

---

## **Diasporic Predicament of Binary Identity & Cultural Struggle in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake***

**K. Balaji Sundharam**

Assistant Professor of English

Agurchand Manmull Jain College (Shift-Ii)

(Affiliated to the University Madras)

Minambakkam, India

### **Abstract**

This research paper studies on Indian roots and American life or to be more exact, at any rate on account of *The Namesake*, Calcutta from one perspective, and Cambridge and New York on the other, give peruses diverse standards of life among individuals speaking to unmistakable societies and perspectives.

**Keywords-** *Indian literature, Cultural Identity, Migrations*

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

UGC Approved

### Introduction

It is in this setting, then again, that one should recall Edward Said's doubt with the idea of culture as something unmistakable, illustrative of a select to a certain gathering or country in Culture and Imperialism in order to comprehend the essential issue with such terms. Edward Said composes:

Culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought, as Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s. Arnold believed that culture palliates, if it does not altogether neutralize, the ravages of a modern, aggressive, mercantile and brutalizing urban experience . . . In time culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates 'us' from 'them,' almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that . . . (Said, Edward. Introduction to *Culture and Imperialism* xiii)

*The Namesake* conveys to fore a number of the issues that Indians, settled in the promising place where there is opportunities, face in America. The story spins around the troubles confronted by a Bengali couple in an alternate nation the conflict of culture, the relationship in the middle of folks and youngsters, the generation hole, personality issue and so on. It discusses the excursion of an Indian lady Ashima, the focal character of the story, who moves from India to America after her marriage and all the while, endures a great deal by missing her nation once in a while. She has a place with a customary Hindu Bengali family, which lives in Calcutta. The novel opens with Ashima reviewing her country affectionately. She is in a propelled condition of pregnancy, conceded in a healing center for her conveyance. The author state:

... Nothing feels normal to Ashima. For the past eighteen months, ever since she has arrived in Cambridge, nothing has left normal at all. It's not so much the pain, which she knows, somehow, she will survive. It's the consequence: Motherhood in a foreign land. . . It was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved. (p.6)

After at some point, she feels torment in her stomach and her spouse Ashoke, an electrical architect, takes her quickly to the healing facility. In the healing center, she feels unbalanced when asked such a large number of inquiries in a dialect with which she is not happy. In spite of the fact that, she has been an understudy of English Literature she can't talk or comprehend English without breaking a sweat. A specialist comes to analyze her advance and asks her something with respect to her conveyance, "she is told that she is still in early labour three centimeters dilated, beginning to efface. What does it mean dilated? She asks and Dr. Ashley holds up two fingers side by side, then

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

UGC Approved

draws them apart explaining the unimaginable thing her body must do in order for the baby to pass” (p.3).

Ashima tries to settle in and modify herself to her surroundings, yet she feels interesting and lost in this nation and invests hours recalling that her guardians and family, and perusing the same five Bengali books over and over. While sitting tight for the kid to be conceived, she remembers the past until the purpose of her flight for Boston. The considered raising an infant in an outsider area unnerves her, . . . “To raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare.” (p.6)

Ashima, while staying in the clinic truly hungers for to converse with the other three ladies in the room. She is utilized to live in a joint family and is not in the propensity for being bereft without conversing with one another. Be that as it may, now, she needs to lie alone in her bed. Here, she truly feels the throb in her heart as she is bringing forth her first youngster far from her home. . “It is the first time in her life she has slept alone, surrounded by strangers; all her life she has slept either in a room with her parents or with Ashoke at her side. She wishes the curtains were open, so that she could talk to the American woman” (p.3). Being an Indian, she is in the propensity for talking or sharing musings on such matters. She needs to impart to an American who has conceived an offspring and needs to recognize what's in store at such a minute. However, she is deprived at the false reverence of the Americans, "She has assembled that Americans regardless of their open statements of love, notwithstanding their miniskirts and swimming outfits, despite their hand hanging in the city and lying on top of one another on the Cambridge Common lean toward their protection" (The Namesake: p.3).

Ashima brings forth boy and he is named Gogol after the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. She feels “Without a single grandparent or uncle or aunt, at her side, the baby’s birth, like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true. . . . She never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived” (p.25).

After the conception of her child Gogol, she needs to backtrack to Calcutta and bring her youngster there up in the organization of the minding and cherishing ones, yet chooses to stay back for Ashoke's purpose, and raises the infant in the Bengali way. “To put him to sleep, she sings him the Bengali songs her mother had sung to her (p.35). She keeps all her passionate dangers and disillusionments to herself and not meaning to stress her guardians, she exhibits in her letters a decent photo of the local offices and cleanliness here. Before long she goes to her own, takes pride in rising up the tyke, moves out alone in the business sector with her child in the pram, corresponds with the passers-by who grin at her and goes to meet her spouse on the grounds, in this manner becoming sure. Be that as it may, the failure is felt more by her, after their relocation from the University lofts to a

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

UGC Approved

University town outside Boston when Ashoke is “Hired as an Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering at the University” p. 48).`

Tejinder Kaur observes, “The shift to this suburban area with no streetlights, no public transportation, and no stores for miles makes Ashima feel more drastic and distressing than the move from Calcutta to Cambridge had been” (p.268). Feeling lonely and displaced in a foreign land, Ashima though not pregnant now, begins to realise that

Being a foreigner . . . is a sort of life-long pregnancy a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect. ( p. 49-50).

Gradually Ashoke and Ashima’s circle of Bengali connections grow and the cultural spirit of Bengal is recreated whenever the friends meet. They know Maya and Dilip Nandi meet Mitras, the Banarjees and then the young Bengali bachelors in the market who return from Calcutta with ‘wives.’ They all become friends only for the reason that they all come from Calcutta. Robert Cohen comments that “distinct diaspora communities are constructed out of the, conference of narratives of the old country to the new which create the sense of shared history. Thus a member’s adherence to a diasporic community is shown by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history” (IX). These Bengali families gather together on different occasions like the rice and name ceremonies of their children, their birthdays, marriages, deaths, and Bengali festivals. They celebrate these as per Bengali customs, wearing their best traditional attires, thus trying to preserve their culture in a new land. In fact, their beliefs, traditions, customs, behaviors and values along with their possessions and belongings are carried by migrants with them to new places. The migrant Bengalis act as honorary uncles and aunts, mashis and meshos for the children for various ceremonies and “sit in circles on the floor, singing songs by Nazrul and Tagore, passing a thick yellow clothbound book of lyrics among them as Dilip Nandi plays the harmonium. They argue riotously over the films of Ritwik Ghatak versus those of Satyajit Ray. The CPIM versus the Congress Party. North Calcutta versus South.” (p.38) But their existential dilemma in this new country is, as pointed out by the novelist, “For hours they argue about the politics of America, a country in which none of them is eligible to vote.” (p.38) Thus the immigrants face political displacement too.

“How they keep alive the memories of their homeland and culture in their ‘new-home’ in some other ways is shown by Lahiri by giving a peep into different Bengali homes” (Kaur, *Studies in Women Writers in English* p.269).

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

UGC Approved

Ashoke and Ashima keep on keeping up solidarity with the group. How these settlers face social clash in the remote frameworks is shown through the issues confronted by Ashoke and Ashima. They think that it's hard to make comprehend their social routine of having two names – pet-name at home and great name for formal purposes which will be settled on the receipt of a letter from Ashima's grandma, to healing center powers on their child's introduction to the world and on his admission to the school. Thus on their little girl's introduction to the world, they choose not to give her two names. Later they distinguish that Gogol keeps on hunting down his own particular personality, for a set code that won't make him feel an 'insider – untouchable'. The first run through his guardians allow him to sit unbothered overnight he runs with his companions Colin, Jason and Marc to a gathering in the college where his dad instructs. This is his first visit to quarters. There he meets a young lady and he presents himself as Nikhil and "he feels without a moment's delay remorseful and invigorated" (Lahiri, *Namesake* p.96). Paralyzed at that, it is so natural to say Nikhil, he who never dated a young lady and feels bold. He figures out how to kiss her before he goes. However, it hadn't been Gogol yet Nikhil, "That Gogol had nothing to do with it" (p.96). One must note the double personality or character emergency in Gogol. Preceding his takeoff for school, Gogol formally changes his name to Nikhil. In any case, despite the fact that he had yearned to change his name, he finds that he needs to get used to being called Nikhil. Furthermore, when his guardians additionally allude to him as Nikhil he feels, "... Right then and there that he is not identified with them, not their tyke" (p.106).

Ashoke and Ashima make adjustments which are completely fundamental. While trying endeavors to safeguard their 'home culture' in their new homes, the original immigrants prepare their youngsters in Bengali dialect, Literature and history at home and through exceptional Bengali classes, and open them to their own particular family ancestry, religious traditions, rituals, convictions, sustenance tastes, propensities and idiosyncrasies. They likewise prep them to adapt to the lifestyles in America. Ashima educates Gogol:

To memorize four-line children's poem by Tagore and the names of the deities adorning the ten-headed Durga during Puja: Saraswati with her swan and Kartik with his peacock to her left, Lakshmi with her owl and Ganesh with his nose to her right. Every afternoon Ashima sleeps, but before nodding off, she switches the television to channel 2, and tells Gogol to watch Sesame Street and The Electric Company, in order to keep up with the English he uses at nursery school" (p.54).

Also, they attempt to raise their kids the way it is done in India. Sonia and Gogol attempt to attest their uniqueness, and Gogol goes to the degree of reminding his guardians that he is eighteen. Ashoke and Ashima can't consider Pemberton Road as their home, yet Nikhil alludes to his New Haven inn as

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

UGC Approved

his home. Ashima is shocked by his comment. "... Sorry, I left it at home," Ashima says "... that following a quarter century America, She still can't force herself to allude to Pemberton Road as home" (Lahiri, *Namesake* 108). Ashima Ganguli, a basic persona in this work of fiction, is not an evangelist, but rather a specialist and she has shown it in her long adventure from India to America. With her grandma, whom she is close dependably has faith in her and realizes that she won't change even in the wake of living in an alternate culture: She has fed her sweets with her own hand. Unlike her parents, and her other relatives, her grandmother had not admonished Ashima not to eat beef or wear skirts or cut off her hair or forget her family the moment she landed in Boston. Her grandmother had not been fearful of such signs of betrayal; she was the only person to predict rightly that Ashima would never change. (p.37)

At whatever point she shows her children's the way of life they could call their own nation, it is on account of she has been extremely fussy in honing it. She directs them however she never constrains her kids to do, as she needs them to do it energetically. She gives them full opportunity to move out and investigate the world and do the things as indicated by their wishes. To the extent the traditions are concerned, she shows them the standards and guidelines of a conventional family, however never limits them to her own particular space.

Lahiri showed that the immigrants in their energy to stick to their own particular social convictions and traditions bit by bit soak up the social methods for the host nation as well. In spite of the fact that at first Ashoke did not care for the eve of Christmas and Thanksgiving, but rather as Gogol reviews that "... it was for him, for Sonia, that his parents had gone to the trouble of learning these customs" (p.286). In spite of the fact that they welcomed American youngsters too on the birthdays and a couple of other Bengali festivities yet at the same time Ashima discovered setting up various Bengali dishes for over forty Bengali visitors "less distressing than the undertaking of sustaining a modest bunch of American kids, a large portion of whom dependably assert they are adversely affected by milk, every one of whom decline to eat of coverings of their bread" (p.72). Their own particular kids prepped to be bilingual and bicultural face social predicaments and relocations more. In spite of the fact that compelled to sit in pujas and different religious services alongside the offspring of other Bengali families. Gogol and Sonia, similar to them, savour American and mainland nourishment more than the syrupy Bengali dishes and appreciate the festival of the Christmas, Thanksgiving and Halloween more, as alluring presents take after in that.

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

UGC Approved

### References

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. Boston Houghton Mifflin Company. 2003

Review of *The Namesake* by Aditya Sinha” The Malady of Naming” in Hindustan Times, September 28, 2003

Said, Edward, “The World, The Text and The Critic” Cambridge Harvard U.P.,1993

Said, Edward. Introduction. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994.

Kaur, Tejinder. “Cultural Dilemmas and Displacements of Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*.” *Studies on Women Writers in English*, Ed. Mohit K. Ray and Rama Kundu. Vol. 4. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2005.