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### Margaret Atwood's *Dancing Girls*: A Study on Cultural Conflicts

#### Abstract:

In the modern milieu, every ethnic group has its own culture and tradition. Without culture one could not survive in the society. Society is nothing but a cluster of human beings and a huddle of cultural values. Culture studies believes that the culture of a community includes various aspects: economic, spatial, ideological and political. It believes that one cannot read cultural artifacts only within the aesthetic realm. Through this paper, a thematic study that encompasses Culture Studies is attempted on one of the short stories Margaret Atwood. *Dancing Girls* is one of the perfect picture of a women who faces cultural conflicts in migrated country. The culture is very important to lead an individual's life. Both ideas are undercurrents in these two short-stories.

**Keywords:** Culture, Society, Cluster, Aesthetic Realm, etc.

In this wide wide world, every ethnic group has its own culture and tradition. Without culture one cannot survive in the society. Society is nothing but a cluster of human beings and a collection of cultural value. Culture is the mode of generating meanings and ideas. Cultural studies believes that the culture of a community includes various aspects: economic, spatial, ideological and political. It believes that one cannot read cultural artifacts only within the aesthetic realm. Raymond Williams, a cultural theorist, gives a definition for culture and society:

“ Our description of our experience comes to compose a network of relationships, and all our communication systems, including the arts, are literally parts of our social organization... since our way of seeing is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and the achievements of growth and change.”

Experience is the central point of view of Cultural Studies. The identity of a person is dependent upon the roles played by an individual. Identity is constituted through experience. However, Cultural Studies is of the opinion that life's understanding also disguises the connections between different compositions in society. Experience is the basis of everyday life. Whatever an individual is learning from his routine life forms his experience. It might be through food, social relations on public transport, clothing, traffic, and the sense of community of our everyday culture. The uniqueness of the way of life is a mode of social interaction and bestows a level of individualism. The preference of lifestyle is a subject of self- realization, where an entity can often change his feel, likings, reassurance and the most important factor is, by forgetting his family, class, and other social relations. The lifestyle choices enable the individual to discover and create his own identity, no matter what his background is. Thus, everyday life is a place where the individual becomes central.

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People are migrating from their native to other countries for their self purposes. But migrating is not a simple one. It has many pros and cons with regard to culture. One cannot easily adopt the culture of other country. But the situation makes them to embrace that culture. Through this paper, a thematic study of Cultural Studies is done with Margaret Atwood's *Dancing Girls*.

Margaret Atwood is an icon of Canadian Literature. Her *Dancing Girls* is one of the short- stories in the collection, *Dancing Girls and Other Stories*. The story revolves around the protagonist Anne, whose native is Toronto in Canada. For higher studies she wants to move to Holland but her parents refuse to go by her decision. Without their permission she comes to Holland and does her Research in Architecture. In Holland, she hires a room in an Apartment of Mrs. Nolan, a widow. She has two brats and they are very mischievous. Even though she is a brave woman, she cannot control her brats. She is very strict to her tenants. As for as Holland is concerned, the girls from other countries who have come for education have to hire a room. So she has to share her room with Lela. The description of the room follows:

The room was smaller and cheaper than her room, though painted the same depressing shade of green. Unlike hers, it did not have its own tiny refrigerator, sink and stove; you had to use the kitchen at the front of the house, which had been staked out much earlier by a small enclave of mathematicians, two men and one woman, from Hong Kong. Whoever took that room either had to eat out all the time or run the gamut of their conversation, which even when not in Chinese was so rarefied as to be unintelligible. And you could never find any space in the refrigerator, it was always full of mushrooms. (75)

Anne is very constrained by the culture of Holland, because a woman can share her room with a male. Her roommate, Lela comes from Turkey and she is doing a Comparative Literature in a University. She has long hair and a golden tooth.

Anne is jealous with Lela because of her beauty is less than Lela's. After a month Mrs. Nolan informs her that a man is going to hire her nearby room. The main thing is she has to share the bathroom with the man. The culture of sharing bathroom with male is really shocks her. She has no other option left behind. So she accepts the offer. In that Apartment everyone follows their cultural dressings. Through that she comes to know that the man is an Arab. She goes on explaining the bathroom which is used by males. She can see the shaving blades and hair inside the bathroom. Once Lela leaves the home permanently with her two Hong Kong friends, Anne starts to be alone in the home. She often has an imagination that, a garden with huge fence. One day, the Arab man gives a blaster sound from his room.

Mrs. Nolan enquires and starts to drive him out by chasing him three streets. The reason for her anger is that she finds him enjoying with dancing girls in his room. Anne often thinks that she is the only one who studies well so far. So she wants to continue here even though the culture is striking her. One day in her imagination she sees a fence around her and outside the fence she sees the dance of dancing girls with the ordinary life of the Dutch. So she wants to break the barricades around her.

The fence was gone now, and the green stretched out endlessly, fields and trees and flowing water, as far as she could see. In the distance, beneath the arches of the aqueduct, a herd of animals, deer or something, was graz-ing. (She must learn more about animals.) Groups of people were walking happily among the trees, holding hands, not just in twos



but in threes, fours, fives. The man from next door was there, in his native costume, and the mathematicians, they were all in their native costumes. Beside the stream a man was playing the flute; and around him, in long flowered robes and mauve scuffies, their auburn hair floating around their healthy pink faces, smiling their Dutch smiles, the dancing girls were sedately dancing. (80)

In this short-story the writer portrays the life of two women - one who struggles to adapt to the other culture and the other, who accepts the other culture. Anne compels herself to adapt to that culture for certain things. She wants some privacy but the culture wants her to share.

The culture is very important to lead an individual's life. Wherever an individual goes, he/she is compelled to adapt to that culture, both physically and mentally. Without adapting that culture his identity would lose. By adapting the culture he would lose his native identity. But both ideas are imbibed in Margaret Atwood's *Dancing Girls*.

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