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Diasporic Crisis of Dual Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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'The Namesake' is a novel by Pulitzer Prize winning author Jhumpa Lahiri. She was born as Nilanjana Sudeshna, but had a pet name Jhumpa, which was found easy to pronounce by her teacher and she became Jhumpa Lahiri. Having been born of educated middle class Bengali parents in London and grown up in Rhodes Island, Lahiri authentically portrays her diasporic experiences in her first novel 'The Namesake'. The novel is autobiographical in portraying the repercussions of what the children of immigrants have to experience when they are destined to be born in a country which does not belong to their parents. The immigrants experience portrayed by Lahiri in the novel forms the core themes of the novel. Throughout the novel through various characters, we get an exhilarating and liberating view of the diasporic situations often experienced by the immigrants.

The title 'The Namesake' reflects the struggle of the protagonist, Gogol Ganguli goes through with his unusual name. His struggle for establishing his identity is dual. The name that ultimately defines a person's individuality becomes a burden for him. It does not give him an identity but puts him in a dilemma, about his original identity. Secondly as a child of immigrants in America, he constantly has to fight with conflicts arising due to his Indian roots. Gogol is ashamed of being what he is i.e. Gogol because he feels his name doesn't have any meaning nor any dignity. He cannot communicate with the name Gogol and that is why wants to change his name. Besides that, he is named after the Russian author, Nickolai Gogol, who dies of slow starvation and was frustrated melancholic man and had no friends in life, and that not only his pet name but Russian author's last name turned his good name. Therefore he feels alone in the world and thinks that he does not share his name even to the author for his namesake. So he becomes Nikhil, but Nikhil betrays Gogol. Gogol struggles throughout the story between two worlds he lives in. For him, he is first American than Indian, where he is born, the place of his origin whereas for his parents, Ashoke and Ashima, he is Bengali first and not American. He feels awkward when he goes to Calcutta and feels that the relatives belong more to their parents. He is unable to understand them and other people living in India. The person who are migrated to some other country have a concrete notion of home as for Ashima and Ashoke, Calcutta is their home. They are related to Calcutta with their past and for the loss of home. Ashima and Ashoke have lots of sentiments attached to their homeland. But Gogol who is born in America like a typical immigrant child, struggle for not related with either place. He has no idea of home as his parents have. He doesn't refer Calcutta his home because he is not born there and have not experienced living there or have no memory of Calcutta as his parents have. We see how Lahiri has drawn the

character of Gogol as ABCD when he attends a panel discussion about Indian novel in English. There he meets lots of ABCD and learns that ABCD stands for 'American Born confused Desi' or as Lahiri refer 'him'. He is also an ABCD as he is born in American and is confused whether he is an immigrant child or the part of his name, Gogol, which is neither Indian nor American so confused of his identity. He also learns that 'C' stands for 'conflict'. He knows the meaning of 'desh' as his parents refer - India as desh but for him, it is India, a foreign land like other Americans. But somehow he knows that he is related to Calcutta to some fundamental ways with which he is not related to America. He leads a bilingual, bicultural life. He is exiled from his parents world for they don't behave like Americans and he is more American than his parents. As Lahiri puts :

"For when Ashima and Ashoke close their eyes it never fails to unsettle them, that their children sound just like Americans expertly conversing in a language, that stills at times confounds them in accents they are accustomed not to trust."

Gogol, the protagonist of the novel is self - alienated. Karney Horney thinks that - "Situation of self - alienation arises when any man makes his 'Ideal image' in his mind other than his 'Real Self'. There exists a gap between his idealized image and his real self." In the novel, we see that Gogol suffers with his double identities, one is as Gogol and another is as 'Nikhil'. Gogol is his 'Real self' and Nikhil is his 'ideal image'. and as Horney puts that there is a gap between the real self and ideal self, so in Gogol's real and ideal self. As Gogol is related to his family but detached by the American world and as Nikhil he is related to American world but not to his family. Further "According to Horney in Psycho Analytical perspective and the state of 'Alienation from Actual self man feels ashamed of what he actually is - as if his feelings, resources activities (and coming to feel) self hate. Such man loses individuality and his relation to himself has become impersonal."

The other thing we see is the clash between two generations - the traditional and the modern. As we already know that Gogol is totally Americanized and therefore he is struggling to adjust himself in his parents traditional world. His parents have their own values and morals in contrast with Americans. They do not accept American tradition as their own and therefore Gogol loses himself in these two worlds. From the very beginning we see that Gogol never wants to go to Bengali classes instead he is interested to go drawing classes. His parents respected their own parents rituals such as they were not willing to name their son until they had received Ashima's grandmother's letter which carried the name, on the other hand Gogol changes his name, ignoring his parents sentiments attached with it and with the change of his name from Gogol to Nikhil - changes his attitudes towards his parents. Now Gogol as Nikhil is free and not related to his parents and their Bengali way of living. As Nikhil, it is easier for him to ignore his parents and in the consequence we find his full detachment from his family. And therefore because of this generation gap, because of conflict between the family concerns and his own individual freedom, he goes away from his family. We also see that Ashima's and Ashoke's married life is different from Gogol's love encounters with Ruth, Maxine and Maushmi. His parents never had met or talked with each other before the marriage, but for Gogol it seems impossible that, how can people marry

who do not know each other and thus it is a courageous task on his part. Besides that his marriage life with Moushmi is a failure, an unsuccessful relation which his parents can't imagine.

Alienation, exile and loneliness also contribute to the theme of the novel. Ashima and Ashoke when they come to Cambridge feel as if they are the only 'Ganguli' in the world. But the feeling of alienation which we find intensely in the character of Ashima is much more than other characters. She is very much alone in the alien land of America. While giving birth to her child, she feels as if the child inside her is the only Indian there with her. For her to become mother in the country where she is not related to anybody and that her child will come to a country where everyone is a stranger is painful:

"But nothing feels normal to Ashima. For the past eighteen months, ever since she's arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all. It's not so much the pain, which she knows, somehow she will survive. It's the consequence : motherland is a foreign land."

After her husband's death, she is left alone and decides to go back to her native place. Gogol is also shattered and we find a change in his attitude. He comes to realise the unconditional love he shared with his father and which was never understood by him and that is the main reason he turns back to his family to fulfill those things which he couldn't have done when his father was alive. We can come to the conclusion that at last he accepts his name, his family and eventually his father. Thus 'The Namesake' is a fine tuned intimate and deeply felt novel of identity and Lahiri has authentically portrayed her diasporic experiences in it.

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