

Ethnic Identity and Cultural Preservation in White Teeth a Novel by Zadie Smith

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Abstract--- *This paper analyses the cultural preservation as an ethnic identification in Zadie Smith's novel White Teeth (2000). The novel underlines the significance of legacy and roots while concentrating on the life of Muslim immigrants whose convictions and beliefs are impacted by British culture. The paper investigates how pro colonized immigrants are behaving to preserve their culture among a multicultural society such as Britain's. It also explains the later generations' assimilation to British culture. Depending on post war Britain's cultural theory of Raymond Williams taking culture as a whole way of life. The paper conducts an analytic qualitative method to reach at one of the important findings that is the dynamics of culture is vital in human lives. Furthermore, it reveals its relationship with environments since culture cannot be separated from synaptic elements of social life.*

Keywords--- *Postcolonialism, Ethnic Identity, Culture, English Novel.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Zadie Smith is the author of the award-winning novel *White Teeth*. She was born in 1975, in north-west London. The author's father was English and the mother a Jamaican, and she grew up in Willesden. The author can, therefore, identify with ethnicity and cultural preservation from her parents. In 1997, she graduated from King's College and wrote the *White Teeth* as her first novel. Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal are the main characters used in *White Teeth*. The two friends were hapless veterans in World War II, and together with their families, they became agents of England's irrevocable transformation [2]. Raymond Williams in his work *The Long Revolution*, 1961, emphasized on culture as a whole way of life. E.P. Thompson argues that culture is the way in which groups deal with the raw material of social and material existence. The two theories have been influential in the development post-war British cultural theory which relates with the novel *White Teeth*. Therefore, the dynamics of culture is important in human lives as it shows its relationship with nature since culture is the whole way of life.

Besides the lived forms of culture, other symbolic structures such as languages and codes are essential from structural point of view. Archie gets a second chance in life after getting a second marriage to Clara Bowden. Clara is described to be beautiful, albeit tooth challenged, from a Jamaican origin and half the age of Archie. They both brought forth a heir known as Irie. The intermarriages of the English with the migrants emphasizes the theme that we all have white teeth. Intrinsically, Samad waited for his bride to be born, he identified with his norms and values, and the couple produced twins. The two brothers took separate paths to confound Iqbal's effort in directing them to the Islamic faith [3]. The novel '*White Teeth*' reveals the modern life, flirting with disaster, embracing the comedy of daily existence and confounding expectations. It was set against London's racial and cultural tapestry, venturing

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across the former empire and into the past as it barrels toward the future. Thus, the novel is about ethnic identity and cultural preservation. Despite individuals origin, they found love and no conservation prevented them from marrying one another since they all could identify with the *White Teeth*.

The ethnically diverse families living in London are faced by various problems while living in a multicultural society. White teeth paint a picture of the first and the second generations struggling to integrate with other cultures. The novel emphasizes the importance of heritage and roots while focusing on the life of Muslim immigrants whose values and beliefs are influenced by British culture. In Bangladesh, Alsana and Samad Miah Iqbal struggled with their livelihood. The hope of their second-generation Muslim faith lies on the shoulders of Magid and Millat as they have a different perception from their parents. The book portrays them as one being in modern British society while the other one has an ethnic identity [2]. Irie, the offspring of Archibald Jones an Englishman and Clara, a Jamaican immigrant, feels confused about her character and tries to break loose. However, she knows that her ethnic identity is essential, and she focuses on the future by living for the present "In the end, your past is not my past and your truth is not my truth and your solution - is not my solution." [11].

A. Cultural Preservation and Identity in White Teeth

According to Althusser, he relates the autonomy of the ideological domain when he states "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices" [1]. Further, he emphasized on the principle of economic and processes relations. In the novel white teeth, Chalfens are the third generation of immigrants who are comfortable with the British culture, which shows that their origin may be different, but their teeth are similar. Conversely, the family is assimilated into the British culture as they represent the rich in society. Markus Chalfen, a genetic engineer, marries a biologist Joyce Chalfen. The couple focuses on the future, and they cut ties with past events. The family serves as a role model to Irie, Magid, and Millat. The novel setting dates back into the second World II in North London. There are many people from diverse cultures. Most of the immigrants have challenged the British culture and have not considered themselves as British [2]. Some ethnic groups have not been recognized by the British as part of them in the country. Thus, the Chalfens had been expected to carry on with their culture and social norms.

In *White Teeth*, illustrating the need for cultural preservations, tradition, and orientation of the past are essential since they do not make us different from others as human beings. An ethnic group has a common culture, and they are distinctive from others: origin influences immigrant's livelihood and actions. In the case of Samad, he wants his sons to carry on with their culture. He highly values its attributes since he is proud of his origin. "To Samad, as to the people of Thailand, Tradition was culture, and culture led to roots, and these were good, these were untainted principles [12]. That didn't mean he could live by them or grow in the manner they demanded, but roots were roots and roots were good. You would achieve nothing in telling him that weeds too have tubers. The first sign of loose teeth is something rotten, something immoral, and deep within gums. Roots were what saved, the ropes one throws out to rescue drowning men, to save their souls. The further Samad himself floated out from the sea; he was pulled down to the depths by a siren named Poppy Burt-Jones. He became more determined to create for his boy's roots onshore, deep roots that no storm or gale could displace.

Samad is, therefore, the best character to illustrate the need for the ethnic and cultural association. He is more convinced that the present should not change the true and pure principles. The color of the dental formula doesn't vary in different circumstances. In contrast, the second generation characters try to avoid the past and roots like the plague. Conversely, Samad is ready to live and die for the principles. He feels that British society is a threat to his roots and culture, and he is determined to preserve his traditions. Thus, he is determined to maintain the belief for his family for continuity of the culture. However, the father is not aware that his sons prefer British culture over their history.

Just as in capitalism theory, in the novel *White Teeth*, Millat is well aware that he will never receive the privileges of a British despite being born in Britain. In Britain, there is multiculturalism, and most of Pakistan parents prefer naming their children using English names to avoid possible discrimination due to their race. Some of the indigenous citizens are at times against the immigrants as they perceive that they are using up their resources freely [12]. Multiculturalism is a British policy as well as ideology. High level of immigrants was as a result of labor shortages in the country after the Second World War II where the government sourced immigrants. The Pakistanis and the Bangladeshis are job opportunities thieves, and those who are unemployed take aids from the government.

Immigrants secure lower class jobs as discrimination against the ethnic groups. Most of the Pakistanis get employment in hospitality fields since the smell of curry is associated with them. It is clear to Millat that his efforts are meaningless to the British state as the society disregards his religion, culture, and attires. His hopes die as he can never succeed in the country. "He knew that he, Millat, was a Paki no matter where Millat came from, that he smelt of curry [3]. He had no sexual identity, and he took off other citizens jobs. He had no responsibility; thus, he only bummed off the state. Immigrants were expected to go back to their own country, or stay in a foreign country and earn their bloody money for upkeep. They worshipped elephants and wore turbans. Millat resembled nobody, nor anyone who spoke like him, or felt like him. As an immigrant, he was ever on the news unless he had recently murdered him. It is for the reason of discrimination that Samad chooses to take his family to north London from East London as he feared for his kids. Life was more liberal in North London due to a high number of immigrants, and they felt free from discrimination.

Culture plays the role of shaping moral leadership and hegemony. In the novel, the Muslim felt that they owed an obligation to Allah and to their children to teach them religion as a way of preserving their culture. Samad Iqbal is not satisfied with the education system in Britain as it omits the teaching of Islam religion. His children are forced to take part in Christian festivals, which adds no religious value to them, such as the Harvest festival. His friends give him options of either sending his sons to Bangladesh or assimilate to the British culture. He feels the depth of England is corrupt towards his family [10]. However, Samad decides to educate his son through proper Islamic education. To achieve his goal, Samad chooses to send his sons to Bangladesh so that they can learn about their culture. Besides, Samad lacks enough capital to sponsor his two sons to learn in Bangladesh. He chooses to send his favorite son Magid since he had the potential of becoming a Muslim, and he could only afford to pay for him alone. The decision does not involve Alsana as she could have opposed it since there was a high danger of living in Bangladesh compared to life in Britain. Samad is a real character who shows the determination people are willing to

show for their ethnicity and to preserve their culture [10]. He is more than willing to risk the life of his son for the sake of the Muslim religion. He focused on passing his belief to the next generation.

Hardships are all over the world despite that some geographical places suffer higher than others. It is different for the people of Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, India, formerly Bengal. They live under the invisible finger of random disaster, flood and cyclone, hurricane and mud-slide. In their half of the country, the place is underwater. An uncountable number of generations have perished in Bangladesh on regular occasions just as the clockwork. Smith describes the state to be ridiculous as life expectancy is an optimistic fifty-two. The citizens are aware that when you talk about apocalypse when you speak about accidental death a masse, well, they are leading the way in that particular field. They will be the first to go, the first to slip Atlantis-like down to the seabed when the pesky polar ice-caps begin to shift and melt. Thus, all humans face challenges of life despite their race and ethnicity and culture.

The living conditions described in South Asia is unbelievable. It is a reason enough for Alsana to object to her husband's decision. He wants to send their son back to their country of origin. She is contented that her family and her relative's life are safe in Britain compared to South Asia [2]. There are adverse weather changes despite many problems occurring in Britain. Contrary, Samad thinks that the environment in Britain is conducive and spoils his sons. The situation in Britain will never make Samad's sons Heroes just like MangalPande. Magid and Millat are safe from disasters and natural calamities and poor living conditions in Asian countries, which should have made them strong. Samad feels that his sons can never be real men since they will not have to face real-life challenges.

Ethnicity and culture emerged as a concern of contemporary concern of cultural theory by Thompson and Williams. Samad Miah Iqbal believes that his culture and religion makes him a better man. Belief has shaped his character and morals as he is a traditional man who explains his frustration to the British society in disregarding the ethnic groups with their religion. The difference between western culture with that of the ethnic groups is identifiable. Samad is frustrated, and he falls in love with a white English woman [9]. Loving an English woman revealed to him that his God was finally taking his revenge. He had been in the wrong religion for compromises, deals, pacts, weaknesses and can't say fairer than that's. He was supporting the wrong team if it was empathy and concessions he wanted if he wished to liberal explanation if he wanted to get a break.His God, uncomparable to the charming white-bearded bungler of the Anglican, Methodist or catholic churches. God was in the business of giving people breaks. The love for Burt-Jones made Samad know that the game was over, he saw the contract, been broken, and the sanity clause did not after all,exist.Samad believed that the temptation had been thrown to his path deliberately and maliciously. All his deals were off as he thought is a punishment from Allah.

Paul Gilroy referred culture as the morbid fascination with Englishness. Samad is desperate about his life in Britain, but going back to his origin country was not an option. Being in Britain for the ethnic people makes them feel unwanted, but tolerated. It feels like making a devil's pact in the country. They have to leave their passports at the check-in, get a stamp, and then make a little money. There is an urge to get back, and nobody wants to stay [7]. The place is cold, wet, miserable, terrible food, dreadful newspapers- who would want to stay? The immigrants are tolerated just like animals housebroken. However, they have made a devil's pact...it is unsuitable for them to go

back despite their unhappy stay in Britain. Their children are unrecognizable in the country, and they all belong nowhere.

In Qu'ran, the Muslims draw their five pillars which unite the believers, and they have similarities just as the white teeth. Tauhid is the faith they have in one God. Their daily prayers s salat. Sawm is the fasting in Ramadan, where they develop moral and physical discipline. The Muslims believe in the distribution of wealth through the practice of zakat, where the more impoverished society receives charity. Moreover, the believers should abstain from the consumption of pork, alcohol, moderate eating, and sleep little and murmur [8]. Samad thrives on living like a true Muslim but he at times fails to abide by all the rules. He blames his failure to British culture.

Nonetheless, Samad is a representative of the first generation of Muslims in Britain and considers his religion as a part of his life. Samad is asked why he does not eat pork, he responds that it is for the same reason an Englishman will never truly satisfy a woman. To emphasize, he says that it is all about culture, rooted deeper in their bones as Muslims.

Samad shows ethnic importance as he stays loyal to his culture. His belief distinguishes him from the rest of the community in Britain. He follows the culture to the letter, for example, the eating habits. The people in the west meet their spouses then later decide on marrying while in the east the marriage is arranged before the couple meeting. Samad is more into the past while his son Millat is not [3]. In the context, he disappeared from home and on his return; he could have probably stolen some money and adopted a western accent. He sounded more of Chalfens and the street talk of the Kevin clan. Millat middle name was Zulfikar meaning the crushing of two swords. He was neither a British or a Bengali, a Christian or Muslim, and he just existed" I'm not actually from India, you know', said Samad with infinitely more patience than he had ever previously employed the many times he had been required to repeat this sentence since moving to England. . . . 'No. I'm from Bangladesh"[11] On the other hand, Magid wishes to show the difference between the locals and the ethnic groups. The indigenous citizens owned cats as their pets while the immigrant's homes had cockroaches. His mother sewed, and that is the only music which could be heard instead of a cello. The ethnic group grew a pile of other people's rubbish instead of having a trellis of flowers to be located on one side of the house [5]. He wished to have a piano, go on biking holidays to France instead of taking days to visit aunties. Their homes used leftover carpets from the restaurants instead of having a shiny wooden floor. His father didn't have a decent job such as well-paying jobs as doctors, but instead, he was a one-handed waiter. In Magid's desire, he looked forward into joining the Harvest Festival just as Mark Smith would. Everyone else should take takepart in the festival to uniform like the teeth.

The young immigrants find it fancy to be British, unlike their parents. They copy the mode of dressing, the accent, type of brand in sports ware such as Nike. The Alsana's sisters, their children, are trouble makers. They neglect their religion, and they fail to go to the mosque, they don't follow the routine of prayers, they have a strange manner of communication and their dressing code is weird and not of Muslim culture. The second-generation immigrants eat all kinds of rubbish and have sexual intercourse with unknown individuals — Muslim culture advocate for abstinence from sexual intercourse and purity till marriage [7]. Youth's disrespects their traditions, and

it is not to be referred to as assimilation but corruption. The immigrants are caused to abandon their beliefs and adopt the British way of life and assimilate.

Magid was not going to become a proper Muslim despite being sent to Bangladesh. The decision could cause conflict between his parents as the mother quite understands that it is difficult for him to hold on tightly to the traditions. She is conversant with the current upbringing where their son was born in Britain. He is, therefore, likely to assimilate to the western community [6]. The mother is free-minded and believes that Magid will find his way out of the ethnic groups and the cultural preservations. He should learn from his own mistakes to learn. The father only believes that hardship is the key to making his son a man.

Some of the Islamic groups experienced rejection and discrimination, which have caused them to form groups to revenge — some experienced offense, violence, beaten up and kicked out which have caused the growth of anger. Mo is bitter about the attacks he experienced in North London while running his halal butchery business. His efforts have been watered down through robbery affecting his business [4]. He is, therefore, more than willing to join a group of radical Muslims. Hifan is a member of KEVIN, and he tries to convince Millat to join the clan. KEVIN influence Millat as they criticize western culture, especially the mode of dressing by women. The female attire is coned into showing erotic fantasy. This view causes Millat to break off his white girlfriend known as Karina Cain since he disliked her dress code. The Islam group argued that the English women dress in a manner that is suggestive that they want it. There is no difference between men and women as they seem to demand sexual act all the time.

II. CONCLUSION

White teeth show how people should find their similarity as human beings and live together and live in peace. The novel focuses on the Bangladeshi family to portray the ethnicity and cultural reservations. Alsana and Samad are the first generations of immigrants to Britain, and their sons represent the second generation. Samad throughout the plot of the story, he is referring to his roots. He refers to the paths and defends Islamic as his authentic culture. To him, his great-grandfather; MangalPande is a hero as he fired the first bullet in the Indian mutiny. He is afraid that the culture in London will not present a harsh environment for his sons. He believes that British culture is corrupt. Samad laments of falling in love with a white woman. He blames it to his mistakes of not following the Muslims values and sinning against Allah, and the woman was his temptation. Samad says that he should have never come to Britain as it is the source of every problem. He says that bringing his sons to Britain is so far from God compared to Bangladesh. All forms of immorality have taken place and are evident through visible condom along the pavements, the participation of the Harvest festival while forgetting his culture.

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