



A Study Related to Diaspora in Lahiri's Novels

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ABSTRACT

Jhumpa Lahiri falls under the second category of Asian American authors who mostly write about India, who view India as an exotic place to make a livelihood under any conditions, and who also deal with the difficulties faced by Indian immigrants trying to survive in a foreign country. In this article, the author uses a few of Jhumpa Lahiri's novels to explore the Diaspora. Her stories are not only fictional works that we read; they are actual accounts of the expatriate community in which they live. Lahiri's writing is praised or well-known for its beauty and poignancy as well as for its ability to gently and mesmerizingly evoke an emotional connection or link between the reader and the characters. Both her protagonists, who are typically immigrants from India to America who must negotiate between the cultural ideals of their origin or country and their chosen home, and her "simple" English, which is easily understood by others, set Lahiri's writing apart. Lahiri is familiar and well-known, in her autobiographical literature, which is immensely absorbing for readers. Lahiri analyses her characters' struggles, fears, and prejudices to chronicle the nuances and particulars of immigrant psychology and behaviour.

Key words: Home, Diasporas, culture, Jhumpa Lahiri, Novel, Fiction, Struggles etc.

1. Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri, byname of Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri is an American author. She has known for her short stories, novels, postcolonial and essays in English, and, more recently, in Italian. Lahiri was born on 11 July, 1967 in London, England. Lahiri completed her double M.A. in English (second M.A. in Comparative Literature), an M.F.A. in Creative Writing and a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies from Boston University. Her dissertation, completed in 1997, was titled "Accursed Palace: The Italian palazzo on the Jacobean stage."

Lahiri initially encountered the writing inspiration in elementary school, and at the ripe old age of seven, she started co-authoring "books" with a classmate during recess. Her first collection of nine short tales, *Interpreter of Maladies*, was released in June. She has published two major collections of short stories, each of which contains 17 short stories. As many readers may already be aware, Lahiri's short stories are primarily about the lives and struggles (including many types of internal and external strife) of Indians in the US. She began her career with the short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*, published in 1999, containing 9 short stories and mostly implying the sense of otherness that Indians, sharply zoomed in on Bengalis (with Bangladeshis included) in the United States. Lahiri published her first novel, *The Namesake* in 2003. A family story she heard as a child influenced the theme and plot of this story. After then she published her second novel *The Lowland* in 2013 and got the Man Booker Prize and the National Book Award for Fiction.

2. Diaspora

Lahiri not only illustrates how the later generations will inevitably become estranged from their cultural heritage as a result of their physical and psychological separation from South Asia, but she also highlights another crucial aspect that may complicate identity formation: the likelihood that the South Asian immigrant families' subsequent generations will wed both white and other ethnic Americans. The latter scenario is how Lahiri depicts Gogol's sister Sonia as she makes plans for her future with her half-Chinese, half-Jewish fiancé Ben. The importance of any one cultural tie must necessarily be diminished when more cultural prerogatives are added to the already complex process of identity creation for future generations. Lahiri also highlights the fleeting nature of these cultural borderlands because only the second generation has experienced a world so strongly influenced by both their parents' native cultures and the American way of life. Lahiri predicts that, in the end, the third generation and beyond will forge a global identity that is not based on nationality or ethnicity but rather on personal prerogative.

A group of people who are dispersed globally and share a common heritage is referred to as a diaspora. It also stands for ethnic group members who have left their homeland with the help of others or on purpose. The term "influential migration" refers to the forcible expulsion of people from their native country for social, political, or economic reasons, such as the indentured labour system, the partition of India and Pakistan, and so forth. Intentional migration from one country to another includes migration for reasons such as education, employment opportunities, marriage, and social reasons. Immigrants who live in diaspora face a variety of problems including a sense of displacement, cultural conflict, and identity confusion. Diaspora literature, also known as diasporic literature, is a genre of writing created by immigrants that describes the experiences of immigrants living abroad. Indian Diasporic

Literature has developed as a result of the literary contributions made by writers of Indian descent such as V. S. Naipul, Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukharjee, Amitav Ghosh, Meena Alexander, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, etc. to diaspora literature.

The plot of the novel revolves round Ganguli family and shows how much nostalgic the family is from the beginning of their landing in America. By reading this book one comes to know how much they wish and aspire for home and for creating their own domestic and social space around them. Lahiri shows in this novel the importance of home, and what it is to be in America and still can't become an American. The concept of space is an important one throughout the novel. For Gangulis' there is no difficulty in maintaining the domestic space by being stick to their own Indian culture. Inside their house they maintain their Indian manners, language, culture and customs: "When Ashima thinks of her husband, she never considers his name". The condition of Ashima is the real portrayal of the condition of women in diaspora. She cries when she is alone at home, her isolation and loneliness haunts her: "she wonders if she is the only Indian in the hospital," but a gentle jerk of baby from the body reminds her that she is not alone. In hospital she is more painful not because of labour but because of motherhood in a foreign land: "that it was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved, had made it more miraculous still"

The novel portrays the cultural dilemma faced by immigrants in foreign land; Lahiri also shows that the immigrants in their passion of being attached to their own cultural beliefs and customs gradually imbibe and assimilate the cultural ways of the host country people. Their own children became bilingual and bicultural, and face cultural dilemmas and displacement more. They became culturally hybrid and there was cultural transformation. Gogol speaks words in two languages, at home he speaks Bengali with his parents and outside he speaks English. After the legal formalities, when Ashima flies alone to be with her husband with a heavy heart and lots of instructions from her family members and relatives. The instructions of what to do and what not to do in America shows how much concerned the Ashima's family is about that she should not lose her identity and Indian culture, same kind of concern was shown by Ashima and Ashoke towards the preservation of their children's identity in America. They also advised them in the same way what to wear, what to eat and in which language they should talk.

3. Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Namesake'

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri, which is the subject of this article, focuses on how first- and second-generation immigrants adhere to their native and new countries (2003). In this book, Lahiri examines the psychological state of second-generation immigrants Gogol, Sonia, and Moushumi as well as first-generation immigrants Ashima and Ashoke. The novel critically exemplifies how the notion of homeland generates a setting to build a sense of home and proximity to identity. The term "home" connotes impermanence, displacement, and dispossession in this age of transmigration. Many critics believe that rather than being anchored, the concept of home is more accurately described as one of being in between two places. Ashima's sense of belonging to her original country, India, is referred to in the book. Additionally, the identities of Gogol, Sonia, and Moushumi are said to be linked to the United States, where they were born. However, the question of whether they seem to be negating Indian intellectual beliefs and principles for this region arises. And how far along are they in building the real home?

The Ganguli family is the microcosm of Indian immigrants in America and other countries. Their condition resembles the condition of present day Indian diasporas. The interesting question in the novel is to what extent and in what forms boundaries are maintained by first and second generation diasporas. John A. Armstrong in "Mobilized and proletarian diasporas" says that Boundary Maintenance is the third constitutive criterion for diaspora. He defines Boundary-maintenance as involving the preservation of a distinctive identity vis-a-vis a host society. Boundaries can be maintained by deliberate resistance to assimilation through self-forced endogamy or other forms of self-segregation (394-395). So we can find in the novel how Ganguli family and other Indian characters maintain a balance of both 'Boundary Maintenance' and 'Boundary Erosion' sometimes they assimilate and sometimes they give a strong resistance to American culture.

Spanning a period of over three decades, The Namesake presents the graphic penportrait of the Gangulis, torn between the pull of the age-old traditions of their homeland and the American way of life. The story begins in 1968 when the newly wed Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli immigrate to Cambridge, Massachusetts and await the arrival of their first child. Gogol, who is afflicted from birth with a name, that is neither Indian nor American, nor even really a first name at all. Soon after his birth he is named Gogol after the world renowned Russian short story writer of the nineteenth century, Nikolai Gogol. Ashoke is deeply indebted to this Russian writer as he believes that it was the copy of Nikolai Gogol's anthology of short stories that saved him from dying in a train wreck in India before he came to America to study at MIT and before his marriage to Ashima. As a form of tribute to the author, Ashoke, waiting with his wife for a prospective Bengali name to arrive from her grandmother for their new-born son, decides to call him by the pet name, Gogol. The parents are aware that Gogol is an 'awkward' name for their American-born son, but unfortunately the letter that contained the respectable Bengali name is lost.

The Namesake is a story about an immigrant family from India, Ashima and Ashoka Ganguli and their two children Gogol and Sonia and their resettlement in America, and their struggle to maintain their Indianness on American land. The novel covers a period of about thirty years of its characters' life, starting in 1968 and ending in 2000. In the beginning, readers are introduced to Ashima Ganguli who is cooking food in her kitchen in America. Then after some months in Massachusetts she is admitted to hospital for delivery. Ashima gives birth to a baby boy who is named Gogol. When Ashoka "he has never been inspired to read a word of Gogol, or any Russian writer, for that matter. He has never been told the real meaning of his name, Gogol, and he is unaware of the incident that almost took his father's life. He's been told only half the truth about Gogol that his father is a fan". (Lahiri, 2003:75)

Ashoke and Ashima, two of Lahiri's first-generation characters, are deeply ingrained in Bengali culture. Bengali woman Ashima stands out because she never refers to her husband by name. On order to instil Indian values in her children, Gogol and Sonia, she makes an effort to observe all Bengali rituals. They frequently accompany their children to Bengali social occasions so they can learn about the culture. Here, Lahiri demonstrates how Ashima

maintains her Indian culture while assimilating into contemporary American society. In the book, cultural conflict emerges because Gogol's parents want to raise their kids in Indian culture, while their kids would rather adopt American culture.

Gogol is upset with his name the entire book. His identification causes him discomfort. He abandons his Bengali background and adopts the life he admires when he changes his name to Nikhil. Gogol never stops eluding his culture. Although he enjoys the company of Maxine's parents and falls in love with her, he feels humiliated of his own parents because they do not fit into American culture. Gogol has been a disobedient person his entire life. His decision to change his name from Gogol to Nikhil is actually a protest. He violates authority by losing his virginity at a party and having a brief liaison with a white female named Ruth. When he becomes "aware of the fact that his immersion in Maxine's family is betraying of his own," he is drawn toward his roots and has a longer-lasting relationship with Maxine, another wealthy white girl. The sudden change in his life occurs when he learns of his father's passing. As he learns to connect with him and his background, his father's unexpected death has a profound impact on him. In order to spend more time with his mother and sister, he ends his relationship with Maxine.

Gogol marries Moushumi, a Bengali girl, according to Indian tradition, with all of their rites, as he gradually comes to understand the value of his family and culture. But as a quiet and reserved young woman in her twenties, Moushumi experiences freedom from her parents and their rigid Bengali traditions: "Without a second thought, she had allowed men to lure her in cafés, in parks, and as she admired artworks in museums. She let the men buy her dinners and drinks. She would sometimes sleep with one man after lunch and another after dinner. By the book's conclusion, Gogol has come to accept the moniker that represents his family's history. He takes out a book of Nikolai Gogol's short stories that his father had long ago given him as a birthday present. He starts to think of his father's train catastrophe and his doomed marriage as accidents that have happened throughout his family's history. Gogol believes that he is now free to do as he pleases as the book comes to a close. He is unable to both accept American society and go back to India. The Namesake illustrates the ongoing problem that the South Asian Diasporas in the First World face as a representative postcolonial diasporic fiction. They become psychological refugees as a result of seeing opposing cultures in Diasporas and feel torn between two homes to which neither of them belongs.

The eastern and western worlds have been combined in Jhumpa Lahiri's work. Themes like assimilation, failed relationships, home, exile, dual identities, rootlessness, and hybridity help us comprehend Lahiri as a writer from the Diaspora. Her transcontinental voyage, during which she became accustomed to both Indian and American society, is more vividly described in the anecdotes she relates. Her texts are replete with descriptions of traditional Indian foods, dressing styles, ceremonies, and names. Lahiri serves as the Indian diaspora's representative in this situation.

Lahiri has a completely distinct perspective on immigrant fiction. She genuinely challenges the system and wonders why someone would be excluded for writing on a particular subject. Lahiri believes that authors have always tended to write about the worlds from which they originate, and it just so happens that many authors are originally from different parts of the world than they ultimately end up living in another, either out of choice or due to necessity, and write about their experiences as a result. In the realm of diaspora writers, terms like "diaspora," "exile," "alienation," "belongingness," and "expatriation" have meanings that are largely similar to one another and contain some degree of ambiguity. They describe being both a refugee and an ambassador in a distant country. Here, diaspora took on the shape of a social formation where it talks about blending into a different culture to produce hybrid identities. For her readers, Lahiri aimed to create several depictions of diasporic life. These differences are represented by the fictions explored in the study. The "inbetweenness" of the immigrant population forces us, the readers, to reexamine our assumptions. The diasporic space is special in its own way. The characters in Lahiri's work exhibit both positive and negative aspects of their diasporic journey. She illustrates the advantages of adaptability and a changing lifestyle for immigrants. Unaccustomed Earth's characters suffer because of their precarious position at the intersection of two different cultures. They continue to adhere to cultural poles, two traditions, and two ideologies, which leads to conflicts, rootlessness, and identity crises. Their destiny is determined by how they view their past and their own original culture. Again, Lahiri mentioned Kaushik's mother's breast cancer in the short story "Going Ashore." She received no assistance or inspiration to deal with the situation from any of her family or friends in India. The family made the decision to return to America in order to escape the upsetting behaviour of the locals and find some mental peace.

Lahiri illustrates issues that demonstrate how the diasporic world has altered the traditional idea of home as a haven of safety and harmony. The experiences of immigrants are varied. Some of the emigrants are able to free themselves from the shackles of outdated beliefs and customs and experience the benefits of integration. People, who recall the past too much, like Kaushik, become mired in the past and lose the ability to move forward. Forgetting one's native culture can be tragic for the Diaspora population and be damaging in several ways. Only by mediating between these two areas can immigrants maintain positive in their life.

To conclude, the diaspora did not just encourage border-crossing. It represents a voyage across less obvious borders including those of time, place, race, conventional beliefs, and language. The diasporic subjects settle in a new environment and produce something new. They cannot just give up their former ways of life and traditions and gradually adapt to the host country; also, the interaction between good and negative in the diasporic realm needs to be highlighted.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, the present chapter presents migration and the sense of exile as a universal experience and the imbalance between the east and the west that changes a person's thinking and feeling. These changes, Lahiri points out, manifest themselves in the loss in personal sphere and social sphere over times. The novel highlights the loss that is inevitable when one lives life torn between the east and the west. Thus, this novel is about contemporary immigrant life and ongoing parallel world left behind. Jhumpa Lahiri tries to negotiate the diasporic space and the narrative space as well as cultural space. Lahiri powerfully portrays a society that is lost in nostalgia and how memories of home intensify their nostalgia. The novel is a luminous family saga that bridges

eras and cultures. Lahiri's narrative offers meaningful insight into the characters' struggle to relate due to their diasporic identity and diasporic consciousness created by dislocation. The novel spans continents, generations, cultures, religions, and races.

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