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Problems of Diaspora in South Asian Writings

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Faisal Alam
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Submitted by:

Mohammad Simon Rahman

ID No. 2004-3-93-001

Department of English

East West University

Submitted to:

Prof. Dr. Faisal Alam

Department of English

East West University

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Introduction

This dissertation analyzes the work of two renowned writers who know a thing or two concerning Diaspora and its effects. First, there is Jhumpa Lahiri, a Pulitzer Prize winner, who was born in London on 11 July 1967 of Indian (Calcuttan to be precise) parentage and grew up in South Kingstown, Rhode Island. She now lives in New York with her husband and son. Her novel *The Namesake* concerns an Indian family that faces the cultural and generation clashes caused by their Diaspora in the U.S. Lahiri's visits to Calcutta with her parents was bound to have an effect on her writing due to the divided sense of identity and the clash of cultures and her writing materials concern her own diasporic experiences.

Our second author is Monica Ali of English-Bangladeshi parentage, who came to England at the age of three and was brought up in Bolton in Greater Manchester. Her novel *Brick Lane* is an "epic saga about a Bangladeshi family living in the UK, and explores the British immigrant experience" (contemporarywriters.com). Ali, who was born in Dhaka on 7 February 1967 to an English mother (Joyce Ali) and a Bengali father (Hatem Ali), immigrated to London during the outbreak of the war in 1971 with her mother and had to adapt to a middle-class environment. Being a child from a cross-cultural match-up, Ali too had to grow up as an outsider within a diaspora ambience.

Though *Brick Lane* and *The Namesake* are written from different perspectives and deal with characters from different backgrounds, they have a few things in common. I intend to explore the problems of Diaspora people portrayed by the authors in these

books. *Brick Lane* is, as David Boratav comments in his interview with the author, "... about being a stranger in a strange land. The story chronicles the challenges faced by a young, rural girl from Bangladesh as she enters an urban setting in London in the 1990's and attempts to bridge the seemingly irreconcilable differences between the two worlds" (*Voices-Unabridged*). In the same interview, Monica Ali reveals her own views to the queries about her novel when she says that her writing "... raise issues of identity, loss and longing, the struggle to survive in a new environment, nostalgia, the clash of cultures and values – all these touch on the human condition" (*Voices-Unabridged*). Being asked on her choice of an immigrant woman in a western context as the central character, she replied, "...I'm certainly aware of the layers of complexity to the situation that someone like Nazneen might find herself in. So I would have wanted to explore all those aspects. She certainly does face hardships. But so do other women, and the men too for that matter" (*Voices-Unabridged*). But in fact, Monica Ali has gone on to portray the hardships of an entire family, and even a society living in Diaspora conditions.

As far as *The Namesake* is concerned, Jhumpa Lahiri has presented a clash of cultures, a search for identity, dilemmas of dual origins and multiple realities and so on which affect people living abroad. The story revolves around the protagonist Gogol's dilemma concerning his name, but an in-depth search will tell us that Lahiri has just used the name-dilemma as a metaphor to show the cultural discord amongst Diaspora people. For Gogol, the central character, his two different names represent two cultures and two different perspectives. To his Indian parents at home he is Gogol, but outside, in a different culture, the culture he grew up in, he is Nikhil, a very Americanized person. As

Lahiri notes, "It's a classic case of divided identity" (hinduism.about.com). The novel nicely connects the author as Lahiri herself grew up within a Diaspora community. Concerning her dual identity, Lahiri commented in an interview, "As a young child, I felt that the Indian part of me was unacknowledged, and therefore somehow negated, by my American environment, and vice versa. I felt that I led two very separate lives"(hinduism.about.com). This is what *The Namesake* is all about, a second-generation perspective from that of Gogol, a confused character in a Diaspora community.

This paper will deal with all the predicaments in the way of Diaspora people. But a brief discussion should be provided on the reception the selected two novels got from the literary critics before we proceed forth. Both of the novels have had their critics. As Lahiri's novel has received mixed reactions. C. J. Gillen, reviewing the work for the South Asian Women's NETwrok Internet site (October 2003), observed that:

> Lahiri's "quiet language" and "eye for details" create "tactile experience of her settings," which enables readers to appreciate the characters' "longings... their struggles to find their own individual spaces and identities across a double continental divide" (quoted in Karim, 210).

On the other hand, Julia Hanna in her review of the novel in the *Boston Phoenix* (12 September 2003), called "Lahiri's extensive use of descriptive detail... more decorative than effective..." (quoted in Karim, 210).

Monica Ali's novel also received a mixed bag. Kaiser Haq wrote this in his article on Ali: "Most reviewers hailed the novel as an important work by a promising writer on a

subject that was central to contemporary England and the South Asian diaspora" (Haq, 23). Kaiser Haq also mentioned Harriet Lane who praised Ali for "fictionalizing a community that was usually overlooked in English letters" (23). Haq also referred to Elsa Gaztambide who praised Ali's 'extraordinary' power in "capturing the female immigrant experience through her character's innocent perspective" (23-24). Sukhdev Sandhu remarked about Ali's novel that it "is a patchy but promising first novel, strongly indebted to its black and Asian literary antecedents, more interested in character than it is in language or even in the area from which it derives its name'" (quoted in Haq, 24).

Before going any further with the dissertation, I would like to offer a clear definition of what Diaspora is. Literally, the word Diaspora means, 'the process by which people of a particular nation become scattered and settle in other countries' (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*). Steven Vertovec spells out three definitions for the term Diaspora. Firstly, he sees it as a "concept referring almost exclusively to the experiences of Jews, invoking their traumatic exile from an historical homeland and dispersal throughout many lands" (2-3). With this experience as reference, the word 'diaspora' indicates a rather negative situation as the Jews diaspora is associated with forced displacement, victimization, alienation and loss. Secondly, he relates the term diaspora to "a variety of experience, a state of mind and a sense of identity. ...a particular kind of awareness generated among contemporary transitional communities..."(8). It is constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion and also positively by identification with a historical heritage like Indian civilization or political/religious forces such as Islam. Finally, Vertovec describes how various writers have attributed sets of

meanings to the notion of diaspora concerning the concepts of globalization: "In this sense -- usually although not exclusively the approach of anthropologists – globalization is examined in its guise as the world-wide flow of cultural objects, images and meanings resulting in variegated process of creolisation, back-and-forth transferences, mutual influences, new contestations, negotiations and constant transformations" (19). In this way, 'diaspora' can be specified as involving the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena.

To give a clearer overview of the problematic aspects concerning diaspora people, Vertovec has also demonstrated that: "The 'awareness of multi-locality' also stimulates the need to conceptually connect oneself with others, both 'here' and 'there', who share the same 'routes' and 'roots'" (8). Vertovec brings in Stuart Hall's version of diaspora which is comprised of ever-changing representations providing an 'imaginary coherence' for a set of malleable identities. Again Vertovec mentions Robin Cohen who developed Hall's point with the observation that "transnational bonds no longer have to be cemented by migration or by exclusive territorial claims. In the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artefacts and through a shared imagination" (9). The point here is, an identification with a diaspora serves to bridge the gap between the local and the global.

While bridging the gap though, diaspora take a part of the native culture away from diaspora people to bring forth some cultural confusion too. In the paper "Three Meanings of 'diaspora', exemplified among South Asian religions" we also get statements of Nina

Glick, Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton. According to them, within the complex web of social relations, diaspora people create and adapt to multiple fluid identities in their society of origin and in the host society. Some migrants might identify themselves more with one society than the other, yet the majority seem to simultaneously maintain multiple identities which link them to more than one nation. And by "maintaining many different racial, national, and ethnic identities, transmigrants are able to express their resistance to the global political and economic situations that engulf them, even as they accommodate themselves to living conditions marked by vulnerability and insecurity" (quoted in Vertovec, 9-10).

Diaspora has been a much talked about issue in recent years. It concerns how and why people leave their homelands and settle in a foreign land and how they adapt to a new set of culture and with a whole new ambience despite facing all sort of predicaments. This dissertation will concentrate on the South Asian Diaspora community issues concerning them, judging them by the writings of two South Asians. We shall try and find out how the Diaspora people get self-conscious and alienated while living in a foreign land where they feel insecure, intense identity crises and other problems. Diaspora people suffer the identity crisis at an initial stage, but slowly and surely regain the feeling of self-confidence as they eventually settle down in what was once an alienating atmosphere. The more they go through phases of alienation, the more they become aware of their own selves. However, they never overcome their trouble completely or succeed in dragging "themselves out of the void" ("Existentialism", 317).

Apparently, a blend of exaggeration of facts and our imagination lead us to aspire to live in a foreign soil. People believe that once they set their feet on a foreign land, they are almost guaranteed a secured life. It's almost an ancient belief that the grass is greener on the other side of the river. Sometimes the illusion created by self-persuasion makes people feel they can get everything once they are abroad. In many cases, the positive feedback that come from Diaspora people help foster such illusions. For example, if someone stays abroad and gives glossy accounts of things and experiences over there, people living at the homeland cannot be blamed for aspiring to go there and have a go at such a life. It is an illusion which can spellbind people for a period of time. However, the fact is, often such magical tales come in expanse of racism, discrimination, clash of cultures, questions of identity, and a harsh battle of survival in a 'dog eats dog world'. This study focuses on the other side of the coin rather than the supposed positive part of an imaginary world.

According to Dubey, "the immigration experience is complicated as a sensitive immigrant finds himself or herself perpetually at a transit station fraught with memories of the original home which are struggling with the realities of the new world" (quoted in Sharmin, 9). On the other hand, from Lahiri's point of view, being a foreigner is like bearing the burden of a perpetual pregnancy. It is easy to theorize on how tough it is when immigrant people start their struggle to survive in a foreign soil. As far as the reality is concerned, things are not as bad as they seem, perhaps they are worse. The identity crisis, the sense of belonging, the constant sense of alienation, the craving for a lost world, these are all aspects of Diaspora life. Stepping feet on an alien land is bound

to create some sort of identity crisis for Diaspora people, for both their first and second generations. The first generation has all the reasons to feel that this new land is not a place they belong to. The new language, different food habits and double ways of living are never the easiest of things to master. When it comes to the second generation, they always are in a catch-twenty-two situation, caught between the culture and heritage that they received from their parents and the culture they grew up in. Here the second generation also suffers an identity crisis of their own, as they are never sure of their original self. Most inevitable is the clash between the two cultures, the native one which the people have left behind but would never detach themselves from, and the new one which they must adopt and cope with in order to survive in a foreign country. There's a cultural clash from a generation-gap viewpoint too. In a Diaspora community, as the second generation grows up, its members are bound to adopt the foreign culture as their own and not the culture they know very little about; that is to say that their parents might impose the native culture on them and that is where the clash of culture begins.

There are also some other problems faced by Diaspora people. For example, language always occupies a major part of the culture/s of a nation. To get to speak in the mother-tongue is a vast moral support and to a certain extent a privilege for a person trying to set his feet on a foreign land. We hear stories about how people search for people just to get to talk to in the vernacular. Especially for first generation immigrants, if they lack the ability to speak the foreign language, they face almost an insurmountable task ahead. They are separated by different levels of communications within the society they have to survive in. In each step of their way in a foreign life, they are bound to find it difficult to

get along without the aid of a language. The case is less severe in the case of those who have relatives or friends already well settled abroad. Language difficulties occur with Nazneen in *Brick Lane* for example. We see how helplessness the girl from Gouripur feels when she moves to London; in the English metropolis she is in dire straits even when she needs to use the bathroom, for all she had initially was the precious possession of two English words, 'Thank you' and 'Sorry'.

Amongst all the individual struggles to settle down, the only common goal in the Diaspora people is that they stick together to save their culture from being swept away in the whirlpool of the multiple realities of life, the duality of the mind arising from the sense of a divided identity, the fractionated origin, ethnic pluralism, religious pluralism and so on.

Steven Vertovec in his paper "Three meanings of 'diaspora', exemplified among South Asian religions" has spoken on problematic issues such as religious and ethnic pluralism which might stimulate a certain self-questioning amidst Diaspora people though Diaspora has not been able to bring radical transformation into their religious practices. In this context Bhikhu Parekh reflects, "The diasporic Hindu was no longer a Hindu happening to live abroad, but one deeply transformed by his diasporic experiences" (quoted in Vertovec, 11). It is almost like two different sets of beliefs co-existing, one set taking the place of the other through a shift, for this feeling really requires a distinction between "religiousness" and "religious-mindedness". Such conditions often compel people to believe that routine habitual practice, rote learning and

'blind faith' are no longer operational. This kind of 'culture-consciousness' also leads to the type of distraction which is very much common in cases of second-generation Diaspora youths. The conflict that is constructed through ethnic pluralism also gives rise to a 'culture-consciousness' that has been described by Bauman as "heightened awareness that one's own life, as well as the lives of all others, are decisively shaped by *culture* as a reified heritage. ... an awareness that whatever one, or anyone, does and thinks is intrinsically and distinctively *culture*-bound, and defined both in relation to one's own culture and the *cultures* of others" (quoted in Vertovec, 13).

Another issue that demands to be added to our discussion concerning Diaspora cultural and political life is the sense of marginality that is always loaded on Diaspora people's backs by the racist and discriminative part of the country to which immigrants move. David Sanderson, attending a literary conference entitled 'Old East End, New East End' which centered on the impact of immigration, has written, "The feeling that things are not quite right is a point made in a newly published study on the East End which concludes that during that last five decades white, working-class Eastenders have felt betrayed by their leaders' promises of better living standards and are resentful of immigrant families with whom they now have to compete for jobs, public services and housing" (*Daily Star*). Cultural hegemony also plays a part, which is why the deshi culture of the diaspora group often gets mauled by a dominating and often discriminative foreign culture. Jackie Kabir finds another obstacle placed in the path of the Diaspora group's attempts to settle down within a foreign culture and assert their authority; their unacceptability in foreign society. As Jackie Kabir writes, "A young Bangladeshi woman

working for a fairly well-known firm says, 'My friend didn't ever get a promotion as she always wore *deshi* clothes at the workplace.' This particular friend of mine was forbidden to wear western clothes by her parents" (*Star Weekend Magazine*). The same prohibition affects Chanu from *Brick Lane* if we remember; the man with a degree in English Literature goes abroad with lofty expectations and everyday dreams of a promotion but ends up being a cab-driver and then getting back to his homeland absolutely empty-handed.

Rituals and heritages, especially in our part of the world, have a very high and special significance. People in our part of the world hold on to centuries old heritages and rituals, be they religious or based on age-old superstitions. These people are, to a large extent, quite sensitive about these issues which are very much parts and parcels of their native culture. So even a little bit of disrespect from foreigners is enough to bring out a cultural clash between Diaspora people and foreigners. The fact is, as far as beliefs are concerned, Diaspora people have to cope with these situations all the time, and face a great deal of trouble on their way to settling down. In *Brick Lane* we see how the two groups The Lion Hearts (the riotous group that was against the Diaspora people accusing them of multicultural murder) and Bengal Tigers (the group of Muslims from the Diaspora people led by the Bengalis that stood against The Lion Hearts) face each other.

A significant aspect of diaspora is the clashes that cause major problems for a certain section of the diaspora community due to cultural difficulties. Second generation diaspora youths like Shahana from *Brick Lane* and Gogol of *The Namesake* have to often encounter such cultural clashes. In *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri uses Gogol's name as a

metaphor of the clash between two generations caused by frissons in the cultural heritage. As Gogol grows up, he harbors a bitter feeling in himself about his name and even tries to escape it. One gets the feeling that he sustains the same feeling about his heritage and this is very much predetermined for any second-generation Diaspora youth. Getting away from the name that his parents had given him was Gogol's first step to brushing aside his parental heritage. The cultural heritage that belonged to Gogol through his parental inheritance, tears Gogol's personal life apart and takes him away from mainstream society, forcing a gap between him and his American friends. From the very early days of his life, the fact, that Gogol's cultural heritage set him apart from his classmates, registers his inner confusion. We find him never wanting to be classified as an Indian. He never favoured attending weekly gatherings of Bengalis or visiting his relatives in India. He prefers art classes to Bengali lessons and listening to Beatles rather than to his father's beloved classical Indian music.

The problem is, parents want their children to stick to their native culture and heritage which their children have a very hazy idea about. The children cannot be blamed too, as they are never quite sure which culture they really belong to or which one they should hold on to. Such confusion in these 'products of diaspora' start right from their early years, when they are taught to give a label to every relationship like *khala*, *chacha* or *mama* whereas in school they are allowed to call their teachers by name. As they grow up, their social life gets into a knot and tricky problems pop up during their marriages. The parents tend to choose their life partners from their own stock whereas second generation youth naturally would like to select a partner from the culture in which they

grew up. The second-generation tend to forget the fact that they are originally from another race, another culture; instead they try to look up to the idea of internationalism or globalization to justify their standpoint.

But in spite of their movement to a new world, the first generation of Diaspora people stick to their native heritage even when they become citizens of the foreign country. They nourish the feeling that they might just drift away from their native culture and turn into a rootless community if they do otherwise. As a result, as much as the second-generation would like to keep out of the cultural clash, confusion keeps haunting them till the end concerning whether to stick to the culture their parents impose on them or to assimilate into the culture they grew up in.

So, cultural conflict is almost predetermined between the first generation of Diaspora people settling in a foreign land but still holding on to their native cultural heritage and language and their children, the second generation, who tend to follow foreign culture. Arguably it is one of the biggest problems that Diaspora people face because such a conflict threatens to tear an entire family apart as the children grow up. Diaspora youths live a life of isolation and alienation as they always nurture the feeling that they do not share their parents' past and are not bothered about their connection with their native land. They embrace every opportunity to make the foreign culture their own one. So, a clash of cultures within a family is always brewing. The parents are always likely to make their children follow their native culture, as we see in *Brink Lane* where Chanu energetically tries to make his daughters recite Tagore's poems although the daughters

almost hates him for doing so. Also, the fact that while Diaspora people absolutely thrive on the dreams of returning to their native land, the second-generation, well settled in the foreign land, cannot think of going to a place which they only have heard of.

A major part of Diaspora people suffers from a 'going home syndrome', but when it comes to getting back to the homeland as happens in certain cases, it is difficult for the second-generation to adapt to their parents' culture. They then feel themselves exiled to a foreign land having to cope with a whole new group of people, tradition and culture or even language, which of course their parents had faced twenty or thirty years ago when they came to another land. The tragedy here is that the first generation of Diaspora people nourish this hope of returning home for the sake of their children, the eventual losers. Ashima in *The Namesake* implores her husband, "I'm saying I don't want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It's not right. I want to go back" (Lahiri, 33).

Before going to the main study, there should be certain clarity about the plan of the thesis. So far the discussion has been revolving around what diaspora is and what are the problematic aspects of diaspora. Now the study will try to search for these problems throughout the two novels and focus on them elaborately in the light of the theories discussed so far. Both the novels will be focused upon in tandem and all the problems will be discussed one after another involving relevant issues and events from the novels.

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Problems of Diaspora:

The focus here in this paper is on fictional treatment of the problems of Diaspora people, and the problems shall be singled out from the chosen texts. Not necessarily all the problems that would be focused on are to be found in both the texts since the books have different settings and characters. One book is set in a working class neighborhood in Britain (*Brick Lane*) and the other one deals with a privileged American group (*The Namesake*). But a single comment by Chanu, a character from Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, just about sums up what is the main argument of this paper. Chanu's concerns regarding the tragedy of diaspora people are revealed when he states:

> "I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I'm talking about the terrific struggle to preserve one's sanity while striving to achieve the best for one's family" (Ali, 92).

When people land on a foreign soil with a dream, their problems start right from day one as the disillusionment of settling down pervades their life. In *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali has created a beautiful metaphor which is perfect for reflecting the problems Diaspora people confront. We find in *Brink Lane* that once the central character Nazneen watches a program on ice-skating on television as she becomes fascinated. This sets up the perfect metaphor for the kind of illusion that Diaspora people go through as they embark on life abroad. The fact is, Nazneen, a village girl from a remote corner of Gouripur, cannot

quite pronounce the word "ice-skating", she calls it "Ice e-skating". This indicates the Diaspora problems because of the difference of language and adaptation of a new culture. Suppose someone who has no clue as to what ice-skating is all about, is asked to perform that specialized art, the outcome would be certain for anyone with common sense; a stumble. Surely, it will take that person a certain amount of time before he masters the technique and starts skating on ice. Very similar is the case of Diaspora people. They can never be expected to adjust themselves straightaway to new conditions. It will take a period of time before they can breathe easy and get used to the alien atmosphere and find a convenient state of being out of all hardships. For Diaspora people, it is as tough to adapt to the new ambience, new language and new culture, as it is for a person to walk on thin ice who has never even known about ice-skating. The major problems diaspora people face are:

Language and Food habits:

In the book 'The Study of Language', George Yule submits his view on the extent to which language represents a culture:

> In the study of the world's cultures, it has become clear that different groups not only have different languages, they have different world views which are reflected in their languages. In very simple terms, the Aztecs not only did not have a figure in their culture like Santa Claus, they did not have a word for this figure either. In the sense, that language reflects culture, this is a very important observation and

> the existence of different world views should not be ignored when different languages or language varieties are studied (246).

In other words, language has a grip over a culture and its people. Language is one of the few strings that tie diaspora people and their homeland. One can draw a parallel between the three characters from *Brick Lane*, Nazneen, Razia and Hasina, to highlight the significance of language on a foreign soil. Hasina left her home and came to Dhaka, an unknown city for her. The same happened to both Nazneen and Razia as they came to a foreign land and had to cope with a whole new ambience. But Hasina had that one advantage – she could at least speak out in her own language, a privilege denied to Nazneen or Razia. Nazneen, it should be stressed, had possessed merely two English words when she had started her life abroad. One recalls Nazneen's feeling of achievement when she went to a pub to use the washroom after losing her way on the roads of London. One also remembers her ecstasy when she simply said 'sorry' to a foreigner. As Monica Ali writes, "... in spite of the fact that she was lost and cold and stupid, she began to feel a little pleased. She had spoken, in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood and acknowledged. It was very little. But it was something" (48). Nor can one forget Razia's striving to go to college to learn English to make sure that the generation gap diminishes once her children grow up. That is how tough it is for diaspora people, especially ones who have little knowledge of a foreign language.

Hasina's letters to Nazneen are everything she could write about her surroundings, but those letters written in Bengali are precious to Nazneen as they serve as the wire

connecting Nazneen to her homeland. Each letter contains bits and pieces of a missing jigsaw puzzle for her. Even her husband Chanu, well-settled in London for decades, brags of every opportunity of his MA degree from the University of Dhaka in English Literature; he also shows his attachment to his mother-tongue through frequent use of Bengali idioms such as:

"And a blind uncle is better than no uncle" (Ali, 17).

"Chasing wild buffaloes while and eating my own rice" (Ali, 26).

"The jackfruit is still on the tree but already he is oiling his moustache" (Ali, 28).

"A bald man does not walk under the bell-fruit tree twice" (Ali, 61).

"He's just a finger blown up to the size of a banana tree" (Ali, 72).

"The local yogi doesn't get alms" (Ali, 90).

"He was Dulal, the son of Alal" (Ali, 254).

Monica Ali represents the problems concerning the language of diaspora people in a sarcastic manner especially in a scene where Chanu and his daughter Shahana converse and Shahana (a second generation Brit. representative of Diaspora culture) detects a mistake in the accent of her father Chanu, (a person who has done his MA in English Literature and aspires to become a lecturer in a university once he returns to his country someday). The scene unfolds in the following manner,

'What is the wrong with you?' shouted Chanu speaking in English.

'Do you mean, said Shahana, ' "What is wrong with you?" not "the wrong".'

(Ali, 165)

These are the kind of linguistic difficulties faced by diaspora people. Native Englishmen and women often look down at the use of such accents. Even in *The Namesake*, it can be observed how shopkeepers ignore Ashoke or Ashima because of their accent and talk straight to Gogol, their second generation son who speaks in a perfect American accent. Gogol is aware in stores "of cashiers smirking at his parent's accents, and of salesmen who prefer to direct their conversation to Gogol, as though his parents were either incompetent or deaf" (Lahiri, 67-68). And the table turns in cases of homecoming as second generation immigrants face the language problem in their parents' native land. That is just exactly what happens in the case of Gogol and Sonia when they come to visit India with their parents.

Food habits too can serve as a handicap in people's lives, all one needs to do is to ask Diaspora people about that. The problem is compounded by religious restrictions as well. Religious South Asians stick to a certain cuisine. For example, Muslims avoid pork because pork is not considered to be 'halal' for them, while Hindus consider beef to be taboos. Thus it is rare for Muslim Asians going abroad and getting used to eating hamburgers, or Hindu to beef kebabs. Also, the difference in food preparation matters; South Asians are usually habituated to highly spiced up preparation of foods whereas the very much diet conscious people in the American or European parts of the world like it less spicy.

Jhumpa Lahiri too in her fiction, explores and reveals the complexities of displacement and the consequences of transformation that diaspora people go through.

One notes the way Ashima in *The Namesake* stands before her kitchen counter, combining Planters peanuts, Rice Krispies, red onions and green chili pepper to reproduce the flavor of a snack sold on the streets of Calcutta, her home by origin, before she moved to the United States with her husband after marriage. Also, the characters of Monica Ali are rarely found eating hamburgers or fried chicken whereas the author has mentioned loads of deshi foods throughout the book.

Difference in food habits can be detected in different generations of the diaspora community. In *The Namesake*, when Ashoke and Ashima go to the supermarket:

> "... they let Gogol fill the cart with items that he and Sonia, but not they, consume: individually wrapped slices of cheese, mayonnaise, tuna fish, hot dogs. For Gogol's lunches they stand at the deli to buy cold cuts, and in the mornings Ashima makes sandwiches with bologna or roast beef. At his insistence, she concedes and makes him an American dinner once a week as a treat, Shake 'n Bake chicken or Hamburger Helper prepared with ground lamb" (Lahiri, 65).

On occasions Gogol and her sister would occupy the kitchen for a day stuffing a turkey and rolling out dough for pies, things which their mother never particularly liked them to do. So, the difference of food preference between two generations of Diaspora is apparent here.

Similarly, when Gogol's family returns India for a short visit, they too suffer food problem. Here Gogol and his sister Sonia are welcomed with cups of Horlick's, plates of syrupy and spongy rossogollas which they dislike and yet have to dutifully eat.

Throughout the tour they crave for their "native" foods. As Lahiri puts it, "from time to time, they privately admit to excruciating cravings, for hamburgers or a slice of pepperoni pizza or a cold glass of milk" (84). The problems in language and food found by second generation diaspora youth is deftly portrayed by Lahiri in the scene when Gogol is returning to America with his family. Sitting on the plane,

> "... for Gogol, relief quickly replaces any lingering sadness. With relief he peels back the foil covering his breakfast, extracts the silverware from its sealed plastic packaging, asks the British Airways stewardess for a glass of orange juice. With relief he puts on his headset to watch *The Big Chill* and listen to top-forty songs all the way home" (Lahiri, 87).

The suffering as well as the relief is clearly visible in these characters. These minor problems in the lives of both generations of diaspora people are very much visible in the characters of these two texts.

Identity crisis:

Jean-Paul Sartre is one of the gurus of modern existentialism. His vision on existentialism offers a clue about the identity crisis of diaspora people:

> "In Sartre's vision man is born into a kind of void, a mud. He has the liberty to remain in this mud and thus lead a passive, supine, acquiescent existence in a 'semi-conscious' state and in which he is scarcely aware of himself. However, he may come out of his subjective, passive situation (in which case he would 'stand-out' from), become increasingly aware of himself and, conceivably, experience *angoisse* (a species of metaphysical and moral anguish). If so, he would then have

> a sense of the absurdity of his predicament and suffer despair. The energy deriving from this awareness would enable him to 'drag himself out of the mud, and begin to exist. By exercising his power of choice he can give meaning to existence and thus universe. Thus, in brief, the human being is obliged to make himself what he is, and has to be what he is" ("Existentialism", 317).

Like Sartre's theory, Diaspora people get stuck in a muddy ambience where from cannot drag themselves out. Émigré people live a life in exile of sorts to where they suffer identity crisis of one kind or the other. The quest for identity agonizes the first generation diaspora till their last day abroad. This perception of identity crisis shall be discussed more vividly in the light of Iffat Sharmin's paper on Stuart Hall's essay on "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". Hall asserts that identity is not an unproblematic thing as one might think it to be. Rather than an accomplished fact, identity should be thought of as a product that is always in process and never complete. As far as Stuart Hall is concerned, cultural identity is a matter of "becoming" as well as "being" (quoted in Sharmin, 1). It belongs to the future as much as to the past. Cultural legacy is inherited from history. But like everything historical, cultural identity also goes through transformation with the span of time. So the already difficult search for identity is bound to be even an tougher task to deal with for culturally displaced emigrant people who are stranded between two different spheres. One is their very world which they can identify themselves with, and the other one, foreign and alien, with no resemblance to the traditions they are familiar with. The problem is even more severe for second generation diaspora people. Even though the second generation feels tied to their parent's cultural identity, they never can identify themselves with that culture. On the contrary, they are

never ill at ease with the culture they grow up in; but the problem is that the people of the foreign culture is never likely to embrace them fully. Concerning this issue Jhumpa Lahiri says that, "for immigrants, the challenges of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, the knowledge of and longing for a lost world, are more explicit and distressing than for the children. On the other hand, the problem for the children of immigrants – those with strong ties to their country of origin – is that they feel neither one thing nor the other" (quoted in Sharmin, 1). Be it an individual or a family from the diaspora crew, who live within two completely distinct cultural setups, the divided identity is always perplexing and taxing.

This process of reinventing one's own self which Gogol goes through, like Sartre's search for one's own existence, reinforces Stuart Hall's definition of Diaspora identities as "those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (quoted in Sharmin, 3).

The sense of belonging:

'Home is where heart is', the saying goes. 'Home', the place where a living being can attach to his or her being is where the person feels he or she truly belongs to. 'Home' is not a place where one can means to stay for a period of time; one ought to create a home by relating one's existence to each and everything in it. Home is something one carries with oneself. It is a place with an atmosphere where one can have peace of mind. In a true 'home', there's always a part of one's self attached to it. Anything other than that, and one would be living in only a house rather than a 'home'. The largest thorn in the flesh of

diaspora people who migrate to foreign lands in search of a comfortable way of life is settling in. As hard as they might try to find their feet in an alien soil, there is always something missing in their life. Time after time in *Brick Lane* and *The Namesake*, characters suffer these spells of suffocation. A close look at them shall vindicate the claims.

The lack of a sense of belonging puts a huge question mark right from day one for diaspora people. The hassles of adopting a whole new atmosphere cause quite a traumatic ordeal as they begin their life in alien soil. Nazneen in *Brick Lane* thus compares her homeland to a foreign land throughout the book. As far as the thoughts of this girl from a remote corner of Gouripur village goes, her homeland can boast of being a place where "You can spread your soul over a paddy field, you can whisper to a mango tree, you can feel the earth beneath your toes and know that this is the place, the place where it begins and ends. But what can you tell to a pile of bricks? The bricks will not be moved" (Ali, 70). She reaches a state of panic in the part where sitting on Razia's windowsill a big bubble of panic gets caught in her mouth. She sees the "Slices of grey sky wedged themselves between the blocks of flats. How small they were. How mean. In Gouripur, when she looked up she saw that the sky reached to the very ends of the earth. Here she could measure it simply by spreading her fingers" (Ali, 353). She was thrown into and stuck within an ambience where even the sky was measured up for her.

Such big difference is not only caused by the difference of atmosphere; it is stifling at times due to lack of breathing space. That claustrophobia resulting from diaspora people

having emigrated in such large numbers is obvious in Chanu's statement, "Ah, it's *overcrowding*, ...*overcrowding* is one of the worst problems in our community. Four or five Bangladeshis to one room. That's an official council statistic" (Ali, 273). Similarly, when Nazneen watches a couple on the television screen performing ice-skating, she goes on to think of their "false smiles, the made-up faces, the demented illusion of freedom chasing around their enclosure" (Ali, 301-302). It is a perfect image Monica Ali has used for the psychological condition and change that diaspora people have to endure; the same false smiles, the made-up faces and the chase for freedom within their little boxes and everything else.

Such are the dilemmas that torture the new arrivals of diaspora culture. No matter how hard one may try, the suffocation caused by nostalgia is bound to make them wobble on their way to acculturation. And even later, this nostalgic feeling keeps coming back to haunt them. For instance, Nazneen observes:

> "It was the same every morning. When she opened her eyes beneath the large black wardrobe she had the sensation – a relief in her bones – that the day had finally arrived. Then she strained to remember what the day was, its significance, and she realized that it was a day like any other. ... She had hated it for fifteen years but this had made no impression" (Ali, 225).

Ashima of *The Namesake* suffers that same feeling of suffocation that Nazneen in *Brick Lane* endures. When Ashima comes back from hospital to her 'gloomy three-room apartment', she finds the same things which had irked her before. Ashima 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 was tired or homesick or cross. She had accepted that 'the very lack of such amenities' was the 'American way'. Jhumpa Lahiri puts the difficulties of diaspora life through a metaphor when she writes:

> "For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is 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. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect" (Lahiri, 49-50).

Here Lahiri reveals the agonizing feeling of the Diaspora community through a comparison with the suffering endured on pregnancy. Both a pregnant woman and a Diaspora person cannot escape their pain and have to walk along with their burden. The only difference is, Diaspora people have to carry their burden for a lifetime.

The Nostalgia:

The central character of *Brick Lane* is Nazneen, a girl form a remote area called Gouripur of Mymensingh district in Bangladesh, who had been married off to Chanu. Off she went straight to the apartment of Tower Hamlet, London. To start with, she had everything needed to make a happy home for her, as the author writes, "She had everything here. All these beautiful things" (Ali, 15). But the missing link with her homeland was always her sister Hasina who remained in her thoughts. "What was Hasina

doing? This thought came to her all the time. *What was she doing?* This was not even a thought. It was a feeling, a stab in the lungs. Only God alone knew when she would see her again" (Ali, 16). All the beautiful things that surrounded her were not quite enough to fill the void that often came to grasp her. She missed her familiar atmosphere:

> "What she missed most was people. Not any people in particular (apart, of course, from Hasina) but just people. If she put her ear to the wall she could hear sounds. The television on. Coughing. Sometimes the lavatory flashing. Someone upstairs scraping a chair. A shouting match below. Everyone in their boxes, counting their possessions. In all her eighteen years, she could scarcely remember a moment that she had spent alone. Until she married. And came to London to sit day after day in this large box with the furniture to dust, and the muffled sound of private lives sealed above, below and around her" (Ali, 18).

One notes Monica Ali's shrewd use of words and phrases such as, 'large box', 'sealed private lives', used to emphasize the suffocation of alienation that often oppressed Nazneen. This feeling of a heavy weight on her soul is even better painted in the lines where Monica Ali writes about Nazneen, "Sometimes she dreamed the wardrobe had fallen on her, crushing her on the mattress. Sometimes she dreamed she was locked inside and hammered and hammered but nobody heard" (Ali, 18). Only the worst of stressful surroundings can invite such dreadful dreams, or rather nightmares.

The ghosts of nostalgia concerning one's homeland are found riding the backs of the characters of *The Namesake* too. As the narrator points out, "In some senses Ashoke and Ashima live the lives of the extremely aged, those for whom everyone they once knew

and loved is lost, those who survive and are consoled by memory alone. Even those family members who continue to live seem dead somehow, always invisible, impossible to touch" (Lahiri, 63). It is an overburdened life for diaspora people, away from all their close ones, all the known surroundings that they were once used to. And as easy as it may seem, it is not the easiest of tasks to cope with such circumstances. At some point of the book Ashima finds herself too old to learn or get used to such a skill, i.e. the experience of solitude. Also, she hated returning to a dark and empty house in the evenings, going to sleep on one side of the bed, and waking up on another.

For all these characters from both books, one thing is for sure; they never belonged to where they were thrown into; they never were at home. A home does not only mean a place where one manages to survive somehow. It takes into account a lot more, such as the surroundings, the atmosphere, the culture, and the people all around us. It is as much an address as one's identity where one can keep coming back and attach his/her existence to it.

Clash of cultures:

Arguably the biggest problem that a diaspora person has to face in his foreign life is to negotiate the clash of two cultures. The conflict between two cultures is enough to disturb their lives and in most cases, it is the inability to cope with the clash of cultures which leaves diaspora people down and out or brings them back to their native land.

Monica Ali chooses to portray the clash between cultures through the things her characters talk about. Chanu, for instance, conversing on drinking habit declares, "You see, it's part of the culture here. It's so ingrained in the fabric of society. Back home, if you drink you risk being an outcast. In London, if you don't drink you risk the same thing. That's when it becomes dangerous..." (Ali, 90). During the same conversation, Chanu underscores the point by simplifying, "This is the tragedy of our lives. To be an immigrant is to live out a tragedy. ...The clash of cultures" (Ali, 91).

Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* also concerns the never-ending conflict between peoples from different cultures. Throughout the novel its characters try to make adjustments irrespective of what culture they belong to, but to no avail. As is the case, eventually the dominant culture takes control over one's life at a certain point; the native culture for the first generation and the foreign culture for the second generation.

There are mainly three cultures found clashing in Lahiri's novel. The deserted native Indian culture, the dominant native American culture and the depressed culture of the 'ABCD' or American Born Confused Deshi, (Lahiri, 118). The novel starts with the story of the Indian couple Ashoke and Ashima Ganguly and the naming of their first child i.e. Gogol who later on changes his name to Nikhil. Right here the author gives some clues about Indian culture concerning the custom that is followed in naming a baby. It is the practice in India to give the baby a surname alongside its real name. The naming of the baby itself thus gives rise to a little controversy in the very beginning and begins the clash of cultures that is pivotal to the novel.

There are also differences in foods habit, preferences for music and books amidst the people from two different cultures of the native Indians and the native Americans. Right from the beginning of her life in America, Ashima finds it difficult to adapt to various foreign set-ups. She feels irked because there is no one to help her in the household work even when she is tired, homesick or cross. But gradually we see her accepting the very lack of such amenities as the 'American way'. She feels an 'abiding horror' when she observes the messy interior of her neighbor Professor Montgomery's house because so far she had seen such houses only in movies.

In the novel, whenever Bengali families meet at the Ganguly's house, Indian native food is always being prepared, yet they have to bring American fast food for the children who are habituated to American things. Ashima always prepares native dishes for herself and her husband, but she has to cook American dishes for her children. Yet Ashima finds some consolation in advising other Bengali wives about Bengali recipes and native food ingredients or preparing '*payesh*' in each of her son's birthdays. With the passing of time Ashoke and Ashima learn to celebrate American festivals and to cope with foreign culture: "They learn to roast turkeys, albeit rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne, at Thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woolen scarves around snowmen, to color boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter and hide them around the house" (Lahiri, 64). Still, as we have seen already, these native people never quite settle into the foreign culture and how Ashima compares being a foreigner to a lifelong pregnancy, a perpetual wait, a constant burden and a continuous feeling out of sorts. It seems that the expatriates' personalities get somewhat repressed in foreign territory. Thus, as soon as

Ashoke and Ashima return home, "... they slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles wider, revealing a confidence..." (Lahiri, 81). But this time Ashoke and Ashima's ABCD children seem to be under a restraining influence. So the dilemma between different cultures are on view throughout the novel.

Gogol gets in touch with his native culture when his father Ashoke dies and he goes through the rituals that a Hindu son must go through after his father's death. This change in him bothers Maxine to such an extent that it eventually causes their relationship to come to a halt. Similarly, an insulting comment by Graham about Moushumi's native culture brings an end to the relationship between them, two other characters from different cultures.

Thus Lahiri develops the entire plot through delineating the conflicts between cultures. Though the story is about Gogol and the story-line revolves around him, the episodes of his and his parent's life constantly produce circumstances that portray the clashes between cultures very much prevalent in expatriate life. Throughout the novel, natives do not quite get away from their own culture, neither do they succeed in establishing their roots in foreign soil.

Clash between generations:

In her article, Jackie Kabir vividly discusses the cultural confusion among second generation diaspora people. She starts off with a little anecdote about a young Bangladeshi girl named Roshni who could not dress as she liked or could not stay out late as other teenagers abroad can, just because her parents would not allow her to do these

things. She sees Roshni as the epitome of most South Asian girls living abroad. The parents are conscious to keep their children away from the foreign lifestyle even when the youth have come close to adulthood. The parents seem to feel that allowing their children to adopt foreign lifestyles to a great level would be crossing a cultural fence. As Kabir puts it:

> This picture has been portrayed in works of a number of Diaspora writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, and Bharati Mukharjee. They write about the children of immigrants to whom the lifestyle imposed on them by their parents is practically foreign. Many teenaged Bangladeshis living abroad are accustomed to a dual way of life: one, for the family, and the other for the friends and people at work which is of course a much larger, broader perspective. (*Daily Star*)

This condition is of course not confined to the cases of youth from Bangladeshi origin in the United Kingdom, rather such anecdotes relate to each and every South Asian boys and girls growing up abroad. As much trouble as the first generation of diaspora people encounter on their way to settling in foreign culture, the problems often seem to escalate in the cases of the second generation diaspora children. They grow up in between cultures. But they can never adopt their parent's native culture as their own because they grow up in an entirely new world. They are always in touch with a foreign culture that is certain to confuse them. What happens is that their parents want them to respect and follow their native culture; looking on the other side of the coin, the second generations are eager to ignore the native culture which they do not know much about and follow the culture they are brought up in. But unfortunately, they can never completely adapt to the

foreign culture because of certain hindrances such as racism and discrimination, nor can they brush aside the native culture because their parents would not let them do so. They are thus handed difficult options to choose from. The result is that they are stranded in a catch twenty-two quandary where they are agonized to some extent to ultimately rebel against their parents which leads to an inevitable gap or clash between two generations.

As far as *Brick Lane* is concerned, Monica Ali makes Shahana, the elder daughter of Nazneen and Chanu, the typical confused and rebellious second generation Diaspora child. Her father Chanu would call her 'the little memsahib'. This is how Monica Ali characterizes her:

> "Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them. If she could choose between baked beans and dal it was no contest. When Bangladesh was mentioned she pulled a face. She did not know and would not learn that Tagore was more than poet and Nobel laureate, and no less than the true father of her nation. Shahana did not care. Shahana did not want to go back home" (Ali, 147).

If there is one thing these second generation diaspora are afraid of, then it is the idea of going back to their motherland or settling there. Naznnen realized this; she knew things would be nice and easy for her and her husband once they are back home, "But the children would be unhappy. Bibi, perhaps, would recover quickly. Shahana would never forgive her" (Ali, 149).

Not only the conception of 'going back home', to be precise, second generation immigrants often develop a certain kind of abhorrence for most of the things about their native land, especially if it is a third world country. That is the case with youths like Shahana. So, when Chanu tries to introduce his daughters to the flowers of Bangladesh through Internet, Shahana straightaway gives her reaction, 'Bor-ing'. One can also recall Shahana's demands to have her lip pierced and have tattoos done on her. She presented these demands to her mother as proof that she could not be 'taken home'. One cannot really blame someone like Shahana when she asks to have tattoos on her arms or pierce her lips and wear jeans, because that is what she sees to be customary all around her. At the same time, one cannot blame diaspora parents either because they ask their children to hold on to their culture and heritage like they did, to some extent, for the interest of the children. Thus it is that during a 'father-daughter conversation', Chanu tries to caution Shahana of the following, "You see, the things I had to fight: racism, ignorance, poverty, all of that – I don't want you to go through it" (Ali, 265).

The problem of generation gap is not as drastic in *The Namesake* as it is in *Brick Lane* as the story-line revolves around upper middle-class family life of Gogol. But still we find certain things about Gogol that separates him from his parents. As the author writes, "Lately he's been lazy, addressing his parents in English though they continue to speak to him in Bengali. Occasionally he wanders through the house with his running sneakers on. At dinner he sometimes uses a fork" (Lahiri, 75).

As Gogol grows up, he cannot quite adjust to his Indian parent's culture. He starts to refer his college residence as his home. He tends towards American habits. We find that "He cannot imagine coming from such parents, such a background, and when he describes his own upbringing it feels bland by comparison" (Lahiri, 111). It was as if "He didn't want... to remain unquestionably in their world" (Lahiri, 126). Gogol's act of changing his name from Gogol to Nikhil symbolizes his urge to get into his American self to get admission into mainstream society although it is assumed to be a foreign one by his parents. Gogol has been allergic to the name chosen for him by his parents, like he was about their culture. But using the name Nikhil, he was at home; not the home he lived in with his parents, rather the home he wanted to identify himself with.

Then comes the conflict between the "ABCD" culture and the culture of the native Americans. Gogol looks up to American values and lifestyle instinctively, although these are very much discouraged by his parents. He cannot quite figure out why his parents would not approve of his relationship with a foreign girl. When Gogol thinks of his girlfriend Maxine's family culture as one full of freedom, Maxine reckons Gogol's family restrictions as a challenge. Comparing Maxine's parents Gerald and Lydia to his own, Gogol develops a sense of dislike about his own parents. He has a sense of relief in being with Maxine's family compared to the feeling of amusement that Maxine feels while spending an afternoon with Gogol's. Gogol starts living with Maxine; nevertheless, sometimes he feels that he is stuck in a no man's land and misses his own family. Readers can notice that Gogol dreads his visits home where he has to cope with a culture he has no liking for. Being at college and away from home makes breathing easier for

Gogol since he is then within mainstream American culture. This detaching himself from his roots and his family for years to come signifies his discomfort in straddling between two cultures.

And yet cultural confusion keeps dogging Gogol, as when after the death of his father Ashoke, Gogol goes through Indian rituals that a son must to go through. For a certain period, they have to eat a mourner's diet, forgoing meat and fish. Gogol remembers having to do the same thing when he was younger when his grandparents had died. He also recalls how bored and annoyed he was back then to observe and follow the rituals of a culture no one else he knew followed. But strangely enough, now sitting together with his family at the kitchen table, that meatless meal seems to be the only thing that makes sense. And suddenly "The rest of it – the calls, the flowers that are everywhere, the visitors, the hours they spend sitting together in the living room unable to say a word, mean nothing" (Lahiri, 181).

So, Gogol's case shows that native culture is always embedded deep within the second generation diaspora which comes out occasionally. They are never away from the native culture.

Class discrimination and racism:

"And you see, to a white person, we are all the same: dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan" (Ali, 21). These are the words of downtrodden Chanu, the archetypal face of South Asian diaspora people. Hungry for success, people like him go abroad in expectation of making a better life in of the foreign land of their dreams. But all for must

the outcome is disappointment, as they find out how tough it is to establish themselves while coping with obstacles such as racism and class discrimination. The problem is much more severe for working class diaspora people because they take the competition for job placement between the foreigners and them to a higher level. All through the story Chanu strives for a promotion, changes one job after another dreaming of secretarial positions but ends up as a cab-driver. Eventually he decides to take his family back home to Bangladesh and start a little business over there. Chanu's life summarizes the fate of most Diaspora people in a dog eats dog world. That is why Chanu says to his wife Nazneen:

> "You see... it is the white under-class, like Wilkie, who are most afraid of people like me. To him and people like him, we are the only thing standing in the way of them sliding totally to the bottom of the pile. As long as we are below them, then they are above something. If they see us rise then they are resentful because we have left our proper place. That is why you get the phenomenon of the *National Front*. They can play on those fears to create racial tensions, and give these people a superiority complex. The middle classes are more secure, and therefore more relaxed" (Ali, 29).

Also, in the later parts of the novel Monica Ali portrays the fight between two discriminative political groups who distribute leaflets, organize secret meetings, marches, clashes and all. On the one side it is The White Lions that wants to assert their authority over diaspora people and on the other the Bengal Tigers that stands tall to fight for survival and rights. Mrs. Islam, a high-positioned lady, once observes the following about

the racist attitude of the natives, "They have no respect for us. How can they fear us?...They will not march. It is too much trouble. If they want us out of here, they can buy us out" (Ali, 369). Another example of the atmosphere of racism is found when Razia and Nazneen watch a white girl wearing slawaar-kameez from outside a new shop. Razia then comments, "Look how much these English are paying for their kameez. And at the same time they are looking down onto me. They are even happy to spit on their own flag, as long as I am inside it. What's wrong with them? What's wrong?" (Ali, 328). The alarm created by racism is quite evident also in the words of Chanu on raising his son within a foreign culture, "I don't want him to rot here with all the skinheads and drunks. I don't want him to grow up in this racist society...The only way is to take him back home" (Ali, 91).

The problem of class discrimination is not that great to some extent for upper middle class Diaspora people like the Gangulis in *The Namesake.* Yet racism remains a factor to be dealt with even for them as Gogol encounters another case scenario of racism:

> "Back home on Pemberton Road, he helps his father paste individual golden letters bought from a rack in the hardware store, spelling out GANGULI on one side of their mailbox. One morning, the day after the Halloween, Gogol discovers, on his way to the bus stop, that it has been shortened to GANG, with the word GREEN scrawled in pencil following it" (Lahiri, 67).

Going back home:

The issue of 'going back home' is another dilemma that makes diaspora people suffer to a bitter extent. Especially, in the case of second generation diaspora youth. Sanchita Islam, a young writer and artist, has hinted on the dilemma that the second generation suffer when travelling back to their parents' homeland in "Gungi Blues" from her anthology:

"Bangladesh was like entering another world.
It wasn't a place I could relax, feel comfortable or warm.
It wasn't a place I could shout or take a walk to the corner shop.
It was just the place where my parents were born.
I was born in Manchester.
Bangladesh was a place to visit, to discover and learn but never to live.
To live there would mean our crumble.
Forced to hide behind white powder, tight lips, strained silence, / or thin pretence we wouldn't know how." (quoted in Sanderson)

Such remarks provide the readers with an unclouded view of the mentality of second generation Bengali immigrants who might at some point return to the places which was once their parents' homeland. They are never quite at home then in spite of being at home. The multiple identity of origin, cultural duality, cultural hegemony, religious plurality and most of all, the multiple realities of life strike second generation diaspora people once they are in their homeland. Caught between two worlds, they suffer for

language problems, food problems and so on. It is, one realizes, the other side of the situation their first generation immigrant parents faced when they first went abroad.

In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen of course could guess that her daughters, especially Shahana 'would never forgive her' if she decided to go back. Chanu return home anyway without his wife and children who were well settled at the end of the novel in a foreign ambience, but he kept on leaving the alienated life of a diaspora person, writing letters to his family from an alien land.

Jhumpa Lahiri has depicted the traumatic experience of second generation Bengalis coming back to their parents' homeland with the episode of Ashima and Ashoke's return home with their children, Gogol and Sonia. The effect of homecoming proves to be the polar opposite for two generations as within minutes of landing off the plane, "Ashoke and Ashima slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles wider, revealing a confidence Gogol and Sonia never see on Pemberton Road" (Lahiri, 81-82). On the contrary, Gogol and his sister Sonia step their feet in alien soil: "Depending on where they are, they eat sitting on red clay or cement or terrazzo floors, or at marble-topped tables too cold to rest their elbows on. ...Of all the people who surround them at practically all times, Sonia is his only ally, the only person to speak and sit and see as he does" (Lahiri, 83-84). Throughout the tour, they are never comfortable as they both get ill. "It is the rice, the wind, their relatives casually remark; they were not made to survive in a poor country, they say" (Lahiri, 86). Truly, while a return to the motherland makes the first generation feel at home, it is the sinking feeling

for the second generation which their parents once experienced when they went abroad; a reversal of roles to be precise.

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Conclusion:

Neutrals may look at Diaspora people sitting on top of an ivory tower of eternal bliss; but that is a world only imagined by fantasists. What such people do not realize is that it is not the easiest task in the world for Diaspora people to survive in that magic world. These people have to go through their own heaven and hell over the years considering the suffering they go through. But people back home get money, fantasy, and inspiration from these very people. This dissertation paper explores the selected texts to bring out the truth about Diaspora people.

Diaspora people step feet on a foreign soil to settle down with great hopes about the land of dreams. And right from day one they confront problems such as identity crisis, fear of drifting away from their native culture and heritage, class-discrimination, racism, language problem, food problem – the list of woes goes on and on. These are the archetype diaspora ordeals which keep on unsettling the Diaspora people from one generation to another. Taking a leaf out of Monica Ali's book, the Diaspora life of first generation immigrants can be labeled as a 'one of a kind' ice skating-ring, where one can never quite master the art of not slipping. Even when one is skillful enough to glide over its slippery surface, s/he must be ready to face odd slipups here and there to survive in a Diaspora life. On the other hand, second generation Diaspora can never be sure of which way to follow, and eventually the quandary often compels them to take a drastic choice, to discard their first generation's culture and heritage.

After this sustained analysis, the objective of this paper, the problems of Diaspora people, reflecting on the selected texts, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, readers can understand that the problems of Diaspora people are never-ending. There is no way out for them except to cope with the ordeals.

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