

Exploring Identity of Female British Pakistani Student with Shifting and Re-shifting of Cultures

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Abstract : The study is aimed at exploring the identity construction of female British born Pakistani postgraduate student who shifted to Pakistan at the age of 12, stayed there for 8 years and re-shifted to UK for Higher Education. Research questions are: 1. What is the academic and socio-cultural background of the participant prior to joining the UoM as a postgrad student? 2. How the participant talk, see herself and act in relation to cultural and social norms and practices? Participant' identity is explored through positioning theory of Holland et al. (1998), referring to the ways people understand and enact their social positions in the figured world. The research is a case study based on narrative interview of Shabana, a British-born Pakistani female postgraduate student, who has recently joined the university of Manchester. Shabana received her primary education in UK during the first twelve years of her life. She is the youngest among the three sisters, with only one brother younger to her. Her father, although not well educated is a successful entrepreneur, maintaining offices in UK and Pakistan. Her mother is a housewife with no formal education. Shabana's elder sister got involved in a relationship with a Pakistani boy against cultural norms of arranged marriage. Resultantly the three sisters were shifted to Pakistan to be equated with socio-religious norms. Shabana termed her first year in Pakistan as disgusting and she hated her father for the decision. However after a year's time and shifting from an orthodox city to the provincial capital Lahore, she developed liking for the Pakistani culture. She gradually developed a new socio-religious identity during her stay, which she expressed as a turning point in her life. After completing O level Shabana returned back to UK and joined the University of Hull as undergraduate Student. At Hull she remained isolated, missed the religious environment and relished the memories of Lahore. She would visit Pakistan almost three times a year. After obtaining her BSc degree from Hull she went back to Pakistan. Soon after she decided to improve her academic qualification. She came to UK to join her parents and got admission in the MSc chemistry program at UoM. Presently Shabana talks about the dominant role of male members in the family culture in decision-making. She strongly feels to struggle hard and attain equal status with males in education, employment, earning, authority and freedom. She sees herself in a position to share the authority with her (would be) husband in important family and other matters. Shabana has developed a new identity of a mix of both Pakistani and UK culture. She is appreciative of the socio-cultural values of UK while still regarding the cultural and religious values of Pakistan in high esteem.

Keywords : postgraduate students, identity construction, cultural shifts, female british pakistani student

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