

Cultural Dislocation and Culture Shock in Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Namesake" And Bharati Mukherjee's "Wife"

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Abstract: *The basic problem of diasporic writings is the feeling of dislocation without roots. The diasporans feel homeless and alienated in the foreign land. Dispersal of roots involves pain, alienation, identity crisis and other feelings to the acculturated ones. The Indo-American diasporan Jhumpa Lahiri document the trauma of the protagonist on different context. The novel shows how the immigrants face cultural dilemmas in the foreign system Lahiri shows that the immigrants in their enthusiasm to stick to their own cultural beliefs and customs gradually imbibe the cultural ways of the host country too. Their own children groomed to be "bilingual" and "bicultural" face cultural dilemmas and displacement more. The theme of cultural dilemmas and dislocations of the migrants, Lahiri does not remain confined to the dislocations of migrants in foreign lands alone. Rather she is philosophical in her approach; she presents dislocation as a permanent human condition. Man is dislocated in this world. By analyzing the novel, one can understand how the first generation immigrant suffers in an alien country. The novelist has dealt with the events like marriage, love for Calcutta, East/West conflict and trauma on pregnancy.*

I. Introduction

Diasporic writings occupy a significant position around cultures and countries. Cultures travel and take root or get dislocated and individuals internalize nostalgia or experience amnesia. Though the immigrant writers share common features, yet the differences based on the condition of their migration and settlement cannot be overlooked. The diasporic writings are the records of the experiences of the diasporic communities living in varied socio-cultural settings. The diasporic Indian writing covers every continent and part of the world. It is an interesting paradox that a great deal of Indian writing covers every continent and part of the world.

Study of the diasporic writings reveals that the common features noticed in the writings of the old diaspora and the new diaspora are nostalgia, homesickness, and the sufferings due to being far off from their homeland. The mental trauma and anguish caused due to the pull and push factors of belonging to the land of adoption at the same time, retaining their cultural traditions thereby maintaining their attitude towards their motherland, made them reject everything Indian glorifying west and criticizing India. The basic problem of diasporic writings is the feeling of dislocation without roots. The diasporans feel homeless and alienated in the foreign land. Dispersal of roots involves pain, alienation, identity crisis and other feelings to the acculturated ones. The Indo-American diasporans Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri document the trauma of their protagonists on different contexts. The former in *Wife* describes the alienated feeling and loneliness of a young bride and the later in *The Namesake* describes the struggles and hardships of a Bengali couple who immigrates to USA. By analyzing these two novels one can vividly see how the first generation immigrant suffers in an alien atmosphere.

With the entry of women writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Chitra Banerjee Divakuruni, Jhumpa Lahiri etc., the English language has widened its umbrella in Diasporic writing. Diasporans migrate to an alien land to live happily, severing their roots of native country. The diasporans' feelings are truly documented by the Indo-American diasporans like Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri in their novel by placing their central character on different contexts. Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* focuses the status of the immigrant women experience, social oppression, east-west encounter and culture conflict.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* located in America, brings her characters struggle in assimilation. Like Bharathi Mukherjee her novel too has autobiographical elements. Her novel, *Wife* deals with Dimple, a young Indian woman. Dimple is married to a young engineer named Amit Basu. She was suppressed by the alien culture. She cannot adjust her life in the USA out of fear and personal instability. She lacks her inner strength and she cannot cope with the culture of New York. At the end of the novel Dimple murders her husband due to acculturative stress.

Culture suggest the arts, customs and institutions of a certain people or nation, thereby helping us to distinguish a certain people or nation, thereby helping us to distinguish a certain group of people from others

and one nation from another. Multiculturalism in the context of one nation's experience of vicissitudes appears to institutionalize another way of expressing that nation cultural identity. 'The Namesake' provides readers with different paradigms of life among people representing distinct cultures and worldviews.

'Multiculturalism' suggest the co-existence of a number of different culture .It does not prescribe homogenization and conformity directly nor does it encourage overtly different ethnic religious ,lingual or racial constituents of a particular society to denigrate and alienate each other to such a society is damaged or destroyed permanently. Jhumpa Lahiri first novel 'The Namesake' (2003) explores the theme of transnational identity and trauma of cultural dislocation. Being "an Indian by ancestry, British by birth, American by immigration" (Nayak:206:2002) and her parents having the experience of "the perplexing bicultural universe" of Calcutta in India and the United States, "Lahiri mines the immigrants experience in a way superior to Bharathi Mukherjee and others" observes Aditya Sinha (Sinha:2003).

The Namesake describes the struggles and hardships of a Bengali couple who immigrates to USA. The story begins as Ashoke and Ashima leave Calcutta. India to Cambridge, Massachusetts. The novel examines how the first and second generation caught between two conflicting cultures with their religio-socio differences. The novel one can identify similar structure in the process of marriage. The bride has no chance to speak of her choice or wish. The power is vested with bride's father. In The Namesake Ashima's father has all the powers vested in him in choosing the bridegroom. Ashima married Ashoke, because it is the only choice for her. The heroines suffer from the cravings for Calcutta, her nativeland.

In both the novels one can envisage the similar structure in the process of marriage. The bride has no chance to speak of her choice or wish. The power is vested with bride's father. In Bharati Mukherjee's Wife, Dimple has a desire to marry a neurosurgeon. But her father, Mr.Das Gupta wishes her to marry a consultant engineer, Mr.Amit Basu. In The Namesake Ashima's father has all the powers vested in him in choosing the bridegroom. Ashima married Ashoke, because it is the only choice for her. Both the heroines suffer from the cravings for Calcutta, their nativeland.

Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake is a story about the assimilation of an Indian Bengali family from Calcutta, the Ganguli, into America, over thirty years (from 1968- 2000); the cultural conflict experienced by them and their American born children in different ways, the spatial, cultural and emotional dislocation suffered by them in their effort to settle "home" in the new land. Like many "professional Indians" who "in the waves of the early sixty's", "went to the United States, as part of the brain drain" (Spivak:61:1990). Ashoke Ganguli too leaves his homeland ,and comes to America in pursuit of higher studies to do research in the field of "fiber optics" with a prospect of settling down "with security and respect" (The Namesake:105). After two year's stay in the USA he comes back to India, marries a nineteen years old Bengali girl from Calcutta named Ashima, who has no idea or dream of going to a place called Boston so far off from her parents ,but agrees for the marriage since 'he would be there'. After the legal formalities, she flies alone to be with her husband, with a heavy heart and lots of instructions from her family members and relatives who come to see her off at Dum Dum Airport "not to eat beef or wear skirts or cut off her hair and forget the family the moment she landed in Boston". (The Namesake, 37)

In The Namesake, Ashima does not prefer to get pregnant in USA. After giving birth to Gogol, though not pregnant, she realises that being a foreigner is a sort of life long pregnancy. Everyone treats her like a stranger in America. In Wife Dimple Das Gupta has an abnormal charm for vomiting during her pregnancy, for no reason she aborts her child. Her immigrant experience worsens her problem and she blames Amit for everything.

In Wife, Ina Mullick gives Dimple a bag, which contains three pairs of pants and boy suit. Ina asks her to wear the pants and have a pizza with her. Dimple replies she feels comfortable with sari. She dislikes things around her, losing balance of mind. She thinks TV as her only friend. She contemplates on suicide. Learning the culture shock her husband asks her "you've changed in the last few months. You even look different"(176). He promises to take her back to Calcutta by charter flight.

Like immigrant of other communication Ashima and Ashoke too make their circle of Bengali acquaintance .They all become friends only for the reason that "they all come from Calcutta"(38).Robert Cohen rightly remarks "a member's adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history" (Cohen:ix:1997). These Bengali families celebrate these different customs and ceremonies like, marriages, death, childbirth, festivals etc together. They celebrate these as per Bengali customs, wearing their best traditional attire, thus trying to preserves their culture in a new land. The immigrants also face political displacement "they argue riotously over the films of Ritwik Ghatak verses those of Satyajit Ray..., for hours they argue about the politics of America, a country in which none of them is eligible to vote" (38).

Lahiri's focus on the tension between past and present complicates Hall's idea of 'being' and 'becoming'. For instance Gogol lives between the world of past and present. Although he attempts to escape

from the past by denouncing his cultural roots and changing his name, he is someone how connected to his roots. He is uncomfortable with his past. He likewise cannot understand the significance of the name Gogol that his parents chose for him. Rather it is because of the very name, he is being teased by his friend. As a result, when he turns eighteen, he goes into a Massachusetts courtroom and asks the judge to change his name. Gogol thinks that by switching his name to Nikhil he would get rid of his past, but his parents still calls him by his original name. This shows that a simple name change does not alter the fabric of a person. Later he comes to know from his father Ashoke that how his name 'Gogol' is connected with his father's past life.

In *The Namesake* the readers learn Ashima escapes from the troublesome America by attending get-together on different occasions like the rice ceremony and the name ceremonies and Bengali festivals like Navratras and Pujos by Bengalies. This gives a positive fervour to Ashima to lead a smooth life unlike Dimple of *Wife*. Dimple rejects the opinion of her husband and finally gets pleasure in killing him, to become a free bird. Though the plots of the two novels differ, there are some similarities, which are expressed by Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri. Rootlessness is the main cause of Dimple's problems that happens due to the lack of acculturation. Her dream turns into neurosis and finally she murders her husband, and justifies it by comparing to TV serial, "Women on television got away with murder"(213)

The Namesake is about the way various generations look at their native and foreign land. The first generation belongs to 1960s. They face trouble to merge with foreign culture. On the contrary, the second generation practises Indian culture to pacify parents. But they live as Americans in their heart of hearts.

By contrasting the life style between Gogol's and Maxine's parents, Lahiri suggests that the immigrant's children are fascinated to adopt the American life style. Gogol's immersion into his girlfriend's life is an indication of a second generation immigrant's child's realization that an identity far from their own cultural roots is a necessity to live happily in the multicultural United States. It is Gogol's ability to understand the difference between the lives of his parents and Maxine's that prompts him to desire Maxine's lifestyle. He is surprised to find the warm welcome from Maxine's parents. Gogol finds a sense of freedom and independence even in the dinner table at Maxine's house.

Salman Rushdie observation is that migrant's straddles two cultures... fall between two stools and they suffer 'a triple disruption' comprising the loss of roots the linguistic and also the social dislocation. Lahiri in this novel also presents that it is not only the Indian migrants who feel dislocated in other countries and face cultural dilemmas, the immigrants from any cultures dilemmas, the immigrants from any culture feel the same in the other "dominant cultures".

The conclusion that while portraying the theme of cultural dilemmas and dislocations of the migrants. Lahiri does not remain confined to the dislocations of migrants in foreign lands alone. Rather she is philosophical in her approach; she presents dislocation as a permanent human condition. Lahiri infact comments on Ashoke's death in America 'who had forsaken everything, to come in this country, to make a better life, only to die here?'(180). This reflects Lahiri's philosophical maturity and existential dimensions in this novel. The above analysis of the novel shows how Jhumpa Lahiri constructs and brings alive the picture of the unknown world that is as much a land of opportunities as it is of conflict and confusion. Jhumpa Lahiri, handles multiple experiences of immigrants. She believes that for immigrants, the challenge of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, the knowledge of and longing for a lost world are more explicit and distressing than for their children.

Most of the diasporans consciously choose to migrate to an alien country of their choice, with the hope of living there. They migrate to live a happy life, yet in reality they struggle a lot for survival. In *The Namesake*, Lahiri has portrayed the conflicts and trauma of Ashima in New York, USA. By her husband Ashoke she moved from Calcutta to USA. Though, she settles permanently there till her husband's death. She has positive fervor, which makes her to spend her last period shuttling between USA and India. On contrary, Dimple Das Gupta in *Wife* has driven to shock and then to despair. She lives in a awaking dream. Her migration has troubled her psyche. She becomes an addict to TV serial. Her transition from being single to marrying a bridegroom chosen by her father, and from living in the familiar surroundings of Calcutta to violent city of New York annoyed her much. Her unstable personality leads to murder her husband. Finally, she ruins her life taking destructive path.

Lahiri's 'The Namesake' is an example of the Contemporary immigrant narration which doesn't place the idea of an 'American Drama' at the centre of the story, but rather positions the immigrant ethnic family within a community of cosmopolitan travellers. She chronicles dislocation and social unease in a fresh manner. She blends the two cultures and creates inner turmoil for many of her characters who struggle to balance the Western and Indian influence. Her novels are more about the co-operation of culture than about confrontation. Stereotypes are examined from a number of angles and deconstructed from both sides- Indian and American.

II. Conclusion

By analyzing these two novels, one can understand how the first generation immigrant suffers in an alien country. Both novelists have dealt with the events like marriage, love for Calcutta, East/West conflict and trauma on pregnancy. In *The Namesake*, Ashima rejects but later accepts USA after a span of period. This shows a positive growth on her. On the Dimple Das Gupta in *Wife* prefers to live in her waking dream. Her fantasies take a violent turn, which take her towards negative side besides the stress on alien culture.

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