



HUMAN DISTANCE AND EMOTIONAL DISCONNECTION IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE NAMESAKE* AND AKHIL SHARMA'S *FAMILY LIFE*

Biradar Mayuri Madhavrao¹

Research Student, Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded, MS, India

&

Dr. Prashant Raosaheb Shinde²

Head & Associate Professor, Department of English, Shivneri Mahavidyalaya, Shirur Anantpal Tal. Shirur. Dist. Latur, MS, India

Abstract

Diasporic narratives frequently emphasize the breaks and gaps that migration causes, especially in the context of family relationships. This study explores the estrangement and disaffection in human relationships reflected in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Akhil Sharma's *Family Life*. By an intensive reading of the texts, and engaging critically with the texts and the scholarly articles, the paper argues that relocation, culture clash, and individual trauma lead to emotional withdrawal, loneliness, and the reshaping of identity. The idea that the characters lack understanding, identity, and communication is supported by the analysis of those parts of the books and characters' utterances. The article, in the end, grasps and argues through characters' quotations and incidents that the position of 'between worlds' is a source not only of intercultural negotiation but also of intrafamilial alienation, which makes people switch between the states of belonging and being left out, and of connection and solitude.

Keywords

Diaspora, Alienation, Family Dynamics, Identity, Indian American Fiction, Emotional Distance, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

One of the most profound changes to the dynamics of human relationships is their transformation by displacement. For Indian-American literature, the themes of alienation, emotional distancing, and the search of identity figure heavily in the reshaping of the familial and interpersonal bonds, both in terms of their structure and their development. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Akhil Sharma's *Family Life*, probe the complexities of these relational cracks, mapping the protagonists' continuous struggle with their inherited and acquired identities. These works do not only depict the protagonists' external changes and the difficulties of assimilation, but also the subtle and often unspoken emotional distances that develop in families. The present research focuses on the artists' depiction of the vulnerability of human relationships, which offers the psychological effects of migration and trauma. Their study is a close reading of the portrayal of the disintegration of the personal relationships by the two authors which provides the understanding of the psychological consequences of the migration and traumatic experience.

Research Methodology:

This study has qualitatively analyzed the subject matter of the study. It involves examining the chosen works. The two novels selected are closely examined for their depiction of distancing in



relationships, and the original texts are referred to with exact page numbers following the MLA Ninth Edition. Besides, the authors also take the help of some secondary resources like some published critical essays and commentaries to locate and understand their point in-depth. Their investigation includes: Thematic textual analysis for instances of alienation, miscommunication, and emotional distance. Comparative analysis between the two novels' treatment of isolation and identity. Integration of literary criticism and scholarly discourse to substantiate arguments. Exact quotation analysis with attention to narrative technique, character development, and dialogue.

Literature Review:

One of the primary features pointed out by the scholars of diaspora fiction is that these kinds of fictions mainly focus on issues of identity and alienation. It is pointed out by critics that Lahiri's *The Namesake* "exposes the pain and confusion of cultural-in-between, particularly as it penetrates the domestic life" (Americana E-Journal). Correspondingly, Sharma's *Family Life* is acclaimed for the emotive and precise nature of its depiction of the cutting off of the traumatic source of the bond of the family (The Crimson). Scholars like Choubey argue that "These works depict the gaps in communication in diasporic families which becomes a new language of silence" (Dislocated Self in *The Namesake*)

As the scholars point out, the family becomes the unit of both novels, through which the issues of uprooting, seeking for the place to live, and inner psychological isolations are resolved and as a result, there appears an emotional coldness or distance which is of equal importance with the physical separation. Besides this, the authors of critical essays, through their arguments, propose that the "exilic consciousness" which appears as one of the effects of migration and trauma even in the case of togetherness is the main reason for the lack of genuine intimacy (Displacement and Alienation in *The Namesake*).

Analysis of the Texts:

***The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri:**

The theme of Lahiri's novel is the Ganguli family, which immigrated from India to America and gradually but distinctly experienced the distancing of their relationships. Gogol, the main character, deals with emotional estrangement from his parents, especially his father, which is the result of cultural misunderstandings and different concepts of identity. A turning point in the story is when Gogol changes his name legally, thus illustrating a breaking of his ties with the family and cultural roots. Lahiri writes, "He wonders if this is how it feels for her parents, to be so utterly disconnected from their past, from people who would remember their childhoods (Lahiri, TN, 99). This point reveals the generational gap; both Gogol and his parents feel loneliness and lack of understanding even though they are close to each other.

The emotional separation grows after Ashoke's passing. Gogol feels deep regret but during his visit home, the distance between him and his mother, Ashima, becomes more evident— "They sit in silence at the kitchen table. Nothing to say, nothing that can be said" (Lahiri, TN, 131). This silence is filled with their shared sorrow but, at the same time, it shows how the move has caused unhealed wounds and unsaid words.

Lahiri's storytelling manner helps to highlight this separation as the characters often keep their feelings to themselves and there is very little speech between them. The constant theme of names— "He hates having to live with a pet name, a name that cannot be said by anyone outside the family" (Lahiri, TN, 28) — isn't just about an external identity crisis but also about a feeling of being a stranger even among the closest ones.

Besides that, Gogol's love affairs turn into the ways to demonstrate his incapacity to establish deep relationships. With Maxine, for instance, "He is conscious of the fact that he is



different, set apart, even as he stands next to her” (Lahiri, TN, 183). Although they are physically close, Gogol’s feeling of estrangement hampers the reaching of a deep understanding which is a pattern originating from his family life. Scholarly conversation confirms this opinion by saying, “In Lahiri’s work, names become a metaphor for distance - between continents, generations, and, above all, hearts” (IOSR Journal). This is evident in his disconnection from his own history when he “lets go of the hand that once anchored him” (Lahiri, TN, 212).

Family Life by Akhil Sharma:

The semi-autobiographical novel of Sharma centers on an altogether different, maybe even more psychologically acutely, spectrum of separating families: the emotional and communicative breakdown after the tragedy. Birju’s drowning and brain injury cause the Mishra family to fall into dysfunction; Ajay, the surviving son, grows emotionally withdrawn. At the beginning of the story, Sharma writes, “We became a family only in appearances. At home, there was nothing that bound us. (Sharma, FL, 56).

The suddenness of Birju's accident tears down the family's old unity and affection is replaced with resenting, worrying, and silence. Alienation of Ajay is a theme that comes up frequently: “I didn't know how to talk to my mother anymore” (103). He sees the distance physically—his mother's getting more and more isolated—and emotionally as he realizes that “Everyone in this family was suffering, but we suffered separately” (Sharma, FL, 157). The minimalist style in the novel is in line with the severity of their estrangement.

The turning point is when Ajay, struggling with survivor's guilt, admits, “I felt jealous of Birju. He had everyone's attention, but he was far away” (Sharma, FL, 175). Birju’s presence-in-absence is what makes the metaphor for closeness unattainable so powerful, as a result, it haunts the people very much. Among other things, the critical analyses of Sharma's work point out cultural and traumatic alienation aspects intersection. As the Dublin Literary Award nomination puts it, “Family Life is not a tale of going through the pain and coming to the healing stage, but that of enduring, of bearing the distances that tragedy imposes” (Sharma, FL, 217).

Comparative Discussion:

Both the books use the distance theme that is not just about being far away either physically or culturally, but about being distantly related to the very existence. In *The Namesake*, distance is shown through relocation to a new land, consequences of naming, and generational gaps. In *Family Life*, the onset of emotional estrangement is the effect of trauma, and this estrangement is further deepened by mental health issues that have not been dealt with and social isolation.

Though the contexts are different, both pieces of work disclose that there is a limit to human empathy when one is faced with such personal, familial, and cultural transition as these characters go through. The characters want to be connected but very often their efforts are frustrated by silence, guilt or the fact that they cannot express their suffering - a phenomenon which is brought to the fore by the writers' sparse and inward-focused prose. While characters of Lahiri wait for the time when they will reconcile and accept themselves, in Sharma's story, the survival is darkly dependent on the ability to adapt to solitude.

Conclusion:

Thus, the two novels, *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri and *Family Life* by Akhil Sharma, through their powerful and insightful plots, put under question the nature of distance - that of literal, cultural, and emotional one - as a decisive factor of human relationships. Both the novels depict migration and the resulting trauma as the major perpetrators that widen the walls behind which intimacy exists and force characters to traverse tricky territories of belonging, memory, and alienation. The gap between worlds becomes, in their stories, the gap between hearts.



References

- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Sharma, Akhil. *Family Life*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.
- “Individual-Family Interface in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*.” *Americana E-Journal*, americanaejournal.hu.
- Choubey, Anu. “Dislocated Self in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*.” *PM Journal*, S.D. College Ambala, pm.sdcollegeambala.ac.in.
- “*Family Life* - Akhil Sharma.” *Dublin Literary Award*, 17 Feb. 2025, dublinliteraryaward.ie.
- “Family, Tradition, and Ritual Theme in *The Namesake*.” *LitCharts*, 2024, litcharts.com.
- “A Critical Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*.” *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews (IJRPR)*, ijrpr.com.
- “Sharma Depicts Tragic 'Family Life'.” *The Crimson*, 7 Apr. 2014, thecrimson.com.
- “Sense of Belonging in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*.” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, iosrjournals.org.

Article Received:15/12/2025

Article Accepted:212/2025

Published Online: 26/12/2025

To Cite the Article: *Mayuri, Birajdar and Shide, Prashant*. “Human Distance and Emotional Disconnection in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* and Akhil Sharma’s *Family Life*.” *Literary Cognizance: An International Refereed/Peer Reviewed e-Journal of English Language, Literature and Criticism*, Vol.-VI, Issue-3, December, 2025, 218-221. www.literarycognizance.com

This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

