

**Anekant Journal of Humanities
and Social Sciences**

A Half Yearly and Peer Reviewed Open Access Print and Online Journal
<http://www.humanitics.org/>

RESEARCH ARTICLE**Vol. II, Issue II, August 2019****Title- IDENTITY CRISIS IN INDIAN DIASPORA LITERATURE WITH
REFERENCE TO JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE NAMESAKE*****Mr. Prashant Sampatrao Shinde**

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Abstract:

The research paper is an effort to explore identity crisis of first- and second-generation immigrants in diasporic literature with reference to Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel '*The Namesake*'. The protagonist of the novel Gogol carries a burden of dual identity and ethnic identity. He experiences dilemma over his identity and hybrid identity. He neither follows culture of homeland nor choose values of adopted country. He tries to assimilate American culture and its values. But he feels incompleteness within and fails to experience a sense of belonging. The question of identity becomes crucial when Gogol is culturally displaced, and he cannot co-relate with any of the two worlds in which he is living. Gogol tries to cope with his real self at the end of the novel.

Key words: diaspora, identity, ethnic, culture, assimilate etc.

Indian writing in English has contributed significantly to diasporic literature as well as recognized internationally by readers and scholars. Diasporic literature is a vast and umbrella term which includes all literary works written by the authors outside their native country. These works are associated with native culture and background. Such writers are related to their homeland one way or the other. We can find roots of diaspora literature in feeling of homesickness, nostalgia, loss of identity, the sense of isolation and alienation. It also deals with issues of amalgamation or disintegration of cultures in the adopted land. The diasporic Indians don't want to break the relationship with the motherland. They feel alien in foreign land and experience dislocation. They experience a sense of restlessness due to non-acceptance by the host society. Hence the immigrants strive to achieve stability through adaptation and assimilation with the society. The diasporic literature offers a detachment to writers to have a clear insight in to their native land. The diasporic writers face factual displacement as well as rootlessness. Uma Parameswaran has

defined diaspora as ‘first is one of nostalgia for the homeland left behind, mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is a phase in which one is busy adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is the shaping of diaspora existence by involving themselves ethnoscultural issues. The fourth is when they have arrived and start participating in the larger world of politics and national issues.’

The diasporic elements are visible in the writings of Kiran Desai, Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, V. S. Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri and many others. Jhumpa Lahiri is a strong voice of Indian diaspora in America. She explores the impact of immigration on the complexities of life through conflict of ideas, ethical values, religious and cultural dilemmas. The word diaspora has been taken from Greek, means scattering, dispersion etc. It means a scattered population whose origin lies within a smaller geographical location. It can also refer to the movement of the population from its original homeland. It was first entered in English in the late 19th century to describe the scattering of Jews after their captivity. The displacement might be willing or forced. So, it becomes hard to negotiate and assimilate in the new culture and milieu. Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London and brought up in South Kingstown, Rhode Island, US. Lahiri’s debut short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2000. Her first novel *The Namesake* (2003) was adopted for film of the same name. She presents anxieties, conflicts, and biases of immigrants in the settlements of a country quite different in experience from their own. She explores diasporic conflict of dual identity and hybrid identity. In an interview with Mira Nair, she says: “I wanted to please my parents and meet their expectations also of my American peers, and the expectations I put on myself to fit into American society. It’s a classic case of divided identity.”

The word identity means a belonging status of man’s life that means where a man belongs that is his or her identity. Identity is not stable as it changes according to time and place. The quest of identity raises questions like ‘Who am I?’ The names given to the persons varies according to the traditions and culture of the society. In Bengali culture two names are given to children. One is a pet name, it is for every day, family use and never appears on official documents. The second good name appears on documents and for recognition in the world outside the family. Such dual identities are represented by the character of Gogol. At birth, Gogol carries both pet and official names. His parents give him the name of the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. Initially it is a kind of formality, and it stays with Gogol in his early childhood. When he is admitted to the school, he rejects his proper name Nikhil and sticks to the name Gogol. It is an effort of him to reject a dual identity. He becomes conscious about the importance of identity when his class visits to the graveyard. Other children can easily locate the graves of the members of their clan, but Gogol could not find any Ganguli buried there. He realizes the fact that he and his family are immigrants to a country where their ancestors did not live. He spends his life in search of an identity. Gogol decides to change his name officially to Nikhil before his departure to college. He wants to blend with American culture but cannot be able to adjust himself with American code of conduct. Such condition seems painful in individual and professional life of Gogol. He cannot relate himself to his homeland as well as he cannot be accepted in settled country. It also raises the issue of intergenerational gap where the first-generation parents Ashoke and Ashima expect from Gogol to live by the value system of Indian culture at home, but he encounters different cultural surroundings outside. Hence the issue of identity becomes complicated for Gogol, and it leads to perpetual dilemma. His failure to assert his identity can be seen in his relationship with women. He falls in love with Ruth but could not sustain a relationship due to differences in value system, cultural outlook, open mindedness, and materialism. After his breakup with Ruth, Gogol has an affair with Maxine, a girl from wealthy and liberal family. After emotional complications related to his father’s death, Gogol feels mentally apart from Maxine. He realizes a fundamental difference in social codes, traditions, and cultural values. His relationship with Moushumi is based on mutual understanding of Bengali- American life. Both are not entirely Bengali not entirely American either. Gogol marries with Moushumi and he is devoted to her and to their relationship. But Moushumi aspires for academic career and doesn’t like rigidity in life. She wants to escape from conventional cultural taboos related to marriage such as stability and comfort. She begins an affair with Dimitri because she is unhappy in her life and

marriage. She always craves for cosmopolitan and urban sophisticate life. Gogol seems quite loyal and serious in relationship with Moushumi. But he starts suspecting her and eventually gets separated and divorced. His multiple relationships with girls from America are not successful and his marriage with a girl from India is also a failure. His life seems a kind of a search for his belongings. He assimilates himself in American culture and strive to retain Indian heritage. He is compelled to feel that he stands on the border line belonging neither to their motherland nor their adopted country. Hence develops a dual and fractured identity.

The novel portrays identity crisis of Ashima, mother of Gogol, also feels that she has separated herself completely from her family in Calcutta. She retains a spiritual connection to India. She adopts cultural diversity and pursue American dream with her husband. She clutches to her moral ideology of Bengali Indian. She tries to restore Indian identity through food and rituals. She experiences a strong sense of emptiness and loneliness after her husband's death. She often feels upset and homesick. Her husband Ashoke tries to stick to Indian culture and values and adopt himself well enough in the land of opportunities. He is a representative of first generations struggle to maintain identity in the adopted land.

Conclusion:

The novel shows lives and concerns of first generation and second-generation Indian migrants in the USA. It also reflects a perpetual dilemma of immigrants in the foreign land. Absurdity and alienation are at the center of the Indian diaspora. The quest of identity, rootlessness and a sense of belonging makes characters restless. Lahiri skillfully points out that cultural interactions are inevitable in multicultural society. So, to preserve and sustain cultural values of homeland and to assimilate values of adopted land may be the answer to the issue of identity crisis.

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