

The Return of the Repressed: Freud's Uncanny, Trauma, and of Diasporic Hybridity in Lahiri's The Namesake



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Abstract: *Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake offers an intriguing course of events which resonate through the diasporic subject of Gogol Ganguli, the protagonist. The paper encompasses the application of Freudian theories of repression, identity formation, and the unconscious, intending to interpret cultural hybridity and displacement of immigrants inclusively. The study circulates around Gogol's life, deciphering the multi layered conflicts between distinct cultures and identities. Contextualization of interdisciplinary theories that of Freud and post-colonial scholars like Homi K Bhabha, Julia Kristeva and Stuart Hall, work coherently to resolve the psychological enigma of diasporic subjects by examining a close association of memory, trauma, and personal aspirations.*

Keywords: Trauma, Memory, Conflict, Jhumpa Lahiri

Introduction

Diasporic literature has served as a fundamental help in navigating the issues of memory and identity by representing the psychological confusions in host traditions. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* is a rich text which has sketched the life of Gogol Ganguli in a foreign atmosphere, struggling with the identity crisis. His character is a reflection of wide diasporic struggles where one battles psychologically in determining his identity and cultural values against host culture. This study analyzes the psychological tensions in the pursuit of identity of Gogol Ganguli, with the ground breaking theories of Sigmund Freud. The concept of the unconscious and repression provides basis to interpret the tension between ancestral values and individual's desires. The paper also reflects the concepts of postcolonial theorist like Stuart Hall, according to whom identity is "never complete, always in process, and always constituted within representation"

(Hall, 1990). Another postcolonial theorist, Homi Bhabha's idea of the "third space", which explains the notion of uncertainty in identity.

Through a close textual analysis of Lahiri's narrative strategies, this research positions *The Namesake* as a Freudian text that interrogates not just the trauma of migration, but the unconscious traces it leaves in the diasporic subject.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

To interrogate the identity crisis within *The Namesake*, The researcher draws upon three theoretical pillars: Freudian psychoanalysis, postcolonial theory, and diasporic cultural studies.

1. Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory

Freud's tripartite model of the psyche the id, ego, and superego serves as a lens to dissect Gogol's internal conflict. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud (1923) posits that the ego negotiates

between the irrational desires of the id and the moral constraints of the superego. Gogol's rejection of his name and cultural heritage can be seen as a repression of the superego-driven Bengali values, while his later identity explorations reflect the id's desire for autonomous expression. Freud's theory of naming as a psychic anchor where names are tied to unconscious identifications and familial attachments resonates with Gogol's discomfort with being named after Nikolai Gogol, a Russian writer symbolic of alienation and death (Freud, 1917).

2. Postcolonial Identity and Hybridity

Lahiri's diasporic characters inhabit Bhabha's "third space," a conceptual zone that transcends binaries of home and host cultures. Bhabha argues that this space is "not the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but the inscription and articulation of culture's" (Bhabha, 1994). Gogol's life oscillates between Indian traditionalism embodied by his parents Ashima and Ashoke and American cultural norms, resulting in a fragmented sense of self. The third space becomes both refuge and battlefield for his identity.

3. Diaspora, Memory, and Cultural Transmission

Psychic labor as represented in *The Namesake* represents the disorientation of self. Where Ashima's longing sense of Calcutta keeps her restless, Gogol is desperate to free himself of historic memories of culture. Lahiri's work is a manifestation of Avtar Brah's idea of "diaspora as the politicized space of cultural memory" (1996), where immigration is not only restricted to the change of physical land, but also encapsulates the emotional detachment. Stuart Hall puts forth that the identity is "the product of historical and cultural positioning" (Hall, 1990), which is demonstrated in *The Namesake* through Gogol's confused sense about his cultural identification. It also recognizes the reconstruction of cultural identity in the diasporic experiences. The trauma of identity and cultural loss results by a combination of one's subjective thoughts and the living experiences influenced by sociocultural

dynamics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Diasporic literature offers a rich insight of the immigrant's identity by disintegrating the psychological and sociocultural components, and examines each with the lens of different theories. It is therefore an amalgamation of postcolonial theories, cultural studies and psychoanalysis, which work together to provide a complete case studies. Jhumpa Lahiri's text, *The Namesake*, is a benchmark in diasporic literature which critically depicts the high rise of identity crisis among immigrants through mental and cultural struggles. Numerous scholars have researched and debated to interpret the mechanism of resolution that immigrants work through to regain their identity and culture. This research explores the diasporic issues in three layers: formation of diasporic identity, psychoanalytic mechanism of self-identification, and Jhumpa Lahiri as a diasporic writer. By merging the psychoanalytic discourse and postcolonial studies, the research further enlightens the experiences of diasporic subjects in a scientific manner.

Diasporic Identity and Cultural Hybridity

According to diasporic theorists, diaspora is a space, which consists of negotiation between ancestral heritage and cultural modernity. According to Hall (1990), the identity is not definite and fixed, rather it is "always in process". The process is constructed by one's emotional and physical dislocations. Identity loss and the struggle to regain it, is an essential debate in diasporic literature. It is, where the cultural heritage is in combat with the modern civilization and culture. The idea of "third space" given by Avtar Brah (1996) suggests that it is the dislocation of land as well as the dislocation of emotional contacts which constitutes the alienation of identity. In *The Namesake*, the similar idea resonates through the character of Gogol Ganguli, whose psychological feelings are haunted by cultural hybridity. The character also signifies the idea of 'third space', which states that culture is derived from the negotiations between the inherent and the foreign culture. This space is a complex set of

factors, where a mind vibrates to develop meanings of himself, his culture and values. In the context of Lahiri's text, Gogol is evidently in the third space, negotiating between his inherent Bengali heritage and American culture. This conflict and contrast of cultures makes this character and the narrative a successful scale of determining the correctness of the postcolonial and psychoanalytic theories. Mishra (1996) brings together the concept of identity loss through "diasporic imaginary", which is characterized by desire, memory, and nostalgic elements. Repulsiveness of Gogol towards his name, his desire of a romantic world and growing distance from his ancestral values are all a part of his mind which is unescapable and also difficult to exist.

Naming and Psychoanalytic Identity Formation

The framework of Freudian psychoanalytic theory consists of elements, which explain the mental process of a human from its grass root level. Freudian theory lays forth three dimensional studies of id, ego and superego. A state of collision and lack of harmony exists among these three elements of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. To contextualize, Gogol's repulsive attitude towards his name represents functionality of ego. Freud's concept of the uncanny evolves through the fact that Gogol finds his name hateful, after he migrates, creating another conflicting space. Furthermore, Freud considers name not only a label of identity of a person, but it carries a deep layer of memory, cultural identification and unconscious attachments. Lacan, views the name of a father as an affiliation to the paternal figure and to his associations. In *The Namesake*, Gogol's repulsion from his name could be derived as a rejection of his ancestral heritage and subjugation to his family's identity. Exile and foreignness is another concept of psychoanalytic studies portrayed by Kristeva in her book 'Strangers to Ourselves'. She deployed the elements of exile and foreignness by asserting that people's first detachment takes place from within and later from the external world. In the light of Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Gogol's derailment from his name is a manifestation of

foreignness and exile, a conflict which is absolutely internal in diaspora. Chatterjee's studies (2011) dissolves the naming conflict of Gogol in *The Namesake* by referring it as a trauma and repression. Goyal (2013), observes the conflict as alienation of self and loss. A vast derivation of ideas supporting psychoanalytic theories make Lahiri's *Namesake* a successful attempt in determining the cultural transit and identity crisis.

Lahiri's Narrative Strategies and Diasporic Representation

Jhumpa Lahiri's writing style is subtle and extensive. Her detailing of the situations and characters entail meaningful delivery of ideas. She dramatizes the situation in a way which is based on subjective characterization, but applies to a wider population of immigrants. According to Koshy (2004), Lahiri's concept of identity is not static as referred with respect to one place, rather, it is a uniform exploration and struggle to get one. The life of the main character Gogol in *The Namesake*, is a chief personification of Freud's psychoanalytic theories of human developmental stages. Memory is one of the foundational elements of one's self which is evident from Gogol's character through his relationship with his father. Oedipal concept of Freud is the process of transition of Gogol's behaviors, from desire of detaching himself of his family's name, to the regained sense of fulfilling his father's expectations after his death, which also resonates the significance of memory. Loss, memory, alienation and familial attachments constitutes mental framework. This assertion is based on Freudian theory about melancholia, which is an in-depth sadness, which reinforces the identity of a person. Studies of Grewel (2005) extends the interpretation of *The Namesake*, by denying the absoluteness of culture and decoding the cultural transition taking place along the narrative as Gogol strives to resolve the clash of cultures. The third person narrative in *The Namesake* also serves as a key to analyze the construction of the character, the fluidity of his thoughts over time, making it a spectacle for the readers for closer and deeper understanding. An interesting case studies of *The Namesake*, conducted by Banerjee (2012)

connects Lahiri's writing style to the therapeutic process of a person's revelation of events, regardless of the past-present-future pattern which eventually leads to the unconscious mind. Gogol's life is displayed to the readers in a way that helps them to see him all the way through his internal unconscious motifs to the external sociocultural experiences.

Psychoanalysis Meets Post colonialism

The conjunction of post colonialism and psychoanalytic domain results in the explanation of confronting psychological structures resulting after migration. Young (2001) highlights that it is chiefly the psychoanalytic framework, which embodies the scientific explanation of psychic complexities. Trauma, is not existent in the form of vandalism, however, it is an intense psychic struggle against loss and alienation. Subjective experiences in postcolonial narratives explore the long traces of cultural dislocation throughout human history. Radhakrishnan (1996) is of the view that western born theories like Freud's should not be integrated with the nonwestern cultures. She professes for 'critical hybridization' which is a concept that addresses the application of western ideas to be applied to the nonwestern cultures with respect to cultural differences and values. Freud's psychoanalytic framework does not serve as a universal pattern for all case studies, however, its enrichment can absolutely illuminate the diasporic experiences in Lahiri's narratives.

Conclusion of the Review

The Namesake is the center of attention, around which the psychoanalytic notions and postcolonial theories circulate for its closer inspection. The critical analysis of Gogol's character goes beyond the representation of culture, offering a deeper insight into the psychological turbulence that he goes through. It is, therefore, wholesome study, which portrays repression, Freud's unconscious and naming theories. The literature review serve as a grounding structure provided fir the further analysis of the narrative, through which different psychological and postcolonial aspects will unwind.

METHODOLOGY

The study is governed by qualitative approach of interpretive strategies. The interdisciplinary analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's diasporic narrative, *The Namesake*, consists of multidimensional layers of psychoanalytical theories and postcolonial critique. Freudian concepts of repression, naming, unconscious are aligned with the post-colonial theories of cultural hybridity of Homi Bhabha. Gogol's character in this case studies will be spotlighted to study the changing patterns of his psychological patterns within the realm of diasporic discourse.

Primary Source and Selection

The primary text of the research is a diasporic novel written by Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*. The narrative displays the life of Gogol Ganguli, a Bengali American, who suffers through sublime internal and external conflicts determining inter cultural differences and identity crisis. This novel is a potential tool, having wide range of themes to explore by bridging interdisciplinary theories. The inherited trauma, unconscious and alienation, memory and loss and cross cultural conflicts are the core themes of this novel which will undergo mining. Gogol changing his name, Ashoke's death and resolution part of the text, *The Overcoat*, are the major discourses in the novel that are looked microscopically in an endeavor to hold the answers of psychological enigma.

Analytical Framework

The discussion of this paper is based on the analytics of psychoanalytic concepts of Freudian essays: The uncanny, Repression, and Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through. Gogol's redemption from his name and culture, and his odd repetitive experiences with train essentially determines an unceasing impact of his unpleasant past on his psyche, thus representing repression. "Unhomeliness" as described by Homi Bhabha is a confused state of living in any culture explicitly. Existence of Gogol's life between his inherited Bengali culture and immigrant American culture itself manifests the struggles of cultural and identity formation. Lastly, the study examines the text through the scholarly ideas o Julia Kristeva, who

proposes the process of alienation of a man from his internal self, taking place primarily to his separation from the external world. She also believes the process to be natural in essence as life in migrated places by default brings the cultures in conformity.

Research Design and Procedure

The close observation of *The Namesake* includes an acute inspection of Gogol's unconscious by character response and symbolic representations in the text. The core aspects of the text are naming, displacement and repetition to interpret scarred psychology of Gogol. The research cultivates using Freudian psychoanalytic techniques and later by the assertion of postcolonial discourse. Although the interdisciplinary craft of the research makes it diverse in cultural studies, psychological studies of trauma and repression, its literary essence stays intact throughout. Scholarly articles of various writers like Banerjee (2010), Caruth (1996), Caesar (2007), and Khanna (2000) also exist to support the assertions give them a solid ground for objectivity. Lahiri's strong and captivating writing style and narrative in *The Namesake* is critically examined to identify Lahiri's course of psychological process he has proclaimed through his text.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* is an embodiment of psychological disruptions and post-colonial threats. Gogol, the Protagonist of the narrative is the major recipient of fundamental ideas expressed through symbols and themes. Gogol's life in the liminal space actively goes through severe disorientation where he is surrounded by identity fragmentation, dislocation, and cultural adversity. Analysis through Freud's theory of *The Uncanny*, Repetition-compulsion, repression and Unconscious, combined with postcolonial studies, are the substantial elements of this discussion. Gogol's resistance word and bitter feelings for his association with his name is a fertile ground for his tormented psychological state. According to Freud, the notion of repression is the flow of unpleasant

memories to the mind back and forth disguised in symbols. Gogol's wishful thinking of denouncing his name and culture could be assimilated by the traumatic accident of train, which his father survived while he read the Russian Author Nikolai Gogol, after whom he named his son later. However, adopting "Nikhil" cannot fully erase the internal conflict; rather, it intensifies his anxiety, illustrating Freud's idea that repression leads not to resolution but to deeper psychic fragmentation. Freud's concept of the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) is particularly relevant here. He explains it as "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Freud, 1919/2003, p. 124). Gogol's name, though chosen by a beloved parent and rooted in survival, becomes a source of estrangement. Caesar (2007) suggests that Gogol's discomfort with his name symbolizes a crisis of cultural and psychological origin he is unable to reconcile the personal history embedded in the name with his desire for American assimilation. Banerjee (2010) further contends that the name serves as a metonym for Gogol's fractured self, oscillating between authenticity and erasure.

Trains, Trauma, and Repetition

Lahiri's use of trains as recurring motifs evokes Freud's theory of repetition-compulsion the unconscious drive to repeat past trauma in an effort to master it (Freud, 1914/1958). Gogol's life is punctuated by critical events involving trains: Ashoke's near-fatal accident, Gogol's own fears in childhood, and ultimately Ashoke's death aboard a train. These moments reflect Caruth's (1996) assertion that trauma is experienced belatedly and often revisited through symbolic repetitions.

Gogol's desire to untie his associations with his name and Bengali culture explain more than storytelling. These acts are, but repetition of haunting memories which were suppressed and recurrently appeared through his aversive behavior after migration. Freud's Working-through phenomena is depicted through the process of Gogol's acknowledgement of his feelings consciously. These events break open the psychological interpretations through

Freudian framework. Goyal (2013) states that the characters incline towards acknowledgment of their feelings rather than resolution of conflicts.

Hybridity and the Unhomely

Postcolonial framework of Homi Bhabha does not only explain the impact of external displacement, but also the internal alienation and dislocation of emotions. The concept of unhomeliness suggests lack of substantial connection to either cultures. Being an American by birth does not prove helpful at all in complete escape from his original ethnicity and everything associated to it, making him inherently the “other”. Mishra (1996) extends the postcolonial discourse by introducing the concept of “imaginary of absence” where, characters are influenced by memory which is a limitation to create identity in a dual culture setup in psyche. Another interesting element of psychic disorientation lies in the relationship between Gogol and Maxine. Gogol finds it a redemption from his embarrassment of his ethnicity, as Maxine parents are not devoted towards American Culture either. However, the death of Gogol’s father Ashoke, results in their breakup as his acute grief did not make sense to Maxine. This context manifests the hidden cultural aspirations that one follows unknowingly. Furthermore, Kristeva (1991) observes internal exile as “foreigner lives within”, where in contexts Gogol’s non-uniformity with his own name and culture leads him to alienation. His relationship with Moushumi, who was a second-generation immigrant, was another revealing event of diasporic trauma. Moushumi’s marriage to Gogol seems a promising match initially until Moushumi cheats on him as she was dissonant towards her traditional responsibilities. Khanna (2000) argues that diasporic subjects live with ironic desire of traditional honor and freedom of choice. At the same time, Gogol also withdraws, acknowledging his inability to live with another immigrant with the similar experiences. It shows that cultural uniformity with one’s partner alone cannot eradicate diasporic troubles.

Memory, Mourning, and Reconnection

Freud’s theory of mourning involves a gradual detachment from the lost object, enabling new identifications (Freud, 1917/1957). Gogol mourns not only the loss of his father but the rupture of an implicit cultural anchor. As he participates in Bengali funeral rites and reconnects with family rituals, he begins to process the repressed aspects of his heritage. Ahmed (2000) suggests that affective orientation turning toward memory is a critical step in psychic realignment, and Gogol’s actions align with this path. Unlike pathological mourning, where the loss remains unacknowledged or unresolved, Gogol’s solitude at the end of the novel reflects cautious integration. The scene in which he reads *The Overcoat*—the book linked to his name and his father’s survival serves as an act of symbolic reconciliation. Lahiri does not offer closure, but as Caruth (1996) emphasizes, trauma narratives are less about resolution and more about acknowledging what cannot be resolved. A Freudian Postcolonial Lens: Synthesizing Perspectives The fusion of Freudian psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory reveals the complexity of diasporic identity as dramatized in *The Namesake*. Repression, repetition, and uncanny symbolism intersect with cultural hybridity and generational silence. Gogol’s identity is not a fixed destination but a recursive negotiation with memory, trauma, and desire.

Young (2001) emphasizes the idea of “hybrid psychic space” in which psychoanalytic discipline coordinates with postcolonial studies for vivid interpretations. We find, that Gogol remains in the ‘third space’, unable to find genuine connections with any culture. This, according to Hall (1990) is a depiction of his understanding which states the identity to be always in process, and never complete. Lahiri successfully resonated the emotional turbulence, psychic labor, and repetition to access Gogol’s unconscious by skillfully fusing the interdisciplinary paradigms of psychoanalysis into postcolonial studies.

CONCLUSION

Jhumpa Lahiri has managed to amuse and educate the readers with both storytelling, and forging awareness of the diasporic struggles. Gogol's life of psychic ruptures leading him from embarrassment to introspection reveals a constant battle of emotions and experiences. It is, where repression, memory, loss and alienation, come in order with unhomeliness, and the third space to rationalize the character's complex mental state. Also, the symbolic and thematic nature of Gogol's name and train execute other notions like cultural hybridity and repetition-compulsion. "working-through" is manifested by the final reading of *The Overcoat* by Gogol after his father's death, where Gogol makes a return to his homely feelings and attachments. Postcolonial theories as presented by Homi Bhabha, Julia Kristeva, and Stuart Hall rendered more extensive examination of the diasporic subjects with respect to cultural hybridity, unhomeliness and displacement. Gogol's relationship with Maxine and Moushumi are yet other enriching aspects of post colonialism, unpacking the impact of loss and mourning, and silence upon the unpleasant experiences. The characters do not typically transcend towards catharsis, but undergo the dynamic process of introspection, approached through memory and loss. The coherent application of Freudian theories and postcolonial discourse proves Lahiri's *The Namesake* as a substantial literary text to address the implicit nature of cultural tensions along with the deep psychic events related to trauma and memory.

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