
Namesake : A Critical Aspect Through the Lens of Postcolonial Theory



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ABSTRACT : *Migration is a term which means the movement of people, animal and locality shifting or moving from one place to another. It never loses its essence in any era we take into consideration because human beings and animals have always been moving from one place to another for their work, job, family, love or residence. With Migration, the feeling of Alienation comes along, that results when the separation from the affectionate object/person/family/place takes place. Alienation is that feeling that makes the people feel that they are no longer a part of the world and it is the flashback those people keep getting from their past which makes them feel more alone in their present state. And all of these are the aspects that fall under Postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory explores themes of disconnection, discrimination, alienation from home. This Research paper aims to*

analyse the process of Migration and feeling of Alienation that keeps striving in the heart of the migrator through the analysis of the novel “The Namesake” by Jhumpa Lahiri and various aspects of day to day lives. However, the term migration has been popularised by several writers like Salman Rushdie, Chimanda Ngozi Adiche, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chinua Achibe. Among them many writers have attained their name, fame through their works all over the world. In that case, this research paper aims to focus more on the problems that the immigrants have faced at their new place and the discrimination that they have gone through. This highlights the mental fight those person suffer when they step into the new place and the adjustment they make.

KEYWORDS :

Migration, Alienation, Movement of human beings, postcolonialism, Cultural Clash.



INTRODUCTION :

Postcolonial theory examines the cultural, social and psychological effects of colonialism and imperialism, including issues of displacement, identity, and marginalisation experienced by colonised people. The physical and mental state of people has drastically changed after the postcolonialism wave. In 1947, when India got free from the colonisers, there was a ray of hope among people to live life on their own terms but at the same time there was an impact that was left upon the minds of laymen by Britisher's rule. It is that they were no longer familiar with their own culture as they were forced to follow the rules and guidelines imposed by British colonisers for a very long span of time. And when colonised people got free then they were influenced by the culture of the foreign authorities and started following their path, as Britishers were from the ruling class and also belonged to the West part of the globe. Hence, we can witness this fact even in 2024 also that people have a large influence and interest towards western culture because it makes them look like the literate ones and following their culture makes them look more Modern. Here, the concept of Postcolonialism arises as the younger ones of the generation are following the trends of western side but the elder ones of the generation are feeling alienated even while living with their family. For the elder ones they were more into their traditional roots and the younger ones are into the new culture that makes the elder people feel like they are not belonging to this place or era. This whole scenario points out in one direction that every individual is trying to fit in one particular place, showing that nobody is satisfied and happy with what they have got.

The concept of alienation is seen in the novel "The Namesake" by Jhumpa Lahiri that was published in the year 2003. It revolves around the character Ashok Ganguli, Ashima Ganguli, Nikhil Ganguli and Sonia Ganguli. The nickname of Nikhil was Gogol as it was compulsory for his parents to come up with a name before getting discharged from the hospital. And at that moment the only name his father could think of, was of Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol, as he was indirectly a reason of his life saved from the train accident. Later in the novel, it becomes the reason of feeling displaced in the host country because of his name being different from the American community. Lahiri's novel focuses on the different viewpoints of two generations, one of Ashok and Ashima, other of Gogol and Sonia, who face the need of belong. Most of the story is about Nikhil Ganguli who is nicknamed Gogol and his own struggle with his disliking towards his name. In the play, we see how Ashok and Ashima shift to



America and, there Ashok starts earning by working as a professor in a University. When Nikhil was not born, at that time Ashima feels alone by being away from her homeland, Calcutta. She feels so alienated that she looks for the same taste of spices in America which results in this way that she starts spending her time reading Bengali stories and articles so that she could feel connected towards her culture. And during her pregnancy time, when every other woman needs a soothing and relaxing environment she was all alone facing her hurdles there. Her husband Ashok, being from an orientalist background is not expressive regarding his love and emotions towards his wife. In the host country, she looks for Indian families which can make her feel familiar at that place but any of the things could not stop her reimagining and remembering her past days. And the stay of neither in homeland nor in host country is almost an experience of nearly death for her. The primary reason for her feeling this way is the change of the culture or we can say the cultural clash she feels between India and America. We can distinguish both cultures on the basis of the opportunities given to woman. On one hand, in America women are treated equally and they live independently, On the other hand, the state of Indian women is so different that they can't even take the decision of staying at their homeland due to emotional indecisiveness. Hence, Ashima can be taken as the right person who can demonstrate diasporic people.

The theme of the novel revolves around the question of 'self'. Cultural activities, factors, and surroundings are very important for a person in the search of his own identity. When a person doesn't get that exposure around him/her then it is generally normal to feel depressed and lost at the same time.

As Jola Skulji says in "Comparative Literature and Cultural Identity", "the problem of cultural identity involves the question of the self and of culture. In other words, this means reflecting on the essence of culture itself and implication that there is a reasonable motive of self-questioning". Ethnicity and Culture are interrelated terms and if seen from a dynamic view then they form a bigger picture of association with Capital. And Culture is intertwined with aspects like the hint of what our future holds for us, what is the place where we can see ourselves in the coming days, all depends upon our surroundings also. Culture is a phenomenon through which one can be known in any part of the world. Like the people who resides in India have certain characteristics of being very friendly, welcoming nature and they don't like to



show their wealth and status among people but if we see the other part like western people, they have an image of being conservative and limited to their family, thinking only of their own, not taking other individual as the part of their own community. There are these types of several differences that makes the migrated human beings feel that they are not living in a familiar environment which is a sad thing. And clearly, these are the feelings with which Ashok and especially Ashima are living their life in the host country.

Ashima tries to protect her family rituals even after staying in America but When Ashima gives birth to Nikhil and Sonia, it becomes more evident that those children are destined to be a part of America and now it will be considered as the homeland of her children. Now she tries to engage with several other ceremonies of white people like Christmas, cooking American food on weekends, organising Thanksgiving and trying to be more collaborative with white parents. She takes up a job of Librarian and starts paying up for herself and there comes a moment where she realises that she is more American now than Indian. When Gogol and Sonia hit their teenage then Gogol realises the fact that his name is different from everyone else's. And this becomes the moment when Nikhil starts feeling displaced in his environment and starts questioning about his identity as he neither belongs to India nor he resonates himself to America through his name. That makes him feel different from the society which makes him very depressed from the mind.

All of Gogol's life he was trying to be fit according to his surroundings and not to look like belonging from some other place. But there comes a turning point when his father dies in Ohio and that becomes a change in the lives and thought process of Ashima, Gogol and Sonia. It is then when Ashima decides that she will be spending half of her time in India. And at this point Gogol also comes out of the state of being liked and accepted by everyone and leaves his girlfriend Maxine and later, he got engaged with a Bengali girl Moushumi. However, those things also got messed up. Moushumi was also going through the same phases of life and mindset as Gogol. That was the reason somehow of generating a connection between the two. But as Moushumi could not stick to one thing permanently in her life that somehow serves a reason for their mutual partition. But the main purpose gets served when every character starts thinking of themselves and try to live their life up to the most.



Explaining the problems of being Asian-American and it being the curse of their confusion which could not even make them feel who they are in reality and where actually they belong is the worst feeling. It is like as if they are trying to live their life but suddenly get a feeling of displacement and not knowing what their purpose is and where do they belong.

As Salman Rushdie says “Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools”, fits right to the concept of cultural clash. Looking on the brighter side, Sonia has lived her life throughout. If we compare the life she would have been living if she would have been raised in India then we can say that the state of women was not as progressive as America. Women were not allowed to go and explore the outside world. But living in America is like a plus point. She gets to live her life on her own terms. That could be a positive remark for her if we ignore the fact that she must have faced the issues of displacement because of her Indian identity. There could be better chances of staying happy outside if people residing there are more familiar. Because we can say here that attachment is not always to the place but to the memory which has been created with our loved ones. At such a point love matters a lot to stop giving mind the unwanted feed and nourish it with love. “Being an outsider is a kind of deep rooted pregnancy. A perpetual pause, a consistent weight, a persistent inclination unwell. It is an on-going duty, an enclosure in what had once been common life, only to find that past life has vanished, supplanted by something progressively confused and requesting. Like pregnancy, being a non-native Ashima accepts, is something that evokes a similar interest from outsiders, a similar blend of pity and respect.”(Lahiri:2003:49-50). This shows the leading confusion arose out from their lives.

CONCLUSION :

The word Ashima means limitless or without any border. And she does justice by her name as she offers everyone limitless love, joy and support whenever they need it. But in terms of her own life, she gets to realise her own place even at the age of forty eight. And for her family “It’s not such a big deal”(The Namesake: Lahiri 161). The feeling of demotivation and the lack of love she faces at the host country is something which we can count as the result of migrating at a place where one cannot relate any further. The same process happens with Nikhil and Moushumi who finds it a challenge to be at a place where they are looked as a stranger. For a moment we can say that Sonia Ganguli has won in the way of living life as she got to live the



life which is quite good through the perspective of female. To sum up this, we can conclude that residing away from the house for any matter is reasonable but not getting love from your surroundings and not getting accepted and feeling discriminated where you are staying is something which is disheartening above all. It can be mended by offering the love to all people no matter from where do they come and how do they relate, is something which is appreciable.

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