

INTERROGATING DIASPORA: A STUDY OF SELECT NOVELS OF JHUMPA LAHIRI

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ABSTRACT

Diaspora has always been a major issue in the Indo-English Literature. Most of the fiction writers of Indian English Literature are settled abroad, but they never got uprooted from their native land and therefore the element of diaspora is one of the essential characteristics in their works. Jhumpa Lahiri is yet another golden feather in the cap of Indo-English Literature, particularly the diasporic writings. She won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for fiction in the year 2000. In this article author describe the problems of diasporic community, diaspora in indo-English fiction, indo-English diasporic literature, differentiate jumpha lahiri from other Indian writers writing in English and analysis between the namesake and the lowland diaspora and cross-cultural identity.

Her first novel 'The Namesake' is the work of a fine writer. The Namesake is extremely interesting eloquent and lucid which has been acclaimed by international media and her second novel the Lowland has actually been considered as a story about two brothers, but it could easily be the story of ideology, and how it shapes the family and relates the life affected by two brothers.

Ker Words:- Diaspora, Jhumpa Lahiri, Movement, Country, English Fiction, Indo-English Diasporic Literature etc.

INTRODUCTION OF DIASPORA

The term diaspora arises from the words dia meaning “away” and speire in meaning “scatter” or “sow” Connotatively, the diaspora has also been defined variedly by many people. At the beginning, applied to refer to the dispersal of Jews outside Israel, the term diaspora as per the **Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary** currently refers to “*The movement of people from any nation or group faraway from their own country*” (Hornby, 1995) as diaspora has varied meaning.

People have always been in pursuit of a better and greater life for their own because they always think about themselves. Since the very beginning of our world till today’s advanced period the study and exploration

continued by everyone to have the best for the living one's and to make them in the comfort zone. Man moves from one particular place to other in look for the comfort and prosperity and to fulfill their demands and requirements. In most cases, the people left behind are left with their homelands to create an even better future than comparison to others who have already left. Diaspora writing deals with the variety of movements and reveals certain characteristics that are identical to the experience faced by the man who is traveling from one place to another and what all difficulties he can have a comparison to others.

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the well known and famous Indian American authors who has been a much-admired chronicler of one's Bengali immigrant experience, and she knows the value and the problems being faced by immigrant and has studied on them very minutely. Her works portray the migrant's experiences as well as their attachment towards the homeland alongside their urge to belong in the settled land for the betterment of the economic as well as social life, and she was very much attracted towards their living ways. This will to have a look at various diasporic aspects and features in the fictions of Jhumpa Lahiri particularly the short story collections in *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) after her first novel *The Namesake* (2003). It's very significant that Jhumpa Lahiri is the child of Indian migrant and she feels that the question of identity is always a challenging one of those who are culturally displaced and being raised in two worlds concurrently as they are part of both the different cultural world as she is asking or querying about others also. The position of people living in the diaspora is always a dual state which creates confusion and disagreements for others. Identity and sense of alienation contribute to the stress on the individuals and their families even though their experiences of alienation and dislocation will be different both at individual and group levels as the feeling of alienation make one feel alone among all. Diaspora is about the creation of new identities in a new cultural area. Lahiri's works exhibit the notion of being uprooted from homeland along with put emphasize on the pursuit of blending in the host country because making one uprooted from their homeland make one completely shatter. Her characters make an effort to become a "new- self" while not having truly let go of the "old – self" therefore creates stories that display universal appeal. Lahiri pursues contradictory ways in handling the issues of diasporic life that will make her writing a delicate and poised voice within the Indian and world diasporic literature.

PROBLEMS OF DIASPORIC COMMUNITY

Perhaps one of the key problems that a diasporic community encounters is the predicament for identity because it is one of the important criteria for all. Identity is probably the most common themes in their literature, and in some cases the search for self-identity is portrayed as confusing, painful and only occasionally rewarding but is important for all to discuss. Some write semiautobiographical novels, delving into personal pasts to either

discover or reexamine their willingness and affinities which clearly shows how the person is. Other people use fictional characters and situations to question traditional norms, testing, trying, and some times reinforcing (whether internally or otherwise) notions of race and culture but they want to reveal the culture of others (Lau).

DIASPORA IN INDO-ENGLISH FICTION



The Indian novelists in English have chosen themes and more than that situation that have relevance around the globe or even the world because they choose what affects many. These themes are not many, as there are various social structures, values, conventions, and customs in different parts of India but these are really touching the heart of many. The Indian English fiction of the post-independence era is free from social and political overtones, and there is a shift of interest to the individual and self-identification as it is more so ever describing a person in personal actually least interest in political respect.

Indian writing in English has acquired an awesome significance in recent years, not only in India but across the world but the Indian writing is to the point. The short story is obviously the most popular literary form which has become popular. The short story writers in English come from different parts of the country, and they have diverse social, cultural and family backgrounds but exactly what unites them would be the use of English as their mode of expression with expression varied culture is mixed, and the result which comes out is colorful.

INDO-ENGLISH DIASPORIC LITERATURE

Diaspora Theory having its many different features and characteristics have influenced the literature of any language on the planet and are still affecting. This literature is widely known as Expatriate or Diasporic Literature all over the world. It would be appropriate to examine the aspect and of such literature in which Indian Writing in English not only contributed tremendously but as well as received international recognition and admiration during the past couple of years and has left impact all over the world.

DIFFERENT FROM OTHER INDIAN WRITERS WRITING IN ENGLISH

Jhumpa Lahiri is quite different from various other Indian writers writing in English, and her vision is different. The majority of the Indian fiction writers writing in English are born and brought up in India, despite the fact

that the writers like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Jhabvala, Vikram Seth and Salman Rushdie reside either in England or America but they are actually Indians by heart. Lahiri was born in London, of Bengali parents and grew up in Rhode Island, United States and is a well-known writer and has a heart of Indian.

Nilanjana Sudeshna "Jhumpa" Lahiri (Bengali; born on July 11, 1967) is an American author and is very well known among all. Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most significant writers of the Indian diaspora in the present time, and she is expert in her writing skills. Lahiri's commence the task of short story collection Interpreter of Maladies (1999) won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, along with her first novel, The Namesake (2003), was adapted directly into a popular film of the same name and is famous among all. She was born Nilanjana Sudeshna but goes by her nickname Jhumpa because of her work. **(Minzesheimer, Bob)** Lahiri is a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, appointed by U.S. President Barack Obama on this prestigious post. Her publication The Lowland, published in 2013, was a nominee for the Man Booker Prize and of course, the National Book Award for Fiction is very famous too. Lahiri is currently a professor of creative writing at Princeton University, and she really is well known among all students. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jhumpa_Lahiri)

Lahiri became the first American of Asian descent to bag Pulitzer Prize, the highest literary award of America with regards to her debut series Interpreter of Maladies and she made this record on her own. M.F.K. Fisher Distinguished Writing Award from the James Beard Foundation (2000) and Guggenheim Fellowship (2002) were also awarded to Jhumpa Lahiri for her devotional work of writing. In 2003, The Namesake, her second literary work appeared on the arena and was also same very much enthusiastic. Like her previous book, The Namesake also exposed her subjective approach to immigration and exile from one place to another. In Interpreter of Maladies, Jhumpa applies many different perspectives and outlooks of narration, viz male, female as well as children viewpoint of narration conversely in the Namesake she presented solely male perspective, she shows all the perspective but differently in different time.

Lahiri talks about displacements as well as deracination of the immigrants and their alienation for the foreign place and thinks that almost any American can connect to some level to a family background of having come across some ocean as it is with almost everyone once in life.

Lahiri in her writing mostly talks about the cultural clash and the question of the identity of human being as a whole. Lahiri also tries her best to describe some proper native characters living in India through her own perspective which she feels for them and as readers, we can tell she did wonderful job in her literature and it shows that even though she was born and brought up in foreign land she is never rooted from her nativeness and still exist in her blood and that's is something very significant about Diaspora writing in literature.

Lahiri has created her space essentially in the Diaspora writing, and her fictions tells us a lot in regards to the experiences of the migrant families and migrant people where we have both the first generations and 2nd generations telling their stories separately or individually about them and each of them has got that plight of living in a foreign land away from homeland and regarding those of the second generations they have got their own difficulties of blending in with the culture of their ancestors and the culture of their own because not easy to accept new culture. Lahiri has traveled extensively to India and has experienced the effects of colonialism there as well as experienced the issues of the diaspora as it exists very rooted in that place. She feels strong ties to her parents' homeland as well as the United States and England, but she has accepted it. Growing up with ties to all three countries created in Lahiri a sense of Homelessness and an inability to feel accepted but from outside it seems that she has accepted. Her familial ties to India were not well enough to make India "home" for Lahiri, as she has never been brought up there "I didn't grow up there; I was not a part of things. We often visited however we didn't have a home actually there. We were clutching at a world that was never fully with us, and it was incompletely with us" (Interview with Vibhuti Patel in Newsweek International, 9-20-99).

In 2008, another collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* was published which is again a good one. Jhumpa once more reveals the diasporic communities, trying to root themselves into the unaccustomed earth which they don't wish to do. Immigrant experiences of the characters are kind of like those of the characters of her earlier works which has been described earlier.

As a well known young writer of Indian background, Lahiri is a type of representative figure for non-immigrant Americans who do not fully understand what it takes to straddle the boundary in between two cultures and what is the outcome of it.

Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second category of Asian American writers who deal with India as an exotic land for a living, and likewise with the problems of *Indian immigrants* adjusting in an alien land for their survival.

Both the *Interpreter of Maladies* and of course the *Namesake* contains themes of conflict in relationships in between couples, families, as well as friends because being an immigrant. From each of these relationships, she explores ideas of isolation and identity, both the personal and cultural which affect everyone in the family. The characters in both of the works frequently happen stancecatastrophes of identity, which are tied to their inability to reunite their American identity along with their Indian identity. Especially in the short fiction of *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri often leaves these crises unresolved and let for the reader. Thus, her work gives us a rather bleak approach to the future of her characters that which kind of reader is she. We may think that this reflects some of Lahiri's concerns about their real-life analogs and what will be the outcome. She often correlates her characters' cultural isolation with extreme personal isolation, recommending that the cultural isolation causes the personal disturbances in life. The circumstances in which this cultural isolation are resolved

or avoided are typically accompanied by a similar resolution or avoidance of personal isolation and people become concern about personal.

ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE NAMESAKE AND THE LOWLAND DIASPORA AND CROSS-CULTURAL IDENTITY

THE LOWLAND

Jhumpa Lahiri is a prominent Indian American novelist as well as short story writer who writes stories which are lesson giving for all the living being. Her works concentrate on Indians residing in the USA, and also their cultural tensions arise due to two different cultures. She imagines India as she has lived abroad by what she has heard from others about India. **The Lowland (2013)** is her newest novel that narrates the story of two brothers who are of different characteristics. The younger one is a Naxalite who is killed in a marshy land near Calcutta in a police encounter as he was in wrong deeds. His pregnant wife Gauri accompanies the elder brother of her late husband to the USA and marries him and gets settled there. In the USA, Gauri is trapped in a permissive life style abandoning her duties as a mother and husband which was different from her prior duties. She is completely disconnected from her family while Subhash takes care of her daughter Bela just like a true father where she was living earlier. Finally, Bela comes to be aware of the fact that Subhash is not her birth father but contrary to Subhash's fear, she is united in love with her Godfather because she gets ample amount of love with him. The novel questions Gauri's indifference to familial duties in favor of independence because she adapts according to place. The main focus of the novel is a human need for love and companionship to spend a complete life.

The Lowland has actually been considered as a story about two brothers, but it could easily be the story of ideology, and how it shapes the family and relates the life affected by two brothers. The descriptions of the world the boys were born into are vivid without ever catering to our thirst regarding the exotic are different from that of girls. The characters here are middle-class, living in a quiet subdivision, centered on thick textbooks and transistor radios, on sneaking into the club for foreigners right outside their doors they are living in their own created world. As the boys get older as well as their interests take different paths, changing the lives of everyone around them, we see India fade into the background, and of course the bleak solitude of New England academia takes over because all are interested in going out and studying.

Jhumpa's novel The Lowland can be described as a marshy stretch of land in between two ponds or can be said the two places. In monsoon floods and ponds mix up making the stretch muddy as well as full of shallow water both look a like when mixed. This is actually a region that is prone to flooding during the rainy season and is never remain aloof from being affected. In summer, the water evaporates leaving it shoddy and dry area as

water disappears or evaporates. The two ponds are linked by flooded water, however, separated during hot summer because more water gets evaporated. They symbolize two brothers in the novel Subhash and Udayan as a pond.

In *The Lowland*, Lahiri refers to the Naxalite Movement of the 1970's which was on the boom. It is a history that was not the part of her experience which she saw or experienced.

She had heard about it from her parents, particularly from her father, She also borrowed a few books from her father on the Naxalite movement and read them and had knowledge related to it. Lahiri had heard from her father the story of two brothers in the neighborhood of her parental family home in Calcutta, and she started feeling herself being seen. The two brothers were rounded up by the police for their suspected alliance with the Naxalite movement and the police killed one of them in broad daylight and his family was destroyed. In *The Lowland*, Lahiri has employed the two brothers showing how the lives of the people are affected by violence and how much it is destroyed. Gauri's life takes altogether a different direction account of her husband's death and her perception towards life also changes. This is how Lahiri employs the political movement of the 1970's in otherwise family story briefing violence affecting life. Violence, in every form and for any cause destroys and distorts the lives of the people and even affect others life too.

Referring to her diasporic dilemma, she said, "Language, identity, place, home: these are all of a piece-just different element of belonging and not belonging and often related or sometimes not related.

For most of Lahiri's novel, we are stuck in the mud with the careful older brother whose name is Subhash. Consequently, there is a quality of motionlessness to *The Lowland* that, especially in its opening units, almost verges on the still — or would, were it not for Lahiri's always surprising language and conspiracy. *The Lowland* is something of a leaving for Lahiri, whose other work often travels the struggles of Indian settler families. *The Lowland*, instead, opens in Calcutta in the 1950s and '60s and keeps recurring there even as the main story moves ahead in time.

THE NAMESAKE

Jhumpa Lahiri's novels deal with problems that appear banal and every day but raise questions about culture, identity, the position as well as the condition of the subject in an Americanized neocolonial world about an immigrant who find themselves not satisfied at the new place. Bhabha has explored this condition existing in between two cultures, however, inhabiting a space that belongs to neither this is situation always between two new cultures. Jhumpa Lahiri, though being American forms part of the diaspora of writers who may be

identified with and analyzed in the postcolonial framework as she also finds herself as an immigrant. However, the questions of identity in her fiction invite compelling and important scholarly inquiry whether the identity is preserved or not (Gholipour & Sanahmadi, 2013).

One of the main themes that might be conveyed through the entire novel in *The Namesake* is the theme of identity, and the person is fighting for an identity. In the novel, almost every person is just a little bit lost or a lot lost, honestly as an immigrant. Practically every character struggles along with his or her identity, for the reason that every character feels the tug and pull of different cultures, different traditions, as well as different dreams because everyone's identity is being lost and fighting for its existence.

Gogol/Nikhil particularly is stuck in between two cultures- the Indian traditions of his parents and the mainstream American culture wherein he grows up and is fighting between two cultures. Gogol and his sister, Sonia face a similar struggle as an immigrant. It's related to the struggle their parents undergo as immigrants and has lost being as an immigrant. Each character faces a choice: should I accept American culture or should I not? If so, how much? Will I be betraying my roots if I do accept other culture? Characters constantly think of these questions through their relationships along with their names, their relationships with their families, and also their choices regarding the future whether they should accept or not.

In *The Namesake*, everybody is just a little bit lost. Or a lot lost, frankly because identity is still a question. Practically every character struggles with his or her identity because practically every character feels the tug and pull of different cultures, different traditions, and different dreams because fighting for their exact identity. The theme of identity is normally centered on Gogol about his identity. In the novel, they have two names: Gogol and Nikhil whose identity is being of concern. When he was Gogol, he was confused, angry and he didn't feel like his own self and was not feeling nice. He hated that name, but that was the name that gave him his first and true identity as his identity begins from there. Around his and relatives and friends (school) he will always be known as Gogol his prior identity. The name Gogol represents his connection to his family and his roots where he was born. On the flip side, we have the name Nikhil for the same person. His character comes to life when he uses the name Nikhil for Gogol. He felt courageous, brave, and even more importantly, he felt like himself with the name Nikhil he understand himself. He loses his virginity by using the name Nikhil, and that name has to lead him to fulfill and have relationships with multiple women which he never had with Gogol (Ruth, Maxine, Bridget, and Moushumi). He legally changes his name to Nikhil before he moves away to college as he didn't find Gogol suiting her. The name Nikhil goes on to represent his individuality and separation from his parents or the new culture. It may also represent him accepting American culture and distancing away from Indian culture with a new name adopting a new culture. The twist comes into play when people are starting calling him Nikhil and he gets startled because he kept his new name. He likes the name

Nikhil much better, but he doesn't feel like Nihkil because he liked this name better than Gogol. On the inside, he feels like Gogol, no matter how much he dislikes the name and has kept new name. This adds to the controversy of his identity: is he Gogol or Nikhil not clear? Or is he a mix of both? Gogol by day, and Nikhil by night not known till now? Perhaps he is trying to emulate a superhero with two identities (Bruce Wayne and Batman, Clark Kent and Superman, Peter Parker and Spiderman), or perhaps not or is he confused.

The theme of identity is a really complex topic in *The Namesake*, as the characters struggle to find their true and pure identity because both have different identity of recognition. They're constantly questioning their own selves about who they are, and also where they belong and actually why he is so. Are they Indian or American not clear? Or are they a hybrid of both not known? The characters in the novel live their lives trying to answer these questions as well as search for answers through their relationships, actions, and dreams why he is here and what he has to get. Leisurely, they find some answers but not true exactly. Their journey might lead them to find the answers they need, as they fight to continue the search for the truth of their identity.

In her 2003 novel, *The Namesake*, as in her two collections of short stories - *Unaccustomed Earth* and *Interpreter of Maladies*, the lives of Lahiri's characters were made palpably real to the readers and was opened before readers, through her exacting evocation of their everyday routines: the Wonder Bread sandwiches, tinted green with curry, that a Bengali mother makes for her embarrassed daughter to take to school, the careful adoption of American rituals like making snowmen or dyeing Easter eggs so that she does not feel obsessed by having Indian mother. Such particulars accentuated the differences between immigrant parents, and their American-born children are big problem for these children, and the almost existential sense of dislocation that exile can produce in individuals who feel at home neither in their ancestral country nor the United States hence they are still looking for their identity.

Lahiri's novel, —*The Namesake*, which depicted the angst of a young Bengali-American named Gogol a person who is fighting for his identity, had the virtues of a ferocious devotion to realist description, a satirical edge when probing upper-class New York pretensions, and a simple, linear plot unable to understand why identity by means of name means so much for others. In *The Lowland*, the narrative moves back and forth through time and across the points of view of all the principal characters and explain about all characters, but this diffusion does not appear to be in the service of formal playfulness or experimentation in the spirit of one of the many variants of modernism but trying to find the identity of migrants.

CONCLUSION

Today Indian Diaspora has emerged to be distinctive transnational communities, bridging the “local” and „global“ together. It is made of experts in several different fields like IT, Medicine, Space Technology, Engineering and Management and so forth. The improvements in communication, as well as transportation technology, have facilitated further development in these networks among the Indian Diaspora in general and regional/ linguistic/ caste Diasporas especially. This is manifested in the socioeconomic, political and cultural networks through transnational and global organizations among the overseas Indian communities, involving their homeland, and also their kith and kin all over the world. During the past decade, these contacts are further facilitated throughout the encouragement and intervention of the government of India and a number of other state governments in various political as well as economic matters. It is obvious that, though distance separates the Indians, they remain linked to one another through ties of real or imaginary kinship, shared resources, as well as cultural exchanges. They preserve and recreate their identity in new homes across the globe.

The issues about identity, nostalgia, longing, and desire for the home have become the central preoccupation of the diasporic writers. Language, culture, as well as history, are the three major constituents of diasporic identity.

A large bulk of Indian Diaspora literature focuses on the issues of identity. There is the emergence of a new type of identity which is based upon humanism, tolerance and secular outlook. The notion of identity is an important focus especially in the works of women writers who give highly volatile expression to women’s issues in the sociopolitical construction of the nation. Many writers who have left their homelands illustrate their immigrant experiences, the predicament of displacement, questioning or celebrating their encounter with the new alien countries.

This paper is written to explore how diaspora has become a dominant or influential theme to occupy space in South-Asian literature. I have tried to outline Lahiri’s talent in handling diaspora in her fictions in the research. The sufferings, feelings, experiences, ups and downs, weal and woes of diasporic people described in Lahiri’s fictions are intended to show in the paper.

In Lahiri’s fiction, the readers are continually being invited to cross over from India to America along with characters. The Indian immigrants, their achievements, struggles and tensions, and also their experiences are nicely portrayed by Lahiri in her fictions.

‘The Lowland,’ Lahiri’s second novel, mainly tells the story of a mother in Diaspora, Gauri and her American born girl, Bela. Cultural hegemony, diasporic crisis, cross-cultural alienation, etc fill the novel.

In 'The Namesake' she describes the lives of two generations of an immigrant Bengali family, the Gangulis in America. It could also be said that in the literature of Diaspora, identities of individuals are closely connected to the space that they occupy and negotiate. Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction, in particular, explores this space-identity link. Her works also present international space or 'the third space' of Diaspora subjects as the sites of intersection of subjectivities, generations, and cultures.

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