

A Diasporic study on Jumpa Lahari's *The Namesake*

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Abstract

The NameSake is a novel by Jumpa Lahiri. It begins in Massachussets and sometimes story line moves to Calcutta. This is a story of a couple named Ahimsa Ganguli and Ashoke, who has settled in America after their marriage. Jumpa Lahiri describes Bengali tradition and culture through significant characters in the novel. *The NameSake* is her first novel which was published in 2003. Lahiri was an Indian Bengali, who settled in America. Most of her works focussed on Indian-emigrants and their experience in a foreign land. Lahiri's subject matter was based on Post colonial issues. She used to write short stories and novels. The researcher is going to examine this novel under Diasporic perspective. Diaspora means migration of people from their own land to foreign land. They are dislocated for finance, studies and political purpose. The aim of this paper is to show optimistic and pessimistic study on Diaspora in this novel.

Key Words: Identity Crisis, Alienation, Bengali tradition, Emigrant, Dislocation.

Jumpa Lahiri is an American author, Short stories, novels and essays. Lahiri was born on 11July 1967 at London in England. She studied Barnard College and Boston University. Her first novel was *The Namesake* (2003), and her second novel was story collection *Unaccustomed Earth*(2008), *Interpreter of Maladies*(1999) and *The Lowland*(2013). She has received many awards like Heming Award, Pulitzer prize for fiction, Asian American Literary Award and National Humanities medal. Jumpa Lahiri is the child of Indian Immigrant parent. Theme of Lahiri's novel is experience of immigrants from India to America. Lahiri belongs to second generation of Indian Diaspora.

Diaspora is a word derived from the Greek word Diasperie means to "Scatter about, disperse" and Dia means "about, across" and Speirein means "to scatter" (Bhatt). Diaspora means people migrated from their own land to foreign land. They migrated for the purpose of studies and jobs. Some Indian diaspora writers are V.S. Naipal, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Gosh and Anita Desai and Jumpa Lahiri. Diaspora writers reflect the theme of the Identity crisis, cultural conflict, alienation and dislocation. Most of the diaspora writers have written about experience and problems they overcome in the newland.

“The children of the immigrant are called “ABCD”- American Born Confused Desi(usually used as Something of an insult). The “in - between -ness” can leave them with uncertainty about their own role in society - neither Indian nor American (Bhatt). This paper pays attention on identity crisis, multi culturalism, alienation and dislocation these are terms under diaspora. Identity crisis means searching for their own identity which they have got lost in a foreign country. Multiculturalism describes various cultures and different languages present in one particular city. Alienation means state of being alienated. Dislocation means person have been dislocated for one place to another place. “people who have flown and tried to settle over the distant territories of the world for various reason have always found themselves in dual condition in the process of settling down” (Macwan). Researcher analyses Identity Crisis through significant in this novel.

According to the bengali tradition, people have two names, one is a pet name which is given by their own family members and it is not in any official records. But good names are recorded in official documents. Usually a person holds only one name but the case is in different here. This is also sort of crisis for their own identity. “Consequently, good names appear on envelopes, on diplomas, in telephone directories, and in all other public places (For this reason, letter from Ashima’s mother say “Ashima” on outside, “monu” on the inside). Good names tend to represent dignified and enlightened qualities” (Lahiri 26) .

Ashoke names his new born boy baby, because the hospital compels him. Ashok named his baby as Gogol Ganguli. According to Bengali tradition, names for babies were given by grandparents. But hospitals in America have some rules stating that before discharge of baby and mother from hospital the baby must be given some names. So, Ashoke named his baby as Gogol and it was considered as his pet name. Then it is registered in hospital records and birth certificate. This is the identity of that new born baby in America. Ashoke named him Gogol because, he loved Russian writer called Gogol. “When Mr. Wilcox returns with his type writer, Ashoke spells out the name. Thus Gogol Ganguli is registered in the hospital’s files” (Lahiri 29) .

Gogol was searching for his own identity in the newland. He is in chaos because of his real name and pet name. He tries to find out the etymology of his name. He does not know whether his name was an Indian or Russian or American name. He was searching for his good name rather than having pet name. Gogol has another reason for his hatred of his name “Gogol” which was given by his father. For this reason he wants to change his name. “His first name is Nikolai, not only does Gogol Ganguli have a pet name turned into good name, but the last turned the first name. And so it occurs to him that no one in the world, whether in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake” (Lahiri 78) .

The paper analyses multiculturalism in this novel, this can be shown through some characters like Ashima, Gogol and Maxine. Ashoke migrate to America with his newly married wife. They belong to Bengali culture, even though this couple settled in America they follow certain Bengali tradition and culture in America. Usually Bengali wives do not call out the name of her husband because its not there in their culture. This couple followed it seriously. “When she calls out Ashoke, she doesn’t say his name. Ashima never thinks of her husband’s name when she thinks of her husband, even though she knows perfectly well what it is. She has adopted his Surnames but refuses, for propriety’s sake” (Lahiri 2).

For Bengali babies there is no baptism to be given, instead of this they celebrate rice ceremony to babies. Bengali people do not give God’s name to their babies. Then first ceremony for new born baby is the rice ceremony. Even though this couple Ashoke and Ashima are in America they follow their own Bengali culture. “Gogol undergoes, his rice ceremony. There is no baptism for Bengali babies, no ritualistic naming in the eyes of God. Instead, the first formal ceremony of their lives center around the consumption of solid food” (Lahiri 38) .

Though though she lives in America, she teaches four lined children poems of Tagore in Bengali language. Then she teaches about features of Goddess and God which present in Calcutta. This represents portrait her devotion towards Bengal tradition and culture. This shows they are in a foreign land but they bring up their children preaching the background of Bengal. “She teaches him to memorize a four- line children’s poem by Tagore, and the names of the deities adorning the ten-handed goddess Durga during Pujo” (Lahiri 54).

Gogol learnt about Bengali tradition and culture through his mother. But also he falls in love with an American girl and he went dating with her. These activities show that he slowly turned to adopt the American culture. “Gogol had skipped lunch that day in order to leave the office in time for the date with Maxine” (Lahiri 133). Gogol understands the Bengali tradition, when he became young. That time when his father died. Following the Bengali tradition, he has to shave his head to perform some rituals “ His father had shut the door, locked it and emerged shrunken and bald. Years later Gogol had learned the significance, that it was a Bengali son’s duty to shave his head in the wake of a parent’s death. But at the time Gogol was too young to understand” (Lahiri 179).

The characters also experience a sense of alienation in this novel. Ashoke went for job in Cleveland and Ashima was left alone in Massachusetts. Even though she had Bengali friends and relatives in America. She harbours some fear in the foreign country. Ashima said it is impossible to bring up Gogol in the foreign land as a lonely woman. “I’m saying I don’t want to raise Gogol alone in the Country. It’s not right. I want to go back” (Lahiri 33). Ashima felt very lonely in America as she

left her parent and brother in Calcutta. Ashoke took care of Ashima but she was longing for blessings of her parents and she thought of her brother feeding Ashima when she was in Calcutta. All these nostalgia and experiences made her to feel as though she has been alienated. "Ashima's eyes fill with eyes fill with tears as Gogol's mouth eagerly invites the spoon. She can't help wishing her own brother were here to feed him" (Lahiri 40).

Ashima felt alone in America after the death of her husband. She felt happy when she spent time with her husband. As a bengali wife she paid all her rituals perfectly after the death of Ashoke. Even after the death of her husband she did not refer to him by his name. This is the way a typical Bengali wife pay her respect towards her husband. Before the death of her husband she was happy in foreign land. After Ashoke's death she felt her own home has been alienated for Ashima.

The protagonist also undergo a sense of dislocation in this paper, Ashima send her Christmas cards to her friends and relatives because they are in different places in America. Ashima send cards to Ashoke, Gogol, Maxine these people are dislocated from their place to another place for studies and jobs. "She decides to send a card to each of them, shifting the respective name to the top. To her husband's apartment in Cleveland, to Gogol in New York, adding Maxine's name too" (Lahiri 166).

The paper finds that are identity crisis, multi culturalism, alienation and dislocation put these migrants in pathos and in pain .In this novel, describes Jumpa Lhari's own experience as a migrant through these characters.

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