

**TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES AND TRAUMA OF CULTURAL
DISLOCATION IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S NOVEL
'THE NAMESAKE'**

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Abstract

Disporic identity is a universal challenge to all migrants. This paper attempts to explain, the cultural dislocation resulted in alienation, cultural conflict, dilemmas of identity and trauma of cultural identities but the creation of transnational identities brings cultural diasporic connection and immigrants celebrates transnationalism. Jhumpa Lahiri's seminal novel 'The Namesake' attempts to built transnational identities in the globalised world. It's also traces out the cross cultural conflict, trauma, isolation, aspiration and dilemmas in the life of immigrants. An identity is a daunting issue for culturally displaced an immigrant that keeps on impinging their very existence. In the host country they find themselves alien, uprooted and often feel nostalgic. This uprootedness brings cultural dislocation in the life of immigrants. Homi Bhabha's concept 'third space' negotiates the identities of the third world immigrants. The assimilation immigrant's and cultural adoption of the host country create a third space for them. My attempt is here, that is the third space where they enjoy their life, culture and ethnicity.

Keywords: *Disporic, transnational identities, identity crisis, immigrants, global*

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An identity is a daunting issue for culturally displaced an immigrant that keeps on impinging their very existence. People migrate in another country for the better lifestyle and to augment their standard of living. This betterment of life sometimes leaves them with bitter experience. In the host country they find themselves alien, uprooted and often feel nostalgic. This uprootedness brings cultural dislocation in the life of immigrants. This paper attempts to explain, the cultural dislocation resulted in alienation, cultural conflict, dilemmas of identity and trauma of cultural identities but the creation of transnational identities brings cultural diasporic connection and immigrants celebrates transnationalism. It's also traces out the cross cultural conflict, trauma, isolation, aspiration and dilemmas in the life of immigrants.

The transnational identities, cultural dislocation, multiculturalism all are the inseparable part of diasporas writing. Where issues concern east west encounter, the writers and critics try to negotiate the identities in the new diasporas world. Immigrants try to overcome the issue of identity. Jhumpa Lahiri's seminal novel 'The Namesake' attempts to build transnational identities in the globalised world. Homi Bhabha's concept 'third space' negotiates the identities of the third world immigrants. The migrants are now gaining their own status cultural identity in the world. Though migrants stay in alien country they do not disturb the dominant culture of host country. Immigrant's assimilation and cultural adoption of the host country create a third space for them. So, Jhumpa Lahiri's attempt to express the transnational identities is a positive concept in the minds of immigrants through the text 'The Namesake'. Now if we see in the globalised world travelling, shifting or

permanently settling down in the foreign land is not a bizarre idea. This process will be always on and on. People due to job, business, and education, personal, social, cultural and religious reasons settle down in new country. So here instead of lamenting on the many cultural diasporic issues person can find the celebration in the globalised world. Jhumpa Lahiri, being an Indian by descent, British by birth and American by immigration (Nayak 2006,p.26) celebrates multiculturalism in her own world, so here her character are also influenced with same idea which lead them into the 'bicultural' and in the world of 'bilingual'.

Many eminent critics have tried to define the concept 'culture'. They all come at the conclusion that a group of people sharing same race, ethnicity, life style, language, habits belong to the same culture. So when they are culturally dislocated it deprives them of the celebration of their own culture. It is one type of imposed culture on them in the host country. At the initial stage immigrants do not find any problem in host country. But when the time comes to celebrate own cultural festivals, demands of rights reminds them, that they are in the new land. There are many issues happen at airport, when Sikhs are forced to remove the turban. Western culture not allowed '*dhoti*' as dress code in the public. So it denies entry to Indians at many public places. Immigrants are racially, culturally, socially and ethnically discriminated in the west land. Definitely immigrants suffer a lot in the host country. This migration leads them in the cultural dislocation.

Every person in the world tries to nurture his own culture in his geographical land. In the migration, detachment from the geographical land put migrants in the vacuum of no identity. So the struggle begins for identity. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel 'The Namesake' is little ahead when characters are having double identity. They even create another foreign identity. This future foreign identity secures them in the globalised world. One side it secures them in the globalised world but another side they are purely away from their own people, culture, language etc. In the novel 'The Namesake', Ashima is a wife of Ashok, very alien in the America. She is very upset in the foreign country.

When Ashok goes in the university to teach, Ashima is totally alone in the house. She spends her time, reading Bengali journal and articles. In her entire life after marriage, first time she is alone in the house. In that loneliness, she is very nostalgic about her Indian family. Ashima thinks about her parents, brothers, friends, relatives and house in Calcutta. This nostalgic feeling has incorporated her mind. Ashima ventilates her thoughts many times in the America to her husband but she finds herself helpless and self-imposed exile in the USA. The couple come to America to make bright future. They even want their children also excel in the America.

Ashima's son Gogol, daughter Sonia and husband Ashok have tried to preserve their own Bengali culture in the host country. But within the few years this Bengali family assimilated in the western culture. Essentially, setting a new home in the foreign land is very difficult idea for them. They all were in trauma of cultural dislocation. Ashima constantly feels homesick in the three room apartment. She has many memories of her father's happy home. In the America Ashima always thinks about her parents that, what are they doing in an India? What time it is exactly in India? Such questions dig her mind in the USA. It is very uneasy for Ashima to stay in America. She has faced cultural, social and ideological conflict in the foreign land.

The idea of settling down in the foreign country can't be denied, so when families' shift first generations suffer most than the upcoming generation. The first generation is very new for the unknown land. They are not aware of the custom, religion, language of the host country. Ashima a traditional Indian woman, the news of her first pregnancy gave her unfathomable joy. Besides she is so afraid to give birth her child in the new land where they have no grandparents, no culture, and no native language. Ashima *"is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare"*. (p.6). She tries to convince her husband many times but negative reply shattered her dream to go to India. It is her thought, to raise her children in own native land. Ashima a pure Indian woman, for the sake of husband and family; agrees to stay in the America. In the alien country when

she gave birth baby boy Gogol. She waits for the letter, which is giving a right name to her child, is part her tradition. She waits many days for the letter but her grandmother's message never reached her. In the result her child got a Russian authors name 'Gogol'. This feeling tortured her throughout her life. That is trauma of cultural alienation. This depression leads her life in the darkness.

Ashima delivered a baby girl after the birth of Gogol. In her entire life, she tries to give Indian culture to her children. Though her children are growing in the foreign country, she did not force them for native culture. Before Ashima settles down in America, many Bengali communities are already a part of America. So it is very obvious that Ganguli family gets good Bengali friends. They have constant visit to Bengali family. Ganguli family also attend many Indian cultural programmes in the America. This meeting and attending programme are not sufficient for them to prevent from cultural dislocation. This cultural dislocation involves the loss of language, family ties, and family system. Jhumpa Lahiri very skilfully tries to trace out emigrants experience with humanistic approach. The Bengali group in America nurture Indian culture, practicing Indian custom and teaching native language to their offspring. There was a possible reason when Ashima avoids American culture because she has good Bengali friends around. The work of art moves in the different direction when her children assimilate in the American culture.

The second generation identity is a complicated issue; they neither relate them with Indians nor Americans. At home Gogol and Sonia have to follow Indian culture and values and outside the home American culture. They are totally merged with American life style. The new generation is not ready to adjust with own native culture. Gogol's parents expect his name 'Nikhil' in the kindergarten and 'Gogol' at home but Gogol is confused and denies the new name in childhood. "He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know. Who doesn't know him?" As a child, he associates a new name with a new identity. At the age of eleven years old, on class trip to cemetery he realises the uniqueness of his name. On his fourteenth birthday, he started hating his

name and resents being asked about it. In Calcutta visit Sonia and Gogol has a task to remember the names of all relatives. In the college party Gogol is not ready to introduce himself to Kim as Gogol, so he introduced his as a Nikhil. It gave a confidence to kiss her. The alien land is now not alien for children. Even they feel so disgusted when they visit India. Gogol's sexual relationship with his girlfriend Maxine is very common for him, but in India it not allowed before marriage. He has not disclosed his affair to his parents. He adopted his girlfriend Maxine's free lifestyle, loves listening English music, drinking wine and many others. Gogol has slept with Maxine many times before the marriage. Gogol is always welcomed by Maxine's parents. They never bother about Maxine's relationship. This free American thinking likes Gogol. Sonia's lifestyle is also very different than any other Indian girl. These all are the indications of assimilation in the American culture. The migrant communities expect their children should follow own culture, but it is very obvious that the children born and brought up in the western country will go with western culture. From their childhood what they have seen? What they have learned? In which atmosphere they grow up? These all leave great impact in the life. So knowingly or unknowing they follow the other culture. This thought is accurately applicable for Sonia and Gogol that they assimilated in the western culture. Now when the situation come define about identity, it is very difficult for them to segregate from Indian and American. Jhumpa Lahiri's implied meaning that, it is a common practice which leads all immigrants into the cultural dislocation. Author is conveying the message that, at one side assimilated immigrants are not ready to mingle with own people. There are many instances came in the novel when Gogol and Sonia not happy about their visit to India. The idea of double identity is clearly reflect in relation with Gogol. He is a true representative of transnational identities.

Gogol Indian by culture and American by birth. These are the two identities troubled him. It is easily noticeable that, he is neither pure Indian nor American. He is not comfortable with his upbringing. To prove that, he is little bit different than other migrants, at the beginning of the college adopted

architecture as subject. He never wants to study Chemistry, Biology and engineering like other migrants. Gogol's all activities and decision show that he doesn't want to be like other migrants. He just follows American life style and culture.

These all Gogol's activities are directed towards his past. Confusion about past traumatise him at every seconds of life. Gogol wholeheartedly denies his past and tries to stay in present. The present is referred here for American culture. When he is not comfortable with his name Gogol it is replaced it with Nikhil. The idea of changing new name suggests that he doesn't belong to Indian culture. But the deep study reflects that this new name 'Nikhil' is also Indian. The namesake brought him in to the past. Though Gogol involved or assimilated in the host country's culture his loving, caring nature in his blood. After the death of his father, as Indian dutiful son he takes all responsibilities of the house on his shoulder. It is a rebirth of Indian values; though Gogol is in the western land but he is very conscious of his responsibility towards his sister and mother. He even rejects his girlfriend Maxine. These entire incidences bring the conclusion that at one side totally assimilated child, again holds his own nationalism. At a one time he overcome the national boundaries and acquired transnational identities. Avtar Brah says:

'The word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation and this is certainly a very important aspect of migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure'. (Brah, p.193)

The novel mostly deals with Bengali culture in American land. Immigrants always teach their children own culture and language. Ashok is pure Indian male at home. Ashok and Bengali families celebrates all Indian festivals in host country. After the birth of Gogol, 'annaprashan' ceremony was conducted. In the ceremony baby child is feed with rice first time. This couple

has attended many musical concerts based on Bengali culture. Even they send their children to the Bengali language class. In house Ashima and Ashok try to give Bengali culture. Gogol has always observed, when there is any death in the family his father shaved his head. That is pure culture they were nurturing on the foreign land. The Bengali couple is found their happiness in children wish. So when child grow they followed American culture. The idea of other culture troubled the couple for very few days. Then everybody assimilated in the American culture. Ashima and Gogol both are celebrating Christmas festivals at home. In that milieu the families are culturally dislocated. Homi Bhabha's idea of 'third space' gives immigrants a new identity. They can relate themselves with new world. The third world immigrants enter in the world of multiculturalism. This attitude leads the leader of the novel in the transnational identities. The first generation couple is representative of emigrants' Bengali group. The second generation is happy with 'bicultural, bilingual' world. Emigrant's children realized that their identity is definitely from their own cultural roots but it is necessary to stay happy in the multicultural world with transnational identities. The assimilation in the American culture is for personal growth. Sonia's decision to get married with Ben and Moushumi's attitude is not to follow any culture of country. So the second generation is going purely in favour of multiculturalism where everybody is happy. No culture is superior or inferior. They give equal importance to all culture. The second generation is the right explorer of 'Transnational Identities' in world.

At the end of the novel alienated lady Ashima herself agrees to spend six months in India and remaining six months in America. It is her decision balancing the entire world. Jhumpa Lahiri has pointed out Ashima's accepted two identities Indian as well as American. She become an integrate part of transnational identities. Gogol also engages in a constant struggle to remain loyal to both worlds.

In concluding Jhumpa Lahiri has clearly showed the picture of cultural dislocation. Her intention is not to make inferior under the title dislocation. She guide's to accept or become the part of transnational identities. This novel is a

torch bearer for all diasporic writing, whose main aim to settle down or search own home. Transnational identities are creating a home for every emigrant in the globe. This is a creation of transnational global identities.

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