
Identity Crisis In Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake

Abstract

The thematic study sheds light upon the issues based on the identities. The immigrants were lost their originality because of the adaptation of new culture in Alien Nations. The immigrants have suffered a lot and also longing for their original life style. So, the paper deals with the identity crisis in the novel Namesake. The novel shows that how a Bengali family adapts the foreign culture. The problem of identity is writ large all over diasporic fiction. The title of the novel shows the importance that she attaches to the identity of her protagonist.

Identity Crisis, Isolation, Diaspora, Culture, Sufferings

The Namesake (2003) is the novel written by Jhumpa Lahiri, which consisting the theme of Identity Crisis. Changing the identity in a particular person's life is continuous because of the efforts of economical, social and biological factors. From an early age, the implementation of social and moral norms for the child associated with the pressure of forbidden impulses and simultaneous imitation or identification with the parents, with their moral norms and attitudes, within parents and society in general. The children's habits and activities also based on their parents and their circumstances.

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most eminent and accomplished writers of contemporary Indian Diasporic Literature. She belongs to the second generation of immigrants to America and well comprehends the plight of young generation that feels sandwiched between the aspirations of parents cast in the traditional Indian mould and the influence of the western peer groups. Being an Indian by ancestry, British by birth and American by migration her depiction of Diaspora experiences are more vivid and buoyant in her works. The significance of her work as a diasporic writer lies precisely in the author's attempt to exploit the underlying tension of an individual living between two countries and two cultures. Despite of her birth on the foreign land, Jhumpa Lahiri has a strong sense of her Indian roots which is clearly reflected through her portrayal of the agonies of non-resident Indians.

Etymologically the word Identity is derived from the Latin root idem, means the same. According to Oxford Dictionary, Crisis is a personal difficulty or situation that immobilizes people and prevents them from consciously controlling their lives. It's also refers to a person's feeling of fear, shock and distress about the disruption itself. Identity Crisis is a psychological condition of disorientation and the act of confusion occurring especially in adolescents as a result of conflicting internal and external experiences, pressures, and expectations and often producing acute anxiety.

The Novel begins as, Ashoke and Ashima are a young couple from Bengali family, leaving their native-Calcutta, and settle in Massachusetts. In there, Ashima struggles for speak English and cultural barriers and also she fears more about the survival in the new country. She delivers her first baby alone, without the help of her relatives.

Ashima thinks it's strange that her child will be born in a place most people enter either to suffer

or to die. There is nothing to comfort her in the off-white tiles of the floor, the off-white panels of the ceiling, the white sheets tucked tightly into the bed. In India, she thinks to herself, 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. (N-4)

The hospital seems like strange to her and suddenly she thought about Indian culture. If she is living in India, she had been send to her mother's home and also treated well; her parents and relatives take care about herself and the baby. But in American country or American life style, there is no space for the relatives. She fears about her loneliness in the hospital and tries to console herself.

She'd noticed the watch among the cavalcade of matrimonial bracelets on both her arms: iron, gold, coral, conch. Now in addition, she wears a plastic bracelet with typed label identifying her as a patient of the hospital. (4)

American seconds tick on top of her pulse point. She calculates the Indian time on her hands. (4) In all the times, she can wear the watch on her wrist. But in the hospital, she wears the plastic bracelet with typed label identifying herself as a patient. She always calculates the Indian time on her hands. In that time, she can feel her identity as an Indian.

She is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare. (6) She feels very fearful of her child. She can't imagine about the raise of her child; she thought about the child's future, it could be brighter one or else could be as a normal American person's life. She can feel about the Indian culture; she knows very well as, their own culture and identity are destroying. They named their child as Gogol; it is a famous Russian author's name.

At home, his mother is horrified. What type of field trip was this? It was enough that they applied lipstick to their corpses and buried them in silk-lined boxes. Only in America are children taken to cemeteries in the name of art. What's next, she demands to know, a trip to the morgue? (70)

For reasons he cannot explain or necessarily understand, these ancient puritan spirits, these very first immigrants to America, these bearers of unthinkable, obsolete names, have spoken to him, so much so that in spite of his mother's disgust he refuses to throw the rubbings away. (71)

According to Gogol's school principles, he has to done a project. Ashima resists Gogol's art project because the rubbings made in cemetery-out of the belief that such art opposed to a basic Bengali principle. She insists the honor and respect for the dead people. Ashima scold him for it. But Gogol still keeps those things in his room, not disobeying his mother rules, but refusing to accept totally the Bengali values of life and death to which his mother demands. In that situation, he felt the identity dilemma of those Indian and American cultures.

Gogol and Sonia must remember to say, not aunt this uncle that but terms far more specific: mashi and pishi, mama and maima, kakku and jethu, to signify whether they are related on their mother's or their father's side, by marriage or by blood. (81)

In sudden vacation, their family moves on to Calcutta for eight months. Gogol and Sonia felt upset; because they both have missed their school and missed America. They do not know how

to call their relatives in Bengali; they call them as uncle and aunty. Their relatives become stranger to them. He can sense the struggles to survive in new culture. For his name changing process, finally his father accepts it and conveyed him that, "In America, anything is possible. Do as your wish". (N-100) His father asserts regarding the American society and its principles.

It is as Nikhil, that first semester that he grows a goatee, starts smoking Camel Lights at parties and while writing papers before exams, discovers brain eno and Elvis Costello and Charlie Parker. It as Nikhil that he takes Metro-North into Manhattan one weekend with Jonathan and gets himself a fake ID that allows him to be served liquor in new haven bars. It is as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party at Ezra Stiles, with a girl wearing a plaid woolen skirt and combat boots and mustard tights. By the time he wakes up, hung over, at three in the morning, she has vanished from the room, and he is unable to recall her name. (105)

After changed his name as Nikhil, he gets a fake ID and he begins drinking, smoking, goes to parties, addicted to drugs and finally lost his virginity. The changes of his activities expresses the American culture changed his own identity. He is always searching for the identity. Later, he started his love with a beautiful girl named Maxine. His relationship with Maxine suffered when she was unable to understand that why he needed to talk to his mother and sister every evening after the death of his father and she says, "You guys can't stay with your mother forever" and further when she asks him to come for a holiday "To get away from all this" and he replies "I don't want to get away" (182)

Expensive pieces of jewelry presented on Lydia's birthday, flowers brought home for no reason at all, the two of them kissing openly, going for walks through the city or to dinner, just as Gogol and Maxine do. Gogol is reminded that in all his life he has never witnessed a single moment of physical affection between his parents. (138)

These lines shows Gerald and Lydia (parents of Maxine), who are openly affectionate, remind Gogol of the distance in his own parent's relationship, a distance that had always seemed normal, inevitable. He is reminded that in all their life, till that date, he has never witnessed a single moment of physical affection between his parents. He can see the difference between Indian and American cultures.

"Listen, I can't come home that week end", he says. The truth seeps out of him slowly. He knows it's his only defense at this point. I'm going on a vacation. I've already made plans." (144) Though she says nothing for a while, he knows what his mother is thinking, that he is willing to go on vacation with someone else's parents but not see his own. (145)

After joined with Maxine's family, Gogol totally forgot his family. His mother called him for celebrating his birthday; but he refuses to go there and he wants to spent time with Maxine's family. Ashima thought that, Gogol is slowly leaving out from their control. But after the death of Gogol's father, he has joined with his mother and married a Bengali girl.

In this novel, Gogol has an identity dilemma. The duality of culture threatens his identity as is reflected in his personal relationships. He experiences an emotional turbulence, torn by mixed feelings of love hatred for India, tumult inside him, a growing bewilderment and he is somewhere unable to fully catch up with the western culture. In spite of his westernization, Gogol is not completely cut off from his roots and identity. Gogol tries to rejecting past and serves all ties with Indian values. His refusal to recognize his relations and continuity with the

past and the gaps and fissures of his present condition make him a stranger to himself. In the death of his father, he finds a beginning and understanding of community and of the place of the individual within family in society. The hour of personal grief unites him to his family and makes him accept their ways. The ambivalence of his in between state causes to vex him anymore. Responding to the binary opposition as complementary rather than oppositional, he eventually discovers and resuscitates his Indian roots and familial ties.

Finally, the author comes to an end with getting uprooted from the native culture traditions and values, the loss of indigenous language, man's position as a mere outcast or an unaccommodated alien, together with multiple injuries and lacerations of the psyche, all account of the theme of identity atrophy.

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