



## **The Emigrants' Psychological Combat In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake***

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### **APA Citation:**

Gokilapriya, T., & Vasanthakumari, T. (2021). The Emigrants' Psychological Combat In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 3051-3053

Submission Date: 11/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 25/12/2021

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### **Abstract**

The Combat is reflected in almost all the post- colonial Indian English Literature. People around the nook and cranny of the world, even other than being in diasporic atmosphere are encountering combat in their day today routine, so when it comes to the case of diasporics it is twice sometimes thrice the problems reflected in ordinary people's lives. The combat occurs due to the result of changes and hence the psychological combats are. These combats are innate and they are the basic process of our mind which happens when individuals perceive their thoughts, views, attitudes, goals and interests contrasted by another individual and social groups. Jhumpa Lahiri being an Indian expatriate having her roots in West Bengal expresses the pains of expatriates with her experience through her characters. She is a Pulitzer Prize winner, who portrays her internal conflicts through her characters in her works which becomes the integral part of her fiction. In *The Namesake*, she portrays inner combats of the character which is more or less similar to her own character with regard to her experience in the foreign land. The confusions, fears, the quest for the identity internally, and the struggles outwardly is also portrayed through the characters. This paper attempts to get to know the combats and conflicts psychologically, which are being faced by all generation immigrants.

**Keywords:** *Emigrants, post colonial, daunting, expatriate, combats.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel *The Namesake* tries to get out the pain of expatriates to the notice of the readers who can analyse and psychologically experience the combats of the diasporics. In the novel, *The Namesake*, the Ganguli family's emotional struggle to make a new life in America marks the start of the combat and struggles of the expatriates in the foreign land. Ashima, an Indian woman and a first generation immigrant, who leaves her homeland with Ashoke after her marriage to America in the pursuit of better prospects and for better standard of living is the centre of our research, who tries to make us know the mental turmoils of diasporics. Ashima who is a naive girl, flies with her husband, Ashoke to America with a heavy heart and after being instructed not to eat or do anything that's restricted in their culture and religion and that goes "not to eat beef or wear skirt or cut off her hair and forget the family the moment she landed in Boston"(TN 37). Once after boarding to America, she starts missing her homeland and her Bengali friends. She belonged to a traditional Hindu Brahmin middle class conservative family where the normal and basic movements outside the house are

condemned. S. Robert Gnanamony describes in his "Diasporen Divided Souls and Identity-Constituting in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*", that "Ashima Ganguly is mostly confined to the four walls of her house. She goes under a lot of tension as the conflictual nature of the eastern and the western culture" (157).

The first combat starts with her pregnancy, where she wanted to eat her favourite Bengali dishes and attempted preparing the dishes which were in vain. During her preparations, she got labour pain and suddenly she started calling her husband as "Are you listening to me?" (TN 2). Ashima was admitted to hospital along with three American women. She, hailing from a traditional Indian family, has a habit of speaking and sharing her thoughts with the family members, but she has none by her side to share her feelings with in the hospital, and so she starts to feel lonely. She somehow tries to communicate with other American women but that was in vain for there were language and cultural barriers. Anitha Singh in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora: Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*", says, "Without emotional support of her family, which is in India, she feels lonely and abandoned, as she struggles through the barriers of culture and language". Ashima, who doesn't have the habit of sleeping alone, struggles hard to sleep alone in the hospital. "It is the first time in her life she had slept alone"(TN 03). She feels restless for she is the only Indian woman in the hospital and her mind starts to seek her homeland, where the culture says, "Pregnant women should go back to her parents' house to give birth"(TN 04). In India, especially in her home town Kolkata, baby delivering is not a private affair, it comprises of so many people who might give solace to the mother. She was asked for "Hoping for a boy or a girl?"(TN 07), she says that she has no expectations "As long as there are ten finger and toe"(TN 07), immediately the nurse smiles and so she thinks that "she should have said fingers and toes"(TN 07).

The next haunting incident is motherhood which was a daunting journey. Ashima gave birth to a baby boy while both Ashoke and Ashima struggled to raise the kid abiding by the American system. She waits for her granny's letter containing the name for the child according to the Bengali customs and culture to name her child. Ashima was also for pet names that her Bengali tradition advocates. By the time of discharge from hospital, the hospital authorities demanded registering the name of the child in their register for their reference. So they were forced to name their child 'Gogol' in the memory of Ashoke for being saved from a train accident at the age of 21, with a page from the book of the author, Nicholai Gogol. Ashoke and Ashima moved into apartments where she remains in her own world with her memories of being dislocated from home land. She cries the whole day with none to console her at the end of the day. She longs for love and care from her blood relations and so she spends her time reading Bengali short stories, poems and articles.

After Gogol becomes six months old, there comes a ceremony called annaprasan which in other words is called rice ceremony, performed for feeding solid food to the baby for the first time. This ceremony becomes the next botheration and an instance of concern for the fact that this ceremony is always performed with the family's elders and with their blessings, but she tries to manage the ceremony with the Bengali friends dressed in their traditional outfit speaking Bengali. This very attitude of making the Bengali environment possible in America signifies her sense of belonging to their own culture. She always makes sure that she raises her son Gogol by giving him Bengali environment in America which again symbolises the combat and conflicts in between cultures. Ashoke and Ashima, in spite of being in foreign land, try to preserve and respect their culture and Indian tradition through food, dressing and various rituals like Gogol's annaprasan. Gogol was sent to Bengali language classes and cultural lessons every other Saturday, which is "they send him to Bengali language and cultural lessons every other Saturday. In Bengali class, Gogol is taught to read and write his ancestral Renaissance"(TN 66). The children including Gogol are uninterested in following Bengali tradition or language and that is reflected in Bengali families in America where during parties on Saturday evenings adults were seen speaking Bengali where else children in another room are seen watching American movies, which in turn again causes mental agony.

The exile in America is a mental trauma where the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation and longing for her lost own cultural land is seen directly. She meets the challenges of her migration and

develops homesickness. However, she tries to have ties with other Bengalis who migrated to America. Gogol's parents, while admitting him in school, named him as "Nikhil". Since the name is strange, Gogol is frightened by the novelty of the name formed with Gogol and Nikhil.

This makes him not respond to his new name, which is his first attempt to reject the feel of dual identity. Hence, this rejection of his new name, leaves him alone with the old name. Apart from having two names, there arises another problem since the name being neither American nor Indian but Russian, he feels frustrated and irritated by his name. Along with that, there comes the problem of identity. He also feels low when he gets to know about the details of the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol from his surroundings, who was a frustrated man who spent his life away from home. He is so desperate to save himself from being in this embarrassment. In school, since he is very much responsive to the name Gogol, he got registered with that name itself. But during his adulthood he begins to hate his name. He thinks that it drags him towards his parents' culture which hurdles him to mix with foreign culture and so he feels isolated. He takes India to be any other normal country in this world and stops having emotional connects with India and thinks America as his home. Gogol legally changes his name to Nikhil at New Haven after turning eighteen. He shows his dejection towards immigrants by not studying their favourable subjects like Physics, Chemistry or Engineering and so he prefers studying architecture. He feels a bit for his relationship with American girlfriends because of his changed name.

Ashima, who doesn't like her son changing his name, worries about the changing attitudes of children which are Americanized. Her faithfulness towards her culture " No parents ever called a child by his good name. Good names had no place within a family" (TN 66). Everyone in their traditions had pet names, even Ashoke (Mithu) and Ashima (Monu) had their names. This created a kind of trauma in the mind of Ashima. She comes out of her suffering by finding a new occupation as librarian to kill her time.

## 2. Conclusion

Hence, Lahiri's works open eyes to the Indian emigrants for they tend to be having innocent and unadulterated love for their motherland (root land) with original instances which makes the readers understand the position of diasporics.

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