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ABSTRACT

The Namesake is about this perpetual dilemma faced by immigrants in the form of Ashima, Ashok Ganguli as they struggle to maintain their identities while trying to shake them off at the same time. The first generation's story was about adaptation, learning, cultivating, and discovering new things about themselves. The second generation of Gogol, Sonia… find itself presented with two conflicting realities and cultures and sets of expectations - one of the host countries through the socio-cultural surroundings and the other of the home country through their parents. Her next novel The Lowland is the most ambitious book, in which she moves out of her comfort zone- the academic world of New England and plunges into a controversial chapter of recent Indian history- the Naxalite movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Lahiri has broadened her novel begins in the land left behind-0 Bengal-during the turbulent decades when Naxalites destabilized the state. The Lowland starts with snippets of the shared life experiences of two teenage brothers Subhash and Udayan. Born fifteen months apart, these children of Bengali parents settled in Calcutta are immensely friendly with each other.

KEYWORDS: dilemma, immigrants, destabilized, Namesake, The Lowland, socio-cultural.

INTRODUCTION:

The present paper is an effort to understand the conflicts before the second generation of Indian Diaspora with special reference to The Namesake by Jumapa 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.

In this novel Lahiri's experiences of growing up as a child of immigrants resemble that of her protagonist, Gogol Ganguly. Lahiri belongs to the second generation of Indian Diaspora whose ongoing quest for identity never seems to end. They feel Sandwiched between the country of their parents and the country of their birth. They are to maintain ties between the ideologies of these two countries, which are poles apart. But in this process they are caught between acute identity crisis from where there is nowhere to go. Lahiri finds herself quite a stranger to both of the countries - in India she is an American and in America, she is an Indian.

Post-colonial Dilemmas: Post-colonial literature has emerged as a genre of contemporary history, post-colonialism questions and reinvents the modes of cultural perception. It studies the residual effects of social, political and cultural aspects. Post-colonial literature, wherein writers articulate and celebrate the post-colonial identity of the decolonized, native society, whilst the independent nations pragmatic connections with the mother country. Dilemma is a situation in which a difficult situation has to be made between two or more alternatives, especially ones that are equally undesirable.

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION:

The Namesake is about this perpetual dilemma faced by immigrants as they struggle to maintain their identities while trying to shake them off at the same time. “The first generation's story was about adaptation and learning a culturing and also discovering new things about themselves. The second generation finds itself presented with two conflicting realities and cultures and sets of expectations - one of the host countries through the socio-cultural surroundings and the other of the home country through their parents.” (Bara 50)

Parents talk of shared history, which stresses oneness. But cultural identity lies not only in oneness but in “critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute what we really are; or rather – since history has intervened – what we have become.” (Hall 112)

Gogol’s Identity Crisis

Through Gogol, Lahiri presents identity crisis, which she herself has faced acutely. She contradicts the idiom “What's in a name?” Rather she is obsessed with ‘it's everything that matters in a name.’ Name signifies the first identity. But this identity gets a blow when it comes to the second generation of Indian Diaspora. The paper intends to explore the conflicts which arise due to different cultural practices before the children of Indian parentage.

Jumpa Lahiri was born as Nilanjan Sudesna, but had one pet name, Jhumpa which was found easy to pronounce by her teacher and she became Jhumpa Lahiri. She felt embarrassed whenever she was called as Jhumpa. She struggled a lot to make herself feel an American but she found just a halfway feeling. The same feeling she puts into Gogol who never likes to be called by this name. The agony felt by Gogol is the agony of Jhumpa Lahiri.

Lahiri's parents, like the whole first generation of Diaspora, were always isolated from the American culture. Despite the fact that they speak English, they were betrayed by their accent. They feel alone and aloof there. Lahiri has shown all this through various conflicts presented in The Namesake.

Gogol's name is one of the chief causes, which make him feel alienated. His loneliness starts from the moment he enters the world. His mother thinks to herself - “She has never known a person entering the world so alone” (Lahiri 24). For him, Gogol signifies a beginning and a survival. The name fills him with joy and indicates a new life. But this very name, the first identity of their son, is the very first factor which contributes to the problem of identity crisis. His name, Gogol "sounds ludicrous to his ears, lacking dignity of gravity.” (76) He does not want to read Nikolai Gogol because he thinks it “would mean paying tribute to his namesake, accepting it somehow” (92).

The Question of Identity

In the postcolonial discourse, the question of identity plays a vital role. The problem of Gogol's name symbolizes the problem of his identity. He wants to be connected to the strange names in the graveyard. He wants to relate himself with American milieu but his name hinders his way to be recognized as an American. Nikhil replaces Gogol when he enters Yale as a freshman. Here nobody knows his earlier name. He feels relief and confident. Here starts his transformation. He starts doing many activities, which he could not dare to do as Gogol. But a new dilemma encircles him. He changes his name but “he does not feel like Nikhil” (105). He fears to be discovered. With the rejection of Gogol's name, Lahiri rejects the immigrant identity nurtured by his parents. But this outward change fails to give him inner satisfaction. “After eighteen years of Gogol, two months of Nikhil feels scant, inconsequential.” (105) He hates everything that reminds him of his past and heritage.

Effort at Blending in – Leading Nowhere

Gogol desires to blend in the American society. He wants to live unnoticed. But he is not viewed as an American by other Americans, even though he is a native born citizen. He tries to put a wall between his past and his present but it is not easy. The adoption of ‘Nikhil’ is a part to live only in the present, but the ghost of Gogol clings to him that he signs his old name unconsciously, he does not respond immediately when he is addressed as Nikhil. He tries to become an entirely different person from what really he is.

Gogol struggles to carry the burden of two names. Nikhil resembles American names, yet ‘Gogal’ and his past follow him everywhere. He experiences a feeling of being in-between. He is considered an ‘ABC’ “America-Born Confused Desi” But he considers himself an American. American society says, “But you’re Indian” (157).

Gogol is an outsider in American society whereas he does not feel intimacy with Indianess. So ‘who he is’ becomes a great problem. What determines identity? Is...
The novel, ‘The Lowland’ starts with snippets of the shared life experiences of two teenage brothers Subhash and Udayan. Born fifteen months apart, these children of Bengali parents settled in Calcutta are immensely friendly with each other. Their various pica-pica doles like transgressing the bounds of an elite club to steal a golf ball or watching glamorous actresses at the film studio are realistically portrayed. Both the children are interested in science and conduct experiments in chemistry and biology. As they grow up, Udayan, the impulsive and somewhat troublesome child for parents, feels attracted towards Naxalism- a brand of communism inspired by Mao-tse Tung of China-which preached a violent end of capitalism. So committed is Udayan to the ideology that he would risk all his married life, his pregnant wife, his brother and parents – to work for the party. However, Subhash, the middle child, is not interested in this ideology. Even when his younger brother takes him to attend meetings, he feels ill at ease and remains politically inactive.

Gauri, the female protagonist in the novel. She comes in contact with Udayan through her brother Manish. Their house is near the college where Udayan is studying Physics. Subhash, on the other hand, goes to the Rhode Island in USA to study Chemistry. Rhode Island incidentally is the area where the writer Jhumpa Lahiri spent most of her unmarried life. The novelty of the place, lifestyle and culture overwhims Subhash and he fails to find any linkage between what he finds and the most comforting home back home in the country of his birth. He comes to India after learning about the killing of his brother at the hands of police. It is here that Subhash thinks seriously about re-settling Udayan's wife Gauri. Much against the wishes of his parents, he marries Gauri and takes her to the States to usher her into a new life. (p.186). He believes that she would be able to forget her Indian's tragedy and find meaning in life.

He had to assure her that he would not go against her wishes and that she would be free to lead her own kind of life. In the USA, bringing her round to a wife's ways was a painfully long, and finally an unsuccessful affair. The part of the story dealing with Gauri's life in America is a journey from her silent, inchoate state to an Americanized libertine. What it misses is the signpost of Subhash's wife, the voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past" (Barry 193). Identity is not just a name or a label to put on a thing. It is a way of thinking about oneself and the world and others. Identity is not just a label that can be taken on or off like a coat. It is a way of being in the world, a way of seeing oneself and being seen by others.

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