Ars Artium: **An International Peer Reviewed-cum-Refereed Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences**
ISSN (Online) : 2395-2423 • ISSN (Print) : 2319-7889
Vol. 4, January 2016
Pp. 131-135

'Diasporic Concerns' and Picturization of 'Predominance of Isolation' of Indian Woman in *The Namesake* : A Film Study

*–Sudhir Narayan Singh**
*Padma Singh***

Abstract

At times people are placed in different spheres of the globe for various reasons and consequently they are exposed to numerous non-familiar situations and subjected to go through multiple new and unforgettable experiences. Since Nineteenth century American continent has been 'a land of dreams' in its true sense and it keeps inspiring fortune seeking persons belonging to other parts of the globe. For many this richest utopia on this earth proved to be "a land of making dreams in their pursuit of happiness" and at the same time for many others this has been proved a nightmarish 'dystopia, a land of breaking dreams'. Even in the era of post-colonial and post imperial American society the journey of an outsider may prove to be a series of painful experiences due to multiple reasons. Isolation is the bi-product of many such experiences which are articulated vociferously by the portrayal and picturization of one of the female protagonists Ashima Ganguly in *The Namesake* which receives a uniqueness by the subtle and symbolic use of the immortal lines from Wordsworth's famous poem "Daffodils" ("I wandered lonely as a cloud... golden daffodils"). This study attempts to locate isolation, as faced by Ashima, who was born and brought up on Indian soil and transplanted on American soil due to matrimonial reasons. Here in her homeland (West Bengal) India, Ashima holds the centre of affectionate attention amongst her paterfamilias; but after her migration to America, she suddenly realises that this cross-cultural matrimonial migration brought her to socio-cultural and emotional periphery where she finds herself totally uprooted and marginalized. She cannot exercise even the cultural and ritualistic way of naming her own baby as the societal practices of the land was somewhat prohibitive in nature. Life itself subjects

* *Assistant Professor, Department of English and Communication Skills, The Technological Institute of Textile & Sciences, Bhiwani, Haryana. Email: sudhirnarayansingh2009@gmail.com*
***Faculty, Department of Hindi, Birla Balika Vidyapeeth, BITS, Pilani, Rajasthan.*

her to multiple but very subjective experiences. Though the experiences themselves were intensely personal but they definitely can be applicable to the citizens of both the nations 'India as well as the United State of America' in general.

Keywords: Diasporic experiences, alienation, isolation, marginalization.

Introduction

Though Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* appears explicitly simple, yet it opens multifaceted vistas by offering sumptuous food to the intellect of its readers or to those who visualize it as film critics. On one hand, it is a very deep and fulfilling love story lived with the hopes, dreams and wishes by a couple Ashoke and Ashima, while at the same time on the other hand it is rich with the ethos of the varied experiences of isolation and alienation in Diaspora by picturizing experiences of a family faced in the country of hope and dream i.e. America. At the outset, it would be appropriate to make it very clear that this study is not inspired by, or conducted with the motive to serve, plead or coin any - 'ism' and if it must serve any that may be accepted or considered as humanism. This fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri was beautifully screened by Mirabai Films and Cine Mosaic Production as Mira Nair's film with same name *The Namesake*. As film it scaled and scripted the following achievements.

Top Ten List

1. 6th – Peter Rainer— The Christian Science Monitor
2. 8th – Carrie Rickey — The Philadelphia Inquirer
3. 8th – Claudia Puig — USA Today
4. 9th – James Berardinelli— Reel Views

Awards and Nominations

Won

1. Love is Folly International Film Festival Award- Bulgaria

Nominated

1. Casting Society of America "Best Feature Film Casting" Cindy Idon.
2. Gotham Award – 2007— "Best Film" Mira Nair & Lydia Dean Pilchar.
3. Independent Spirit Award— "Best Supporting Male" — Irfan Khan.

Setting of the Movie

American continent has been 'a land of dreams' in its true sense. For many this richest utopia on this earth proved to be "a land of making dreams in their pursuit of happiness" and at the same time for the many "Dystopia, a land of breaking dreams". The story of *The Namesake* dwindles between India and America. But it has an India while it runs in America and at the same time it has an America while it has been set in India. Throughout the movie these two nations could never divorce each other.

Isolation: One of the Diasporic Bi-Products

Many a times persons are placed in different spheres for various reasons, and as a result of that they are exposed to numerous non-familiar situations going thorough new and unforgettable experiences. Isolation is also the bi-product of many such experiences. Even in the era of post-colonial and post empirical American society, the journey of an outsider may prove to be a series of painful experiences due to multiple reasons. This study attempts to locate isolation, as faced by one of the female protagonists Ashima, born and brought up on Indian soil and transplanted on American soil due to matrimonial reasons. There is a great contrast between American and Indian values when Gogol falls in love with Maxine who draws him into a wealthy American family. So, there is an alienation and indifference towards family values and that sort of alienation was also successfully picturized by Mira Nair.

Isolation and its Treatment in *The Namesake*

The Namesake portrays the alienation and immigrant experiences in America as imbibed by Ganguly family. The novel also highlights each and every character and their loneliness in one way or the other. Portrayal and picturization of one of the female protagonists Ashima Ganguly in *The Namesake* receives a uniqueness by the subtle and symbolic use of the immortal lines from Wordsworth's famous poem "Daffodils":

> I wandered lonely as a cloud
> That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
> When all at once I saw a crowd,
> A host, of golden daffodils; (1-4)

While at her parents' home in Calcutta, (West Bengal), India Ashima holds the centre of affectionate attention amongst her paterfamilias; but after her migration to America, the above lines of "Daffodils" proved to be her destiny. It didn't take her much time as brutal experiences that she came across in her post marital life gradually that made her to realize that this cross-cultural matrimonial migration brought her to socio-cultural and emotional periphery where she finds herself totally uprooted and marginalized. She cannot exercise even the cultural and ritualistic way of naming her own baby as the societal practices of the land was somewhat prohibitive in nature.

Ashima, who is facing the reality of life, finds herself all alone at every stage. Starting from an arranged marriage in India, immigrate to America with her husband Ashoke, also feels loneliness in some way or the other. While in hospital at the time of Ashima's delivery, she finds herself all alone, cut off by curtains from three other women in the room.

> It is first time in her life she has slept alone, surrounded by strangers; all her life she has slept either in a room with her parents, or with Ashoke at her side. She wishes the curtains were open, so that she could talk to the American women. (Lahiri 3)

She wonders that she is only Indian in the hospital, but a gentle twitch from the baby reminds her that she is not alone. She thinks and feeling strange to give birth to her child at that place where 'most people enter either to suffer or to die'.

"There is nothing to comfort her in the off-white tiles of the floor, the off-white curtains, the off-white ceiling, the white sheets tucked tightly into bed." Now she thinks and compares the care given by the parents and in-laws in India at the time of giving birth to a child. A sense of insecurity and restlessness came on her face. The situation becomes more painful when:

> She cries out, pressing her head against the pillow. Her finger grip the chilly rails of the bed, but no one hears her, no nurse rushes to her side. She reminds the time from being separated by her parents at Airport and tears rolled down from her eyes. She never tried to foot-out from her parents' home all alone but now the situation is against her to lay in bed in foreign land with no one familiar at this crucial moment where more care is required.
>
> American second tick on top of her pulse point. For half a minute, a band of pains wraps around her stomach, radiating towards her back and shooting down her legs and then, again, relief. She only calculates the Indian time on her hands. (Lahiri 4)

In spite of her growing discomfort, she has been astonished by her body's ability to make life so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved. A sense of loneliness and fear runs in her eyes to give birth to a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare.

Their son Gogol, named for the Russian writer, rejects both his unique name and his Bengali heritage. When at one point, Ashoke gifts his son a volume of Nikolai Gogol's short stories for his fourteenth birthday, hoping to explain the book's significance in his own life, Gogol seems to be indifferent to it. Such quietly revealing moments show a little feeling of happiness and loneliness in Gogols' mind. He does not want to accept the name Gogol as his friends started making fun of it. The loneliness of lives in exile is most poignantly revealed in the late night family telephone calls from India, always an announcement of illness or death which was nicely picturised by Mira Naire. When Ashoke informs Ashima about the death of her father the background itself was very suggestive by projection of the shade of a hoofed snake on the wall.

In one way or the other it won't be an exaggeration to infer that Gogol's marriage with Moushumi Mazumdar was hardly a marriage of minds, which further proves to be nothing but an intensive and poignant failure ending in divorce. Ashima also starts blaming herself for everything that has gone wrong in her son's life. Life itself subjects her to multiple but very subjective experiences. Though the experiences themselves were intensely personal but they definitely can be applicable to the citizens of both the nations 'India as well as United States of America' in general. After the death of Ashoke, Ashima finds herself totally alone in the American soil. She divides her time between America and Calcutta and ultimately decides to sell her house.

Conclusion

As movie, it pleads for a balance overview of human life, looks for the establishment of a golden mean (The Madhyam Marg) of Man-woman relationship, a gradual shift towards harmonious relationship and philanthropic human relationship and cultural amalgamation instead of the portrayal of radical feminism. Its filming delineates the subtle inter-dependence of husband-wife relationship with minimum conflict of masculine dominance or female subjugation. Its many fold canvas also carries the colours of amalgamation and assimilation of cultures of east and west. It also breaks the limitless boundaries of cross-cultural-communications by surpassing the threshold of all its known classified barriers. The east-west encounter also reaches the final and amicable cultural amalgamation towards the end of the movie where the final remarks of Ashima Ganguly becomes the binding notes of a humanistic thesis.

Works Cited

- Wordsworth, William. "Daffodils." http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174790
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. Noida, India: Harper Collins, 2008. Print.

❑❑❑