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Rajab's *Atlantic Street* and Identity Crisis in a Globalized World of Disorientation

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ABSTRACT

*Human beings have been very protective about their identities. Cultural identity is one of the mechanisms that keep them connected to each other and their roots in the globalized world. This becomes more evident in times of threat and uncertainty about their belonging. Therefore, the issues of identity come to the fore in migration and diaspora discourses. In this article, I draw from Stuart Hall's idea of identity and argue that irrespective of the socio-cultural disorientation and ethnic prejudices, in which the central character undergoes in the novel and craves for and succeeds in creating an identity. Not only the protagonist but also other characters come together to proclaim their identity which on the other hand establishes *Atlantic Street* as a novel by Rajab¹ that represents ethnic prejudices. However, the prejudices the characters suffer, in turn, help to bring together the characters who suffer and constitute an ethnic bond between them. The inscription of the lack of recognition as human beings, and the pursuit of identity in and through literature respectively, reiterate the fact that both literature and identity are cultural products that are entwined.*

KEYWORDS: Socio-cultural disorientation, ethnic prejudices, globalization, identity

INTRODUCTION

Rajab's *Atlantic Street* (2008) portrays Sunam Upadhyaya who belongs to an academic background in Nepal as the central character. Seeing no opportunity in Nepal, he dreams of "America."² He immigrates to America for "education and prosperity" (Rajab, 2008, p. 33). When Sunam reaches there, he is mentally fragmented and physically exhausted in his effort of searching for jobs. In addition, the prejudiced behavior of the managers along with the marginalization he faces as a South Asian by the host-land citizens ends him up in diaspora distress. However, he comes into terms with the environment by sharing with other immigrants like him from various countries of their origin. Besides, by involving in literature and literary activities he relocates himself and creates his identity through literature.

In the present context, the practice of going out of the country owes not necessarily and only to victimization or colonization as it was in the ancient times. Migration, which

¹Rajab is the pen-name which Janardan Pudasaini uses for his literary creation. I write Rajab throughout this article for it is the only name that appears in the source (novel).

² The term "America" appears the same way in the novel. My intention is none other than retaining it the same way as the author has written it.

at times leads to the formation of diasporas, in the contemporary world is due to the advancement in science and technology as well as the impact of globalization. According to Harvey, globalization can be understood as a "time space compression" (1990, p. 270). Globalization with its compressive nature has interconnectivity with different parts and people in the world. This connectivity is established for various reasons and basic purposes like education, work and trade.

In this line, Tölölyan (1991) argues that diasporas are the "communities of the transnational moment" (p. 5). Supporting this argument, Clifford (1994) defines diaspora as "any group living in displacement" (p. 310). In this article I have used Clifford's definition and refer to *Atlantic Street* as a diasporic novel for it relates to the story of displacement. Similarly, Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin (1998) argue that the massive movement of the people globally at the turn of the century is the root cause of the creation of diasporas. This global movement of the people is mostly voluntary in search of better opportunities in life as in *Atlantic Street*.

Furthermore, the movement brings the people of different nations and origins closer. It also exposes them into culturally different situations. For instance, the central character in the USA is acquainted with people like Mark and Alen. Alen is the apartment broker. He reports to Sunam, the protagonist, that the owner of the apartments is a Japanese-American multimillionaire:

Mark mathillo talako apartment number due ma baschha. Usko apartmentko this munikko apartment number ma mu baschhu. Bastabma due sana apartment matra bhayeko yo sano, chitikkako kathe aadhunik ghar ho. Ghardhani Japanimulko American ho. Gharbhadako charpege kararpatrama usko naam "STU" lekhiyeko chha. [Mark lives upstairs in apartment number two. Right below his apartment, I live. Actually this house is a modern house made up of wood which has only two apartments. The landlord is a Japanese-American. In the rental contract paper, his name "STU" has been inscribed.]³ (Rajab, 2008, p. 3)

The wooden structure of the house is something new for the character "I" who would have seen only stone and mud or brick and cement houses in his country. The landlord has his hyphenated identity as a Japanese-American.

The inscription "STU" disorients Sunam; so does the chain of business that crosses the borders, compressing the spatial boundaries. The organic food market chain owned by a Bangladeshi amazes him:

[T]yo grocery store aantar rajyebiyapi sanjaal bhayeko corporate gocery store thiyo. Purai Masachhuchest rajye bhari lagbhag teyesko ek hajar store thiye. Aafno naam anusar tyo store cahubisai ghanta khulthye. [The grocery was a corporate grocery store having transnational network. All over Masachhucets states it had a thousand stores. As per its name the store would remain open for twenty four hours.] (Rajab, 2008, p. 21)

The grocery which had transnational network with its stores at multiple locations is an example of the proliferation of corporate business and institutions in the contemporary world marked with "boundarylessness." In such a porous space one might easily experience a sense of dilapidation or loss of one's identity, which in turn warns his consciousness to secure one for himself.

In this regard, Jasbir Jain affirms that the inbetweenness of culture and the lack of identity in the recipient society impregnate the diasporic subjectivity with excruciating frustration that gives way to creative fervor in them:

³ All the translations of the quoted lines from Nepali to English in this paper are my own.

The creative sensibility of the diaspora occupies the unique but unenviable position of straddling two cultures... Torn between the two worlds, the identity crisis experienced by the immigrants results in what has also been termed as a 'fractured self' stripped of the identity that defined them in their homeland... (2012, p. 156)

The above quote explicates being in a limbo between two cultures, the diasporas' cultural breach and identitylessness play a vital role in their existence away from homelands. It creates challenges for them and tears them apart. The split of identity renders them devoid of sense of security that their native cultures provide but the host i.e. the US, fails to.

As of the term 'culture' in English is derived from the Latin derivative *cultura*, which referred to cultivation in farming. But soon it adopted an extended meaning relating especially to the cultivation or improvement of something. In the present context, the term 'culture' implies any social institution, custom, literature, art, music etc. that is cultivated in a society. In this regard, Milner and Browitt (2003) define culture:

More generally, the word refers to the entire range of institution, artifacts and practices that make up our symbolic universe. It tends to include art and religion, science and sport, education and leisure, but not normally economics and politics. (pp. 227-228)

Culture, thus, is pervasive in each domain of society. It talks about the intricacies of general human history. The term is applied to refer to intellectual and artistic productions or practices, which in their forms and implications define human society as socially constructed rather than naturally acquired. Therefore, culture can be a state of artistic, intellectual, social or historical movement, advancement or even an entire epoch.

Post-modern and post-colonial discourses treat culture the most contested or at the same time the most celebrated subject. Post-colonial perspectives came forward from the colonial observation of the Third World countries and other minorities like diasporas and their discourses. It forces us to assume culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value often compared to disproportionate demands and practices, and produced in the procedure of social survival as Bhabha (1992) observes:

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement... It is translational because such spatial histories of displacement...make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, are rather complex issues. (p. 438)

The transnational dimension of cultural transformation turns the process of cultural translation into a complex process of meanings making in regards with migration, diaspora, displacement and relocations. It is from this fluid location of cultural value, the postcolonial and transnational intellectuals like V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie in India and the Nepali diasporic authors like Rajab attempt to weave a historical and literary saga. Thus, literature reveals the representation of culture and society. People through history, custom and language create themselves using culture as a mode. People remain abide by culture, to ascertain their belonging and establish identity.

THEORETICAL INSIGHTS INTO IDENTITY

The English word "identity" is derived from the Latin word "idem" which means "the same." This term implies not only some sort of intransience and stability which is crucial to being a subject but also applies to certain collective (inter-subjective) unities

which are supplied with self-awareness and an ability to develop and learn (Fornas, 1995).

The issue of identity is central to the contemporary study of culture and literature. Cultural studies focus on how we come to be the kind of people we are and how we comply with the identifications of ourselves as male or female, black or non-black. According to Edgar and Sedgwick (2008), cultural studies "examine the context within which, and through which both individuals and groups construct, negotiate and defend their identities" (p. 183). Seen through the spectacles of cultural studies, identities are not concrete things. Rather, they are discursive constructions, the product of dominant discourses or regulated ways of speaking about the world.

On the other hand, identity as a cultural product is mostly linked with ethnicity, class, race, sexuality and subcultures. However, the intent to remain within an indigenous culture which can be termed as "being" is challenged by the ongoing trend of globalization and migration (Hall, 1997). It is because of peoples' needs, urges, and whims of settling in foreign lands. The migration process has shrieked the boundaries among the cultures and the contemporary identities are, therefore, rendered fluid, feeble or tantamount to a loss.

West (1993) emphasizes the significance of identity connecting it to the preoccupations of life and death. West observes that identity is about desire and death. How human beings construct their identity is based on how they desire it to be, and how they conceive of death or how they want to live and die? For West, it is "the longing to belong", a deep primal need for human beings for which they negotiate with their environment. Through identity, they have a desire for "protection, security, safety, and surety" (p. 2).

Thus, identity does not only give life and sense of security to the individual, the culture, the land and the history always reflects the identity of the individual. Most significantly, an individual feels secure and comfortable within the particular culture and society, which gives him or her a firm identity. The people expatriated to the land other than their own suffer from the sense of alienation and dislocation in the lack of identity which is termed as "identity crisis." When the expatriated writers feel that their identity is in crisis, devoid of which it is difficult to lead a vivid life, they express a need to reclaim the one from the migrated location.

Cultural identity and identity crisis

According to Hall (1997), culture is bound up with the notion of identity. Identity is the process by which people describe themselves to each other. They question it if they find the difficulty of belonging, and even seek to go back and be attached to their culture as a foundation and thereby try to establish their identity. It has become the contemporary issue in the study of culture. However, the identity discourse is not unproblematic as identity itself is a problematic thing, which slips determinacy in the volatility of the diasporas' "inbetweenness" (Hall, 1997). In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Hall (1997) writes that identity is a social construct which is never complete, and is a process and is always constituted within representation. Identities are wholly social constructions and cannot exist outside cultural representations.

Cultural identity, thus, can be described as specific structured units in our symbolic interactions with which people construct, designate or characterize collective (social) as well as individual identities (Fornas, 1995). Hall (1997), agreeing with this point holds:

Cultural identity [can be defined] in terms of 'one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or

artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. (p. 223)

Thus, Hall (1997) assumes cultural identities that "reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as "one people", with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history" (pp. 111-112). The diasporic writers irrespective of their location of residence and the location of origin seem to uphold socio-cultural identity in the core of their being henceforth in their expression. Nepali diasporic writers like Pudasaini is not an exception to it.

When the diasporic individuals land up on a cultural limbo, their identity gets thwarted and gets blurred even to the verge of loss, the situation can best be termed as "identity crisis." Erikson coined the term "identity crisis" during 1940s (as cited in Edgar & Sedgwick, 2008, p. 186). For him identity crisis is a condition of having lost a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity (as cited in Edgar and Sedgwick, 2008, p. 186). In this regard, identity crisis seems to be the result of lack of definite location and specific culture or nation.

Hall's notion of being and becoming

Hall (1997) in his canonical essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" propounds two definitions of cultural identity in relation to diaspora. The first is an essentialist identity which emphasizes the similarities among a group of people. This is also termed as "being" (p. 223). In other words, the first definition of identity is understood as a collective, shared history among individuals affiliated by race or ethnicity that is considered to be fixed or stable. According to this understanding, our cultural identity reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which bind us as "one people" (p. 223). This is known as the oneness of cultural identity, beneath the shifting divisions and changes of our actual history. For instance, from the perspective of the Caribbeans this would be the Caribbeanness of their experience.

Hall also explores the second form of cultural identity that exists among the Caribbeans, an identity understood as unstable, metamorphic, and even contradictory marked by multiple points of similarities as well as differences. This cultural identity refers to "what they really are," or rather "what they have become"; this is also termed as "becoming." Based on this second understanding of identity as an unstable entity, Hall (1997) emphasizes the similarities and the discrepancies amongst imagined cultural group.

Hall (1997) argues that instead of considering cultural identity as a finished product we should think of it as a production which is never complete, but is always in process. To explain the process of identity formation, Hall uses Derrida's theory of "difference" as support, and sees the temporary positioning of identity as "strategic" and "arbitrary." Finally, he defines the Caribbean identity as diaspora identity. Thus, diaspora identity is always on its becoming or dynamic. In *Atlantic Street*, the author presents a proclivity for both its cultural as well as individual facets.

Cultural identity as opined by Hall (1997) is "a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common (p. 223). This kind of sensitivity to oneness and collective behaviour is stronger in diasporic representations as their existence is always in a struggle for identity in the alien culture and society. The process of the acquirement of cultural identity has its initiation from a reverse situation i.e. a socio-cultural disorientation. This paper examines the search for cultural identity by the diasporic subjects owing to this very disorientation.

AN ANALYSIS OF *ATLANTIC STREET*

In the novel, the proclivity for cultural identity in the characters is shown to be triggered out of cultural differences. As an emigrant from Nepal to the USA, the protagonist of *Atlantic Street* ("I") faces a lot of cultural disorientations. He seems to disregard the legal cultural customs of the host land when he tries to hire a single bedroom apartment for a family of four people:

Thik chha contract paper ma timiharu logne-swasni due jana matra basne lekhnu parchha...pachhi timiharu je gara...tara jana timiharu charjana basnu gairkanuni hunchha...timiharu aafnu risk ma baschhau bhane basa...tara gharbhetile nirikshan garna aayo bhane timiharu phandama parchhau... [It's alright, in the contract paper we have to write that you two spouses are living...do whatever you feel like later...but you know, all four of you living here will prove illegal...if you want to stay, stay on your own risk...but if the landlord comes for inspection, you will be caught.] (Rajab, 2008, p. 6)

The narrator undertakes a legal risk in terms of his lodging, due to his inability for affordance as well as a different cultural orientation i.e. in Nepal; there is no such housing provision with regards to maintaining a living standard; many family members might live in a single or double-roomed house.

Moreover, the central character was brought up in a society where sex is not open and free. When he has to deal with the young students of Burkley School of Music buying contraceptives at Store Twenty Four, his values about sex are questioned. More than for him, for other employees of the same store, who were from Bangladesh, a country that is more orthodox about sex, the workers denounce America saying: "America no good...but money good" (Rajab, 2008, p.23). On the other hand, it depicts the hybridization of language, when the employers leaving their languages behind communicate in broken English; it becomes their *lingua franca*. In this way, the socio-cultural differences between their lands of origin (here Nepal, Bangladesh) and the host land (the USA) brings the people of similar culture (Nepali and Bengali) together. The characters in the novel undergo not only socio-cultural but also techno-cultural disorientation.

Techno-culture disorientation

The contemporary world is a globalised, techno-centric, virtual hamlet. The spatio-temporal distance has been shrieked due to the advancement of technology. The technologically developed spaces like the USA seem to challenge the developing world with its high-tech commodities, machines and modes of communication and representation. The characters in *Atlantic Street* literally seem to be benefitted with exposure and are shown developing skills of technology. However, at times they are challenged, demeaned and rejected for the lack of its know-how. They are marginalized for their technical backwardness.

In the novel, Sunam's wife joins a job of ironing shirts, where she had to acquaint herself with the machines; even a small negligence would cause a great harm to her body. She had the burnt-spots all over her hands. On the other hand, the heat was unbearable, and on top all the employees there were the obliged migrants working for subsistence. Rajab (2008) paints a pitiable picture about immigrant women from all over the world. Thus, the workers had to be very careful and apt at their job that was techno-dominant or automated machine oriented though it was low-paid and very difficult: "It was run by the hard work of only the emigrant women workers who had submitted to America" (Rajab, 2008, p. 20). It implies that they are physically as well as economically exploited.

Likewise, at Store Twenty Four, the protagonist mentions that its system is “completely computerized” and his “scanning the goods on computer and packing them” (Rajab, 2008, p. 22). When he quits the job at Store Twenty Four, after that he mentions of “applying for jobs online, being called for interview by e-mail and booking air ticket online” (Rajab, 2008, p. 17). These are new practices to be undertaken by him for the process of adaptation. In this way, the life of the characters in America is marked with differences and discriminations.

There are characters of multiple origin like Sunam, Hiraratna, and Bigyan from Nepal, Mark, and Nasrin from Bangladesh, Marsha, Ilsa and Noam Chomsky are African-Americans. Nasrin has been an immigrant from Bangladesh for a decade. Her parents had spent a refugee life in Nepal during the Bangladesh War for Liberation. They had to undergo a challenging life but still they were able to educate Nasrin upto M.A. So she had her prestigious job but she came from Bangladesh with her husband as he worked at Boston University and was able to attain a green card. She feels guilty and repentance working there as a team member of the organic market. Still she cannot go back, for her husband has a nice job at the university and a green card. However, she lays her divided mentality bare in aggressive expression:

...mu college ma lecturer bhaisakeki manchhe hun, tyo mandabuddhi lai k thaha chha...ara k garnu tesaiko underma basera kaam garn parirhechha...chitta bujne kaam paune bittikai mu yo jhoor kaam chhodihalchhu... [..I am the person who has already been a lecturer at a college, what does that semi-wit know...but what to do, I have to work under her...no sooner I get a better job I will leave this drudgery...] (Rajab, 2008, p.67)

Though Nasrin has spent a decade in America, she finds it worse and harder than her refugee life that she had spent in Nepal. She reveals it when the narrator asks her how she feels about America: “*Mulai ta yo ekpatak aayepachhi umkana nasakine jail jastai lagdaichha...jail ko life kasto hunchha...yo bhanda ta shayad kathmanduko sharararthi jeevan nai ramro hunthyo hola...*” [For me it feels like a jail from which we can't break free after we come...how would a life in a jail be...may be the refugee life in Kathmandu would have been better than this...] (Rajab, 2008, p. 67). Nasrin compares her life in the USA with a jail and longs for freedom from there. In addition, she finds her existence there even worse than being a refugee.

In this way, all the characters in the novel migrate to America to get their desire for money and higher education fulfilled. When they land in the host land, they create a globalized space. However, they collide with host land realities, limitations and prejudices which propel them to question their present state of being. Not only their identity faces a threat of loss but their dignity also gets derogated. Because of the degrading and prejudiced behavior of the manager, Sunam leaves his job which he had attained with a lot of hardship at Store Twenty-Four: “*Kaam ta garo thiyena...tara managerko ghrinaspad byabhahaar sahirahane sthithi pani chhaina....chhodihale bhane aarko paene ho, haina. . .*” [The job was not difficult...but there is no condition to bear the hateful behavior of the manager too...if I leave, will I get another one or not...] (Rajab, 2008, p. 25). Though the work was doable for him, but he is not comfortable with the manager's hateful treatment; therefore he leaves the job though it further pushes him to uncertainty and distress. It implies that it is not only the physical ease counts for human beings at work but what makes a difference is the due esteem and recognition. The disorientation caused due to ethnic discrimination is described with deeper details in relation to ethnicity.

The pang of being marginalized as non-Americans

It is depicted in the novel that if even the immigrants are able to get the legal provision of stay, one way or the other, it remains a challenge to gain social acceptance in the host land. The native people remain as mainstream and the immigrants and diasporas with a hyphenated identity are conferred as the second class citizen's position. Acquiring of the hyphenated identity at times happens through the recipient country and sometimes even the diaspora communities self ascribe it as Rajan and Sharma in *New Cosmopolitanisms: South Asians in the US* (2007) hold: "Although the United States censuses or demographic data has no category called 'South Asian' we choose to employ this self-reflexive term because of its regional-cultural specificity" (p. 4). Whatever be the case, the hyphenated identity impels distance with the natives.

In *Atlantic Street*, the central character and his family move to their own apartment. His neighbor Mark and his girlfriend Malisha do not bother much to initiate a social relation with the narrator, they seem indifferent and self-centered, individualistic beings. However, in his own efforts, the central character establishes a relation with Mark and at each moment cautiously carries it out.

In the laundry where Sunam's wife worked, there were almost only the emigrant working, it was meant for the immigrants as it was a very difficult and risky job. The other level of marginalization can be seen at the level of gender; there were only women workers at that specific job of ironing the shirts. The wage was also too low as compared to other Americans. However, they cannot raise their voice against it, as for them it was the question of subsistence (Rajab, 2008).

Similarly, Sunam could not continue the job he took up at Twenty-Four Store also due to the cause of being marginalized. Especially the prejudiced behavior of the store manager Amin who used to favor only the Muslims from Bangladesh, not only that Sunam had got the job for Nepal being a good neighbor of Bangladesh, others especially Indians were further marginalized (Rajab, 2008). Sunam feels insecure, weak and helpless as being unable to chase the native looking beggars around the Twenty-Four Store. He had to use the language of respect "please" whereas they were allowed even to steal, not listen and not obey the workers like Sunam who are from South-Asia whereas the employee had to keep their respect all the time: "...*hamro please lai tee pichha thukidintye. Ra dhoka ko danya banya ubhina chhoddainathye* " [...they used to spit at our 'please'. And would not leave standing on the right and left of the door] (Rajab, 2008, p. 24). Spitting at somebody's request is a demeaning behavior which the natives show to the emigrants. Due to this lowering conduct, Sunam suffers a sense of being an outsider. He feels not only socially and culturally but also technologically of being marginalized; when he goes to Los Angeles at the high-tech marketing company to be interviewed, they reject him because he has no practical knowledge of high-tech skills.

Nasrin though she is a Bangali emigrant had a university education and occupation of a lecturer from and in her country of origin; she has been working under Marsha at a common organic food market. The central character takes it as frustrating for the qualification and experience back at homeland is not taken into account. Nasrin expresses her disappointment of having to work under a less learned person than her. She is discontent at the fact that the academic qualification that she earned back at her homeland is not accounted for at all, let alone being valued.

At the labor market, all the characters sound dissatisfied as well as culturally disoriented. Compared to the kind of uncertainty and suffering of unemployment at homeland, the pain of living in a foreign land seems more torturous as none of the characters receive the treatment as equal of a mainstream citizen. Their life has to suffer in the swamp of marginality, disorientation, mental and psychological discomfort. Then

there seem no options except for relating their stories of suffering and pain with each other or on the paper. In this way, the characters (Nasrin, Marsha, Mark, Bigyan, Sunam and the beggars) from multiple locations in *Atlantic Street* dramatize the issues of marginalization and cultural disorientation.

Ethnic association for identity

The episodes of marginalization warn the characters with a threat to their identities, both individual as well as cultural. To assert their presence and identity in a foreign land they form a unity. The homogeneity is geo-spatial as they all recognize themselves as South Asians. Irrespective of the heterogeneity in language, nationality, religion and culture that exists among them, they come together for their recognition. The characters like Hिरaratna, Bigyan and Sunam from Nepal, feel empathetically connected. Even if Sunam ignores him, Bigyan who works at the Kenmoor Linker Store shows care and belongingness by calling Sunam back. Similarly, Hिरaratna also asserts that the acquaintances he had made in the USA are all of a business kind. They lack emotional bonding; therefore, he appeals Sunam to visit him so that he could reveal his real self to Sunam (Rajab, 2008).

Similarly, Nasrin from Bangladesh and the central character Sunam also feel geo-spatial proximity. The sense of geographical belonging is intensified by Marsha's statement (at the organic food market) that "it will be comfortable for Sunam to work with Nasrin as they are from the same part of the globe" as she shows him the utmost level of familiarity in the foreign land (Rajab, 2008, p. 62).

Edi Amin, the manager at Store Twenty Four assists him get the job due to being from the global south or neighboring country i.e. Bangladesh. Amin's acts of preferring Muslim employees and from the countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nepal also represents South Asian as well as religious (Muslim) solidarity respectively (Rajab, 2008).

Along with religious and geographical proximity, "intellectuo-ethnic"⁴ bond also is palpable. For instance, with Chomsky, though an American, Sunam feels ethnic empathy owing to Chomsky's support for the so-called Third World. Sunam in a conversation with Mark about Chomsky (referring back to one of his interviews) says, "I love him, he loves Nepal... Yeah, he is the person of the third world..." (Rajab, 2008, p. 54).

In *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, Ronald Takaki writes: "What transformed Asians into 'strangers' in America was not simply their migration to a foreign land and their lack of indigenous and organic ties to American society, but also their point of origin and their specific reception (Takaki, 1990, p. 12). Obviously, it seems to be the reason, the diasporas and emigrants from different South Asian countries have shared a sense of belonging under the canopy of South Asian ethnicity. In this regard, Chatterjee (2012) asserts that "community emerges as the refuge from the threat of assimilation into dominant culture" (p. 157). Hence, *Atlantic Street* illustrates individual, ethnic and regional unity when it comes to overcoming the issue of identity loss and its reclaim.

Literature for adaptation and identity

Of course, in a diasporic existence, there is pain but not without pleasure. Cohen (2010) in this regard affirms that "the tension between an ethnic, a national and a transnational identity is often a creative, enriching one" (p.7). The central character, very articulately, illustrates his opinion that the diasporic distress can be given a creative

⁴ The word is my own coinage to mean ethnic solidarity based on intellectual similarity.

outlet. Sunam tries to relocate and adapt himself at the host land by taking shelter under creative domain of literature. Sometimes he involves himself in an intellectual discussion with Mark about Chomsky. Irrespective of his immense criticism of America, Chomsky is quoted as saying, "this is the best country in the world" and Sunam does not hesitate to confirm to Chomsky's saying in a monologue looking at him walking in front of his house through his window (Rajab, 2008).

On Sundays, Sunam visits museums; sometimes he strolls around the universities; he revives and cherishes more memory of his country connecting various phenomena of the host land at present to his homeland in the past. He seems to have been happy in the intellectual surrounding of the Atlantic Street.⁵ He visits Longfellow House, which has been a literary medium for adaptation and identity negotiation as poets, and writers assemble to meet, discuss and recite their literary creations. The author-narrator devotes ample space to Longfellow's poem that was cited at the Longfellow House that day. The song, which is sung of the comfort and ease of being at home, it valorizes his love and memory for his homeland and warns of the uncertainty of the lives of those who become emigrants and diasporas:

Stay, stay at home, my heart and rest;
Home-keeping hearts are happiest
For those that wander they know not where
Are full of trouble and full of care
To stay at home is best. (Rajab, 2008, p. 51)

The notion that "staying at home i.e. the land of their origin is the best" is in the core of the above poem. In these expressions the central character confirms to what Ryang Sonia in her book *Writing Self in Diaspora* states. She says: "discursivising is an effect to humanize the horrors and tragedies of life (and here, would include not only the act of speaking the unspeakable but also the act of writing the unwritable)" (Ryang, 2008, p. xiii). Evidently the novel is the "metaphors of identity" and the testimony of the ethnic unease and diasporic tension that the author underwent (Maver, 2009, p. x).

CONCLUSION

The central character Sunam in *Atlantic Street* experiences the loss of cultural comfort and identity on his emigration to the USA. In the course of living in the host land, he undergoes various incidents of disorientation, discrimination and marginalization. However, the same discomfort brings him in connection with many other dislocated subjects from South Asia. United they show a proclivity for cultural identity. On the other hand, through the literary meetings he orients himself with native culture as literature also forms a part of culture. Besides, through the mode of literature the protagonist constructs his individual identity as a Nepali-American writer in a globalized world by producing the literary artifact entitled *Atlantic Street*. Hence, it is the socio-cultural disorientations and ethnic prejudices that propel the characters come together, share and negotiate for their identity, and have a pursuit of it and eventually gain it.

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⁵ *Atlantic Street* is a location in the U.S.A. after which the novel is named.

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