

The Emotional and Psychological Struggles of Immigrants in Akhil Sharma's Family Life

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 3

Month: January

Year: 2025

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Citation:

Sivaranjini, et al. "The Emotional and Psychological Struggles of Immigrants in Akhil Sharma's Family Life." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 12, no. S3, 2025, pp. 116–19.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12iS3-Jan.8833>

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Abstract

This paper explores the psychological, cultural, and emotional challenges faced by immigrants, focusing on Akhil Sharma's novel Family Life. It examines themes of displacement, identity crises, trauma, and familial relationships through the experiences of Ajay, the protagonist. The study highlights Ajay's struggle to reconcile his Indian heritage with his American upbringing, his emotional turmoil following his brother's tragic accident, and his battle with self-worth due to parental expectations. The novel provides a poignant reflection on the immigrant experience, emphasizing the fragility of human emotion, the impact of trauma, and the resilience of the human spirit in navigating cultural transitions and personal loss.

Keywords: Identity Crisis, Cultural Adaptation, Stress, Depression, Belongingness, Cultural Displacement

Those who had moved around often suffered much and had many difficulties. Strong emotions of regret, culture shock, and homesickness sometimes followed from adjusting to a new culture, habits, and way of life. While language obstacles aggravated loneliness, anger, and stress, social isolation resulted from the difficulty of creating a new social network in a different country.

One's feeling of identity and belonging lost was rather upsetting, and financial challenges like job hunting and budgeting were frightening. Moreover, mental health had a clear influence. Various persons who migrated often experienced anxiousness and heightened emotions from the various changes and unknowns. Children from these homes struggled academically and emotionally when they changed with new schools, teaching approaches, and peer groups.

Moreover, the disintegration of alliances and behaviours often reduced social ties with far-off relatives and known friends, which led to isolation. Time passed and the lack of stability affected overall health, therefore compromising the capacity for balance and purpose. Notwithstanding these challenges, frequent migration developed resilience, adaptability, and multicultural awareness.

Learning to walk in strange territory, appreciate other points of view, and have a cosmopolitan perspective turned out to be good skills gained from these interactions. Those who had appropriate coping mechanisms and helpful networks turned their hardships into personal growth and success. Akhil Sharma's story clearly shows these differences in their reception and longing for their roots.

Born in Delhi, India, in 1971, Akhil Sharma subsequently came to the United States and reared in New Jersey. Sharma's writings, as an Indian-American researcher and writer, often centred on issues of cultural identification, migration, and the immigrant experience. His works were well-known for their lyrical language, subtle character development, and great insights on the human condition. His most famous book, *Obedient Father*, was out in 2000. a fresh story set in New Delhi following corrupt official Ram Karan, remorse over previous crimes including sexual assault within his family weighing him. The book earned the 2001 PEN/Hemingway Award and investigated subjects of power, corruption, and redemption. 2014 saw publication of *Family Life*. Shortlisted for the Folio Prize and the International Dublin Literary Award, this semi-autobiographical work. For his remarkable narrative, Akhil Sharma was bestowed with many literary accolades including an O. Henry Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Deeply affecting and exploring the complexity of the immigrant experience, family ties, and identity challenges was *Family Life*. The story tracked the Mishra family, who 1970s immigrants from India moved to New York City. An unanticipated tragedy marred their trip when their older son suffered a serious brain damage. Akhil Sharma offered a personal and reflective picture of a family's attempts to negotiate their new reality by exploring issues of guilt, responsibility, and the need for belonging using a non-linear narrative and evocative language.

The protagonist and storyteller of the Mishra family was Ajay, the youngest son. Ajay's character developed with emotional depth and self-observation as he battled to negotiate his connection with his family, particularly with his elder brother Birju, left badly injured after a terrible accident. His path was one of contradictory feelings, shame, loyalty, and a frantic quest for his own identity. The Mishra family experienced extreme loss and suffering after Birju's life-altering tragedy. As the younger son, Ajay carried expectations and negotiated his own emotional challenges. His trip mirrored the complexity of immigrant life, cultural integration, and the dynamics of a family moulded by tragedy.

As Ajay negotiates life after the terrible tragedy of his brother Birju, his reflection focusses on remorse, identity, and the weight of duty. As he worked with his identity and found solace in books, writing, and academic accomplishment, readers saw the conflict between guilt and optimism. Offering a powerful meditation on family connections, bereavement, and self-discovery, the tale gently blended comedy with intense emotions. Ajay's portrayal brilliantly captured the difficulties of growing up stuck between two cultures. His tale was relevant and provocative because of his sensitive and sometimes funny viewpoint. "Our lives became tragic after we had been normal and content. Everything changed." (FL 70). This quotation caught the significant change in the lives of the Mishra family. At first look, it seemed like a simple analysis of their journey from bliss to sorrow. On closer inspection, however, it revealed a deeper complex investigation of human emotions and fate.

It suggests that before the catastrophe, Ajay's family had a regular existence free from notable hardship. Here, "ordinary" describes a daily existence marked by consistency, predictability, and everyday pleasure. Without any major issues, they most likely had typical family relationships, dreams, and daily activities.

The contrast in the quotation shows how quickly life may turn from being joyful and normal to horrible and agonising. This comment highlights how quickly the family's life changed after Birju's accident and shows how an unanticipated event may turn an otherwise comfortable life

into one that is suffering. The declaration started with showing a life of normality and satisfaction, therefore inspiring stability and calm. The abrupt line “And then everything changed” stood as a sharp contrast, highlighting the unexpected character of disaster. The change from happiness to sadness underlined the frailty of human life and its erratic path.

“During the coming days, the wealth of America kept astonishing me. The television had programming from morning till night. I had never been in an elevator before, and when I pressed a button in the elevator and the elevator started moving, I felt powerful that it had to obey me.” (FL 24).

Ajay’s greatest struggle stemmed from his family’s migration to the United States. Adapting to a foreign culture brought overwhelming challenges, leading to a crisis of identity. He wrestled with confusion, self-doubt, and an acute need for belonging.

Social pressures, prejudice, and feelings of alienation at school—where cultural differences placed Ajay apart from his peers—made his difficulties even more pronounced. This caused him to separate himself from his background at times and lead periods of guilt and humiliation over it. Still, his path came to represent resiliency and self-assertion despite the outside challenges.

The horrible incident that left Ajay’s sister Birju gravely crippled aggravated his problems. Being a silent observer of his parents’ anguish and impotence forced him to grow fast. Living in a house where unhappiness and unspoken expectations were common made Ajay lonely and humiliated. Between his American surroundings and his Indian background, Ajay was at a crossroads.

It turned into a continuous battle to harmonise personal objectives with societal norms. His struggles to balance his many identities helped to expose the challenges of self-discovery and societal expectations.

“I would walk along the fence; sometimes I grieved so hard I ran out of breath. I dissociated from myself when this happened. (Fl 52). According to Akhil Sharma’s family life, Ajay’s great grief and suffering have driven him to become emotionally and mentally estranged. Growing insensitive helps him to protect himself from the suffering by preventing him from really feeling.

A frequent response to great strain or stress is to sometimes feel as if one is viewing oneself from an external standpoint instead than totally involved in the present. This disengagement is a natural protection. His mind uses to manage the strong emotions he finds difficult to integrate after his brother’s accident. Ajay’s sorrow stemmed in great part from his family dynamics. Silence enveloped the catastrophe, therefore suppressing Ajay’s expression of loss. This emotional repression resulted in a lack of feeling, which made sense of his world challenging. The cultural and social obligations imposed on him as an immigrant from India contributed to his difficulty helped to reinforce an emotional isolation cycle.

Ajay’s emotional suffering was exacerbated by memories of his old life in India running opposite to his experiences in America. Thinking back on Birju’s tragedy and its aftermath made him very depressed and made recovery very impossible. The weight of these memories imprisoned him in a state of grief, therefore preventing his ability to grow. In Akhil Sharma’s Family Life, the word “upheaval” describes the extreme psychological and emotional challenges Ajay and his family face after the accident that claims his brother Birju. Apart from his bereaved parents leaving him alone, Ajay struggles with guilt and the pressure to succeed. He experiences a range of emotions, from grief for his brother to bitterness at his family’s suffering to a need for personal fulfilment. His parents also suffer greatly; his mother devotes herself totally to raising Birju while his father absorbs the grief. Once solid, the family’s life spirals into chaos typified by emotional anarchy, misinterpretation, and irregularity. Family Life examines from Ajay’s point of view how disaster throws off a family.

Ajay’s emotional affliction displayed itself through perpetual sentiments of grief, rage, remorse, and unease. The profound emotional disturbance he experienced was a vivid testament to the fortitude of the human spirit. His psychological wellness sustained a substantial impact, resulting in solitude, despondency, and a feeling of detachment. His story acted as a potent depiction of the

significance of psychological health cognizance, especially for migrant populations who frequently lacked sufficient emotional aid frameworks.

Ajay also wrestled with culpability as a survivor. The realization that he remained unharmed while Birju's life was irrevocably modified tormented him. Sharma skillfully communicated the emotional intricacies of the immigrant passage through Ajay's viewpoint, illuminating the challenges of cultural adjustment, familial obligations, and individual metamorphosis.

Akhil Sharma's *Family Life* is a powerful exploration of the immigrant experience, family tragedy, and personal identity. Through Ajay's journey, the novel highlights the emotional turmoil of cultural displacement, grief, and self-discovery. His struggles with guilt, isolation, and resilience reflect the broader challenges faced by immigrant families. Despite the hardships, *Family Life* emphasizes the strength of the human spirit, showing how adversity shapes identity and personal growth. Sharma masterfully captures the complexities of belonging, making Ajay's story both deeply personal and universally relatable.

Primary Source

1. Sharma, Akhil. *Family Life*. Penguin India, 2014.