

Cultural Crises and Identity Struggle in the Diasporic Novel of JhumpaLahiri “*The Namesake*”

Poonam Rani

Assistant Professor in English, Hindu Girls College, Sonipat (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 07 September 2018

Keywords

diaspora, exile, homogeneous, heterogeneous, cultural crises, identity

ABSTRACT

Diasporic communities are the group of people who are distanced from their native land. The experience of exile is a kind of separation where a person has a sense of belongingness to the native land while living in the foreign land. The term ‘diaspora’ can be defined as heterogeneous where cultures are specially separated from their place of origin yet living between places in their identity and cultural life. Jhumpa Lahiri herself is a second generation child of immigrant of India in USA. Her works are mainly focused on first and second generation of Bengalese and covers many themes like theme of exile and isolation and assimilation. Displacement is one of her pervasive themes of writings.

1. Introduction

Diasporic writings are the phenomenal growth which takes place in the field of Indian writing in English. Salman Rushdie is credited with having blazed the trail with his *Midnight Children* in 1981. After him many have shared their views and have showed the might of their pen. These leading lights are Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth, Kiran Desai, JhumpaLahiri, and also the non prominent ones like Indra Sinha, Ruchir Joshi, ManielaSuri, and others. After the turn of the century, the genre of Indian English Novels has become well enriched.

JhumpaLahiri, a brilliant novelist won the Pulitzer prize for her story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*. As Wordsworth was the harbinger of Romanticism. Along with Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy, she is also harbinger of the new wave in Indian Fiction. Lahiri has the first hand experience of writing about second generation of immigrants in America.

The title of the novel *the Namesake* strikes another theme of the of the problem of identity. There are two names of the protagonist which present conflict in identity problem. The Gogol name makes him Russian neither matches to India nor America. Post colonial literature shows great importance to the question of identity. In Indian society, it is found that when child does not resemble to his parents, everyone asks him jockingly about his identity and the child suffers for his identity. The issue of identity has been taken by Lacan in ‘Mirror Stage.’ Here everyone teases Gogol for his Russian name, feels helpless and he thinks his parents are not his real parents and gets his name changed but soon he realises the background of his name ‘Gogol’ which is so important for his father and Russian writer is his life saviour. His father told him the importance of his name and died at the end of the novel. his marriage was a failure but he grows philosophical. Gogol has drawn the right inspiration from the death of his father. He goes on world tour to make his life meaningful.

Nostalgia and isolation are the key characteristics of diasporic literature. When a person shifts to foreign land he compares his culture to foreign culture. When Ashima is admitted in hospital, waits for delivery, there are three more couples with sharing the room. But privacy is unaware about them. Their experiences of pain are not different but the label of country makes it different. She has got the idea that so rich the country in money and standard but so poor in emotions.

JhumpaLahiri has presented relationships with varying degree of acculturation of the second generation of Indian immigrants. In any process of acculturation, the possibility of change exists at all moments of life that is why we get hybrid characters rather than pure subjectivities. But in that situation we cannot say which the character is good. Mausami could successfully adjust herself in a new culture and Gogol could not. Culture gives meaning to person’s identity. When we reach in other’s culture, such a situation may not arise at all in case the third generation. Gogol is related to second generation does not feel duty bound to the culture code of their parents. Ultimately Lahiri concludes that the prevalence of global identity that realize upon neither nationality nor ethnicity but personal prerogative, an identity which is to be forged by the third generation and beyond.

Culture is the most important tool than politics and history, individual and society. Culture can also create harmony in the world. Every country should also show respect towards the culture of another country and make this earth to live like VasudevKutumbkam. The issues of family ties, clash of values, cross-cultural relationship, love and loneliness are also included in by the writer. It is also a story of guilt on parents’ culture but when Gogol realizes the importance of his name for his father, he starts loving Indian culture and his guilt changes into innocence. Result of this is that his bond with his mother and sister is much stronger than his two girl friends Ruth and Maxine and his wife Maushumi because he ties a lot with his knowingly- unknowingly deeply rooted in Indian culture.

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