

## THE ASPECT OF IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE NOVEL “THE NAMESAKE”, BY JUMPHA LAHIRI

**Sampath Kumar Y.G.**

Associate Professor, Govt First Grade College, Kadur, Chikkamagaluru Dt. Karnataka,

E-mail: sampath1yamasandhi@gmail.com

### **Abstract:**

The Namesake is a cross-cultural multigenerational story of the Hindu Bengali family journey to self-acceptance in Boston. Jumpha Lahiri masterfully explores the themes of the complicity of the immigrant experience and torridness, the clash of life style, cultural disorientation and the conflicts of assimilation and the tangled ties between generation and paints a portrait of an Indian family form between the pull of respecting family traditions, and the American way of life. It's a tale of love, solitude and emotional upheavals with an imaging eye for detail and ironic observation. In The Namesake, Lahiri enriches the themes that made her collection an international best seller.

**Key words :** Multigenerational, immigrant, torridness, assimilation, upheaval, disorientation.

### **Introduction**

Major international best seller, “The Namesake” is the debut novel by Jumpha Lahiri, the author of “Interpreter of Maladies”. That bagged the (2000) Pulitzer Prize for fiction, and won critical acclaim for its grace, acuity and compassion in detailing lives transported from India to America. Jumpha Lahiri an excellent writer deals with the major theme of problem of immigrants which she experienced in her own life. She is Indian but lives in America so she has a first hand experience in dealing with the problems of immigrants which she tries to show in her works. In the novel The Namesake she uses two names Gogal/ Nikhil which show her own expedited life. In her life too she has two names that are Nibanjana Sudeshna Lahiri. Jumpha Lahiri is one of the succinct, realist Indian-American authors. Among the immigrant Diaspora writer she gains a separate path. She is famous for her diasporic, expatriate sensible writings. She depicts very powerfully the immigrant experiences in her work. The Namesake is the perfect combination of the life of Indian people living in America.

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The Namesake takes the Ganguli family from their tradition bound life in Calcutta through their fraught transformation in to America. It is in 1967 on the heels of their arranged marriage. Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli settle together in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Engineer by training, Ashok adapts for less weary than his wife, who resists all things in America and pines for her

family. When their son is born the task of *bonhomie* bestows the vexed results of bringing old ways to the new world. Named after a Russian writer by his Indian parents in memory of a catastrophe years before, only Gogol Ganguli knows how much he suffers the burden of his heritage as well as his odd, antic name.

Jumpha Lahiri brings great empathy to Gogol as he stumble along the first generation path, stream with conflicting loyalties, comic detours, and crunching low affairs with penetrating insight. She reveals not only the defining power of the names and expectations bestowed upon us by our parents, but also the means by which we slowly sometimes painfully come or define ourselves in this fine novel of identity. In the fast globalising world in which the boundaries are becoming redundant, there is expected to be cultural *bonhomie* and cooperation. But in the case of migrants and their descendants, such talks still remain in the realm of farce.

In the novel “The Namesake” Lahiri’s experiences of growing up as a child of immigrants resemble that of her protagonist, Gogol Ganguli. Lahiri belongs to the second generation of Indian Diaspora whose ongoing quest for identity never seems to end. They feel sandwiched between the country of their parents and the country of their birth. They are to maintain ties between the ideologies of these two countries which are poles apart. But in the process they are caught between acute identity crisis from where there is nowhere to go. Lahiri finds herself quite a stranger to both of the countries – in India she is an Americana and in America she is an Indian.

“The Namesake” is about the perpetual dilemma faced by immigrants as they struggle to maintain their identities while trying to shake off at the same time. The first generation’s story was about adaptation and learning, acculturing and also discovering new things about themselves. The second generation finds itself presented with two conflicting realities and cultures and sets of expectations –one of the host countries through the socio-cultural surroundings and the other of the home country through their parents. Whereas the parents maintain ties with their home country and try hard to inculcate in their children the reverence for the values of the home country, the children are fascinated more by their peer groups and the society at large of the host country, which, of course was no longer a host country for them, but the country of their birth. But the country of their birth also does not accept them entirely and they keep struggling for cultural identity which sways between two countries. Parents talk of shared history which stresses.

Jumpha Lahiri is a famous Indian American Diaspora expatriate writer with Bengali background. Jumpha Lahiri’s collection of short stories and novels seems to be just that each stories follow the lives of first and second generation Bengali American. However there are other threads through the stories. Most are about immigrants from privileged background that come to live in well to do Boston and Cambridge area. Their children go to very good schools and go on to have very good cares. They also have families and grand children with all that comes life and all its various problems. Jumpha Lahiri mainly focuses these themes in her stories and her expatriate sensibility, exile, cultural dilemma assimilate Diaspora writing. Lahiri was born in London the daughter of Indian immigrant from the state of West Bengal. Her family moved to the United States when she was two. Lahiri grew up on Kingston, Rhode Island, where her father Amar lahiri works as a librarian at the University of Rhode Island. Lahiri’s mother wanted her

children to grow up knowing their Bengali heritage, and her family often visited relatives in Calcutta when she began kindergarten in Kingston Rhode Island. Lahiri's teacher decided to call her by her pet name Jumpha, because it was easier to pronounce than her "proper name" Lahiri. Lahiri's ambivalence of god the protagonist of her novel The Namesake over his usual name.

**Primary source:**

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