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**A CONFLUENCE OF CROSS CULTURAL CONFLICTS  
 IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S SELECT WORKS**

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**Abstract:**

*Man is forced to leave the homeland in quest for a better life. This migration is either temporary or permanent or voluntary which always gives painful experiences in the adopted country. The migrants struggle a lot to maintain their identities in the new land. The strong root of Indian culture and tradition never allows the first generation immigrants to mix well with the new culture. Lahiri shows her own identity crisis in the novel "The Namesake" through Gogol. She is the mouthpiece of second generation Indian Diasporas. Most of her stories focus on the emotional struggles of Indian immigrants in the foreign system. The immigrants face various problems at different stages such as loss of identity, dual personalities, familial love, feeling insecure, and preservation of their culture. Lahiri's immigrants are physically and psychologically displaced that is, they are physically in the host land and psychologically in the home land. First generation immigrants maintain their own identities and keep struggle for their cultural identity whereas second generation swing between the two cultures - one is the land where they live and other is parents and also the second generation seek towards self-recognition and self-identification.*

**Key words:** *Dislocation, immigrants, emotional struggle, host land, cultural identity.*

**Introduction**

Jhumpa Lahiri, a daughter of immigrant parents of India, her experiences as a growing child in America are the background of her writings. Lahiri portrays the life of both first generation and second generation Indian immigrants. Her characters predominantly belong to Indian origin, especially of Bengali origin. The world is not an imaginative one but they are real states and countries. Lahiri, a second generation of Indian immigrant did not get any answer for her quest for identity. The second generation immigrants in America experienced the quest for identity. They feel fragmented between the culture of their parents' country and the country of their birth.

The first generation immigrants from India struggle to live comfortably in the strange land. They are wavering to adopt the new cultures, new food, and new dress codes. Her stories mainly focus on the nostalgic impulses, cultural dilemmas, identity crisis, rootlessness, in betweenness. India's culture is strengthened by its ceremonies, rituals, pujas etc. The first generation immigrants really find it difficult to get on easily with the people in America and in a strange backdrop find themselves alienated. Lahiri explains,

It's hard to have parents who consider another place 'home' even after living abroad for thirty years. India is home for them... India was different our extended family offered real connection. Yet her familial ties to India were not enough to make India 'home' for Lahiri- I didn't grow up there. I wasn't a part of things. We were doting at a world that was never fully with us.

The second generation immigrants find themselves stranger to both of the countries. In India they

are considered Americans and in America they are Indians. They find themselves with the two conflicting cultures. Lahiri belongs to the second generation whose quest for identity never seems to end. She portrays the life of the Indian immigrants, their life mean living in forced exile which leads to identity confusion and problems of identification in the backdrop of alienation from 'home' land and 'new' land.

In her debut novel *The Namesake*, she reflects her own experiences. It deals with the story of cultural gap between the Indian parents and American born children in different ways. In the words of Raju Barthukar, "A transitional of a subjectivised experiences, Lahiri, "The Namesake" is a narrative which assesses the nuances of American societal life and the attempts by the immigrants to the place the same at par with their native or root culture.

Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli, Indian immigrants of U.S. follow their native culture in the new homeland. They want to bring up their children Gogol and Sonia to follow their cultures of their ancestors. They try to preserve their cultures in the way to celebrate rituals, religious ceremonies, festivals in their 'home' in the adopted country. Ashima usually follows the tradition by wearing saree with sleeves, making food, prayers. She always keeps in touch with her family by posting letters and also eagerly expects the reply from her family. Now-a-days the communications are easily shared with the help of technologies like Skype, Twitter and social networking. Though the communication is very easy among the immigrants and their relatives, their inner conflicts cannot be easily erased. They easily get all things in the new land but their participation in the family is only artificial.

When Ashima is in the family way, she feels alienated. In India, everyone of the family surrounded to take care the woman who is carrying. On contrary, in America only her husband is at her side, no one of her Indian origin is at her side. "A country where she is related to No one, where she knows so little and where life seems so tentative and spare."

In her pregnancy period, she has sleepless nights, she couldn't bear the pain in back, she often visits the bathroom, she feels very discomfort, she is often surprised by her mother and grandmother. She feels that, she is far from her home. No one monitors her during her pregnancy. For it was one thing to be pregnant, to suffer the queasy mornings in bed, the sleepless nights the dull throbbing in her back, the countless visits to the bathroom. Throughout the experience, in spite of her growing discomfort, 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 home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved, had made it more miraculous still.

Ashima and Ashoke feed their tradition into their children. Ashoke adapts himself less warily to the American culture. His memories of life in India are less peaceful and remind him of the terrible train accident that left him with physically and emotionally shattered. Ashoke settles for the name Gogol, after the famous Russian writer whose book of short stories helped to save his life during the train accident. He impulsively connects with the name of the Russian author Nikolai Gogol. The phenomenal breakout in an Indian train crash for which Gogol is the perfect name for their first born boy. Here, it starts the problem evolving the boy Gogol grows adult and becomes more enthusiastic to fit in with his peers, the boy begins to his name, it is neither American nor Indian, even Bengali.

Ashima is horrified about the field trip of Gogol, her son. Only in America, the children are taken to cemeteries in the name of art. But in India, the graveyard is the most forbidden place; children are not allowed to go to the burning ghats. As Ashima says, "Death is not a past time", her voice rising steadily, "not a place to make paintings" which clearly shows the cultural differences between India and U.S.A. Ashoke and Ashima embrace their past in India but their children Gogol and Sonia are more comfortable with the American culture. As Gogol grows, the fascination of his father on the Russian author Nikolai Gogol, soon he changes his name to Nikhil. Name provides an identity to an individual and Gogol is constantly reminded about the uniqueness of his name "He's come to hate questions pertaining to his name, hates having to constantly explain. He hates having to tell people that it doesn't mean anything an Indian ...

he hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that is neither Indian nor American" (*The Namesake* 75-76).

Gogol does not understand the emotional significance of the name. He does not like his name which is neither Indian nor American. He wants to be identified as an American but does not like an American with this name. His problem of the name symbolizes the problem of identity. Though he is a citizen and wants to live as an American in the American society. But no one is viewed him as an American. He experiences a feeling of in betweenness. The boy is fragmented and broken by the 'sand-wich' culture. This novel is a replica of the life of Lahiri. Lahiri proves this through the characters of Ashima, Ashoke and Gogol respectively.

Lahiri's another novel *The Lowland*, her latest one in 2013, which investigates the lives of Bengali immigrants, who are a middle-class educated couple Subhash and Gauri to seek higher education coming to America. One can also say it is by the stroke of their fate to emigrate from India to America. In this novel one can see, the subaltern voices of a middle-class man, named Udayan who obsessed by a sense of equality and justice. So he joined in the Naxalite Movement in 1960's and against the government. Finally he is put to death by the police. His wife Gauri who is in the family way, becomes a widow. The sibling of Udayan, Subash is shocked by the news of his brother's death. Subash leaves for Calcutta there he meets Gauri in a white sari remains isolated in the house. The widows are treated as aliens. The old customs in India marginalize the widows and treated them as sinners and how much the woman educated is no matter at all in those days. "Of mourning and seclusion inside the house. The vermilion was washed clean from her hair, the iron bangle removed from her wrist. The absence of these ornaments marked her as a widow, she was twenty three years old" (*The Lowland*).

Subash does not like this custom. He decided to marry Gauri. But his parents are not ready for this. To raise his brother's child, in the place of Udayan, he takes Gauri to the U.S and starts a new journey of life. Gauri gives birth to a female child, Bela. Subash treats Bela as her daughter. Though Gauri accepts to marry Subash, her past life with Udayan haunts her mind. She does not play her role as a good mother to Bela. She wants to continue her studies on philosophy. She treats her daughter Bela, a kind of burden after Udayan's death. Gauri does not want to be a mere housewife like a slave to perform the duties of the house from the morning to the night. She wants to explore her desires, wishes and ideas. She wants to search her identity through her job, a teacher in Frankfurt school. She establishes her areas of specialization in German idealism. She takes her own way and able to reach what always she wants to be and wants to have.

Jhumpa Lahiri's short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* depicts the experiences of both first and second generation Indian immigrants and also about East- West encounter, her experience of dislocation and identity crisis. The story, *A Temporary matter* the first of its collection is the story of Shoba and Shukumar, a young married couple, are American citizens of Indian origin. They live in Boston for three years. In this story, Lahiri explores the idea of marriage, that is, an arranged marriage is one of the most important of cultural practices of India. They lost their first child during its birth itself. Shoba has changed and stayed out of the household matters. Her love and care towards Shukumar also dies down after the incident. The announcement of five days power cut for one hour due to storm, which break their confusions and silence. They spend their time together, in a power cut. Shoba gives an idea to play 'confession game' during this time. Each evening in darkness will confess one event of their lives to each other. This unexpected power cut give them a chance to come closer and open up their mind each other. Shoba turns nostalgic and says, "Sometimes the current disappears for hours at a stretch. I once had to attend an entire rice ceremony in the dark. The baby just cried and cried. It must have been so hot." And she also says, "I remember during power failures at my grandmother's house, we all had to say something. A little poem, A joke, A fact about the world."

They start to reveal their untold facts to each other. Shukumar all days looks forward to the power failure. They confess each other's guilt and their forgotten love is rejuvenated through their confessions.

Shukumar at last reveals the sex of their dead child by telling that it is actually a boy. Shoba's final confession is burst into tears and she never wants to know the details of their dead child. Thus the title justifies that many aspects of every one's sufferings and sorrows in the life only to be temporary. Thus the crisis of their married life is broken by the power failure. Every one's silence is broken only by their confessions and ended up with one's confessions.

In her short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* has the different aspects of Indian immigrants as in the case of most of Lahiri's characters. The title story "*Interpreter of Maladies*" deals with the experience of an Indian man with the Indian American family. Mr. Kapasi, an interpreter of diseases to a foreign doctor in Orissa. He is hired as a guide to Mr. Das family, for their tour of Konark. Mr. and Mrs. Das come to India along with the three children. Mrs. Das comes to know the job of Kapasi, an interpreter for Gujarathi patients. She wants to reveal her life's secret to Mr. Kapasi. She seeks a remedy for her mental pain from Mr. Kapasi. Mrs. Das is not true to her husband, because one of their son is actually not to Mr. Das's but the friend of Das. She opens the eight years secret to Mr. Kapasi. She further tells him, "For eight years I have not been able to express this to anybody not to friends, certainly not to Raj".

Lahiri shows most of the emigrants of India obsessed with this kind of maladies. They could not completely change themselves as Americans in their thoughts and feelings. This cultural dilemma is the characteristic of Indians settled in abroad. The typical Indian Mr. Kapasi could not understand the difficulties of two cultures. He then asks her, "Is it really pain you feel Mrs. Das or it is guilt?". He fails to give any remedy to her. He is only an interpreter of language not of guilt.

In this collection, the story, "*Mrs. Sen's*" is one of the most moving story. Mrs. Sen settled in America. She is always attached to India, maintains her Indian identity at the same time adapts to American culture. She lives as a typical Indian wife in a foreign culture. She has no friends, feels isolated in the strange land. To avoid her loneliness, she starts her carrier as a baby sitter. She loves to buy fresh fishes and loves to cook for her husband as typical Indian women. She is often irritated by the American life. She feels to lose her uniqueness. Her interest is to buy fish and cook it which remembers her home land. She does not want to give up the idea of her home land. M.J. Samson says, "acceptance and adaptation of basic elements of the local culture, its language and its life style

### Conclusion

Lahiri's stories examine multiple identities and diasporic experience, alienation in the lives of immigrants. She portrays the life of Indian migrants to America. Mostly revolving on her own experiences of her visits to Calcutta, Lahiri's stories are scattered with the details of traditional Bengali names, food, cuisine, and attire. Her stories give the readers a glimpse of the large submerged terrain of cross-culturalism. She is able to change cultural perspective with the same efficiency with which a bilingual speaker does code switching. Most of the characters of her book under discussion play out a simultaneous existence in two cultures. The immigrants of her stories face varied problems at different stages on the need to their assimilation of a new culture. Most of them suffer different kinds of losses of identities, familial love, economic security, social status or feeling insecure about the preservation of their own religion. In all the stories the characters face some sort of maladies. Nearly all of the characters are defined by isolation of some form or other. In their isolation, these characters feel that they are missing something vital to their identities. As Kadam Mansing says, "Lahiri deals with a multicultural society both from 'inside' and 'outside', seeking to find her native identity as well as a new identity in the adopted country. This brings a clash of culture and dislocation and displacement." Her stories are tried to establish the characters' individual identities in a new milieu experiencing the sense of displacement, alienation and isolation.

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