

Cultural Identity as Portrayed in *Hana Khan Carries On* (2021) by Uzma Jalaluddin

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Abstract:

This study examines cultural identity in the main character of the story. The objective of this study is to explore the process of cultural identity formation, how the main character handle that identity, and the impacts of the formed cultural identity. This study uses a qualitative method, and the data collecting are reading the novel, categorizing quotations based on the research questions, and analyzing them using Homi K. Bhabha's theory. The findings show that the main character's cultural identity is formed through complicated interactions among different cultures, creating a third space for identity negotiations. The character indicates ambivalence and fluidity in her identity, echoing the uncertainty this hybrid space. Further, the formed cultural identity challenges prevailing narratives and encourages the formation of new, more comprehensive identities. The implications of this research emphasize the significance of understanding identity as an continuous process that is constantly growing, influenced by social interactions and power relations in society.

Keywords: Cultural Identity; Hybridity; Identity Formation; Third Space

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji identitas budaya dalam tokoh utama cerita. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi proses pembentukan identitas budaya, bagaimana tokoh utama menangani identitas tersebut, dan dampak dari identitas budaya yang terbentuk. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dan pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan membaca novel, mengkategorikan kutipan berdasarkan pertanyaan penelitian, dan menganalisisnya menggunakan teori Homi K. Bhabha. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa identitas budaya tokoh utama terbentuk melalui interaksi yang rumit di antara budaya yang berbeda, menciptakan ruang ketiga untuk negosiasi identitas. Tokoh tersebut menunjukkan ambivalensi dan fluiditas dalam identitasnya, menggemakan ketidakpastian ruang hibrida ini. Lebih jauh, identitas budaya yang terbentuk menantang narasi yang berlaku dan mendorong pembentukan identitas baru yang lebih komprehensif. Implikasi penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya memahami identitas sebagai proses berkelanjutan yang terus berkembang, dipengaruhi oleh interaksi sosial dan hubungan kekuasaan dalam masyarakat.

Kata kunci: Hibriditas; Identitas Budaya; Pembentukan Identitas; Ruang Ketiga

INTRODUCTION

Cultural identity can be interpreted as a characteristic in the form of a culture that distinguishes a nation or community group from other groups. Cultural identity is usually connected with beliefs, values, and practices, as culture intrinsically shapes the essence of those who engage with it (Joseph, 2012). Every community group or nation must have its own culture that is different from other nations. According to Hall (2015), this view of cultural identity is slightly familiar and uneasy, as it challenges our concept of 'cultural identity.' In this perspective, cultural identity is not a settled essence but rather a continuously evolving construct shaped by a mass of factors, including historical context, social interactions, and cultural interactions. In this way, cultural identity is understood as a fluid and active process continuously affected and reshaped by various external aspects. This idea of evolving cultural identity can be seen in Uzma Jalaluddin's novel *Hana Khan Carries On* (2021) where the main character's life images the complexity of navigating multiple cultural influences.

Hana Khan Carries On (2021) pursues the story of Hana, a 24-year-old South Asian Muslim woman living in Toronto who desires of seeking a career in radio. Hana begins an anonymous podcast where she concerns the struggles of being a South Asian woman and a child of immigrants and the daily challenges she faces. Throughout the novel, Hana fakes multiple roles, from managing her internship and assisting her family's struggling cafe to dealing with the new halal eatery that has opened across the street. As she faces forces from all demands, Hana also forms an anonymous bond with one of her podcast listeners. The novel profoundly examines issues of cultural identity as Hana navigates the discrimination and racism she faces as a hijab-wearing Muslim woman in Canada. Her background in cultural identity is one of personal growth as she realizes to balance the expectations of her immigrant family with her goals and aspirations.

The study aims to elaborate on the protagonist's cultural identity. The main focus is on three key aspects: the process of cultural identity formation, how the protagonist establishes and manages her identity, and the impact of her cultural identity on her interactions with others. This study's significance is that it has the potential to contribute to understanding cultural identity formation in literary contexts and its wider importance for society. By exploring how the main character struggle with her cultural identity, the research highlights the importance of recognizing identity as a fluid and growing process

affected by social interactions. The research gap in this study lies in the limited exploration of cultural identity within the precise context of modern South Asian Muslim women living in Western cultures, specifically as depicted in modern literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first previous study was done by Hamidah (2023) entitled “The Alienation of Indian Muslim Women in *Hana Khan Carries On* (2021)”. The study focuses on the theme of alienation faced by Indian Muslims living in America, mainly due to discrimination based on skin color and the hijab. The study employed Seeman's theory of alienation, which contained six types: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, self-estrangement, and social isolation. These categories were involved to analyze the emotional and societal challenges the novel's personalities faced—Hanaan Khan, Fazeela Khan, and Ghufuran Khan. Through qualitative approaches and narrative analysis, the study demonstrated how these characters encountered alienation as a minority individual in a largely non-Muslim community. The result effectively illustrated the different types of alienation; it primarily focused on the characters' alienation without exploring deeper parts of how they coped with or questioned their marginalization.

The second previous study written by Amrullah & Ikrima (2024) entitled “Islamophobia in Uzma Jalaluddin's *Hana Khan Carries On* (2021)” examined the issue of Islamophobia in modern Western societies, exploring how it is depicted in *Hana Khan Carries On*. The study frames Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism and analyzes how the novel images this through characters facing negative stereotypes, anti-Arab perspectives, and hate for Muslim values, especially regarding Muslim dress. The research uses the theory of cultural racism to emphasize the discrimination and challenges Muslim as the minority. The result shows the specific examples of Islamophobia and linking them to cultural racism, it could have explored more deeply how the personalities respond to and resist these prejudices, delivering a more balanced view of their personal growth and identity formation.

The previous studies on *Hana Khan Carries On* effectively highlight important social issues like alienation and Islamophobia via qualitative methods and narrative analysis, delivering valuable insights into the discrimination and marginalization of Muslim

minorities. Nevertheless, their scope is limited, as they primarily focus on external factors and do not deeply explore how characters manage with or fight marginalization or the internal growth of their identities. In contrast, my study shares similarities in methodology and the object but differs by offering a wider investigation of cultural identity, discussing how it is constructed and carried out in response to external challenges, and delivering a more comprehensive view of the main character' personal development.

Homi K. Bhabha's Perspective on Cultural Identity

Bhabha (2012) in his book emphasizes that existing within a world system where dominant economic and cultural forces are run away from people or countries can be an alienating experience, forcing individuals and groups to fight these contradictions and seek new spaces outside the "center and periphery" structures. This view on cultural identity relates closely with the concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and third space. Hybridity directs to the mixing of cultural factors that occur when individuals run between multiple cultural identities. In contrast, ambivalence is the continuous process of constructing oneself within changing environments. Bhabha's third space is essential as it represents the innovative, in-between area where these identities are arranged and hybridized. All three concepts are companions as they emphasize cultural identity's fluid and transformative essence for people as it responds to social exclusion and marginalization.

Hybridity

In exploring the deep meaning of cultural identity dynamic in modern life, Homi K. Bhabha emphasizes that hybridity acts as a critical idea for understanding the relations between different cultures (Bhabha, 2001, as cited in Dehdari et al, 2013). This concept indicates that identities are not fixed but relatively fluid, shaped by various impacts and relations. In contemporary literature, we often see characters live in multiple cultural backgrounds, mirroring their experiences' complexities as immigrants. Such representations challenge the traditional ideas of identity and inspire readers to rethink how they sense cultural differences. Moreover, identifying hybridity allows for a more inclusive understanding of identity, where diverse voices and stories come together. This approach eventually enriches our appreciation of literature and its role in managing



social issues, emphasizing the importance of embracing cultural diversity in increasingly related world.

Ambivalence

Ambivalence occurs from the complicated relationship between groups, where one group, often seen as the superior, influences the other. The influenced group thinks that embracing the traditions or values of the dominant group will make a better situation (Bhabha, 2006, as cited in Lazuardi & Laksono, 2021). This complex interplay emphasizes how individuality can be fluid and shaped by external influences, directing to a sense of hesitation. In today's world, people often face the challenge of balancing their cultural origin with global impacts. This struggle can create pressure, as people may feel force to work to standard norms while also desiring to celebrate their unique backgrounds.

Mimicry

Bhabha (1994, as cited in Setyowati, 2018) said that Mimicry concerns the act of adopting, adapting, or even repeating details from another culture. It entails an excessive representation of language, traditions, conducts, and ideas. This process can be seen as a form of flattery and a negotiation process within cultural dynamics. While it may originally appear like a simple copying of attributes, mimicry often reflects deeper intricacies of identity and power. In modern society, individuals often run between their cultural backgrounds and those of dominant cultures, constructing a unique combination of effects.

Third Space

The concept of the third space, emphasizing a space of mixing and blending (Bhabha, 1994, as cited in Bhandari, 2022). He examines how colonized individuals develop hybrid identities through interactions with the dominant culture during colonial rule and inequality. This idea helps comprehend identity formation's complexities in various cultural contexts. In today's globalized world, the third space can be seen in how people run numerous cultural influences. People often create new uniqueness by combining pieces from further cultures, which can lead to rich and varied faces of self.

Nevertheless, this blending also presents problems about cultural appropriation and the possible dilution of original traditions.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study employed a qualitative approach, focusing on words to analyze the cultural identity in the novel *Hana Khan Carries On*. As the qualitative research means to gather someone experiences, perceptions, and behavior (Tenny et al., 2017). The research issues were the main characters, and her backgrounds are shown in the novel. The data collection concerned reading the novel carefully and taking notes on important quotations connected to the research questions. The facts and reliability of the data were provided by using a methodical approach, and theory from expert by Homi K Bhabha to organize and analyze the collected quotes. The research was completed through several phases. First, the researcher read the novel to learn and understand the main character's journey and individuality struggles. Next, suitable quotations were specified and organized based on the research questions. Finally, the data was examined using Homi K. Bhabha's theory, focusing on concepts of cultural identity to analyze the character's cultural identity story.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Process of Identity Formation of the Main Character in the Novel *Hana Khan Carries On* (2021) by Uzma Jalaluddin

Ambivalence

It's complicated for the kids of immigrants. I'm not talking about the usual my parents don't understand thing. My parents believe in the power of choice, and they never asked me to sacrifice my dreams for theirs. Yet I feel like I should anyway. Where does that feeling come from? Is it just loyalty and strong family ties? Is it because, as part of a marginalized community, we all had to stick together to survive, and that sort of experience tends to become habit? Maybe it's about guilt. (Jalaluddin, 2021, p. 23)

This reflects Hana's ambivalence, struggling between her personal aspirations and cultural obligations. She struggles with her understanding of duty to her parents' values while desiring her own freedom. The quotation highlights the internal conflict aspect of identity formation in multicultural settings.

Discrimination Experience

“I blinked. Fighting the jihad? What was he talking about? I raised my hand to correct him. “Um, sir, jihad is not the fourth pillar of Islam. The fourth pillar is fasting during the month of Ramadan.” Mr. Nielson looked at me indulgently. “I know you might not be comfortable with the truth, Hana, but you don’t need to feel ashamed. Fighting the jihad is a pillar of Islam.” “No, it’s not,” I said. I could feel my face flushing. As far as I knew, Mr. Nielson was agnostic. Why wasn’t he listening to me, the only Muslim in his class?” (Jalaluddin, 2021, p.63)

This passage highlights Hana's experience with discrimination, where her teacher, an outsider, inaccurately explains her religion. According to Bhabha (2012), identity formation is shaped through interactions where minorities are marginalized.

Mimicry

I thought Biryani Poutine made the restaurant sound interesting—a fusion of Indian and Canadian cuisine. Even though we only serve Hyderabad food.” (Jalaluddin, 2021, p. 44)

This words of "Biryani Poutine" symbolizes Hana’s adaption of Canadian culture in her family’s restaurant, aligning with Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, where Hana combines aspects of both cultures to implore to a wider audience. Although they mainly serve traditional Hyderabad dishes, the restaurant’s name images an intended mimicry of Canadian cuisine, placing Hana between her two cultures. This mimicry is not just about imitation but a way to bridge cultural expectations in her society with her experience, making a distinctive identity that combines her heritage with her Canadian surroundings. Hana’s mimicry can be seen as both a process for acceptance and a slight piece on the cultural assimilation forces faced by immigrant people.

The Main Character Faces Identity Struggles in the Novel *Hana Khan Carries On* (2021) by Uzma Jalaluddin

Third Space

“As a Muslim, I have faith that things will work out the way they were meant to. But I also know I will be tested in this life, and I worry about those tests. I spend too much time wondering what will happen if I fail too” (Jalaluddin, 2021, p.82)

Hana navigates her faith and identity, reflecting on the struggles of living between different cultures and expectations. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" is evident here, Hana struggles to balance her cultural heritage and her personal aspirations. Her

acknowledgement of being tried in life says to the complex identity negotiations that children of immigrants often encounter, mainly when they belong to marginalized communities. Hana's thought highlights the internal struggle to stay faithful to her origin while following a self-definition path. Her experience shows how the third space serves as a place of uncertainty and a forum for forming an identity that adopts and combines diverse aspects of her life.

“I have decided to sell the restaurant, meri jaan. It might not be what you want, but it is my choice and I am at peace with it.” Mom had been telling me, in so many different ways, for weeks. She waited while I absorbed the news. I took a deep breath, pulling myself together. I would be all right, and my mother deserved to think about herself for once. It was time she got to choose. Choice. That was what my parents had gifted me. There is nothing more powerful than being able to make up your own mind about something. Nothing headier than reaching out your hand and saying, This. I choose this. (Jalaluddin, 2021, p. 279)

The decision to sell the restaurant is weighted with symbolic weight, as the restaurant symbolises a “third space” where Hana's South Asian origin meets her Canadian identity. For her mother, the restaurant represents a maintained connection to their past, a cultural enclave where their traditions and values can succeed. For Hana, nevertheless, this space has also evolved a source of force and burden. Her mother's choice to let go of the restaurant emphasises a generational and cultural shift, accepting change as a part of their identity's growth. The third space here highlights the dual nature of originality as both adaptable and traditional, catching Hana's complex struggle between preserving her cultural roots and adjusting to her evolving identity as a Canadian girl.

The Effect of Cultural Identity of the Main Character in the Novel *Hana Khan Carries On* (2021) by Uzma Jalaluddin

Hybridity

“It's complicated for the kids of immigrants. I'm not talking about the usual my parents don't understand thing. My parents believe in the power of choice, and they never asked me to sacrifice my dreams for theirs. Yet I feel like I should anyway. Where does that feeling come from? Is it just loyalty and strong family ties? Is it because, as part of a marginalized community, we all had to stick together to survive, and that sort of experience tends to become habit? Maybe it's about guilt. We are kids who benefited from the sacrifices our parents made when they decided to move

to a richer, safer country. If we then grow up to grow apart, have we become ungrateful villains?" (Jalaluddin, 2021, p. 32)

This quote speaks to the effect of cultural hybridity, a key element of Bhabha's theory. Hana struggles with the expectations of her immigrant parents and her own desires, embodying the hybrid identity that is neither fully Canadian nor fully tied to her South Asian roots. Hana's background indicates how hybridity can lead to both empowerment and pressure. It allows her to run multiple cultural worlds while also challenging her self-identity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, analyzing Hana's cultural identity within *Hana Khan Carries On* illustrates the complexity of identity formation among children of immigrants, especially within a multicultural in the Western society. In the novel, *Hana Khan Carries On* (2021) by Uzma Jalaluddin, the main character's identity formation process is observed by ambivalence, experiences of discrimination, and mimicry. She encounters various identity struggles through the concept of the third space, which acts as a domain of negotiation between her cultural origin and her current circumstances. Furthermore, her grown cultural identity defines hybridity, combining her original cultural experience with the results of her new environment. For future research, studying the psychological aspects of identity formation in *Hana Khan Carries On* is suggested. While this study has explored the sociological measurements, exploring Hana's internal psychological struggles and resilience could deliver deeper insights into the personal influences of cultural identity on individuals in running their multiple cultural.

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