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DIASPORA/ TRANSNATIONALISM/FEMINISM AN ENIGMA OF CULTURES IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S NOVELS

R.Sudha

Assistant Professor of English, Department of English (PG-SF), N.G.M. College, Pollachi

Abstract

Today female writers outnumber male writers everywhere. They are allowed to express their ideas through writings. For sure they are empowered, but to some extent.

Today they have reached the peak of creation with the contributions of regional and national even global levels. They are educated and employed and they travel and know what happens around them. The recent development in Indian literature is most remarkable in the history of Indian writing in English.

Most of the Indian English novels of the recent times written by migrant writers are taken theme from contemporary Indian Socio- cultural situations. They also undertake the exploration of the relationship between the east and the west. It has become a recurring theme in contemporary Indian English fiction. Now issues like post- colonialism, multiculturalism, nativism, social and political agenda are treated with great importance.

Contemporary writers are not confined to people living in India, but a large number of them are part of the Indian Diaspora, and all their writings are around India and they have Indianness. One among them is Jhumpa Lahiri.

Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian – American writers of Indian Diaspora, chooses her characters, who belong to the community of Indian immigrants. She focuses her writings to reveal the colour and creed of India and she depicts "Indianness" through her plain language and her characters. By the influence of her own life she makes her stories to describe how a younger generation is acquainted with Indian culture and tradition and old generation's struggle to raise a family in a country very different from theirs.

She picturizes everyday life of an Indian - born American immigrant to colour her theme of cross – culture, identity crisis, cultural dislocation and disconnection between generations in both of her novels *The Namesake* and *The Lowland*.

This paper concentrates and presents kaleidoscopic views of Jhumpa Lahiri's portrayal on the lives of immigrants and their alienation and inter-generational gap of immigrants and their problems including social, cultural and political instability.

Transnationalism, Identity crisis and Alienation are inter- linked and inexhaustible topics forever. Diaspora is ever new area, because there are many diasporic writers both novelists and poets from USA, Britain, Pakistan, Bangladesh and also Srilanka.

A Diaspora (in Greek – a scattering (of seeds)) is any movement of a population sharing common national and ethnic identity. The term 'Diaspora' refers to a permanently displaced and relocated people. Its use began to develop from the original sense when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, the word 'Diaspora' then was used to refer to the population of Jews exiled from Israel in 607 BC.

The literature of Indian Diaspora has major international figures such as V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie. They have practiced a variety of literary forms and represented an extra ordinary ethnicities, languages and religious traditions. The women diasporic writers of Indian literature have contributed the perspective of gender along with the themes of ethnicity, migrant and post – colonialism.

Contemporary writers are not confined to people living in India, but a large number of them are part of the Indian Diaspora, and all their writings are around India and they have Indianness. It is concerned with human beings attached to the homelands. Their sense of yearning for the homeland, a curious attachment to its traditions, religions and languages give birth to diasporic literature which is primarily concerned with individual's community's attachment to the homeland.

As an Indo-Nostalgic diasporic writer, Jhumpa Lahiri has moved her novel *The Namesake* in an Indian way through maintain Indianness. She differentiated the Indian immigrants' lives from Native Indians, after having a keen observation on their living in foreign land, their culture, and conflicts among themselves, to bringing up the off-springs in different culture. When they are all defeated by the all circumstances of host land, they alienate themselves from society.

Jhumpa Lahiri is from the second generation of Indians abroad. They belong to urban middle – class, English educated society. In recent times, immigrants have

become an important force of writing in large spectrum. In that Jhumpa Lahiri has a prominent place as a diasporic writer.

India is the largest Diaspora in the world. Overseas Indians share a strong bond with their country of origin. This is reflected in their languages, cultures and traditions that have been maintained, often over centuries and continue to be vibrant and unique.

Diaspora literature's main characteristic features are displacement, Multicultural identities, hybridity and identity. In present times, Women and men writers are equally taking their place in Indian Diaspora by their valuable contributions many women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity that is not imposed by a male centred society of India but when it comes to diasporic literature the tempo is changed.

Lahiri is one among the immigrants. Being experienced by alienation, she depicts the same of very truth in her characters also. Lahiri was born in London, the daughter of Indian immigrants from the state of West Bengal. Her family moved to the United States when she was two; Lahiri considers herself an American, stating, "I wasn't born here, but I might as well have been". Lahiri grew up in Kingston, Rhode Island, where her father Amar Lahiri works as a librarian at the University of Rhode Island. Lahiri's mother wanted her children to grow up knowing their Bengali heritage, and her family often visited relatives in Calcutta. Thus Lahiri has got female lead for her first novel *The Namesake* from her mother's characteristic features. She has characters from real life.

Lahiri's writing is characterized by her plain language and her characters, often Indian immigrants to America who must navigate between the cultural values of their homeland and their adopted home. Lahiri's fiction is autobiographical and frequently draws upon her own experiences as well as those of her parents, friends, acquaintances, and others in the Bengali communities with which she is familiar. Lahiri examines her characters' struggles, anxieties, and biases to chronicle the lances and details of immigrant psychology and behaviour.

In her novel *The Namesake*, the protagonists Ashima Ganguli and Ashoke Ganguli are the first persons to feel like alienated. Like many professional Indians, the hero Ashoke Ganguli leaves his homeland and comes to America to do research for his doctorate degree and with an idea of setting down with security and respect. After two years' stay in the United States of America, he comes back to India for his marriage. He undergoes with respective rituals to marry Ashima as per their culture. Ashima is a nine-teen year old Bengali girl from Calcutta, who has no idea or dream of going to the place called Boston, so for

from her parents. After the legal formalities, Ashima is alone to be with her husband, with heavy heart and lots of instructions from her family and relatives.

When she is admitted to her obstetrician Dr. Adly for her labour pain, she feels lonely and,

"She wonders if she is the only
Indian person in the hospital, but
A gentle twitch from the baby
Reminds her that she is technically
Speaking, not alone. Ashima thinks its
Strange that her child will be born
In a place most people enter either
To suffer or to die. There is nothing
To comfort her in the off-while
Tiles of the floor, the off-while
Panels of the ceiling, the white sheets
Tucked tightly into the bed in India,
She thinks to herself, women go home
To their parents to give birth, away
From husbands, and in-laws and
Household cares, retreating briefly
To childhood when the baby arrives" (3-4)

She searches for the Indian face between the white and black people. She feels as if she is in some other planet with unknown aliens. She decides to go back to Calcutta and raise her son there with the help and in the company of caring and loving ones.

Ashima does not want to give birth to her son 'Gogol'. She wants him to be brought up in Indian culture. The most terrifying experience for her is motherhood is an alien land. In India, if a daughter gets married and becomes pregnant, her parents and relatives will, often visit her and gives her courage to meet the difficulties to be faced during her first child birth. But on the contrary, in America women are admitted to the hospital, nurses will take care of them. She is unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved. She feels all alone. It is described as,

"Without a single grandparent
or parent or uncle or aunt
at her side, the baby's
birth like, most everything else in
America, feels somehow haphazard
Only half true. As she strokes and studies her
Son, she cannot help but pity him,
She has never known of a person,
Entering the world so alone, so deprived" (24-25)

Then she has no other go. She stays back for the sake of Ashoke, Instead of being happy about the birth of her child 'Gogol', she feels guilty and disturbed. Lahiri brings out the feeling of loneliness in a foreign land through the thoughts of Ashima, who struggles to settle

down on a label that she feels align to her. The immigrants, the Indian women are in particular, experience the double alienation after their marriages. They are expected to come far away from their own family and they are often made to accept the culture of the husbands as a familiar one to them whether they adopt or disable immediately within the country soon after their marriage. Their isolation is being double if their husbands work as immigrants. As they accompany their husbands to the host country, they are once again alienated.

Ashima feels emotionally that she is dislocated from the comfortable home of her father which is full of so many loving ones. She longs to go back home which is portrayed as mythic place of desire by Lahiri is an immigrants imagination. When it comes to comparison, the familiar biological relationship between the characters and home land and host land differ a wide.

Most of the time she remains lost in the memories of her home in India, thinking of the activities going there by calculating the Indian time on her fingers, which is ten and half hours, ahead in Calcutta. She spends her time reading and re-reading Bengali short stories, poems and articles from the Bengali newspapers and magazines, she has brought with her. As a Bengali woman, who has natured by the Bengali culture and tradition since her birth, she could not change her life to live like an American woman.

She is Bengali by birth, struggles to live among American ladies. So automatically she alienates herself from foreign culture. Through this Lahiri brings out the truth that the culture, relationship and social behaviour decide the personality traits of human beings. Ashima isolates herself, in foreign country, where the circumstances lack to satisfy her heartfelt life, as being an Indian.

Unlike India, America has a culture being a satellite family that is the children want to depart from their parents after certain age they don't expect the care from their parents. They like to live their life without the intervention of their parents. But as a Bengali woman, Ashima dislikes to live in a foreign land so far from home, without the care of her family. She behaves as a Bengali is all the ways. She used to bring up her child in a Bengali way. She used, "To put him to sleep, she sings him to Bengali songs, her mother had sung to her" (35)

She makes her home as an island which reflects Calcutta in some way or the other. She lives like an islander among the Americans. She tries to foster new cultural transmissions with her American friends. The Bengali families gather together on different occasions like the Rice and name ceremonies of their children, their

birthday, marriages, deaths and the Bengali festivals like navarathras and poojas. They celebrate these as Bengali customs, wearing their traditional attires they trying to preserve their culture in a new land. In fact their belief, traditions, customs, behaviours and values along with their possessions and belongings are carried by migrates 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 circle on the floor, singing songs and enjoying themselves. They also argue riotously over the films of Ritwik Ghalak versus thoughts of Sathya Jitray, the CPIM versus the congress party, the north Calcutta versus south but their existential dilemma in this new country is pointed out by Lahiri, "For years they argue about the politics of America, a country in which name of them is eligible to vote" (38)

Ashima associates herself to read Bengali books and to do Bengali rituals to make an escape from mingling with Americans. Even through Ashima suffers a lot to meet the cultural conflicts even after many years of stay in America; she retains her culture in food dress and values, as well as assimilating the American culture for her personal growth and for the sake of her children. Ashima,

"Dressed in one of her better saris,
wearing lipstick and perfume, is
contrast to the khakis and T- shirts
and soft leather moccasins Gogol
and Maxine both wear" (146)
After her husband's death also,
She still wears saris, still pets
her long hair in a bun" (276)

The immigrants find it difficult to face a new and a different culture of a host country, the Indian culture is totally different from the western culture. Ashoke and Ashima struggle to adopt a new culture in the migrated land. This culture practice is different from host country cultural practice. Because they are not Americans but Bengali-Americans. Here their identities change.

A person can understand that the enthusiasm to stick to their own cultural beliefs and customs, gradually imbibe the cultural ways of the host country too. Initially, Ashoke did not like the celebration of Christmas and Thanks giving but as Gogol recalls it. "It was for him, for Sonia, that his parents had gone to the trouble of learning these customs" (286)

But it is initially disgusting to a Bengali born and bred Ashima to encourage all the customs of foreign land. It is this house which becomes for her, home in America. But Ashima in heart senses,

"Being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize is a sort of life long pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden a parenthesis is 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. (49-50)

Jhumpa Lahiri considers name as mirror as it reflects the "self" of the person. One could achieve a selfhood by acting towards ourselves in much the same manner in which we act towards other people is the society. As per the title *The Namesake* a name has a significant role in the story Ashoke and Ashima are troubled to make Gogol to follow their Bengali practice of having two names, pet name (Dhaknam) Gogol, at home and and, good name (Bhalonam) Nikhil a name for formal purposes. Actually it is a name of Russian author. "Nikholai Gogol. As Ashoke has got an inspired by his writings he names him like that. But Gogol feels having double names will cause the double identity. Already he thinks himself as ABCD (American Born confused Desis), he wants to put a full's top to his confused double names. He changes "Nikhil" as his name. Hence on their daughter's birth they decide not to give her two names, but a single name, "Sonia".

Gogol becomes a reasonable, responsible son to his family after his father's death, when he comes to know the real role of his father. Having a fragile mentality she has her feelings, which are consequences of her cultural conflicts, being a window and first generation immigrants portrayal is given by Lahiri as,

"Ashima feels lonely, suddenly, horribly and permanently alone, she feels overwhelmed by the thought of the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and is now in its own way foreign for thirty three years she missed her life in India " (279)

She does not want to interrupt the lives of her children. She becomes not to be strict by sticking on make her children to speak in Bengali in home. Though they learn Bengali and practice their parents' culture, they are more interested in American way of life.

The difference between the generations arises from their exposure to the integrating services of the majority society from birth. The education system helps the children to be confronted with both cultures at the same time they begin to observe totally different values learn social order and also to gain access to better occupation and life style of their own. The education system implants the seed of individualization and liberalization in the second generation mind. They have been educated along side with their white and black colleagues and they demand equal rights within the majority culture. Their attempt to complete a thing is stronger than their parents, in acknowledging America as their home; they are cultivating their own distinct values, interests, meanings and ambitions with their host country.

Conclusion

Culture is impossible from conflict, though it does not cause it. When differences surface in families, organizations or communities, culture is always present, shaping perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and outcomes. Cultures are embedded in every conflict, because conflict arise human relations. Cultures affect the ways the people name, frame, blame and attempt to tame conflicts. Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. The culture of India is the way of living of the people of India.

The culture conflict of behaviour patterns and values those results when different cultures are incompletely assimilated. Lahiri's fiction focuses on the struggle of both Indian – American women in individually and collectively creating and nurturing American – Bengali and Bengali – American identities in their new American landscape. Thus this paper concludes with various types of allegation, felt by each character socially normally biologically and psychologically.

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