

An Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's the Namesake in Light of Cultural Dislocation and Identity Crisis

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Abstract: *The world has become a global village with amazing communication developments because of globalization. Globalization has caused international geographical limits to almost disappear from our perception and has also resulted in a new wave of migration. More and more people are leaving their own nations to go abroad in quest of a better life and more opportunities. People are ready to give up everything in this day of globalization in order to accomplish their aspirations. The move often causes the migrants to deal with a variety of problems. People that advance through this process cease to exist in this world. The impacts of globalization cause modern man to lose his sense of identity as a member of any group, culture, or country. In her first book, "The Namesake," second-generation immigrant Jhumpa Lahiri deftly explores the inner psychology, identity crisis, feeling of belonging, loneliness, alienation, collision of cultures, adjustment issues, and bewildering relationships between the first and second generation.*

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri

I. INTRODUCTION

Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian immigrant who became a well-known storyteller of the second generation globally, was raised in an immigrant home. She was born in London to Bengali parents. A couple of years later, she relocated to Rhode Island, USA. Throughout her early years, she and her parents traveled to Calcutta (now Kolkata) on several occasions due to her parents' familial ties. She understands her parents' deep sense of alienation and their ongoing struggle to preserve their Bengali culture in this strange new land since she is an immigrant from India herself, having immigrated there in her second generation. Her parents are immigrants to the country, and since they see a threat to their culture, they battle in many areas of their life with who they are. The topics of identity crisis, relocation, the experience of immigrants, and the interactions and disputes between the first and second generations are all examined in this essay. In "The Namesake," author Jhumpa Lahiri writes on the thirty-year process of the Indian Bengali Ganguli family's assimilation into American society from Calcutta. In the process of trying to find a new "home" in the new nation, the Ganguli family and their American-born children encounter cultural displacement, which is also explored in the book. Ashoke Ganguli leaves his home city of Calcutta, India, and journeys to America in quest of a better life, greater opportunities, and a place to call home "with security and respect." The Namesake is 105. After two years away, he returns to Calcutta, India, where he marries Ashima, a nineteen-year-old Calcutta girl. Despite the fact that Boston is so far away from her parents, Ashima has no great aspirations to visit, but she also doesn't feel horrible about the marriage. "He has to be here, for sure" (The Namesake, 9). Ashima leaves Calcutta to go be with Ashoke alone, carrying a heavy heart and a ton of instructions from her family and relatives gathered to see her off at Dum Dum Airport. Included on the list of instructions given to her were "not to eat beef, wear skirts, cut off her hair, and forget the family the moment she landed in Boston." (The Namesake, 37). Ashima, in her little three-room Boston apartment, is sad and craves her own country. Experiencing both physical and mental uprooting, she yearns to go back to her father's comfortable and loving "home." Ashima's memories of "home" are still consuming her. She spends endless hours reading poems, short stories, and articles from Bengali magazines she brought back from Calcutta. As she puts it, "the fact that it was occurring so far away from home, unsupervised and unnoticed by those she loved, had made it even more miraculous." She finds the idea of becoming a mother devastating in a foreign land. But in a region where she knows so little, where she is alone, and where everything appears so tentative and easy, she fears

raising a child. 6. The Benamed One. She falls deeply in love and says, "In India, women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household responsibilities, temporarily withdrawing to childhood when the baby arrives." #4. The Identical. After giving birth, she ardently want to travel back to Calcutta to raise her child among close friends and family: "I'm saying don't want to raise Gogol alone in this county." It is untrue. I'd want to go back. The Namesake, chapter 33. To avoid upsetting her parents, she decides to stay there for the sake of her spouse, keeping all of her emotional dangers and disappointments to herself. She eventually figures out how to support the child, sell, and deal with people on her own. Ashoke feels very disoriented when she gets "hired as an Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering at the University," after her move from the University Apartments to a university town outside of Boston.

"She is shocked because in this town there are no sidewalks to speak of, no lighting, no public transit, and no shops for miles at a time," Lahiri writes, capturing the misery of Ashima's isolation in an unfamiliar place. She's not pregnant anymore, but she still sometimes tosses Rice Krispies into a dish with peanuts and onions. Ashima is beginning to realize that living abroad is a lot like being always pregnant—you're constantly waiting, you're always under pressure, and you always feel like something is wrong. Page 49 of *The Namesake*. Being immigrants, Ashoke and Ashima progressively build relationships with the Bengali immigrant population in the United States. Their common, evident, and hidden Calcutta origin makes them all become close friends: "They are all Bengali natives." *The Namesake* 38. Robin Cohen states succinctly, "A member's adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by a Md Abdul Jabbar Sk acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history." Cohen, 1997:ix). These immigrants from Bengal are preserving their cultural traditions by dressing in their best traditional attire, indulging in delicious Bengali food, speaking only Bengali, and taking part in a variety of Bengali rituals and ceremonies, including festivals, Annaprasan, marriage, births, and funerals.

Bengali immigrant families therefore live far from their original culture, yet they nonetheless work hard to preserve it in their new, foreign nation. They also feel politically displaced, as seen by their debate: "They argue riotously over the films of Satyajit Ray versus Ritwik Ghatak." The Congress Party's rival is the CPIM. Bengali against East Bengal. Though none of them is permitted to vote in America, they fight for hours about politics there. *The Namesake* 38. In an interview with Mira Nair, Lahiri Jhumpa Lahiri addressed the topic of cultural diversity in the foreign nation, stating, "I wanted to please my parents and meet their expectations." Like my American peers, I created standards for myself and attempted to live up to them in order to fit in with American culture—a classic case of dual identity. A book at books.google.co.in with the ISBN 812-6906898 cannot be located. In keeping with their continuous struggle to preserve Bengali culture in their new home, Gogol is sent to study Bengali language and culture at the household of one of Ashoke and Ashima's Bengali friends. The students in the class study with little enthusiasm, feeling that studying would be a hardship and that they would rather be at ballet or baseball practice. in *The Namesake* at 66.

The views of the first and second generations about the cultural legacies of their chosen country and their home country clearly differ from one another. The first generation makes every effort to maintain the heritage culture. At the Gogol's Annaprasan (rice ceremony) feast, Ashoke and Ashima get a little respite from their foreign surroundings. The way Bengali people dress, behave, carry themselves, and participate in rituals all bear witness to their sense of cultural identity. On the other hand, when family members pass away, they feel nostalgic. The importance that immigrants take on Bengali culture is indicative of their internal yearning to return home. However, because of his casual embrace of Bengali customs and rituals, Gogol-Sonia, the second generation, seems to be eschewing his Indian identity. Their hyphenated position as Indian-Americans has left them with an identity crisis.

Their apparent devotion to American conventions makes them seem uninterested in Indian customs. *Namesake* (The, 179) Gogol and Sonia disobey the rules and conventions of the religious rite when their father passes away, declaring instead that "it was a Bengali son's duty to shave his head in the wake of a parents' death." The cultural exile affects the sacred bond of marriage for immigrants from India. In India, husbands and wives are expected to behave in public and private according to a rigid set of rules. These rules are not as precise in America and are sometimes disregarded altogether, which highlights marital strife. As in *Pradhan*. The first- and second-generation immigrants are at odds about marriage.

First-generation immigrants Ashoke and Ashima see marriage as a sacred institution that imposes an obligation on them to be together till the end of their lives. Second-generation immigrants, like Gogol and Moushumi do not adhere to this

parental tradition, however. After living together blissfully for a year and a few months, Moushumi has made the decision that she does not want to continue her married life with him. She wanted to be Dimitri's life partner since she felt a connection with him even before she married Gogol. Returning to New York via aircraft, she files for divorce. Because of Western (American) culture, second generation immigrants see married life and marital joy quite differently. A major theme in postcolonial discourse is identity. The feeling of cultural dislocation is the main factor contributing to this identity problem. The problem Gogol had with his name Russain, which is neither American nor Indian, represents the identity crisis predicament.

The baby Gogol was called after a Russian writer Ashoke found very meaningful because of the role the book had played in saving his life in a horrific railway accident when he was on his way to Ranchi. Gogol, though, is indifferent to the mystique that still envelops his name; he just cannot get enough of it. It's neither American nor Indian. Subordination engulfs him. His feeling of inadequacy increases upon learning that Nikolai Gogol was a disillusioned man who lived far from home. He is making a desperate effort to shield himself from the humiliation he is feeling. When he was younger, he defied his parents' wishes and answered at school using his true name, Nikhil. The principal of the school therefore enters Gogol by name. Gogol later changed his name to "Nikhil" when he entered at Yale as a freshman in 1986. But changing his name doesn't fix the problem; instead, it's caused him to develop a new psychological problem. After hearing from his father about the horrific train accident and his own rescue, Nikhil is feeling a bit down. He feels regret for defying his parents' desires by changing his name and blames his father of being dishonest for not sharing the logic for his prior name choice. He reads "The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol," which his father had given him when he was fourteen, as the book draws to a conclusion, revealing his guilty conscience.

At the end of "The Namesake," Ashima is preparing to go back to Kolkata. She does, however, undergo a profound mental change. She's changed since the beginning of the story: "She finds the idea of moving back to the city that used to be her home overwhelming, but it seems odd to her now in a different way. She feels both eager and indifferent for the days she has left to live since she knows she won't die any faster than her spouse died. She yearned to go back to India after spending thirty-three years there. She will now miss her job and interacting with the women at the library. She will miss throwing parties. She will miss their unexpected relationship, their treks into Cambridge to watch old movies at the Brattle, and living with her daughter. She will miss the country in which she met and fell in love with her husband. His ashes have been scattered into the Ganges, but this town and this house will always remember him. In *The Namesake*, (278–279).

By the end of the novel, Lahiri manages to convey Gogol's uneasiness. He now takes comfort in the knowledge that nobody was aware of the reasoning behind the name he was given. The thirty-two-year-old Nikhil Gogol Ganguly is happy with the importance of his name and the fact that he embraced his destiny. His loathing of himself and his name now weighs heavily on him. After giving his name, identity, and namesake a great deal of thought, he concludes that in order for anybody to enjoy life on Earth, they must accept responsibility for forging their own path. He feels affinity with his mother, sister, and other family members now that he knows where he came from. He understands the unpleasant fact that doing so will not diminish the value of American or Indian culture. Jhumpa Lahiri deserves recognition for her portrayal of cultural displacement and the resulting identity crisis.

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