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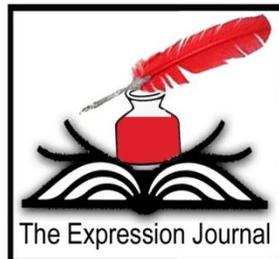
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INNER TURMOIL OF ASHIMA GANGULI IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S NOVEL *THE NAMESAKE*

Ashok Kumar

Assistant Professor (Guest Faculty)

Govt. College, Nagina, Nuh, Mewat, Haryana

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Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri is a reputed feminist novelist who has taken the theme of the problems and the predicaments of women in her novels. In the novel, *The Namesake* she has projected the inner turmoil of the central female protagonist of this novel. Lahiri weaves delicate strings of different relationships. Ashima also has some relationships in her family which make her heart-broken and disheartened. Her life becomes much complicated in this novel not because of other reasons but just as she is a woman who is just expected to bear the tyranny of men and the patriarchal society. Her fault lies only in her gender being a female. There are two main characters Ashima and Ashoke in this novel who make a couple and this couple does not live a happy and peaceful life because they basically belong to Bengal and settle in the United State where Ashoke Ganguli is studying in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The novel deals with the internal turmoil of Ashima and the external factors also affect her life when her husband was alive and she remains more distressed and dejected even after his death. Her life becomes a constant journey of struggle and she is unable to come out of her family problems. Thus, the novel deals with her identity crisis.

Key-Words

Cultural Clashes, Inner Turmoil, Identity Crisis, Gender Discrimination, Migration.

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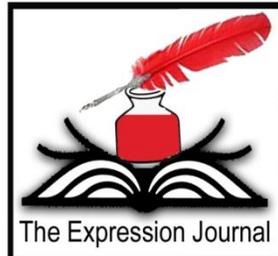
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Jhumpa Lahiri is an India-born Pulitzer Prize winning writer whose childhood name was Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri. She has written two novels *The Namesake* and *The Lowland* and two short-story collections *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth*. She has touched various themes related to women, family relationships and the problems prevalent in the modern society in her novels. She has picked the theme of gender discrimination in her novel *The Namesake*. The novel has also been adopted as a movie in 2007 whose director is Mira Nair and the stars are Irfan Khan and Tabu for Ashoke and Ashima respectively of the novel.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London on July 11, 1967. Her parents were Bengalis. Her father Amar and mother Tapati migrated from Calcutta to the United Kingdom. Her father was a university librarian who later settled in South Kingstown, Rhode Island. Her name Jhumpa was given to her by her school teachers. Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* tells about the lives, traumas and struggle of a Ganguli family. *Interpreters of Maladies* is her first short-story collection and her next short-story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* has been taken from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. This collection also remained in the *New York Times'* best seller list. The novel *The Namesake* has its setting in Cambridge in 1968 when the novel opens. Ashoke and Ashima belong to West Bengal and after an arranged marriage they migrate to Cambridge in the United States. Ashima, from the very beginning, has some fears about her life in America and she does not feel comfortable with that idea that she will have to live in the U.S. without other family members except her husband. She has to live a subjugated and stifling life there because she is not allowed to take any step without the permission of her husband.

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Ashima lives a life of a traditional wife in the United States. She is busy from morning till evening and it is explicit from the very page of the novel, "She wipes sweat from her face with the free end of her sari. Her swollen feet ache against speckled grey linoleum. Her pelvis aches with baby's weight." (1) She lives her life like an Indian woman who is not allowed to call her husband by his name. She also follows the same practice, "It is not the type of thing Bengali wives do. Like a kiss or caress in a Hindi movie, a husband's name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over. (2) She has to call the attention of her husband by such words, "Are you listening to me?" (2) Thus, she has to live much different life even in a developed country.

Ashima and Ashoke do not try to understand each other's feelings. When Ashima feels labour pain, they rush to the hospital where they are informed that there is time in the delivery. Ashoke does not stay with her in the hospital and she has to live there alone in the deep agony and pain, "It is the first time in her life she has slept alone, surrounded by strangers; all her life she has slept either in a room with her parents or with Ashoke at her side. She wishes the curtains were open, so that she could talk to the American woman." (3) She was in labour pain and she misses her family very much but unfortunately, there was nobody to assist her. She tries to talk with the hospital women but they also seem not to take any interest in her, "She has gathered that Americans in spite of their public declarations of affection, in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, in spite of their hand holding on the street and lying on top of each other on the Cambridge Common prefer their privacy" (3). Thus, this remains a very difficult time for her. After that she gives birth to a son, "The baby, a boy, is born at five past five in the morning. He measures twenty inches long, weighs seven pounds nine ounces." (5) It was good news for her but she had nobody there except her husband to share her happiness. Thus, she feels much dejected and lonely. Another problem arises when hospital employees deny discharging her without giving their son a legal name. They have already written a letter to Ashima's grandmother but they get no reply from her. Ashoke looks at the slight limp on his foot that was due to his train accident. At this moment, Ashoke chooses his name "Gogol" adopting this name from the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol whose story "The Overcoat" he liked very much. When Gogol is born, Ashoke's three Bengali friends come to see him.

There is a story why Ashima's husband gives this name to his son. It is related with his past. He was reading when one day he was going to his grandfather's home and a tragedy occurs in the train. When the train crashes in the morning, he was reading "The Overcoat." He was buried in the debris but suddenly a rescuer casts a glance at the page of the Gogol's story and thus, he was saved. Ashoke was in his train journey from Calcutta to Jamshedpur and one of the passengers, a middle-aged Bengali, Ghosh, a businessman suggests him to go on the world trip. Ashoke takes Ghosh's advice very seriously and he applies in the MIT and reaches there due to his scholarship.

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But Ashima is not happy with her life in the United States and she decides to return India but her husband does not listen to her and he says that there is no future in India. She has to remain alone at home. Ashima feels again uncomfortable just because her husband goes for his work and she has to stay alone in the hospital. Ashima does not feel good alone in the hospital. Neither her husband nor other family members are there. She has the nostalgia about deliveries in India: "In India she thinks to herself, women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares, recreating briefly to childhood when baby arrives. (4) That's why there was a strange suffocating and stifling environment in the family. Ashima's husband keeps her under the full control but she writes her home that she is doing fine and there is no problem to her. After some time Ashima comes to know that her father has died due to heart attack and they had to come back to India. Ashima gives birth to a new baby Sonia and she tries to convince her husband to return India but her husband turns a deaf ear to her.

Ashima's problems take serious dimensions when she comes to know that both of their children also feel rootless and placeless on that foreign land. Gogol dislikes his name so the extent that he changes his name nick because he finds his name much obsolete and students make fun for his name and even the teachers also fail to pronounce his name quickly and that's why he thinks of changing his name and finally he dies so. Ashima's problems aggravated when she notices that her son, Gogol and her daughter, Sonia also do not want to come back to India and they want to settle in the United States just because he does not find India much comfortable for them. Both the children fall ill when they visit India. Gogol lives a modern lifestyle like other English children but he fails to establish his links with other English boys. Gogol spends his fourteenth birthday but he arranges this party at two occasions. He calls his friends on his birthday and he celebrates his party the very next day after her birthday with his family and few friends of her father. Gogol enjoys his life fully and he does not care for anybody.

When Ashoke has sabbatical, the family decides to ship back to India. They visit the Taj Mahal, Agra and Sonia has allergy from jackfruit and they see a very horrible incident in the train regarding a passenger who was robbed and murdered. Gogol starts his school and his English teacher, Mr. Lawson, gets inspired by his name and he assigns him some homework on the story "The Overcoat" but when Gogol reads this book he finds nothing good in that writer. Gogol starts dating with the girls also. Her first crush was Kim and after that Maxime. Ashima does not want to give her children this kind of culture and that's why she wanted to come back to India but it was too late for that also. When Ashok dies, Ashima has to see bad days of her life. She lives a miserable life and her son Gogol's marriage with Moushumi also does not prove fruitful as she starts having relationships with her ex-boyfriend. She makes up to live her remaining life in India and she decides to come back whenever her minds allows her in a year.

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As a conclusion, it can be stated that Ashima has to suffer a lot due to her gender and the pressure of the patriarchal society in a different cultural environment. "A whole history remains to be written of spaces ... from the grotesque strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat...(Foucault 94-103)She lives her life in great hardships and she faces all these problems of inner turmoils due to cultural diversity and her famine world. She faces the problem of her identity crisis which germinates due to these two main reasons. Hall tells it in his chapter 'Who Needs 'Identity'', There are two ways of responding to the question. The first is to observe something distinctive about the deconstructive critique to which many of these essentialist concepts have been subjected. (Hall 1) Barry writes about the colonial identity, "Fanon argued that the first step for 'colonised' people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past" (Barry 193).

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