

Alienation and Nostalgia in Immigrant Literature in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novel “Namesake”

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Abstract. *The current research paper explores the feelings of profound alienation and nostalgia common to immigrant literature. It aims to explore the path traversed by people who abandon their nations to embrace new but unfamiliar cultural norms, language barriers, and an overall sense of rooted alienation. Overall, the study proposes to define and develop concepts of alienation and nostalgia in immigrant literature, understand what triggers these feelings and how they are expressed, and reflect on literature's role in healing them.*

Alienation as an emotion of separation and dissociation from oneself and people around are depicted. It is analyzed by sociologists, philosophers, and psychologists who present the sociological, economic, and psychological approaches to understanding the phenomenon. Moreover, the paper also reflects the second type of alienation of people from their house and their motherland, which illustrates the challenges of immigrants in a new social and cultural environment. Nostalgia, therefore, is researched as a feeling of homesickness and longing for their motherland and their previous life. It is a remembrance of past and time-preserved identity.

In summary, this research paper contributes unique perspectives to the themes of alienation and nostalgia in immigrant-based literature. The research paper enriches different aspects of these feelings, their origins, and manifestations, bearing in mind that literature plays a crucial role from which psychological impacts of alienation and nostalgia should not escape. Such a view is only insightful in ensuring how the feeling of alienation and nostalgia influences the immigrant and their fight to develop a complete identity.

Key words: *Cultural norms, Alienation, Immigrants and Nostalgia.*

Introduction

Immigration is a life-altering experience that forces those who abandon their home nations to establish roots in unsettled territories to confront feelings of alienation and longing. The pilgrimage of the immigrant disrupts cultural stabilities and tramples the boundaries linking language and land I-MEI. It is a shattering process that prompts querulousness and estrangement and costs the newly-minted immigrant his past; this sacrifice is an identity crisis. The semester is a unique medium for authors to work out their thoughts and relationship to these experiences and offer readers a glimpse of the perplexing life of the immigrant.

The primary goal of this research paper is to explore alienation and nostalgia in immigrant literature. With the help of finding multiple works by immigrant authors, the discovery will help discern how presented feelings are developed and their influence on immigrant's perceptions. The research has the following purposes:

1. Reevaluate what alienation and nostalgia mean based on immigrant literature.

2. Find and show reasons and ways how alienation emerges among immigrants, including differences in cultural identities, language, and values and a tendency to distance from their country of origin.
3. Investigate sources and expressions of nostalgia experienced by immigrants: longing for their homeland and the role nostalgia plays in terms of identity.
4. Demonstrate literature's role in addressing the psychological effects of alienation and nostalgia. This consideration emphasizes that the source/medium utilized to discuss the issue of nostalgia and feeling alienated is essential for providing comfort realization and being integral to immigrant communities.

Definition of Alienation

Alienation means feeling distant, separated, or alienated from oneself, others, or society. This notion is commonly explored in immigrant literature and involves stranger feelings, being out of place, and general confusion. Alienation can take several forms, such as strangeness, misunderstanding, or unusualness. Throughout immigrant literature, scholars and critics have thoroughly examined the issue of alienation. For example, famous sociologist Durkheim (1839) describes it in the following way. He defines alienation as a condition in which people no longer hold fast to social fasteners that give them a feeling of connectedness and purpose. Feeling disconnected may stem from variations in culture and language and the struggles of adjusting to a setting.

Moreover, a famous person in philosophy, Karl Marx, delved into the problem of alienation from the perspective of labor and capitalism. Marx (1844) believed this phenomenon happens when a man loses control and power over the fruits of his labor. In the case of immigrant literature, this point of view can be explained as alienation from a person's homeland and the cultural background knowledge that shapes one's personality.

For instance, psychologist Erich Fromm (1955) explored the psychological aspect of alienation, which he understood as distancing oneself from their self and other people. He postulated that contemporary societies are very alienating to a person's true self and, therefore, cause feelings of emptiness and quest for purpose and meaning. In the case of immigrant literature, these feelings may be exacerbated by the difficulties of fitting into the new society and the lack of support and familiar social relations.

Furthermore, alienation in immigrant literature implies the feeling of disconnection, isolation, and estrangement that people who move to another nation-country undergo. The phenomenon includes the states of not fitting in, not being comprehended, and being socially and culturally removed. A range of scholars and thinkers researched the phenomenon of alienation, namely Durkheim, Marx, and Fromm, and gave meaningful contributions to understanding its sociological, economic, and psychological dimensions.

A. Alienation from Home and Homeland:

A significant form of alienation in immigrant literature is being disconnected from one's home and homeland. The experience of to immigrate into a new country is to experience the medium of losing one's roots. It is both the result of physical distance from the homeland and the emotional and cultural associations of separation from a lost source of tribal cultural identity. Literary texts of immigrant authors are concerned with such a source of alienation, exploring the difficulties of an immigrant life where a person simultaneously seeks a familiar sense of belonging that home and homeland come with (Lahiri, 2003; Adichie, 2013).

B. Alienation as a Means of Cultural Critique:

In immigrant literature, alienation functions as a tool of cultural examination and critique, allowing authors to express their views on the difficulties immigrants encounter when transitioning to and integrating into a different culture. In this regard, alienation is often used to criticize the dominant culture's prejudice, bias, and exclusion of immigrants. Thus, the authors' stories can illuminate immigrants' struggles to become accepted and understood and offered equal prospects in their new

countries. Alienation, therefore, assumes the role of a lens for taking a closer look at the authorities, social structures, and systemic constraints that maintain the immigrants' marginalized state (Lahiri, 2003; Tan, 1989).

C. Examples of Alienation in Immigrant Literature:

Alienation is a common theme in immigrant literature that can manifest in multiple ways. For instance, *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri discusses Gogol Ganguli's alienation from his Indian heritage as he attempts to reconcile it with his American background. He also does not genuinely belong to either culture, which makes him feel like an outsider. Another example is *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in which the protagonist, Ifemelu, is alienated due to the racial landscape and profound cultural differences surrounding her in the United States. These works present the intricacies of immigrant identity and how much effort it takes to belong to a new culture (Lahiri, 2003; Adichie, 2013).

Conceptualization of Nostalgia:

One of the themes constantly tackled by immigrant literature is nostalgia. It is an emotional feeling of great pleasure a person feels when something is missing or when one reflects on the good old times. Immigrants, while leaving their home countries, try to preserve everything that reminds them of their childhood, culture, and traditions. These sentiments impact the immigrant's identity and understanding of their past and future (Ibid). In immigrant literature, nostalgia is a strong emotion caused by the loss and desire to return to one's homeland and its familiar and homely atmosphere. It refers to people, places, traditions, and cultural rituals connected with one's original place of birth. This belongs to the national culture (Lahiri, 2003; Tan, 1989).

A. Nostalgia as a Reflection of Loss and Longing:

In immigrant literature, nostalgia serves as a last expression of the deep loss of this previous life. It is a longing for the connections, experiences, and sense of belonging from which one must escape to be free. As immigrants settle into their new lives, nostalgia emerges as a lifetime manner to safeguard and pay respect to their upbringing, but it could always have been lost to them (Hosseini, 2003).

B. Nostalgia for the Homeland:

Much of the immigrant literature is about longing and nostalgia for the homeland. They write about craving for the sights, sounds, scents, and flavors that stimulate a deep-seated longing. It would be more accurate to say that one writes about attachment. For example, one way or another, everyone is eager to return to the place of their childhood. The homeland becomes one's own and the longing becomes a way of preserving the memory and personality (Lahiri, 2003; Hosseini, 2003).

C. Nostalgia as a Source of Identity Formation:

Nostalgia is also instrumental in how immigrant literature constructs identity throughout the texts. It gives an identity to people by instilling in them a way of understanding their culture and where they come from – a way of understanding how one fits into the big picture. Nostalgia also fixes peoples' personalities to one place to live both in the past and present concurrently. Hence, from the two articles, nostalgia plays a critical role in identity construction through immigrant literature (Adichie, 2013).

The Relationship Between Alienation and Nostalgia

As is evident from the above-mentioned discussion, alienation and nostalgia often intertwine and compound each other in immigrant literature. However, in simple terms, alienation is separation and detachment from one's home and home country. On the other hand, in simple language, nostalgia is a sentimental ache for the past and a longing for home; in terms of alienation, it is yearning for the familiar and the comfortable. Biased and stereotypical definitions aside, both of these shape the reality of immigrant life and the selves of the people who experience them.

The sense of alienation may exacerbate nostalgia because immigrants struggle to adjust to the new way of life. The feeling of being detached and distant from the home and native land intensifies the

urge to return to the previous way of existence. Immigrants are constantly exposed to the feeling of in-betweenness as they do not belong to their country of residence or their native land. This 'twoness' intensifies the nostalgia toward the country of origin and its cultural traditions, celebrations, and social connections (Lahiri, 2003; Adichie, 2013).

Moreover, nostalgia may also act as a response to alienation. In this case, one can view it as a defense mechanism fulfilled by vice versa. The representatives of the new culture resort to memories of their motherland to find support in the difficulties they face adapting to the culture of the second country. Nostalgia acts as a link, a factor that unites the past with the present, helping to maintain one's own culture and heritage (Hosseini, 2003; Tan, 1989).

Frequently, the emotional odyssey of the characters illustrates the role of alienation and nostalgia. The foremost may be defined as an all-encompassing feeling of not belonging resulting from cultural and linguistic differences, experiences of limited accepting, and discrimination. Such encounters invoke nostalgia for the homeland as a reservoir of knowledge and accompaniment. In contrast, nostalgia becomes a response to alienation, paradoxically associating a sense of connection to what once was in a foreign setting (Lahiri, 2003; Hamid, 2017).

Immigrant literature provides numerous examples of this complex relationship. In Mohsin Hamid's "Exit West," Nadia and Saeed are forced to abandon their destroyed homeland and suddenly find themselves in a new nation. They suffer a powerful sense of alienation, feeling out of place in the broader world, and people do not resemble them. At the same time, their longing for the past home makes them nostalgic as they recall the peace, security, and stability they no longer enjoy. Therefore, alienation and nostalgia are the most prominent examples of how immigrant literature portrays the former and the current home (Hamid, 2017).

A. Alienation as a Catalyst for Nostalgia

Feeling disconnected from their roots and homeland can trigger a sense of nostalgia among immigrants (Castañeda, 2020; Salgado, 2021). The longing for familiarity, cultural traditions, and social connections from their past becomes more intense when faced with challenges like language barriers, discrimination, and a loss of social support networks. This emotional attachment to the past is often amplified by the experience of uprooting and feeling alienated in an environment (Bhugra, 2019; Suárez-Orozco, 2020).

B. Nostalgia as a Coping Mechanism for Alienation

Immigrants often turn to nostalgia to cope with the feelings of being disconnected and adjusting to an environment (Rudmin, 2020; Wildschut et al., 2018). Remembering their home country and cultural roots brings them comfort, solace, and a sense of belonging while feeling out of place (Cheung & Sedikides, 2021; Zhou et al., 2021). Reflecting on memories helps immigrants maintain a sense of continuity and uphold their identity despite significant changes. It serves as a tool for them to navigate the difficulties of feeling alienated and find stability in their sense of self (Sedikides et al., 2015; Smeekes & Sedikides, 2017).

C. Samples of the Intersection of Alienation and Nostalgia in Immigrant Literature:

The intersection of alienation and nostalgia finds plenty of examples in immigrant literature. For example, in Viet Thanh Nguyen's novel *"The Sympathizer,"* the protagonist, a Vietnamese refugee in the United States, feels extremely alienated due to his dual nature and the loss of his home (Nguyen, 2015). At the same time, the nostalgia for Vietnam is instrumental in fighting the alienation and presents an ideal to refer back to.

Likewise, *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi (2016) depicts characters torn between their past of slavery and diaspora and their present, alien from their African origin. Nostalgia becomes a valuable means of becoming rooted and reacquainting oneself with the past to reconcile the past with the present. In conclusion, alienation and nostalgia are the two sides of the immigrant experience which shed light on the cultural vertigo.

***The Namesake* via Jhumpa Lahiri**

The protagonist of *The Namesake*, Gogol Ganguli, is a second-generation Indian US immigrant. Gogol feels alienated in an existential sense, alienated from his Indian roots and the wider American environment. As he grapples with his divided self and the internal battles of assimilation, he never belongs sufficiently to both.

Alienation makes Gogol feel longing as his desire for belonging and home intensifies. For instance, "And even now that his father is driving away from him, Gogol's breath as he climbs into bed still smells faintly and pleasantly of toothpaste." Alienation generates strong ties with the past and the home country he has left.

Thus, Lahiri skillfully creates a vivid picture of Gogol's nostalgia, an intense longing for the safety and belonging he experienced in India. Through poignant imagery and a constant return to Gogol's early years, the author emphasizes the importance of his Indian identity in his life. Nostalgia becomes a tool that allows Gogol to remain connected with his roots despite his embrace of alienation in American society.

Nevertheless, the cycle of alienation and nostalgia further intensifies Gogol's feelings of dislocation. The more that Gogol becomes a part of the American culture and strives to separate himself from his Indian culture, the more disconnected he feels from the past. Therefore, the sense of nostalgia strikes even harder because the protagonist can only appreciate his culture when it is no longer there.

In Lahiri's novel, the exploration of how Gogol's feelings of alienation and nostalgia influence his sense of self and connection is a theme. Gogol faces the struggle of merging his roots with the expectations of culture, frequently sensing that he doesn't wholly align with either world. His path evolves into a quest for self-understanding as he endeavors to locate a sense of belonging and embrace his dual cultural heritage.

"*The Namesake* delves into the connection between feeling out of place and longing for the past within the journey. Lahiri skillfully portrays the challenges of embracing cultures through Gogol's character, highlighting the struggles faced by those caught between worlds. The book emphasizes our yearning for relationships and a sense of belonging, emphasizing how alienation can deeply affect individuals while showcasing nostalgia as a way to cope with feelings."

Psychological Influence of Alienation and Nostalgia

The feelings of being disconnected and longing for the past can deeply affect people well-being, those who have moved to a new country (Berry et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021). When individuals experience alienation, marked by a sense of isolation, detachment, and exclusion from society, it can trigger emotions like loneliness, sadness, and worry (Liu et al., 2020; Pugliese & Pelucchi, 2021). On the side, nostalgia can bring about a mix of joy and yearning (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2020; Zhou et al., 2021). These emotional journeys shape how people adapt to unfamiliar surroundings and impact their overall mental health.

A. Emotional and Mental Significances of Alienation

The consequences of alienation in the emotional and mental senses are also severe. Immigrants who are socially isolated and feel alienated "show symptoms of heightened psychological distress (Berry et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021). Immigrants may experience an identity crisis and be lost and unable to find their place in society, which provokes depressive disorders, anxiety, helplessness, and sleep disorders (Liu et al. 2020; Pugliese & Pelucchi 2021). Therefore, psychological consequences should not go unnoticed in helping immigrants integrate and provide well-being (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2020; Wei et al., 2021).

B. Longing, Displacement, and Psychological Well-being

The immigrant journey often involves feelings of longing and displacement, which can deeply affect a person's health (Morioka & Yamada, 2020; Rudmin, 2021). Yearning for one's homeland and a desire to belong can trigger emotions like nostalgia and homesickness (Castañeda, 2020; Salgado, 2021), offering solace while also intensifying feelings of isolation that impact one well-being

(Cheung & Sedikides, 2021; Wang et al., 2020). The experience of being displaced from surroundings can bring about grief, confusion and disruptions in connections (Bhugra, 2019; Suárez Orozco, 2020).

C. Coping Strategies and Resilience

Immigrants use ways to deal with the difficulties of feeling disconnected and yearning for their homeland (Rudmin, 2020; Wildschut et al., 2018). These approaches involve relying on their circles for support, participating in customs, and staying connected to their roots (Suárez Orozco et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2021). Building resilience is crucial when adjusting to surroundings as individuals learn to overcome challenges and derive significance from their encounters (Berry et al., 2020; Wang & Wildschut, 2019). Immigrants who demonstrate resilience are more inclined to adopt coping mechanisms and achieve mental well-being despite the struggles of feeling alienated (Chen et al., 2021; Rudmin, 2020).

D. The Role of Literature in Lecturing Psychological Influences

Exploring literature plays a role in addressing the influence of feeling disconnected and longing for the past experienced by immigrants (Guzmán-González et al., 2021; Salgado, 2021). Immigrant writings often delve into themes of self-discovery, yearning and the quest for acceptance, offering individuals a sense of validation and insight (Morioka & Yamada, 2020; Wei et al., 2021). By immersing themselves in stories of characters facing obstacles, immigrants can find comfort in shared experiences. Learn practical coping mechanisms. Literature serves as a form of therapy fostering compassion and enhancing the well-being of immigrants as they navigate their feelings of isolation and nostalgia (Guzmán-González et al., 2021; Salgado, 2021).

Analysis of the Effects of Alienation on Immigrant Characters

The feeling of alienation or isolation influences individuals portrayed in literature. It affects their healthy relationships with others and connection to their roots. Exploring these consequences helps us gain insight into the challenges and emotional depth of the journey.

When immigrants find themselves in environments and undergo a shift in their sense of self, they frequently encounter a profound feeling of isolation (Smith, 2019). An illustration of this is evident in pieces like "*The Namesake*" by Jhumpa Lahiri, depicting the character's challenge to harmonise his Indian background with his American environment. This detachment from one's identity leads to perplexity and detachment from both spheres (García, 2017).

Language obstacles and issues, along with communication, also make individuals feel disconnected (Huang, 2018). Characters who are immigrants frequently face obstacles when trying to convey their thoughts and build relationships with others. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel "*Americanah*", the character's difficulties with English significantly impede her ability to blend into American culture (Adichie, 2013). This feeling of alienation contributes to her sense of being isolated.

Immigrants also face challenges adapting to a new environment, creating a heightened sense of alienation (Li, 2020). The unfamiliar social norms, customs, and landscapes can create a profound disconnection from their surroundings. In "*The Joy Luck Club*" by Amy Tan, characters navigate the complexities of Chinese-American culture, often feeling like outsiders in both societies (Tan, 1989). This cultural alienation affects their sense of belonging and exacerbates their isolation.

The effect of isolation on individuals is extensive. Mentally they might confront emotions of solitude, sadness and worry (Wang, 2016). In terms of interactions, they could discover themselves isolated. They were left out of popular groups (Nakamura, 2019). Tensions between age groups and clashes of cultures within households also emerge due to the isolation felt by family members (Kim, 2017).

It's important to grasp how alienation impacts characters as it helps foster empathy and understanding towards the journey. Delving into these topics through literature allows us to comprehend better the emotional hurdles immigrants encounter and strive to build more welcoming and compassionate communities.

Conclusion

In summary delving into feelings of isolation and longing, in writings uncovers how deeply the immigrant journey shapes one's self-identity and connection to a place. Through their works immigrant writers effectively explore these intricate feelings offering readers a glimpse, into the struggles encountered by individuals who have departed from their native lands.

Feeling disconnected and detached, alienation presents itself in ways like not fitting in, miscommunication and differences in culture and language. This sense of being alienated is made stronger by being from one's home country and losing ties to one's culture, as discussed by thinkers like Durkheim, Marx and Fromm.

Feeling nostalgic, however, is about yearning for the past and one's roots. It showcases the sense of loss felt by those who have moved away and helps them hold onto their traditions. Nostalgia attends as a connection between what was and what's now, shaping identities and offering solace during the struggles of adjusting to a new life.

The connection between feeling disconnected and longing for the past is complex, as being alienated can heighten one's sense of nostalgia. In contrast, nostalgia can attend as a way to cope with feelings of alienation. Immigrants often grapple with straddling two worlds, craving what they left behind while desire to find a place where they belong in their environment. Furthermore exploring the themes of alienation and nostalgia, in literature enhances our insight into the experience by showcasing the challenges, intricacies and resilience of individuals embarking on the life changing journey of migration.

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