

AHIMSA AND GOGOL IN THE FICTION OF JHUMPA LAHIRI'S THE NAMESAKE

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The novel *The Namesake* deals with not only geographical extension but also the troubled complexity of a particular nexus of space and time in postcolonial, postmodern time. By crossing and re-crossing multiple borders of language, history, race, time and culture diasporans challenge the absolutism of singular place. They relocate the trajectory of their identity in the multiplicity of plural interrelationships. Edward Casey's "Non-limited locality", in other words, does not mean the disappearance of borders, but rather it suggests the complexity and changing meanings of place between and beyond various outside and inside borders. Owing to their shared experience of mobility, Asian diaspora fiction in America expresses a paradoxical attitude towards the question of borders. For them, borders become barriers as well as bridges. This paradox indicates a tension between different cultural localities. It is a kind of spatial-cultural multiplicity that both challenges and defines diasporans self-conception. For diasporans, the emotional, cultural and psychological identification is often related to difference, distance and dislocation. Diasporans, therefore, have to redefine their sense of place against the grain of primordial limitations. They need to reconstitute their identities outside to over-determined discourse of closure that excludes displaced differences from the landscape of locality.

Here in that chapter there is a portrayal of the two leading characters of *The Name sake*, Gogol and Ashima. This novel constantly focuses on the contrasting experiences of the two generation of expatriates Ashoke and Ashima, who do not attempt to or are no inclined towards getting Americanized while Gogol and Sonia constantly face the weed to belong. *Namesake* specially shows a struggle of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli two first generation immigrant from west Bengal, India to the united states and their American born children Gogol and Sonia.

Gogol's mother Ashima is the heart of the story. While the other Characters are so significant, Ashima is one who feels. So, she is the only character through which we really come to understand the feeling of alienation, culture Ashok and home sickness they many immigrant fitel.

In Ashima's case culture means "tradition" However, Lahari through the Character of Ashima in the novel shows how such roles can be read as a source of empowerment when translated into the contest of middle class immigrant life in America. Ashima's life in America is a whole different life style than her life in India. Having come from India to America for her husband's career having children in America and having to cop with the news of her mother's illness and father's death from distant homeland, Ashima Ganguli proves to be a woman of strength. The narrator tells us,

"One more than one occasion (Ashoke) has come home from the university to find her morose in bed, rereading her parent's letter."

Ashima is isolated in Cambridge, with no friends of her own. In Calcutta, She would have had the company of siblings, parents, cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles, but now they are thousands of miles away. Ashima is the binding factor that keeps the family together. when her children leaves the Indian culture and more towards the American lifestyle, it must be hard to watch. She was much depressed because they know nothing of Bangali tradition.

In the name sake, Ashima weds Ashoke Ganguli in an arranged marriage, not even knowing his name when first met him in the betrothal. The adjustment for Ashima is over whelming as a new wife in a new country. After the birth of Sonia and Gogol, motherhood is a very challenging issue for Ashima. Ahima's loneliness after the birth of her son Gogol is realistically portrayed.

But nothing feels normal to America. for the past eighteen month, ever since she's arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all, it's not so much the pain, which she knows. somehow, she will survive it's the consequence motherhood in a foreign land she had been astonished by her body's ability to make life exactly as her mother and grandmother and all her great grandmothers had done. That it was happening so far from have unmonitored and unobserved by these she loved had made it more miraculous still, but she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one where she knows too little, where life seems so tentative and spare.

The difficulties Ashima and Ashoke face in America are best articulated. by Ashima herself when she says "for being a foreigner, Ashima is bringing to realize, is sort" of lifelong pregnancy a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts (49) This sentiment is express early in the work and makes the reader aware that life in America will be a constant struggle. She remarks that in India a mother giving birth would be surrounded by family and friends. The atmosphere in India then, is much more intimate than in Cambridge, where everything feels less personal and "colder" than back home.

Ashima desperately to recreate Calcutta life in the united State to maintain the thing she invites all the émigrés which hold them together when they move apart and have families. Friendship is yet another way they can try to recreate their Calcutta homes over in the states. Lahire portrays the middle aged woman finally living life without the demands of a family, without the need to conform to a fixed schedule which was always based on the needs of the other members of the family. She lives life without too many rules, without do's and don'ts being imposed on her.

Now she does the laundry once a month. She no longer dusts, or notices dust, for that matter. She eats on the sofa, in front of the television, simple meals of buttered toast and dal, a single pot lasting her a week and an omelets to go with it if she has energy to bother. Sometimes she eats the way Sonia and Gogol do when they visit, standing in front of the refrigerator, not bothering to heat up the food in the oven or to put it on a plate. (NS 162)".

After the death of her husband Ashoke, living alone, Ashima finally learns to cope. As the children move away, she decides to spend six months every year in India. In a way, she will be "True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere" (NS 276).

Another Major Character in the name sake is Gogol. American born Gogol the son of Indian immigrants, wants to fit on among his fellow New Yorkers despite his family on willingness to let go of their traditional ways. Gogol is confused about much related to his

identity and sense of being in the word. Gogol thinks that his identity is American and has not trace of Bangali roots. At the same time, his identity is one that is divergent from his parents.

Gogol is always haunted by his name. Through Gogol constantly wonders about the reason for having such an unusual name, his father harbors no doubts about the appropriateness of the name. To him Gogol was his savior because it was a volume of Gogol's writing that he was reading when the terrible train accident took place 209 km. away from Calcutta, and of it was the book and a few pages that he clutched in his hands which saved him people around him were dead and over he was almost left behind by the search party.

But the lantern light lingered just long enough for Ashoke to raise his hand, a gesture that he believed would consume the small fragment of life in him. He was still clutching a single page of the overcoat crumpled tightly in his fist, and when he raised his hand the wad of paper dropped from his fingers that he heard a voice cry at the fellow by that book I saw him move (NS 18).

However time and again he wishes that it has been a more acceptable name like Leo or Anton or even Alexander which could have been shortened to Alax. His name "Gogol" sounds ludicrous to his ease lacking dignity or gravity" (NS 76).

And it occurs to him that no one he knows in the world in Russia or India or America or anywhere shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake (NS 78).

When Gogol listens to the details of Nikolai's life he is both surprised and shocked. Nikolai's friendship with Pushkin, his dismay at the reception of the comic play, the government Inspector, his frustration, his morbidity, his melancholia, his depression, the steady decline into madness, his slow death by starvation, all these come as a surprise to Gogol. After hearing the details of the author's life, Gogol's attitude to his name undergoes a sea change.

As Gogol progresses through high school, he resents his name more and more for its oddness when he informs his parents that he wishes to change his name, his father objects the idea but reluctantly agrees.

He admits to the judge that he wants to change his name because he has always lasted it and as he walks he feels like a prisoner whose walls and a free become thin. Of course he realizes that everyone he knows in the world still calls him Gogol. He is aware that his parents and their friends, and his own friends from high school will never call him anything but Gogol. (NS 103).

Through *The Namesake* Lahiri is commenting on how the human condition is heavily influenced by culture and one's sense of identity. Throughout the book, we definitely see the implications of Gogol's identity. As a child starting school, he preferred to be called "Gogol" but in his adolescent years, this would be a decision that haunts him for the latter half of his life, but after the death of his father his identity was sort of reshaped, when he seemingly had a revelation and remembered the death of his grandfather and his father's head as shaving as a sign of respect. He honored this and shaved his head, as well. Ashoke's death triggered something in Gogol, and made him appreciate family more, and even enough to prompt him to read the book that his father gave him.

Work cited

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2003. Print.