

## Social Alienation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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### Abstract

Diaspora writers have their roots in the sense of excretion and isolation, which emerged because of alienation and expatriation. Usually Diaspora writers deal with detachment, displacement, separation, existential rootlessness, loneliness, nostalgia, a quest for identity and isolation. Edmund Fuller remarks that "in our age man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problems; a conviction of isolation, randomness meaninglessness in his way of existence". For the purpose, the present study of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* published in 2003. Analyses how the social alienation in Diaspora literature in general and Indo-English literature from different angles. Social alienation is a major concept of human condition in the contemporary society. Major protagonist Ashoke Ganguli and his wife Ashima feel that have separated from their family completely, especially Ashima feels that she has segregated herself completely from family in Calcutta. Her father's death and quick in her marriage to Ashoke, ruins her. Meanwhile she suffers a lot outside and within the society. The study examines the concept of social alienation and it is manifested itself in Jhumpa Lahiri's debut novel *The Namesake*.

**Key words:** Diaspora, displacement, alienation, nostalgia, identity and social alienation.

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### Introduction

The concept of social alienation, convey of being an unknown person in the foreign land. Social alienation is a person's feeling of detachment from a crowd – whether family, friends, or wider society – to which the person has a resemblance. Such alienation has been explained that a condition in social interactions reflected by a low degree of integration or common values and a high degree of detachment or separation between individuals, or between a people and a group of people in a society or work location. It is a sociological concept developed by several classical and contemporary issues. The theme has many discipline-specific uses, and can refer both to a personal emotional state (subjectively) and to a type of social connection (objectively). People who experience emotional pain because of alienation may help from seeing a mental health practiced. Increasing a sensitivity of empowerment may help person conflict alienation.

The present study takes up Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. The study analyses how the social alienation role uplifting and understanding society and its problems outside or within. Jhumpa Lahiri successfully tells the story of the Diaspora through a Bengali family by underlining the emotion of separation throughout the novel *The Namesake*. She highlights the emotional dislocation of the alienated Diaspora to create awareness about their efforts for emotional and physical endurance.

Jhumpa Lahiri emphasizes throughout the novel *The Namesake* that successfully engaged phases like immigrant, a sense of alienation from our surroundings, distance, loss of identity, alienation and despair. In Jhumpa Lahiri's novels can see belongingness and crisis of identity. Jhumpa

Lahiri was a Pulitzer Prize winning novelist and born on July 11, 1967 in London and later her family moved to United States. Her parents were immigrants from the state of West Bengal, India. Her novel *The Namesake* represent the life of Gogol(Nikhil) Ganguli is the American-born son of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli. Jhumpa Lahiri's protagonists are the continental immigrants but they endure social alienation. They have their difference of awareness between two selves- the native and the foreign. They have their journey towards home and individuality, being accepted as unsettling race through alienation, dilemmas of cultural identity and ethnicity.

They, all the time, have feelings of rootlessness and separation. The separation has been described in different ways by different scholars. Arnold Kaufman mentions –"To claim that a person is alienated is to claim that his relation to something else has certain features which result in avoidable discontent or loss of satisfaction A dictionary of literary terms defines alienation in the following words, "Alienation is the state of being alienated from something or somebody; it is condition of the mind". Encyclopedia Britannica describes alienation as "the state of feeling estranged or separated from ones milieu, work, products of work or self". The novel begins with the wretched portrayal of concern, awkwardness and a group of psycho-sociological problems such as desire, rootlessness, separation, isolation experienced by Ashima, who at a young age has migrated to a country where "she is related to no one". Motherliness for Ashima does not bring only joyfulness but also the nuisance of raising the child all alone in country of strangers. The child's

birth was alone celebration and the awareness that his entry in the world was, "unaccompanied and deprived" laid the foundation of that predicament that small child had to experience throughout his life. Ashima's struggle to adjust in a foreign country, to become accustomed herself to the newly found atmosphere is the struggle of every immigrant to expose their self-identity in an alien land. Feeling lonely and displaced in a foreign land, Ashima begins to feel that: 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." (50-51).

Ashima Ganguli feels alienated in the outer edge; this alienation of being a foreigner is compared to "a sort of lifelong pregnancy," because it is "a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts... something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect." Gogol also feels alienated, especially when he realizes that "no one he knows in the world, in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake." (122)

The idea of alienation is tied to loneliness in Chapter 7, with observe to Ashima. She is living unaccompanied in the house on Pemberton Road and she does not like it at all. She "feels too old to learn such a skill. She hates returning in the evenings to a dark, vacant house, going to sleep on one side of the bed and waking up on another." When Maxine comes to stay with the Gangulis at the end of the mourning period for Ashoke, Gogol can tell "she feels useless, a bit excluded in this house full of Bengalis." (146). It's the way he is used to emotion around her extended family and friends in New Hampshire. The subject of alienation appears in Moushumi's life, as she describes to Gogol how she abandoned all the Indian suitors with whom her parents tried to match her up. She tells him, "She was convinced in her bones that there would be no one at all. Sometimes she wondered if it was her horror of being married to someone she didn't love that had caused her, subconsciously, to shut herself off." (151). She went to Paris so she could reinvent herself without the confusion of where she fit in.

Later their son named Gogol (Nikhil) Ganguli suffers from alienation because of his name, mainly when he realises that unknown takes this name now in the world. There is no clear basis or illumination of his name at least for namesake. He is a second generation of immigrants. His ties

with the home land are not so strong as those of his parents. Therefore, the natural world of his isolation is different from that of his parents. As Nigamananda says, "Jhumpa Lahiri's first generation Indian-Americans cherish their post and its memories and an indispensable and integral part of their roots and their beings, her second generation Indian-Americans reflect both proximities and distancing from it; they seem to perceive and adopt new angles at which to enter this reality. More particularly, they took forward to the concerns and modes of their hybridization and cross-cultural fertilization in the increasingly multicultural space of USA and not more absorption in the dominant culture." (122) Gogol feels alone and uneasiness, this becomes the main basis for his alienation. His emotion of segregation further deepens when he tries to pass up his parents and keeps his friends away from them. In an effort to incorporate with American culture, he tries to adopt American everyday life. He feels uncomfortable because his parents are different from the natives of America. He tries to pass up his parents and keeps his friends away from them. He tries to submerge in American civilization. In this challenge, he changes his name from Gogol to Nikhil, befriends with Kim, and has fun with her. Next, he tries to mix up with Maxine's family. He drinks costly wine at her parents' hut in the country. His ethics pricks him. "At times.....another bottle of wine is opened and Gogol raises his glass to be filled, yet again, he is conscious of the fact that his immersion in Maxine's family is betrayal of his own." (Lahiri 141) At this point he is shabby with a emotional conflict, foremost to alienation. Sidney Finkelstein defines alienation as "a psychological phenomenon, an internal conflict, a hostility felt towards something seemingly outside oneself, a barrier erected which is actually no defense but an impoverishment of oneself". (76) Gogol's experiences, his problem cannot only be limited to Indian Diaspora, living in America. Even in India, people who are migrating from their resident state to other states in organize to earn their living face the same trouble. We can take the example of the people migrating from hills to dissimilar parts of India in exploration of well-paid jobs. Immigration-takes place yet it is at a smaller level, but the hurt, the suffering that the people familiarity can be well compared to the pain experiences by Ashoke and Ashima. This feeling of loss of identity is not only extensive in the Indian Diaspora but can also be felt in the hearts of those Indians who even although living in India, find themselves separate from the land of their birth. Gogol likes a classic Indian-American, makes aware attempt to be unusual from his parents. He wants to live in a world free from the Bengali customs from the ethnicity that lay him behind to a country and

traditions. He does not want to be an unknown. He feels he is an American and he wants to detach himself from everything which is Indian or Bengali. He has seen throughout his life how the natives happiness his parents and with disbelief and disrespect. The parents are humiliated and segregated by the hosts. Gogol wants to keep away from such conditions in his own life and to realize a intelligence of belongingness and he is ready to reject what is his own and absorb into a traditions that he wants to make his own.

Gogol feels alienated occasionally in his marriage to Moushumi. When he finds leftovers of her life with Graham around the residence they now share together, he wonders if "he represents some sort of capitulation or defeat." (154). When they go to Paris simultaneously, he wishes it were her first time there, too, so he didn't feel so out of place while she feels so apparently happy.

Ashima feels separated and unaccompanied after showering before the party. She "feels lonely suddenly, horribly, permanently alone, and briefly, turned away from the mirror, she sobs for her husband." (161). She feels "both impatience and indifference for all the days she still must live." (166). She does not feel provoked to be in Calcutta with the family she left over thirty years before, nor does she feel enthusiastic about being in the United States with her children and prospective grandchildren. She just feels tired and besieged without her husband.

The immigrants practice portrayed by Lahiri in the novel forms the central topic of the novel. Throughout the novel in the course of various characters, we get an exciting and stimulating view of the Diasporic situations frequently experienced by the immigrants. Gogol want to be enlightened from his Indian backgrounds but after his father's death, the Indian ethics which he had hereditary, from him, makes him move closer to his mother and his sister resulting in a sprain with his connection with his girlfriend Maxine. The unexpected death of his father makes him turn back towards his family and innocently he donned the accountability of an elder son, as he would have done if he had lived in India. Gogol's search for identity is a never -ending explore; he cannot refuse the Indian culture and cannot even fully recognize the American ethics. This turns out to be on going, demanding and complicated process for him. He cannot refuse the demands of custom and cannot afford to contain to the temptations offered by a new civilization.

### Conclusion

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* is a novel that wonderfully portrays the social alienation happens when people are not flourishing in relating themselves to the position, they live in. Ashima and Ashoke in the novel *The Namesake* endures

because they failed to attach themselves with the people and the traditions of the crowd land and this results in alienation., in the novel *The Namesake* intensely portrays what Jhumpa Lahiri had voiced herself and she not at all allows her characters to be submerged under their troubles, thus making *The Namesake* in welding the theme of migration and dislocation to that of human relationships.

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