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The Journey of Ashima in the Namesake: the Alienation, the
Assimilation and the Integration

Abstract: This article is aimed to bring out the essence of Ashima as an Indian immigrant, overcoming the alienation and attaining successfully the integration by assimilation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. Her story is not merely of a lost identity rather it is a story of finding oneself unleashing to the unbound, to the unfold universe reaching towards limitlessness.

Keywords: Diaspora, Assimilation, Integration, Culture, Tradition

Dispersion is the English word synonyms to the meaning of the term “diaspora”, a Greek word used for the Jewish people who were exiled or dispersed from their homeland, Israel. The people managed to survive on the other lands by adapting the tradition and culture of the new places and what is most striking about them is that they nurtured and nourished their own ethnicity by clinging to it at the same time. Migration or immigration is the trending term of Diaspora which has been evolved a literary genre dealing with the process of adapting and adopting the culture of a new land by the people who are migrated from their home land for

various reasons. In this regard Indian Diaspora has a long history. The record of people migrated to various countries all over the world from India is high and basically it is some European countries or some developed countries. So it is very clear that the basic reason for Indian immigration is for better fortune to have a better life abroad. Now it is assimilation along with integration which makes the Indian immigrants to have a balanced life in the host countries conquering over alienation, identity crisis and other emotional breakdowns. To be integrated is to accept the norms and values of the host society and behave like them retaining own ethnic culture, social system, language and religious beliefs.

Jhumpa Lahiri's debut novel *The Namesake* is one of the true specimens of Indian Diasporic writing. The author has a mastery to deal the Diasporic themes as she herself is a child of migrant parents having all Diasporic experiences. *The Namesake* tells the saga of Ganguly family who left India with a sack of Indian culture and Bengali tradition and settled in the USA. Ashoke Ganguly, a professor in Boston marries Ashima Bhaduri, a sensitive Bengali girl and brings her to Boston. Ashima is very emotional where Ashoke is practical adopting easily the American way of life. She feels more than others and in the beginning of the novel she is found very upset and morose sinking into a feeling of nostalgia missing her home at Calcutta very badly. The pain of home sickness overpowers her: "On more than one occasion he has come home from the university to find her morose, in bed, rereading her parents' letters". In this new land she feels alienated finding herself uncomfortable to fit in. There are new customs to acquire, new ways of doing things: "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".

Ashima represents what Avtar Brah terms 'the homing desire of the migrant'. She is a portrayal of a hesitant migrant of fixed origins on the very outset of the novel. She belongs to the women community who are not ready to accept or adapt the cultural changes in the host country and the sole reason of being there is their marriage. At the same time she portrays a pure Indian woman who can bear all pains and sufferings for the betterment of her child. When she gives birth to Gogol, her first baby she wishes to go back to her home where she would have been treated with extra love and care by her near and dear ones like every typical Bengali girl but she decides to be there with her husband in that alien land. In the course of time she learns to adjust with the new way of life and transforms to a mature mother of two children from an immigrant Indian bride. Though she tries to imbibe Indian culture and tradition into her children but never forced them to strictly follow them. Here she tries to assimilate with the culture of USA and develops a sense of integration which brings satisfaction to some extent. She makes friendship with some people outside her community not only that she manages to find a job in a library to occupy her time when her husband is in the university. She tries to come over from the stigma of 'we' and 'they' concept.

Ashima and Ashoke become more liberal to accept the American traditions as Gogol and Sonia grow up; they begin to adjust with the American friends of their kids who are gradually immersing into American tradition and culture. It is not easy for them but they are well aware about the dual identity of their children. The couple starts celebrating Western occasions like Christmas, Thanksgiving Halloween and so on: "For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati". On the eve of Thanksgiving they learn to roast turkeys rubbed with cumin, garlic and cayenne; in December they hang a wreath on their

door; at Easter, they colour boiled eggs violet and pink and hide them around the house. Despite of being a Hindu, Ashima cooks beef in her kitchen to make an American dinner for her children. Again she dislikes the choice of girlfriend of Gogol when he comes of his age but over time she becomes lenient to accept the relationship of her children with the non-Indians. The divorce of Gogol and Mousumi, a Bengali girl (Second generation migrants) plays an instrumental role to Ashima who realizes that belonging to same community cannot guarantee to the bond of marriage. She accepts smoothly when Sonia marries Ben, a non-Bengali fellow. The tragic death of her husband makes Ashima to sink into a feeling of alienation once again: “Ashima feels lonely suddenly, horribly, permanently alone, and briefly, turned away from the mirror, she sobs for her husband. She feels overwhelmed by the thought of the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and is now in its own way foreign”. At this juncture she is supposed to move to her homeland but to everyone’s surprise she decides to stay six months in India and another six months in the States with her children. The coexistence, the ambivalence, the integration gives Ashima the mental peace justifying her name as it suggests “she who is limitless”.

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