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## **Diasporic sensibility in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri**

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### **Abstract**

Jhumpa Lahiri, an American author known for her short stories, novels and essays in English and more recently, in Italian. She was born in London, the daughter of Indian immigrants from the Indian state of West Bengal. Her debut collection of short-stories *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), and her first novel, *The Namesake* (2003) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) express the theme of cross-culture, migration, issues of diasporic community on the foreign land and search of identity. All her works depict the above mentioned issues faced by Indians on reaching on the foreign land. Since she was herself a migrant from India to America; she therefore mentions all that what she sees with her open eyes.

**Keywords:** Cross-culture, search of identity by, diasporic community, religions conflict and issue of language

### **Introduction**

Etymologically the word 'Diasporic' means scatter, diverse and differences between two minds against each other. It involves in cross cultural between two different countries. Diasporic sensibility is the dominant theme in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri. Lahiri is the writer of several books which express the differences between the two cultures where both cannot not adjust together on the one platform. As we see that different religions people have their different religions festivals to celebrate and different gods to worship; and all these religions cannot be one to celebrate one particular festival and one god to worship. In India different religions people whose different cultures and different way of life, and when these minds are different so how can they accept the person coming from different religion and culture.

The smallest unit of different cultures example is own country where Hindus, Muslims, Shikhs, Christians, Jainism and Buddhism live and follow different religion. If a person coming from Muslim family engages in marriage of a Hindu family or a person coming from Hindu family involves in marriage of Christian family at the same time we have different culture and after the marriage the two different cultures cannot go on one for a long; and the problem will create between the two culture writers have tried their best to explore the theme of diaspora among them Jhumpa Lahiri is one of those who has made clear the difference of two cultures at a large scale. Her famous work *The Namesake* (2003) highlights the theme of a person who goes on to mix with different culture forcefully and sets up her own individual identity.

*The Namesake* focuses on cross cultural tale of a Hindu Bengali family who travels to Boston. The story has gone to narrate the family's traditional bound and deep rooted life in Calcutta and travel to America. We find the character's name Ashok and Ashima who feels the jolt of the changing of place from India (Calcutta) to America (Boston). In this work we have the protagonist named Gogol Ganguli coming from the second generation is very much suffered to have his particular name and identity. He faces difficulties in naming him and for that he struggles hard in the diasporic community. He tries his best to adjust in the family where he is alone and all alone and for his own self-definition he is ready to leave out his traditional name and changes his name from Gogol to Nikhil. He thinks that by changing his name the diasporic community will accept him. But he will not forget his past memories, past name and past life, which will haunt him time and again. The changing name for him will not suffice to have his own identity. Thus the whole family coming from India to America suffers some kind of diasporic difficulties:

Being a foreigners a short of life-long pregnancy – A perpetual wait, a constant burden a continuous feeling out of shorts. It is an – going responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life only to discover that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding like pregnancy being a foreigner Ashima believes, is something that elicit the same curiosity from strangers the same combination of pity and respect. (*The Namesake*, PP; 49-50)

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Jhumpa Lahiri is the writer of second generation; she, therefore, finds out the problems of second generation Ashok and Ashima together with Gogol Ganguli who suffer differently or reaching America on a foreign land. Ashima is pregnant and she does not find any supporters there in America; she thinks that she has many supporters in India but on the foreign land she is alone and nobody ready to accept her in the diasporic community. Lahiri, herself, has travelled on the foreign land and collected a huge experience of Indian diasporic pains and sufferings when they are on the foreign land and extorted that experience in her works. It is to be noted here that in America the culture is different from that of India. The child is born America is given name after registering in the hospital and giving the certificate. This type of multicultural example has clashed their (Ashok and Ashima) Bengali tradition.

The bad news is that they are told by Mr. Wilcox, compiler of hospital birth certificate that they must choose a name for their son for they learn that in America, a baby cannot be released from the hospital without a birth certificate, And that a birth certificate needs a name. (Lahiri, 27)

The specific name given after one's birth becomes one's identity, a symbol of identity, and it is the only source by which people can recognize one by calling his/her name. The little of the Namesake is itself painful for Gogol Ganguly who has given a particular name at the time of his birth what American system requires. Ashok names his son Gogol what requires for Ashok an emotional attachment. Gogol gets his name which neither Bengali origin nor American so he is neither Bengali nor American but hangs in the middle of both the countries like pendulum. Thus the pains and sufferings for Ashok and Ashima does not end due to coming on the foreign land. They have no their own identity.

Jhumpa Lahiri's next bestseller work *Interpreter of Maladies* appears in 1999 shows Lahiri's bicultural and bilingual heritage. In the story we have Mrs. Sen, an Indian housewife who migrates to North America after her arranged marriage. After settling in America she does not want to accept American culture. Her husband is a professor. She keeps all the things in her kitchen and house full of sense of India in the reason she might feel Indianness even though she is in America. In America she works as a babysitter to a boy named Eliot whose mother is a working woman. Mrs. Sen does not provide the child loving care therefore Eliot remembers his mother's love and affection. When Mrs. Sen is told to learn driving which is very much required in the place like America she refuses to do so. All the activities of Mrs. Sen show that she does not want to follow all the culture of America. She thinks about return of India where she could have a driver for her car and everything others.

By then Eliot understood that when Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India, not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables. (Lahiri, 121)

Mrs. Sen is a woman depend upon her husband for everything whereas the mother of Eliot works in a place she earns for her livelihood and becomes a modern woman. She is the fine example of a modern American woman. She knows how to drive a car and other activities necessary for a modern woman. On the contrary Mrs. Sen does not know how to drive a car and she is not ready to accustom to American culture so there is a clash between the two cultures.

The immigrants link themselves back to home land through

letters, telegrams and phone calls. Mrs. Sen did the same. She gets happier receiving letters from India and Eliot noticed the enthusiasm in her while reading the Bengali written notes. He felt that while reading letters Mrs. Sen is no longer present in the room. (Lahiri, 122)

It is very much noticed here that the letters come from India her native land gives pleasure to Mrs. Sen's mind and heart. These letters act as a remedy for her troubled heart living in America as her does not find solace in the foreign land and its cultural activities. She finds herself aloof from all the system foreailed in America as a diasporic citizen. Her heart thumps heavily because she does not want to live America anymore and desires to leave for her own native land. She finds herself unable to accustom in the country wealthier to India. America is different in the respect of fooding, living, clothing and manners to that of India. Hence Mrs. Sen fully reject to adjust herself in American system.

Her (Jhumpa Lahiri) work is an unaccustomed Earth which depicts how one feels on the land that is not his own, the soil and earth is totally unknown and unaccustomed to the place. As the title of the work it show that the place for who's a person is unknown. The main character is Reema who feels nostalgic attachment after the loss of her origin place. Reema belongs to the second generation; she is fully independent and earns for her own living; she automatically learns the loss of her own identity. Reema after passes many years in America she still remembers her mother, who has left a huge property for her. She remembers the days passed with her white husband but these memories are less important to those she passed in her native place India. She has a Sen of three years old and aspires second Sen to give birth. Reema knows Bengali language what is fully unrecognizable in America where she resides, If she refuses to speak her own language and celebrate her own religion it means she has just crushed her own culture and imbibe the culture of anothers. Now she little uses her Bengali language at home. In Bengali culture children gets the responsibility of taking care their parents. She cannot take care of her parents as she is away from them. She longs how she could not reach her native place at the sudden demise of her mother.

"My mother's dead. My father lives in the us" But you are Indian, no?

"Yes.

"You live in India" – "I don't live anywhere at the moment." (Lahiri, 328)

Reema is to follow all the American culture from fooding, living, and clothing. She has to wear American clothes and follow all the culture unwillingly. She always remembers to loss of her own identity and culture.

Growing up, her mother's example-moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a household – had served as a warning, a path to avoid. Yet this was Reema's life now. (Lahiri, 11) Reema's life of India in comparison to America is fully worse and a thing of constant negotiation. She is having well educated and became a lawyer in New York and an independent woman; her compulsion lies to settle in America due to her husband job.

Lahiri's second novel the lowland seems to be autobiographical that tells the story of Indian diasporic to America. Since Lahiri is a diasporic writer, her family

migrated to America from Calcutta whose she faces the problems of her own identity as she cannot match to the American culture. The novel tells the story of Subhash and his wife Gauri who were born in India in the city of Calcutta and later on they migrates to America where they feel pain and suffering to imbibe the culture of America as a diasporic. Subhash, the main protagonist of the novel is firmly holding the culture of his own native place and does not want to follow the culture of America of the new place.

“There were hotels he might have entered in this part of the city to have a whiskey or a beer, to fall into a conversation with strangers. To forget the way his parents behaved, to forget the things Gauri had said”, (The Lowland, PP, 134-35) Subhash and Gauri both thinks when will they return to India. But with the passage of time Subhash shows himself American when he is among his American friends. He drinks beers, goes to hotel to eat the food, and does all the things what American culture require.

“The day after they arrived her father sat for a ceremony to honour her grandfather, who had died a few months before.” (The Lowland, P; 234)

Both Gauri and Subhash does the same what American culture require but they don't forget their own culture of India. They take pride of their own culture and think superior to America. Gauri feels herself American different from India in order she might able to express herself. She tries her best to be out of her own previous identity. She goes to deliver a lecture on the occasion the driver comes to bring her with him when the driver thinks her a servant and informs the owner to the house where he has arrived.

“Her appearance and accent caused people to continue to ask her where she came from, and some to from certain assumptions. Once, invited to give a talk in San Diego, she'd been picked up by a driver the university had sent, so that she would be spread the effort of driving herself. She had greeted him at the door when he rang the bell. (The Lowland, P. 286)

It is to be seen here that Subhash and his wife Gauri both try to change themselves to imbibe the American culture as a diasporic but fails; they are easily recognized that they are not the citizen of America and migrate from any other country of the world. At this they feel pains and sufferings in adjusting themselves in the modern country America.

Her next novel where abouts in the translation of *Dove mi trovo* into English, Lahiri reveals in an abjuration of the precise identity she had been chafing against. The novel is structural in the form of brief vignettes told by an unnamed narrator in an unnamed city in an unnamed country. Lahiri does not express entirely of the book of places, characters, nationalities. The few biographical details we know are that the narrator is 46 years old, an academic and writer (of what, we never find out), and most crucially, lives alone in the city she has inhabited since she was born. *Whereabouts* is haunted by the question of possibilities and what it means for a woman who is so established in her way of life someone who wishes her mother would understand that solitude affords her the “small pleasures” (Lahiri, P. 46) While at times missing the “pleasant shave a companion might provide” (ibid). In a novel as intimate and mediated as *whereabouts*, however, that doesn't always make something prosaic about Lahiri's dedication to poise when combined with her narrator's despondency and detachment.

I yearned at several moments for the control to drop, for Lahiri to dig deeper, for her to get uglier, bloodier, like the

only occasion in the novel where the narrator displays an inflamed emotion, turning to a guest at a dinner and snapping, “Do you realise you have no idea what fuck you are talking about?” (Lahiri, P. 89)

Thus we see that the works of Jhumpa Lahiri are dominated will the theme of diasporic sensibility. It is in the reason that Lahiri was born in India in the city of Calcutta to America where she experienced the diasporic sense of Indian residency in America so the characters she has wiled in her works coming from Indian origin who suffer variously for their own identity. Some of characters do not ready to leave their own culture at any cost and represent in the diasporic community as disguised in order the Americans should understand that they are origin of America But soon they are recognized because the original and disguised has a difference. For long these characters have much worried about their own past life. The memories haunt them from time to time. What they saw happening in India different from that of America. In woman coming from the second generation go to work in a factory to be indepent, drive a car, smoke in public and sleep with different man. This eullina is seemed queer by an Indian woman who migrates from India to America. All the works of Jhumpa Lahiri remains started on noting this kind of culture in America.

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