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CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S THE NAMESAKE

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Abstract:

The objective of this paper is to project light on the emigrants from India to foreign countries. Some of the emigrants have become diasporic writers who express their struggle with two cultures, two identities and their belongingness to nowhere in their writings which are termed as Diasporic literature. The paper also brings forth the plight of the migrators who are torn between multiculturalism and their flight for name. In short, the paper focuses on the constant conflicts and perplexions of name and identity that the emigrants face in the present world.

Keywords: Diaspora, identity, dilemma, post colonialism

When a researcher talks of Diaspora, researcher has to start with the analysis of emigration and settlement of people beyond the boundaries of their homeland. Restoration of the cultural identity in the host society is another significant criterion of the concept Diaspora. There are certain literatures on various Diasporas such as the Chinese, African etc., Likewise study on overseas Indians is also being carried out today under the thesis of Diaspora Studies. Most of the literature on the Indian Diaspora concerns with Indian migration their socio economic and culture experiences, of conversion and acculturation in the present society. Overseas migration of Indians may be surveyed in terms of three phases (a) the ancient and the medieval (b) the colonial and (c) the post-colonial phases

The ancient and the medieval phase Indians have been relocating to various parts of the world from ages. The earliest exodus of Indians may be for the purpose of the trade and religious contacts with other civilization like the Greek and the Mesopotamian. The post colonial phase Indians have migrated to the foreign countries in order to do job and business that suits their qualification so that they will lead a luxurious life. Those Indians have the diasporic feelings and longing towards their homeland in their effort to get adapted and acculturated to the foreign country in which they are settled. These Indians have expressed and depicted their nostalgic feelings through their writings which are called as Indian Diasporic Literature.

Such writers of Indian Diaspora are V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, M. G. VasANJI, Bapsi Sidhwa, Kiran Desai, and Jhumpa Lahiri have explored the identity crisis, racial and cultural conflicts, ethnicity, sense of belongingness, loneliness and alienation among the immigrants. As Avtar Brah writes:

What is home? On the one hand home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'Origin'. On the other hand home is also a lived experience of locality. It's sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day, all this as mediated by the historically specific of every day social networks. (192)

In anthropology, displacement occurs when people are forced to leave their place of residence. These are referred to as displaced people. Over thirty years (1968-2000), Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* tells the story of an Indian Bengali family from Calcutta, the Ganguli, assimilation into America; the cultural displacement that the Ganguli family and their American-born children face in their effort to settle 'home' in the new land.

In this presentation a study is done on the novel *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri. *The Namesake* is the first novel which is praised by many critics. Her Master Piece is Interpreter of Maladies a famous story and it has received the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. *The Namesake* was published in 2003 which covers the story that spans over thirty years in the life of the Ganguly

family. The Calcutta born parents migrated to the US as young adults, where their children Gogol and Sonia experience the persistent generational and cultural gap with their parents. The novel studies the problems involved with being caught between two opposite and conflicting cultures with their highly different religious, social and ideological differences. The novel portrays the clashes between first generation Bengali Immigration to the United States and their son, Gogol in particular. The story starts as Ashok and Ashima leave Calcutta, India and settle in Central Square, Massachusetts. Through a sequence of mistakes, their son's nick name, Gogol, becomes his certified name, an occurrence which will mould many aspects of his life.

Gogol is named so, by his parents in the memory of Russian writer 'Nikolai Gogol' whose book saved his father's life in train accident, when he was young. Giving two names for one person is a common thing in a Bengali family. So 'Gogol' is the 'dak nam' or pet name and 'Nikhil' is the 'bhalo nam' or the official name. Gogol grows up as an American who cannot understand his parents' Bengali traditions and tries to push them aside. Not only the Bengali traditions but also he finds himself as an odd man in the adopted life. Thus Lahiri portrays his search for his own self in two words. The novelist also captures guilt, longing, tragedy and hope in this excellently told story of family and of love. Jhumpa Lahiri once again exploits names as the looking glass self. She believes that each person experiences the self as a social object of which he becomes aware of until he attends a particular age and there is an assertion of an individual beginning to become autonomous.

One's own self is on the course of building a psychic identity. He organizes this identity because of the expectations of others and necessitates viewing himself or herself as an important and unique other. A man needs to reach a particular age to realize about his own self esteem and the identity. Burke and Stets provide the following example that helps to understand how one can have a number of identities in different contexts:

One can be a teacher, a wife, a mother, a friend, [...] and so on. Each position has its own meanings and expectations that are internalized as what we would now call an identity [...]. Each of these multiple selves we now recognize as different identities. Each 'self,' as we use the term, is therefore, made up of the multiple identities a person has. (24)

Gogol in *The Namesake* is happy and feels satisfied with his name since the process of selfhood as communication is about to grow. So far he is just a receiver of the signals that travels through his path way called Gogol. But he starts to identify that he has no place as an individual and the notion of self recognition is not developed. Hence he wants to change from 'Gogol identity' to 'Nikhil identity'. The teachers' description of Gogol in the class destroys his self- conceptions for he sees an indication of others in the same shade, as they have for Nikolai Gogol. Gogol who aims to be unique feels shy at the countenances of likeableness and so he seeks refuge in lavatory and underestimates himself.

In order to forecast a new identity, Gogol wants to change his name to redevelop a high self esteem. He goes to his parents who are unhappy but give their consent at the face of his unhappiness. In the event of changing his name, he informs the judge that his name is Erie and that identity gives only mental discomfort. The bench deigns and the process to crystallize a new identity is Gogol's fresh endeavor. Through his identity, he wants to feel the real me with help of his material self, he meets a series of sensation in his relation with Ruth, Maxine and Moushmi. Through his relation, he reaches only at what All port calls bodily me"with his identity as Nikhil, he lacks the physical presence for his parents and his relatives in India to whom his identity as Gogol is enduring and ineradicable thinking of his own self. She is torn between pride and embarrassment. Nikhil hints indirectly he who is entire, encompassing all now fails him for the self is not purely an experience but he has a consciousness of self work. As Jola Skulj notes in her "Comparative Literature and Cultural Identity," "[t]he problem of cultural identity involves the question of the self and of culture. In other words, this means reflecting on the essence of culture itself and the implication that there is

a reasonable motive of self-questioning” (2). The “self” reflects upon an autonomous subject or the subjectivity of every human being. As she elaborates further:

Understanding of identity was a result of the romantic interpretation of the self as the inner reality of a given subject. It revealed in itself the concept of the subject as an absolute and autonomous being and denied any decisive or obligatory references outside itself. It denied transcendence outside oneself and identified itself only with its immanent reality or with its own immanent validity. (2)

In the process of shaping and reshaping, directing and redirecting, fashioning and refashioning himself as a social being Gogol fails to keep up his self hood through the process of self interaction. Now Gogol has realized the hindrances within the system of concept we use to define our own selves. Though Sonia and Moushmi are well coordinated with their ‘dak nam’ and ‘bhalo nam’ as Bengalis, Gogol fails in it and it demands a credible interpretation. Simply one can say that Gogol is far away from understanding the importance of Gogol as a writer and contributor to the aesthetics of literature.

All the experiences of Gogol that are mentioned may sound unreasonable in the novel for the readers, which are the real experiences of the author Jhumpa Lahiri herself. Jhumpa Lahiri’s real name is Nilanjana Sudeshna which is pure Indian name is criticized much by her teachers in her school and hence she goes by her nick name Jhumpa. Jhumpa Lahiri has faced many problems recording her identity from her child hood. She wants to make her native as well as foreign readers to realize the dilemma faced by emigrants and their struggle to get adapted to the culture in which they are settled.

In the case of Gogol, the false character of Jhumpa, same crisis goes on. He wants to fit in his American world and at the same time he wants to fit to his parent’s expectations. We cannot arrive at a point that he hates his parents rather he fails to understand the Indian world of his parents because of his brought up as an American. He lives “two Lives in the single life”. He is tossed between the Indian and American Culture. So he is culturally dislocated and he lives in Tri Shanku world. As a typical hero he goes about his life with a purpose, going where facts lead him. He hesitates to take a few serious steps in his life but they are motivated more by his defiant mark against his brought up rather than a genuine desire to swim against the present. His unfortunate choices in marriage stems from an instinctive desire to cling his Indian roots. The novel is about the constant dilemma faced by the emigrants, as they struggle to maintain their identity. They are also forced to make troublesome choices and they try hard to avoid being misfits in foreign land the immigrant’s journey is found with departure and deprivation, though it is ultimately rewarding. But it secures for the subsequences the generations a sense of arrival and advantage. They have an intense desire to be loyal at once to the old world and still fluent in the new.

Thus Lahiri gives a range of details and uses these differences in cultures to keep the readers aware of the growing cracks between these two world and how Gogol moved from his origin and those Bengali ties hold him. Finally, Gogol learns that the answer is not to fully renounce or attempt to diminish to restrict either culture or world but to harmonize two worlds together. He cannot be fully in tune with his identity till he realizes that it is made only when both the cultures are adorned. He cannot choose to be one or the other since he is made up of both. So he should not weaken himself rather should strengthen his pride by mingling both the cultures/world. Though the novel wraps up with more down falls occurring in Gogol’s life, he is able to stand on his feet. He is no longer ashamed of himself or the way he lived. He is proud of who he is and where he comes from. Most important, he is proud of his name and all that it means.

In Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, the role of memory in a process of change is often used by the writer in an effective way. It is through the eyes of the first generation settlers that the second generation learns about the homeland. Cultural displacement involves the loss of language, family ties and a support system. Lahiri stresses culture and its importance in immigrant experience with a humanist outlook. Narrating the immigrant experience in America she consciously foregrounds the

merits of native culture and the mysteries of acquired culture probably experienced in the process of her own self-acculturation. The loss of roots, language and social norms are the three most important parts of the definition of what it is to be human being.

Lahiri's writing is characterized by her plain language and her characters, often Indian immigrants to America who must navigate between the cultural values of their homeland and their adopted home. Lahiri's fiction is autobiographical and frequently draws upon her own experiences as well as those of her parents, friends, acquaintances, and others in the Bengali communities with which she is familiar. Lahiri examines her characters' struggles, anxieties, and biases to chronicle the nuances and details of immigrant psychology and behavior.

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