

Generation Disparity and Identity Quest in Jhumpa Lahiri's *THE NAMESAKE***VINU C. JAMES**

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ABSTRACT

A growing body of an academic work on the globalisation asserts that in the face of the financial and economic accommodation of the global and national borders are extravagant or at least no longer continual in the contemporary world. An advanced global culture is being set into the space by the effort of telecommunication technology and a generation enhancement of the world wide intercourse. These give rise to a culture with ethnic difference is being evolved and registered. Crossing the borders of both literal and metaphorical has become the state of post colonialism and post modernity; it is difficult to change the subject's marginality because they fail to find a home in the new space entered. Twentieth century witnesses the migration of people into various places, and it leads to the representation of post colonial identities. Post colonial theories have been preoccupied with the issues of hybridity, in between-ness and diaspora.

KEYWORDS: Globalisation, marginality, global culture, hybridity, diaspora

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Colonialism has fashioned the history of millions of people. Most of the colonised countries gained independence during the second half of the twentieth century. Cultural creativity is the common factor of colonialism. Some of the most popular post colonial literary texts in English are produced by immigrant writers and their successive generations. The postcolonial or migration literature shows a double perspective on literature because of the writers from other countries and also their multiple cultures.

Postcolonial literature has different interpretations. It contains social and cultural erosion, cultural estrangement, misuse of power, exploitation and use of English language

and literature. Many things come as an after effect of post colonialism. Postcolonial theory and literary texts are rich with various forms of displacement, exile, diasporas, migration, etc. The writers of Indian origin narrate their experiences of what it means for mingling with two cultures. The writer remains insecure in between two of the cultures.

Post colonial writings have an important role in reading the past and present of the once colonised countries. Along with post colonialism and feminist studies, women's movements began to flourish. A Native woman considers the colonial project as a civilizing mission. Spivak has her opinion on abolition of Sati practice in India as "White men saving brown women from brown men" (297). Globalisation reacted against capitalism and made post colonialism. The representation, voice, marginalisation and the relation between politics and literature are the most common subjects of post colonial feminism.

Post colonial feminist theory became a pressure on the mainstream post colonial theory and its content repeats the gender difference. Post colonialism links with post colonial feminism and they repudiate all the male centered theories. They point out that these male centered disciplines not only deny the rights of women, but also discriminate against the society. So they argue for the role of women from the struggle for independence and also try to the survival of women from the misrepresentation in the nationalist discourses. Edward Said's Orientalism, also fails to give attention to female community.

The term 'diaspora' has evolved from a Greek word 'diaspeirein' which means 'a scattering of seeds' which refers to the movement towards any population sharing the common ethnic identity. They are forced to leave or they voluntarily leave their settled territory, and became residents in areas far more from the former. The first mention of diaspora is found when the Jews were exiled by the Babylonians from Israel in 607 BCE. However, earlier evidences of diaspora can be traced back to the passages of ancient Sanskrit scriptures, particularly Vedic texts where cultural exchanges took place between ancient India with the rest of the world in as early as 2000 BCE.

Jhumpa Lahiri an Indian Diaspora writer believes that literature is a medium to establish their individuality. She concentrates on the immigrants and their challenge to exile and isolation. The children of immigrants became a victim of the difference between oneself and unfriendly surroundings. They seek to find an identity of one's own. A migrant tries to maintain the culture that he possessed. Salman Rushdie has viewed the term 'exiles' equivalently with 'emigrants' and 'expatriates'. He says: "Exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look have . . . (to) create . . . fiction . . . not actual cities or villages but invisible one's, imaginary homelands- Indians of the mind"(10).

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* mainly focusing on how a name transforms one's identity and the woman's suppression in the postcolonial country. It also points out the change of name and the effect it has in a sense of identity, that is, the struggles of people who are born in the United States to Bengali parents and also focusing on the women's representation of an Indian diaspora. Jhumpa Lahiri married an Englishman and settled in the U.S with her husband and two children. Lahiri worked as an unpaid intern at Boston magazine. Her work in the magazine, however, involves the writing flattering items about consumer products. When she began to write short stories she achieved some positive feedbacks. Her stories have been awarded the Transatlantic Award from Henfield Foundation in 1933 and the Hemingway Award in 1997. In addition to these, the New Yorker had

reprinted three of her short stories in pages and had named Lahiri as one of the most fantastic young writers in America.

The Namesake is a proof for Ashoke's balance in the two mutually exclusive worlds and also an Ashima's imbalance in the western society. Ashoke being an economic refugee never experience a sense of dilemma in between the two worlds. Because he could find his own space in the home as well as host country. While Ashima's transition of host country became suppressed, Ashoke's became a smooth one. He made periodic visits to India and tried to maintain ties with the family. For him, there is no difference between India and America. He considered India as a land of love relations and family and America as a land of economic gain, academic land and profession. In between these two worlds, he failed to recollect the demerits of diaspora. He failed to recognise himself as he suppressed his memories and nostalgia about India, his homeland. It was an unforgettable event that India presented him when Ashima had lots of happy moments with his father, mother, brother and grandparents. Ashoke's attraction to U.S is limited only on the academic goals and also the financial scenario of western culture. So he ignored India consciously to some extent. This is why he transformed into the moral values and ideals as good father and husband. Maybe this is the reason which maintained Ashoke and Ashima as a successful partner till the last moment of their life.

Jhumpa Lahiri skillfully chooses the names for her characters in the novel. In another sense their characters have relation with their name and life. It's contrary to what their name suggest. Ashoke the name indicates 'without *shoka*' or 'without grief' but his life dips in an extreme grief. His life is satisfying for him. But his life ends when his family members not near him. It was very painful for him and also for his family. Similarly Ashima means in Bengali 'without borders, limitless'. But Lahiri represented as a person whose life is tied in between borders and limits. As a woman she is completely imprisoned in the border of family, country and also society. As a wife she is satisfied, but forced to obey what Ashoke demands. As a mother, she is compelled to choose what children desire most. As a woman, especially as an Indian woman she is forced to live as a suppressed human being in between western society. But Ashoke's death could transform a balm on the Ashima's pain of living. She began to think freely and tries to stand on her own leg with her job at the library.

In *The Namesake*, the primary reason for migration seems to be the easy way to attain financial status. Even though it offers social power and empowerment for both men and women but creates some struggles also. After the death of her husband, Ashima attained job and tries to be the leader of the family. The job at library gives a pleasure not only for the living but it became a transformation in the history of third world countries

The terms 'hybridity' and 'diaspora' stands for the mixed or globalised cultures. Diaspora arouses the specific problems of human displacement. The diaspora community realises that it is very difficult to leave the country. They focus on the cultural politics of diaspora.

As people moves to different countries, mass migration generate an innovative forms of communication. The questions of dislocation, relocation, home and assimilation has become the central issues of the expatriate writers. Jhumpa Lahiri, the popular Indian diaspora writer who is bound by the past and common native language attempt to discover the myth of the archetypal homeland for the immigrant. She draws out lives of two cultures and identities.

Jhumpa Lahiri's debut novel *The Namesake* showcases the expatriate Bengali community's life at Boston. Their expatriation and the problems became a central concept in the novel. She not only focuses the lives of first generation, but also focuses the second generation expatriate's struggle to fulfil their lives in the western world. Questioning their identity is their attempt to attain belonging in a post colonial world. She portrays the immigrant's experiences and clash with cultures.

Lahiri's novel analyses the unique dilemmas of her characters with great empathy. In that novel she portrays women as a subordinate human being. When she tries to explore the Indian immigrants struggles at America. She concentrated how 'expatriation' or 'exile' effects in different ages and a generation of people. Writing concludes that the women are the most suppressed human being.

Jhumpa Lahiri explores the second generation people's dilemma through their trips to India as guests. They experience a sense of alienation. Gogol's fluency in English language was an amusement for Indians. For them, he is an American and they are poor Indians. When Gogol changed his home, Ashima became too much depressed.

Jhumpa Lahiri depicted Ashima as a representative of first generation immigrants. She is a graduate woman, but her life is narrowed into the four walls of kitchen and home. She provides prime importance for family fails to uplift her living status equal to that of her husband. She was dependent on her husband for everything. But Lahiri uplifts her into an independent woman. Through this she returns the individuality and selfhood for Ashima.

After Ashoke's death, Ashima intends to break down her life between India and America. "True to the meaning of her name she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident anywhere and nowhere" (Lahiri 276). When she returns to Calcutta, she feels lonely as she realises that she will, "Miss the country in which she had grown to how and love her husband. Though his ashes have been scattered in the Ganga", It is in her house in America that, "he will continue to dwell in her mind" (Lahiri 279).

Ashima's life thus straddles between two homelands and two cultural spaces. Thus she became a global, multicultural citizen, which establishing a bridge between the two lands which she inhabits. At last she decides to spend half a year in America and the other half in India. The novel thus provides importance to the problems of immigrant's life and their family.

This paper tried to analyse *The Namesake* in the light of post colonialism, diaspora and postcolonial feminism. It was able to conclude that immigrants are always haunted by the mixing up of culture and the quest for identity. There was also an attempt to scrutinise how intense is the woman suppression in a postcolonial world. Here Ashima comes out from the suppression and Nikhil wins to find his own identity in a foreign world.

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