

THEME OF IDENTITY CRISIS AS PORTRAYED IN THE LITERARY WORKS OF JHUMPA LAHIRI AND CHITRA BANERJEE

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Abstract:

This research study examines how identity crises in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are impacted by diaspora. For this purpose, the researcher has cited both of these writers' books and collections of short stories. Divakaruni, a writer from the diaspora, persuades western individualism to accept her point of view, which gives women freedom and scope while rejecting traditional Indian culture. Lahiri explores the Diaspora in her works, as well as the challenges and intricacies of interpersonal relationships. Lahiri's characters are confined animals because of the diametrically opposed cultures of India and America. Her articles mostly focus on the experience of immigrants. Lahiri emphasizes the struggles and tragedies of Indians living abroad in her writing. She also discusses the identity issue experienced by second-generation immigrants as well as cultural challenges. Children of first-generation immigrants are unable to completely assimilate into American culture while also having no desire to identify with India. According to Divakaruni, every immigrant would identify with the native people. The identity problem would otherwise be inevitable. She hopes that each immigrant will adjust to the indigenous people's way of life in order to live peacefully and harmoniously with them. She expresses her feelings as a result through her works.

Key words: *Diasporic writings, Immigrants, Identity –crisis, Man-woman relationships.*

INTRODUCTION

Among her many other achievements, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a well-known author, short story writer, speaker, poet, essayist, fiction, non-fiction, young adult fiction, book reviewer, and columnist. Her main focus is the struggle of immigrant women in patriarchal cultures in their new homes, and she writes both fiction and nonfiction novels on the lives of South Asian immigrant women. Before switching to writing, Divakaruni was a poet during the first few years of her career. She has published a lot of short tales, and they are all successful. Arranged Marriage (1995) and The Unknown Errors of Our Lives (2001), two of her short works, are both recognized as classics. She released her first book, Arranged Marriage, in which she offers a western interpretation of the Indian marriage system. This collection focuses on the abhorrent dowry custom in India and goes into great depth about it. In her literary works, Divakaruni offers a critical examination of the plight of the immigrant woman in a patriarchal culture where arranged marriage and dowries are seen as detestable Indian social customs. As a writer from the diaspora, Divakaruni persuades western individualism to embrace her point of view by allowing women freedom and scope while criticizing India's traditional culture.

She discusses a range of immigration-related topics, such as the general concerns that immigrants face and the host country's presumptive inferiority toward newcomers. For everyone interested in the Indian diaspora, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's work is a must-read due to her strong place as a relentless experimenter in the galaxy of Indian Diasporic women authors.

The concerns of the Diaspora and the conflicts and ambiguities of interpersonal relationships

are topics that Lahiri examines in her writing. She addresses this concept in *The Namesake* (2003) and *The Lowland* (2013), as well as in her two short story collections *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008). She has traveled extensively across all of India and is personally aware of the problems that are prevalent in the diaspora. She has strong emotional links to the country of her parents, as well as to the US, England, and other places. She is now homeless and an alien due to her involvement in the founding of three nations.

Lahiri comes from an Indian ancestry. Although Lahiri's parents consider India to be "home," she does not share their sentiments. Her links to her family are inadequate to consider India to be her "home." She was born and reared in America and England and often visits India, but she does not have a sense of national identity. There is no country that I regard to be my motherland, Lahiri remarked during a press conference in India. No matter where I go, I always find myself exiled. I travel, thus I was inspired to write about those who live in exile. Chandhari, n.

This study article examines the experiences of first and second generation Indian immigrants to the United States as well as some tales concerning views of otherness inside Indian communities, rather than focusing on the identity difficulties of the Diaspora population. These stories focus on the issues that people living in the diaspora have when it comes to relationships and communication, as well as the loss of one's sense of self. This collection also emphasizes the characters' tension between the two worlds from which they are torn away, as well as their struggle with the same feelings of exile as they do.

Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel, *The Namesake*, was released in September 2003 and was a critical and financial triumph. The story of Ashoke and Ashima, an American couple who immigrated to India, illustrates the challenges of immigration as well as the tension between Indian and American culture. There are two primary lines that divide the book. After spending the first twenty years of her life in Calcutta, Ashima had a difficult time adjusting to life in America. After growing up in India's strict religious views, Ashima finds it difficult to adjust to America's more laid-back lifestyle. The second generation immigrant son of Ashima, Gogol, tries to find his own identity in the two worlds he inhabits. Gogol is followed in the second narrative line from infancy through his first 33 years of life. Thus, these two plotlines serve as representations of the clash of civilizations.

The namesake of the title, Nikolai Gogol, who was born in Russia and now lives in the United States, is an Indian-American by descent, an American by birth, and a Russian by virtue of the author's last name. He experiences hostility, irritation, misery, or even tension as a result of each of these opposing civilizations. In Jhumpa Lahiri's book *The Namesake*, the character "he despises the fact that his name is both ludicrous and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American, but rather Russian in origin." (75-76)

The 2008 film *Unaccustomed Earth* focuses on first- and second-generation immigrants who experience nostalgia, racial discrimination, rootlessness, and alienation. Lahiri highlights the reality that the country that welcomed first generation immigrants later becomes their new home. The second generation suffers as a result of lifestyle copying.

The most recent Jhumpa Lahiri novel, *The Lowland* (2013), is about a Naxalism victim. It was published in 2013. In 1967, a movement of peasants rebelled against the authorities and

landlords. It is an exact replica of Mao's earlier Chinese revolution. Brothers Subhash and Udayan. Apolitical, calm, and responsible older brother Subhash visits his parents to console them after his Naxalite sibling Udayan is killed by the police. Subhash is driven to wed Gauri, the Udayan widow who is now pregnant. Rhode Island is where Subhash drives her. Bela, Gauri's daughter, is born.

In contrast to the modernity of the faraway continent, the present work screams against politics, sexuality, and the Indian traditional trap for the woman.

Jhumpa Lahiri's 2016 nonfiction book *In Other Words* is the first to advocate for the Italian language. It is a surprise to have an autobiographical Italian-language work. It emphasizes the process of picking up a new language and follows the journey of a writer in search of a fresh perspective. It's a fantastic story, and *The Triangle* helps us understand what it's like to fight constantly between Bengali and English as two different languages. One is the language he hears around him, and the other is his native tongue.

In particular, Lahiri's characters are caged beings as a result of the conflicting cultures of India and America.

Her writing focuses on the experience of immigrants. Jhumpa Lahiri said, "The immigrant experience is problematic because a sensitive immigrant is continually trapped in a transit station, where memories of the original home clash with the reality of the new environment." (22)

In her works, Lahiri emphasizes the struggles and tragedies of Indians living abroad. She also talks about the identity crisis faced by immigrants of second generation and cultural conflicts. Children of first-generation immigrants are unable of becoming fully American while also having no desire to identify with India. The book *The Namesake* examines topics including conflicts of cultures and moral principles, loneliness, and familial ties. Chaman Nahal argues, "Maybe two huge parts of cultures, such as the East and the West, cannot meet in peace; some of us feel they may, in his article on intercultural clashes. Okay, they collide in discord. The union of meanings is what it all is (85–86).

The Namesake tells the story of the Ganguli family's first-generation American immigration experience. Bengali woman born in Calcutta is Ashima Ganguli. She gets hitched to Ashoke Ganguli and embarks on a trip to America. She initially appears in the novel when pregnant and at a hospital. From the snacks they eat in the kitchen to the ceremonies and rituals they perform, the Ganguli family's strong sense of tradition can be seen in everything they do. Ashima expresses her discomfort at the American hospital and draws comparisons between childbirth practices in the two countries.

Indians who reside outside of India make up the Indian diaspora, and these diasporic communities are often cut off from their homeland as a result of economic migration in search of employment and a higher quality of life. Despite living in their host country, individuals nonetheless have a deep affinity with and sense of belonging to their home culture. They are in-between and hence span two cultures. Second generation immigrants, however, create their own culture via a fusion of the native and host cultures. In *The Namesake*, identity struggles, complicated generational ties, and cultural disagreements are all addressed.

As he consumes marijuana, spends the night at a friend's house, and makes plans to watch *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* with his friends, Gogol assumes an American character. At a

party, he runs across Kim and introduces himself as Nikhil. He uses the presumably formal name, Nikhil, for the first time when he flirts with her and kisses her. After the party, he was as surprised by himself as his friends were. As a consequence of the legal procedures, Gogol eventually changed his name to Nikhil. He personally makes the necessary changes in the family court. The next day, he tells his parents about it and corrects them for giving it such a name. When he tells his father that no one takes him seriously because of his uncommon last name, his father is intrigued to see who does not. Since Gogol is the only one "who plagued him, the only one who was always aware of and troubled by his name's humiliation, the only person who continuously questioned it and wished it were different, was Gogol" (100), he is aware of the solution to this problem.

His parents have also been informed that Bengali, not Russian, would be used as his official title. Given that many Americans change their names every year, it was simple; the only problem was that he still felt like Nikhil. No one recognizes him as Gogol when he enrolls at Yale as Nikhil to begin his studies. His new surname is enthusiastically entered in his course books.

One weekend, Nikhil takes the Metro-North train into Manhattan while assuming the persona of Jonathan and obtains a fake identification card that enables him to get alcohol service at New Haven's pubs and eateries. At an Ezra Stiles party, he loses his virginity as Nikhil to a woman wearing a plaid wool skirt, combat boots, and mustard tights. (105) He changed from an immigrant to an American by changing his name from Gogol to Nikhil.

But now that he is Nikhil, it is simpler to shut off his parents' requests and worries (105).

His lifestyle has altered as a consequence of his name change, and he has become an American.

In quest of a better life in a foreign country, immigrants freely depart from their social and cultural context. They made the decision to leave their neighborhood and live among outsiders, including Ashoke, who immigrated to the country with the intention of becoming a professor at an American institution. The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri shows the identity dilemma of Gogol's protagonist when he learns that his name is neither Indian nor American. The story revolves on his name. He feels uncomfortable with the moniker throughout the whole book since it seems unsuitable for him. Even after changing his name from Gogol Ganguli to Nikhil Ganguli, he does not feel any better since he still perceives Nikolai in Nikhil. The significance of pet names in Bengali culture is emphasized by Lahiri. Daknam, the Bengali word for a pet name, literally means the name by which one is called by family, friends, and other close individuals at home and at such private, unguarded occasions.

A lingering remnant of childhood, pet names serve as a reminder that life doesn't have to be so formal, so serious, and so challenging. They serve as a reminder that no one can please everyone. (26)

Lahiri goes into detail on a person's name's significance. Individual identities differ from person to person and are not universally respected. The proper name, bhalonam, is often used by family members while the rest of the world refers to them by their pet name. Because of the strangeness of his given name, Gogol hates it.

Nearly all of Divakaruni's works are set in India or America and all of them discuss the lives of people from South Asian countries who have immigrated to those countries. Her tale, which she immigrated from India, is beautifully conveyed via the experiences of all the other

ladies in her book. Wherever Indian immigrants settle, she is certain that they must live side by side with native peoples, whether they want it or not.

"Expatriates have significant and dramatic experiences when they reside outside of their own society. They make the other country become their home, yet they can never completely settle down and be at peace there either. (2003)

Each immigrant would identify with the native people, according to Divakaruni. Otherwise, the identity crisis cannot be avoided. She hopes that each immigrant would adjust their lifestyle to that of the native population in order to create a happy and peaceful cohabitation. She thus uses her composition *Dissolving Boundaries* to describe her emotions.

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm a listener, a felicitor, and a people-connector. To me, the ability to break down barriers is the essence of life."

Adjustment is thus a necessary part of life, and without it, no relationship or human life has any worth between any two individuals, wherever in the world. The traditional marriages depicted in Divakaruni's first collection of short tales, *Arranged Marriage*, are planned by the parents of the families. The stories in this book are all about a man's marriage to his wife and about their experiences as immigrants and native Indians in America.

Through these stories, Divakaruni emphasizes the need of every Indian woman being strong and aware of human values wherever she is. She also encourages all Indian women to adjust to their new environment and life partners while welcoming change with positivity. Divakaruni portrays both the advantages and disadvantages of arranged weddings as well as the lives of immigrants who are married. Marriages do have misunderstandings because the partners are unable to connect with one another's way of life.

The *Unknown Errors of Our Lives*, Divakaruni's second collection of short stories, contains nine stories, the most of which are about planned weddings, marriage engagements, and familial and marital breakdown. It accurately depicts how Indian immigrants in America are transferred, uprooted, and then redirected due to changes in time, place, or connections. As a result, both of these collections of short stories provide a fantastic representation of the many immigrant experiences that Indians have had in America.

They talk about how men and women haven't adjusted or learned how to be a husband and a wife in order to keep their marriages happy forever. Additionally, they provide as a sobering reminder of the dreadful reality and predicament faced by newlyweds. No woman is held responsible, despite the fact that she is also a contributing factor to the marital issues, if anything strains the marriage or family relationship.

The *Mistress of Spices* by Divakaruni tells the story of Tilo alias Tilottama, an Indian immigrant living in America, how she uses spices to solve the problems of other Indian immigrants, and how she uses her love for an American to gain independence and fulfill her own desires. Her decision to put her own wants before of others has caused her to have an identity crisis. She thus finds herself in a predicament where she is confused whether she must give up her Indian personality in order to marry an American or keep her identity as an Indian immigrant. She is ready to forgo being an expected Indian woman in favor of being married to an American.

She is aware of the struggles faced by Indian women since they are not permitted to enjoy life's joys as freely as other Indian immigrant women. Tilo is a young immigrant from India who has learned how to use spices to help other Indian immigrants with their family

problems.

She is, however, obliged to work as the mistress of the spices at a company in Oakland, California, where she appears as an old woman. She is not permitted to leave her place of business or have any kind of direct contact with her customers. She must set her personal desires and interests aside to fulfill her obligations. She can't help but fall head over heels in love with him since she is a young woman who also happens to prescribe therapeutic spices to a young American. She may become a married woman once she marries the man she loves thanks to the spices she uses to heal other people's personal problems.

Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* explores the relationship between two cousin sisters. Despite having differing personal goals, they have an incomparable amount of sisterly love for one another. Anju, also known as Anjali, and Sudha, also known as Basudha, were both born on the same day in Calcutta, India, to two traditional family members. If Sudha hadn't started crying when Anju was placed on her aunt's abdomen, she could have spent more time in her mother's womb. Since then, Sudha has been Anju's heart sister, and her unwavering love has been fate.

However, since their fathers mysteriously passed away on the day of their birth, they were fatherless children. Anju and Sudha have always been inseparable as sisters of love and loyalty, even after their marriages and divorces. Both of them had their own desires in their hearts since they were old enough to understand the values of life. Sudha wanted a husband and children, while Anju wanted to go to college.

Sudha said that Anju's father's death was brought on by her evil-minded father. Anju was envious of her sister's sexually enticing beauty since she didn't have an exquisite demeanor. Both of the ladies were wed to men chosen by their families. Sudha remained in India while Anju and her husband relocated from India to the United States. Despite their physical distance, they were still connected spiritually. They came to the realization that they needed to turn to one another and stay heart sisters to one another. They were accurate.

Both of the sisters of heart's lives are continued in Divakaruni's novel *The Vine of Desire*, which is set in America. Since being apart from one another, 10 years had passed. These ten years, however, did not go as easily as they had imagined, and there were some issues with their marriage. Sudha was obliged to petition for divorce from her spouse despite having a daughter via her divorced husband since Anju had an abortion during her pregnancy.

They were reunited now that both sisters had arrived in the United States. To help her sister Anju deal with the sadness she was feeling after losing her first child, Sudha made the trip to America. Similar to this, Anju intended to provide Sudha with a lot of relief from the pain of divorce. As a consequence, they each decided to live together in order to use their lives to assist the other. Sunil had a deep affinity to the attractive Sudha, his childhood lover, even before he married Anju.

His sexual feelings for her were rekindled when she unexpectedly showed up at his American home, where she was supposed to live with her sister Anju. Anju was jealous as a result of Sunil's actions, and the two sisters' hearts were broken in a manner that appeared irreparable. Sudha totally disregarded Sunil's feelings and Anju's reactions to her actions as she tried to build a self-sufficient life for herself and her kid in America. She managed to get a job for herself and relocate to a new area where she could live independently with her little daughter. She began to associate herself with American culture and life to the point that she even

started to live like an American by attempting to date and adjusting to the new CIVIL environment, despite the fact that she was every bit an Indian in spirit. The sisters would have to wait for time, the great healer, to quietly and amicably settle their family disputes. Neela: The historical fiction book *Victory Song (Girls of Many Lands)* by Divakaruni is focused on the Indian independence struggle. The book's focus on a 12-year-old girl does not indicate that children or teenagers are its target audience.

It teaches people how to handle any problem that could come up in their life. The movie drives home this concept during Neela's search for her father and her identification as an Indian with the freedom fighters. Neela has the ability to absorb everything and act in line with her comprehension, even if she doesn't appear to be old enough to understand the Indian freedom struggle.

She opposes tradition, patriarchy, and marriage and joins the Indian freedom fighters in their quest for independence because she is naturally bold and adventurous. After taking part in a demonstration against the English occupiers, Neela's father does not return home, which annoys her. She is committed to finding her father and supporting him in his fight against colonialism and British imperialism. She travels to Calcutta by herself and assumes the identity of a little kid.

She learns that her father has been detained as a consequence of her contact with an underground freedom fighter. With his help, she devises a plan to avoid arrest and free her father from custody. She therefore senses a feeling of community among India's freedom fighters. *Victory Song*, as described by Sarah Stone in her review of the book, "not only educates young readers about India's culture and history, but also superbly entertains, with a likeable protagonist and a dramatic scenario that readers are captivated by." (Rev.2003)

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