getting involved with a girl of an entirely different culture and background.

Maxine as an Entry into American Family Life

He started growing intimate with Maxine. She was also Anglo-African and had a completely different background than Gogol's. This point became the centre of interest to Gogol, and he began getting involved in Maxine's family. He started dealing with her family as if it were 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 from American culture and intense desire to intermingle with a native culture made him close his eyes to 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. Gogol 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 and Ashoke as Opposing Cultural Poles

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 Gogol to get close to Maxine in the earlier phase at a time when he was ambitious about 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, Gogol lost interest in Maxine and left her after the demise of his father. This event made it evident that Gogol could not reconcile or balance between the cultures; that is, the one to which he belonged and the one in which he was living.

Moushumi and the Persistence of Cultural Conflict

The other measure for analyzing the impact of the influence of this conflict of culture could be witnessed with the study of Gogol's relations with Moushumi. He met her after leaving Maxine. She used to study with him 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 the West took over Moushumi, and she started getting involved with another person by having an extramarital affair with a guy named Dimitri Desjardins.

Reconciliation Through Personal Values

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. While Indian culture is submissive, 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. A conflict of conduct is instigated 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 on an extramarital affair. However, at the end of the story, Gogol is shown to have adjusted to the situation when he is presented finding the novel bearing 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 focused attention and dedication to personal values only.

Work Cited

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