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*Corresponding author
Hero Hassan Abdulla
hero.hassan@uor.edu.krd

Gendered Displacement: Ashima's Intersectional Journey in Jhumpa Lahiri's *the Namesake*

Hero Hassan Abdulla/ Department of English, College of Education, University of Raparin, Ranya, Kurdistan Region/Iraq
Saman Hussein Omer/Department of English, College of Languages, Salahaddin University-Erbil, Kurdistan Region,Iraq

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Abstract

Migration narratives predominantly focus on male experience, likewise critics and scholars have often directed their attention to male protagonists. Yet, this paper aims to spotlight on female migratory experience as displayed through the character of Ashima in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003). The research claims that Ashima's experience is overlooked by critics and researchers in favor of Gogol, the male protagonist in the novel. Through Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectional theory, this research investigates Ashima's migratory journey, highlighting the intersectional complications facing her as she navigates her journey in the United States. The study maintains that her experience is not shaped by a single factor, rather by the overlapping factors of gender, race, class, and migratory status. Concludingly, the analysis emphasizes that Ashima's traditional gender roles are not only means of oppression but also foundations for her transformation. Thus, female migrants may have the ability to successfully overcome intersectional oppression and take advantage from them for asserting their agency.

Keywords:
Female Migration,
Intersectional Theory,
The Namesake,
Resistance,
Endurance



About the Journal

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1. Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) is one of the seminal novels in contemporary fiction that explores the complexities of migration in relation to other identity markers. Lahiri, as one of the renowned contemporary female authors, is known for her exploration of migrant experiences in most of her notable works, focusing on Indian-American immigrants. She has been an immigrant herself; therefore, she attentively and effectively pictures migration complications, mainly from women's perspective. Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London in (1967) to Bengali parents originally from Calcutta (the capital of West Bengal, India) later they moved to the United States, and she grew up in Rhode Island. She is a second-generation immigrant who has been raised in literate bi-cultural atmosphere. Though, they lived in New England, her family maintained a close relation to their Bengali roots. She is one of the first South Asian American authors to be recognized as a canonical figure by being included in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (Dhingra and Cheung, 2012).

Further, Friedman (2008) claims that, Lahiri belongs to the new generation of contemporary ethnic American authors who have transformed the thematic focus of migratory narratives. They shifted the focus from the portrayal of American dream and assimilation that dominated the earlier migrant narratives to the exploration of individual identity, family relationships, cultural negotiations, emotional and gender dimensions of diasporic life. Lahiri's novel, *The Namesake*, unlike common migratory narratives, is not about American dream. Rather, it is about what happens to migrants and their children once the dream is obtained. Nonetheless, in portraying an immigrant family who are not struggling with poverty or overt racism, Lahiri reserves a link with earlier narratives and align herself to the contemporary immigrant writers.

In tracing Ashima's journey, the novel depicts Bengali female immigrants in America, portraying their experience with migration, wifehood, motherhood, and femininity. It illustrates how female experience intersects with gender, class, ethnicity, education, and migratory status. Drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw's pivotal ideas about the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and migration, the research explores how these intersecting identities shape Ashima's migratory experience. The research attempts to spotlight on Ashima, interpreting her as marginalized migrant woman in America and the sideline character that often overlooked by critics in favor of Gogol as the male protagonist.

2. Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality as a theoretical framework scrutinizes how social identities like race, gender, class, sexuality intersect and create a unique experience of discrimination and privilege. The term 'intersectionality' was first articulated by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a professor of law and social activist, in (1989) within the context of United States black feminism and critical race theory. She laid the foundation of the theory through the publication of two path-breaking articles. The first article entitled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (Crenshaw,1989). The second one is "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" (Crenshaw, 1991).

Crenshaw (1991) used the concept of intersectionality to "denote various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences" (p.1244). She claims that by focusing on 'single- axis discrimination' like race or gender we fail to give the whole picture of black women's anguish. Thus, she uses the word "intersections" as a metaphor of roads that cross each other to emphasize on the marginalization and discrimination of black women. The metaphor of the road signifies that identity politics and anti-discrimination laws addressed only race or sex not both of them concurrently (Lykke, 2010). Also, it has been described

as a metaphor and theory for examining the complex interaction between multiple forms of disadvantage that centers on ethnicity, race, color, religion, caste, sex, gender, disability, age, etc. (Atrey, 2019). Thus, intersectionality refers to the interconnectedness of social identity structures like race, gender, class, ethnicity, religion and others in the lives of individuals, especially black and minority women. This theory, then, is well-suited to this paper because it helps to reveal the complexity and multifaceted experience of migrant women as it cannot be reduced to mere race or gender obstacle.

3. Literature Review

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) has garnered notable attention from critics and scholars since its publication. This review attempts to examine selected scholarly works on *The Namesake* (2003). It aims to highlight the critical gap in existing criticism; specifically, the marginalization of female protagonist, Ashima. Early critical responses focused on identity, cultural negotiation, and generational differences in the novel. Besides, there were attempts to focus on gendered frameworks. In this context, Kasun's 2009 thesis entitled "Womanism and the Fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri" studied womanism in Lahiri's *the Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth*. The study claims that Lahiri both represents and redefines womanism in these works, through her portrayal of family-centeredness and cultural maternity as defined by womanism scholars Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Clenora Hudson-Weems. Further, the researcher claims that traditional womanism is both reflected and challenged by the characters in Lahiri's mentioned works. The research concludes that Lahiri's intergenerational womanistic works call for a womanism that is independent from current womanism's Afrocentricity.

Correspondingly, the reflexive nature of identity in the novel is studied by Khorakiwala in "Reflexive Identity Construction in South Asian American Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*" (2021). The research examines the reflexive nature of the identity of four main characters in the novel: Ashima and Ashoke as the first generation; Gogol and Moushmi Mazoomdar as the second-generation immigrants, based on Anthony Giddens' concept of reflexive identity. Depending on this theory, identity is dynamic and individuals continuously adjust and reshape their identity on the basis on interactions and experiences with external world. The study concludes that first-generation immigrants demonstrate an integrated identity dimension, while the second generation show multi-identity dimension.

A more recent study is Bhandari's "Reshaping Identities: Female Agency in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*" (2024). The study employs Amartya Sen's capabilities theory and Albert Bandura's concept of human agency to female agency in the novel focusing on Ashima's journey from a patriarchal society to America. The article claims that Ashima's character starts to evolve as she adapts to the American culture. The article highlights the positive consequences of migration, concluding that once the cultural and economic barriers are elided, Ashima got her agency. Although, Bhandari studies Ashima's agency focusing on her adaptation, but the structural and intersectional restraints that shape her subjectivity are not explored.

Further, few scholars used intersectional theory to study Gogol's identity. Vaishnav's article "From Calcutta to Cambridge: Intersections of Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*" (2024), examines how the intersections of identity like race, class, gender, and sexuality interact to shape the protagonist's journey and his family. The study describes Gogol's complications with his name and cultural heritage as an embodiment of the struggles immigrants face. It further displays the intergenerational conflict among immigrants. Employing qualitative methodology and thematic analysis, the conclusion demonstrates the complexity of identity formation in diasporic contexts and the novel's great contribution in depicting such complexities. Although the study uses intersectional lens but the focus is still on Gogol, sidelining Ashima's gendered position. Additionally, in "Skin

and Story: An Intersectional Exploration of Racial Trauma, Identity, and Displacement in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*", Iftikhar and Fatima (2024) study racial trauma in both novels employing both racial trauma theory and intersectionality as theoretical framework. The study aims to discover how multiple factors like skin color, race, oppression intersect and generate both visible and invisible racial trauma. The researcher claims that Gogol's conflict with his name and Ashima's struggle with new culture reflect the broader racial trauma experienced by immigrants. The trauma then, is not purely personal rather it is collective and structural.

From the review, one can observe that much scholarly attention has been accorded to the novel, but few of them focused on Ashima distinctly. Most of the aforementioned researches focused on identity, racial trauma, cultural negotiation, and generational differences, using frameworks like diasporic, postcolonial, intersectional perspectives exemplified by Gogol's journey. Yet, there is a lack of engagement with intersectional nature of Ashima's female migratory experience, a gap that the current study seeks to address. This research is anticipated to make a valuable contribution to the existing literature on gendered migration and to fill the gap in the existing literature.

4. Methodology

The study is qualitative descriptive analysis; it employs close textual analysis of Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003). The analysis is theory driven, guided by intersectionality as postulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Through intersectional framework, the study scrutinizes the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and migratory status that shape Ashima's diasporic gendered experience.

5. Discussion:

5.1 Ashima Before Migration: Gendered Preparation for Endurance

Lahiri in *The Namesake* provides specific details about Ashima's life before migration as a daughter living with her parents in Calcutta. These details contextualize gender power, and reveal that Ashima's subordinate position has been well-established even before her marriage. In the flashback, Ashima is described as a young educated girl who belongs to middle class family. Though she aspires to follow her study, but her parents insist on her marriage, she has no choice but to submit. Since, in Bengali tradition, as Chattopadhyay (2017) argues parents are choosing the brides and grooms, children have no decision in the process. Living in a culturally conservative society, Ashima is conditioned to adhere to gender-expected roles. She shows obedience and agrees on the arranged marriage. The narrator further describes her domestic skills, like cooking, knitting, and the literary talent of poetry recital. These feminine traits signify the cultural expectations and conditions for a daughter prepared for the marriage bond. Furthermore, the events before Ashima's migration emphasize the intersection of her gender, class and cultural norms that influence her life and destiny. Ashima has given up her dream to attend college in obedience to her parents, as the narrator indicates,

It had been after tutoring one day that Ashima's mother had met her at the door, told her to go straight to the bedroom and prepare herself; a man was waiting to see her [...] She was nineteen, in the middle of her studies, in no rush to be a bride. And so, obediently but without expectation she had untangled and rebraided her hair (Lahiri, 2003, p.7).

The marriage was arranged and preparations were made, Ashima remained passive throughout the process. The narrator states, "one week later, the invitations were printed, and two weeks after that she was adorned [...] These were her last moments as Ashima Bhaduri, before becoming Ashima Ganguli" (Lahiri, 2003, p.9). Significantly, Ashima seems to be aware of the patriarchal traditions, and her position within the hierarchy, therefore, she has never rebelled against them. As Karmakar (2017) states, within the Hindu-Indian family structure, males have a dominating position, the females take a subordinate one. Ashima accepted the marriage without questions and expectations, "it was only after the betrothal that she'd learned his name" (Lahiri, 2003, p.9). When she was asked

if she is capable of living abroad in Boston, a city she has never heard about, she remarks “won’t he be there?” (Lahiri, 2003, p.9). Ashima’s speech reveals her acceptance of traditional status. Also, it foreshadows her future obedience and dependence on her husband after marriage. Thus, marriage will be simply a transitory state from domination of her family to the domination of her husband. Hence, the patriarchal foundations were established before her departure to America. These patriarchal expectations follow her to America shadowing her presence and steps forward. Consequently, her transition from an obedient daughter to a dedicated wife, then a devoted mother, stresses the continuity of her intersected marginalization and subjugation.

5.2 Early Years in the United States: Intersectional Vulnerability and Cultural Isolation

5.2.1 Migration as a Gendered, Forced Transition

Migration for Ashima is not a choice but a forced transition determined by her gender role, like her arranged marriage, it is a crafted path to bridge. She migrates to America to accompany her husband, who is a PhD candidate. Depending on her Indian culture, it is her responsibility as a wife to endure, to follow, and please her husband. While abroad, she suffers from loneliness and homesickness. Lahiri recounts,

On more than one occasion he has come home from the university to find her morose, in bed, rereading her parents’ letters. Early mornings, when he senses that she is quietly crying, he puts an arm around her but can think of nothing to say, feeling that it is his fault, for marrying her, for bringing her here (Lahiri, 2003, p.33).

In her early years in America, Ashima endures emotional and cultural challenges. She suffers from homesickness and isolation. Tamely, she endures her suffering silently concealing both her emotional and physical distress. Despite her inner struggle and disappointment, she remains loyal to her husband as she was to her parents. Once she landed in the host country, her disappointment initiated. Contrary to her expectations, they live in a small drafty apartment which contains only three rooms without a corridor opposite to what she has seen in movies. But she never complains, neither to her husband nor to her family, “she has kept her disappointment to herself, not wanting to offend Ashoke, or worry her parents” (Lahiri, 2003, p.30). Yet, her silence from an intersectional standpoint, is the result of intersecting factors including the patriarchal norms, gender-expected roles, and migratory status. That is, Ashima has been raised in a patriarchal society which trained her to be submissive and self-sacrificing. Her silence does not signal passivity, rather a choice determined by her gendered and migratory position, yet it deepens her sense of isolation.

Ashima’s intersectional identity is central in the novel. She is a Bengali, migrant wife, and a mother who is required to navigate her journey as a mother and migrant in a foreign country. Her intersectional identity places her on the verge of multiple disadvantages. Ashima’s suffering is not due to domestic violence, abuse or poverty, but rather a compounded oppression caused by the intersection of multiple factors including gender, class, race, ethnicity, and migratory status. Her initial isolation is not because of overt racism or sexism but because of the accumulation of being a woman, Bengali, migrant, and a mother. These factors are unwittingly overlapping and marginalizing her, as Crenshaw states, “intersectional subordination need not be intentionally produced”, since “it is frequently the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with preexisting vulnerabilities” (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1249). Ashima already embodies these vulnerabilities.

5.2.2 Linguistic Marginality

Speaking the language of the host country is crucial for the migrants’ integration. According to the International Organization of Migration (IOM), “The ability to speak the language of the country of destination is one of the most important facets of integration. Language and communication can

help build the bonds between migrants and the members of the host society that facilitate integration” (IOM, 2008, P. 34). This is another immediate constraint Ashima faces abroad. Her limited linguistic efficiency is among the causes of her marginality and invisibility. It limits her social, cultural interaction which hinders her integration. Her limited proficiency creates a barrier and deepens her sense of isolation. Also, it generates challenges for communicating in everyday situations at hospitals and stores. Making her more dependent on her husband who is fluent in English due to his academic background. Crenshaw believes that “Language barriers present another structural problem that often limits opportunities of non-English-speaking women to take advantage of existing support services” (1991, p.1249).

Additionally, this deficiency becomes more apparent when she is in the hospital delivering her first child. When Patty, the nurse, asks her whether she hopes to have a son or a daughter, Ashima hopes only for a healthy child replying, “as long as there are ten finger and ten toe” (Lahiri, 2003, p.7). Ashima realizes her linguistic mistake through Patty’s smile, she is supposed to say ‘fingers, toes’. Consequently, she feels tormented and her mistake was as painful as her contraction, as the narrator describes, “this error pains her almost as much as her last contraction” (Lahiri, 2003, p.7). This is because in Calcutta, she was a tutor preparing herself for a college degree. She had been tutoring children of the neighborhood, helping them to memorize lines from the poems of William Wordsworth and Alfred Tennyson, “to pronounce words like sign and cough, to understand the difference between Aristotelian and Shakespearean tragedy. But in Bengali, a finger can also mean fingers, a toe toes” (Lahiri, 2003, p.7). From an intersectional perspective, Ashima’s lack of proficiency is compounded by her gender.

Due to her position as a migrant wife who followed her husband to America, her role is confined to her household. She spends most of her day at home doing household chores, and this limits her English practice and interaction with culture. Her gender and domestic duties restrict her social mobility and interaction with the host country initially. Thus, her communication with natives is limited, unlike her husband who is pursuing academic success. Thus, Ashima faces double marginalization, being the “other” in a foreign country and woman in a familial system based on patriarchy. As their children grow up, Gogol and Sonia witness several occasions of ethnic and racist prejudices against their parents motivated by their accent and appearance. The narrator recounts,

For by now he is aware, in stores, of cashiers smirking at his parents’ accents, and of salesmen who prefer to direct their conversation to Gogol, as though his parents were either incompetent or deaf. But his father is unaffected at such moments, just as he is unaffected by the mailbox (Lahiri, 2003, p.67-68).

The excerpt illustrates that ethnic markers like Ashima’s clothes (sari) and Bengali-accented English used by the first-generation are visible tokens that prompts racial and social bias towards them, and that it often upsets the second-generation. Such occasions, as termed by Crenshaw (1991) as structural intersectionality, display the intersection of racial prejudice, linguistic discrimination and ethnicity that marginalizes and oppresses the immigrants systematically.

5.2.3 Motherhood as Isolation and Burden

Another pivotal stage in the life of Ashima is the intersection of migration and motherhood. For her, motherhood is a burden she is not sure she can carry without support, “It’s not so much the pain [...] It’s the consequence: motherhood in a foreign land” (Lahiri, 2003, p.5). As a migrant woman giving birth in a foreign hospital, she feels alienated. Her fears stem from the fact that she does not want to raise her child in a country that feels alien to her without having her family to support and help,

That 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 so tentative and spare (Lahiri, 2003, p.6).

Therefore, Ashima's role as expectant mother is intertwined with the complexity of migratory experience. When Ashima is admitted to the hospital to give birth, her feeling of alienation and estrangement intensified, "now she is alone, cut off by the curtains from the three other women in the room" (Lahiri, 2003, p.3). Symbolically, the curtain indicates her separation and estrangement from the white culture. She is in the hospital with native Americans but separated by the curtain, a barrier she wished to be removed. The same way as she lives in America but still feels like an outsider, estranged by the cultural differences. The narrator describes her feeling like "she wishes the curtains were open, so that she could talk to the American women. Perhaps one of them has given birth before, can tell her what to expect" (Lahiri, 2003, p.3). But she remembers the cultural differences in which Americans "prefer their privacy" (Lahiri, 2003, p.3). She feels lonely in this bleak stage of her life, her experience of delivering a child is complicated by her migratory position "she wonders if she is the only Indian person in the hospital" (Lahiri, 2003, p.3-4). This is essentially because it is uncommon for Bengali women to give birth at hospital, "Ashima thinks it's strange that her child will be born in a place most people enter either to suffer or to die" (Lahiri, 2003, p.4). Unlike, migrants' common conception, for Ashima America is not a dreamland rather it is a place for suffering, death, and unsuitable environment for her newborn baby.

Moreover, her sense of displacement is further exacerbated due to cultural differences. Both American and Indian culture disadvantage and oppress her, since they both generate challenges for Ashima as she navigates her identity. In India, a woman gets filial support unlike America, "In India, she thinks to herself, women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares" (Lahiri, 2003, p.4). But for Ashima, the delivery of her child happens in a country that centers around individualism, "in America, one can and should rely on oneself rather than the larger social community for survival and enrichment" (Chancer and Watkins, 2006, p.85). Likewise, the American culture is indifferent to her worries. Since, it is all prepared for the needs of the white Americans. The repetition and emphasis on the word 'white' in the narration reflects this idea, "there is nothing to comfort her in the off-white tiles of the floor, the off-white panels of the ceiling, the white sheets tucked tightly into the bed" (Lahiri, 2003, p.4). Ashima as a brown migrant woman in a white context is surrounded by customs and rules set specifically to meet their needs not hers.

Furthermore, Ashima's experience is more intricate after the birth of her son. Emotionally, as Bran (2014) indicates, Ashima's nostalgia is further complicated by postpartum depression. Hitherto, Ashima feels foreign to both experiences of motherhood and migration. The narrator carefully depicts her physical discomfort which is worsened by her nostalgic state. Her situation cannot be linked merely to her gender or the physiological changes women undergo after childbirth. Rather, her anxiety is due to multiple forms of oppression as Crenshaw believes (1991). After returning from hospital,

As she walks slowly through the rooms it irks her that there are dirty dishes stacked in the kitchen, that the bed has not been made. Until now Ashima has accepted that there is no one to sweep the floor, or do the dishes, or wash clothes, or shop for groceries, or prepare a meal on the days she is tired or homesick or cross. She has accepted that the very lack of such amenities is the American way. But now, with a baby crying in her arms, her breasts swollen with milk, her body coated with sweat, her groin still so sore she can scarcely sit, it is all suddenly unbearable (Lahiri, 2003, p.32).

The excerpt acutely describes the emotional and physical burden of motherhood intersected with the migratory status of Ashima. It pictures her vulnerability during postpartum. Her suffering is not merely physical, rather it is a combination of duties expected from her as homemaker, wife, mother, and migrant in a country still foreign to her. Therefore, Ashima faces compounded pressures at the same time. She suffers from physical pain due to childbirth in addition to the gender roles she is expected to play like doing the household chores, and taking care of her newborn child. Thus, motherhood for a migrant woman is more challenging because of the lack of support and her migratory status. Through depicting Ashima's postpartum, Lahiri reveals the often-neglected side of migration narratives, such as migrant women's complications with childbirth and motherhood in exile.

Besides, Ashima as the first-generation migrant wife and mother "attempts to protect her ghar from Americanization" (Alfonso-Forero, 2007, p.854), via performing diverse rituals in her home as means of holding to and maintaining cultural roots. In traditional Indian culture, like most other countries, gender roles are divided between men and women; the ghar (home or domestic) and bahir (the outside world). This dichotomy determines the family system and the position of women in their culture. Men's realm is bahir, the outside world and the material pursuits. While women's realm is ghar, which is domestic and spiritual. This division "positions women as the guardians and propagators of Indian culture" (Alfonso-Forero, 2007, p. 853-854). Socially and culturally, she prepares Bengali meals, creates a family cycle with Bengalis, holding parties in her house like rice ceremony and celebrating Hindu rituals (Lahiri, 2003). In doing so, her responsibility goes beyond her family cycle and motherhood, as Alfonso-Forero (2007) argues, "Ashima takes great pride in hosting these feasts over the course of her life as Indian-American matriarch" (p.856). Her goal in creating a Bengali-like home is twofold; preserving her cultural tradition in diaspora which gives her an emotional serenity, and introducing these traditions to her children who are born in the host land. Thus, she feels responsible for maintaining a cultural balance in her family, she intends to "make a home far away from her homeland" (Sri,2024, p.22).

Additionally, Ashima becomes a cultural source not only within her family, but to the Bengali-American community in America. She becomes what Bran (2014) calls a cultural mother not only for her children but for Bengali women, she becomes a cultural source for Bengali women who are new migrants in America. Newlywed migrant Bengali women seek Ashima's advice and instructions. The narrator comments, "Like Ashoke, the bachelors fly back to Calcutta one by one, returning with wives [...] The husbands are teachers, researchers, doctors, engineers. The wives, homesick and bewildered, turn to Ashima for recipes and advice" (Lahiri, 2003, p.38). Thus, Bran (2014) praises Ashima's triumph as mother and migrant, arguing "her achievement is exceptional since she has managed to be a wonderful mother for her own children as well as a cultural mother figure for the community" (p.144). Ashima, then functions as both marital and cultural mother in the novel.

Ashima's role intersects with race, ethnicity, gender, and migration status. Based on Crenshaw's theory (1991), her situation cannot be understood through single-axis factors of race or gender, rather the above-mentioned factors intersect to shape her identity and role in the host land. Ashima is expected to undergo her role as a caregiver and transmitter of Indian culture to her children, concurrently she has to navigate her journey in a foreign culture as a migrant. At home, Ashima teaches her children about religion, culture, and language in order to protect her own culture from erasure in the dominant western culture. She sings Bengali songs and lullabies for baby Gogol, as a child, she teaches him poems by Tagore. Also, she helps him memorize the names of Hindu gods and goddesses like Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Gangesh. Later, when he grows up, he is required to attend classes about Bengali language and culture that he does not like to, "She teaches him to memorize a four-line children's poem by Tagore, and the names of the deities" (Lahiri, 2003, p.54). Besides, she never forgets to prepare Gogol for his future prospects, thus she facilitates his

exposure to English language and culture from his early childhood. Therefore, every afternoon before taking her nap, she “switches the television to Channel 2, and tells Gogol to watch Sesame Street and The Electric Company, in order to keep up with the English he uses at nursery school” (Lahiri, 2003, p.54). Her responsibility as a migrant mother intersects with her role as cultural mediator, she has to consider both home and host culture in raising her child which makes her burden heavier.

As her children grow up, mothering brings new challenges for her. She has to cope with new cultural norms of the host country. The most difficult part was accepting “her children’s independence, their need to keep their distance from her, is something she will never understand. Still, she had not argued with them” (Lahiri, 2003, p.166). In India children live with their parents till marriage like Ashima did before her marriage. But as the narrator says, “this, too, she is beginning to learn” (Lahiri, 2003, p.166), to accept that her children, unlike her, desire to live independently. When she turns forty-eight, she starts to live alone, like her children and her husband, but the narrator comments, she “feels too old to learn such a skill. She hates returning in the evenings to a dark, empty house, going to sleep on one side of the bed and waking up on another” (Lahiri, 2003, p.161). But Sonia and Gogol tell her that “Everyone should live on their own at some point” (Lahiri, 2003, p.161). These changes are demanding, but she does not resist, instead she absorbs them for the benefit of her children and as a motherhood responsibility.

5.3 Turning Points: Resistance and Emerging Autonomy

As the novel progresses, readers notice Ashima’s gradual and unique assimilation to American culture. Unpredictably, her agency is originated from her domestic traditional roles. Alfonso-Forero states that Lahiri, in *The Namesake*, reveals that the conventional gender roles that have been regarded as submissive and disempowering for women, can function as a site of agency and empowerment in the context of immigrant life who belong to the middle class in America. Ashima’s experience with the role of a dutiful wife and migrant mother prepares her to be a transnational figure. By forging an identity that negotiates and navigates the expectations of both cultures (Alfonso-Forero, 2007). She has successfully selected aspects of both cultures without sacrificing her role as a wife and mother.

The first step of empowerment that Ashima takes is after the birth of her son, Gogol. Initially, she rejects raising her son in America, she tells Ashoke, “I’m saying I don’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country, it is not right. I want to go back” (Lahiri, 2003, p.33). However, soon after his birth, she starts to create a routine for her duties as a mother. Lahiri writes, “she begins to pride herself on doing it alone, in devising a routine. [...] she, too, now has something to occupy her fully, to demand her utmost devotion” (2003, p.34-35). The interplay of motherhood and migratory status, thus, can serve as both disadvantage and empowering for Ashima. She thinks that raising a child alone is impossible in a foreign country. But soon after the birth she starts to create a balance between her estrangement and motherhood. Gogol’s presence makes her feel more attached to the host land. She starts to discover the surroundings with him, spending long hours outside with him. Sometimes “staring at the baby, she sees pieces of her family in his face” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 35). Interestingly, Ashima’s assimilation is “propelled by the child and Ashima’s newly-acquired position as a mother” (Karmakar, 2017, p.136). Ashima has been invisible to Americans before motherhood, but when she goes out for the first time with Gogol to get some rice, things feel familiar and she is thrilled by the sense of acceptance. The narrator maintains,

she is repeatedly stopped on the street, and in the aisles of the supermarket, by perfect strangers, all Americans, suddenly taking notice of her, smiling, congratulating her for what she’s done. They look curiously, appreciatively, into the pram. “How old?” they ask. “Boy or girl?” “What’s his name?” (Lahiri, 2003, p. 34).

While Ashima's position as a wife restricted her access to the outside world, motherhood enables her to create a link between her past and present, between home and outside, remarkably between Calcutta and America. So, Gogol as an Indian-American born child is Ashima's link to the host land. Karmakar (2017) believes that although the diasporic experience is challenging for women due to traditional gender expectations, it can be transformative as well, helping them to reshape their identity and enhance their agency.

Additionally, when Ashoke leaves for Ohio for the purpose of research, she remains alone in her house for the first time in her entire life. Her children are amazed at her American-like act. She also starts to pay less attention to the household chores and cooking. Stoican (2009) states, "This fact proves that it is Ashoke and her children that trigger the performance of the traditional Indian woman's role" (p.91). Instead of spending her whole day at home doing household chores, she starts to drive and takes a part-time job at the local library. Her work is significant for her agency; her socialization begins and familiarizes her with the White culture. Her husband's unwarned death, later, marks another stage in her journey towards agency. When he dies, she decides to split her time between India and America. Her decision to live alone is another marker of her agency and her deviation from Bengali tradition that expects a widow to live with her children or other family members. Consequently, her agency is "quiet but determined" (Alfonso-Forero, 2007). Also, it is grounded in confidence; which enables her to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. Besides, her independence enables her to take advantage of her American citizenship marked by her passport, driver's license, and social security card. The narrator remarks on her achievements,

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 prospect no longer terrifies her. She has learned to do things on her own, and though she still wears saris, still 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 (Lahiri, 2003, p.276).

Ashima fulfills her duty as a wife and migrant mother, and finally becomes transnational figure. True to the meaning of her name, "she who is limitless, without borders" (Lahiri, 2003, p.26). She navigates cultural traditions and gender limitations quietly and selectively. Her feminine role as an Indian immigrant mother does not impact her determination and capacities.

Looking at the stages of Ashima's life, one can observe that, Ashima has lived for others. All her life, she has defined herself in terms of her relationship with others and her gender roles. Staying loyal to her assigned roles as daughter, wife, mother, widow and finally a grandmother. Adriana Elena Stoican in "Adaptable and Change-Resistant Cultural Values in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*" (2009) believes that Ashima's decision to split her time is the result of no longer fulfilling her family roles as a wife and a mother. Thus, when she is free from such duties, finally she has time to live for herself,

she wipes the steam off the bathroom mirror and studies her face. A widow's face. But for most of her life, she reminds herself, a wife. And perhaps, one day, a grandmother, arriving in America laden with hand-knit sweaters and gifts, leaving, a month or two later, inconsolable, in tears (Lahiri, 2003, p.278).

The novel opens and ends with Ashima; initially the narrator describes her nostalgic and alienated feeling in America followed by her worries about raising a child in a foreign land. Similarly, it ends with her nostalgia and her being uncertain about how her life goes on after the death of her husband. Again, she is reminded that she is a foreigner, not only in host land but from herself, and the home country in away,

Ashima feels lonely suddenly, horribly, permanently alone, and briefly, turned away from the mirror [...] 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. She feels both impatience and indifference for all the days she still must live (Lahiri, 2003, p.278-279).

After the death of her husband, she rejects to be sati depending on Indian tradition and the state of being 'subaltern' in Spivak's term. She performs the traditional Indian mourning faithfully, but refuses to remain a traditional Indian widow or being sati. Sati refers to a historical Hindu practice in which a widow is immolated on her husband's funeral pyre. Contrary to expectations, she is an empowered woman who decides to travel back and forth between home country and host country (Bran,2014). She uses the experience of migration for her advantage. The novel ends the same way it started, with Ashima preparing food. However, this would be the last celebration in her house which is already vended.

In the book *Psycho Dynamics of Women in Post Modern Literature*, Padamavathi claims that "Early Indo-Anglian novels portray women as Sita like characters. By fulfilling cultural values" (2008, p.23). Sita is a central female character in Hindu mythological epic Ramayana who sacrifices her life for her husband Ram. She is depicted as a devoted wife, and an ideal mother despite her ordeals. Thus, she is an embodiment of an ideal women in Indian culture (Karmakar, 2017). However, over the last three to four decades, there has been a gradual shift in the portrayal of women in Indian and the broader South Asian literature. Female authors, during this period, have made a great twist. Instead of traditional portrayals of passive, self-sacrificing, suffering, enduring women, they presented emotionally complex female characters who are engaged in complex struggles for self-assertion and identity. This transition reflects the broader socio-cultural changes within these societies and their interaction with West (Padamavathi, 2008).

Remarkably, Ashima's initial representation in the novel seems stereotypical and her role is traditional, she is depicted as Sita- like character. There are critics like Tamara Bhalla who criticized Lahiri for creating such stereotypes in order to display the complexity of migration (2012). Nevertheless, one of the important aspects of Lahiri's novel is that female characters are not portrayed as mere victims. As Chattopadhyay claims, "Lahiri does not only portray her women characters as victims of patriarchal oppressions but she provides them with opportunities to cross the threshold of conventional norms" (2017, p.45). Similarly, Alfonso-Forero (2007) supports this claim saying, "while she addresses Ashima's sense of loss and alienation as an immigrant in the U.S., Lahiri does not present Ashima as a victim of any sort" (p.860). Alternatively, she empowers Ashima through providing her with transnational position. Her status allows her to engage in both American and Indian culture, but in her own terms, without prioritizing either or overlooking the feelings of loss and estrangement that afflict immigrants. Thus, "the scope of her agency must be read in the context of her particular Indian-American position" (Alfonso-Forero, 2007, p.860).

Unlike common stories of female empowerment, Lahiri's female characters choose their unique path. There is diversity even among her female characters in the same novel. As Padamavathi states, "recent writers' stories realize both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman. Rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal, they push the ideal towards the full expression of each woman's potential" (2008, p.30). Eventually, Ashima's decision to split her time between India and America signifies her hybrid identity and transitional womanhood.

6. Conclusion

A close examination of Ashima's migratory trajectory through an intersectional lens in *The Namesake* reveals that women experience migration differently from men. Their experience is multifaceted and is shaped by the overlapping factors rather than a single one. Depending on Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, Ashima's trajectory is shaped not by a single factor but by

the convergence of gender, race, class, language, and immigrant status. Initially, Ashima appears to be restricted by traditional gender roles. Seemingly, the readers perceive Ashima as a Sita like character due to her sacrifice, silent endurance, acceptance, and submissiveness. However, she steps out from the domestic constraints gradually and undergoes the process of transformation quietly. Beside her physical and emotional exile, she successfully resists the cultural and racial constraints hindering her transformation. Lastly, she transforms from a traditional housewife to a transnational figure. Unlike conventional feminist narratives, Ashima is not rebelling, rather, she resists quietly crossing both cultural and geographical boundaries successfully. Contrary to traditional assumptions, motherhood and domestic duties, are not forms of inferiority or subjugation, rather, they are sites of empowering for a domestically confined female character like Ashima. Significantly, in *The Namesake*, Lahiri indicates that gender obstacles and women's resilience can be depicted without reducing the narrative to a binary struggle between men and women. Women are not opposing men; instead, both are compelled to defy prescriptive cultural norms. Furthermore, Ashima's migration and her gradual agency both reflects and recaps the history of women's migration. Women started migrating as dependent spouses attempting family reunification and ended up independent migrants seeking better opportunities; embodying the feminization of migration. Ashima represents a prominent figure in contemporary fiction who embodies female resistance and empowerment in seemingly oppressing contexts of home and host land. Intersectionality reveals that female migratory experience is multifaceted and shaped by the convergence of gender, race, language, and migration status. Finally, this research enriches gendered migration studies by foregrounding the intersectional experience of Ashima, exploring the limitations of single axis analysis and stressing the complexity of female migratory experience.

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جینه بوونی جینه دهیری: گه شتی تیکه لکیشی ئە شیمیا له هاوناوی لاهیریدا

هێرۆ حسن عبدالله

بهشی زمانی ئینگلیزی، کۆلیژی پەرورده زانکۆی راپه‌رین، رانیه، ههریمی کوردستان/عێراق

hero.hassan@uor.edu.krd

سامان حسین عمر

بهشی زمانی ئینگلیزی، کۆلیژی پەرورده، زانکۆی سه‌لاحه‌دین، هه‌ولێر، ههریمی کوردستان/عێراق

saman.omar@su.edu.krd

پوخته

چیرۆکه‌کانی کۆچ به‌گه‌شتی باس له ئەزموونی پیاو ده‌که‌ن، به‌هه‌مان شیوه‌ توێژهر و ره‌خنه‌گرانی به‌زۆری سه‌رنجیان له‌سه‌ر پاله‌وانی پیاوه. به‌لام ئامانجی ئەم توێژینه‌وه‌یه تیشک خستته‌سه‌ر ئەزموونی ئافره‌تانی کۆچبه‌ره له‌ریگه‌ی کاره‌کته‌ری ئەشیمیا له‌ رۆمانی (هاوناوی) جومبا لاهیری (٢٠٠٣) دا. توێژینه‌وه‌که ئاماژه به‌وه‌ده‌دات که به‌هۆی سه‌رنجانی زۆر له ئەزموونی گوگۆل، که پاله‌وانی پیاوه له‌ رۆمانه‌که‌دا، ئەزموونی کۆچبه‌ری ئەشیمیا فه‌رامۆشکراوه. هه‌روه‌ها له‌روانگه‌ی تیوری تیکه‌له‌کیشی کریتیشووه تیشک ده‌خاته سه‌ر ئەو گه‌رفته تیکه‌له‌کیشانه‌ی رووبه‌رووی ئەشیمیا ده‌بنه‌وه له‌ گه‌شته‌که‌ی له ئەمریکا. لیکۆلینه‌وه‌که ئەوه‌ده‌ده‌خات که ئەزموونی کۆچبه‌ری ئەشیمیا ته‌نها به‌یه‌ک هۆکار دروسته‌بووه، به‌لکو چهند هۆکاریکی وه‌کو ره‌گه‌زو نه‌ژاد و چین و دۆخی کۆچبه‌ری تیکه‌له‌کیش بوون. ئەنجامی توێژینه‌وه‌که ئاماژه به‌وه‌ ده‌دات که رۆله‌ نه‌ریتییه‌کانی ئەشیمیا ته‌نیا هۆکاری په‌راویزخستن و چه‌وساندنه‌وه‌ی نین، به‌لکو بناغه‌یه‌کیش بۆ گۆرانکاری. که‌واتا ئافره‌تانی کۆچبه‌ر توانای ئەوه‌یان هه‌یه که به‌سه‌ر له‌مپه‌ره تیکه‌له‌کیشه‌کان سه‌ریکه‌ون و سوودیان لی وه‌رگرن بۆ سه‌ربه‌خۆیی و بێ‌یاردانیان. **وشه سه‌ره‌کییه‌کان:** ئافره‌تی کۆچبه‌ر، تیوری تیکه‌له‌کیش، هاوناو، پایداری، خۆراگری.

الهجرة الجندرية: الرحلة التقاطعية لأشيميا في رواية (السّمي) ل جومبا لاهيري

هيرو حسن عبدالله

قسم اللغة الانكليزية، كلية التربية، جامعة رابرين، رانيه، اقليم كوردستان/العراق

hero.hassan@uor.edu.krd

سامان حسين عمر

قسم اللغة الانكليزية، كلية اللغات، جامعة صلاح الدين، اربيل، اقليم كوردستان، العراق

saman.omar@su.edu.krd

الملخص

غالبًا ما تهيم السرديات المرتبطة بالهجرة على تمثيل الخبرة الذكورية، كما اعتاد النقاد والباحثون توجيه اهتمامهم إلى الأبطال الذكور، غير أنّ هذه الدراسة تسعى إلى تسليط الضوء على تجربة الهجرة النسوية من خلال شخصية أشيميا في رواية السّمي (٢٠٠٣) للروائية جومبا لاهيري. يتناول البحث الرحلة الهجرية لأشيميا في ضوء نظرية التقاطعية لكيمبرلي كرينشو، مع إبراز التعقيدات التقاطعية التي تواجهها أثناء تكيفها مع الحياة في الولايات المتحدة. تفترض الدراسة إلى أنّ تجربة أشيميا لا تتشكّل بفعل عامل واحد منفرد، بل هي نتاج تداخل عوامل متعدّدة تشمل النوع الاجتماعي، والعرق، والطبقة الاجتماعية، والوضع الهجري. كما تشير الدراسة إلى أنّ تجربة أشيميا قد جرى تهميشها في الدراسات النقدية لصالح التركيز على غوغول، بصفتها بطل الرواية الذكر. تستنتج الدراسة إلى أنّ الأدوار الجندرية التقليدية التي تودّيها أشيميا لا تمثّل أدوات للاضطهاد فحسب، بل تشكّل أيضًا مرتكزات أساسية لتحوّلها الذاتي، وتبيّن الدراسة أنّ النساء المهاجرات يمتلكن القدرة على تجاوز أشكال الاضطهاد التقاطعي، بل وتحويلها إلى مصادر قوة تُسهم في ترسيخ فاعليتهن وإثبات ذواتهن.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهجرة النسوية، نظرية التقاطعية، رواية السّمي، المقاومة، الصمود