

Struggle to Acculturate in the Namesake: A Comment on Jhumpa Lahiri's Work as Diaspora Literature¹

Mahesh Bharatkumar Bhatt

Gujarat Arts & Science College, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to bring forth the way in which Jhumpa Lahiri, a Pulitzer prize winner novelist explores the dilemma of name and immigrant's sense of identity and belongingness in the novel The Namesake. The paper discusses the term 'diaspora', and their role in the present day world, the major issues of multiculturalism, struggle for name, identity and belongingness suffered by the characters in the novel. Some light is also thrown on the movie 'Namesake' based on the novel produced by Mira Nair.

Keywords: Diasporic writing, Indian poetics, Immigrants, Indian diaspora, Multiculturalism, Cultural dislocation.

1. The Term Diaspora and the Role of Indian Diaspora

Etymologically, the term Diaspora coined from Greek word *Diaspeirein* – “to scatter about, disperse”, from *Dia* means “about, across” + *Speirein* means “to scatter”. It was used by the ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of a dominant city-state who emigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization, to assimilate the territory into the empire. During the ancient times a large number of Indians migrated to Far East and South East Asia to spread Buddhism. During the colonial period, the migration was a history of misery, deprivation and sorrow. The third wave of migration from the nineteenth century was mainly to the industrialized, developed economies. The Indian diaspora is a generic term to describe the people who migrated from territories of the republic of India. The situation today is largely the “success story” of the Indian diasporas in the Silicon Valley and the other professionals mainly settled in the U.K., North America and Europe. In the Namesake, Gogol's parents Ashoke and Ashima belong to this wave of immigration to the United States whereas Gogol is a product of the contemporary success story of the Indian diaspora in the United States.

The Diasporic Indian is like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world. With the globalization of national economies, the chutnification of cultures and Bollywood's increasing cultural appeal and reach, Indians became one of the forces to flatten the world. Indians in the USA are one of the largest

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented in the 20th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia (IAHA), held in New Delhi on November 14-17, 2008. The author owes his intellectual debt to Prof. Binod Khadria, JNU, New Delhi; Dr. Indira Nityanadam, M.C.Shah Arts College, Ahmedabad; Dr.. M.A.Said, formerly at Government Commerce College, Gandhinagar; his colleagues and scholars whose books/articles he has referred.

among the groups of Indian diasporas, about 2.5 million. They are well represented in all walks of life particularly in academia, I.T. and medicine.

2. Writers of the Indian Diaspora in English

Literature, as a product of culture becomes the source by which we would be awoken about the global scenario and multiculturalism. Good fiction embellishes facts and adds interesting layers to hold readers' attention and makes people aware about the contemporary society. About the diasporic writing Jasbir Jain says, "Language and cultures are transformed as they come into contact with other languages and cultures. Diasporic writing raises questions regarding the definitions of 'home' and 'nation'. Schizophrenia and/or nostalgia are often preoccupations of these writers as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures" (Jain, 1998). The creation of literature gives the historical connections in the context of contemporary social structure.

The first imaginative works that lay the foundation for subsequent narratives of the diaspora is a collection of short stories of Seepersad Naipaul concerned with the lives and struggle of the *Girmit* or sugar diaspora. The new diaspora can be exemplified by the uneasy interaction between gender, class, ethnicity and nation-states. For sugar diaspora, 'home' signifies an end to itinerant wandering in the putting down of roots, while for new (*masala*) diaspora, it is linked to a strategic espousal of rootlessness. Diasporic writing, a post-colonial scenario, elaborates issues such as marginalization, cultural insularity, social disparity, racism, ethnicity, etc. Oscillating between the attractions of home and those from the new, the migrants wage a constant psychic battle: the old world is replete with myth and tradition; the new world order is proliferate with thirst for freedom and independence. They are in a dilemma as to whether they should remain in a ghetto of old values with least interaction with the majority, or break the barriers and get assimilated with the overwhelming new culture.

The writers of the Indian Diaspora like V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, M. G. Vasanji, Bapsi Sidhwa, Kiran Desai, and Jhumpa Lahiri have explored the identity crisis, racial and cultural conflicts, ethnicity, sense of belongingness, loneliness and alienation among the immigrants. The history of immigration is the history of alienation and its consequences. For every freedom won, a tradition is lost. For every second generation assimilated, a first generation in one way or another spurned. For the gains of goods and services, an identity gets lost, and uncertainty found.

Literature should remain the faithful representation of contemporary society. So, it is the moral duty of the diaspora writers to remain faithful while mixing the facts with fiction in their writings. They would be considered, to some extent the flag bearers of the history of their time. Majority of the diaspora writers write about their own experiences, the problems that they have to face while settling on the new land.

3. Difference between Indian and American Culture

Indians may appear to be a homogeneous mass of people, but in reality India is the world's oldest melting pot where the population can be classified and broken down by religion, caste, language and sex. Because of these divisions, ironically, every Indian belongs to a minority

group. From the day an Indian is born he/ she has to assimilate, thrive and succeed in this environment. When one goes to the U.S. it is an extension of being able to assimilate and succeed in a different world.

But in India, one possesses the ability to disappear into the masses of the city because one does not look different from those around him. However in North America's white Anglo Saxon environment, one loses that capability and has to prove his worth constantly, especially in places where Indians are a rare commodity. Maintaining ties to India and preserving Indian tradition in America meant a lot to them. The idea of melting pot is a metaphor that implies all the immigrant cultures are mixed and amalgamated at their own place. Most of the first generation parents have immigrated to North America to improve their economic status. They look down upon the unbridled individualism of the west and privilege familistic values of their own ethnic culture.

Diaspora is basically an experience of dislocation and re-location. Indian culture is plural and fluid. It is the intrinsic plurality and the built-in tolerance of the Hindu system itself that provides a matrix where embedding is possible. Several migrant communities like the Parsis and Bahai's etc. have enriched Indian culture at the same time they assimilated into Indian Culture like sugar in the milk. The into-Indian diaspora has made India very resilient.

4. Major Issues in Diasporic Writing

Diasporic literature, quite like immigrant literature, mirrors a 'double vision', at once of 'yearning backward' and 'looking forward'. The peculiarities that we find in the NRIs have been successfully narrated by the diaspora writers. The following are the major issues in real life that are discussed by the diaspora writers. The children of the immigrants are called "ABCD" – *American Born Confused Desi* (usually used as something of an insult). This "in-between-ness" can leave them with uncertainty about their own role in society – neither Indian nor American. As the NRIs may adopt foreign culture, it may be a threat to our own Indian culture. Identity is lost as they are treated as Indian on the foreign land and as foreigner on their motherland. They used to postpone returning to India every year, i.e. NRI syndrome. Again, they talk ill about India and Indians. Those who return to India after some stay abroad have to face public criticism of leaving the land of opportunity without thinking about any adjustment on that land. The immigrant novelist is a teacher who wishes to educate his fellow natives about the actual nature of colonialism. He wishes to inculcate in them, a deference for their indigenous value system. He is the spokesman who tries to de-mystify his natives about the glorified white race at the same time suggest to adopt what is best in them like discipline, cleanliness etc. Dr. M.F. Salat rightly says: "The diaspora as belonging to everywhere and nowhere at the same time, just like an "unanchored Soul" (Pal, 2004). Regarding the diasporic experience, Adesh Pal says, "The first generation has strong attachment with the country of their origin. From the second generation onwards ties with the homeland gradually gets replaced by those with the adopted country. Food, clothes, language, religion, music, dance, myths, legends, customs of individual community etc. become the markers of identity. These are retained, discarded or adopted differently at different times and places" (Pal, 2004).

Physical displacement from the motherland may also raise socio-cultural and psychosomatic identity questions. Cultural cross-currents have led to a hybrid culture and a

new process of cultural assimilation. A mixed cultural milieu opens up new vistas of communication and dialogue in this cosmopolitan world. As a result, diasporic reciprocation has become one of the recurrent themes in post-colonial world literature.

The Writers of Indian diaspora, as William Safran observes: “Continue to relate personally or vicariously, to the homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship” (Paranjape, 2001). One of the Major issues pertaining to the Indian Diaspora is how to preserve Indian cultural identity successfully. For that the institution like British council or Alliance Francaise should be appropriately adapted and emulated.

5. Biographical Sketch of the Authoress Jhumpa Lahiri

Jhumpa Lahiri (born as name Nilanjana Sudeshna) was born in 1967, in London, and raised in Rhode Island. She also has two different names – different on her passport and birth certificate. She is a graduate of Barnard College, did her M.A. at Boston University, and a Ph.D. in renaissance studies. Her debut collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Her first novel *The Namesake* (2003), a major national best seller, was named the New York magazine book of the year. *Unaccustomed Earth*, published in 2008, is her latest collection of short stories.

Talking about her own dilemma of name she says in her interview with Jeffrey Brown, “It’s what my world is, and I’ve always been aware of my parents came from Calcutta. I have found myself sort of caught between the worlds of left behind and still clung to, and also the world that surrounded me at school and everywhere else, as soon as I set foot out of the door” (Pbs, 2008).

Jhumpa Lahiri largely writes about the human condition of Indian diaspora in the USA. Her focus is the ‘mindscape of characters’ and ‘human predicament’ in its wider perspective. Lahiri delves deep to explain the labyrinths of her characters, to explore, psychologically the intricacies and complexities of human relationships particularly of a class of characters who live in the west but with parents born and raised in India. What are they? – Indians or Americans. They had not changed their habits, and they are apparently a close knit ethnic group, still far from being assimilated into the general current of life around them. Yet they were as far from the Indian current. Like the mythological king Trishanku, they stood suspended between two worlds, unable to enter either and making a haven of their own. Gogol resembles this situation.

6. About the Plot and Various Aspects of the Novel

The novel is the story of two generations of an Indian family and their struggle to acculturate themselves in the west. In the autobiographical novel, *The Namesake*, Lahiri tells the story of Gogol Ganguli, the American-born son of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, who arrive in Massachusetts from Calcutta in the late 1960s. Regarding the self in the text versus the self as text in Asian-American Autobiographies, Rocio G. Davis says, “Asian American autobiographies generally highlight the protagonist’s growing comprehension of the meaning or value that society places on questions and attitudes about ethnic differences, historical reconstruction, and the place of their communities in American societies” (Davis, 2005). We

find the same; to some extent in this novel. The novel begins in 1968 with the birth of a son to Ashoke & Ashima Ganguli, a Bengali couple settled in Boston. While Ashima is giving birth, the reader is taken back in time to 1961 when Ashoke almost lost his life in a train derailment. Only the book he was clutching – *A Collection of Nikolai Gogol's Short Stories* – revealed him to rescuers. With this story in mind, the Ganguli's confront the problem of what to do with their newborn son's name. He needs both a '*bhalanam*' – a good name for the outside world, and a '*daknam*' – a pet name to keep with Bengali tradition. But the letter carrying the good name never arrives from Ashima's grandmother in Calcutta, so he starts his life with only his familiar name Gogol. Gogol is admitted to the school under the name of Nikhil but the principal explains that due to their son's preference, he will be known as Gogol in school. When Gogol's sister is born, the Ganguli's are ready with the name, Sonia/ Sonali.

On Gogol's 14th birthday his father presents him the book '*The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol*', but does not tell about the train accident. Later on, his father tells him the truth of him being named so. It has a profound effect on Gogol. Gogol could not assimilate himself with the American culture. He loves Ruth, a white American, his college friend, but their friendship retained for a short period. His next love is Maxine who is of white American ethnicity. Their friendship breaks because of Gogol's struggle regarding emotional complications of his father's death. After this, his mother tells Gogol to have friendship with Moushumi, daughter of their friend, due to their shared culture and background. But their marriage breaks as Moushumi loves Dimitri, a German man.

Ashima, after the death of her husband, decides to live for six months in India and Six months in the U.S.A. At a party on Christmas Eve, Gogol finds the unread book that his father had presented him on his 14th birthday. He turns to read the first story 'The Overcoat'. The novel ends with the ideas in Gogol's mind. "The givers and keepers of Gogol's name are far from him now. Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist. Yet the thought of this eventual demise provides no sense of victory, no solace" (Lahiri, 2004).

Lahiri pictures the sordid spectacle of racism, prejudice and marginalization by the unwelcoming society and Gogol is a victim of it. This we find in the recent migration of students to Australia, Canada and other developed countries. Gogol struggles to transform himself by escaping from the traditions of the community of Indian immigrants to which his family belongs. He is an ABCD – an *American Born Confused Desi*. Lahiri depicts that the ABCD's are unable to answer the question: "Where are you from?" The novel probes into the inner psyche of characters and brings out stirring and teasing sense of identity by clash of cultures. In the flat world, multiculturalism results in "the Melting Pot" and "Salad Bowl". The novel overflows with the subtle grace and dignity of a family forced to make peace with their loyalties to India and America.

7. Gogol's Predicament for Name

Contrary to popular idiom "What's in a name?", Gogol is obsessed with "It's everything that matters in a name!". His hatred for his name is explained thus: "For by now, he's come to hate questions pertaining to his name, hates having constantly to explain. 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 but full of all things Russians” (Lahiri, 2004).

In Indian perception good names represent dignified and enlightened qualities. Pet names are sometimes meaningless and silly. The title *The Namesake* reflects the struggle Gogol Ganguli goes through to identify with his unusual name. About the controversy of name of Gogol, Lahiri says in an interview, “But I think that for the child of immigrant, the existence of two names kind of speaks so strongly for the very predicament of many children of immigrants. On the other hand, the problem for the children of immigrants – those with strong ties to their country of origin – is that they feel neither one thing nor the other. This has been my experience, in any case. For example, I never know how to answer the question: “Where are you from?” If I say I’m from Rhode Island, people are seldom satisfied. They want to know more, based on things such as my name, my appearance, etc. Alternatively, if I say I’m from India, a place where I was not born and have never lived, this is also inaccurate. It bothers me less now. But it bothered me growing up, the feeling that there was no single place to which I fully belonged” (Book Browse, 2007).

After changing the name, there is only one complication: “He doesn’t feel like Nikhil. Not yet. ... But after 18 years of Gogol, two months of Nikhil feel scant, inconsequential” (Lahiri, 2004). Gogol is not completely cut off from his roots and identity. He tries to reject his past but it makes him stranger to himself.

8. Theme of Cultural Dislocation

Today’s fiction celebrates hybridity. The social upheavals and the terrible delusions of modern times have been presented in nearly all novels that are being written today. These novels have a universal appeal cutting across barriers of culture and time. We are all socialized differently because we come from different cultural backgrounds and we grow up in different communities. But at the core of every culture remains the uploading of basic human values. A globalised culture has now evolved and it must combat with the world of heterogeneous societies who do not wish to leave aside their historical particulars which give them uniqueness. Certain elements constitute markers of identity – food, clothes, language retention, religion, music, dance, myths, legends, customs, individual community, rites of passage and others. These are retained, discarded or adopted differently at different times and places; but a feeling of oneness, a tug of the roots persists even after several years and sometimes centuries.

Writers who are cultural hybrids like Maxine Hongkinstun (*Warrior Woman*), Gloria Naylor (*Café Bailey*), Alice Walker (*Colour Purple*), Bharati Mukerjee (*The Holder of the World*), Jhumpa Lahiri and many others are taking up issues like identity crisis, nationalism, alienation, marginalization, insider outsider, hegemonic power discourses in the fiction that they are writing today. Critic Stuart Hall says, “There are at least two different ways of thinking about ‘cultural identity’. One is in terms of shared culture, a sort of collective.... the second one is what we really are, or rather – since history has intervened – what we have become.... Cultural identity in this sense is a matter of becoming as well as of being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. Cultural identities... undergo constant transformation” (Dodiya, 2006).

Regarding hyphenated identity Meena Alexander, a diasporic woman writer, has identified herself as having serious problems in America. She writes in *Fault Lines*, "In America you have to explain yourself constantly. It's the confessional thing. Who are you? Where are you from? What do you do? I try to reply. As much as anything else I am a poet writing in America, but American poet? What sort? Surely not Robert Frost or Wallace Stevens variety. An Asian-American poet then? Clearly that sounds better" (Alexander, 1993).

In Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* the role of memory in a process of change is often used by the writer in an effective way. It is through the eyes of the first generation settlers that the second generation learns about the homeland. Cultural displacement involves the loss of language, family ties and a support system. Lahiri stresses culture and its importance in immigrant experience with a humanist outlook. Narrating the immigrant experience in America she consciously foregrounds the merits of native culture and the mysteries of acquired culture probably experienced in the process of her own self-acculturation. The loss of roots, language and social norms are the three most important parts of the definition of what it is to be human being.

For the second generation the question of identity is a complicated issue. At home Indian culture and value system are adhered to, while in public the American code of conduct is followed. All first generation settlers want their children to do well and get good jobs. The American dream looms in their eyes and they want their children to exploit the situation and derive maximum benefit for themselves, but they must follow the Indian moral and cultural code at home. Ashima and Ashoke try hard to hold on to their Indian-ness, their culture despite surrounded by the American culture all around. They go at the Kathakali dance performance or a Sitar recital at memorial hall. When Gogol is in third grade, they send him to Bengali language and culture lessons every other Saturday, held in the home of one of their friends. But, Gogol, Sonia, and Moushumi want to chart their own lives. The second generation immigrants are not attached to their cultural past, infact; they find it easier to accept America's hybrid culture. Both Gogol and Sonia grow in suburban New York and choose American over their Bengali culture, which is not liked by their parents. Upon Gogol's graduation the family goes on a trip to Calcutta, as they enter India, "There are endless names Gogol and Sonia must remember to say, not aunt this and uncle that but terms far more specific: *mashi* and *pishi*, *mama* and *maima*, *kaku* and *jethu*, to signify whether they are related on their mother's or father's side, by marriage or by blood" (Lahiri, 2004). Gogol's shifting in with Maxine is an assertion of his independence, and his desire to completely merge with the American culture. Gogol eventually marries Moushumi, but they are not happy and so they part. Gogol is schizophrenic as he is split/torn between two nations, India/America, between two names, Indian/Russian, between two value systems, traditions/conventions. Genetically he is tied up to his traditions and has unique self; racially he is alien, and a second class citizen in America. He feels that his wife has a better status. His complexes get reflected through Moushumi, who feels dissatisfied having married him.

For **Ashima**, motherhood in a foreign land is much severe for her. She could not forget her relatives in India and continuously longs for them. "For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of life long pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover the previous life has been vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding" (Lahiri, 2004). Ashima experiences that "Americans, in

spite of their public declarations of affections, in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, in spite of their hand-holding on the street and lying on top of each other on the Cambridge Common, prefer their privacy” (Lahiri, 2004). Ashima’s love of family influences her to create a close-knit web of immigrant friends. This group practices Indian custom, speaks the Bengali language, and, in many respects, becomes a substitute family for the vast collection of relatives back in India. But for Ashima, the close relations between the immigrants become an excuse to avoid the customs of American life. For Ashima and Ashoke, the question of disregarding their elder’s wishes is impossible whereas the situation reverses after a few years when their children follow the American tradition. Ashima is reluctant to learn to drive, she insists on wearing Indian clothing and eating Indian food, and for many years she lives without American friends. To a large degree, her life is consumed by recreating Indian culture in America. After the death of her husband Ashoke, after the divorce of Gogol and after Sonia decided to marry Ben, Ashima decides to stay for six months in Calcutta and six months in America. She is overcome by a feeling of being dis-housed, not knowing where she really belongs. Her struggle for acculturation and her final decision or solution to it is found at the end: “She feels lonely suddenly, permanently alone... she feels overwhelmed by the thought of the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and is now in its own way foreign.... For thirty-three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she worked. She will miss throwing parties... She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband” (Lahiri, 2004).

Ashoke wants to provide a better life for his newly born son by earning a doctorate degree from a prestigious American university. In naming his son, he pays the greatest homage to western culture because Gogol is a representative of European high culture. As a university professor Ashoke is accepted into the academic community – but at home he continues to be the traditional Indian male, fastidious about his clothing and food. For Ashoke, memories of life in India are less peaceful. The memories of that fateful night influence him to leave India and ultimately lead him to choose an unusual name for his son. Still, Ashoke, like his faithful wife, embraces his past in India and recognizes that it plays a significant role in his life as a father and an American.

Gogol: If Ashima and Ashoke make peace with their pasts, however, their son, Gogol, spends much of the novel attempting to eradicate his heritage. This first becomes evident when Lahiri describes how Gogol and his sister resent childhood trips to India during which they are forced to interact with family and give up the material comforts of American life. The novel depicts the cross-cultural issues of not getting assimilated with the culture of America for Ashima and Ashoke, at the same time their children could not adjust themselves during their visits to India. Gogol does not want to go to Kindergarten as his parents told him that at school, instead of being called Gogol, he will be called by a new name, Nikhil, a good name. As Gogol grows older, his desire to escape his own past becomes more pronounced. When it comes time to apply for college, for instance, Gogol turns his back on his father’s alma mater and accepts a position at Yale. While in college, meanwhile, he refuses to study an “acceptable” immigrant subject like chemistry, engineering, or biology, preferring instead to pursue an interest in architecture. Such actions not only neglect the wishes of his parents, but also serve as a reminder that Gogol is uncomfortable with his upbringing. Unlike his parents, Gogol does not see himself as a stranger living in a foreign land. He wants to be seen as American. Gogol’s rebellion against his past reaches a crescendo the summer before he leaves

for college. One day Gogol attends a panel discussion about Indian novels written in English. He is bored by the panelists who keep referring to something called “marginality”. When the sociologists on the panel talks about ABCD, Gogol thinks the word Confused to be replaced by conflicted. He knows that *Deshi*, a generic word for “countryman”, means “Indian”, but he never thinks of India as *Desh*. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India.

Lahiri skillfully blends events of the past into events of the present. She allows readers to live the moments along with her characters as the past becomes present – the present, past. Yet Gogol's inability to shake his own past is most evident in his relationships with women. In his early romances, he is careful to avoid any contact with his past or upbringing. India is rarely discussed, and his girlfriends are not allowed to meet his parents. With one woman named Maxine, in fact, Gogol attempts to become an entirely different person. He adopts Maxine's carefree lifestyle. He listens to Maxine's music. He drinks her wine. For a while he even lives in Maxine's house, all in an effort to build a wall between his present and his past. Even with all his efforts to the contrary, however, Gogol cannot ignore the memories of his past – his name, his parents, and his Indian heritage. They have shaped his character and they define him as a human being. When the dynamics of his own family change after the death of a beloved family member, Gogol slowly begins to realize that he cannot simply walk away from who he is. For better or for worse he loves his family and their Indian custom. He even begins to realize that his passionate efforts to create an entirely new person are ultimately just reactions against his past. For Gogol, therefore, much of the rest of the novel is consumed by attempts to make peace with his past. He begins to open up about his heritage in relationships, and he incorporates his family into his life. The years of resisting his past have made him uncomfortable in the present. However, Gogol slowly becomes a student of his past. And the lessons he learns, Lahiri seems to suggest, pave the way for him to discover a peaceful future. From the beginning *The Namesake* is a novel unconcerned with the future. The future is unpredictable. But, as Lahiri so often seems to suggest, the past could not happen any other way. Gogol at the end realizes why his parents used to visit their homeland annually; he understands the value their native culture had for them. Gogol opens towards a new understanding of his own rich culture which till now he did not try to understand. The novel is a portrayal of the progression of Gogol's cultural education and the broadening of Gogol's cultural horizon which makes him see his past with love and respect. Towards the end he realizes the value of his Indian identity.

9. Presentation of India in the Novel

Food, the trips to Calcutta, Ashima's nostalgia and her memories combine to form image, an image of India in *The Namesake*. Looking from a macroscopic point of view, *The Namesake* does offer glimpses of or about India; but a microscopic scrutiny would class the novel primarily as the spokesman of a middle class Hindu Bengali family, in particular, the Hindu Bengali community, their traditions, customs, cultural beliefs and social set-up. The novel depicts a prominent cultural feature, i.e. food. Rice, the staple food of Bengalis, plays an important role in Ashima's life in New York and even at *Annaprasan* ceremony of her children. In India there is so much diversity in the relationship names as 'Dida', 'Dadu', and 'Mamu' etc.

Lahiri has depicted the middle class society of Ashima's father before her marriage in Calcutta. Besides very few exceptions, the male is the head of the family in most Indian societies. In the novel Ashoke's father does all the talking when they come too see Ashima. Ashoke is too shy even to raise his eyes to her. In a society that has evolved with values of respect and submission to the wishes of elders, it is usual for Ashoke and Ashima, later in the novel, to avert their gaze when Maxine, their son's girl-friend runs her hand through Gogol's hair. Since a woman in an Indian society takes care of the children and the house, it is appropriate for Ashima's mother to brag her daughter's accomplishments. She says, "She is fond of cooking, and she can knit extremely well" (Lahiri, 2004).

The novel also depicts a panoramic view of the economic imbalance of a culturally rich and varied country. Poverty peeps in the scenes of Calcutta. Both Ashima and her daughter remove their gold ornaments before boarding a train in India. The novelist also presents a contrast in the way an American and an Indian family greet and feed guest. Gogol and Sonali think about their visit to Calcutta as: "Every few weeks there is a different bed to sleep in, another family to live with, and a new schedule to learn" (Lahiri, 2004). Ashima does not pronounce her husband's name as according to Hindu belief it may lessen the life of a husband. There are three attributes that determine a man's behaviour or *swabhava* in Hindu mythology. One of these attributes, *Rajas*, is associated with activity and passion symbolized by red colour. Vermilion, as a symbol of this is erased along with removal of bracelets, when Ashima and her mother become widow.

Written literature of a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries. Language carries culture and culture carries, particularly through oral tradition and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. In the case of Indian novelist writing in English, he constantly has to struggle in appropriating an alien tongue. English has an entirely different culture and social inheritance. Sentences like this one addressed by Ashima to Ashoke "Are you listening to me?" are mere translations that fail to convey the complete intended meaning. Similarly, Ashmia says "Dida I'm coming" (Lahiri, 2004) at the time of departure from India instead of good-bye. There is a vast difference so far as the intimacy of physical love of parents in presence of their children is concern. For the parents of Maxine to have intimate physical love and kiss etc. are very common feature of their culture. But for the parents of Gogol, the physical love is very private moment not to disclose in presence of children.

It is general belief among the Indians that in India children do bother about the parents every time. But it was a great trauma for Ashima and Ashoke that though their children adopted American culture, they do not bother to come and meet parents on Thanks-giving, an annual celebration on which the children generally used to come and stay with parents. It creates a great shock to the first generation of immigrants when they heard from their relatives living in India that they are living with their kids and grand kids, daughters-in-law etc. under the same roof. Most of the Indian diaspora writers consciously, or not, writes the same kind of things, which really touches the reader that sometimes the children may become selfish in India, but in America it is very common that after entering into college, the kids less bother about parents. When NRI's children marry Americans their grand children are pale, dark-haired, half American grandchildren.

10. The Diasporic Writing and Indian Poetics

The diasporic experience is the case of separation and according to the great grammarian Panini, it is the case of *apadana karaka*, is a case of sorrow. According to Bharata's Rasa Theory separation is the major *vibhava*, cause and experience of the *sthayi bhava*, relatively durable mental condition identified as grief and the *rasa*, the state of being, identified as *Karuna rasa*, pathos in Rasa Theory. In the diasporic condition the dominant *rasa* is *Karuna*. Movement or dislocation is the other element in the experience. Intellectualization of homelessness is the reality of diasporic experience. In the films like *Naam*, the prominent *rasa* is that of *virah* from the mother land. The famous song 'Chitthi ayi hai' is sung by Manhar Udhas in that film. According to Makrand Paranjape, there is a *rasa* of dislocation in the diasporic text. Ultimately they are love stories whose presiding *rasa* is *sringara*, even if it is *vipralambha* or love in separation. We find these same in the *Meghdoot*, a famous play by Kalidas, in Sanskrit when Yaksha suffers this in separation from his beloved. The immigrants experience like a bride, who after marriage, despite of two homes remains homeless or the outsider both at the home of her father and her husband and struggles to assimilate.

Unlike in drama, in life, there is no replay. Diasporic experience is the politics of recall memory, *smṛti* – a poetics of sorrow. It is a great literature of recall. Secondly, it is the theme of return, whether it is a mental or a physical return. Thirdly, the experience of strangeness is an inability to understand or accept the cultural custom and modes. Fourth is the desire to integrate. Fifth is the sense of transience that someday this will happen and sixth is search for permanence. Then finally comes the absence of belonging and embedding and/or code mixing. Thus there are seven elements which are used to investigate or recognize the consciousness, diasporic consciousness: memory, return, strangeness, desire to integrate, transience, desire for permanence, a sense of belonging and embedding. The diasporic writing is an Industry. There are some writers in whose writing we find the experience is enunciatory, renunciatory and denunciatory.

11. The Film Version of *The Namesake*

Literature and film are two very different mediums; and when a literary work is adopted successfully on celluloid, because of cinematic considerations certain changes are incorporated. Film is the youngest of the three – films, literature and culture; yet its multiform birth has deep roots in the other two. Films have visuals and music that impact the mind and stay in memory for a long time. Bharat's *Natya Shastra* centre staged performance and through it focused on the evocation of emotional responses. Literature depends mainly on words but makes use of sound, rhythm, form and such-like methods; films work out their own medium specifies with the camera eye using language, music, perspective, space, composition, sequence and the human body. The theory of Rasa and catharsis stress the significance of emotions. These emotions can be brought to the mass successfully through audio-visual presentation and film is the best medium for it.

Mira Nair read Lahiri's *The Namesake* when she was flying to India for a traumatic task – her much loved mother-in-law had just passed away. This is the scenario for most immigrants away from home. Mira Nair's *The Namesake* says, "The greatest journeys are the ones that bring you home." The film has some variations from the plot of the novel. But as *Hindustan Times* says, "It is a jewel of a movie." *The Namesake* is about the imminently relevant question:

What does it mean to be an American family? Jumping between the equally colourful and vibrant cities of Calcutta and New York, *The Namesake* is a family drama about the Ganguli's who come to U.S.A. from India in order to experience a world of limitless opportunities. The visual text tries to portray the predicament of the diaspora and hence its artistic aim is not different from the written text. Ultimately the visual text artfully complements the written text and poignantly highlights the complex problems faced by the Indian Diaspora in the west.

12. Conclusion

Question of identity has remained a source of conflicts and has led to wars in history. But it is more persistent for those who are grown up in two worlds simultaneously. In short, the novel is about a reference bible of experience for immigrant population of South-East Asian Diaspora. The dilemma of name can not be solved by just changing the name on record. The multiple and diverse order we live amidst today has put us in great problems in this multicultural and globalized world. The process of globalization has not only unsettled people and cultures but has created new identities and affiliations in terms of both conflicts and collaborations. Globalization might have abolished physical borders but it has set up intellectual and psychosomatic borders.

The novel deals with the clashes between the two different worlds that Ganguli family simultaneously inhabits. The world of Bengali immigrants who struggle to integrate into main stream North American culture while maintaining the customs of their homeland, and the world of Ivy League America into which the Ganguli's try to integrate. Lahiri stresses the fact that for diasporic people 'home' is a very fluid concept which changes its meaning along with the prevailing mindset of the person. As a diasporic text, in the parent child relationship we find the generation harbouring essence of dislocation and the other finding itself rootless. The identity of the individual, which is consistently affected by society, is something one has to discover through a process of reflections and negotiations. Lahiri sends a crystal-clear message to the third-world people who are quite keen on entering into the first-world with strong aspirations for a better future without realizing that this displacement to the first-world demands greater adaptability in terms of both climate and culture.

Government of India, by implementing the recommendations of Singhvi committee, grants dual-citizenship and awards Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, which ushered in a new chapter in the history of the relation between India and the diaspora. By celebrating kite festival, Vibrant Gujrat Festival, Industrial Meet with the NRIs, Gujrat government attracts them to invest in the industry in the nation; at the same time tries to spread Indian cultural heritage into the second and successive generations of the diaspora.

The thought of *Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam* is ingrained in Indian Philosophy, so multiculturalism should not be regarded as threat but a part and parcel of the life of all human beings living on the earth, reaching the great ideals of world peace, harmony, and universal fraternity. Gandhi-ji said in Young India: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any" (Gandhi, 1921).

Diaspora is all about the creation of new identities, spaces for growth, resolution of conflicts and a new culture, either composite or plural. Diasporic writings are constructed not on the principles of harmony but on the principles of simultaneity. The principle of

simultaneity displays 'the core' human predicament in the countries of the West and the East. Diasporic discourse, therefore, is the step towards the discourse of the species of man, the narrative of the Homo- Sapiens.

References

- Alexander, M. (1993), *Fault Lines*, New Delhi: Penguin.
- Barringer, F. (2006), *Book Review: Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Namesake'*, North Carolina: Carolina Review.
- Book Browse (2007), *Author Interview*. July 28, 2007. Source: <http://www.bookbrowse.com/authors>
- Davis, R. (2005), "The Self in the Text versus the Self as Text: Asian American Autobiographical Strategies", in G. Huang (Ed.) *Asian American Literary Studies*, Edinbergh: Edinbergh University Press.
- Dodiya, J. (Ed.) (2006), *Critical Essays of Indian writings in English*, New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.
- Dhavan, R.K. (Ed.) (2001), *Writers of the Indian Diaspora*, New Delhi: Prestige Books.
- Gandhi, M. (1921), *Young India*, Navjivan.
- Jain, J. (Ed.) (1998), *Writers of the Indian Diaspora*, Jaipur: Rawat.
- Katrak, K. (1997), "South Asian American Literature", in King-Kok Cheung (Ed.) *An Inter Ethnic Companion to Asian American Literatur*, New York: CUP.
- Kirpal, V. (1989), *The Third World Novel of Expatriation*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.
- Lahiri, J. (2004), *The Namesake*, New Delhi: Harper Collins.
- Mishra, D. (2007), "New Diasporic Voices in The Inheritance of Loss", '*Prajna' Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Business Administration*, S. P. University, Vol. 12.
- Pal, A. and T. Chakrabarti (Eds.) (2004), *Theorizing and Critiquing Indian Diaspora*, New Delhi: Creative.
- Paranjape, M. (Ed.) (2001), *Indian Diaspora: Theories, Text, Histories*. Delhi: Indianlog Publication Pvt. Ltd.
- PBS (2008), *Online news hour*, 25 July 2008. Source: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour.com>
- Ray, Mohit (Ed.) (2004), *Studies in Literature in English*. New Delhi: Atalantic.