

DIASPORIC FEATURES IN THE NAMESAKE BY JHUMPA LAHIRI

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Abstract

The Namesake, Jhumpa Lahiri's second literary work, was released in 2003 and is a novel about the Indian Diaspora. The Indian Diaspora has a long history, but it has recently grabbed the interest of creative authors. The novel depicts the everyday routines of an Indian immigrant family who immigrated to America following the country's freedom. As the daughter of immigrants, it's safe to assume that the writer is concerned with the obstacles that immigrants face in America, including their traditions, values, culture, religion, language, and, most importantly, their identity. The consequences of the Diaspora on the characters in The Namesake are examined in this paper.

Keywords: culture, language, identity, religion and traditional values.

INTRODUCTION

The colonial period gave individuals in Asia and Africa, the colonised territories, the chance to go to Europe, the imperial centre. People continued to migrate for economic, political, cultural, and personal reasons even after the colonial period ended. They made their home there. Diaspora is the phenomena of people travelling to and establishing in a foreign nation. Because the old nation, together with its religion, language, and culture, occupies a significant part of their minds, the settlers have a difficult time integrating into the new land's community. Diasporans confront significant challenges from the start of their settlement in a foreign place, as they must transcend their previous identities and blend in with the current conditions. Their two lives old and new are divided by an unspoken conflict, resulting in a predicament for them. They come across the juxtaposition of conflicting views about the two worlds, which leads to a condition of dual life that is eternally tormented. They frequently

learn, to their horror, that they belong nowhere and are residents of no man's land. They can't forget their history or fully accept the new place, so they try to live with their mental dualism. They must undergo a significant reorganisation of their ideas and behaviours in order to do so, which makes them feel alienated in their new existence. Those who were born and reared in another country have an entirely distinct diasporic experience. They are free of the ailment that plagued the earlier settlers in terms of their connection to the old nation. This generation learns about their homeland via their few trips, books, films, and stories shared by their parents. As a result, kids grow up with little awareness of their home nation, which gradually expands as they mature. When their history is revealed to them for acceptance, or their current identity is questioned in a strange nation, they are faced with a dilemma. Their parents' fixation with their ethnicity can often lead to a series of inquiries regarding the paths they should choose. This eventually leads to the

same ailment as the initial settlers. However, because of their attachment to the place in which they were born and raised, it's easy to imagine that their suffering isn't as severe as that of the original settlers. Lahiri examines these two types of dispersion in *The Namesake*.

In her novel *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri explores the haunting experience of Indian immigrants Ashoke and Ashima, as well as their children, Gogol and Sonia, who were born and raised in America. This novel explores the Indian diaspora through the lenses of place, time, language, and culture. In her work, Lahiri mentions three continents: Asia, Europe, and North America. She plans to use the major characters, Ashoke, Ashima, and Gogol, to explore the novel's topic, diasporic dilemma. Diasporic tension isn't very high for Ashoke. It's particularly noticeable in Ashima and Gogol. Sonia is constantly kept out of the novel's major conflict. I believe that studying the important personalities will provide us with a good knowledge of their diasporic difficulties.

In *The Namesake*, Ashoke, the son of an Alahabad customs official, travels to America to study fibre optics for a PhD. Because of the instability in India, the West has always piqued his interest. The train accident, which occurred while he was travelling to his grandfather's home in Jamshedpur, bolstered his decision to leave India, the country "...in which he was born and in which he had nearly died" (JL 20), and to move to the "metropolitan centre" from "the situation of conflict and uncertainty..." (Colonial 146) (Colonial era, 1970)

Ashoke is psychologically equipped to assimilate into mainstream American culture. His refusal to return to India is demonstrated by his employment at an American institution, the relocation of his wife, and the purchase of a property in the United States. But he can't forget about his history. It is an unavoidable occurrence for immigrants. In his article "Diasporas and Multiculturalism," Victor J. Ramraj correctly observes:

Even if diasporans may not desire to return home, they have a conscious or subconscious tie to the ancestral country's traditions, practises, values, faiths, and languages wherever they are. (BK 215)

For this reason, he has intentionally adhered to his Indian sect during his thirty-two-year stay in America. He has shown an interest in sending his son, Gogol, to learn Bengali. He gladly attends Durga Puja and other religious festivities with his children out of respect for ancestral custom. He, too, has developed a taste for Indian cuisine.

The diasporic conflict in Ashoke isn't stated explicitly. When Ashima repeatedly pressurises him to return to India, he sometimes feels compelled to do so. But he can't guarantee that since he recalls Ghosh, the railway passenger he encountered on his way to his grandfather's house. Mr. Ghosh admitted to Ashoke, "it is my greatest regret, coming back," (JL 33), just hours before his death in the train disaster, in the context of his return from London. He is concerned about India's societal unrest. As a result, he considers his voyage to America to be his final movement, making it simpler for him to acclimate to American society without the agony that comes with being a diasporan.

Ashima's character in terms of her marriage, her trip to America, her life there, and the continual strain she feels within to cope with American life, in the hopes of discovering her diasporic troubles.

When Ashima married Ashoke, a Ph. D., "she was studying for a college degree," her steady environment in India altered dramatically (JL 7). In compared to the other suitors, "the first had been a widower with four children, the second, a newspaper cartoonist who knew her father, had been hit by a bus in Esplanade and lost his left arm," Ashoke is undoubtedly the finest suitor for her (JL7). She appreciates her mother's "salesmanship" (JL 7) for her engagement to an American citizen. Before their first encounter, she was "unable to resist a

sudden and overpowering yearning" (JL 8) to walk into Ashoke's American shoes.

This may seem small in relation to the novel's overall narrative, which is designed to depict diasporic conflict. Her handling of Ashoke's shoes, on the other hand, demonstrates her unmistakable interest with Ashoke's American identity. Ashoke's American identity overshadows her other identities as a daughter, sister, and native Indian, as well as her cultural identities. This represents her anticipated lengthy life in America, from which she will never fully emerge. She resembles her necklaces, chokers, and bracelets, which are stored in "an unusually big safety deposit box in a New England bank vault" (JL 9). This is a symbolic vaulting of herself into America's secure vault.

She, like her spouse, enjoys American life because of the safety it provides to modern citizens. Her history begins to influence her life in America as time passes. She isn't self-sufficient enough in America to make her own decisions about her life, work, and future. Despite living in a materialistic society, she maintains her Indian custom of being a housewife by limiting herself to domestic duties. She, too, has spent twenty years in America without working. When she is forty, she takes a job at a library.

With the birth of her first child, Gogol, her obsession with America fades. Existence at Cambridge during her pregnancy is far from typical for her, and the hardest part for her is motherhood in a strange country, where she is "terrified to raise a kid in a country where she is linked to no one, where she knows so little, where life appears so uncertain and sparse" (JL 6). A diasporan's sense of estrangement is a constant source of pain. She has suffered from it since the beginning of her life in America, and it is most evident with the delivery of her first child, who is born:

The baby's birth, like most things in America, feels random, on half true, without a single

grandmother, dad, uncle, or aunt by her side. She can't help but pity her son as she stokes and suckles him and analyses him. She had never known someone who came into the world so alone and destitute. (JL25)

Her shift from an Indian housekeeper to an American mother begins with her first kid, Gogol. She should be honoured as a wife, mother, and, most importantly, an American. She must undergo significant personal, psychological, and behavioural adjustments in order to acquire all of these identities. Bringing about change isn't always simple; it may be stressful. Throughout her lengthy existence in America, Ashima has embraced this as well.

"Recognizing the difficulty of reproducing or returning to the past, and the absurdity of an obsessive fixation with origins" is at the heart of *Diaspora* (Colonial 147). In *The Namesake*, Ashima suffers much as a result of her failure to replicate India. As a result, she shows her deep dissatisfaction with her life in America and often pressurises Ashoke to return to India. "I'm saying I don't want to raise Gogol alone in the country," she informs Ashoke after Gogol's birth. This isn't right. I'd want to return" (JL 33). However, she eventually comes to terms with the realities of her existence in America. The idea that she will never be able to return to India fills her with the angst of a diasporan. She discovers conflicted feelings about her previous and present lives. As a result, she reorganises her day-to-day activities. She can go to the market by herself and buy all she needs, and she "begins to take satisfaction in doing things alone" (JL 34). She has a pattern for taking care of Gogol, cooking for them, bringing them out, or waiting for Ashoke at Harvard Yard with handmade samosas and a new thermos of tea for seven days of the week. She will, unavoidably, grow preoccupied with her normal American existence. However, as she revisits her past, she feels the pangs of diaspora, which leads to a serious dilemma in her life.

As a diaspora, Ashima is defined by her "constant travel between home and abroad"

(BK 6). The movement constantly leads her to the construction and reproduction of the past.

For this, she

...dumps the letters onto her bed and goes through them, devoting an entire day to her parents' words, allowing herself a good cry. She revisits their affection and concern, conveyed weekly, faithfully, across continent—all the bits of news that had had nothing to do with her life in Cambridge but which had sustained her in those days nevertheless. (JL160)

She neither rejects nor accepts her previous existence. She floats between these two worlds, like the letter her grandma mailed with her son's name on it that was misplaced.

Despite their evident devotion to their country, diasporans have a "yearning for a sense of belonging to the current place of domicile" (BK 216), which strengthens their bond with it. Furthermore, Victor J. Ramraj points out the following truth while commenting on the themes of Pillai's stories:

The diasporic Indian population must be willing to adapt and change its traditions and rituals to current Western ideas and practises. (BK 219)

Ramraj's insight does not go unnoticed by Ashoke and Ashima. As a result, neither Ashoke nor Ashima ever meddle in Gogol's personal life, including his honours course topic selection, his relationships with Ruth and Maxine, and his living together with Maxine at her house. They appreciate their son's newfound Americanization, but it's an imposed welcome that doesn't come from a clean permitted heart. They experience diasporic tension as a result of their fight between yes and no. In Ashima, it is more severe. She is diametrically opposed to her husband and children. In response to Ashima's failure to

integrate herself into American life, Lahiri states,

At forty-eight, she has learned to appreciate the isolation that her husband, son, and daughter are accustomed to and do not seem to mind. Her children reassure her, "It's not such a big thing." "At some time, everyone should live on their own." However, Ashima believes she is too old to develop such a talent. (JL160)

Gogol, the protagonist of *The Namesake*, who was born and raised in the United States. When it comes to naming, Gogol's existence begins with a dilemma of identification. The elders, according to Indian tradition, are responsible for naming. Ashima's grandma, the family's oldest, is permitted to name Ashima's first son, who "sent the letter herself, going with her cane to the post office, her first journey out of the house in a decade" (JL 25). They, on the other hand, have never received the letter. Because a newborn cannot be released from the hospital "without a birth certificate" (JL 27), they deviate from convention by giving their kid a "backup" (JL 28) name in order for his birth certificate to be granted.

To come up with a "backup" name, Ashoke consults the book that saved him from a train disaster when he was younger in India. He was reading Nikolai Gogol's short story "The Overcoat" at the time. The rescue crew gave up hope of finding any surviving guy in Ashoke's compartment, and Ashoke was located under the mangled limbs of Ghosh in a horrific scene. Because of the shifting of the pages of Gogol's book, the rescue crew was able to identify him. In this sense, Gogol's work becomes a metaphorical saviour for him, and he owes the Russian writer a lifelong debt of gratitude. So he gives his son "the perfect pet name" (JL 28), which is Gogol.

Ashima agrees to the name because she understands that "the name signifies not just for her son's existence, but also for her husband's" (JL 28). They aren't satisfied with the name, as Ashima explains, "it's merely a pet name, not to be taken seriously, only something to put on the certificate for now to discharge them from the

hospital" (JL 29). "Gogol Ganguly is registered in the hospital's files" in this way. (JL 29)

As a result, Gogol is born into the world with a name that is neither Indian nor American. Without a certain, Gogol's parents were unaware of the dreadful experience he would endure later than the rest of his hybrid name. The name is a symbol of rejection and disapproval for Ashoke and Ashima. They react to the typed name of Gogol on the prescription because "it doesn't seem right; pet names aren't intended to be made public in this way," as Lahiri puts it (JL 36). It's a fresh source of friction in their lives that displays their dissatisfaction with the present. The same thing Gogol does after going to learn a lot about his namesake Nikolai Gogol's biography.

Gogol's hybridised name is always a source of conflict for him, a stimulus for him to uncover his own acculturated identity, for him to shuffle and reshuffle his perspectives on his twin identities in America. He bears a striking similarity to Edward Said (1935-2001), an Arab named after the Prince of Wales. In his article "Between Worlds" from *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said states,

Moreover, as a Palestinian going to school in Egypt with an English first name, an American passport, and no certain identity, I was an uncomfortably anomalous student all through my early years, with an unexceptionally Arab family name like Said connected to an unlikely British first name (my mother admired the prince of Wales in 1935, the year of my birth), I was an uncomfortably anomalous student all through my early years: a Palestinian going to school in Egypt, with an English first name, (557)

Gogol, certainly, does not suffer from the same extent of identity problem as Said. However, he is brutally tortured for his name as he integrates

into American culture, befriends American females, and goes about his daily duties.

The diasporans are shaped by time and geography. Because of the time and distance between them, Gogol and Sonia have no feelings for India, their family, or even the Indian culture. They don't have the same sentiments for their Indian relatives that their parents have. During their brief visits to India, they do not appreciate the company of the numerous mashi, pishi, mama, maima, kaku, and jetu because "they do not feel close to them as their parents do" (JL 81). They are mildly saddened by the death news of their relatives. According to Lahiri, the typical sight of their house after receiving death news is:

These killings wake Gogol and Sonia up in the mornings, their parents wailing on the opposite side of their thin bedroom walls. They wander into their parents' room, confused, embarrassed at the sight of their parents' weeping, and just somewhat depressed. (JL 63)

A look inside Gogol's thinking will offer us a pleasant impression. Gogol has been uninterested in preserving good ties with the Indians since the beginning. Even his girlfriends are all from the United States. Later, his marriage to Moushomi proves to be a complete disaster, leading him to regard his own people as a formed group.

Gogol always favors the American way of life to the Indian way of life. His connection with Ruth is the culmination of a lengthy yearning to make friends with an American girl. To cope with Maxine's American existence, he undergoes a significant transformation. Even yet, he strives to shake from his parents' questionable habits in order to have a more genuine relationship with Maxine. Again, Lahiri says:

He didn't want to go to his father's alma mater, live in a Central Square apartment like his parents did, or revisit the streets that his parents talked about fondly. He didn't want to go home on weekends, to go to pujos and Bengali parties with them, to be completely immersed in their culture. 126 (JL)

It's also the fact that he doesn't have a smooth American existence with Maxine at Ratcliff's House. Because he is an Indian, he feels inferior in Maxine's household, which motivates him to become more Americanised. The tension that emerges from the coexistence of his ambiguous cultures, which he inherited from his own family and American society, is then produced. This conflict might sometimes lead to a diasporan re-discovering himself. Gogol's relationship with Maxine falls down as a result of his recognition that there is a gap between them that makes their connection impossible.

The loss of his father adds to this knowledge. "He realises now the shame that his parents had within, at not being able to do anything when their parents died in India," he says (JL 179). He is now regretful for his indifference to his parents' feelings. With his father's death, cremation, newspaper obituary, calls from other places with condolence messages, the mourning period, and the feast on the breaking day of the mourning period, his life takes a new turn. All of this has given him a fresh perspective on himself and a strong psychological bond with his family. His condescending tone has changed in response to his newly discovered devotion to his family. "It is the image, more than anything else, that attracts Gogol back to the home again and again," Lahiri adds. (JL189). In this manner, the portrait becomes a testament to his self-discovery, which liberates him from American materialism and machinery, although for the time being. This is a major struggle for him since Americanism has always been a dominant factor in his life, whether consciously or unconsciously. To his own people, he is an outsider. The fact that he is aware of his isolation is the most crucial aspect about him.

In *Reflections on Exile: Essays*, he encounters the same sorrow as Edward Said did in his essay "Between Worlds."

My whole education was Anglocentric, so much so that I knew a great deal more about British and even Indian history and geography of the Arab world. But although taught to believe and think like an English schoolboy, I was also trained to understand that I was an alien, a Non European Other, educated by my betters to know my station and not to aspire to being British. The line separating Us from Them was linguistic, cultural, racial, and ethnic. (558)

Even his decision to marry Moushomi Majoomder, an Indian like him, was the result of an unavoidable reshuffling of his thinking that he had practised in his childhood. Now he's trying to figure out what they both have in common. "In a way, he thinks, it's true- they have the same colouring, the straight, thick eyebrows, the tall, slim physique, the high cheekbones, and the black hair," Lahiri writes (JL 203). Gogol's realisation aids us in establishing his altered viewpoint.

Both Ashima and Gogol, the novel's two main protagonists, are able to interpret their fragmented ideas about their final future course before the novel's end. "Six months of her life in India, six months in the United States," Ashima says (JL 275). "True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere," writes Lahiri (JL 276). But, in terms of her life, this resolve isn't necessarily definitive. She has a lot more to deal with. Ashima's diasporic tension of dual life is revealed by Lahiri's observation:

She had been missing her life in India for 33 years. She will now miss her position at the library, where she had previously worked. She won't be able to stop throwing parties. She will miss living with her daughter, the unexpected relationship they have developed, travelling to see old movies together in Cambridge... She

will miss the land where she met and fell in love with her spouse... He will continue to occupy her thoughts here, in this house and in this town. (JL 279)

Gogol's mother's choice to spend six months in India after selling the property and dividing her time in America opens up a new realm of possibility for him. "And yet these experiences have made Gogol, fashioned him, decided who he is," Lahiri writes (JL 287). With his rediscovery of himself at his father's house, among his mother's friends, and amid the books gifted by his father on his birthday, he becomes another Ashoke for the time being. Lahiri correctly reveals Gogol's eventual fate:

As the evening progresses, he would become distracted, longing to return to his room, to be alone, to read the book he had previously abandoned. It was about to go from his life completely until he rescued it by chance, forty years ago, when his father was recovered from a smashed train. (JL 290)

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri is a masterpiece more about Indian diaspora. There isn't a lot of diasporic tension around Ashoke. However, Ashima and Gogol are well-known characters with diasporic problems. This is an increasing challenge among Indian immigrants, and it is extremely tough for them to overcome. Lahiri hasn't attempted to bring her characters together. Ashima's final decision on her life is just temporary. Her diasporic conflict is noticeable. Gogol's life, on the other hand, is similar to that of millions of Indian immigrants who are continually divided by emotion, personality, religion, culture, language, and, most importantly, relationship.

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