

Diaspora and Culture: A Study of Indian Immigration and Integumentary Anxiety in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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Abstract: *This research aims at capturing the sense of identity, loneliness and untold anxiety among the immigrants from the writing of one of the prominent authors writing in English from Indian subcontinent. The Namesake, a well-knit novel by the author Jhumpa Lahiri. The novel "The Namesake" depicts it the best kind of reference to classify Diaspora as the word 'Diaspora' as well as its prime role in this present era, the first and second generation who are struggling for identity, loneliness and the most prominent one is integumentary anxiety among them. It is that untold anxiety which the people can't disclose to anyone. It remains in the very heart of them untold and unexpressed. In fact Jhumpa Lahiri the novelist is child of Indian immigrants and she is also migrated from her birthplace England to America. The effect of both made her Diaspora writer and a migrant one. She mirrored the life of the Indian Diaspora, who are struggling for identity and the integumentary anxiety. They construct unhomey home in the foreign land.*

Key Words: *Diaspora, Original, identity, transnational, multiculturalism, Indian Immigration, Integumentary Anxiety*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial human beings aspire for comfort and keep searching better locations to live in throughout their lives. The factors which drive humans to move from one place to another principally include economic, safety, etc. They often struggle in order to be in clover. But this struggle outright comes to an end with the feeling ambivalence and hiraeth and subsequently people feel down in the dumps and are left grief-stricken. There may also be several other causes not listed above to leave one's own homeland to settle on alien lands across the world, but somewhere or the other, this shift results in fretfulness and concurrently resuscitates the feelings of nostalgia and disillusionment. The present study aims at recording and highlighting such unregistered emotions, portrayed in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*.

II. DIASPORA AND CULTURE

In this current age the people are not having any fixity of their homeland. They move from one place to another. The people come in the contact of various cultures, languages and identities. So this is the main reason that the concept of homeland and fixed identity in the current era of global migration is a complex framework.

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As it is stated by the renowned critics such as **Homi K. Bhabha** and **Avtar Brah** the floating and temporary nature of home and fluid identity both are replacing the age-old concepts of fixed or permanent 'home' and identity as well. The idea of fixed 'home' arouses the spatial politics of home, the sense of self identity, its displacement, intimacy, exclusion and inclusion. The movements of the people from one country to different countries prove the concept of fixed home a wrong one. The concept or the idea of owns home gives the self identity of a person, which binds human emotion, feelings, sentiments, closeness and connectivity to one another. Apart from it actually home is made of emotional properties. And as it is accepted by all the culture that the identity and belongingness of human being rest in a home, after leaving the homeland the people leave their identity behind and they suffer and miss their originality or identity.

The present paper focuses on the first and next-generation immigrants' who are showing their hate to the old and new lands as it can be found in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. In this novel, Lahiri has tried to find out the psychology of the first generation immigrants, Ashima and Ashok and the second generation immigrants, Gogol, Sonia and Moushumi. The present novel is critically indicating the concept of own homeland which generates an atmosphere to build home as well as identity of closeness. The current era of transmigration, **home** is signifying its temporariness. There are several critics, who had indicated that the immigrants hold dual identities; out of them even one is not fixed. In the novel, Ashima is pinning for her homeland for she feels loneliness and misses her near and dear in her odd days in foreign land while Gogol, Sonia and Moushumi are closely attached to the USA, where they took birth. They don't give importance to their original land, i.e. India. They think that USA is the place where they are more comfortable and happy.

III. AIMS AND THE OBJECTIVES

The research targets at recognizing the integumentary anxiety among the immigrates as well as the problems rising because of the cultural differences. The immigrates who are living away from their home land, whatever the problems they encounter there and their anguish and anxiety for their original land. Considering all these aspects, an attempt is made to mirror the pain of the immigrates through this research. From the cultural points of view it is reflected that the second generation has forgotten their own values and culture and they try to involve in the culture of foreign land. Actually it is the way to

evaluate and analyze the pain, sufferings, problems and integumentary anxiety of the immigrants specially the women and the new generation and the differences and clashes between their views and perspectives.

IV. HISTORY OF MIGRATION

Migration is not a recent phenomenon. It has its deep roots in long back uncovered history. The people have migrated from one country to another to get comfortable and easy life. There are various reasons which pull person to move from his own country to another country, they are like to earn money, to get education, to escape from war, to escape political or social issues, etc. Robin Cohen, a famous and renowned historian, [1995] imparts various different migration events which took place long back thus:

- 1- There was a fixed settlement in the various colonies, the time duration for this remained from 1500s to mid 19th century.
- 2- Next comes Slavery, the time period for this, remained from 1550 to end of 18th century.
- 3- Just after these two eras of migration within Europe, Africa and Asia comes and it remains from 17th to 18th centuries.
- 4- Next comes the turn of indentured labour and this time period remains from 1834 to 1917.
- 5- After that the time period begins with migration to the New World and it rests from 1800s to 1930.
- 6- After covering all these centuries the time period of post WWII migration starts and it rests from late 1940s to 1960s.
- 7- Just after all these periods next comes post 1970s migration.

V. INDIAN IMMIGRATION AND INTEGUMENTARY ANXIETY

Lahiri focuses on the condition of the immigrants, she also makes an effort to improve the conditions of diasporic immigrants. The characters, she has portrayed, are not showing any contrast. They all are living a normal life in the foreign land, from Brown” (Waldman, 2008). It can't be said that it is not only their parents' culture but the era is equally responsible for their concerns of literary works. The background of Lahiri's foreign family is another prior factor and aspect of her fame and name in the field of literature in a short period of time. It was her first book of Lahiri which brought a status of a literary personality to her. Jhumpa Lahiri was quite unfamiliar and unrecognized personality in the literary field just before her first work of Literature. However the present paper is focusing on Lahiri's first novel, *The Namesake*. This novel gives a crystal clear picture of the lives of the Ganguli family. But the main focus is concentrated on the life of Gogol Ganguli. The novel begins with the prominent character's mother, Ashima, who is admitted in the hospital of America, at the time of her delivery.

The story of the present novel describes the life of Ashok, his accident by the train as well as his arranged marriage to Ashima. The novelist tried to characterize the lives of the immigrant parents and made an effort to “preserve the

‘home culture ; while on the contrary the parents are also grooming the children in the American culture as well as life style”. (Mishra, 2006). There is a great characteristic in Lahiri's work i.e. to understand the immigrants. And she portrays her own experience which she extracted in such a way that she had already led their life. As she showed the feelings of seclusion and otherness in her novel, it seems as she gives her own feelings to the all characters. It is the art of Lahiri to understand the profound feelings and emotions of the immigrants. In the very beginning of the novel, when Ashima was all alone, she felt like a secluded person on the unknown land.

Lahiri does not portray the variations by depicting the ethnic or religious rituals on the other hand she shows all through Ashima's profound feelings and emotions. She pines for her homeland and family beyond the limits.

It is more pathetic, when she is all alone in hospital. The feeling of seclusion lingers in her mind, when she misses her near and dear badly. She thinks that if she would be in her own country, everyone would be by her side but as she is in foreign land so no one is with her to ask about her present situation. At that very time she aspires to be with her family to share herself with open heart. But she misses this part too much.

The Namesake is a story of two generations of the immigrants. It portrays cultural struggle of two generation for the native land. It explores various problems in the identity building for the first and the second generations of the immigrants. It's a story of Ashima Ganguli who arrives in Boston as a bride after her marriage and she also realizes that she is all alone in the hospital while giving birth to her first child at Massachusetts. In fact, an Indian woman wishes the emotional support at least at the time of her first delivery. In America, she does not feel anything common. She takes everything as astonishing and stunning for she never faced such situation in her life, when she was in her own country.

She also misses her favorite Indian food during her pregnancy. She recalls each every moment which is closely related to her life, like when she was living with her family, she used to taste all types of food, whatever her mother prepares. In India there is a special food chart for the pregnant lady but here in the foreign land, there is nothing like that so she goes to the extreme level of unspoken anxiety. She cannot share with anyone, what she is feeling at that time.

As in the beginning of the novel the cultural and identity issue both the aspects are put forth. Ashima does not call her husband by his name openly as it is against the Bengali-Indian culture. So she gives another substitute to call her husband. She follows all the Indian rituals and culture even after coming to foreign land. It shows that how much she is attached to her culture. It is quite undetectable from her. It is just because of connectivity with Indian culture empowering her to stay on the foreign land.

There is an issue of changing the name of Gogol for Ashoke thinks a name to his son as ‘Gogol’,

In fact it is the name which is taken from famous Russian author. The same author whose book he was reading during the accident of train wherein he saved. Many people died in that accident so he calculates that the author is lucky for him. So it is the lucky book by which his life is saved from a severe accident. He has broken his back during that fatal accident. As it is the Bengali culture to give two names to their children, one as pet or nick name, which is called at home while the other one is official name to use it outside the home. Even Gogol also has two names and his public name becomes 'Nikhil'. Ashima stresses that the second name is also given after the same Russian author, i.e. Nikolai Gogol. But Gogol doesn't like his name, so he decides to change his name.

Lahiri, therefore describes Indian culture and traditions, she throws light on those customs and rituals which she has already experienced in her personal life. The representation of Lahiri's ethnic favour is quite different from Bengali traditions of giving names to the babies, dressing sense, eating food habits, etc. The main point of the novel begins when Gogol's a pet name becomes his official name. Lahiri has profound experience of the Bengali rituals, custom and culture of giving two names to a child. Actually Lahiri's official name was Nilanja Sudeshna Lahiri. But she did not like the name so she chose the name Jhumpa Lahiri to make it official one. This we have to understand from the context of the country from where people or their families arrive. Therefore the term diaspora is important in this relation.

The novel begins in 1968, the novel clarifies that the arranged marriages are very ordinary and common even in this period. As per the culture of Bengalis, the arranged marriages made as the specimen not only in rural areas but also in urban sectors. In fact Lahiri has not focused on the peculiarity of Indian culture but rather she tries to show that the Indian Bengali communities are very less problematic. The overall narration of the story of the novel rotates around the arranged marriage and there are no problems and traces of contrast between the two Indian and American culture and custom. On the other hand the story takes its turn at the layers of the background. Ashima, the main character of the novel is portrayed as the suppressed woman or an obedient daughter. Even the marriage of Ashima and Ashoke is not depicted as the forced one. They lead a very happy married life even after the opted arranged one. There are no clashes between the two. They support and coordinate to each other. In the present novel, the upbringing of Gogol was done to keep in mind the Indian culture and custom as it is quite natural to him. In spite of going back to Calcutta for eight months every year, Gogol was not at all excited and happy about the Indian culture and custom as he does not perceive it as antithetical to American. They are mere his belongings which he remembers now and again. The Indian culture and customs are presented in this novel as something very peculiar and precious asset. It can't be said that it is only Gogol who is having such an opinion and perspective about his culture. Even the mother of his girlfriend considers his parents' practices of culture and customs as something very odd and boring, Gogol does not add her conviction. While he felt that "it may be a line which has been drawn" between him and her, Gogol has an idea that the cultural practices are the extract of his parents' arranged marriage

which is done something at once unthinkable and unremarkable (Lahiri 138).

While at his this stage, he wouldn't even think to select or go for arranged marriage for himself. The thought of arranged marriage is something very strange and peculiar to him or even it can be said that Indian culture suppresses the feelings and emotions of the generation. So Gogol is not a representative of only one culture, initially he is dating only American girl friends, but later on marries Moushumi, a Bengali American lady. Despite the fact he is neither having the intention to denounce nor aspired to the concept of arranged marriage, does even their relationship resemble true picture of cultural practice. Bhalla reflects that.

The most important factor is that how an individual can make balance between two cultures as well as how he handles the effect of two cultures immigrants' children who look at their parents' culture and felt that that is similar to the main stream culture they do not even experience the bicultural conflict" (Stroink & Lalond, 2009). At the same time, the same features are visible in the writing of Jhumpa Lahiri. As she depicts that Indian diasporic community is different from American community, Lahiri shows through her work of wisdom that the second generation, Indian Americans do not inclined to make compromise between the double cultures. The fact is, that the new generation does not make any variation between the two and their parents, which is entirely based the vast differences. Lahiri reflects the inner conflict and stress between the two generation the parents and children as it is the universal truth. When Ashima is having problems with her daughter Sonia during her adulthood, their conflicts and confrontations are portrayed as general one. The clash between the two generations is represented by "Ashima who cries, and Sonia slams the doors" and the story revolves around the themes like coloring the hair or Sonia's wish to pierce her ear" (Lahiri, 107). Overall almost the entire story resembles clash between previous and next generation, Even it is quite impossible to decide whether the confrontation or conflicts are emerging out of the cultural differences or generation differences.

As it has already stated that the children of immigrants adapt the culture and customs of their parents by making the contacts with their family members and community. In spite of the source of the foreign culture, the enhanced contacts with the culture as well as custom of their parents can be helpful to the children to perceive it as easy going. To understand the cultural norms can take place either through the exposure to diaspora or through the educational institutions. The gradual understanding of the characteristics of other culture is known as enculturation. It is seen that through the research of ethnographic dividing two strata of the people the middle and the upper class Hindu Indians in United States, which reveals that it is very common among the Indian Hindu parents who believes that the children should be brought up, considering the norms of Indian culture. As Ashima, whenever she spares time she teaches her children about Indian culture and norms.

Whenever she accompanies Gogol She also sings the same song which her mother used to sing for her. Ashima also teaches Gogol to memorize Tagore's four line children's poem and all the deities names, along with the adorning the ten handed goddess Durga. It is the main cause that Lahiri represents characters of immigrant particularly their children as active model, As per their principles and opinions. The main purpose and process of enculturation can be defined like the Indian immigrants deliberately want to bring up and frame their children with Indian effect as they got from their parents in their childhood. So they share their experience and deep rooted influence of Indian culture. This is the medium which helps two generations to fill the gap of their ideas and opinions in one bond.

There are several critics who consider that Lahiri is an expert in portraying the true picture of the immigrants. The condition of the immigrants' parents is fully different for it is visible from their ethnic appearances, traditional food habits, which itself show the sense of varied culture. The author clicks the true images of ethnic dressing sense of immigrants' parents to depict their background. The sari, as it is a core Indian traditional dress, which has been depicted initially, at the beginning of the novel *The Namesake*. The ethnic Indian dress, sari is referred several times in the novel, it shows that the author stressed more on the Indian culture as it symbolizes Indianness and it is also an identity of ladies of Indian Diaspora. Therefore the author tries to show two varied cultures at a time, one is all about the western or foreign culture and the other one is all about Indian culture and tradition. The novel represents some common habits and deep rooted beliefs of both the cultures western as well as Indian, which is the part of their respective cultures. As Ashima is very fond of wearing sari even this habit is not differentiating or separating her from the community of western. The notion of wearing sari cannot be taken as it is sign or the identity of Indianness but the thing is this that the people are not intended to accept orientalism. The present novel depicts the mental stress and unspoken plight of Ashima, not her variations. The novel is not only described ethnic Indian dress but also Indian food which Ashima prepares on the foreign land in the opening of the novel.

The narration of food habits doesn't serve the purpose of orientalism, but it symbolizes and refreshes the sweet and cherished memories of head and heart of own land. As Lahiri depicts the stories of successful immigrants of India in America, the story of the immigrants, has been captured in the novel *The Namesake* in such a way to show that how the characters are making a struggle to harmonize between the two cultures Indian and Western as well as how to adopt a new one. Lahiri's immigrants and their children are not shown that they are unfamiliar or alien to the culture of America. On the other hand they are depicted as the immigrants of India, are having their dual identity.

This can't be stated that the immigrants led a secluded life as they belong to different cultures and lands. On the other hand the author depicts the food habits of the immigrants and their interlinked emotions and feelings which she experiences in the very first month on the foreign land. She feels herself all alone there as there is no one to share her feelings and emotions with an open heart. When Ashima is

hospitalized just because of her first delivery of her child and she was asked that what she is expecting baby girl or boy, she replies that both are equal to her. The author doesn't portray the Indian immigrants, as they use broken English. The immigrants' speech carries unique characteristics. The author of this novel uses her own real life experience; somewhere authenticity is less visible in the novel. Lahiri has a limited exposure and experience of Indian culture even then she mirrors the original Indian culture, which Indian immigrants practices in foreign countries.

VI. CONCLUSION

The novel *Namesake* reflects the lives of first and second generation of Indian immigrants in USA. The feeling of being alien is a part of experience of Indian Diaspora, and if the people are staying at home at any part of the universe, it does not mean that the feeling of being an alien would not come to their minds. They will be a victim of alienation even at home in foreign land. The novel also reflects that how the Indian immigrants undergo the sense of identity and their untold anxiety on the foreign land. There is no one with whom they can open their hearts and souls so whatever they have in their hearts that remain within them, untold and unexpressed. The second generation Diaspora gets the roots after undergoing cultural disbalance. Overall Diaspora is entirely all about the structuralizing the new identities, development, growth, finding the solution of conflicts and to enter in the arena of a new culture.

The novelist Lahiri represents that the immigrants are strictly stick to their own cultures, beliefs and customs with great zeal and gumption but gradually they are also coming very close to the foreign culture and in this way they are making a harmony between the two cultures together. The children of the immigrants are brought up, keeping two cultures in their minds, which put the new generation in displacement and dilemma. But whatever that may be the people who have left their own land, are having some unseen attachment and respect for their land and culture.

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