

**PORTRAYAL OF DIASPORIC DILEMMA IN BHARATHI
MUKHERJEE'S JASMINE AND JHUMPALAHIRI'S THE NAMESAKE:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

ASHWIN CHOUHAN

RGU-IIIT BASAR, MUDHOLE, ADILABAD,
TELANGANA, INDIA.

Abstract

One of the most significant consequences of globalization is the mass migration of people from the native land to an alien land. This mass migration leads to establishment of diasporic communities in a foreign land. The immigrants feel homeless and alienated in the foreign land; this involves pain, alienation, identity crisis and other feelings. The experiences of the immigrants in JhumpaLahiri's The Namesake and Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine, reveal that the migrants are searching for Home in an alien land to find meaning and belonging in their diasporic situation, with an incorporation of their Indian roots and the alien culture. The works of the authors unfold various issues related to cultural transformations in their identities, new possibilities, new ways of thinking and complex experiences faced in the process of their assimilation in a new country. The paper analyses the efforts of the diasorans who undergo a series of diasporic experiences both in India and abroad.

Key words: *Globalization, Alien, Native, Migration, Diaspora, identity crisis, uncultured, dilemma.*

**PORTRAYAL OF DIASPORIC DILEMMA IN BHARATHI
MUKHERJEE'S JASMINE AND JHUMPALAHIRI'S THE NAMESAKE:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

- ASHWIN CHOUHAN

Why Diasporic Longing?

The immigrants are haunted by some sense of loss and agonize over the home left behind; and they create their writings with elements of imagination. The impact of diasporic experiences on their psyche depends on their levels of belonging in a foreign land. When these experiences are expressed in literature, there emerge writers who search for their roots in the lands of their ancestors. The diasporic writing depicts the experience of encountering a different mode of living strange to them, and the cultural adaptation is the only solution; and this brings in cultural shock. Immigrants are expected to embrace the culture and language of the host land. The attempt is further complicated by the multicultural confusion where immigrants wish to stay as permanent residents, but there is failure on the emotional front. Thus the migrant caught between two or more separate cultures, lives on a borderland. They carry their essential strangeness within. They can neither forget the culture they have come from, nor can they fully assimilate into the culture they have adopted because they cannot erase their identities totally. They start searching for roots in an alien land to find meaning and they aspire to belong to something in their diasporic situation. Regardless of location, ethnic origin, age or gender, immigrants in Europe and the world overall have to struggle with the tension between alien/native culture and identity

The Namesake and Jasmine:

The novels, *Jasmine* and *the namesake*, both depict stories of the character's diasporic dilemmas in alien lands. At first it might seem that the stories are very similar in showing the struggles of adapting to America and learning the ways of life, but a closer

examination of the characters reveal that the identities and the problems with identities that the protagonists have are fairly different. In Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, we can see mainly only one character whose identity can be studied from the immigrant perspective. Jasmine immigrates to America by herself and the novel shows her solitary journey in America. Then again, *the namesake* begins as a story of a married couple settling to America. In the course of the novel, the novel concentrates on examining and showing the difficulties the children of immigrants face in America. In *the namesake* it is not only one person settling to a new country, but an entire family who faces the problems of identity.

Analyses of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*:

The story of *Jasmine* is the story of dislocation, nostalgia, longing for original home and re establishing connections with its past through reminiscences. This novel traces the story of the eponymous heroine in her American odyssey. Jasmine, the Hindu widow, who leaves India for the US after her husband's death in a terrorist attack, is found to undergo a cross-cultural metamorphosis in her fractured life as an immigrant. The opening chapter of the novel starts with the words: Lifetimes ago, under a banyan tree in the village of Hasnapur, an astrologer cupped his ears – his satellite dish to the stars – and foretold my widowhood and exile. I was only seven then, fast and venturesome, scabrous-armed from leaves and thorns.

The astrologer goes on to allude to the story of Behula from Hindu mythology. Here Bharati Mukherjee is not just eroticizing the content of the novel through these allusions. She is defining the mental space of her seven-year-old protagonist. Jasmine's psyche is formed by the stories that her mother recited to her of "the holiest sages", the "third eye" they develop in the middle of their foreheads to peer "out into invisible worlds" and their likes. No doubt Jasmine's mind is spiritually inclined even though she challenges and revolts against customs and traditions. Jasmine's decision to fulfill her husband's aspiration of going to America is guided by her spiritual beliefs as she acknowledges: I had not given even a day's survival in America a single thought. This was the place I had chosen to die, on the first day if possible. I would land, find Tampah, walking there if necessary, find the

college grounds and check it against the brochure photo. Under the very tree where two Indian boys and two Chinese girls were pictured, smiling, I had dreamed of arranging the suit and twigs. The vision of lying serene on a bed of fire under palm trees in my white sari had motivated all the weeks of sleepless half-starved passage.

The village girl from Hasnapur survives in America. She does not immolate herself because after landing on the Gulf Coast of Florida she is raped, and in turn she murders her rapist. This defiles her mission and death is denied her: "Lord Yama, who had wanted me, and whom I'd flirted with on the long trip over, had now deserted me. The transformation of Jasmine from the archetype of Sati to that of Goddess Kali as she towers over the man who violated her chastity, with blood oozing out from her sliced tongue, is a dramatic and violent imagery of self-assertion. Jasmine's "decision to kill herself first, is a decision of a woman who lives for her deceased husband but the woman who kills Half-Face is prompted by her will to live to continue her life" Jasmine's journey from Punjab, through Florida, New York, and Iowa, to California depicts the various stages of her exilic condition. But these exilic locations are also representation of the spiritual states of her mind. Jasmine assumes different mythological avatars in her various exilic states: "I have been reborn several times" She shuttles between identities: "Jyoti [was] the Sati-Goddess, Jasmine lives for the future". Jasmine emancipates herself from being an illegal immigrant into a self-assured American woman but her spiritual call comes from India: "I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness".

Jasmine is the most congruent exploration of Bharati into the dilemma of belonging and longing. Bharati's depiction of Jasmine throughout the novel traversing different alien nations is superb. She highlights Jasmine's alienation from her culture due to her constantly shifting identities. She longs for the safe confine of her original home in India. Temporarily Jasmine does acquire a foreign identity but it is fake. Her past : " is fully alive like a seed in the soil, awaiting the season of warmth and growth to bring it to germination".

Analyses of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name Sake*

Lahiri's "The Namesake" is an example of the Contemporary immigrant narration which doesn't place the idea of an American Drama at the centre of the story, but rather

positions the immigrant ethnic family within a community of cosmopolitan travelers. She chronicles dislocation and social unease in a fresh manner. She blends the two cultures and creates inner turmoil for many of her characters who struggle to balance the Western and Indian influence. Her novels are more about the co-operation of culture than about confrontation. Stereotypes are examined from a number of angles and deconstructed from both sides- Indian and American

The novel explores the themes of expatriate painful experiences and cultural dilemmas of the first and second generation Indian immigrants. Loneliness is one of the burning problems of the expatriate community in the nation of their choice. In this novel *The Name Sake*, the Bengali Indian couple Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli experience this issue in plenty on landing in Cambridge or Massachusetts; of the two, it's the wife who undergoes this trauma more than the husband.

In America, Ashima cannot imagine giving birth to a child in the hospital without being surrounded and cared by her mother, grandmother or aunt. Lying in the hospital, she wonders, "If she is the only Indian person in the hospital..." (3). She feels lonely. Most of the time, she remains lost in the memories of Calcutta, her home town, thinking of the activities going there by just to get rid of American culture.

Having obtained a Ph.D. in Boston, Ashoke has been researching in the field of fiberoptics. Lahiri portrays the emotions of Ashima and Gogol Ganguly. Gogol is the first born in Ashoke's family. After the birth of her son Gogol, she longs to go back to Calcutta and raise her child there in the company of the caring and loving family members but decides to stay back for Ashoke's Sake. It takes at least two years for Ashima to cope up with the American culture.

Though Ashoke had been there for years, he is totally ignorant about American norms and rules applied for a newly born child. Unlike in India, a newly born child needs a name to be given in the hospital. This compels Ashoke to name his son, Gogol, the name of the famous Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. Ashoke's miraculous escape in an Indian train crash is credited to a bulky copy of a Nikolai Gogol novel so that the parents decide that Gogol is the

perfect name for their first born boy; not knowing the consequences that their son is going to face later in life and eventually leading up to his identity crisis.

Conclusion:

By analyzing these two novels, one can understand how the first generation immigrant suffers in an alien country. Thus both Bharati and Lahiri vociferously project the rupture of social association of the individuals with their native land and due to migration with their new 'exile' home. The individuals suffer psychologically due to forfeit of social relationships and with no place to fall back upon.

WORKS CITED

Primary sources:

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. HarperCollins Publishers. India. 2003.

Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*. New Delhi; Penguin Books: India, 1990

Lahiri, Jhumpa. 2011. *the namesake*. [2003]. Fourth Estate: London. Press

Secondary sources:

Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. Oxon: Routledge Classics.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1996. "Culture's In-Between". In *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Ed Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Higher Education &
Research Society