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An Analysis Of Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake, An Allegory Of An Exile's Search For True Self

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Abstract:

Culture is "that complex system which encompasses knowledge, belief, art moral, law, tradition, and any other talents and habits acquired by man as a member of society," as EB. Tylor put it. The Namesake, by Pulitzer Prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri, centers on an immigrant couple and their two American-born children and explores the complexities of their shared heritage. This dissertation attempts a close analysis of the experiences of Ganguli families who, in an effort to pass on their cultural values to their children, often end up creating children who grow up with conflicting ideas of who they are and where they come from. In addition, the study analyzes the characters' internal conflicts and prejudices to provide a nuanced and detailed portrait of the immigrant experience. Immigrants cause a shift in character-level ideas and attitudes in two countries.

Keywords: Internal Conflicts, Immigrant Experience, Complexities.

Introduction

Roots can and do change locations in the modern world. As a result, a number of publications using the term "diaspora" have surfaced. Recent studies derive varied meanings, terminology, and forms of diaspora, but all agree that its central theme is that of displacement. On this basis, Robin Cohen explains the ambiguity of the term "diaspora" as "collective trauma banishment, where one dreamed of the house but lived in exile" (ix). This newfound awareness of boundaries and nationality in the immigrant's mentality is a direct result of the compulsions in migration, which have been the current pattern especially among middle-class professionals. Whereas the literature of first-generation immigrants often deals with such themes as "double consciousness," "adaptation," "acculturation," and "intergenerational conflicts," the literature of second-generation expatriates tends to go beyond such themes and instead focus on "Be/longing." Even if writers develop in different ways, a common thread running through their works is

a sense of remorse at having abandoned their own culture and society. They have mixed feelings towards both their "home" country and the place in which they now live. Every immigrant feels the strain of being caught between two worlds.

One of the most accomplished writers of the diaspora is Jhumpa Lahiri. She was born in the United Kingdom to Indian parents and later immigrated to the United States. She, as an immigrant, can speak from personal experience when it comes to feelings of longing for one's native country and the nostalgia associated with times long past. She explained why she felt like an outsider in the United States: "I went to Calcutta neither as a tourist nor as an outsider and yet I also know that as different as Calcutta is from Rhode Island, I belonged there in some essential manner." (7). The protagonist, Gogol Ganguly, in *The Namesake* (2003) by Jhumpa Lahiri, who is set in America, goes through similar challenges. As argued by Roico G. Davis, "Asian American memoirs often highlight the protagonist's distinctive historical reconstruction and the place of their commonality in American societies" (41). So, Lahiri uses the novel as a vehicle to investigate the intertwined themes of global identity and the psychological trauma associated with being uprooted from one's native culture.

In the first chapter of *The Namesake*, protagonist Ashoke Ganguli moves to the United States to study fiber optics at Boston University. Ashoke and Ashima are an Indian couple living as expats in the American city of Massachusetts, and the film depicts their experiences there. Ashima Ganguly is divided between two worlds after she marries an American, Ashoke, and makes the difficult transition to life in America. Being torn between two worlds can cause severe mental anguish, since it can lead to feelings of loneliness, trauma, and difficult choices.

Ashima, in contrast to the other character depictions, follows her spouse to a foreign nation while still adhering to the traditional norms of Bengali households. She didn't realize there was another option to the one she had chosen for herself. Even if she is 'homeless' after relocating 8,000 miles to a location with harsh cold winters, she may feel 'at home' there. In contrast to her earlier life, she no longer has a strong affinity for the snow, the bare land, the soil, or even the technological society. Despite her best efforts to dedicate herself to her family and build a new future, her past is always present as a continual reminder of who she is.

Ashima's admission to the hospital to give birth occurs first in the narrative. Her degree in literature does not help her decipher the doctor's American accent. Ashima, a disadvantaged character that Lahiri portrays, longs for the Indian environment where she could speak freely to people who would understand her despite their cultural differences. The effects of many modern issues on the steady movement of main ties within "home" and "country" are central to Jhumpa Lahiri's writing. Family is the most valued and treasured institution in the lives of immigrants. However, in the modern era, due to the effects of inherent personality features, the search for identity, external stresses, economic and political upheavals, and so on, these fundamental relationships have become brittle. The following lines from Ashima's poem reveal her inner turmoil: "It is the first in her life she has kept alone, surrounded by strangers; throughout her life she has side." If only the curtains were open, she could have a conversation with the American woman (3). Ashoke is aware of his wife's suffering in the new place, but he never brings up the subject or tries to see things from her perspective. When she returns home to care for newborn Gogol, she is surrounded by a bleak environment that only serves to heighten her sense of isolation. Ashima comforts herself with memories of India. Reading the letters her parents sent and five Bengali novels over and over again has

left her hoarse, revealing her distress. The following remarks recount the agonizing experience of her immigration.

Being a foreigner is like being pregnant for the rest of your life: there's never an end in sight, and there's always something extra to do and always something that seems wrong. It's a continuous obligation, a pause in what was once a carefree existence, followed by the sobering realization that ordinary living no longer exists. Ashima speculates that being pregnant in a distant country elicits the same mix of sadness and respect from strangers as does being a foreigner. (50)

Ashima is there for every major event in the book. Ashima's role is described in Lahiri through a unique socialization technique. She didn't learn about the meaning of "independent living" until she got married. Ashima is portrayed by Lahiri to be a typical Bengali woman of the 1960s in that she has no ambitions beyond being a housewife. Even though she has a degree from Calcutta University, she puts her family first and has no interest in pursuing a career.

From Houghton's perspective, the United States is a "island of ethnic minority who continue to exist even in multi-cultural communities" (106). However, she is unable to interact with people from the typical American culture due to her family's conservative values. She feels it is important for his son to learn about her Bengali heritage, so she sends him to classes every Saturday. She also "teaches him to memorize a four-line children's poetry by Tagore and the name of the deities adorning the ten-handed goddess Durga during puja; Saraswathi with her owl and Ganesh with his mouse to her right" (54).

Acculturation and assimilation are challenges that affect immigrants of both the first and second generations in unique ways. The comments of her "elder who told her: not to eat beef or wear skirts or cut off her hair or forget her family" have stuck with Ashima throughout her life (37). Immigrants' children don't follow the rules. Ashima's daughter-in-law Moushumi is a second-generation immigrant, and her travels to Europe have broadened her horizons. She has a more flexible and westernized approach to cultural norms that she can bend to suit her own purposes. She "secretly sworn that she had never gotten completely dependent on her husband" (247). In this age of multiculturalism, her marriage has failed. As the narrative progresses, Lahiri demonstrates that Ashima is oblivious to the hierarchical imbalance in her household. She seems to have slipped into the predetermined roles of mother and wife with ease, indicating that she is a conformist. Since her husband's passing, she's been feeling more alone and has made the decision to relocate to India. She has lived in the United States for quite some time, yet she still doesn't feel quite at home. Again, this demonstrates that, no matter how long they live in the host country, first-generation immigrants will never feel at home there.

For Sonia, the catalyst was the emotional distance between her and her mother Ashima. After Ashoke's passing, she makes the choice to care for her mother. She thinks women in India are portrayed well and are respected for their commitment to traditional norms. Ashima tries to defend traditional values against the more materialistic ones prevalent in the West. Every day, she does her best to fight "against the allure to integrate" and keep her family's Indian heritage alive (Forero 854). She has a crippling worry that her family would forget their Bengali heritage if she doesn't, despite her best efforts to do so.

In contrast to this modern Indian history, the lives of the first-generation female protagonists reveal an actual India in which a repeating tradition persists at the deep-structural subcutaneous layers. In this study, nostalgia and loneliness are the natural responses of all exiles across all time and place. Isolation of

the third world individual in the chosen land on the basis of race and color leads to an aggressive self-definition in native, ethnic terms.

The story explores the idea that diaspora is a quest for identity and its many facets. When the first generation of migrants undergoes upheaval, encounters crises, and feels emotionally detached from her ancestral home, the second generation of migrants is able to create and reconstruct the past through reading and rereading, giving rise to a whole new set of identities, spaces for growth, solutions to conflicts, and cultural norms.

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