

In-betweenness and Identity Crisis among Diaspora: A Study of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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Migrations have been pouring across the globe since a century. The number of people living outside their country of birth is larger than at any other time in history. International migrants would now constitute the world's fifth most populous country if they all lived in the same place. A variety of reasons lie behind these migrations. The desire to create a better social, economical and educational state takes the people from their nation to other developed nations. Because of this, we have come to know terms like Diaspora and transnationalism. Diaspora is a term which has gain a place in literature in 20th century a lot. Infact in literature, this term has been used extensively now. Literature by diasporic writers has come out with the problem and possibilities generated by the experience of migrancy and diasporic life.

Originally, the term Diaspora is taken from Greek word Diaspeirien- the meaning of which is to scatter about and across. The term was used for the ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of dominant city- state who emigrated to a conquered land with the aim of colonization, to include the territory into the empire. During the ancient times a large number of Indians migrated to far East and South East Asia to spread Buddhism. When Britishers arrived, that process of migration became a history of deprivation and sorrow. Then, there came another wave of this migration in 19th century which was due to industrialization towards developed economies.

The state of being in-between and identity crisis marks the Diasporic fiction. While major concerns of the most diasporic writers are fractured and fluid nature of individual identities, they also point out the differences in exploring how new and old generation Diasporas relate to their land of origin and the host culture. Due to the displacement, Diasporas' sense of in-betweenness, a sense of inability to belong becomes more problematic and desperate. The rootlessness, coupled with the apathetic attitude of host culture sums up to the sense of otherness and alienation. If seen metaphysically human beings seem to be in eternal exiles. Human beings do not have a permanent home anywhere. It is this displacement which gives diasporic writing its unique qualities of loss and nostalgia.

JhumpaLahiri born as Nilanjana Sudeshna was born in 1967 in London and raised in Rhode Island. She came on literary stage with *Interpreter of Maladies*(1999) and won Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Her first novel *The Namesake* (2003), is a cross-cultural, multigenerational story of a Hindu Bengali family's journey to self-acceptance in Boston. *The Namesake* talks about the theme of transnational identity and pain of being away from one's own culture. The novel is a narrative about the assimilation of an Indian Bengali Family from

Calcutta, the Ganguli's, into America. The cultural dilemma experienced by them and their American born children is quite different. The spatial, cultural and emotional dislocations suffered by Ashoke and Ashima in their effort to settle home in the new land are in contrast to the miseries of Gogol, Moushumi and Sonia.

Ashoke Ganguli leaves his homeland, and goes to America in pursuit of higher studies to do research in the field of fiber optics with a prospect of settling down with security and respect. After two year's stay in the USA he comes back to India, marries a nineteen years old Bengali girl from Calcutta named Ashima, who has no idea or dream of going to a place called Boston so far off from her parents, but agrees for the marriage. After the legal formalities, she flies alone to be with her husband.

The novel starts with Ashima in hospital going to give birth to Gogol. From the starting of the novel, the mental alienation faced by Ashima in the foreign land is shown clearly. Ashima often feels homesick and feels alone. She feels emotionally dislocated from the comfortable home of her father full of so many loving ones and wants to go back. She spends her time on rereading Bengali short stories and articles from the Bengali magazines, she has brought with her. It is the only way she connects herself with her homeland. Ashima seems to be afraid about the whole idea of raising a child in a country "where she is related to no one, where she knows so little". (*The Namesake*: 2003) The fright of Ashima appears justified as she never has any independence in the conservative society of Bengal. She was habituated with being confined within the homely atmosphere and familial relationships which is common in the Bengali society. In the outside world, which she has to go after marriage, she finds herself out of that homely atmosphere and thus starts feeling lonely and marginalized. She misses her homeland much more now after being separated from it. Home becomes a place of desire in the immigrant's mind after being in different nation. Even after being in totally different world, she is not able to spell his husband's name as it is the tradition in India to do so.

After the birth of her son Gogol, she wants to go back to Calcutta and to raise Gogol among her own people but decides to stays back for her husband's sake and brings up the baby in the Bengali ways so 'to put him to sleep, she sings him the Bengali songs her mother had sung to her' (*The Namesake*; 35).

Ashima and Ashoke too like immigrant of other nations make their circle of Bengali people. They all become friends

and like relatives as they all come from the same native place. Lahiri in her novel *The Namesake* also explores how these immigrants are making efforts to preserve their native culture even in their new places. The first generation immigrants train their children in Bengali language literature and history at home and expose them to their own family lineage, religious custom, rites, beliefs, food, habit and mannerisms. They also prepare them to adjust with the kind of life in America. Lahiri proves that the migrants in order to have the taste for both themselves and their kids, follow both the cultures and thus imbibe the culture of host country as well. Ashima acquaints Gogol with Durga Puja, she also makes him memorize lines from 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. But being too young to comprehend the impact of these things, he is not bothered about his hyphenated existence as long as he has not stepped into the outer world which is alien to his parents but not for him as he is born American Indian.

Towards the second-half of *The Namesake* when Gogol celebrates his 27th birthday at his girlfriend Maxine's parents Lake house in New Hampshire without his parents, Maxine and her mother Lydia throw a dinner to celebrate his birthday. At dinner Gogol encounters Pamela, a middle aged white woman, who insists on viewing him as Indian, despite his polite response that he is from Boston. Maxine's mother corrects Pamela, saying that Gogol is American, but in the end even she hesitates, asking him if he actually was born in the United States. The tragedy is that even Gogol's United States citizenship does not guarantee his identity as an American. This tendency to categorize Gogol as an Indian might be viewed as an example of othering of Indian or Asian immigrants in the United States, where individual are identified according to their roots, rather than their country of residence or citizenship. However *The Namesake* is a novel that celebrates the cultural hybridity resulting from globalization and the interconnectedness of the modern world and forces to rethink conventional immigrant's experience.

For Gogol, India is not his country or 'desh', he sees himself as American. Though he considers himself an American, he is brought up in a home with diametrically different cultures, similar to Bhabha's in between space where people can, to a certain extent, move and negotiate within their worlds. He is both Indian and American. He belongs to Indian parents on a different geographical space than India and is acculturated as an Indian at home. But outside this house, he is an American. India, for him is a foreign country both physically and psychologically. He strives to adjust with his dual cultured life. He feels attracted to Maxine, his American girlfriend but also feels a sense of duty towards his parents. Like every immigrant child, his real struggle is to have an identity in US lifestyle. He tries to create a distance from his parents' culture and parents too and thinks to adopt American identity. He stays with Maxine many times, sleeping under the same roof as her parents. For him the concept of home becomes unconventional as for him to define his homeland is to define his identity. Their cultural identity, for him, is to add the American culture's flavor to his life.

Ashima retains her Indian Culture in dress and values but also tries to adjust with the style of life in America for the sake of her own and her children's growth after her long stay in America. With the passage of time, she becomes more open to the nature of fluidity of identity and culture. After the death of Ashoke, she prefers to stay her time both in America and Calcutta. She becomes more lenient with the cultures and learns to adopt best of both the cultures. Sonia marries Ben who is a half Chinese boy and Moushumi's attitude not to stick to any of the two cultures and to oscillate between clearly presents that second generation migrants have become transnational and can adopt any of the culture at once and then can jump to another according to their convenience.

Lahiri's *The Namesake* is an example of the Contemporary story which doesn't place the American theme as the main idea, but rather brings the immigrant ethnic family within a community of cosmopolitan travelers. She depicts dislocation and social unease in an entire fresh way. She presents the psychological unrest because of mixing of two cultures through her characters who keep on striving to create a kind of balance between Indian and American influence.

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