

Identity Crisis in the Fiction of Samina Ali focusing on Madras on Rainy Days

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Abstract:

This research paper focuses on the identity crisis of the main character, Layla, in Madras on Rainy Days. This novel is written by Samina Ali. The researcher explored the critical conditions and the crisis of women's identity in patriarchal society. The marginalization of women is a significant component in the novel that represents the patriarchy in the society. It focuses on the egalitarian philosophy of the community which hardly visible in real life. The main character of the story experienced two lives i.e. the modern which was there in America and the second is in India. She was forced to accept the proposal of arranged marriage. She was trapped into the confusion of two identities that ultimately leads to her identity crisis. Layla, the main character was confused with her identity and existence in human society. She was treated as commodity which was used and then forgot. This research is an attempt to identify the traces of identity crisis in this novel.

Keywords: Identity, displacement, marginalization, cultural & religious Identity.

Introduction:

Madras on Rainy Days received Rona Jaffe Foundation Award in 2004 for Fiction. It also received PEN, Hemingway Foundation Award in 2005. And also, Roman Etranger Award in 2005 in France. The book was selected as the best debut novel of the year by Poets & Writer magazine ("Madras"). The book series, Madras on Rainy Days, explored the life of Layla, the main character in the story. The author of this book has explained the situation of an Indian-American Muslim girl, Layla. She had to accept the proposal of her arranged marriage by her parents. She was trapped into the tradition of the marriage system. She was also trapped into the religious and orthodoxy restrictions ("Madras"). The main character of the story has to face the orthodoxy and religious dogma that restrict the freedom of her. She was living in America where religious restrictions were not so much dominating. But when she came in India, she experienced the rigid and incorrigible religious and cultural dogma that cannot be over-crossed ("Madras").

It is the story of commitment like marriage and before the first appearance of life changing love. It was very treacherous passage. For the girl who was living in America, it

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became difficult to accept the marriage proposal only because of their parents forced her to do it. Layla, the main character of the story lives two kinds of lives, the life in America for half year and remaining half year, she used to live her life in India. She was trapped into two lives. The American life represents the freedom that gives the pleasure of living by doing the things according to our needs and interest whereas the traditional and orthodox life is full of rituals and duties that may be difficult for the women who lived a happy life with freedom in America. Cultural contradiction is a symbolic representation of the situation where a girl is pregnant before marriage and it cannot be accepted by any Indian. It could be a normal thing in USA but in India it could be a matter of life and death for a woman. The arranged marriage is like a punishment for Layla. The most important aspect of the story which cannot be neglected is that the social aspects could not be sacrificed for an individual interest. Layla was pregnant before marriage. This could harm her life badly if she married with the person to whom her marriage was fixed.

Layla was paralyzed virtually. This girl was caught between two cultures. There is untimely convergence that makes for a closing down rather than opening of new possibilities. In fact, parenthood is constantly in peril or jeopardy throughout this book. Layla's unintended pregnancy puts her life in risk, both literally and in terms of her ability to act independently. Later in the book, her close friend discovers she is expecting a much-desired child, and we follow along as she and her husband face impossibly difficult challenges. In this book, it's difficult for life to take off safely.

Layla watches as her mother yells and begs at the person on the other side of the door. Time moves forward as she stands perfectly still, a straightforward illustration from which Ali deftly conveys the fundamental ideas of the book: My lips feel warm as a thin strip of sunshine passes across them, and I imagine this is how red lipstick should feel red for weddings. But soon, I start to feel uncomfortable, and the sweat on my back and neck moistens the cotton sheet that's under me, creating an impression. In this book, things never quite look or feel the way they should. The print on the bed cover depicts Layla's uneasy stasis. Layla continues in her voice:

But I stay still. I remain still for the remainder of the day. The ribbon of light descends my body as the sun passes the opaque sky. After letting my lips slide across my throat, it proceeds to slice through my breasts, stomach, pelvis, and thighs before ultimately becoming too weak and retreating to the turquoise wall. This is the only way that I have ever kept track of time. Eventually, it becomes impossible to see the airborne dust particles. The contours of my own skin are not either. Everything becomes hazy and entangled, and where I once clearly noticed my big toe sticking straight, it might actually be my shirt's folds. (Ali Samina 112)

It was thought to be horrifying how, in this passage, the sun slices and dismembers her piece by piece, leaving her disembodied as evening falls. We can feel the weight of her immobility. Having accompanied Layla until the book's conclusion, I can understand Ali's harrowing account of it on two levels. The novel's main focus is on identity, despite the high stakes drama and all of the anticipated (and given) twists and turns. Where exactly do this

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young woman's body and soul's boundaries lie? How will she put herself back together after the cultural forces tear her apart?

America is portrayed by Ali as a clear blue sky seen through a window; it may be more intricate than it first appears, but it also invites the main character to soar. Ali portrays Indian culture as much more in focus and confining, in contrast to American society, which is faraway but liberating because it is out of her mother's sight. It has elements of a prison and a loving home, and there is a significant tension between the two. The mother who is writhing in pain on the other side of Layla's door is in the same predicament that other mothers throughout culture and time have been in: having witnessed the risks of allowing her daughter to escape the mould that tyranny places on women, she is doing everything in her power to keep her in that mould, even if it means losing her life. Mother of Layla is all too familiar with the horror of being left alone without the support of a kind spouse. She steadfastly refused to get a divorce when her abusive husband had an affair and wanted to leave the family, playing the role of his humiliated wife while he lavished everything on his second wife. We sense the soul-price she pays to hold on to the cultural lifeline her fictitious marriage provides for her in the passages where we witness her bringing Layla's father, her "husband," into her home. She views having a unique voice and passionate passion as luxury items that Indian womanhood just cannot afford, and so she makes an effort to instill these traits in her daughter out of love and certain mother desperation. At some level, Layla's mother is both a crusader and a saviour. The three main characters in this book Layla, Sameer, and Ali's ritual-heavy Indian culture must be acknowledged. This culture acquires a personality and an ambition of its own because to Ali's humorous and intimate portrayal of it. Layla was undergoing through the harsh procedure of marriage. Even after the first night of marriage she was not sure about her relation's stability. Her mother-in-law has to check everything in her i.e., whether she is suitable for the groom or not. She was confused with her identity and lost her existence as a human being. She was treated as a commodity by a patriarchal society. In Indian culture when a girl marries, then she has to leave her parent's house and go to her husband's one. She would be given a new identity in her new life. This life sometimes becomes very difficult to accept. In India and other counties also, many women have the same problem.

Little does Layla realise that Sameer, her planned spouse, also harbours a dark secret that puts both of them in danger. As the plot of the book proceeds ruthlessly, Layla and Sameer can be seen struggling to find some sort of human connection or even identity inside the oppressive cultural and familial structures that would otherwise engulf them. How much are Layla and Sameer prepared to give up in order being whole? This work has a rich, opulent emotional richness, and the moods are contagious. The book is written in the past tense, yet it almost reads like a journal because the narrator is searching through the events for meaning and guidance on what to do next. Layla contemplates her escape at one point when imprisoned once more (but not by her own choice this time). She also observes that her garments are becoming too small due to her prolonged idleness. In this manner, the reader is brought along for the voyage and shares in her agony and perplexity.

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It is odd that the characters often remind us of the subtext when Ali has already made it very apparent that Layla is suffering from a hole in her soul as a result of her battle for existence and identity. But due to the astounding brilliance of the rest, the one or two instances like this stand out so much more. Ali uses language in a seductive way. I keep getting drawn back into her words as I flip through the pages again to write this evaluation. I still have a hard time putting it down.

In Madras on Rainy Days, the freedom to forge one's own future is emphasised. As we read it, we are forced to consider the ways that we limit our own potential in an effort to survive in a dangerous environment. All cultures, to varying degrees, are hostile to the unprocessed person. Without facing the forces that undermine our creative and fertile potential, one cannot enter adulthood.

Conclusion:

Layla, the protagonist of the story, struggled with her sense of self and was uncertain about her place in her new family and culture. The identity dilemma that plagues women in patriarchal culture is obvious. They compromise their hopes and expectations because they are unsure about their identity. In comparison to the East, western nations provide women more independence. Even today, in orthodox society, customs and rituals that were outmoded in western countries are still practised. Layla was content with her life in America, but when she moved to a traditional household and lost her identity, she also lost her previous life.


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