



Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's the Namesake

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Abstract: *The Namesake makes it the best kind of ready reference to classify Diaspora as the term 'Diaspora' and its role in the present era, the life of first and second generation immigrants and their struggle for identity and belongingness are well articulated through the plot and characters. The fact that Jhumpa Lahiri is the child of Indian immigrants when she migrates from England (where she was born) to America makes her both a migrant and Diaspora writer. She has written on the Indian Diaspora and narrated stories that reveal the inconsistency of the concept of identity and cultural difference in the space of Diaspora in her works.*

Diaspora: Diaspora has been a favorite topic in the transnational world of literature for innovative literary outputs in recent years. People who have flown and tried to settle over the distant territories of the world for various reasons have always found themselves in dual conditions in the process of settling down. They do not get away from the settled assurance of home and they cannot allow their roots being blown over into fragments of uncertain insecurities on a foreign land. The intellectuals and authors have tried to represent these feelings in diverse ways in diverse writings all over the world.

Diaspora Literature: Due to communication technologies and willed migration of people from their place of origin in search of better life Diaspora has not been a new phenomenon now just as exile or expatriate in our globalizing world. Diasporas are a deracinated population leaving cultural and ethnic origin in a motherland other than where they currently reside. Their economic, social and political affiliations cross borders of nations. Diaspora studies presume the existence of displaced groups of people who retain a collective sense of identity. The writers of Indian Diaspora practice a variety of literary forms and represent an extraordinary diversity of ethnicities, languages, and religious traditions. Emmanuel S.

Nelson writes in the "Writers of the Indian Diaspora: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook" that writers of the Indian Diaspora share a Diaspora consciousness generated by a complex network of historical connections, spiritual affinities, and unifying racial memories, and that this shared sensibility is manifested in the cultural productions of the Indian Diaspora communities around the world. The element of homesickness, longing and a, "Quest for Identity" or "Roots" mark the Diaspora fiction.

In postcolonial diasporic literature, the notion of home is unhomeliness, the feeling that one has no cultural home or sense of cultural belonging. The diasporic people perceive nostalgic links and memories of their original home or homeland. In this regard, Stuart Hall points out, "The link between these communities and their 'homeland' or the possibility of a return to the past are much more precarious than usually thought" (p. 355). Due to modernization and globalization the diasporas themselves are deeply affected by their position, so they do not return home. The postcolonial critic Avtar Brah defines the home of diasporas in this way: What is home? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On

the other hand, home is also a lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, somber grey skies in the middle of the day, all this, as mediated by the historically specific of everyday social relations. In other words, the varying experience of pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentments or the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture that marks how, for example, a cold winter night might be difficulty experienced sitting by a crackling fireside in a mansion compared with standing huddled around a makeshift fire on the streets of nineteenth century England (p. 192). This expression demonstrates that the notion of home for diasporas is much more complex and ambivalent. The home of origin and the home of settlement juxtapose, and the diasporic identity can often draw much more on the experience of migrancy and settlement of making one's home than on a fixation to a homeland. Similarly, for Salman Rushdie, the idea of home has been a damaged concept as he says in his book *East, West*, "Home has become such a scattered, damaged, various concept in our present travels" (p. 93). For Rushdie, home signals a shift away from homogeneous nation-states based on the ideology of assimilation to a much more fluid and contradictory definition of nations as a multiplicity of diasporic identities. One of the overriding characteristics of diasporas is that they do not, as a general rule, return. They are at the threshold. Thus, they are hunted by some sense of loss, rootlessness and alienation. Unhomely is not homelessness. It means to feel not at home even if one is in one's own home. For the diasporic people, the sense of belonging to the family and the nation is ruptured. They leave the space called home or homeland and reconstruct home by moving beyond boundaries, and the "home" is no longer just one place. It is locations" (Location, Bhabha p. 57). This position is echoed in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* in which she constructs home in the liminal space between the two countries and two cultures because the Ganguli children in the novel are transnational. Transnationalism postulates multiple allegiances, affinities, emotional attachments, solidarities, obligations, identities and sense of belonging which span international borders. Mrs Ganguli in *The Namesake* is appropriately named Ashima which means without borders, "True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere" (Lahiri, p. 276). It means that she is a transnational citizen who does not have a fixed home.

As a postcolonial novel, Lahiri's *The Namesake* spins the story of a Bengali couple and their wards' voyage between two continents and cultures. The novel depicts a postcolonial world where the story covers the events from 1968-2000. After their arranged marriage, the Bengali couple Ashoke and Ashima moves to Cambridge from their ancestral homeland, Kolkata.

Ashoke, a doctoral candidate of electrical engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), willingly immigrated to America in search of better opportunities for him and his family. So, he easily adapts to the mores of the American society. However, Ashima's immigration defies her self-will. She simply follows in the footsteps of her better-half. In the initial part of the novel, Ashima's unwillingness to migrate and settle in an alien milieu causes her much pain. As a newly wed-bride, she pines for her lost home, and desperately wishes to go back. She misses her family in the wake of her loneliness. She sobs, complains and moans for her home, but finds none to console herself. She is nostalgic and often fancies an imaginary homeland. She reads the same five Bengali novels that she owns several times, yet she is unable to throw them away. She rejoices rereading the letters from back home written in Bengali hand and keeps them preserved. Ashoke and Ashima spent three decades of their lives in America. They try to naturalize themselves as American citizens. They hold an American passport, a driving license and a social security card. Officially they can claim the house at 67 Pemberton Road as their own. However, they never fully feel 'at home' in America. Rather they take themselves as permanent foreigners and wish to return to India someday. Moreover, they make occasional family trips to India throughout their lives. Thus, they are portrayed as transnational beings who keep on moving back and forth. After Ashoke's death, Ashima acts as per her name i.e. without borders. She decides to spend her time between India and America. Meanwhile, Gogol is plagued by an acute sense of homelessness. He has

inherited a sense of exile from his parents. He can neither claim America nor India as his homeland. His Bengali heritage forbids him from completely assimilating into the white American society. On the other hand, the clan of his relatives in Kolkata is not enough for him to consider India as his homeland. Hence, the postcolonial diasporic literature raises questions regarding the definition of 'home' and the diasporic people wage a constant psychic battle: the original home is replete with myth and tradition; the new home proliferates with thirst for freedom and independence. They are in a dilemma as to whether they should remain in a ghetto of old values with least interaction with the majority, or break the barriers and get assimilated with the overwhelming new culture.

Conclusion: Diaspora in Nowhereness The diasporas' condition of living here and belonging elsewhere refers to unhomeliness in Lahiri's *The Namesake* in which the Indian immigrants and ABCDs in the United States can easily feel a sense of living in exile, loss of communication, the sense of belonging to nowhere, inability to feel accepted and complicated social status. Dealing with the themes of immigrant experience, identities and displacement, and ties and clashes between the generations, this novel question: which home do the diaspora belong and take responsibility culturally and geographically? The novel focuses on the nowhereness of the characters. The Ganguli children realize that neither they are Americans nor Indians. Gogol cannot erase his past so he accepts his name and his parents' home. Likewise, he cannot disregard the present American home in which he brings up. That's why, his responsibility for the past or the present remains confused. Therefore, he is in nowhereness. In the same way, after the death of Ashoke, Ashima wants her children to do well and get good jobs in America. Though she follows the Indian moral and cultural code at home, the American dream looms in her eyes and she wants her children to exploit the situation and derive the maximum benefits from this dreamland. So, in spite of selling her house on Pemberton Road in the US, she decides to spend six months in India and six months in the US. By this, we understand that as an Indian diaspora, she is neither responsible for Indian home nor American home. She is without a home of her own, a resident of nowhereness. In short, the residents of nowhereness, i.e. the diasporas, are always in transit, neither in nor out. They live in tragic awareness and consciousness. The more they are conscious, the deeper feeling of tension, stress and tragedy they acquire like the Lahiri's representative characters, Gogol and Ashima in *The Namesake*. The encounter, confrontation or tension between the desire for assimilation in the free American world and the need for ethnic identity lead the diasporas in the space of nowhereness.

References

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