

STRUGGLE AND CHANGING IDENTITY OF IMMIGRANTS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S NOVEL THE NAMESAKE: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* is the novel that gives the life journey of the USA based Indian Diaspora. Hence an honest effort through this paper has been done to study the how different characters in the novel acts as per the time and show their traits in different situation and emerges as true Indian Diaspora. At the same time, the pangs of alienation and adjustment in foreign culture at the cost of leaving one's own mother land is also systematically analysed. The paper also highlights on how the new generations of Indian Diaspora react to the changing situation and how they adjust themselves as the culture and land change.

Keywords: Indian Diaspora, alienation, culture, identity, forgiveness, hope.

Introduction

The Namesake is an account of two generations of the Gangulis, a family of Indian immigrants to the United States and is inspired by the facts of Lahiri's life. *The Namesake* is a work of fiction. The novel is based on various perspectives. Lahiri proves how each character grows, falls in love, and suffers hardship. She depicts them both as members of families and communities and as individuals, with needs and wants that are particular to them. *The Namesake* talks about people's loving relationships and friendships; the nature of household and loss; and the impact of literature, art, and food on people's lives. It is a novel of personalities- and of the way people shape and change those personalities over time.

The Namesake is an account of the experience of Indian Diaspora. Ashoke initially names his son Gogol, after Nikolai Gogol, a famous Russian. Ashoke has special importance to this character in his life. For years, Gogol finds his name strange and does not understand why his father wishes to name him after Nikolai Gogol. Over time, however, Gogol comes to understand the train-wreck during which his father is reading Gogol's work. This occurs after Gogol has changed his name to Nikhil, and begun introducing himself this way to friends in college. Thus, just as Gogol feels he has escaped his liability of a name, given him by his parents, he begins to understand the importance that that name has for Ashoke and Ashima. The world Lahiri creates both stresses the importance of names and shows that all names, all identities, exist in flux. Gogol becomes Gogol, but by the end of the novel, he finds himself reading Nikolai Gogol in his old home near Boston. When he is a younger man, he wants only to escape the identities he feels are imposed on him by his family. Over the time, he learns the struggles of his parents' generation.

Discussion

The Namesake is centred on five primary periods in the life of the Ganguli family: From India to America; Gogol's Childhood; Nikhil- the American; Ashoke's Death & Gogol's Marriage

and Failure and Future Hope. The first two chapters of the novel relate the story of the Gangulis' initial days in America. Ashoke resolves to move to Boston and initiates graduate school after hardly surviving a tragic train accident in India. A few years later, his parents and Ashima's parents organise their marriage, and Ashima comes to Boston from Calcutta to join Ashoke. In the beginning of the novel, we come to know that the two of them are going to a Boston hospital because Ashima is in labor with their first child.

Ashima's grandmother writes a letter to Ashoke and wants to know about the name of newborn. Unfortunately, it is lost in the mail. As usual, while releasing from the hospital, one needs name; the same is the need to Ashoke's family and is required to Ashima's grandmother to put on hospital record. The Gangulis keep the pet name Gogol. It is linked to the Russian author whose short stories Ashoke used to read when his life nearly ends on the train. The sudden demise of Ashima's father forces them to leave for Calcutta in a rush, and the name Gogol is put on his passport.

As the novel precedes to chapters 3 and 4, we get the idea of Gogol's childhood. Gogol grows up as a Bengali American child with a stable name of no end. His parents resolve to give him the ceremonial Bengali name Nikhil to begin with kindergarten, but Gogol dislikes to call him by this name and hence his school teachers call him by his legal name, Gogol. Sonia is Gogol's younger sister. Both Ashoke and Ashima want to continue their children in Bengali cultural but Gogol and Sonia are more inclined to Americans as they have American friends during childhood. The Gangulis' usually arrange house parties for their community friends as per Bengali customs. On one such occasion of birthday party, Gogol comes across Moushumi, a shy girl of his age. Meanwhile the Ganguli family comes to India for some duration when Gogol is in tenth grade; but both feel exhaustive and reluctant to stay in India.

When we go through chapter 5 and 6, we find Gogol's official identity changes to Nikhil. Now onward the name Nikhil is used before starting his undergraduate study at Yale University. He tries to keep his past completely separate from his new life; even nobody knows that his legal name is Gogol. During education, Gogol regularly visits to Ruth's family in Boston. Ruth is his fellow Yale student. During this, once Ashoke tells Gogol the story of the train crash that influences his choice of Gogol's name. Gogol becomes bachelor of Columbia University and works as an architect in New York City. There, he falls in love with a woman named Maxine Ratliff. Day –by–day, the love between them goes on increasing and his relationship with Maxine grows till he moves in with the Ratliffs. Ashoke accepts a research appointment in Ohio and soon he is to shift for that purpose.

We come across sudden death of Ashoke in chapters 7 to 9 that transforms Gogol's whole world. Ashoke calls his wife from Ohio to tell her he has checked himself into the emergency room with a stomach-ache, and a few hours later he dies of a heart attack. Gogol travels to Ohio to collect his father's relics. He somehow vacates his apartment and returns to Boston to stay with his family. Maxine is kind and considerate and mourns on Ashoke's sudden demise. Gogol keeps away Maxine from his family and they break up. Soon after a lapse of times Gogol clandestinely meets Bridget, a married woman and through her dates Moushumi, a fellow Bengali American who has recently disengaged from Graham, a non-Bengali. Soon they fall in love and marry but that is also not their fate.

After completion of her fellowship in Paris, Moushumi behaves as if lost something in her personal life and waits that one day everything will be better. Moushumi experiences rift in

her relation with Gogol after fellowship in Paris. Somehow, she gets the information of her old friend, Dmitri with whom she has fallen in love during high school education. Once Moushumi suddenly mentions about Dmitri's name to Gogol and then feels guilty that Gogol might be thinking about their relation. Soon they take become separate. Ashima has planned to sell the Ganguli's house at Pemberton road. Once, she organizes a Christmas party as a last party of the family and makes up her mind to stay six months in year in Calcutta and remaining six months in America. Gogol comes home for the party and gets an earlier gift from his father, a copy of *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol* and starts reading it. .

In the limelight of the above story, we come across various themes that show different facets of human- being. Themes are the vital and often widespread thoughts discovered in a literary work that are generally seen in the novel as-

Alteration, and its Reliance on Constancy

Through *The Namesake*, Lahiri finds the changes that take place in the Ganguli family. She cautiously arranges an order of repeated events, gatherings, meals, and social events throughout the life in the Ganguli's family. This shows that certain truths remain deceptive though the family's situations swing with the passage of time. Actually, it is through change that characters learn who they are, and what remain steady. Ashoke's life entirely changes after the train-wreck in India. He then decides to go to the United States, and when he returns to Calcutta; he marries to Ashima. This changes both their lives and early switch to marriage in Cambridge. However, Ashima still feels that Cambridge *is* her home. The Gangulis are a family unit that grows and matures over time. Ashima seldom wishes for life in Calcutta, she thinks that she has entered a new life, a new family in the United States. In a true sense, her own longings for love and completion and friendship, never change. But the situation, and the place, in which these desires are fulfilled changes.

Universality of Forgiveness

We also find the germs of forgiveness in the novel. In the beginning, the novel seems that it is merely an experience of the Bengali-American community but as the novel proceeds, we get an idea that various facets of human relations are revealing. America is a country of different groups and communities. The Bengalis experience a feeling of alien when they come to America. The Gangulis feel out of place when they come to Cambridge. The same happens with Ashima when the family settles in outskirts of Boston. Moushumi grows apart, become foreign to one another, because Moushumi longs for a different set of experiences, and for a different kind of relationship. This theme is born out in Gogol's different romantic relationships.

The Creation of Distinctiveness

The Namesake is a novel of individualities. Here the members of the Ganguli's family get an opportunity to create their own identity as per the time. Gogol understands that changing one's name officially is one thing but to become a different person is another thing. Gogol grows up confused by his pet name. Gogol tries on different identities at different stages of his life: in college, with Ruth, after college, with Maxine, and in his marriage to Moushumi. Moushumi, too, is confused in her French identity that is continental, and rational. The recognition she finds with Gogol of husband and wife irritates her and she pursues to get rid of it. On the contrary, Ashoke and Ashima come closer as time passes. When Ashoke dies, Ashima gets a new identity of widow. No doubt, as a widow she gets a lot of love and support of her family.

Conclusion

The Namesake is an account of a Bengali-American Ganguli family well written by Lahiri in which one gets an idea of how Indian migrants have to face the problem of identity when settle in foreign land. It gives a deep impact on the minds of the first and forthcoming generation that cannot be erased throughout their lives. They are haunted by the cultural trauma throughout their lives. They remain of no end. The sorrow of mother land always pinches them though they enjoy romantic life in foreign countries. The love for land some or other day attracts them to their birth place. They live in foreign country but they have constant fear of losing the ground. Lahiri has systematically portrayed the canvas of such alienated Indian Diaspora with her own style through various characters and answered all such complexities of diaspora lives through her characters. She has in a true sense shown the pangs of Indian Diaspora.

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