

**Study of Feelings of Displacements and Cultural Dilemma of Immigrants Portrayed in
Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake***

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ABSTRACT

The Major Objective of this paper is to portray dilemma and quandary of the name and feeling of identity as well as attachment of the people of Indian origin who are immigrants in the USA in the famous novel The Namesake written by Jhumpa Lahiri. This novel is the prefect of its kind of reference to categorize the term 'Diaspora' and its significant in the current times. The Namesake shows the confusion and predicament related to name faced by people of Indian origin and first and second generation of the immigrants in USA. The novel story, its plot and characters are perfectly show the struggle and identity crisis faced by such people. None other than Jhumpa Lahiri would have written it in better way, as she is a daughter of immigrants. She moved to USA from UK. So, being a migrant she can express her feeling and proved as one of the best Diaspora writer. Jhumpa Lahiri is known for her works in the field of Indian Diaspora and related issues. Some of the critical issues are discussed in the paper as mentioned above.

KEY WORDS

Origin, Diaspora, Identity, Transnational, Multiculturalism

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(1) Displacement of Mankind and Migration

Since the beginning of the life of earth, man has always looked for upliftment in lifestyle. If we observe human evolution from Stone Age to ICE age, we have always seen that man has kept on exploring place in search of better life. This wanderlust of mankind has resulted into advancement of technology in the field of science and agriculture. Truly speaking, such exploration and movement are very much painful and they have resulted into exile from homeland. This term exile has very negative implication. If we talk about something called self exile then the term may become ambivalent. Exile can be seen in different forms. An immigrant is from a class lower than that of an émigré or higher than the refuge of lower than that of expatriate. We can say that an immigrant is a person who leaves his homeland on his own and settles somewhere in the different country either permanently or for longer duration of life. We can say the émigré is a person who might be forced to leave country due to political reasons. Refugee can be known as a person who left his country due to some dangers in his homeland. Expatriate is a person who left his homeland to a new country due to professional commitments.

1.1 Diaspora

Diaspora can be seen as most loved topic of various authors at an international level. This topic is also most favourite topic of world literature in the recent past. One of the reason for the growth of Diaspora related literature is because migrants always feel connected with such literature, as they can find themselves in the situation created in such works. As many Diaspora literature shows the grieves, difficulties and other challenging aspects of life of migrants. These migrants found themselves in dual conditions because they cannot forget the values that they have learned from their home country as well as they have to match themselves with the rituals and customs of the new country. So, many authors have shown such dual feelings of the migrants in their own ways in their writings.

1.2 Diaspora Literature

As the communication technologies have developed and number of migrants is increasing in the world, Diaspora Literature has gained significant importance in current times. Diaspora is not a new term; it exists since the existence of mankind. Diasporas are deracinated population by leaving their socio-cultural roots in the homeland and to settle in the other place in search of better lifestyle and future scope. Diaspora studies have assumed the survival of such displaced people who want to keep their roots and sense of belongingness to their motherland.

Many authors of such Diaspora literature are very good at showing cultural, social and political diversity between countries. Emmanuel S.Nelson wrote in the *Writers of the Indian Diaspora: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* that:

.... writers of the Indian Diaspora share a Diaspora consciousness generated by a complex network of historical connections, spiritual affinities, and unifying racial memories, and that this shared sensibility is manifested in the cultural productions of the Indian Diaspora communities around the world. The element of homesickness, longing and a, 'Quest for Identity' or 'Roots' mark the Diaspora fiction. (263)

As Terry Eagleton writes in, *The Idea of Culture* (2000) that:

“The word ‘culture’ contains a tension between making and being made most Diaspora writers concentrate on generational differences in exploring how new and old Diasporas relate to their land of origin and the host culture. Often their major concerns in works are split and flowing nature of individual identities. The rootlessness, coupled with the indifferent attitude of host culture adds to sense of otherness and alienation. Indians of almost all Diasporas have sought to record the manner in which they have adapted to

their environment. They have tried to demonstrate how they have experienced both identification with new world and alienation from their old homeland” (181)

Jhumpa Lahiri has said, “The question of identity is always a difficult one, but especially for those who are culturally displaced, as immigrants are who grow up in two worlds simultaneously” (2). Because of the dislocation of the people Diaspora’s search for meaning and difficulties in finding sense of belongingness in the other country become concern for the migrants. One of the tragic moments of the Diaspora literature is when these migrants want to return back to their motherland. The place that they want to return to have faced complete change and their thought becomes illusion. An immigrant longs for the world left being in his native land but does not manage to belong to either of the place. This happen because when he returns back and sees everything new at his homeland, he seeks connection with the old one, and this search for old make his life sand and miserable. He faces mixed feeling of missing old and accepting new at his homeland. Actually, he starts living two life .i.e. life inside his house and life outside his house. He tries to replicate old lifestyle in his new home, which ultimately results into no success in any of the fronts.

[2] Struggle for Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*

It seems very interesting that Jhumpa Lahiri is a daughter of Indian Migrants. This migration has become blessings in disguise for her as she understands the pain and sufferings of migrants and expresses her feelings and thoughts into her Diaspora literature. Jhumpa Lahiri has experienced cultural flavours of three countries that is India, UK and USA. Being an Indian Origin, she born in UK and migrated to USA, she understands socio-cultural aspects of these three countries.

If we look at the frequent theme of the Jhumpa’s works, we can say that her works portray good and bad feelings of the emigrant from one country to other country. Characters in her works are seen trapped into cultural dilemma. As these emigrants are excited about new beginning at the same time they have pain of losing their own motherland. Jhumpa is a second

generation of the Indian emigrant who has undergone such pain and sufferings that were expressed in her works. Lahiri in her debut collection of stories *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) about her characters also bespeak the glory of common life, "I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first..... As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination"(No Page).

As far as *The Namesake* (2003) is concerned, Jhumpa Lahiri has shared her experiences of, how an immigrant's child grows, through experiences of the protagonist of the novel. Gogol Ganguly, who is also a protagonist of the novel, is seen facing all those situations and dilemmas that were faced by Lahiri in her personal life. She has shown Indian Diaspora and develops story that divulge the discrepancy of the concept of identity and differences related to culture with respect to Diaspora. She plays with her characters in same manner in her novel. As per Jhumpa's approach, names symbolize the identity of one's life. Name assists person to exchange thoughts and ideas with other person. Names play significant roles in self identification for every person. As far as Indian traditions are concerned, name is integral part of social and cultural life. In India, there are many rituals and naming ceremony are also done for infants. As far as literature is concerned, names have very significant role, as names can be considered as symbol of identity, place or even race/religion etc.

Title *The Namesake*(2003) shows the difficulties and efforts of Gogol Ganguli to create her identity with respect to her name, which is little different than usual Indian Bangali names. The novel represents the experience of a very specific community which has no name. The novel revolves around the Bengali community couple who have migrated to USA due to certain reasons. They are the first generation in USA and their children are second generation in USA. By telling the story of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, author wants to show the cultural differences and conflicts in the family of immigrants from India. The novel shifts smoothly from birth of son to death of an elderly father.

The great concern of novel is that Gogol the representative of community without a name, is himself misnamed Gogol. He struggles with a name he is embarrassed by and a heritage either Indian or American he is not sure of either. Gogol wants to redefine himself as a born and brought up of USA rather than to be identified from his parent's Bengali immigrant culture. In order to get self-definition, he abandons the name Gogol and tries to become someone else. The question of identity becomes crucial when a person is culturally displaced and he cannot co-relate with any of the two worlds in which he is living. While experiencing identity confusion from a change of names, Gogol is nonetheless able to define his identity. Since Gogol is born after his father survives in a horrifying train accident, his father sees the name Gogol as a pet name as a gesture of his rebirth.

However, Gogol does not understand how meaningful his name is when he is young. Gradually, he starts knowing the uncommon nature of his name which creates problems with his identity when he grows up. The main problem with Gogol is that he is a hyphenated character living in two totally different worlds, the stress of which he can't cope up, he is lost and drifts away from his parents and culture. Gogol does not understand the emotional significance of the name. He does not like to be known by a name which is neither Indian, nor American, nor even first name. The name becomes a problem for Gogol, because he feels uncomfortable with the Russian name. It makes him to detach himself from his family members.

Later on, Gogol develops resentment toward this name during adolescence and decides to use his legal name, Nikhil, as an overcoat to escape from Indian culture. Although the name Nikhil brings him more confidence, Gogol is always present inside him. Soon he feels a sense of futility and dissatisfaction about avoiding his roots:

Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives,
Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to

exist. Yet the thought of this eventual demise provides no sense of victory, no solace. It provides no solace at all. (289)

All his efforts pay him back with confusion about who he truly is. He sees himself as Nikhil, striving to be truly American, yet he fails to eradicate Gogol. By the end, he chooses to stick with "Gogol," is Indian identity, since he realizes that everything that he has gone through, from the botched naming attempt at his birth (Gogol) to his realization of the hope behind Gogol, is the meaningful fragment to define who he is.

Likewise, Ashima, Gogol's mother arrives in the USA with her husband Ashoke has no idea or dream of going to a place called Boston so far off from her parents. But she agrees for the marriage since he (her husband) would be there. Ashima often feels upset and homesick and she sulks alone in their three room apartment which is too hot in summer and too cold in the winter, far removed from the description of house in the English novels she has read, she feels spatially and emotionally dislocated from the comfortable 'home' of her father full of so many loving ones and yearns to go back.

Ashima undergoes same phase and she feels that living in a foreign land is like a lifelong pregnancy. She clutches to her moral and cultural ideology of Bengali Indian. Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli try to create a small Bengal clutching to their roots and culture in America far from the land of their birth and struggling for an identity in the land of opportunities and riches. At home and with friends, they speak in Bengali and eat only Bengali dishes with their hands. They find many Bengali friends and try to create their own community there. Often they used to throw parties to their friends in order to meet them. They wait eagerly for such gatherings. They try to restore their traditions by preparing Indian food, inviting Brahmin for rituals and so on.

Parents do their utmost to create Bengali ambience for Gogol and Sonia by arranging all Bengali get-togethers, but the two as they grew in hybrid culture, part Bengali, part American, gingerly respond to their parents efforts to create a homeland in America, an oasis of Bengali

culture. Ashima tells Gogol about Durga Puja, she also makes him memorize four line children's poem by Tagore. But at the same time she is conscious of her child being American student and makes him watch Sesame Street and the Electric Company in order to match with English he uses at school. So Gogol is always sailing in two boats simultaneously, one with his parents at home speaking Bengali and living in Bengali style and the other of American Indian.

Here, nobody knows his earlier name. He feels relief and confident. No one knows him as Gogol but Nikhil. His life with new name also gets changed. Gogol is an outsider in American society whereas he does not feel intimacy with Indianness. So 'who he is' becomes a great problem. It is the name which determines identity. Gogol is trying to get identity. Even after making all efforts to erase his past, his failure to assert his identity is seen in his relationship with women. He does not want Ruth or Maxine to meet his parents. Such efforts are made to escape his past identity and heritage.

(3) Conclusion

The Namesake(2003) credibly shows the life of immigrants from India to USA irrespective of the level of generations. Alienation experience related to the Indian Diaspora and this novel very nicely shows that people in any corner of the world faces the experience of Alienation. One of the major reason for such kind of experience is that such immigrants faces severe cultural dilemma and suffering due to the cultural shift they face. This novel very nicely explain the problems faced by first and second generation immigrants from India. Although their problems are different but the level of pain and grief that they face are same. Diaspora refers to creation of new identity and new level of understanding in new culture. Lahiri very nicely explains that the immigrants do stick to their basic roots due to their moral and enthusiasm but over the period of time they also have to follow the customs of the new place too. So, in longer term the second generation is nurtured in bilingual and bicultural environment. Such bicultural environment creates cultural displacement and dilemma in the mind of first and second generation of the Diaspora.

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