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REFLECTION OF IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S  
'THE NAMESAKE'

ANJU CHAUDHRY

PhD Scholar, Department of English

M.D. University

Email:[gur.anju@gmail.com](mailto:gur.anju@gmail.com)



ABSTRACT

This paper makes a modest attempt to analyse the various issues faced by the immigrants as portrayed in Lahiri's novel first novel *The Namesake*. The story of the novel is set in United States, Calcutta hovers in the background. . It is out of her experiences of the bizarre identity crisis on the part of those who have remained as immigrants and those who were traumatized by homelessness, that the contents of the novel *The Namesake* were derived. Jhumpa Lahiri admits that as the novel conveys the experiences of alienation of the migrants from their roots, it is to some extent autobiographical. The novel shows how the immigrants face cultural dilemmas in the foreign system Lahiri shows that the immigrants in their enthusiasm to stick to their own cultural beliefs and customs gradually imbibe the cultural ways of the host country too. Their own children groomed to be "bilingual" and "bicultural" face cultural dilemmas and displacement more. This paper throws light on how Lahiri uses Gogol's name to show the duality of immigrant experience and thus explain what Hall meant by diaspora experience when he said that, "diaspora experience is defined by ...the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity." It focuses on the lives of immigrants and their inner and external conflicts in an alien land. By highlighting issues like cultural dilemma, quest of identity, multiculturalism and universal aspects of human existence, Diasporic Literature occupies an important status in the literary field.

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INTRODUCTION

The present collection of articles offers valuable reflections on theoretical and creative aspects of contemporary Indian English fiction impacted by different material and ideological spheres of life in recent times. A study of contemporary fictional works and their analysis based on different theoretical perspectives certainly points out how contemporary creative writings and their studies have moved ahead to explore uncharted lands [14]. Immigrant writers have often turned to the creation of literature to express their

experiences in a new place, stimulated by the confusion and conflict caused by the meeting of two or more cultures. Immigrants become like a translated text as they are acted upon the tension between the original culture (source text) and the new culture (target text) often results in some sort of loss of meaning or significance. For an immigrant, the loss of family, traditional clothing, native language(s), religious communities, cultural traditions and holidays, or any number of other things can contribute to a transformation of identity. Likewise, in the lives of Gogol, the protagonist of the novel in *The Namesake*, this loss is manifested in identity crises and transformations [1]

Jhumpa Lahiri born on Gregorian calendar month eleven, 1967 in London the daughter of Bengali Indian migrant is Associate in Nursing American author. Jhumpa Lahiri rapt to the USA at the age of 3 and grew up in Rhode Island. Immersed in migrant culture, she conjointly spent an excellent deal of time in Republic of India, wherever her family created frequent visits to relatives in Calcutta Lahiri's focus on cultural displacement highlights the Asian Indian immigrant experience from an intergenerational perspective. Whereas Lahiri was still in class, she began consciously examining the migrant expertise, though she was initially seeking to understand her own identity. She used fiction to illustrate the Asian Indian immigrant experience, ranging from conflicts between Hindu and Christian lifestyles to an Indian immigrant's loneliness and longing for 'home'. She collected her stories into a book, *Interpreter of Maladies* that won the Pulitzer Prize in 2000 [2]. Introduced to the literary world, through her first novel in English, *The Namesake* which was even converted into a film retaining the title, the Indian diasporic writer, Jhumpa Lahiri, has penned two novels and two short story collections. Jhumpa Lahiri did not belong to the first generation immigrants, and hence, she did not explicitly face with the challenges or loneliness of the exile and the longing for a lost world. But like many immigrant offspring, she too felt intense pressure to be loyal to the old world and fluent in the new. She could very easily identify the feelings of the children of immigrants of being neither one thing nor the other.

*The Namesake* is a personal experience which is given a mutual expression. Growing up with ties to all three countries like India, London and America created in her a sense of homelessness and an inability to feel accepted. Lahiri's characters, estranged in the conflict to balance two different worlds, enable us to understand the complexities and existential confusion of the immigrants in the new land of settlement. *The Namesake* tells the journey of an Indian couple, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli as they join together through the tradition of arranged marriage and quickly immigrate from Calcutta to Cambridge, Massachusetts. The story follows Gogol through his life exploring the issues of the immigration experience, cultural conflicts, and the unique issues that develop for and between the first and second generations of an immigrant family [4].

Addressing the different themes of immigration, collision of cultures and the importance of names in *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri demonstrates how much struggle of immigration can be. It takes a look into the second generation immigrant's cultural dilemma, the child's struggle to realize that one's family is different from others, the teenage desire to fit into a culture so different from that of one's parents, and the adult desire to reconcile what was left behind and lost in the adaptation from one culture to another.

*The Namesake* is a modern context that a new geography featured with "increased mobility, new means of transportation and communication are bound to affect the psyche of migrants and their perceptions of their own experience" (65). From the immigrant experience in *The Namesake* are distinguished from those in some other immigrant writings in that overt racial discrimination or arduous pursuit of American Dream seem not to belong to the thematic repertoire and therefore, poverty, persecution and blatant racism should not be considered as valid notions that contribute to the transculturation difficulties. Such a way of conceptualizing the novel is the basis that the manuscript is founded upon [3].

Lahiri's *The Namesake* is an example of the Contemporary immigrant narration which doesn't place the idea of an 'American Drama' at the centre of the story, but rather positions the immigrant ethnic family within a community of cosmopolitan travellers. She chronicles dislocation and social unease in a fresh manner. She blends the two cultures and creates inner turmoil for many of her characters who struggle to balance the Western and Indian influence. Though she lives in US, got married with a Spanish American boyfriend, Alberto Vourvoulis in the traditional Bengali fashion but her works are imbued with the ethos of Indian culture and

sensibility. Her novels are more about the co-operation of culture than about confrontation. Stereotypes are examined from a number of angles and deconstructed from both sides- Indian and American.

Ashima is the anchor for the first part of the novel, which presents the immigrant experience in a very genuine and first hand manner. Her Attachment to her family in Calcutta gradually seems to loosen up, as her life begins to revolve around Gogol and his upbringing. Various experiences, which Ashima has, during her delivery, are very lifelike and bring out many sharp contrasts between the two cultures. These experiences are presented in a first-hand manner, as Lahiri herself was born as immigrant parents and she seems to understand the tiny bargains, this assimilation into a new culture has required [6].

Ashima's experiences are also, not just filtered through the prism of set traditions but are projected in life like manner. Ashima thinks:

that Americans in spite of their public declaration of affection, in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, in spite of their hand holding on the street and lying on top of each other on Cambridge Common, prefer their privacy (3).

Ashima's migrant experience, identity issues, the tension between India and USA and between family tradition and individual freedom, the generation gap, the connection between folks and kids the uneasy standing of the immigrants are the key themes dealt with in *The Namesake*. Ashima represents the bulk of women expatriates who are reluctant to vary or adapt to the culture of the host country and also the social, cultural, non-secular and philosophic conflicts faced by them within the host country [7-8].

As the novel *The Namesake*, the individual the migrant expertise is manifested to be distinct in every character. There are differences between generations: the first-generation immigrants are mainly confronted with issues of adaptation in coming into the new country, of retaining Bengali culture within the American cultural context, and of introducing US cultural forms to the Bengali household within limits. However second generation immigrants like Gogol and Sonia have an entirely different experience. They face the challenge of grip the American way of life they were born into without betraying the ways of their parents and their country of origin, India [3]. The fogeys wish them to suit in America and succeed so encourage them to learn English. At a similar time there's always pressure from their oldsters to marry another Bengali and still live in keeping with Bengali tradition. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* provides a fantastic insight into the lives of 1 family from India as they struggle to search out balance between 2 terribly different cultures from one generation to consequent [4]. The experiences of the Ganguli family in America—a country that for few of them is an intensely foreign environment—offer a glimpse of life as an Indian immigrant to the US. Husband and wife have differing reactions to the barrage of recent customs that greets them in America, and along they embody 2 sides of the immigrant experience.

Firstly, this paper examines Lahiri's delineation of the brighter side of the life —many an advantage or a benefit—of the immigrants in their hostland in the novel, Lahiri has explicated in *The Namesake* the exuberant life, some of her characters lead. They get slowly adapted to the alien culture. Secondly, Lahiri's depiction of the darker side of the immigrant experiences in *The Namesake* is analyzed in this paper from various perspectives and at different depths of meaning.

Gogol, Sonia, and later Moushumi then represent following generation of immigrants, the primary American-born generation, for whom assimilation—the method of adapting to American culture—comes way more naturally. The Ganguli kids become older speaking English natively, in contrast to their oldsters, and square measure way more fascinated by American food and popular culture, since they need attended American colleges their whole lives. For them, it's Asian nation that appears foreign. On their visits to family, they're nostalgic for American food and confused by common Indian rituals. However, their divided loyalties usually result in an indoor struggle for a unified identity [5].

In a recent review of her novel *The Namesake*, it was stated, "Lahiri mines the immigrant experience in a way superior to Bharti Mukharjee and others". Several critical interpretations will follow of this novel. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, not only speaks to immigrants but also to the original settles on different levels. It is different from the exotic outpourings of Indian Immigrant writings in English. *The Namesake* portrays people

who need to make sense of their own destinies, in their own terms. The ordinaries of immigrant tales, which project cultural sacrifices, material gain, which was hard earned with perpetual adjustment, make *The Namesake* a fresh and worthy contribution to literature. Lahiri steers away providing easy answers, offering readers a complex look into the immigrant experience. Her handling of the complexities of immigrant experience is a simple but a very mature manner of a mature fiction writer[9].

Jhumpa Lahiri says,

"for immigrants... the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, the knowledge of and longing for a lost world, are more explicit and distressing than for the children. On the other hand, the problem for the children of immigrants \_ those with strong ties to their country of origin is that they feel neither one thing nor the other" (Lahiri, qtd in "Jhumpa Lahiri on her debut novel. An interview with the author" [11]).

By juxtaposing the immigrants 'initial experiences and practices in the United States with their latter adoption and immersion into the U.S. culture, she suggests the nomadic nature of identity, pushing the characters towards inhabiting transnational space in American society. Therefore, her characters confront immigrant experiences in the United States and, constantly negotiate between different aspects of their lives, recreate a third space that transcends the definite cultural and national boundaries. It not only speaks of immigrants but also of the original settlers at different levels [12]. It portrays people who need to make sense of their own destinies, on their own terms. The crises of identity and the everlasting longing for 'self' have been remarkably portrayed by both the narrators- Jhumpa Lahiri and Mira Nair. Lahiri with autobiographical note presents the feelings, desires, dreams and, their struggle for all things in an alien country [13].

Ramana [14] critically examines how Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* remains silent about the political and the broader social issues and limits to the personal and the familial. Such observations provide valuable insights for the critical evaluation of diasporic fiction. Looking from a postcolonial perspective Ramana asserts that novels like *The Namesake*, no doubt, bring out the hardships and tensions that immigrants undergo in their adopted homes in general and in the western countries in particular, yet they fail to draw attention to the marginalized position of the migrants in socio-political terms.

In *The Namesake*, another layer is added to the story: class. The main Indian-American characters grow up with parents who are educated professionals; they graduate from Ivy League universities and enter similarly elite careers such as architecture and academia. But these characters often envy the lifestyle of their Anglo-American peers, who come from well-to-do families, who have never had to pull themselves up by their bootstraps the way their Indian parents have. Many of the characters (we're looking at you, Gogol) are acutely conscious of how possessions and property reflect class status. By analyzing the novel, one can understand how the first generation immigrant suffers in an alien country. Lahiri mines the immigrants experience in a way superior to Bharathi Mukherjee and others novelists. Lahiri has been one of a very small number of writers to discover the mainstream second-generation immigrant experiences with a degree of gravity and care.

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