

Identity Crisis and Different Feministic Approach in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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Abstract: The Indian feministic fiction is mostly related to the pessimism, negative approach and the predicament of women in the male dominated society. Women are shown as a kind of puppet in the patriarchal society. She suffers from identity crisis. This paper is going to help to understand Indian female differently, her journey from pessimism to optimism and her survival in alienation. The paper will through light on how Jhumpa Lahiri presented Indian women as a force to overcome all sorts of troubles and not as a victim only. The Namesake presents story of a typical Indian woman who leaves her homeland with her husband to settle in a completely distinct environment. The paper helps to understand the mentality of those Indian women who leave their home in search of better future and the protagonist of the novel is the representative of all their sufferings and at the same time a role model to know how to overcome all those troubles.

Key Words: Feminism, Identity, Pessimism, Optimism, Homeland, Survival, Alienation.

Introduction

Born in London and raised in Rhode Island Lahiri is a Pulitzer Prize winner for her short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*. In the novel *The Namesake* Jhumpa Lahiri has given mutual expression to the personal experience. The Namesake is about a Bengali family who moves from Bengal to America. The novel opens with the news of a new born baby and Ashima's desperate wait for the letter of her grandmother carrying baby's name. Letters came from all the relatives but from Ashima's grandmother. In Bengali culture it is the grandmother who selects the name for the new born baby. In haste and to get the name registered in the hospital Ashok names the baby after his favorite Russian writer Nikolai Gogol and it upsets Ashima. Lahiri presents the predicament of both the first and second generation immigrants. Ashima is the central female character of the novel and has become the victim of identity crisis. Her husband Ashok's dream fulfilled when he reaches America but Ashima is the one who lives in alienation and dislocation. For the first year she remains all alone in the house where she has no one to interact with. She feels America is, "a place most people enter either to suffer or to die" (Lahiri, *The Namesake*, 4).

Ashima always feel homesick for their motherland and now and then try to connect their lives by paying visits to Calcutta. Their visit to their homeland is seen as a big change in their personality and behaviour as noticed by their children:

And then the frosted doors slide open and once again they are officially there, no longer in transit, swallowed by hugs and kisses and pinched cheeks and smiles... Gogol and Sonia know these people, but they do not feel as close to them as their parents do. Within minutes, before their eyes Ashoke and Ashima slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles wider, revealing a confidence Gogol and Sonia never see on Pemberton road. (**Lahiri**, *The Namesake*, 81-82)

Ashima found American life a kind of exile, away from home and relatives. Being herself from an immigrant family Jhumpa Lahiri feels for all those who fall in the same field. Jhumpa belongs to the second generation immigrants but she has to follow the old ways like the first generation immigrants who always want to maintain the sanctity of their culture and ways of living. When Gogol and Sonia left home to settle their own lives Ashima once again felt lonely. Lahiri through these characters help us to understand the complicity and existential dilemma of the immigrants in the new land settlements. Ashima felt the same complicity and loneliness away from home:

Being a foreigner is a sort of life-long pregnancy-A Perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an on-going responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding like pregnancy being a foreigner Ashima believes, is something that elicit the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect (**Lahiri**, *The Namesake* 49-50).

Ashima has been tolerant to displacement and pregnancy in displacement despite her silent rebellions that never go beyond an idea. She is aware of the fact that Bengali identity is not equipped enough to wage war against the displacement and the hegemonic values of the country. "Who had forsaken everything to come to this country, to make a better life, only to die here?" is her another silent rebellion that passes through her mind when Ashoke is dead of a heart attack in a remote part of the country (**Lahiri**, *The Namesake* 180).

Ashima witnesses a sea of change in her life. She witnesses cultural dislocation, change in food habits and adoption of American way of life by her children. Her children being the

second generation immigrants completely wants to follow the American way of life but their parents wants them to follow the ethos of Indian culture and in maintaining the balance between the children becomes the victim of identity crisis.

Ashima represents all those Indian women who willingly or unwillingly leave their homes to settle in the foreign lands with completely different environment, people and culture. And unfortunately suffer with cultural dislocation and alienation. But unlike other female characters Ashima does not let these problems to destroy her and send her to darkness or despair. She thinks differently and accepts America and its culture as the truth of her life.

Like all mothers she cares about the life of her children. At one hand she feels excited about the marriage of her daughter Sonia and has a sigh of relief that she has taken the right decision. But regrets her own decision of introducing her son to Maushami, who destroyed life of her son Gogol. After the death of her husband Ashok she decided to spent six months in America and six months in India, shows her keeping balance between her first and second home.

Lahiri unlike other Indian female novelists does not let her female characters into absolute darkness and despair but leads them towards optimism, light and hope.

Conclusion:

Lahiri gives new hope to the women and their approach of life in the new land settlements. Her approach is optimistic and hopeful and Ashima is the representative of it. Identity crisis has remained a core issue with migration and migrants. But the important thing is our approach towards the problem. It has a bad psychological impact but with positive approach it can be overcome.

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