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## **Diasporic Rift between First Generation and Second Generation Migrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake***

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### **Abstract**

Amidst mapping the global diasporic literature, Indian diasporic literature writers have made a mark in highlighting various issues, essentially focusing on issues of migration, hybrid-culture, quest for identity, assimilation, cultural conflict and show a bitter rift between first and second diasporic migrants. The research paper attempts to focus on the diasporic rift between first and second generation migrants with regard to Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. Jhumpa Lahiri reiterates about Indian and American culture and mapping the nostalgic sense of migrants. *The Namesake* clearly distinguishes between first and second generation migrants in terms of identity crisis, longing sense of homeland, cultural assimilation and nostalgia.

**Keywords**

Diaspora; Diasporic Consciousness; Quest for Identity; Cultural Differences; Sense of Nostalgia.

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Migration has a long history and its roots trace back to primitive age when human beings were barbaric. Earlier migration was a result of slavery or a consequence of involuntary displacement but later migration became a voluntary process. In *The Namesake* Jhumpa Lahiri gives an indelible portrait of Indian migrants in the terms of self-displacement, generation assimilation, and quest for identity. Though Jhumpa Lahiri is a second diasporic writer, she writes on native culture, and cultural differences. Her writing gives a clear scenario of Indian diaspora.

A Pulitzer winner, Jhumpa Lahiri is a perennial voice to conjure Indian diasporic writing. She has penned two short story collections and two noted novels. She grew up at Rhode Island in America. Jhumpa Lahiri is known as a foremost diasporic writer despite dwelling in America. She presents Indian culture, homeland and language. She is an Indian American writer who attempts to take a plethora of two different cultures. The novel seeks to bring forth the diasporic consciousness in case of the first generation migrants who is still enchanted about their homeland and its traditions. On the contrary, *The Namesake* highlights the second generation migrants who are ready to accept host cultural doctrines. *The Namesake* directs our attention to Indian Bengali family that move to America and then how American culture encounters with Indian culture.

Indian diaspora is widely spread across the globe, and even there diversity is found among them. Indians are moving to many developed countries after India attained independence and it gradually takes a new form of migration.

In this novel Jhumpa Lahiri draws our attention towards a Bengali family who moves to America where they settle with a strong attachment to native customs and traditions. Jhumpa Lahiri has portrayed Ashoke Ganguli, first generation diasporic Indian and second generation migrants -Sonia, Gogol and Moushumi. From the beginning to the end of the novel one comes across many incidents that disclose diasporic consciousness and cultural assimilation, and cultural differences.

The novel indeed presents a panoramic view of Indian culture. As the novel starts one can see that Ashoke ties a knot to Ashima and thereupon Ashoke takes off to America with Ashima and upon reaching there Ashima becomes nostalgic of her past. She first does not cope up with American culture because she was very unfamiliar with the new host culture. After she was married to Ashoke Ganguli, she comes to America where she was not familiar to the life of unknown land. When she becomes pregnant she thinks that her child will be born in a place where most people enter either to suffer or to die. She murmurs within herself: "In India, 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 (Lahiri 4)".

The alienation from her motherland makes her to rediscover the plethora of Indian tradition and whereupon she realizes that in India every woman goes home to their parents or relatives where their relatives take care of her. Writer wisely maps the nostalgic sense of Ashima throughout the novel.

Diaspora is also associated strongly with religious practices. The first generation migrants weave the religious practices in the womb of foreign land. Anderson (1994) and Skrbis (1999) comments long distance nationalism largely in the context of how the diaspora takes an interest in the homeland politics.

In keeping a view to revive the homeland culture and traditions first generation migrants perform religious rituals frequently of their motherland and they humbly even introduce the home-land culture to their next

generation. In the novel, Ashoke and Ashima invite Indian friends; Nandis and Dr. Gupta to join them on the eve of Gogol's Annaprasan. As they are Indians they go through the home land tradition. It is actually a traditional Bengali ceremony. In Bengal this tradition is performed when a baby becomes ready to eat solid food.

By February, when Gogol is six months old, Ashima and Ashoke know enough people to entertain on a proper scale. The occasion: Gogol's annaprasan. His rice ceremony. There is no baptism for Bengali babies, no ritualistic naming in the eyes of God. Instead, the first formal ceremony of their lives centers around the consumption of solid food. They ask Dilip Nandi to play the part of Ashima's brother, to hold the child and feed him rice, the Bengali staff, for the very first time. Gogol is dressed as an infant Bengali groom, in a pale yellow pajama-Punjabi from his grandmother in Calcutta. The fragrance of cumin seeds, sent in the package along with the pajamas, lingers in the weave. A headpiece that Ashima cutout of paper, decorated with pieces of aluminum foil, is tied around Gogol's head with string. He wears a thin fourteen-karat gold chain around his neck. His tiny forehead has been decorated with considerable struggle with sandalwood paste to form six miniature beige moons floating above his brows. (Lahiri 38, 39)

Diaspora is a trail of retention of past memories which lead to the feeling of nostalgia.

Anderson puts (1983) that the population, integrated without being assimilated into the host countries, retains a rather strong identity awareness which is linked to the memory of its territory and the society of origin with its history.

The historical roots of homeland are at the heart of Ashoke and Ashima. The Annaprasan function is to be done as per the Bengali tradition and

Ganguli family makes a request to Dilip Nandi to play as role of Ashima's brother, to hold the child and feed Gogol the first bit of solid. It was actually unforgettable for either Ashima or Ashoke Ganguli as parents of Bengali origin. Gogol is the main attraction of this function who wears a thin fourteen Karat-gold chain around his neck. In this annaprasan ceremony Gogol's parents wear their traditional dresses. The beautiful payjama and sari are repercussion of Indian-Bengali culture.

The Bengali couple liked so much the Indian Bengali culture that they could not stay away from it during the festivities. It seems that Ashoke Ganguli and Ashima are madly infectious by homeland culture and traditions. First generation Indian migrants wrap up themselves with home land culture and tradition.

Jhumpa Lahiri displays two different flows which might not meet together at a certain point. In the case of Ashoke Ganguli, Ashima and their next generation are even too far away from each other. Diasporic generation is mainly concerned with their identity. Ashoke and Ashima both had nick-names which are artfully related to their native culture. Even when they are grown-up, however, whenever they received a telegram from their grandmother they found their official names on the outer side of the telegram but inside the telegram they discovered their nick-names. As per the Bengali tradition they christened their first baby. However, Gogol does not like his nick-name Nikhil. His parents says to him that they too have nick-names and then as Gogol's parents admitted him at an elementary school, he gets quite a bad experience as the principal pronounced his name quite different from the way his parents pronounced. Gogol finds himself in the valley of two different cultures.

He wants to spend his entire life with his name proper therefore he constructs a new identity at America. In the same vein Rani Mashi's daughter, Moushumi also does not like her nick-name Moossomi because kids at school were pronouncing her name strangely as 'Moose'.

The second generation migrants are caught between two different worlds where they struggle for the quest of identity. The second generation migrants do not desire to stay with their original identity but on the other hand their parents want to stick with their original identity. The novel expounds some prominent traits of diasporic generation in reviving the earlier memories. When Gogol and Sonia grow up they do not bother about their original culture and even traditions. They behave with their friends as a part of American culture.

Gogol's parents had hoped and expected that their son would select MIT and they even wanted that Gogol would not go to outside Massachusetts and should attend to his father's Alma mater. However Gogol did not listen to their words and he moved to Columbia in order to attend the architecture program and thereupon completing it he did not want to become a part of Massachusetts so he did go to New Haven. He even did not like to revisit the Central Square where his father had lived. Gogol also put himself aside by not attending Pujas (rituals) and Bengali parties. It was a great shock to Ashoke and Ashima who always wanted to keep him in Bengali ways.

The novel focuses on the unbreakable link with their home country and their parents and grandparents. Jhumpa Lahiri explains it as follows:

Ashoke and Ashima are planning their first trip to Calcutta, in December, during Ashoke's winter break. The upcoming journey inspires them to try to come up with a good name for Gogol, so they can submit his passport application. They turn to their Bengali friends for suggestions. Long evenings are devoted to considering this name or that. But nothing appeals to them. By then they've given up on her grandmother remembering the name, for Ashima's Grandmother, they are told, can't even remember Ashima. Still there is time. The trip to Calcutta is four months away. Ashima regrets that they can't go earlier in time for Durgo

Pujo, but it will be years before Ashoke is eligible for a sabbatical.  
(Lahiri 41)

This was the first time for Ashoke and Ashima after the birth of Gogol to visit to Calcutta. Therefore Ashoke and Ashima are too anxious to meet with their relatives with Gogol. They are planning to go to India in December and they even think that the journey would give Gogol another name. They meet their Bengali friends in order to fix the nick name of Gogol. Unfortunately it was not determined so finally they wanted to give up on Ashima's grandmother. Ashima expresses her concern over missing the Durga Pujo. She regrets that they can't reach India earlier to attend Durga Pujo. The first generation migrants are really committed and attached to not only home country but also to its culture.

As the novel moves on a dangerous cyclone jolts the Ganguli family terribly, in which Gogol's father passes away. It was a great shock for the entire Ganguli family. It was not easy for them to come out in very short time from the mourning of Mr. Ashoke's death. The incident hampers Ashima so deeply that she cannot live normally with her son and daughter. Ashima being an Indian parent worries about her son and daughter. Therefore she directly asks Gogol to patch up with Maxine who is the girl- friend of Gogol. She does not like Maxine. She further expresses her wish that Gogol should think about her friend's daughter. Finally Gogol and Moushumi meet each other and they are bounded by marriage ceremony. The diasporic consciousness about native culture is always fulfilled by first generation migrants. "Gogol does not feel happy with his conjugal life .so one day he asks to Moushumi Are u happy you married life (Lahiri 271)?" The question is haunting Gogol since he met Moushumi's ex-boyfriend. As a direct result the conjugal life of Gogol comes to end.

Lahiri writes rightly:

But it's no longer possible for her to live here now that Sonia's going to be married the wedding will be in Calcutta, a little over a

year from now, on an auspicious January day, just as she and her husband were married nearly thirty-four year ago. Something tells her Sonia will be happy with boy –quickly she corrects herself –this young man. He has brought happiness to her daughter, in a way Moushumi had never brought it to her son. That it was she who had encouraged Gogol to meet Moushumi will be something for which Ashima will always feel guilty. How could she have known?

But fortunately they have not considered it their duty to stay married, as the Bengalis of Ashoke and Ashima's generation do. They are not willing to accept, to adjust, to settle for something less than their ideal of happiness. That pressure has given way, in the case of the subsequent generation, to American common sense. (Lahiri 276)

Actually Marriage within the Indian community is a key aspect in order to restore cultural identity and national consciousness. Marriage is known as a great parameter of someone's culture. In the context of the novel, Ashima always not only thinks about their children but she makes all attempts to keep them happy. Therefore she gives her consent for the marriage of Sonia to a Jewish and half Chinese boy, Mr Ben. On the other hand, she insists that Gogol should marry Mousumi, an Indian origin parents' daughter. But Moushumi was unable to maintain a warm conjugal life with her son, Gogol. The second generation could not keep alive their homeland tradition and culture and they failed at all levels.

The novel shows a glimpse of diasporic consciousness among first generation. One can say that the diasporic roots and reviving diasporic roots are at the centre of first generation migrants and diasporic trail of origin culture, a universal theme has been gone through the novel. In fact Diaspora is a basket of transmission of culture, language, traditions, and food habits.



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