

INDIAN DIASPORA: A CRITICAL STUDY OF JHUMPA LAHIRI'S NAMESAKE

¹Kaberi Sonowal, ²Sikmi Borah, ³Manab Jyoti Bora, ⁴Bhagyasree Talukdar

¹M.Phil Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India, kaberisonowal77@gmail.com

²Ph.D Research Scholar, Dept. of Assamese, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India, sikminorah81354@gmail.com

³Ph.D Research Scholar, Dept. of Assamese, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India, sikminorah81354@gmail.com

⁴Department of Assamese, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India, bhagyasreej123@gmail.com

Abstract

This novel *Namesake* written by Jhumpa Lahiri runs through crises within an American born to Indian immigrant parents. The struggle starts with the name “Gogol” which was inspired an author loved by the immigrant Indian Father. While the story travels through the subtle adamant nature of Ashima, the mother of Gogol to not let go her Indian influence by continuing to reading Indian languages to a day when Gogol starts identifying him as an Indian. Jhumpa Lahiri further portrays the unsettlement of the first generation Indian immigrant family and the hardship they face while settling in a different country as immigrant, while living with the memories of their homeland. The novel reeks of cultural shock, alienation faced by the ones who leave their homeland for better opportunities and also the home sick feeling shown through mother of Gogol, Ashima, The life of Ashoke Ganguly, the father of Gogol travels between two culture, while the story travels through his endeavour to protect his own culture and identity, as parents his idea was to raise Gogol in American way.

JhumpaLahiri being one of the few celebrated writer of diasporic literature, it would be apt to study her work through the cross –cultural prism in the diasporic literature by critically viewing her work in *Namesake*.

Keywords: Diaspora, Identity crisis, Immigration, Double identity.

INTRODUCTION

“Diaspora” is a scattered population whose origin lies in a separate geographic locale or hails from a different part of world other than where they ordinarily live. It is also defined as a community of people who do not live in their country of origin, but maintains their heritage in a new land. Diaspora is predominantly saturated with the elements of nostalgia as they seek to discover themselves in the ambience of new cultures. They write in the backdrop of cultural traits of their land of origin and at the same time endeavour to fit them into the cultural space of the lost land. And such literature acts as a bridge

across various cultures, paving a way for better understanding between different cultural regions, countries also renders an impetus for globalization.

Characteristic features of the Diasporic writing are the quest for identity, uprooting and re-routing, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia etc. This kind of writing helps to generate aesthetic evaluation, negotiation with cultural constructs and aid the emergence of a new hybridity. In the storm of cultural and moral advertises the Indian community is acknowledged for a greater sense of adjustments, adaptability and accessibility at the

same time conscious about saving the grace of their country which is clearly noticeable in Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel "The Namesake".

Jhumpa Lahiri ranks in the second generation diasporic Indian literature who has faithfully demonstrated the lives of both first and second generation immigration in the US. further portrays the unsettlement of the first generation Indian immigrant family and the hardship they faces while settling in different country as immigrant, while living with the memories of their homeland. The novel reeks of cultural shock, alienation faced by the ones who leave their homeland for better opportunities and also the home sick feeling shown through the mother of Gogol, Ashima, The life of Ashoke Ganguly, the father of Gogol travels between two cultures, while the story travels through his endeavour to protect his own culture and identity, as parents his idea was to raise Gogol in American way. The friction between Ashima and Ashoke through their journey in Cambridge beautifully captures the narrative of cross-cultural influence in living and lives.

Jhumpa Lahiri being one of the few celebrated diasporic literature, it would be apt to study her work through the cross –cultural prism in the diasporic literature by critically viewing her work in Namesake. The book also reveals the travel of culture through reading, though it is subtle as the name of the son of Ashima and Ashoke is borrowed from a Russian Author, who was one of the favourites of Ashoke and who is emotionally attached to the name.

Diasporic Literature

Writers living in Foreign Countries, writing for and about their motherland wherein the writings reek of their quest for identities through the complexities of dual culture, nostalgia of their homeland and the palpable contrast in way of living in the host country etc can broadly be categorized as Diasporic literature. In the present globalised, multicultural world, diaphora studies and diasporic literature are emerging field, in literally and socio-cultural studies. The diasporic literature is influence by the feeling of displacement, dislocation in foreign lands and they feel alienated and suffer from existential crisis, mental trauma, failing in their attempt to acculturate themselves to the host culture.

While talking about Diasporic Literature, Homi K. Bhabha stated that the negotiation of cultural identity involves the continual interface and exchange of cultural performance that in turns produce a mutual and mutable recognition (or representation) of cultural difference.

There are many Diasporic authors, whose works have been critically acclaimed, however, the work of Jhumpa Lahiri, in "The Namesake" was the first of the presenter's reading experience of diasporic literature. Her works portray human conditions by interpreting difficulties faced by individuals suffering from dislocation. While "The Namesake" was the Jhumpa Lahiri first Novel and the author had very lucidly poured in her own experience of being born to an Indian immigrant to England and she takes her reader through the complexities of living a life of an immigrant as that is marinated with multi-layer emotional experiences ranging from alienation to efforts to assimilate to the host country. The narration in the book namesake uses the flashback technique by recount her past, her fond memories in India. The namesake is written in third person narrative and the author narrates the story primarily through the eyes and interpretation of Gogol's point of view and also brushes the point of view of Gogol's parents, Ashima and Ashoke Ganguly and also his wife Moushumi.

In the book, Lahiri is seem to be very descriptive and it conveys the message that Lahiri had tried to focus on huge timeline through minimum pages and as such in many occasions the voice of the author comes to the fore through her characters. Her book The Namesake represents the personal experience of the Indian Diaspora in the west and the story focuses on the relationships and family ethos.

Objective

This research paper aims to understand the issue of Diaspora and how this has impacted the lives of the characters of Jhumpa Lahiri's Namesake. The process of globalization and transnationalism is the main factor of creating two identities and issues arises like dislocation of cultures, crisis of identities, marginalization etc. This paper tries to understand how first generation immigrants from India constantly getting nostalgic for their Homeland; on the other hand, second generations is getting

assimilated and tries to adapt the way of Americans in comparison to their parents.

Discussion

The Namesake is born from the duality of the author's identity being a second generation immigrant to United States of America from India. The story is stuck between two cultures, one is the values of traditional Indian Society and the other is modern America ideals of living. Through the protagonist, Gogol, the author portrays the assimilation and synthesis of two cultures in one character, wherein Gogol grows up in an Indian Home and breathes freedom American way of living outside the four walls of home. At the same time the main protagonist's mother Ashima who happens to be the first generation immigrant continued to hold onto their Indian values.

The story canvases the idea of cross-cultural complexity through the character Ashima, who while living in a Foreign Country feels homesick and craves for her home and same is poignantly referred in the novel. She reminds her life in Calcutta and think of how different it is than her life in America. She feels that she is not only dislocated to America geographically but also socio-culturally. She misses her Indian way of life and continues to hold on to the Indian way of living through her food habits, dressing etc. Through her character Lahiri displays the vulnerability faced by Ashima due to identity loss, alienation in a foreign land. The ferocity of Ashima resistance to assimilate to the culture of host country by letting go her culture is palpable in the novel. She lived without American friends and avoided American way of life and she continued to cling to her own imbibed self.

Cross-Cultural crisis can be felt in Ashima when she firmly decides to stick to her own identity unlike her husband Ashoke. In sharp contrast Ashoke, who is also a first generation immigrant, tires to grab better career opportunity that appears in the host country. Ashoke tries to fit into the way of living which has been chosen for him in America by means of his immigration and his endeavours to assimilate are seen from his character throughout the novel. The narration of the moment of pride for Ashoke after his name is published in the University faculty's list shows his endeavour to accept the host culture.

In fact there are instances where Ashoke tries to raise his kids in American way of life.

Ashima's isolation further reveals after the death of her husband Ashoke, when she started to live alone in their house she felt terribly alienated and lonely. However, in those desperate times she never displayed her eagerness to live in Calcutta with her family and in the contrary her character stays rooted in the American home while living with the feeling of exhaustion and permanent separation from her dead husband.

The polarity of culture is beautifully described through the crisis of naming their son, as the letter of suggested names delays in arrival. The crisis of Indian parents in an American Hospital just after the birth of a new born child emphasises on the challenges faced by immigrants.

The name of the protagonist of the novel, Gogol is inspired from a Russian Writer, who was loved by his father Ashoke. The name not only is inspired by the love for Russian writer but also he was emotionally connected with the name for he survived a Train accident and only possession remained after the accident was the book written by his favourite author, Nikolai Gogol. Gogol resists the Indian culture and upbringing in his home and seen to be in conflict with parents ideals. While he grows up more open to American way of living and emulates their culture and approach to life, his mother seems to be trying to "protect" or "preserve" the Indianness of her son. But he drifts slowly and steadily and falls in love with an American Girl and starts to live with her. Jhumpa Lahiri displays the difference in cultures, by portraying the stark difference in way of living of the parents of his girlfriend Maxine. There is also a duality of his character in terms of accepting his American identity by discarding Indianness is questioned by his own act of asking his girlfriend to conform to Indian standard of living while introducing her to his parents.

Gogol discovers his Indian identity after the sudden death of his father while performing the last rites of his father and the rituals thereafter. It is shown in the novel that the last rites were performed by Gogol as per Hindu ritual in Indian way life shaving his head etc. In due course, he discovers importance of his family and slowly starts to identify himself as an Indian and eventually just to make his mother happy he

marries a Bengali girl Moushumi in Indian traditional way.

The theme of Identity crisis is also portrayed through the character Moushumi, the wife of main protagonist Gogol. She is shown as second generation Indian immigrant living in America and her crisis stems from her feeling of loneliness. Her character travels through a phase wherein she rejected the Indian way of marriage, i.e., arrangement and thereafter she finds herself in the same position after her love leaves her. Her finding of her own character is through the loneliness she feels post her break up, displaying the vulnerability generations of immigrants.

Sonia, sister of Gogol also finds herself in the crossroads of two cultures, but her character is not shown as vulnerable as Gogol and she lived with her mother and embraced the Indian way of living. However, by the end of the narration, Sonia falls in love with an American male and effortlessly transcends to American living. Before Sonia's marriage to her American Husband, she fights through the nay-saying Indian mother in Ashima, however, on a later stage of the narration, Ashima seems to accept the cross-cultural identities her children were born to. Character of Sonia is the quintessential example of cross-cultural emergence displayed in the Lahiri's Novel.

Conclusion

In the Novel *The Namesake*, the characters of Jhumpa Lahiri finds it hard to identify themselves with one culture and the constantly struggles between their root and the host culture while being pained by dislocation, feeling of alienation, identity crisis etc. Second Generation immigrants as shown in Gogol's character and as well as in his wife and his sister shows the emergence of a hybrid identity and they have tried assimilate with the host culture adopting the ways and life styles of the Americans.

The characters of Gogol, Sonia and Moushumi remained in a third cultural space, where they were neither completely Indian nor they could assimilate completely to the American culture, but seen more often to oscillate between the two cultures. The novel *The Namesake* therefore completely fits in to the category of Diasporic Indian Literature.

Reference

- [1] K Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
- [2] Cohen. Robin. (2002). *Global Diaspora: An Introduction*. Routledge.
- [3] Lahiri, Jhumpa. (2003). *The Namesake*. Flamingo.
- [4] Bhalla, Tamara. (2012). Being (and Feeling) Gogol: Reading and Recognition in Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Namesake". *Oxford Journals* (n.d.): 105-129, volume. 37, issue.1.
- [5] Chakraborty, Madhurima.(2014). *Adapdation and Shifting Allegiance of the Indian diaspora: Jhumpa Lahiri's and Mira Nair's The Namesake(s) Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4. pp. 609-621.
- [6] Richards, Wadia. (2017). *Love, Desi Style: Arranged Marriage and Transnational Mobility in Mira Nair's The Namesake*. *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol. 26, No.1. pp.64-80.
- [7] Mishra. Vijay. (2007). *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary*. Routledge.