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Website: www.ctboracollege.edu.in

Email: ctborainfo68@gmail.com

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**DREAMS, DESIRES AND DEJECTIONS OF A DIASPORIC INDIAN
WOMEN DEPICTED IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE NAMESAKE***

Ganesh B.Sonawane

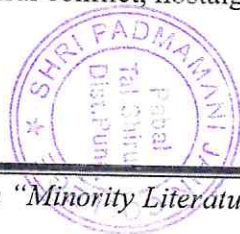
Assistant Professor, Dept. of English
S.P.J.College, Pabal, Shirur, Dist-Pune, gbslitlover1979@gmail.com ; 07350522178

Abstract

*In the postcolonial and postmodern globalized world, people have started to migrate from one nation to another. They have accepted the concept of global citizenship. First there is an attraction for foreign land, then it becomes a dream to get settled overthere. When this dream comes true, such people gradually feel dejected. These diasporas get suffered from the problems of migration such as homesickness, nostalgia, rootlessness, identity crisis, cultural conflict, marginalization and many more. In the course of time, after facing the cultural conflict, they get settled in the foreign land. The first generation of diasporas experiences the dejections while fulfilling their dreams and desires about their life. Indian writers now are globalized as they depict the problems of the migrants facing the challenges of globalization. The present paper holds the purpose to point out the dreams and dejections of an Indian diaspora reflected in Jhumpa Lahiri's much celebrated novel *The Namesake*. This is an effort of the researcher to analyse the character of Ashima Ganguly, a diasporic Indian woman, who suffers from the problems of migration in the age of globalization. Ashima stands for every Indian woman who doesn't have choice but to migrate to and settle in USA along with her husband. She represents an Indian woman who remains in a sort of trauma of diasporic existence.*

Keywords: *Dreams and desires, Dejections, Diaspora, Migration and Woman, etc.*

This research paper deals with the dreams and dejections of Ashima Ganguly, one of the major characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003). Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the leading Indian English novelists, belonging to the second generation of Indian immigrants settled in USA. Being her homeland she has travelled extensively in India. She has observed the postcolonial society and the challenges faced by the people who left for abroad. Jhumpa Lahiri herself represents the citizen of the globalized world. The novel deals with the challenges of globalization in social and cultural context. It deals with the themes of globalization such as postmodernism, postcolonialism, multiculturalism, identity crisis and diaspora. The novel is about a diasporic couple Ashoke and Ashima Ganguly who leaves India and settles in America. They suffer from the problems of migration. Ashima is the most sensitive Indian lady suffering from the problems like cultural conflict, nostalgia and alienation.



Role of Ashima: the heart of the story

Ashima Ganguly is not only a part but is the very heart of the story. She is the central character in the novel as the novel begins with her perspective and ends with hers too. She is the heart of the story. In fact she is the only character who 'feels'. She has a lifelong feeling for her past. She misses her life in Calcutta. She is the wife of Ashoke Ganguly who is a professor in one of the American Universities. She has to leave India, her homeland and has to settle in a complete foreign land. She is one of the diasporic Indian who has to accept the challenges of globalization. Ashima tries to cope with the challenges of migration. She gradually feels attached with the American way of life. In the era of modern globalization, voluntary migration of people from their native homeland has been increased. Indian Diaspora tries to have global citizenship. Bhat observes –“The diasporic Indian is like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life. He spreads out his roots in a 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 home in the world.” (Bhat, 2009:38)

Dreams and Desires of Ashima

In the postcolonial period people feel attracted towards the western lifestyle. Going to the West has become a matter of prestige. Like any Indian educated woman Ashima desires to go to America. For the first time when she meets Ashoke, she falls in love with his American standard of living. Symbolically she wears his shoes of American brand. She has an attraction of this foreign land. She desires to enjoy the life style of American people. At the age of nineteen she meets Ashoke in Calcutta and agrees to marry him. After marriage the couple moves to Cambridge.

Ashima starts living in America. Everything is new and foreign for her. She tries to adjust with the American culture but she suffers from homesickness, especially when she was about to become a mother for the first time. She is in the hospital. Ashima thinks it is strange to give birth to a child in a place where most people enter either to suffer or die. She doesn't want her child to be born in a foreign land. In India, she thinks to herself that women go home to their parents. She recalls the memory of her parents. Her delivery is perfectly normal but –

“Nothing feels normal to Ashima. For the past eighteen months, ever since she's arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all. It's not so much the pain, which she knows, somehow she will survive. It's the consequence : motherhood in a foreign land [...] it was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved, had made it more miraculous still. But she is terrified to raise a child in a country, where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems to be tentative and spare.”
(The Namesake, 6)

Her Dejections: Alienation, Nostalgia, Rootlessness and Nowhereness

Ashima after living in America realizes how her 'Dream of America' turned into 'Dejection'. As a diaspora, she has to face the problems of the emigrants such as alienation and loneliness, nostalgia and homesickness, rootlessness and nowhereness.

Throughout the novel she suffers from alienation except some occasional get together of her family and friends. Ashoke becomes busy with his career and stays at Ohio. Her son Gogol is in New York doing his job. Her daughter Sonia is having education in California. Ashima has to live alone in the house. She has to face isolation on two accounts- being surrounded by the strangers and being left alone by her own family members in America. “Through the existential struggle of Ashima, Lahiri represents the pang of a woman as wife living in diaspora; a pang caused by a sense of isolation. Here we find isolation from both the local society and her own society.” (Sah, 2012: 155) She feels completely alienated after receiving the shocking news of the death of her husband. Ashima after the death of her husband feels completely alienated and decides to move to India but her heart lingers in America where she has spent thirty three years of her life. She then decides to live six months in India and another six months in America within a year. Due to the thought of leaving America she faces a psychological burden. Lahiri describes her state of mind,

“For three years she messed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library; the women with whom she's worked. She will miss the women with whom she's worked. She will miss throwing parties. She will miss her daughter. [...] she will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband. Though his ashes have been scattered into Ganges, it is here

in this house and in this town, that he will continue to dwell in her mind.” (The Namesake, 279)

Ashima has to face nostalgia for life long period. It is sort of lifelong pregnancy, a continuous burden for her. Within her three decades of residence in America, she has to maintain balance between ‘American Present’ and ‘Indian Past’. The life after and before marriage. It is just like a constant burden Ashima faces the alienation and feeling of ‘otherness.’ The Gangulis have to move from Cambridge to Boston, where Ashoke has been hired as an assistant professor of electronic engineering at the Boston University. Even this migration too is like an unbearable burden to Ashima. Lahiri depicts her feelings of ‘otherness’ and ‘rootlessness’ as -

“For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong 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 that, that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect.” (The Namesake, 49-50)

Nostalgic state of mind is experienced by Ashima throughout the novel. Her mind is divided between the present reality of residence in America and her past life before her marriage in the homeland. However she doesn't have choice. She is helpless. Even she decides to leave America after the death of Ashoke, it becomes difficult for her. Prajapati in her scholarly article observes,

“Nostalgia becomes an integral part of her identity. She tries to make balance between her lived life in the host location and a life in the homeland before marriage. She is now free to be with her relations in her original homeland but she is quite unable to leave the place due to a developed new love which tucks on entire life lived with multiple roles of mother, wife and a commanding figure. (Prajapati, 2014:278)

As a diasporic person Ashima faces a sort of “inbetweenness” and “nowhereness” (Bhabha, 1994:1) Along with her husband she has to face rootlessness. They have a lot

of Bengali friends residing in America but cannot visit their Indian relatives and homeland every occasion.

Multicultural Aspect of her personality

Ashima strongly represent Indian woman who loves culture. She tries to maintain the balance between the culture of her 'homeland' and that of her 'hostland'. She arranges get together for both her Bengali friends in America and for the natives. She gradually accepts the American culture. She celebrates Gogol's birthday in both Indian and American ways. She throws parties for her American friends. She learns to prepare American food and to celebrate the American festivals. Lahiri describes,

"They learn to roast turkeys, albeit rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne, a Thanks giving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woolen scarves around snowmen, to colour boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter and hide them around the house." (The Namesake ,64)

Thus right from the food habit to the customs and rituals she accepts the way of life of American people. She celebrates the festivals of both the cultures. For their children – Gogol and Sonia, Ashima and Ashoke celebrate with progressively increasing funfair, the birth of Christ, in order to introduce them with the American culture along with the celebration of the worship of Durga and Saraswati.

Her quest for Identity

Ashima has to struggle for her own identity. Right from the beginning she doesn't have any choice. Her parents arranged her marriage with Ashoke. In the course of time her husband dies. She has to take the responsibility of the family. Her children accept the American culture and forget their roots and culture. In all this ups and downs she hardly gets time to think about herself. For thirty two years she had to live in dual identity- Indian and American. Now she is standing in between. After finishing all her responsibilities towards her children she decides to leave America. However she feels deeply rooted with American culture. Unknowingly she has created a world around her. Therefore she decides to enjoy the freedom of life. She decides to live a new life. She decides to live in India for six months and in America for another half of every year. About this move Mansing Kadam in his research article rightly states, "In spite of feelings of displacement, marginality and a crisis of

identity, this move is directed towards finding new ways of adaption in a new country." (Kadam, 2012:129)

Ashima as a representative of Indian Diasporic woman in the era of globalization

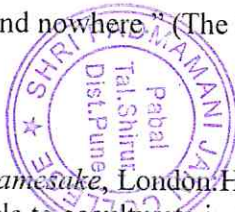
At the end of the novel Ashima decides to live in America for six months and in India for the next six months. Thus she accepts the global citizenship in the period of post-colonialism and globalization. Lahiri describes –

“For the first time since her flight to meet her husband in Cambridge, in the winter of 1967, she will make the journey entirely on her own. The passports no longer terrifies her. She has learned to do things on her own though she still wears saris, puts her long hair in a bun, she is not the same Ashima who had once lived in Calcutta, she will return to India with an American passport. In her wallet will remain her Massachusetts driver's license, her social security card.” (The Namesake, 276)

For the first time she decides something independently about herself. Now she is no longer an Indian or American. She becomes the citizen of the world-borderless, homeless, and limitless as her name 'Ashima' itself suggests. The name 'Ashima' signifies the person without the borders. Lahiri tells the significance of the characterization of Ashima by explaining the meaning of her name. “True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere.” (The Namesake, 276)

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Shri Padmamani Jain
Principal
Arts & Commerce College
Pabal, Tal. Shirur, Dist. Pune. 412403