



A STUDY OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S - "THE NAMESAKE"

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ABSTRACT

The study of cultural identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Name Sake" it was published in September 2003, it is the debut novel by American author. It was originally published in The New Yorker and was later expanded to a full length novel. It explores many of the emotional and cultural themes and it explores two conflicting cultures with distinct religious, social, and ideological differences. The story begins as Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, a young Bengali couple, leave Calcutta, India and settle in central square in Cambridge. Here we can see a lot of struggles and cultural conflicts in this novel. How they are suffering to adopt different kinds of foods, traditions and the language. In this novel Lahiri beautifully portrays about how the couples missing their native and their relatives in this novel. The couple has to face lots of problems when they immigrate from their own land. Ashima struggles through cultural barriers as well as her fears as she delivers her first child alone. If she had the delivery place at Calcutta, she would have had the baby at home, surrounded by her family. At US the delivery is successful but the new parents learn the new rules of the country they have to leave the hospital after giving a legal name to their child. Like this the new parents are learning new rules in their immigrant country. The aim of the paper is to analyse first and second generation immigrant characters. The paper would be an attempt to examine the characters from the America and India and their cultures in the novel.

KEY WORDS : Culture, Conflict, Ideology, Name Sake, Immigrant

INTRODUCTION:

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri, is a story of culture, race, and inheritance, and how these factors mold a human attitudes and changed their life. The story has more diasporic experience. The novel focuses on Ashoke and Ashima a newly married Bengali couple moved to America to lead their life. The newly married couples get to learn a new rules of the country. While moving from India to America Ashima has no ideas about the country, after arriving there she had missed her home and parents. She struggles because of the climatic change. In India we had a different weather but in America it was too cold and snowy, Ashima was suffered to the adapt the climatic conditions. Most of the time she remains lost in the memories of her home thinking of the activities going there by calculating 'the Indian time on her hands' which is ten and half hours ahead in Calcutta. In America they were followed a different kinds of culture and foods, but Ashima tries to cook Bengali foods at home. During her pregnant days she felt lonely in that country, she gave birth to her son without her family members in America. If she lived in India she was cared by her family members. The new parents aren't allowed to leave the hospital until they give a name for their newly born baby. Finally they named their son as Gogol, and leave the hospital. At first Gogol likes his name later he tries to change it as Nikhil. After birth of Gogol and Sonia Ashima learns to go for shopping and she went for the parties invited by Indians lived in America.

Discussion:

Gogol and Sonia who were born in America they want live their life in American lifestyle. In America children used to take decisions on their own, so Gogol grew up like an American, at the age of four he loved his name and later he changed as Nikhil. An India father and mother wished their child to grow up by learning Indian cultures, they aren't accept that. Ashoke was busy with his works and he used to give lot of friendly advice to Gogol.

Stuart Hall, in his essay, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" says the identity is not as transparent and unproblematic as we think to be. Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, we should think of it as a product, which is never complete and is always in process always constituted within, not outside, representation. Cultural identity to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending time, place, history, and culture. Culture identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation (Hall, Qtd in colonial discourse and post-colonial theory). When the novel begins the issues of names and identity is presented. As Ashima's water breaks, she calls out to Ashoke her husband. However calling a name of husband is not accepted in Indian culture, she does not use his name because it would not be proper. According to Ashima

It's not the type of thing Bengali wives do.... a husband's name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over.

Ashoke and Ashima spend three decades at America, they try to naturalize themselves as American citizens. They hold an American passport, a driving license and a social security card. Officially they have a house at the city. However they never feel at home. Ashima's nature is nostalgic, as a typical immigrant Bengali woman in initial stage she finds difficult to adopt American society. Her migration disturbs her, later she tries to learn everything. Ashima is a woman, who preserved her culture and customs in the foreign land. She used

to wear saree and kurtas in the foreign land and doesn't forget her Indian culture. This novel describes the first generation Bengali migrants to America and the second generation their very own children. The First Generation Ashoke and Ashima Who were struggles to learn everything, they tries to adapt the foreign society and foods. Ashima feels lonely at home when Ashoke leaves home for work, she used to do crafts and thinks about her native land. After she gave birth to two children , Ashima search a work for herself , to overcome her loneliness she worked as a Librarian. When she came here she doesn't the street names. Later she develop herself and learn everything. She worked as a librarian , she drives a car, she made new American colleagues. In this novel Jhumpa Lahiri beautifully presents the problems of immigrants which she felt in her own life. She is also an Indian but lived in America. She has also faced everything that Ashima has faced, she tries to show in this novel. Ashima was presented as good Bengali wife for her husband. Who used to cook for her husband and children eventhough she lived in a modern society. After her husband's demise she felt more lonely and plans to return back to her native land. When she knew about Gogol's shattered marriage life she was confused about her own decision.

By Jhumpa Lahiri's Writing we can see the second generation life Gogol, Sonia and others. Gogol who wants to live his life in American Culture. Gogol was teased by his friends so he has changed his name as Nikhil. While his parents made a trip to India , they went to Visit Taj Mahal after seeing that he used to changed his career as Engineering into Architecture. The Second Generation in this novel has permitted by their parents to live their life as their wish. However Gogol spends his life living in the United States where children are often ashamed of their difference from others. During Adolescence, Gogol desires to blend in and to live unnoticed. Other Americans never view him as an American however even though he is a native born citizen. This presents struggle between two cultures and problem of sense with Bengali culture and values. But Gogol and Sonia grow up relating mostly to their peers and the surrounding cultures in United states. The second generation, whose parents still cling to old traditional beliefs, feels trapped by their differences, not only at school but at home. Lahiri demonstrates how much of a struggle immigration can be.

CONCLUSION :

The novel shows an diasporas are always in transformative phase. How the Indian couples survived their life in American society, but the younger generation could not locate their identity in either of the balance between two cultures. Gogol is the central character acts as a link between two cultures. He is caught between the family expectations of being loyal to his mother land and fluent in the host land. The Namesake is story we can study of different cultural conflicts. It begins with migration of the first generation and the life of the second generation. In this novel we can find the struggles of immigrant and how they overcomes their cultural conflicts.

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