

Depiction of Painful Expatriate Experiences and Cultural Dilemmas in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* : A Brief Analysis

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ABSTRACT: This article projects Jhumpa Lahiri as a notable immigrant writer who goes beyond the conventional wisdom where she creates her identity as transnational. She emphasizes not only Disapora, but also the impact of multiculturalism. It also throws light upon identity of Disaporic nature, conflict of dual identity and Cultural Dislocation.

Key Words: Immigrant, Diaspora, Dual Identity, Cultural Dislocation.

On the basis of religion, race, caste, economic and social status, the individual identity is moulded. Jhumpa Lahiri does neatly explore the ideas of cultural and personal isolations and identities through various characters and her debut novel, *The Namesake* explores the themes of expatriate painful experiences and cultural dilemmas of the first and second generation Indian immigrants by which the loneliness is one of the burning issues of the expatriate community in the nation of their choice. Lahiri uses simple and lucid language to depict the immigrant experiences and the cross-cultural conflicts between Indian and Western culture. She successfully explores the myriad landscape of human relationships by welding the theme of immigration and displacement to that of human relationships against the backdrop of both geographical as well as emotional displacement.

Lahiri through her novel *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* projects the life of the second generation Indian American writer and explores the ideas of cultural and personal isolation in her novel. Conflict in relationship between couples, families and friends is projected in *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*. She correlates her characters' cultural isolation with extreme personal isolation suggesting that the cultural isolation causes the personal. Multiculturalism is a weapon of justice which can solve a quite number of differences between various cultural communities including minorities. Her themes like the immigrant experience, the clash of cultures, the tangled ties between generations etc is portrayed in the novel *The Namesake*. This work is a dispassionate account of the limited, contented lives of Bengali immigrant community by which the people surrendered themselves to their adopted country without taking the risk of exercising choices.

Lahiri's first novel *The Namesake* spans over thirty years in the life of the Ganguli family where her Calcutta born parents immigrated as young adults to United States where Gogol and Sonia experienced the generational and cultural gap with their parents. This is novel is an autobiographical work of Lahiri which projects the story of two generations of an Indian family and their struggles to adopt themselves in the West Country. The hybrid identity of the immigrants creates a tumultuous situation in the novel regarding their belongingness and it creates impure identity rather than fixed identity in which national identities get eroded and replaced by the hybrid identities. "They argue riotously over the films of Ritwik Ghatak versus those of Satyajit Ray. The CPIM versus the Congress Party. North Calcutta versus South. For hours they argue about the politics of America, a country in which none of them is eligible to vote." (*The Namesake*, 38)

The Namesake celebrates cultural hybridity resulting from globalization and it rethinks conventional immigrant experience in which it throws light on national and cultural identities of India suggesting that individuals cannot confine themselves within the narrow concept of national and cultural boundaries characterized by migration. The issues of global migration and cross-cultural elements seem to disavow the popular hearsay and it reflects the fact that 'Home is where the heart lies'. Edward Said's skepticism with the concept of cultures is very relevant and it is as something distinctive, representative of an exclusive to certain group or nation in Culture and Imperialism (1993). Said writes: Culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought, as Mathew Arnold put it in the 1860's Arnold believed that culture palliates, if it does not altogether neutralizes, the ravage of a modern, aggressive, mercantile and brutalizing urban experience...In time culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the nation or the state, this

differentiates 'us from them' almost always with some degree of identity, and a rather combative one at that (xii) (Said:1993). Jhumpa Lahiri's characters are in a search for their origin and they find a place that can be called as one's own and it is a choice between the concept of cultural identity and multiculturalism which remained as juxtaposed throughout.

The characters in the novel find it very difficult to get adapted to the new identity in the foreign country and the cultural values which tend to be very new to them to follow. Jhumpa Lahiri portrayed the cultural identity, personal identity and psychological identity in a palpable manner by which Gogol is not in a right way until he realizes that he is embellished by new culture. Many characters like Sonia, Moushmi overcomes divided identity by proving the fact that identity is an open question not a guaranteed one.

The Namesake is a novel of identities where Gogol perplexed by his pet name but he has legally changed it to Nikhil and realized how it is difficult to become a different person. At different stages of life Gogol tries on different identities. Gogol's identity is closely linked to that of his father. Gogol represents the life that followed the horrible train accident he suffered in 1961. Gogol represents the life that followed the horrible train accident he suffered in 1961. Gogol does not understand that part of his identity till his father's dooms day. Another character Moushumi is wrapped up in an identity that is "French then the identity she forms with Gogol etc. Ashima and Ashoke grow closer together. When Ashok dies Ashima with her support of her family, she begins to learn a new identity. Lahiri's works are imbued with the ethos of Indian culture and sensibility and it can be examined from a number of perspectives and can be deconstructed.

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