



INDIAN DIASPORA: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF JHUMPA LAHIRI'S NAMESAKE

Parmod

Ph.D Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Maharshi
Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana

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Abstract:

Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *Namesake* follows the life of an American born to Indian immigrant parents. The conflict begins with the name "Gogol," which was inspired by an author who was a favorite of the immigrant Indian Father. While the story progresses through the subtle tenacious attitude of Ashima, Gogol's mother, who refuses to let go of her Indian influence by continuing to read Indian languages until the day Gogol begins to identify as an Indian. Jhumpa Lahiri depicts the life of a first generation Indian immigrant family and the difficulties they confront as immigrants establishing in a strange country while living with memories of their birthplace. The work reeks of cultural shock, alienation experienced by those who leave their birthplace for greater possibilities, and home sick feelings expressed by Gogol's mother, Ashima. The novel follows the life of Ashoke Ganguly, Gogol's father, as he strives to protect his own culture and identity; as parents, his plan was to raise Gogol in an American manner. Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the few recognized writers of diasporic literature, therefore it would be appropriate to explore her work in *Namesake* via a cross-cultural prism in diasporic literature.

Introduction:

A "diaspora" is a dispersed community whose origin is in a different geographic location or originates from a different region of the world than where they normally live. It is also defined as a group of individuals who do not live in their nation of origin but keep their history alive in a new land. As people attempt to discover themselves in the ambiance of other civilizations, the diaspora is largely infused with elements of nostalgia. They write against the backdrop of cultural qualities from their home country while attempting to fit them into the cultural space of the lost region. And such literature functions as a bridge between different cultures, paving the way for improved understanding between different cultural regions, countries, and also provides encouragement for globalization.

The struggle for identification, uprooting and rerouting, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia, and other characteristics distinguish Diasporic writing. This type of writing contributes to aesthetic judgment, cultural construct negotiation, and the formation of a new hybridity. In the midst of a maelstrom of cultural and moral advertisements, the Indian community is recognized for a higher sense of adaptation, adaptability, and accessibility while being concerned with preserving the grace of their nation, as evident in Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel "*The Namesake*."

Jhumpa Lahiri is a second generation diasporic Indian author who has faithfully depicted the lives of both first and second generation immigrants in the United States. This depicts the unsettling of the first generation Indian immigrant family and the difficulties they encounter as immigrants while living with memories of their motherland. The work reeks of cultural shock, alienation experienced by those who leave their birthplace for greater possibilities, and home sick feelings expressed by Gogol's mother, Ashima. The novel follows the life of Ashoke Ganguly, Gogol's father, as he strives to protect his own culture and identity; as parents, his plan was to raise Gogol in an American manner. The conflict between Ashima and Ashoke as they go through Cambridge eloquently illustrates the story of cross-cultural influence in living and lives.

Because Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the few recognized diasporic writers, it would be appropriate to explore her work in *Namesake* via a cross-cultural lens in diasporic literature. The book also demonstrates cultural travel through reading, but it is subtle, as the name of Ashima and Ashoke's son is derived from a Russian Author who was one of Ashoke's favorites and who is emotionally tied to the name.

Diaspora:

Diasporic literature is written by writers living in foreign countries for and about their motherland, and it reflects their quest for identities through the complexities of dual culture, nostalgia for their homeland, and the palpable contrast in way of living in the host country, among other things. Diaspora studies and diasporic literature are developing fields in both literary and socio-cultural studies in today's globalised, multicultural world. The experience of exile, dislocation in foreign lands influences diasporic literature, and they feel alienated and suffer from existential crisis, mental trauma, failing in their attempt to acculturate themselves to the host culture.

Homi K. Bhabha noted regarding Diasporic Literature that the negotiation of cultural identity entails the continuous interaction and exchange of cultural performance, which results in a mutual and malleable acknowledgment (or depiction) of cultural difference.

There are many Diasporic authors whose works have received critical acclaim; nonetheless, Jhumpa Lahiri's work in *"The Namesake"* was the presenter's first reading experience of diasporic literature. Her works depict human realities through interpreting the problems that people who are dislocated encounter. While *"The Namesake"* was Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel, the author very clearly poured in her own experience of being born to an Indian immigrant to England, and she takes her reader through the complexities of living an immigrant's life as it is marinated with multi-layer emotional experiences ranging from alienation to efforts to assimilate to the host country. The narrator in the book's title employs the flashback technique to relive her past, particularly her beloved memories of India. The novel's title is written in third person narration, and the author relates the story mostly through the eyes and interpretation of Gogol, as well as Gogol's parents, Ashima and Ashoke Ganguly, and his wife Moushumi.

In the book, Lahiri appears to be very descriptive, and it delivers the message that Lahiri wanted to focus on a large chronology with few pages, and as a result, the author's voice comes to the fore on numerous occasions through her characters. Her novel *The Namesake* depicts the human experience of the Indian Diaspora in the West, with a focus on relationships and family ethos.

The Namesake:

The name expresses the Indian Diaspora's personal experience. *The Namesake* is inspired by the author's dual identity as a second generation Indian immigrant to the United States of America. The story is trapped between two cultures: traditional Indian society's traditions and modern America's standards of living. The author depicts the absorption and synthesis of two cultures in one character, Gogol, who grows up in an Indian home and breathes freedom American way of life outside the four walls of home. At the same time, the primary protagonist's mother, Ashima, who is a first generation immigrant, maintained her Indian ideals in the west, and the plot revolves around relationships and family values.

The story depicts the idea of cross-cultural complexity through the character Ashima, who feels homesick and craves for her home while living in a foreign country, as vividly referred to in the novel. She recalls her time in Calcutta and considers how different it is from her life in America. She feels not only geographically but also socioculturally displaced in America. She misses her Indian way of life and continues to practice it through her eating habits, clothing, and so on.

Lahiri's character exemplifies Ashima's vulnerability as a result of identity loss and isolation in a foreign environment. In the narrative, Ashima's tenacity in resisting assimilation to the host country's culture by letting go of her culture is palpable. She lived without American acquaintances and eschewed the American way of life, clinging to her own imbibed personality.

Ashima experiences a cross-cultural crisis when she insists on maintaining her own identity, in contrast to her spouse Ashoke. In stark contrast, Ashoke, a first-generation immigrant, strives to seize better job opportunities that arise in the host country. Ashoke attempts to fit into the way of life that has been selected for him in America as a result of his immigration, and his efforts to assimilate are visible in his character throughout the story. The story of Ashoke's pride once his name is published in the University professor list demonstrates his effort to accept the host culture.

In reality, there are times when Ashoke attempts to nurture his children in an American manner. Ashima's seclusion is revealed further following her husband Ashoke's death, when she began to live alone in their house, she felt horribly alienated and lonely. However, in those terrible times, she never expressed her desire to live in Calcutta with her family, and on the contrary, her character remains anchored in the American home while suffering from tiredness and everlasting separation from her deceased husband.

The duality of culture is brilliantly depicted through their son's naming issue, as the letter of recommended names takes its time arriving. The problem of Indian parents in an American hospital shortly after the birth of a new child highlights the difficulties that immigrants endure.

The name of the protagonist of the novel, Gogol, is inspired by a Russian writer who was loved by his father Ashoke. He was emotionally connected with the name because he survived a train accident and his only possession remained after the accident was a book written by his favorite author, Nikolai Gogol. Gogol opposes Indian culture and upbringing in his house and appears to be at odds with his parents' ideas. While he gets more open to the American way of life and emulates their culture and manner of life, his mother appears to be attempting to "protect" or "preserve" her son's Indianness. But he gradually wanders away and falls in love with an American Girl, with whom he begins to live. Jhumpa Lahiri depicts cultural differences by depicting the significant disparity in way of life of his girlfriend Maxine's parents. His character also has a dichotomy in terms of adopting his American identity while rejecting his Indianness, which is called into question by his own behavior of urging his fiancée to conform to Indian standards of living while introducing her to his parents.

Gogol realizes his Indian origin after his father dies unexpectedly while executing his father's dying rites and the rituals that follow. The tale depicts Gogol doing his final rites according to Hindu tradition and

Indian way of life, such as shaving his head. In due course, he realizes the value of his family and gradually begins to identify as an Indian, and eventually, just to make his mother happy, he marries a Bengali lady Moushumi in the traditional Indian manner.

The character Moushumi, the wife of the main protagonist Gogol, also represents the issue of identity struggle. She is portrayed as a second generation Indian immigrant living in America, and her issue originates from her loneliness. Her character goes through a phase in which she rejects the Indian manner of marriage, i.e., arrangement, and then finds herself in the same situation once her love abandons her. Her discovery of her own character comes from the loneliness she feels following her breakup, highlighting the vulnerability of generations of immigrants.

Sonia, Gogol's sister, is similarly at the crossroads of two cultures, but her character is not as fragile as Gogol's, and she lives with her mother and embraces the Indian way of life. However, at the end of the story, Sonia has fallen in love with an American male and has seamlessly transitioned to American life. Prior to her marriage to her American husband, Sonia battles the naysaying Indian mother in Ashima; but, at a later point in the narration, Ashima appears to accept the cross-cultural identities her children were born with. Sonia's character is the quintessential illustration of cross-cultural development in Lahiri's novel.

Conclusion:

In Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, the protagonists struggle to identify with one culture and are torn between their roots and the host culture while suffering from dislocation, alienation, identity crisis, and so on. Second Generation immigrants, as shown by Gogol's character, as well as his wife and sister, have attempted to assimilate with the host culture by mimicking the customs and lifestyles of Americans. The characters of Gogol, Sonia, and Moushumi remained in a third cultural space, where they were neither completely Indian nor could they fully assimilate into American culture, but were seen to oscillate between the two, and the novel *The Namesake* thus completely fits into the category of Diasporic Indian Literature.

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