



Diasporic Sensibility in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Interpreter of Maladies' and 'The Namesake'

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Abstract:

"Jhumpa Lahiri is the kind of writer who makes you want to grab the next person you see & say "Read this!" She's a dazzling storyteller with a distinctive voice, an eye for nuance, an ear for irony. She is one of the finest short story writers I've read"

-Amy Tan

The present paper explores the diasporic sensibility in Jhumpa Lahiri's texts, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*. She is well known author of Indian Diaspora so; she presents tormenting conflict of culture in her novels & short stories as she herself confronted in such critical situations. Being a second-generation immigrant there are some autobiographical elements in her literary creations. Her debut short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* spot light on the issues of immigrants. The stories address sensitive dilemmas in the lives of Indian immigrants with various themes like crisis for identity, homesickness, rootlessness, nostalgia, marital difficulties, & disconnection between first & second generation of United States' immigrants. The story of the novel *The Namesake* spans over thirty years in the life of the Ganguli Family. The Calcutta-born parents of Gogol & Sonia immigrated as young adults to the United States, where their children brought up with bitter experiences of generational & cultural gap.

Keywords: *Diaspora, Cultural conflict and nostalgia.*

Introduction:

Nilanjana Sudeshna Jhumpa Lahiri was born on July 11, 1967, the daughter of Bengali immigrants, in London. Her family moved to the United States when she was 2 years old. Nilanjana Sudeshna was her school's name but the authorities thought that the nick name Jhumpa is quite suitable and easier, so it became her official name. She was born in London. She has explored the issue of cultural encounter specifically. Most of the times, we find how



she is talking about India, Indian peoples especially about the Bengalis; surrounding tradition & customs of India. It clearly shows her love & passion for India though she is living abroad.

Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second generation of Indian immigrants abroad, so she has expressed the experiences of the second-generation appropriately which is the strong feeling to become sandwiched between their homeland and an alien land. Meanwhile, she tries to comprehend the experiences of loss and nostalgia of the immigrants of the first generation. Lahiri's debut short story collection, *Interpreter of maladies*, was released in 1999. In 2003, Lahiri published her first novel, *The Namesake*. Both the selected texts spot light on aspect of Diaspora. So here an attempt has been made to explore the Diasporic sensibility in her selected texts.

Interpreter of Maladies

Being a Diaspora writer Lahiri presents the theme of conflict of culture in her short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* and her debut novel *The Namesake*. She has presented the cross-cultural differences in all her nine stories of *Interpreter of Maladies*. The story 'A Temporary Matter' indicates a symbolic reference to an unusual power cut for an hour in Boston that also symbolizes the married life of Shoba and Shukumar. The story presented the frustration of Shoba. Through her characters Lahiri highlights the depth of loneliness and frustration which multiplied bitter and traumatic experiences of immigrants in the western soil. Through the story of *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* Lahiri focused the trauma of Mr. Pirzada who came from his homeland and still preserving the ethos by creating a bond with the Bengali couple who speak the same language and becomes an equal sharer in his travails.

Through the story *Interpreter of Maladies* Lahiri presents many aspects of Indian culture which are completely different from American culture. The story of *Real Durwan* exhibits Boori Ma's sufferings because of manmade borders and religious intolerance. The confrontation of class and culture has been shown through the character of Boori Ma and this is highlighted in the present novel. The story focuses on human relation and emotion of women with the issue of cultural conflict. The story of Mrs. Sen and her agony and frustration as an Indian Bengali woman living in America. Mrs. Sen plays the role of representative of each and every woman who goes abroad in completely unfamiliar world after their marriage with their life partners. The story *Blessed House* presents the different aspects of lives of immigrants. Through the character of Sanjeev which is the first-generation immigrant and his wife Twinkle who is second generation immigrant. Lahiri illustrated the tussle and trauma of cultural clashes



in this book. Through the story *The Treatment of Bibi Halدار* Lahiri records Bibi's helplessness at the apathetic culture and conflict of class.

'The Third and Final Continent' reveals sparks of conflict of culture and class. Being an author of diaspora, Lahiri's stories have not only created the figures leading to nostalgia but also contain realistic picture of rich traditions and culture of India. So, Lahiri depicted cultural conflict in Interpreter of Maladies appropriately and all nine stories gave detail account of the life of immigrants.

The Namesake

There is depiction of theme of identity crisis and feeling of alienation in Lahiri's debut novel *The Namesake*. Lahiri exhibits the tale of immigrant's life through her novel *The Namesake* by presenting the various appropriate characters like Gogol, Ashima and Ashoke. Gogol's identity crisis, loneliness and sufferings are highlighted in the present novel. He has suffered a lot in his life some of the time due to his name & most of the time because of his marriage.

The Namesake tells the story of Gogol Ganguli, the American-born son of Indian immigrants, spanning from his birth in 1968 to his adulthood in the year 2000. In this novel Jhumpa Lahiri examines the social and psychological stages he goes through while developing a transitional identity.

The Namesake presents the four generations of the Ganguli family, in different corners of the world. The first generation is represented by Gogol's great-grand parents, His great-grandfather teaches Ashoke the father of Gogol that how the reading is important and the great-grandmother sends Ashima a letter which contains what was Gogol's name to be. But the letter never reaches the American continent & Gogol never meets his great-grandparents. As his grandparents never lives in India. So, Lahiri's main focus is on the third & fourth generations of Ganguli. The story depicts the struggle of Ashoke & Ashima Ganguli who are the first-generation immigrants.

It can't be denied that Ashoke and Ashima face cultural conflicts in the choices of food habits of their children. Ashima prepares all kind of Bengali dishes on festivals & different occasions, children swallow that with heavy hearts. Gogol later gets habitual to American food. The conflict is seen when Gogol's mother on his birthday has prepared all



native dishes having Indian flavors. Lahiri stated Gogol's conflict on seeing his mother's preparation:

“Along with the samosas, there are breaded chicken cutlets, chick peas with tamarind sauce, lamb biryani, chutney made with tomatoes from the garden. It is a meal he knows it has taken his mother over a day to prepare and yet the amount of effort embarrasses him.” (Lahiri, 2004. p.148.)

Gogol resolves the cultured confusion and follows in the footsteps of his native culture after his father's sudden demise. The Namesake provides an ironical capacity to voice the general experience of displacement & dislocation. It is quite electric blend of cultural remnants- Russian, Bengali, American and its very immediate sensuality to the typically nebulous experience of heterogeneity.

Lahiri's most of the characters in stories and novels have been presented with insight. As a diasporic writer Lahiri shows that real cause of their conflict of culture & class lies in their sense of loss and their displacement from their native culture in the first generation & second generation as well. In fact, what is a host country for the first-generation immigrant becomes a native country for second generation immigrants. For first-generation immigrant their blood-ties make them feel nostalgic since no home can be comfortable than the home land. Their familial bonds are much stronger as compare to the next generation. Jhumpa Lahiri also stated that her responsibility is not painting a flattering portrait, but her responsibility is to paint a real portrait, a true portrait.

The first-generation migrant's like Ashoke and Ashima, dislocation from their native land and culture become very tormenting. The second-generation immigrants like Gogol and Sonia also feel up rooted in their parent's native land- as well as in the adopted land. Since they have accommodated themselves in the country of their birth, they feel alienated with Indian with only exception of their Parents. For them Sarika Dubey stated:

Cultural identity is metaphoric, unstable and marked by multiple points of similarities as well as differences. They both reveal a deep awareness of the self as fluid rather than fixed on 'becoming' rather than being". (Dubey, 2009. p.46-63.)

The second-generation immigrants, who behave like the native of the host country, ultimately find console in their parents' faith and also in their traditional ways. Uma Parmeswaran called it as a question of attitudes that at times clash. She appropriately says:



“Within the diaspora community the concept of ‘home’ continues to exacerbate intergenerational frictions that let us remember, exists everywhere. Most young people whose parents keep to old ways feel trapped by their differences not only at school, but also at home. Home for those born in Canada is very definitely Canada but because of force feeding by their parents ‘homeland’ could still be India”. (Parmeswaran, 1998. p.43.)

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Conclusion:

So, the above discussion of Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* throws light upon depiction of Diasporic sensibility in both the works of art. Cultural conflicts, identity crisis, rootlessness, displacement, nostalgia etc. expressed in her debut short story collection *The Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* as well. It has been seen that above selected works strike largely a common fusion as regards the Diasporic experiences. Though she is living abroad her belonging to Indian roots make her to write about Indian Diaspora. The personal experiences of Lahiri and her encounter with the realities of the world enforced her to write about the theme of cultural conflict and to create characters in such a way. Being a diaspora writer Lahiri records her personal experiences in both the works so there are autobiographical elements in it.

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