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ON

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held on 03 October 2019 and Organised by P.G. & Research Department
of English

S. T. HINDU COLLEGE, NAGERCOIL-2, Tamilnadu, India



Traditional Craving In The Souls Of The First Generation Immigrants: A Diasporic View

Into Lahiri's *The Namesake*.

Sherlin Johnson
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Manonmaniam Sundaranar University
Tirunelveli

Abstract

Indian writing in English is no longer a bogie fixed to the British engine. Indian diasporic literature which has wedged global attention in recent times. The concept diaspora means diffusion or spreading of people from their homeland. This paper highlights the traditional practices in India as rendered by Lahiri in her novel *The Namesake*. Contemporary Indian novelists in English influence their distress in a clear means for the failure of human's traditional and ethical values in the middle of persistent urbanization and the far-reaching western influence. *The Namesake* represents the opposition of American and Bengali- Indian tradition at each stages of life. In the novel, Lahiri brings into light that the first generation immigrants always have quest for the native tradition in their soul even though they are physically present in strange country.

Keywords:

Nostalgia, Daknam, Bhalonam, diffusion, urbanization, quest and attachment.

Indian writing in English is no longer a bogie fixed to the British engine, but it is running proficiently on its own track with the assistance of its own engine. It is adding position by leaps and bounds not only in pasture of Indian fiction but also in Indian poetry and drama. Today Indian writing in English has been approved as a part of independent authority in all the universities of India. Writers like Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie have amazed the whole world with their extraordinary writing skills. Indian diasporic literature which



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has wedged global attention in recent times is usually by and about educated immigrant or their offspring and deals with issues like isolation, nostalgia, identity crisis and inequality.

‘Diaspora’ a swift rising term in literature, is derived from the ancient Greek word ‘Diaspeiro’ which literally ‘to sow over’. The concept diaspora means diffusion or spreading of people from their homeland. ‘Diaspora’ stands for all those who migrated to diverse countries across the globe in the hunt for better fortunes. Jhumpa Lahiri was born as Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri on 11 July 1967 in London to Bengali parents from Calcutta. She has been brought up and educated in London and Boston. She is the second generation immigrant living in the United States. Her connectivity with India and Indian people is borrowed from her grandparents, books and other NRIs. Lahiri’s two short story collections *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) are intention to discover the emigrant dilemma of contemporary men and women the two worlds the East and West and their cultural quandary. Her debut novel *The Namesake* seems to be autobiographical. It endures with her desired theme of immigration and different ordeals interrelated to it. This paper highlights the traditional practices in India as rendered by Lahiri in her novel *The Namesake*. “A tradition (or traditions) is structured on a set of values, belief- systems and social processes which anchor it and give it meaning and significance” (Mahapatra 117). Tradition is a much discussed word in literature, philosophy, social anthropology and other social sciences. The modern writers contemplate that the legendary epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana as a rich and productive foundation of tradition.

The present society in India happens to be an indefensible and susceptible target of cultural, social, political and religious eruptions. The argument of Indian society, which is basically unmanageable and flexible with the attack and the surge of growing modernization and technological development has unfortunately led to the dislocation of traditional and modern systems. Contemporary Indian novelists in English influence their distress in a clear means for the failure of human’s traditional and ethical values in the middle of persistent urbanization and the far-reaching western influence. In her novel *The Namesake*, Lahiri has shown the result of mixed culture in the second generation migrants and the first generation migrants settled in the



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United States. The contrast between the two traditions where the first generation migrants maintain a bond with their native soil and keep up their traditional values whereas the second generation migrants find it difficult to maintain themselves with their traditional roots. The second generation feels uprooted from their traditional insight. In the novel, the first generation expatriates like Ashoke Ganguli and Ashima Bhaduri keep up to the traditional norms but the second generation immigrants like Gogol Ganguli, Sonia Moushmi, Mazoomdar switch on themselves to modern lifestyle.

The Namesake is a story of cultural mix and conflict. It represents the opposition of American and Bengali- Indian tradition at each stages of life. Ashima Bhaduri and Ashoke Ganguli were married in the traditional way through conciliation and arrangements made by their parents and other guardians at Calcutta. On the day of marriage, Ashima was ornamented by her countless aunts and cousins. “At the designated hour she was seated on a piri that her father had decorated, hoisted five feet off the ground, carried out to meet the groom. She had hidden her face with the heart shaped betel leaf, kept her head down bent low until she had circled them seven times” (10). On the other hand, in the case of modern trends in marriage, Gogol and Sonia had a short distressed married life because their marriage were the result of dating and living together lifestyle.

The storyline runs through another tradition called naming ceremony. In India, there are two or more names given leisurely to a child, the most common being one pet name and another an authorized name. In America, the name has to be finalized at birth itself. In Bengali tradition, a respectable elderly member in the family have to choose the name of a child. The rights for naming the child rested with its grandmother. Generally, Bengali tradition grants two names for a single person, one is ‘Daknam’ and other is ‘Bhalonam’ “In Bengali, the word for pet name is ‘Daknam’, meaning literally, the name by which one is called by friends, family and other intimates at home and in private, unguarded moments. Pet names are a persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is always so serious, so formal, so complicated” (26).



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In the novel, the main characters like Ashima and Ashoke have their own pet names, Monu and Meetu respectively. In their adulthood too these were the names by which they were called in their families. Bhalanam, means good name by which they are identified in the outside world, especially on envelopes, diplomas, telephone directories and in all other public places. Even in the case of choosing name for their son Gogol, they accord to the Bengali tradition. They have decided to let Ashima's grandmother to do the respect, who has named six great grandchildren in their family. They have decided to put off the choice of naming the baby until a letter comes from India. They disregarded from filling the forms, which was vital to get the baby's birth certificate from the hospital. The real name left over pending, his father named him at the hospital, after his favorite Russian author, Nikolai Gogol and the baby was named as Gogol Ganguli. In the school, Gogol was mocked for his name by his schoolmates. At the age of fourteen, he started to dislike his name completely and after reaching the proper age, he changed his name officially through a court degree to become Nikhil Ganguli. Still he remained as Gogol to all of his old colleagues, family members and friends. "Man in the modern society seems to lost his long-cherished traditional roots, cultural heritage and value systems amidst the ongoing progression of urbanization and industrialization" (Prasad and Joseph 99).

Ashima does not make use of her husband's name all over the novel. Since "it is not the type of thing Bengali wives do" (2). Even after the death of Ashoke, she refuses to use his name. On the contrary, Moushumi influenced by the American tradition often calls her husband by his name Gogol. In Indian tradition, women use to change their surnames after marriage. In the novel, after marriage Ashima too changes her name from 'Ashima Bhaduri' to 'Ashima Ganguli'. "These were her last moments as Ashima Bhaduri, before becoming as Ashima Ganguli" (9). In the case of second generation immigrant couple, Gogol's wife Moushumi does not adopt Ganguli as her surname even with a hyphen. She says that a hyphenated surname would no longer fit into the window of a business envelope. Besides by now she has begun to publish under Moushumi Mazoomdar, even the thought of changing her last name to Ganguli has never crossed her mind.



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As their children grow up as Americans, their parents Ashima and Ashoke with no other go partially started to practice American lifestyle. On Gogol's fourteenth birthday, Gogol has two celebrations one is typical American and the other is traditional Bengali celebration. Ashoke also begun to dress in American attire but Ashima continues to wear ethnic attire. Even though Ashoke gradually leans over western culture, Ashima has deep attachment towards Bengali tradition. Ashima's attachment with her Bengali tradition is obvious when she sends Gogol to learn Bengali language and culture every weekend. Through the novel, Lahiri bring into light that the first generation immigrants always have quest for their native tradition in their soul and heart even though they are physically present in strange country.

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