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Identity Crisis in the Works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research paper is to look at how diaspora affects identity crises in Jhumpa Lahiri's and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works. The researcher has provided references to the novels and short story collections of both these novelists for this aim. As a diasporic writer, Divakaruni persuades western individualism to embrace her point of view, which grants women freedom and scope while rejecting India's conventional culture. The Diaspora, as well as the difficulties and complexities of human relationships, are explored throughout Lahiri's writings. Because of the contrasting cultures of India and America, Lahiri's characters are imprisoned animals. Her writings are mostly on the immigrant experience. In her works, Lahiri emphasises the lives and tragedies of Indians in exile. She also examines cultural difficulties and the identity crisis faced by second-generation immigrants. Children of first-generation immigrants have no desire to identify with India yet are unable to become fully American at the same time. Each immigrant, according to Divakaruni, would identify with the indigenous people. Otherwise, the identity crisis will be unavoidable. She aspires for each immigrant to adapt his or her way of life to that of the indigenous people in order to live in peace and harmony with them. As a consequence, in her works, she communicates her sentiments.

Key words: Diasporic writings, Immigrants, Identity –crisis, Man-woman relationships.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a well-known author, short story writer, lecturer, poet, essayist, fiction, non-fiction writer, young adult fiction writer, book critic, and columnist, among many other accomplishments. Her primary interest is the plight of immigrant women in patriarchal societies in their new home countries, and she documents the experiences of South Asian immigrant women in both fiction and nonfiction books. Divakaruni began her

professional life as a poet before transitioning to writing. She is a successful short story writer with a large number of published stories. Her two short stories, *Arranged Marriage* (1995) and *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* (2001), are both regarded as masterpieces. She published her debut collection, *Arranged Marriage*, in which she portrays the Indian marriage system from a western perspective. This collection is dedicated to the heinous practice of dowry in India, which is discussed in detail. A critical analysis of the predicament of the immigrant lady in a patriarchal environment in which arranged Marriage and dowries are considered to be terrible rituals of Indian society is provided by Divakaruni in her fictional works. As a diasporic writer, Divakaruni persuades western individualism, which allows freedom and scope for the woman while rejecting the traditional society of India, to accept her point of view.

She addresses a variety of immigration-related issues, including the macro-level problems of immigrants and the attitude of the alien land toward immigrants, which presumes them to be inferior. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has established a secure distinctive position as a tireless experimenter in the galaxy of Indian Diasporic women writers, and her work is a must-read for anyone interested in the Indian diaspora.

Among Lahiri's works are the issues of the Diaspora and the tensions and ambiguities of human relationships, which she explores. It is this idea that she tackles in her two short story collections, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), including in her two works, *The Namesake* (2003) and *The Lowland* (2013). She has been much across the whole of India and has individual awareness of the issues that prevail in the Diaspora. She has significant emotional ties to her parents' nation, as well as with the United States and England, along with other locations. Because of her ties to the formation of three countries, she has been made homeless and an alien.

Lahiri has ancestors who are from India. Lahiri's parents consider India to be "home," but she does not feel the same way about the country. Her family ties are insufficient to qualify India as a 'home.' Despite the fact that she often travels to India and she was born and raised in America and England, she does not have a feeling of belonging to any nation. As Lahiri said during a news conference in India,

"There is no nation that I consider to be my homeland. I always end up in exile in whichever place I visit. I travel, which is why I felt drawn to write about individuals who live in exile." (Chaudhari 3)

Rather than concentrating on the Diaspora community's identity struggles, this research paper covers the experiences of first and later generation Indian immigrants to the United States, as well as some stories about perceptions of otherness within Indian groups. These narratives center on the problems of relationships and communication, as well as the loss of one's sense of self for persons living in the Diaspora. This collection also highlights the characters' battle with the same sentiments of exile as they do, as well as their conflict between the two worlds from which they are ripped apart.

In September of 2003, Jhumpa Lahiri published her debut book, *The Namesake*, which was a critical and commercial success. The narrative of Ashoke and Ashima, an Indian immigrant couple from the United States,

depicts how difficult immigration can be, as well as the conflict between Indian and American culture. The book is divided into two main lines. In the first place, there is Ashima and her tough transition to life in America after spending the first twenty years of her life in Calcutta. Ashima has a tough time adapting to the more laid-back society of America after spending her childhood in India's rigorous religious beliefs. Gogol, Ashima's son, is a second generation immigrant who struggles to develop his own identity in the two worlds in which he lives. The second narrative line follows Gogol from his birth through his first thirty-three years in the world. As a result, the collision of civilizations is represented through these two storylines.

Gogol is represented by the title's namesake, who is Indian by ancestry, American by birth and residence, and Russian by the author's last name, Nikolai Gogol, who was born in Russia and now resides in the United States. Every one of these clashing cultures causes him to feel hatred, annoyance, anguish or even tension. In the words of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*,

"He despises the fact that his name is both ludicrous and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American, but rather Russian in origin." (75-76)

Unaccustomed Earth (2008) focuses on immigrants of the first and second generations who suffer from nostalgia, racial prejudice, rootlessness and alienation. Lahiri brings out the fact that the host nation for the first generation immigrants becomes the home place for second generation. The imitation of American lifestyle harms the second generation.

The Lowland (2013) is the most current book by Jhumpa Lahiri that is about the victim of the extreme left movement called Naxalism. It is a movement of peasants that rose out against the police and the landowners in 1967. It is the duplicate of Mao's previous revolution in China. Udayan and Subhash are brothers. Udayan a Naxalite, and murdered by the police and his elder brother Subhash who is apolitical, quiet, and responsible, comes home to comfort his parents. Subhash is compelled to marriage with Gauri, a pregnant widow of Udayan. Subhash takes her to Rhode Island. Gauri gives birth to a daughter, Bela.

The current book shouts against politics, sexuality, and Indian customary trap for the lady which juxtaposes the modernism of the distant continent.

In Other Words (2016) is the first nonfiction by Jhumpa Lahiri written in favour of Italian language. This autobiographical work is a revelation written in the Italian language. It focuses on the process of learning to speak another language and shows the journey of a writer who is looking for a new voice. It is a great narrative; *The Triangle* lets us grasp what it means to live between two languages, English and Bengali in continual struggle. One is the language around him, and the other is the language that is at home.

Above all, Lahiri's characters are imprisoned creatures owing to opposing cultures of India and America. Her literature concentrates upon the immigrant experience. In the words of Jhumpa Lahiri,

"The immigrant experience is problematic because a sensitive immigrant is continually trapped in a transit station, where memories of the original home clash with the reality of the new environment."
(22)

Lahiri highlights the lives and tragedies of Indians in exile in her writings. She also discusses cultural tensions and the second generation immigrant's identity dilemma. Children of first generation immigrants have no ambition to identify with India yet, at the same time, are incapable of becoming 100 percent American. *The Namesake* is a work that explores issues such as cultural and moral clashes, loneliness, and family bonds. In his piece on intercultural conflicts, Chaman Nahal writes,

"Maybe two large segments of cultures such as the East and the West cannot meet in harmony; some of us believe they can. All right, they meet in disharmony. It is all the same a meeting, a meeting of meanings" (85- 86).

The Namesake is about the Ganguli family's experience as first generation immigrants in the United States. Ashima Ganguli is a Calcutta-born Bengali lady. She marries Ashoke Ganguli and travels to America with him. She is first seen in the book in a hospital, pregnant. The Ganguli family is deeply rooted in tradition, which is evident in everything they do, from the snacks they consume in the kitchen to the rites and rituals they observe. Ashima is quite uneasy at the American hospital and contrasts how infants are delivered in America and India.

The Indian diaspora is made up of Indians who live outside India, and these diasporic groups are often separated from their motherland due to economic migration in pursuit of job and a better standard of living. Even though they reside in their host nation, they retain a strong connection to their own culture and a feeling of belonging. They span two civilizations as a result of their inbetweenness. However, second generation immigrants build their own culture as a synthesis of host and native cultures. *The Namesake* is a work that deals with cultural disputes, complex generational links, and identity difficulty.

Gogol adopts an American persona as he smokes cannabis, stays overnight at a friend's place, and travels to see *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* with his companions. He meets Kim at a party and introduces himself as Nikhil. He flirts with her and kisses her for the first time, and it is the first time he uses the ostensibly official name, Nikhil. He was as taken aback by himself as his buddies were following the celebration. Gogol later changed his name to Nikhil as a result of the judicial processes. He goes to the family court and makes the required amendments on his own. He shares it with his parents the next day and chastises them for giving it such a name. When he informs his father that no one takes him seriously due to his unusual surname, his father becomes curious as to who does not take him seriously. Gogol is aware of the answer to this issue since he is the only one

"who plagued him, the only one who was always aware of and troubled by his name's humiliation, the only person who continuously questioned it and wished it were different, was Gogol" (100).

It has also been brought to his parents' attention that his actual title will be Bengali rather than Russian. It was easy given, since many Americans change their names each year, but the only issue was that he continued to feel like Nikhil despite the change. He begins his studies at Yale as Nikhil, and no one recognises him as Gogol. He cheerfully records his new surname in his course books.

Nikhil, posing as Jonathan, boards the Metro-North train into Manhattan one weekend and procures a counterfeit identity card that allows him to be served alcohol in New Haven's bars and restaurants. He loses his virginity as Nikhil at an Ezra Stiles party, with a female dressed in a plaid woolen skirt, combat boots, and mustard tights. (105) by changing his name from Gogol to Nikhil, he transformed himself from an immigrant to an American.

“But now that he’s Nikhil it’s easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas” (105).

He has become an American, and his lifestyle has changed as a result of his name change.

Immigrants leave their social and cultural milieu freely in search of a better life in a distant place. They chose to abandon their community and live among strangers, such as Ashoke, who emigrated to America with the goal of teaching at an American university. Lahiri depicts Gogol's character's identity crisis in *The Namesake*, and the plot focuses on his name as he discovers that it is neither Indian nor American. The name seems to be inappropriate for him, and it causes him distress throughout the novel. He is not relieved even after changing his name from Gogol Ganguli to Nikhil Ganguli, and he senses Nikolai in Nikhil. Lahiri emphasises the importance of pet names in Bengali culture. In Bengali, the term for a pet name is *daknam*, which translates literally as the name by which one is addressed at home and in other private, unguarded times by family, friends, and other intimates. Pet nicknames are a lingering relic of childhood, a reminder that life does not have to be so formal, so serious, and so difficult. They are also a reminder that one cannot be everything to everyone. (26)

Lahiri elaborates on the meaning of a person's name. Individuals' identities vary from person to person, and they are not regarded similarly by everyone. Typically, members of the family use the pet name, as the outside world uses the proper name, *bhalonam*. Gogol dislikes his given name because of its awkwardness.

Almost all of Divakaruni's works are situated in India or America and all of them deal with the immigration experiences of individuals from South Asian nations. As an Indian immigrant, her story is very well told through all the stories of the women in her book. Her steadfast opinion is that wherever Indians settle as immigrants, they must cohabit alongside indigenous peoples, whether they like it or not.

"When expatriates live apart from their own culture, they have profound and dramatic experiences. They convert the other nation into their home, but they never stay calm there, and you can never really return and be quiet at home there either." (2003)

Divakaruni anticipated that each immigrant would identify with the indigenous people. Otherwise, the identity dilemma is inescapable. She wishes for each immigrant to adapt his or her way of life to that of the

indigenous people in order to ensure a happy and harmonious coexistence. As a result, she expresses her feelings in her piece *Dissolving Boundaries*.

"As far as I am concerned, I am a listener, a felicitator, and a connector of people, and for me, the skill of dissolving barriers is the essence of existence."

Thus, adjustment is an integral aspect of existence, and without adjustment between any two people wherever in the globe, no connection or human life has value. *Arranged Marriage*, Divakaruni's debut collection of short stories, is about conventional weddings arranged by the families' parents. All of the tales in this book are on the marriage relationship between a man and his wife, as well as their experiences as Indian natives and immigrants in America. Divakaruni emphasises the necessity of every Indian lady being strong and cognizant of human values wherever she is via these tales. Additionally, she wants every Indian woman to embrace change with a cheerful attitude and adapt to her new surroundings and life partner. While describing arranged marriages, Divakaruni depicts both the positive and negative aspects of each and the immigrant experiences as married people. Misunderstandings in marital relationships do occur as a result of the parties' inability to connect with their way of life. Divakaruni's second short story collection, *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives*, has nine pieces, the most of which deal with planned weddings, marriage engagements, and family and marital disintegration. It portrays genuinely how Indian immigrants in America are moved, uprooted, and then rerouted by time, location, or connection. Thus, both of these short story collections serve as an excellent expression of the different immigration experiences of Indians in America. They recount the lack of knowledge and adjustment between man and woman as husband and wife in order to maintain their perpetual marital happiness. They also serve as a stark reminder of the terrible reality and dilemma of newlyweds. If anything strains either the marriage or family connection, only the male becomes the scapegoat; no woman is held accountable, despite the fact that she is also a partner to the marital problems.

The Mistress of Spices by Divakaruni is about Tilo alias Tilottama, an Indian immigrant in America, her method of fixing other Indian immigrants' issues with spices, and her love for an American as a means to establish her independence and cater to her own wishes. She has an identity crisis as a result of prioritising her own needs above those of others. Thus, she finds herself in a position, unsure if she must maintain her identity as an Indian immigrant or surrender her Indian personality in order to marry an American. She is willing to choose marriage to an American over being a conventional Indian lady. She understands the plight of an Indian woman, since no Indian lady is let to enjoy the pleasures of life freely, as every other Indian immigrant woman is. Tilo is a young Indian lady immigrant who has been taught to utilise spices to treat other Indian immigrants' family difficulties. She is, however, compelled to work as the mistress of the spices in the form of an elderly lady at an Oakland, California, business. She is not authorised to leave her business or to engage in any kind of personal interaction with her clients. She must do her duties by putting aside her own interests and wants. However, as a young lady who happens to prescribe therapeutic spices to a young American, she cannot not but fall head over heels in love

with him. The spices she uses to treat other people's personal troubles may transform her from a mistress to a married lady after her marriage to the guy she loves.

Sister of My Heart by Divakaruni is about the bond between two cousin sisters. Their personal aspirations are different, yet their sisterly affection for one another is unmatched. Anju alias Anjali and Sudha alias Basudha were born on the same day in the same home as the daughters of two traditional family members in Calcutta. Sudha would have stayed in her mother's womb for a longer period of time had it not been for her sobbing when Anju was put on her aunt's tummy. Sudha had been Anju's heart sister ever since, and her incessant love had been destiny. They were, however, fatherless children due to their dads' inexplicable deaths on the day of their birth. From their earliest years till they married and divorced, Anju and Sudha have been inseparable as sisters of love and devotion. Both had harboured own desires in their hearts, as they were mature enough to appreciate life's values. Anju preferred a college education, whilst Sudha desired marriage and motherhood. Sudha claimed that her evil-minded father was responsible for Anju's father's death. The fact that Anju did not have an elegant demeanour caused her to be envy of her sister's sexually alluring attractiveness. Both women were married to males who had been selected by their families. Anju and her husband moved from India to the United States, while Sudha stayed in India. Despite the fact that they were physically apart, they were spiritually together. And they realised that they had to turn to one other and continue to be sisters in heart to one another. They were right.

The *Vine of Desire*, written by Divakaruni, is a continuation of the lives of both of the sisters of heart who have settled in America. It had been ten years since they had been separated from one another. However, these 10 years did not pass as smoothly as they had hoped, with no difficulties in their married relationship. Unfortunately, Anju had an abortion during her pregnancy, and Sudha was forced to file for divorce from her husband, despite the fact that she had a girl child born to her via her divorced husband. Now that both sisters had arrived in America, they were reunited. Sudha travelled to America in order to assist her sister Anju in overcoming the grief she was experiencing as a result of the loss of her first child. In a similar vein, Anju planned to offer Sudha with significant comfort from the agony of divorce. As a result, they each made the decision to spend their lives for the benefit of the other by living together. Even before he married Anju, Sunil had a strong attraction to the lovely Sudha, who was his childhood sweetheart. Upon her unexpected arrival at his American house, where she was to reside with her sister Anju, his sexual desires for her were revived. Because of Sunil's acts, Anju was filled with envy, and the two sisters' hearts were torn apart in a way that seemed to be irreparable. Sudha attempted to establish a self-sufficient existence for herself and her child in America, completely disregarding Sunil's sentiments and Anju's responses to her actions. She was able to find employment for herself, and she was able to move out to a different location where she could live with her infant daughter on her own. The fact that she was every inch an Indian in soul did not prevent her from identifying herself with the life of America and its diverse culture, to the point that she even began to live like an American by trying to date and deal with the new CIVIL environment. The sisters would have to wait for time, the ultimate healer, to resolve their family issues calmly on their own terms. Neela: Victory Song (Girls of Many Lands) by Divakaruni is a

historical fiction novel that is centred on India's independence movement. The fact that the novel centres on a twelve-year-old girl does not imply that it is intended for youngsters or adolescents. It educates folks how to deal with every issue that may arise in their lives. In the course of Neela's quest to discover her father and identify herself with the freedom warriors as an Indian, the film hammers home this point. Despite the fact that Neela does not seem to be mature enough to comprehend the Indian liberation movement, she has the capacity to comprehend everything and act in accordance with her understanding. She is daring and adventurous by nature, and she fights tradition, patriarchy, and marriage, and she aligns herself with the Indian freedom warriors in their struggle for independence. When Neela's father does not come home after participating in a protest march against the English overlords, she is dissatisfied with his absence. She is determined to track down her father and assist him in continuing his struggle against British Imperialism and colonialism. She goes to Calcutta on her own, posing as a little boy in disguise. As a result of her encounter with an underground freedom fighter, she discovers that her father has been imprisoned. She concocts a scheme to elude capture and release her father from jail with his assistance. As a result, she feels a sense of belonging among India's liberation warriors. As Sarah Stone writes in her review of this novel,

"Victory Song not only teaches young readers about India's culture and history, but also entertains superbly, with a likeable protagonist and a dramatic scenario that keeps readers engaged." (Rev.2003)

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