

# Diasporic Allegory in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novel *The Namesake*

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**Abstract-** *This article examines how Jhumpa Lahiri's novel The Namesake (2003) employs allegory as a narrative strategy to explore the experiences of diasporic subjects. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's theory of metaphor and allegory, the article argues that Lahiri uses allegory to create a complex and dynamic representation of identity, culture, and belonging in the context of migration and globalization. It analyses how the protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, embodies the allegorical meaning of his name, which refers to both the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol and the Bengali word for "jewel". It also discusses how Lahiri's novel engages with the themes of memory, history, and literature as sources of allegorical interpretation and self-understanding for the diasporic characters. The article concludes that Lahiri's novel offers a nuanced and multifaceted view of diaspora as a condition of possibility and challenge for contemporary subjectivity.*

**Indexed Terms-** *Diaspora, The Namesake, Cultural Studies.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The term "diaspora" refers to the movement of individuals away from their original country and to other locations, typically across the borders of many nations or continents. A diaspora may be caused by a number of different things, including political wars, economic opportunity, religious persecution, natural disasters, or even cultural integration. It is possible for diaspora to have a substantial impact not only on the identities, cultures, and political systems of migrants and their host nations, but also on the migrants' relationships with the countries from which they emigrated. The study of diaspora is an interdisciplinary discipline that looks at the history,

experiences, and contributions of diasporic communities located all over the world, as well as the challenges and opportunities these communities confront in the modern period. The Jewish diaspora, the African diaspora, the Irish diaspora, the Chinese diaspora, and the Indian diaspora are only some instances of diaspora.

Jhumpa Lahiri is a well-known author who was born in India but currently resides in the United States. Her writings centre on the ideas of identity, culture, and belonging. Lahiri's Bengali parents moved the family to the United States when she was just two years old. Lahiri was born in London to these parents. She was raised in Rhode Island, where she experienced the conflict between the traditional values of her parents and her own desire to integrate into American society. She felt the strain throughout her childhood. The short tales and novels written by Lahiri are reflective not only of her personal experiences but also of the experiences of other immigrants who strive to achieve a balance between their ancestry and the new country in which they find themselves. The Interpreter of Maladies, Lahiri's first collection of short stories, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2000, solidifying her position as a preeminent figure in the world of modern literature. Her later books, including as *"The Namesake," "Unaccustomed Earth,"* and *"The Lowland,"* have similarly been met with widespread acclaim and commercial success from readers and critics alike. The literary style of Lahiri is distinguished by its simplicity as well as its elegance and clarity. She use language that is precise and vivid in order to create characters that are genuine and complicated, and who are confronted with emotional and moral conundrums.

The stories written by Lahiri frequently address topics such as families, marriages, loves, losses, and feelings

of isolation. Her books also demonstrate Lahiri's profound interest in the history and politics of India, particularly the Partition of 1947 and the Naxalite movement of the 1960s and 1970s, all of which took place during the author's lifetime. Lahiri has garnered accolades for her ability to capture the complexities and variety of the Indian diaspora in a variety of environments and situations in her writing. Lahiri is a multi-talented individual who not only writes but also translates and teaches. She has translated many books, including "*Ties*" by Domenico Starnone and "*Trick*" by Dacia Maraini, from the Italian language into the English language. In addition, she has taught creative writing at a number of universities, including Princeton, Boston University, and Columbia University, among others. She began writing in Italian shortly after relocating to Rome with her family in the year 2014. In 2015, she released her first book written entirely in Italian under the title *In other words*.

The author Jhumpa Lahiri wanted to give herself a new challenge and investigate a different facet of her identity, so she made the decision to write in a language other than English. The perceptive and compelling tales written by Lahiri have contributed significantly to the expansion of the canon of published works. Lahiri is an exceptional writer. She is a true representative of the diaspora who has transcended the borders of language, culture, and nationality. Hence, she is able to speak more than one language fluently. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel has an Allegory Concerning the Diaspora, which was published in 2003 by Jhumpa Lahiri, is an engrossing examination of the diasporic experience of Indian immigrants and their offspring in the United States.

The story follows the lives of Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli, who emigrate from Calcutta to Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the late 1960s, and their son Gogol, who is born and reared in the United States. The story is told through the eyes of the novel's protagonist, Gogol. Within the context of migration and displacement, the novel investigates the ways in which the individuals manage their identities, cultures, and relationships with one another. The relevance of names as indicators of one's identity and sense of belonging is one of the overarching ideas explored in this book. Allegory is a literary device that conveys a meaning that is either hidden or symbolic through the

use of characters or events, and this book uses names as an allegory. Gogol, the protagonist of the book, gets his name from the Russian author Nikolai Gogol, and the work is named after him. Ashoke, Gogol's father, is said to have survived a train catastrophe in India by reading one of the author's books and came up with the name for his son, Gogol. He is significant to Ashoke not just because it is a symbol of his survival and thankfulness, but also because it is a method for him to tie his son to his own cultural background. Gogol, on the other hand, has a difficult time identifying with others due to his name, which he considers to be odd and awkward. He does not see himself as connected to either the Russian author or his Bengali heritage. The more traditional name of Nikhil, which he took on when he started college, is the one that he prefers to be known by. He distances himself from his family in order to better integrate into American society, which he does through dating American women, seeking a job in design, and dating American women. On the other hand, he is uneasy and discontent with the decisions he has made in his life. He is now aware that simply altering his given name does not alter the person he is or the place he hails from. The names Ashima, Ashoke, Sonia, and Moushumi are all characters in the book, and they are all people who are a part of the Indian diaspora in America.

The novel also investigates the names of additional characters. The meaning of Ashima's name in Sanskrit is "she who is unlimited," but she often feels constrained by her responsibilities as a housewife and mother in a different country. She finds it difficult to adjust to the way of life in the United States, and she misses her family and friends back in India. She continues to practise her customs and rites, such as preparing Bengali food and participating in Bengali holidays. She also makes an effort to inculcate in her children a feeling of cultural identity, but she has the impression that they are moving more and further apart from her. In Sanskrit, the name Ashoke means "he who is without sorrow," but he bears a profound sadness within of him as a result of a near-death experience he had in India. In the United States, he has a more positive attitude towards doing new things and seizing new possibilities, such as pursuing a career in engineering and going on adventures all over the world. He also encourages his son to seek his own interests and passions, despite the fact that he believes

his kid does not comprehend or appreciate the sacrifices that he has made for the family.

In spite of the fact that her name, Sonia, translates to "golden" from the Hindi language, neither her parents nor the rest of society regard her as valuable or respectable. She goes against the traditions and customs that her parents have instilled in her, such as dressing in traditional Indian garb and marrying an Indian man. She develops a personality that is more self-reliant and forceful, and she decides to pursue a profession in law. In addition to this, she ties the knot with Ben, an African-American guy whom she adores and respects. Although "moist wind" is what the name Moushumi signifies in Bengali, the woman's life does not make her feel free or happy. She was born and reared in the United States, making her a member of the second immigrant generation. Even though she possesses a doctorate in French literature, she does not have a secure profession or clear goals for her life.

Moushumi marries Gogol because it is convenient for her and because their families put pressure on her to do so, but she doesn't love him nor does she share his views. Her affair is with an old acquaintance from France named Dimitri Desjardins, whose name suggests a connection to her intellectual interests and aspirations. She has been unfaithful to her boyfriend with him. In the backdrop of diaspora, the story demonstrates how characters' names can either reflect or contradict their identities, cultures, and connections with one another. The story makes the argument that names are not immutable or unchanging entities, rather, they are fluid and dynamic concepts that are capable of shifting in both time and location. The story also gives the impression that a person's name alone is not sufficient to indicate who they are or where they belong. This novel challenges the binary oppositions between East and West, tradition and modernity, as well as self and other, which are commonly used to create diasporic discourse. The story depicts the complexities and variety of the diasporic experience as one that involves a variety of different things.

#### CONCLUSION

The novel *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri is analysed in this article as to how the author used

diasporic allegory to explore the themes of identity, belonging, and cultural hybridity. An example of a literary device known as a diasporic allegory is one that makes use of metaphors and symbols to reflect the struggles and experiences of diasporic communities. In this article, Lahiri conveys the intricate and ever-changing nature of diasporic identity creation through the use of the theme of names, the metaphor of trains, and the symbol of bridges in her work. It also discusses how Lahiri's novel challenges the binary oppositions of home and abroad, tradition and modernity, and self and other, and instead presents a nuanced and multifaceted view of diasporic subjectivity. This topic was brought up because Lahiri is a writer of Indian descent who lives and writes in the United States. *The Namesake* is an impressive and captivating example of a diasporic allegory that provides insights into the present phenomena of globalisation and its impact on individual and community identities.

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