

SOCIETY RACE AND CULTURE: CULTURAL DISLOCATION AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S 'NAMESAKE'

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Abstract:

Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Namesake' deals with the fascinating accounts of the diasporic experience. In her fiction she depicts the issue of identity and cultural distinctiveness as significant themes and introduces the model of cultural growth. The novel describes the hardships and conflicts faced by the three protagonists, Gogol, Ashima and Ashoke as they leave their native land to the more modernized world of the United States. This paper depicts the cultural struggle and conflict undergone by the protagonists as they move from their native land to America. The paper also discusses how the characters Ashima, and Gogol manage, finally, despite the challenges of a foreign culture to develop and accept the new culture while keeping the uniqueness of their culture while coping up with the demands of the Western world. They go through a lot of rejection and redefinition and finally acquire their natural cultural identity. Thus, it results in an assimilation uniting the two cultures into a unison and amalgamation.

Keywords: *Culture, dislocation, identity Crisis, conflict, unison.*

Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Namesake' deals with the fascinating accounts of the diasporic experience. In her fiction she depicts the issue of identity and cultural distinctiveness as significant themes and introduces the model of cultural growth. Apart from her various themes like nostalgia and loss and longings, she also displays the stories of people who have migrated from the roots for greener pastures and better way of life. But the memory of their native land always haunts them, and namesake is all about it the dichotomy between the two worlds It explores the complex cultural relations and identity crisis from contemporary cultural discourse.

The story revolves around its protagonists between Kolkata, Boston, and New York. The novel depicts the life of an Indian couple who settled in

Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1968. The novel describes the hardships and conflicts faced by the three protagonists, Gogol, Ashima and Ashoke as they leave their native land to the more modernized world of the United States. The 'Namesake' is all about the various generations and how they look at their native land. The two conflicting cultures become the main backdrop of the novel showcasing the differences involved in the religious, social, and ideological issues.

It is the story of two generations and Indian couple Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli who settles in Masse chouettes in 1968. It describes the hardships and struggles of this Bengali couple who immigrated to the USA to form a life outside of everything that they're accustomed. It explores the theme of cultural identity rootlessness of tradition and family expectations in a lucid manner. The first generation tries to shed its roots to embrace a foreign culture and face trouble to merge with it while the second generation practices the Indian culture due to compulsions laid down by their parents, but they are American at heart.

This paper depicts the cultural struggle and conflict undergone by the protagonists as they move from their native land to America. It would be an attempt to examine the conflicting attractions of the American way of life and the tussle between the traditions of different cultures. It will also describe how the main characters finally manage to adjust to the new surroundings and succeed in embracing the new culture while protecting the rooted one. The paper also discusses how the characters Ashima and Gogol manage, finally, despite the challenges of a foreign culture to develop and accept the new culture while keeping the uniqueness of their culture while coping up with the demands of the Western world.

The novel depicts the distinguishing aspects of native culture within a clash of civilizations which initially motivates a resistance of the foreign culture only to stimulate, eventually the development of a new form of culture, which is

inevitable in the globalized ever-changing world. They face the feeling of otherness and try hard to create a third space of their own, where they can welcome the certain features of the new world while clinging to their original identity. The kind of relationships these characters develop over the years in an alien land, and how the inherent qualities help in determining one's own cultural identity.

It also describes the cultural challenges Ashima faces as she struggles to adjust with a new western society. She is unable to shed her Bengali roots and identity but manages to overcome the feeling of displacement and loneliness as she embraces their culture to a certain extent. They succeed in embracing the new culture while protecting their Bengali roots. Her husband has totally adapted the new system in his life but strives hard to maintain his daily traditions of his root place. He is utterly disgusted when his children attempt to give up their native identity. Ashima- is the one who finds it more difficult to give up her Indian identity. She struggles hard to accept the new society in which she is placed by fate. She tries to cling to the Bengali roots and identity which is shown in the beginning while naming her first baby. She goes through different phases of identity formation. However, she tries hard to adapt herself to the new changing surroundings and welcome it to a certain extent. She tries to escape from the alien land to India on various occasions like the Bengali pooja, rice ceremony, name ceremony and Navratri pooja which helps her to lead a smooth life and to adjust to the new place with a positivity. Most of the people choose to migrate to USA or alien land due to their own choice and commitments to live a happy life, yet they struggle a lot to adapt to the new culture and way of living. This is well depicted by Ashima and the conflicts and turmoil she faces in the foreign land.

Earlier she experiences deep sense of alienation, but with passage of time she overcomes it and finds the place worth living and enjoys it. She is unable to throw away the tattered 'Desh' newspaper that she brought along to read on flight while coming to Boston Also she keeps her family letters safe in her bag are a sort of consolation to overcome the pains of alienation and displacement. She also calculates the Indian time in her hand and always wants to know what time it would be in India which shows that she cannot cut herself off from her roots. The emphasis of native identity early in the novels motivates Ashima's clinging to her Indian culture, which is again supported by too many Indian friends in the States. Ashima enlarges

her circle of Indian friends in America by inviting them to numerous parties she holds at her house thus becoming the guardian and propagator of Indian traditions and culture.

Gogol is the novel's central character, who sort of takes the story forward. He has adjusted to the new ways of the place where he is born and brought up. He imitates the language, dress, way of living and food. He rejects his own native roots and suppresses his own cultural identity. He rejects the symbol of Indian culture and later he repudiates his parent's style of life. He refutes his own native culture and tries to disentangle the ties of his cultural roots by changing his name. He is unable to understand why his parents chose his name which is a matter of much discomfort to him as his American friends tease him. Gogol's confrontation with Indian culture can be seen in the main conflict over his name. Gogol's maturity is complicated because of his name. He refuses to have a girlfriend to whom he must reveal his name. He goes to a court when he turns 18 and changes his name to Nikhil. It is here Gogol clings to as a signifier of a new self. Nevertheless, the new name which he rejected as a child does not deepen the admiration of his new identity. It does not make him attached to his Indian roots. For him the name Gogol is an obstacle to a free life far away from the restrictions of his parents' conservative world. But his parents call him by the same name Gogol so he cannot get rid of his past which shows that a name change cannot alter the fabric of a person. His father once narrates him the entire incident of why he named him 'Gogol' as it was deeply connected to his own past. Finally, and after his father's death, Gogol's personal growth is associated not only with welcoming his native culture but embraces both the cultures.

He rejects his native roots and internationally suppresses his own cultural identity. Gogol and his sister are unable to adjust to their own culture which their parents have thrust on them. Since they are born and brought up in USA, they are closer to this culture which they like to imbibe and follow. They somehow are unable to relate to this culture. As a child he hates being dragged off with his sister to "Knights of Columbus Hall overtaken by Bengalis where they are told to throw marigold petals at a cardboard effigy of some goddess and eat bland vegetarian food." (p 64) This cannot be compared to Christmas, "when they hang stockings on the fireplace mantle, and set cookies for Santa Claus, and receive heaps of presents and stay home from school." (64-65) Gogol becomes obsessed with certain things associated with

Western values and freedom. He like them is involved with various girls and romances with them, drinks, smokes, prefers the Beatles over kathakali and Bengali rituals. He distances himself from his parents seeking an American styled life and rents a separate flat and is fascinated by the free and independent life. He desires his girlfriend's free life over his own which stifles him into bondages away from his native culture and Indian values.

The novel focuses on Gogol's identity crisis which is the central theme of the novel and from which it has derived its title. Gogol's parents try hard to fix love of India and its culture and respect for Indian values and rituals in Gogol. But somehow or the other he finds it hard to adjust to such a loyalty to a lace which he has never visited. He feels that he will be deprived of all the privacy and modern means of civilization which he used to in the place where he is positioned. This is evident when the family makes a trip to Kolkata. Both Gogol and Sonia are unable to cope up with new situation and their very entry into the country at the airport develops alienation as they do not find the relatives close to them as their parents who are exalted meeting them. They have no liking to the Indian food, and they are fond of western cuisines and fast food which are replaced by "plates of syrupy, spongy rassogollas" (p 82) for which he has no appetite. He sleeps under a mosquito net and takes bath in pouring cups of water over his head. The four-poster bed in the house bed denotes to him the lack of privacy which he would have been forced to share had they lived here. For Gogol India is a primitive setting where he and his siter will be deprived of all means of civilization they had grown up used to the thought itself startles him to discomfort. He is nowhere man here and he cannot adjust to the underlying situation anyhow. His American accent is not understood by his Indian relatives and becomes "a source of endless amusement" (p 118) India to him is not a homeland but a foreign land, where he must adjust enormously. His alienation is thus not only spatial but also linguistic. For him India is "a foreign country" (p 118) in which he is physically and psychologically alienated

The author has also contrasted the lifestyle of Gogol and Maxines parents, indicating that the American children are more fascinated to adopt to the western style due to its freedom associated with it Gogol understands the differences between the two lifestyles prompts him to desire Maxines lifestyle, which is uprooting him from his native roots due to its independence and freedom and

broader outlook. He becomes a foreigner in his own country.

Finally, Gogol reunites with his family after his father's death. As he reads Akkaky Gogol's book, which his father gave him as a birthday present, Nikhil finds Gogol within himself. He is now ready to read the book," he has once forsaken, has abandoned until now (290). Not only has he salvaged the book "as his father was pulled down from a crushed train forty years ago(p291) but he has also saved Gogol. He takes one more step ahead towards his own identity after years of assimilation into western culture and denial of his Indian roots. Losing his father, he is now more aware of his duties an Indian son. His admiration for the American life gets feeble. He goes through a lot of rejection and redefinition and finally acquires his natural cultural identity. Now he does not want to get away from his family. After spending years away from his family roots now he is back into the folds of his native roots and values their love, He also fears to miss his name the father who always called him by this name as Gogol: "Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once for all vanish from the lips of the loved ones (p289)

Thus, the novelist presents the dislocation as a permanent human condition. Ashoke the husband of Ashima had come to this country to have better living standards and opportunities, "who had forsaken everything to come in this country, to make a better life, only to die here?" (p 180"). Lahiri constructs and bring alive the picture of the unknown world that is as much as a land of opportunities as it is of conflict and confusion due to the rootlessness and displacement. She blends her characters in such a way that the two cultures create inner turmoil, and they struggle to balance western and Indian influence. It is more about the cooperation between the two cultures rather than confrontations. Thus, it results in an assimilation uniting the two cultures into a unison and amalgamation.

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