



The Indian Diaspora: Identity, Assimilation and Cultural Resilience: A Transnational view

Corresponding Author: M. Kavipriya,

PhD Research Scholar,

Department of English,

Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies,

Chennai.

Co- Author: Dr. M. Rajalakshmi,

Assistant Professor and Research Supervisor

Department of English,

Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies,

Chennai.

Abstract

Indian literature exemplifies on the exploration of its dynamic relation, cultural practices, geographical extensions, social norms and complexities of cultural assimilation. Indian literature is predominantly the literature produced by diverse bodies and the literary discourses written by writers from Indian sub-continent. Both pre- and post-Independence era spanning vividly with different language and clings on to the cultural and traditional roots of India. The culture, heritage and linguistic richness is all mirrored in the literary discourses featuring both oral and written narratives. Indian literature has an evocative history that encompasses ancient and religious texts as well. One of the pivotal features and themes of such discourses were to disclose and discuss about identity, colonization, Gender, religion and politics.

Keywords: Dislocation, identity, Acculturation, assimilation and Migration.

After colonization, the beginning of the 19th century marked the beginning of the remarkable emblem of change in literary discourse as the Britishers control the Indians or occident's were highly were efficient in influencing the framework of literature. Western literature model created a huge impact on Indian literature and perpetuated avenues in different forms of novel and short stories. The writing style, literary descriptions and established literary models of the westerners have created an intense imperialistic views and perceptions. One such imperial implication that persisted the colonial influence is Jhumpa Lahiri penned a phenomenal production named *The Namesake*. The novel explores and intensifies on transnationality. A dynamic perception that allows this perception to be viewed in a transnational framework. This novel is an identified transnational novel because it establishes the dualities that exist in Bengali- American family. The novel's plotline implicates the experiences of dual identity tracing their journey from Indian origin to American adaptation. The novel explicitly explores the problems of cultural shifts, binaries, identity recreation and transnational identities that navigates avenues to comprehend the diverse complications that insures the plot. The novel introduces Ganguli's family who have their cultural roots in India and they migrated to other states and to other parts for their personal and professional growth. This sense of migration across borders and cultures is a key aspect to comprehend transnational theory. This aids in exploring the individuals, groups and society that eventually leads to multiple changes socially, politically and geographically. It offers us a better lens to comprehend its multi-dimensional perceptions of the globe beyond borders. Transnational theory helps the individuals and communities to regularize their connections to their home culture while adapting to new settlements and cultural changes. Post colonial world is responsible for the aura that is created by the blend of diverse ethnic groups. This leaves space for the recreation of the hybrid space. The immigrants from diverse backgrounds blur and cut across the demographic and geographical concretes of an individual or groups. One among such evident victim of transnational ideology is one of the prolific writers of Indian literature is Jhumpa Lahiri and her text predominantly focus on such narrative discourses. Her writing rejuvenates the complexities of diasporic sensibility. The representation of their characters hunts their actual identities, two worlds: the home and the host. All characters be it first generation or second generation, irrespectively have fluid identities. The novel represents the ideal struggle of individuals between two worlds. A second generation Indian in America- Jhumpa Lahiri writes her own experiences and exemplifies on the cross-cultural fertilization ignoring

negative connotations either of the home and host. The concept of transnationalism challenges traditional understanding of migration as a shift of population from one place to another but as a process that eventually accelerates global connections and assimilation within vivid borders. In the novel, Lahiri's characters serve as transnational individuals who frequently travel and maintain connections with their homeland. Their experience of being displaced, along with the cultural identities of Indian immigrants, implies that people cannot restrict themselves to the limited notion of national and cultural borders in a globalized world marked by transculturation and relocation. In this context, Lahiri's portrayal of Indian immigrants echoes the observation that the ideas of nativeness and native places have grown increasingly complex as more individuals define themselves, or are defined by others, in relation to their de-territorialized homelands, cultures, and roots. In her novel 'The Namesake', Lahiri showcases a spectrum of diasporic identities embodied by characters such as Ashima, Ashoke, Sonali, Gogol, and Moushumi. Lahiri delves into the theme of identity, suggesting its inherent fluidity. The essential query arises regarding their origin and identity: 'Do I belong to the country of my birth or to where I currently reside?' When examined through the lens of flexible identities, we see that Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli, the first generation of Indian immigrants from Calcutta who soon settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts after an arranged marriage, exhibit preparedness, resilience, and adaptability in embracing their multifaceted identities, remaining open to significant compromises and adjustments. Ashoke was introduced to Russian writers early in his life, which encouraged him to understand that reality and identity are both varied and coexist on different levels simultaneously. Consequently, he resolves that he is both Indian and American, and that his world encompasses all the writers he has admired, allowing him to simultaneously embody the dutiful son who visits India annually to see his family and the knowledgeable and esteemed Professor of Fiber Optics at MIT, who achieves fellowship and conducts research in Boston, while being a supportive yet traditional Indian husband and a aware parent aiming to raise his children in a setting rich in diverse identities. Indeed, his name 'Ashoke' itself reflects Lahiri's endeavor to portray this character as one who is 'a-shoka', or free of sorrow. His existence flows smoothly in the United States until his unexpected death in Boston. The concept of identity is quite complex as it is tied to fitting into a cultural environment, especially when an individual experiences cultural dislocation. In such situations, one finds it difficult to connect with either of the two worlds they inhabit. This can lead to a multiethnic

experience. Ashima Ganguly, who was born and raised in India, marries an expatriate in America and goes through this phase, likening life in a foreign country to a 'lifelong pregnancy.' She adheres to her moral and cultural values as a Bengali Indian. Ashima and Ashoke Ganguly endeavor to establish a small piece of Bengal in America, attempting to maintain their roots and cultural identity far from their homeland. Within their home and among friends of Indian descent, they converse in Bengali and enjoy Bengali cuisine with their hands to reconnect with their heritage and keep in touch with their country of origin. They cultivate a sense of home even when separated from their true home. However, regarding their children, the disconnection from their own culture, combined with the feeling of alienation from the country in which they reside, leads to a sense of rootlessness, as their children view America as home while India becomes a distant place for them.

The state of the diaspora, characterized by living here while feeling a connection to somewhere else, signifies a sense of unhomeliness in Lahiri's *The Namesake*. In the United States, Indian immigrants often experience feelings of exile, disconnection, a lack of belonging, and complex social standings. This novel addresses themes of immigrant experiences, identity, displacement, and the generational ties and conflicts that arise. It raises the question of to which home the diaspora belongs and what cultural and geographical responsibilities they bear. The narrative highlights the characters' feelings of emptiness. The Ganguli children come to understand that they fit in neither as Americans nor as Indians. Gogol, unable to erase his past, ultimately accepts both his name and the home of his parents. At the same time, he cannot overlook the American home where he was raised. Consequently, his sense of responsibility regarding both his past and present becomes muddled, leading him to a state of emptiness. Similarly, after Ashoke's death, Ashima desires her children to thrive and secure good jobs in America. Although she adheres to traditional Indian values within her home, she envisions the American dream for them and encourages them to take full advantage of the opportunities available in this new land. Thus, despite selling her house on Pemberton Road in the US, she chooses to split her time between India and the US. This illustrates that as an Indian diaspora, she feels accountable to neither her Indian roots nor her American life. She exists in a state without a personal home, occupying a space of emptiness. In essence, those who inhabit this emptiness—namely, the diasporas—are perpetually in transit, belonging neither fully here nor there. They live with a profound sense of tragedy and awareness. The greater their consciousness of this duality, the more they experience tension,

stress, and tragedy, similar to the characters Gogol and Ashima portrayed by Lahiri in *The Namesake*. The struggle between the desire to assimilate into the liberated American society and the need to maintain ethnic identity ultimately places the diasporas within the realm of emptiness.

Works Cited

1. MIRZA, ANUM. "CONFLICTS OF ASSIMILATION IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S THE NAMESAKE." *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities V.VIII* (2017). 17 May 2021.
- 2 Paudyal, Binod . "Reimagining Transnational Identities in Lahiri's *The Namesake*." *South Asian Review* 36.2 (2015): 195- 212. 11 May 2021.
3. "Gogol's *Namesake*: Identity and Relationships in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*." *Atenea*. Vol. 27, No. 1 (June 2007): 103- 119.
4. Lahiri, Himadri. "Individual-Family Interface in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*". *Americana*, vol. 4, No. 2 (2008), Available at <http://americanajournal.hu/vol4no2/lahiri>.
5. Nair, Mira. *The Namesake: A Portrait of the Film*. New York: New market Press, 2006.