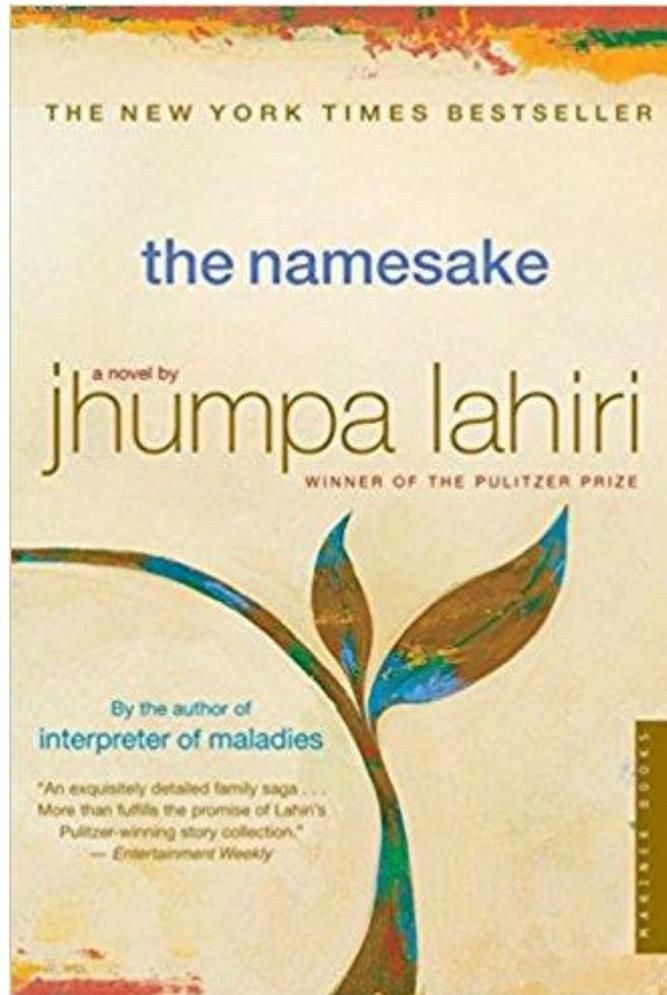


Psychological Conflict in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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Abstract

Conflict is an important feature of postcolonial Indian English Literature. All over the world people are facing conflicting situations. Due to various factors, social, economic, and political changes in society immigrant in foreign countries. The individual is facing a number of problems in the society. Due to changing life style brings a conflict. Psychological conflicts are innate and natural process of the mind which occurs when individuals perceive their thoughts, views, attitudes, goals and interests contradicted by another individual and social group. Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian expatriate from the state of West Bengal with whom she had immigrated to the United States. She is a postcolonial, multicultural South Asian woman writer and Pulitzer Prize winner Indian American author.

Psychological conflict is an integral part of her fiction. In *The namesake*, she portrays internal conflict of character, conflict between characters and conflict of character with the society. And also, she portrays the internal struggle of the protagonist such as confusion and fears, existential quest, the external struggle in her novel. In this paper try to focus psychological conflicts of first generation and second-generation immigrants.

Keywords: Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, conflict, immigrant, Postcolonial, expatriate, Multicultural

Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri is a brilliant novelist; she has been hailed as the herald of the new trend in Indian fiction. Nilanjana Sudehna Jhumpa Lahiri was born on July 11, 1967, daughter of Bengali immigrant parents, in London. Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian by origin, British by education and American by citizenship. She presents her cross-cultural experiences as part of her novels. Her characters are Indian, Bengali origin who have migrated and who enjoy the similar experiences like hers. *The Namesake*, Lahiri's first novel, was published in the year 2003. It was originally a novella which was published in *The New Yorker* and later it was expanded to a full-length novel.

Ganguli Family's Emotional Struggle

Lahiri's debut novel is all about Ganguli family's emotional struggle to make a new life in America. Indian woman, and first-generation immigrant woman Ashima, travels from India to America along with her husband, Ashoke, after her marriage and in the process experiences emotional struggle because of cross-cultural demands on her life. Ashoke is a first-generation immigrant, who leaves his homeland and comes to America in pursuit of better jobs, better standard of living and higher studies to do research in the field of "fibre optics" with a prospect of settling down with "security and respect" (TN. 105).

Ashima

Ashima is an innocent girl who flies alone to be with her husband. After the legal formalities, with a heavy heart and lots of instruction from her family members and relatives who come to see her off at Dum Dum Airport, "not to eat beef or wear skirts or cut off her hair and forget the family the moment she landed in Boston" (TN. 37). She feels that "Unlike her parents and her other relatives, her grandmother had not admonished" (TN. 37). This instruction indicates the cultural ethos of her native land.

Ashima feels emotionally missing her country and her Bengali friends. She belongs to a traditional Hindu Brahmin middle class conservative family, where a free spirit and movements outside of the house are restricted. S. Robert Gnanamony, in his "Diasporan Divided Souls and Identity Constituting", says, "Ashima Ganguly is mostly confined to the four walls of her house. She goes under a lot of tension as the conflictual nature of the eastern and the western culture" (157).

Pregnancy and Hospital Experience

During her first pregnancy, she was interested in preparing and eating her favourite Indian dishes. She bought ingredients from an American store to cook an Indian dish. She could not manage to prepare the dish. The taste dissatisfied her. She reaches out for one more onion in the cardboard, and the labour begins in her lower abdomen. She throws the onion and calls her husband who is studying in the bedroom, by using his surname. She never calls out by his first name. She is a traditional Bengali woman, she uses interrogative, "Are you listening to me?" (TN.2).

Ashima is hospitalized for delivery along with three American women. She is being an Indian traditional woman who has been used to live in a joint family and who, like other Indian women, is very much in the habit of speaking and sharing their thoughts. She feels lonely in the hospital. But she wishes to speak with other American women, but it does not work out. In “*The Theme of Dual Identity*”, Anitha Singh observes, “Without emotional support of her family, which is in India, she feels lonely and abandoned, as she struggles through the barriers of culture and language”. She wears a silk saree, vermilion on her forehead, flower-garlands in her hair.

Ashima struggles to sleep alone in the hospital. She says, “It is the first time in her life she has slept alone” (TN 03). She wonders and feels restless because she is the only Indian woman in the hospital. Her mind seeks her homeland again, where the culture and tradition say, “Pregnant woman should go back to her parents’ house to give birth” (TN 04). Childbirth in Calcutta is not a private happening. It involves a lot of people who comfort the pregnant woman with both the words of advice and solace.

The nurse in the hospital asks Ashima, “Hoping for a boy or a girl?” (TN, 07) she expresses her thought without expectation in anatomical details “As long as there are ten finger and toe” (TN, 07), the nurse smiles, then Ashima realizes her error, “she should have said fingers and toes” (TN, 07), which pain her more. Motherhood is a daunting challenge for Ashima. She gave birth to a baby-boy. Ashima and Ashoke struggled to follow American system. She waits for her grandmother’s letter that would bring the new name to her child. She does not want to dispense with the proud practice of pet names that remind her old-time intimacies. But the American hospital authorities forced them to register the name in their child’s birth certificate before discharge which can never be changed. Ashoke realized the situation and he remembers the incident which saves his life at age 21. He named his son ‘Gogol’.

Life in the Apartment

Ashoke and Ashima started living in the apartment. She remains in her own cocoon. She feels emotionally dislocated from her ‘home’. She cries whole day inside the house. There is no one to console her. She longs for the love and care of her mother, father and relatives. She spends her time reading Bengali short stories, poems and articles from the Bengali magazines which she brought from her home. She keeps trained her ears to the sound of the soft lick in the mailbox between the hours of twelve to two “in the door” (TN. 36), waiting for her parent’s letters which she keeps collecting in her white bag and rereads often.

Plan to Return to Calcutta

Ashima seriously decides to go back to Calcutta to raise her child there in the company of her close relatives and dear ones, “I’m saying don’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It’s not right. I want to go back” (TN. 33). But being a woman, she wants to adjust to her husband’s wish. She thought to raise her son in the Bengali way. So, she decides to stay with her husband and keeps all her emotional hazards and disappointments to herself and not intend to worry her parents. “To put him to sleep, she sings Bengali songs which her mother had sung her” (TN. 35).

Bringing up Gogol

When Gogol is six months old, his annaprasan (rice ceremony) is performed. Ashima is resentful about the fact. In Bengali culture new born baby’s unforgettable moments, and important ceremony include annaprasan ceremony. It is a ceremony of feeding solid food for the first time by maternal uncle. In America, Ashoke and Ashima organized annaprasan ceremony for Gogol with other Bengali friends in the United States. They were in traditional dress, speaking in Bengali, and the

performance of ritual testifies to their sense of belonging to their own culture. She tries to raise her son by giving him the environment of Bengali tradition in the new country which symbolizes their struggle in between the culture.

Preserve and Respect Their Indian Tradition

Both Ashoke and Ashima are living far away from their home. But they try to preserve and respect their Indian tradition through food, dress, as well as various rituals, such as Gogol's annaprasan in a foreign land. When Gogol is in the third grade, "they send him to Bengali language and cultural lessons every other Saturday. In Bengali class, Gogol is taught to read and write his ancestral alphabet... and together with other children, he reads handouts written in English about the Bengali Renaissance" (TN. 66). Neither Gogol nor the other children are interested in this at all. Later, during various parties customarily held on Saturdays evenings at the homes of Bengali families, only adults will speak Bengali while their children will be watching an American movie in another room, which creates mental agony for the children.

Gogol at the Centre of It All

For Ashima exile in America is a challenge. Her loneliness, the constant sense of alienation and longing for the lost world in India are more explicit. She meets the challenges of her disorientation and homesickness by developing ties with Bengalis who migrated to America. When Gogol's parents take him to school to start his schooling, they have a new name "Nikhil" for him. This name is unacceptable to him for it makes him a strange to his own self. He is frightened by a struggle generated by forming newness in between Gogol and Nikhil. But this time it was Gogol himself, who does not respond to his new name. It was his first attempt of rejecting a dual identity. This rejection left him alone with his old name Gogol.

Gogol faced problem in his name which was neither American nor Indian, but Russian, which symbolizes the problem of identity. He feels a kind of irritation for his name. He feels inferior among his friends when he learns that Nikolai Gogol was a frustrated man and spent his life away from home. He is desperate to do something to save himself from the embarrassment he is facing. As a child, he does not willingly respond to his official name to Nikhil (as his parents wanted) in school. So, the Principal of the school registers his name as Gogol.

America Is His Home

Gogol begins to hate his name during his adolescence. He thinks it ties him down to his parent's culture, to his family's past, it blocks his way to mingle into American life and culture. Gogol feels lonely and suffers from a sense of alienation. He takes India as only India, a country like any other country in the world. No emotional bond being attached to it, not like in America. But Boston is the sweetest place for him, America is his home. Gogol legally changes his name to Nikhil at New Haven after his eighteenth birthday. Gogol refuses to study immigrants' favourable subjects like Physics, Chemistry or Engineering and he prefers to study architecture. He often worries about his relationship with American girlfriends with a strange name.

Children Are More Americanized

Ashima worries about the attitudes of her children were more Americanized. She does not like Gogol for changing his name. She refuses to write 'Nikhil'. She knows that her son did not like his pet name. She is more faithful to her culture "No parents ever called a child by his good name. Good names had no place within a family" (TN. 66). Ashoke and Ashima had pet names - Ashoke (Mithu), Ashima (Monu). So, she writes the names one by one age-wise.

Ashima, instead of being crushed down by the changes in her children, emerges out of suffering. After trying to do best in raising her children she finds herself in a new occupation for herself as a librarian to fill the vacant hours of her life.

Thus, Lahiri's work is an eye opener to the Indian residing outside India because their unadulterated love for their former mother land in subtle and unimaginable ways interferes with the cares and future of their children.

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