



## Immigration Experience the Study of Jhumpa Lahiri's Novel – Namesake

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'*The Namesake*' is Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel. The novel describes the struggles hardships of a Bengali couple who immigrate to the United States to form a life outside of everything they know. One can note diasporic elements in the novel. Diaspora is originally a greek term of which means "a scattering or sowing of seeds." The word diaspora has gained universal currency. According to oxford Advanced learner's dictionary. The today's term diaspora is generally used for the depression of people from their original homeland (or emigrated ethical group) typically having a minority status in the host country land at least keeping their ethical identity. The novel manages to highlight the confusion, the homesickness and loneliness of the first generation Indians in a foreign country.

In the novel, Ashoke, Ashima, Goyal, Sonia and Moushmi unfolds the high intensity psychological disturbance and uprooting they live with. The lives of each of them, except of Sonia, reveal their painful

ISSN : 2348-5612 © URR



perceptions and experiences, thwarting their hopes and aspirations and traumatizing their psyche. Although the whole family struggles to conform to the American way of life, it is Gogal who experiences the most difficulty, starting with the problem of his name which is changed in his teens. Jhumpa Lahiri does a wonderful job getting the reader in this character's head and feeling for him as he grows up in a culture entirely new to his parents and their attempts to keep the Indian culture true to their children

The novel commences with *Ashima's Painful pregnancy* and child bearing abroad and culminates in her final decision to divide the rest of her life between India and America. In the U.S. she does her best to perform the role of a perfect homemaker in an otherwise alien place and to become a commenting force in holding up the



traditional Indian values against the largely materialistic values of American life. The rumbling of a trauma emanating from a fear of losing her Bengali culture are easily noticeable during her labour pains in the first chapter :

“It is not so much pain, which she knows, somehow she will survive. It’s the consequences motherhood in a foreign land ...”

During such a period of emotional unhinging the only source of comfort for Ashima was the tattered copy of *Desh* magazine that “she had brought to read on her plane ride to Boston.”

After the baby is delivered, the problem of naming him arises as they have not yet received grandmother’s letter. They are faced with the rule of recording the name of the boy in the hospital book before discharge. To get rid of this dilemma they temporarily christen the baby as Gogol; the name which harbours the secret of a traumatic event in Ashoke’s life. The whole episode reveals her intense desire for holding fast to homeland conventions and equally intense pain at the failure to do so due to circumstances. Lahiri captures this

emotional statements of Ashima when she says :

“She has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived.”

And later she says to Ashoke :

“I don’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It’s not right. I want to go back.”

Gogol and Sonia also suffers from the trauma of diasporic existence. They long for their home where they can stay only in sojourn (for short time) and the home they live in throughout their lives somehow remains alien; they don’t think of it as home nor the land they live in as their homeland. Gogol’s unsuccessful love affair with Ruth and Maxine can also be accounted for as conflict between two cultures. His break off with Maxine comes about mainly because of his adherence to familial values and filial duty. Gogol’s metamorphosis is triggered by the death of Ashoke. Earlier he was living an American life, now he thinks as an Indian and understands the value of his family. Behind his racial reawakening lies his recall of the traumatic accident of his father, the ceremonies like tonsuring of his father’s head according to the Hindu beliefs and the



struggle of his father. Gogol realizes the significance of all these and chooses to side with the family. When Maxine asks him “to get away from all this”, he replies “I don’t want to get away.” Later he marries Moushmi but the marital bond does not last for long. More than circumstances and temperamental differences, the memory of past plays a greater role in breaking off, the marriage of Gogol and Moushmi. Moushmi’s diasporic trauma.

### Conclusion

Their diasporic existence highlight their acute sense of loss, pain and nostalgia for the native land, its people and culture and their feelings of alienation at times of deep despair. Often enough they take recourse of to their memory. Ashima recalls Calcutta, Ashoke recalls the train accident, Gogol recalls his father. This presence of past in the present in *The Namesake* weaves a charged and challenging pattern of figuration and refigurations and of the problematic of both the land and promise and the native land.

Throughout the novel it seems that Ashima is living a life of memory, the memory of Calcutta when she is in the states and the memory of states when she is in

Calcutta. In this sense, she is a citizen of third space, a triashanker, neither of Calcutta nor of America. This Trishanker existence is at the centre of diasporic trauma and Ashima is a true representative of such an existence.

### References

1. Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. New York : Harpercollins, 2007. Print.
2. Hornby, Albert, S. ed. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary London : Oxford UP, 2005. Print.