



Identity Crisis and Traumatic effects in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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Abstract

Trauma is an event that can possibly happen because of losing something, such as death of family, couple, or people who have good relation. Novel is one kind of prose which tries to express something widely. Various events in life which is faced by characters in the story are psychological aspects. Related to psychology of literature, Trauma is one of psychological aspect in human. Identity crises is a fact that no one does not want to change or suffer but they expect the other to change by all means in undergoing various cultural, religious and dislocation of land from one to another. The focus of this paper lies in the complete effort on understanding the trauma of the Indian diasporians and losing their identity in their society. In Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, it is Ashima who as a child of Bengal resembles the proof of immigrant where the ongoing quest of identity crises arises. She has been sandwiched between the birth of her country and has adopted the ideologies of alien country. Gogol and other characters in *The Namesake* face this perpetual dilemma as faced by immigrants while settling their lives in a new land. They struggle to maintain their identities while trying to shake them off at the same time.

Keywords: Trauma, Conflict, Identity Crisis



Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in 1967 as Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri to an Indian Bengali immigrant family in London, England. Then, at the age of three, the family migrated to Rhode Island, a state in the United States of America where her father Amar Lahiri started working as a librarian in one of the universities and her mother Tapati as a teacher. This early childhood migration and the academic association of the parents have left indelible marks on her fiction. She grew up in Kingston, and she completed her Bachelor's degree in English at Barnard College in 1989. She earned her master's degree in English, Creative Writing, and Comparative Literature and a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies from Boston University. Her first novel *The Namesake* (2003) was acclaimed as a New York Times Notable Book. It was selected as a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and as one of the best books of the year by USA Today and Entertainment Weekly. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* discusses the life experience of a Bengali family who migrated to America for a better life which is entirely different from the life they lived in India. This novel deals with the problems of alienation, cultural conflict, identity crisis, rootlessness, loss and longing. All her fictions are dealing the problems of migration, lives of expatriates and especially about the Bengali families migrated to America. Felling that is arisen by the traumatic experience can cause an extreme reaction both one's psych and psychology. When someone faces an event that cause trauma, she or he will get various impacts from the traumatic experience. The impact includes shock, denial, and anxiety.

Major Thrust

The novel vividly depicts the trauma of immigration and the struggle to adapt to a new identity. Ashima, in particular, experiences profound feelings of isolation, nostalgia, and cultural shock as she navigates life in America. Gogol also grapples with the complexities of



his dual cultural identity, feeling torn between his parents' expectations and his own sense of belonging. The identity crisis is that which Ashima underwent of severe mental phrenic trauma and she called this a period of confusion. Her sense of identity also becomes insecure, and she struggled a lot to make herself to feel as an American, with emotional dislocations and heavy heart she tries to settle in their home in a new land. She compares the American culture with Indian culture, which gives dilemma experience and makes her survival more difficult. At one such occasion, Ashima felt that living in foreign land is like a lifelong pregnancy. *The Namesake* portrays one's identity at the backdrop of culture, society and religion. The main characters in this novel are trying to uncover their identity and its reasoning behind their lineage. In this novel, one can understand the fact that Ashok and Ashima are the two characters who undergoes identity crisis and culture conflict very dangerously. They were more attracted to their home land more than their host land which is America. Because the inherent nature, culture, character and nature of a person cannot be substituted with a new one. These characters constantly undergo the process of imitation, transportation and adaptation. They were struggling to balance Indian and western culture. This can be considered as the one hurdle in the lives of all the immigrant families. Ashima and Ashoke became victims of this dilemma since they spend their youth in India. They were really suffering to recreate a microcosm of India in their apartment by cooking and consuming Indian food, following Indian rituals and celebrating Indian festivals. But their children, being born and brought up in India they made friends with Americans and accustomed to their culture. But all the characters in this novel are neither too American nor too Indian. They were existing between two. The culture, life style, rituals and way of perception of a person is unique and cannot be compared and understood by others fully. So, the customs of a person cannot be understood and substituted by the other. Naturally the characters in this novel are adopting a space in between the two. All the characters in the



novel go the process of imitation then adaptation and transportation. The characters struggle to keep a balance between the two cultures. They are literally shuttling between two cultures. To adopt the new, they have to leave their Indian culture behind. The Ganguli family could translate into the new culture but at the cost of letting go the home culture.

The Namesake also depicts how cultural heritage is sustained by the first-generation immigrants through memories, nostalgia and cultural practice. They also keep their connection with their family living in India through letters, phone calls and infrequent visits. They wait for letters from their family and after receiving such letters they reread them several times and connect themselves with their family members. They also make efforts to pass on their cultural heritage to their children so that they grow up with the essence of native culture. They compel their children to learn Bengali language and take part in Bengali ceremonies. The novel states about Ashima's efforts to impart literature and religious values of India to Gogol. *She (Ashima) teaches him (Gogol) to memorize a four-line children's poem by Tagore, and the names of the deities adorning the ten-handed goddess Durga during pujo: Saraswati with her swan and Kartik with his peacock to her left, Lakshmi with her owl and Ganesh with his mouse to her right* (Lahiri, Namesake 54).

Conclusion

Although she depicts various emotions and aspect in her characters but personally one can find her work and human behaviours most intimidating. She brings a sense of uncertainty in her writing that human mind is possessed with dilemma in her first novel. The identity of the individual, which is consistently affected by society, is something one has to discover through a process of reflections and negotiations. Jhumpa Lahiri explores forces of resistance working between the first generation and the second generation in each aspect of life in a diasporic setting. The perceptions of both the generations always stand in contrast to each



other. The first generation accepts their existence as “Indian American” whereas the second generation chooses their destiny as “Americanized Indians.”

References

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