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IMMIGRANT ISSUES IN JHUMPHA LAHIRI'S THE NAMESAKE

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Abstract

Diasporic consciousness is the term which contains the ideas including sense of loss, realisation of being an outsider, longing for the home, dilemma, burden of exile and dispossession due to relocation. Jhumpa Lahiri, a daughter of an immigrant is one of the post colonial writers who faced clashes between two culture in 'The Namesake'. The period of globalization and the fast moving of the development of technology, many people from India migrate to foreign land for many reasons mostly for better opportunities. They try to connect to their culture, their native language, and these evoke a psychological oppression resulting to dilemma of cultural clash and identity crisis. This novel is portraying diverse cultures, nostalgic experience, close family bonds and the duality of immigrants. This paper is an attempt to analyze the immigrant's issues at new land, particularly immigrants of America. Immigrants from India get psychological struggle through their journey of life in the new land. Their reminiscences, at times give relief from the present depressed life situation. The main characters exhibit the extreme struggles of finding their identity during the period of transformation. The novels investigate the lives of middle class educated Bengali immigrants either coming for higher education or brought by the stroke of fate of life. Lahiri projects the immigrants, who are obsessed by their preferences, loneliness and guilt of vanished connections with family members and relatives in their native country.

Keywords: immigrants, loneliness, diasporic, dilemma, reminiscences, dispossession, cultural clash, identity and nostalgic experiences.

Diasporic literature deals with the amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. Immigrant settlement is the result of immigrant experience, when dislocation gives a break between their ancients, and it takes 'ancestral impulse' as an effort to look back their roots. The diasporic literature evolves in the circumstances of immigrants broken psyche where it created the diasporical sense. The migrant writers are pushed to write about their multicultural echoes with the understanding of the socio-cultural and political realities around them. The creation of diasporic literature reflects the feeling of homelessness and nervousness of those immigrant writers. Their cultural displacement and inner conflict during the course reconstructing them in the new land helps them in the creation of new literary work.

Indian Diasporic literature is an umbrella term which includes the literary work of authors, who are outside of their nature country and writing about their own culture and tradition. The sense of alienation, displacement, nostalgia, rootlessness and quest for identity are reflecting in the works of great writers of English fiction of India are Raja Roa, Mulkraj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, had strongly exposed the

cruel realities of Indian life which had the strong influence in the society. Communalism, Castism, Feudal practices, East west Encounter, Nationalism poverty peasantry, rural urban conflict, subjugated women are the major themes of Indian fictions of those days.

Lahiri published '*The Namesake*' her first novel in 2003, the story of Bengali immigrants at United States for 30 years. As young immigrant from Calcutta Ashima gnat Ashoke struggles to retain their identity as Bengalis at United States. Their children Gogol and Sonia, born and brought up in American soil, as a second generation Bengali immigrants have their constant generational and cultural gap with their parents. Later in 2007, the novel was released as movie directed by Mira Nair. Kal pen as Gogol and Tabu and Irrfan Khan as his parents.

We can see the cultural clashes between the nations at very beginning of the novel. When Gogol has born, Ashima and Ashoke waits for Ashima's grandmother's letter containing a boy name and a girl name for the child, sent a month ago. In Bengali tradition the eldest grandparent has to name every child in a family that is official name and every child will have another pet name also. Pet name is meant for family

members and the official name is to be used by outer world. In Gogol's case the grandmother's letter not reached Ashoke and Ashima where American hospitals need to be named as soon as the child born and to be registered in the birth certificate. It becomes a very big problem for them to name the child without a note from the eldest of their family. So Ashoke decides to a pet name for the child, a Russian author's name 'Gogol' whose book gave another life to Ahoke from the train accident as text tells;

...he remembers the page crumpled tightly in his fingers, the sudden shock of the lantern's glare in his eyes. But for the first time he thinks of that moment not with terror, but with gratitude... 'Hello Gogol', he whispers, leaning over his Son's haughty face,...'Gogol' he repeats and satisfied. (Lahiri, Namesake 28)

Gogol throughout his life struggles with his name 'Gogol'. He feels it odd among the American children. Gogol considers his Name as an embarrassment for him and uncommon nature of it in American surroundings. He realizes that he is not belong to that soil when he examines the grave stones during his school field trip as "Smith!" the holler. "Collins! Woods!". Gogol is old enough to know that there's no Ganguli here"(Lahiri, Namesake 69). Gogol understands that his name can never be added in the grave stones. Because, in past history there was no Gogol or Ganguli there and in the future too. He understands he Will be burnt not buried after his death according to Bengali tradition. He remembers the moment at his grandparents' house at Calcutta from taxi he saw the dead body of a stranger, carried on people's shoulder through streets for cremation.

Gogol hates his name, which is often mispronounced by teachers, friends and neighbours. Gogol often teased as "Giggle" or "Gargle" because he knows, he never come across this name in his life at America. Gogol at the age of ten visited Calcutta thrice in a year during Durga pujo and summer holidays. Gogol when staying at his grandparents' house gets shocked to know there are much number of Gangulis there as the text narrates;

he remembers the astonishment of seeing six pages of Gangulis, three column to a page, in the Calcutta telephone directory. He'd wanted to rip out the page as a souvenir, but when he'd told this to one of his cousins, the cousins had laughed. (Lahiri, Namesake 67).

Gogol is always conscious about his name he struggle to accept his name and dual identity of Bengali and American. He prefer to be an American immigrant than a Bengali. He had observed from the childhood the native Americans behaves differently with his parents attitude and their accent of language, smiles secretly at them. The neighbour's kids making fun of the family titles 'GANGULI' hanged in the house gate and they made it as 'GANG' and wrote 'GREEN' scrawled followed by it. Gogol feels ashamed of and runs into his home to avoid seen by others during Halloween day. He also observed in stores and complexes the cashiers stares at his parents' accents and the sales man prefer to change their conversation with Gogol, as though his parents were incompetent or deaf. Gogol feels embarrassed at those moment for the situations.

Gogol's decision on changing his name to 'Nikhil' is another part of creating his own identity and searching his self. He feels Nikhil is free from all cultural bandages from his native. He himself feels odd when he is addressed by the name 'Nikhil', inside in his mind he remains as 'Gogol' connected with his Indian origin. He manages to maintain the duality between American's and Bengali's cultural values. This is the main diasporic character runs throughout the novel.

As he grows he started to lie to his parents, smokes pot, sleeps with many girls which reflects that he feels no uneasiness over American way of life. He started to follow his own heart. He moves out of his family obligations, isolates himself and moves to New York. He gets a American girlfriend Maxine. He feels more comfort with her family. Gogol moves with Maxine's home and starts liking her home more than his own home. He feels Maxine's parents are more understanding and feels more comfortable in mixing with them. He loved their way of living. He feels that they are incomparable

with his parents. He loves to be with them sharing ideas, which is the way he attracted to the American way of life than his native. Sonia and Gogol loves away from their parents which is very rare in Bengali families. In India people live in joined families, and the younger ones are not allowed to stay away from home particularly girl children are not allowed to live out of the families.

Immigrants in various situations to find their identity between two cultural boundaries homeland and new land. Gogol Gangulis task is more complex, throughout his life he struggles for identity. He had quest for finding his self from various situation. As a result he changes his name, but he cannot feel fit into the new name Nikhil while he feels himself as Gogol. He get into the conflict by his identity crisis. Later he feels the old name is better than the new. Gogol changes his name thinking that there is no Gogol in America where he don't want to be treated differently by his name. Whenever his name pronounced, it sounds weird for him. His double identity as Indian and American confusing him even towards the end of the novel he chooses one identity over other. He clutches between choosing the Indianness and Americanness, it troubles him a lot and finally tries to find the cultural reunion to himself. Ashima as a first generation immigrant able to maintain the subjectivity over her own culture as her starting point but Gogol when he was born already in the crisis between native homeland and new land. Lahiri uses Gogol's name to show duality of immigrant experiences throughout the novel. The immigrants always live in the sense of loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, longing for the past life of their lost world which are more distressing them than their children. Gogol Ganguli's struggle is more complex and problematic by being grounded by many issues like tradition and family expectations.

The name identity is focused from beginning of the novel. Ashima calls out Ashoke by his name for the first time when her water breaks. She never used his name since that would not be proper according to their tradition. In Bengali's tradition Bengali wives do not call their husbands by their names as the text tells us;

...when she calls out to Ashoke , she doesn't say his name. Ashoke never thinks of her husband's name when she thinks of her husband, even though she knows perfectly well what it is... It's not a type of thing Bengali wives do. (Lahiri, Namesake 2)

Ashima leaves her own country after her marriage with Ashoke. Ashima in the new land completely feels lonely while Ashoke is busy with his studies. They settled in a deserted area, the apartment they hired is full of new people to Ashima. When she was pregnant there's no soul to give her any suggestions during her pregnancy. In India she would have been occupied by number of relatives around her to take Care of her. Her loneliness in new land makes her emotionally upset even after her delivery. She is so much depressed that she and her husband are only there to take care of their child there. As an immigrant at foreign country she begins to realise the lifetime pregnancy as constant burden for her. The continuous feeling of depression and her responsibilities as a Bengali woman. Parenthesis which was once stemmed to ordinary life, has changed now. She discovers that her previous life has vanished and it has been replaced by something more complicated one now.

He feels his name hinders his ways to be recognised as an American. This is why he replaces Gogol by Nikhil when he enters into Yale as a fresh man. There he feels confident and relieved where no one knows him as Gogol but Nikhil. His transformation starts from his change of his name. After this he started doing many activities which he was unable to do when he was Gogol. He started dating with American girls. He shares live in relationships. His food and way of life everything changes. But again new dilemma arises and clutches him even when he changed his name as Nikhil as the text narrates;

There is only on complication: he doesn't feel like Nikhil. Not yet. part of the problem is that people who now know him as Nikhil have no idea that he used to be Gogol...at times he still feels his old name painfully and without warn..." (Lahiri, Namesake 97).

Every society has some peculiar norms and values. The rules and regulations, and the code of conduct of one society may differ from another society because of various reasons and basically due to the differences because of economic, political, social and cultural values. To settle down in a new land, an immigrants are expected to adjust and adapt himself to

the present cultural values. They need to imitate the lifestyle of the host country, which become imperative. On this process there will be clashes between values in the minds of the immigrant as they will be caught in the middle state. These things seem to be normal in part of globe will totally seen as weird another part of globe.