

# Social, Racial and Gender Identity Dilemma in The Namesake

Nesma Abdo Mohamed Mohamed

Master Degree

[n.abosaty11@gmail.com](mailto:n.abosaty11@gmail.com)

الملخص (باللغة العربية)

يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على حفاظ المهاجرين على ثقافة وطنهم مثل اللغة والعادات والقيم والأعراف والأدوات والمنتجات والمنظمات في الأرض غير المعتادة. تحمل الاسم نفسه هي أول رواية لجومبا لاهيري. تعيش جومبا لاهيري حاليا في نيويورك ، وقد ولدت لأبوين هنديين بنغاليين في لندن. كل من الثقافات الهندية والأمريكية متجذرة فيها. إنها تصور صوت الهنود في الهند والمهاجرين الهنود في أمريكا عاطفيين للغاية ومهارة. في روايتها الأولى من أجل اسم ، تكتب عن ثقافتها البنغالية بشكل أصيل تماما ، على الرغم من أنها لا تعيش هناك. تتعلق بعض موضوعات الرواية بالأسرة والنمو والتقاليد وتجربة المهاجرين. أظهر لاهيري من خلال الرواية الهوية الثقافية التي تربط بين الأشخاص الذين ولدوا في الغرب ، لكنهم ينتمون في الأصل إلى بلد يعتبره الغربيون العالم الثالث.

كما يسلط الضوء على الثقافة الهندية. الهند بلد عظيم ذو ثقافة عظيمة. يحترم الشعب الهندي هذه الثقافة ويتبع عاداتها وتقاليدها. تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى اكتشاف الثقافة الهندية وتلقي الضوء على معاناة الأطفال الهنود الأمريكيين بجنسياتهم المزدوجة. ويهدف إلى إقامة علاقة بين هوية الأبطال والاستيعاب الثقافي مع الأراضي المضيفة.

## Abstract (English)

This research sheds light on the migrants' preservation of their homeland's culture such as language, customs, values, norms, tool, products, and organizations in the unaccustomed earth. The

Namesake is Lahiri's first novel. It was published in ٢٠٠٣. Jhumpa Lahiri currently lives in New York, she was born to Bengali Indian parents in London. Both Indian and American cultures are rooted in her. She depicts the voice of Indians in India and Indian immigrants in America very passionate and skillfully. In her first novel The Namesake, she writes about her Bengali culture quite authentically, although she does not live there. Some of novel's themes relate to family, growing up, traditions and immigrant's experience. Lahiri has shown through the novel the cultural identity which interfaces people who are born in west, but belong originally to a country which westerns considered as the third world.

It also sheds light on Indian culture. India is a great country with a great culture. Indian people respect this culture and follow its customs and traditions. This thesis aims at discovering Indian culture and it sheds light on the suffering of Indian-American children with their double nationalities. It aims at establishing a relationship between protagonists' identity and cultural assimilation with the host lands.

## **Introduction**

In the last quarter of twentieth century, people have been migrating from place to place and from south Asia to the western world in searching for food, clothing, shelter, security and comfort. This mobility is found through terms of geographical shift and in the cultural transformation and ethnic changes of the migrants. The geographic mobility of modern times has meant the dispersion of

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racess and cultures all over the world. After crossing the borders of a nation, an ethnic group struggles hard to keep together through ethnic and cultural ties. The migrants preserve the culture of their homeland such as language, customs, values, norms, tool, products, and organizations in the unaccustomed earth.

The twentieth century has witness the rise of ethnic consciousness which sang loudly through many struggles, writings, speeches and actions throughout the world. The struggles to uphold ones ethnicity is not done by a particular group but was shared by every quarter of the society even the commoners. Many writers such as Bharati Mukerjee, V. S Naipal and Jhumpa Lahiri are among writers who portray many voices and many cultures in their fiction. There is a one common characteristic among them, is all of them have taken the nationality of a country which is alien to their motherland.

For example, Jhumpa Lahiri currently lives in New York, she was born to Bengali Indian parents in London, and she often went for vacations in Calcutta during her youth days. Both Indian and American cultures are rooted in her. She depicts the voice of Indians in India and Indian immigrants in America very passionate and skillfully. In her first novel *The Namesake*, she writes about her Bengali culture quite authentically, although she does not live there. About the setting of her stories, Jhumpa Lahiri writes, "The terrain is very much the terrain of my own life- New England and New York, with Calcutta always hovering in the background"(Nagpal ٤٨).

Jhumpa Lahiri is a well-known figure in the literary world in around the globe. She is an outstanding writer of Asian diaspora in general and Indian American writer in particular. She is among Indian writers who have been awarded in the western countries. She won awards such as O' Henry award for short stories in ١٩٩٩ and Pulitzer Prize for fiction in ٢٠٠٠. She began writing at the age of seven. Lahiri's parents were born in India, but she was born in London. Her father worked as a librarian and her mother was a traditional Indian wife.

Lahiri is one of the second generations of Indian diaspora literature who grows up as a child of Indian immigrants. She grew up with the tradition of good name and pet name. She was named as Nilanjana Sudehna Lahiri, but her teacher of Kindergarten encouraged her to go by pet name, Jhumpa. This is of course of the protagonist's experience of *The Namesake*. She has made limited trips to India in her childhood; she traveled as a tourist because she has never lived there. Nathalie Friedman writes that "scholars and critics have dubbed her (Lahiri) a documentalist of the immigrant experience" (١١١). Lahiri's writings focus on immigrants' experiences relating to different sociological components\_ culture, race and religion based on alienation, homelessness and sense of lose.

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## Social, Racial and Gender Identity Dilemma in The Namesake

The Namesake is Lahiri's first novel. It was published in ٢٠٠٣. It was originally published in The New Yorker and later expanded to a full-length novel. It had been adapted into the popular film of the same name. Some of novel's themes relate to family, growing up, traditions and immigrant's experience. Lahiri has shown through the novel the cultural identity which interfaces people who are born in west, but belong originally to a country which westerns considered as the third world. Lahiri discussed in an interview about the differences in experience of parents and children of Indian origin, living in the United States:

The question of identity is always difficult one, but especially so for those who are culturally displaced, as immigrants are, or those who grow up in two worlds simultaneously, as is the case for their children. The older I get, the more I am aware that I have somehow inherited a sense of exile from my parents, even though in many ways I am so much more American than they

are. In fact, it is still very hard to think of myself as an American. This is of course complicated by the fact that I was born in London. (٩)

The novel deals with two generations of Indian immigrants. The first generation includes Ashoke and Ashima who were born in India and migrated to America. The second includes their children Gogol and Sonia who were born in America, but they are Indian by origin. The span of two generations is about thirty years. Immigrants' families suffer from sense of loss, nostalgia and identity crisis. Lahiri says "They all come home to Calcutta and for this reason alone they are all friends. Most of them live within walking distance of one another in Cambridge." (٣٨)

Ashoke and Ashima live in America, but they are not away from their culture. They always performed all the Bengali festivals and religious ceremonies and even their dressing was mostly Indian. On another hand, their children Gogol and Sonia are confused in accepting their root which is alien to them and they want to live like Americans. Lahiri writes "For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrated with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event children look forward to more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati." (٦٤)

The novel begins in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in ١٩٦٨. Ashima Ganguli, expecting a child, makes a snack for herself in the kitchen of her apartment, which she shares with her husband, Ashoke. The two met in Calcutta, where their marriage was

arranged by their parents. The Namesake takes place in two very different parts of the world: India and America. In the novel, the main character, Gogol, is forced to adjust to many different environments. Gogol's parents, Ashima and Ashoke, were born in India; however Gogol and Sonia were born in America. Gogol and his parents shared very different definitions of home, because of difference in upbringing. There is a culture clash for Gogol, between his Bengali heritage and new American ideals.

The Namesake falls under the category of realistic fiction because its characters, setting and all of the events are realistic. Realistic fiction is stories that feature events that could actually happen in real life. The Namesake is also one of diasporic fiction, which describes books with characters that move away from their homeland and describes the books that were written by an author who lives outside his or her home country. First, it describes books with characters such as Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli who left India to live in the United States. Second, Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London, lived in America, and wrote The Namesake.

India is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world as it is home to innumerable castes and tribes. Its government is a constitutional republic that represents a highly diverse population consisting of thousands of ethnic groups and likely hundreds of languages. India occupies the greater part of South Asia. Its capital is New Delhi. Swami Ranganathananda said:

India has been known to other nations as a land of wealth and philosophic wisdom, both trade with India and communion with her mind and thought were much sought after. These facts go to show that the people of ancient India took keen interest in man as a member of society, man struggling to overcome external obstacles, man seeking delight in social and personal existence. (٥)

Indian culture originated in the ethno-linguistically diverse Indian subcontinent. It is the heritage of social norms, ethical values, traditional customs, belief systems, political systems and artifacts. It does not include India only, but also countries and cultures whose histories are strongly connected to India by immigration particularly in South Asia and Southeast Asia. It includes India's languages, religions, dance, music, architecture, food and customs differ from place to place within the country.

Immigration and Nationality Act, or the Hart-Celler Act has applied a system based on an immigrant's connection to relatives or a job waiting in the United States. Once in the country, an immigrant could sponsor immediate family to come to the United States to live such as Ashoke Ganguli in *The Namesake* who came to the United States as a graduate student and then send for his wife



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to live with him. He was one of the first waves of immigrants from India. He studied engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and later becomes a university professor. He only returns to India to visit family.

In the 1980s, the second wave of Indian immigrants has begun; it was represented in family members of those who were already in the United States. Through the following decades, immigration to the United States from India increased exponentially, so there was a third wave of Indian immigrants including educated professionals and college students.

In 1930 the Government of India tried to create a constitution and its acts were rewritten. The Congress Party included Hindu and the Muslim League, but it was mostly Hindu. And the Muslim League was not given an adequate voice in planning the government, so it realized that to be fully independent, they would have to have their own country: Pakistan. Civil war broke out between Hindus and Muslims, starting in Calcutta and spreading out across India. In 1947, Britain prepared to give India its independence, so it sent Lord Mountbatten who realized that the religious factions were not going to declare peace any time soon, so he planned for partitioning India, separating regions by their religious majorities.

As a result of partitioning, West Bengal became a state in India. People from West Bengal were immigrating to the United

States to escape from ongoing conflict between Muslims and Hindus and to find jobs. The capital of West Bengal is Calcutta. In the ۲۰th century, Economic opportunities for villagers were slim; so many Bengalis immigrated to the United States. In *The Namesake*, the Ganguli family's social life revolves around a large group of Bengali families who emigrated to study and to provide for their families.

Most of Bengali immigrants to the United States confronted culture shock such as Ashoke and Ashima in *The Namesake*. They tried to adjusted changing in food and clothing. They had to learn American English, which was different from the British English they had learned in India. They were only speaking their native language at home. The need for familiar Bengali customs, led Bengalis to find one another and create communities. Indian immigrants only focused on education and work, so their culture mostly stayed insular to their communities.

Indian immigrants tried to maintain their traditions through eaten food at home which remained Indian rather than American and Clothing which stayed close to traditional Indian styles. The strong ties with family back in India also helped to maintain connections with cultural traditions. For example, Ashima looks forward to letters from her family, the letter which arrives from Ashima's grandmother with two name options: one for a boy and one for a girl. It is the Bengal traditions to have a respected elder choose the name of a child.

In August ١٩٦٨, Ashima Ganguli, a Bengali woman who has recently moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts with her new husband, is about to give birth. Her husband, Ashoke accompanies her to the hospital in a taxi. Their baby boy was born in the morning. Ashima and Ashoke want to wait name him until a letter arrives from Ashima's grandmother with two name options: one for a boy and one for a girl.

It is the Bengal traditions to have a respected elder choose the name of a child. However, it is time to leave the hospital and the letter has not arrived. So, they must break with Bengali custom and give their son an official name on that birth certificate. So, they decide to give the boy a pet name that will be used until they can officially name their baby based on his grandmother's wishes.

Ashima and Ashoke give the boy a pet name, Gogol, after Ashoke's favorite author, Nikolai Gogol, whose story "The Overcoat" saved Ashoke from dying in a train wreck earlier in India. Ashoke had a page of the story, which he had been reading, in his hand, and the dropped page alerted rescuers he was still alive. Ashoke's miraculous survival is what prompts him to travel abroad after his recovery. Gogol's nickname is supposed to be replaced, as is Bengali tradition, with a "good name," his official name, when Ashima's grandmother mails them her name selection. However, her grandmother has a stroke and is unable to communicate, and the letter is lost in the mail. The hospital needs an official name, so Ashima and Ashoke put "Gogol" on the birth certificate.

Gogol's birth gives Ashima a purpose and a way to become comfortable in her surroundings. She takes him everywhere with her, finally venturing into the world to shop for food, take walks, and interact with people in the neighborhood. By ١٩٧١, the Gangulis have moved from Harvard Square to a university town outside Boston. After two years in university-subsidized housing, Ashima and Ashoke decide to buy a home.

The new house is on Pemberton Road, and there are no Bengali neighbors. Ashoke becomes a professor of electrical engineering at a local university in a suburb of Boston and moves his family there, to a house on Pemberton Road. The move is difficult for Ashima, partly because she leaves her friends in Cambridge for a neighborhood where people don't really speak with one another often. It is also difficult because now much of her time during the day is her own, as Gogol has begun kindergarten.

On the first day of Gogol's kindergarten, Ashima and Ashoke tell the principal, Mrs. Lapidus, that she should call Gogol by his formal name, "Nikhil." But she overhears them referring to him as "Gogol" and asks him what he would like to be called. When he answers "Gogol," it sticks. Ashima gives birth to Gogol's little sister, Sonia, in May. The children begin to connect with others at school, and Sonia, in particular, becomes very American in her tastes. The family starts to adopt American traditions and activities, including clothing, holidays, and some American foods. However, Ashima continues to wear her saris and cook mostly Indian food at

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home, though she makes compromises for her husband and children.

Gogol's name embarrasses him as he gets older because it is Russian, not Indian. His English teacher in high school talks about his namesake, Nikolai Gogol, and Gogol is mortified because the author Gogol had such a depressing life. On Gogol's fourteenth birthday, his father comes into his room and gives him his birthday present: *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol*. Gogol is more interested in listening to the Beatles than looking at the book, and he is unable to appreciate it.

Ashoke begins to tell Gogol about the train accident that made him appreciate the author Gogol so much, but stops because he realizes Gogol cannot yet understand. When Gogol graduates from high school and goes to Yale, he decides to go to court to change his name officially to Nikhil, freeing himself from the legacy of the name in public. His family still calls him Gogol, though, and his father finally tells him about his namesake and the train accident.

Gogol meets a girl named Ruth at college and dates her for a year. However, their intense physical relationship can't overcome their differences, and her study abroad at Oxford causes them to grow apart. By ١٩٩٤, Gogol is living in a tiny apartment in New York working as an architect. He begins to date a woman named Maxine Ratliff. Her parents, Lydia and Gerald, are incredibly wealthy, and they interact in a casual but intelligent way that is totally opposite the behavior of Gogol's own parents. He begins

spending most of his time at their home rather than at his own apartment, and he feels effortlessly incorporated into their lives. Eventually, he basically moves into their home with them.

Ashoke decides to take a temporary position in Ohio at another university, but he doesn't want to move his family there, so he comes home every few weeks to help Ashima with the house. While he is away, he develops stomach problems, which he ignores. He ends up going to the hospital. When Ashima calls the hospital to check on him, an intern tells her that Ashoke has "expired." He has died from a massive heart attack. Gogol and Sonia drop everything to help their mother. Sonia stays with Ashima while Gogol cleans out his father's Ohio apartment. The next morning, he flies home to Boston to be with his mother and Sonia. At the house on Pemberton Road, many people come by to sit with them in mourning. Sonia decides to live there with her mother for a while.

A year after Ashoke's death, Gogol has broken up with Maxine. Gogol begins to spend more time with Ashima and Sonia, and his mother convinces him to go on a blind date with Moushumi, a girl he had met at his ١٤<sup>th</sup> birthday party. Moushumi lives in New York, as well, and studies French literature as a PhD student. Gogol and Moushumi discover they feel comfortable with the familiarity of being with another Bengali, and they fall in love and get married.

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The wedding is a huge Bengali affair run entirely by Moushumi's parents. However, the marriage begins to sour when Moushumi makes Gogol spend time with her intellectual friends, who make him uncomfortable. She begins to feel restless, wanting to study in France, where Gogol doesn't fit in with her colleagues. Bored with her life with Gogol, she starts having an affair with Dimitri, an old crush of hers. Gogol finds out about the affair, and they divorce.

A year later, before Christmas of the year ٢٠٠٠, Ashima is preparing food for the party she will throw that evening. She has decided to move out of the house on Pemberton Road to spend six months at a time in Calcutta with her family and six months in the United States with her children and friends. The reader learns from Ashima's point of view that Sonia and Ben are going to be married in Calcutta in a little over a year. While Gogol is at the party, he enters his old bedroom and finds the book of Nikolai Gogol's stories, the gift from his father.

He sees his father's inscription in the book and realizes not only how much his father loved the author's stories, but also how much his father loved him. Now, he sees the inscription his father has written inside: "The man who gave you his name, from the man who gave you your name." At the end of the novel, Gogol starts to read "The Overcoat" to connect with his father's memory.

In the *Namesake*, Lahiri tries to indicate two sides of immigration. First, she tries to outline the brighter side of

immigrants' life in the host home through their adapting to sophisticated life that makes their stay in the alien land more comfortable. For example, in the beginning of the novel Ashima prepares her favorite Indian food and at the end of the novel she has learnt to prepare Christmas cake.

Secondly, she outlines the dark side of the immigrants' experiences. In the novel, important characters such as Ashima, Ashoke, Gogol, and Moushumi suffer from loneliness and alienation. For example, Ashima is afraid to raise a child in a country where he is not related to anyone, Ashima says: "I say I don't want to raise Gogol alone in this country. That's not true." (٣٣)

In the twentieth century, there was a great movement of Indian immigration across the geographical boundaries. Among these immigrants, there were some distinguished diasporic writers such as Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, V.S. Naipaul and Jhumpa Lahiri. They have thrown light on issues like displacement, hybridity, identity and cultural conflicts. The author of the Namesake is Jhumpa Lahiri who was born in London to Indian parents.

In her writings, she basically throws light on immigrant experience relating to different sociological components- religion, culture and race. In the Namesake, Lahiri explores a variety of issues relating to American immigrants such as displacement, cultural conflicts, loneliness, language barrier, loss of identity, sense of



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belonging, gender issues, marital conflicts, and the generation gap between the first and the second-generation immigrants.

Diaspora is the process of shifting from one place, leaving the roots behind and living in a new place, dealing with different culture. The moved people feel the constant loss of their native land, culture, history and ethnicity while living in another country. The Indian Diaspora is second in number after Chinese. It consists of more than ١٥ million individuals through the world, especially in Great Britain and in the US. Indian literature arrests global attention today. It is usually by and about educated migrants or their descendants. Indian literature and all diasporic fiction replete with issues related to location, movement, crossing border, original home and adopted home and identity crisis.

Jhumpa Lari's stories are about people living far from their home and moving to a new home and a new world. Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* explores the idea of isolation and identity, not only personal, but also culture. The characters of the novel encounter identity crisis, which is tied to in abilities to reconcile the American identity with their Indian identity. Stuart Hall has noted in his essay "Ethnicity: Identity and Differences" that identity is neither simple nor stable, but it is a structure that is split and it always has ambivalence within it. Hall reconceptulises identity as "something that happens over time that is never absolutely stable, that is subject to the play of history and the play of difference" (١٥), so identity is not fixed, but it is dynamic construction that adjusts to the changes experienced within and surrounding the self.

The question of identity in *The Namesake* is the most tangible theme; it is no doubt a question of the self. Cultural factors are very important in the quest for the identity and self, especially for immigrants. As Jola Skuis notes in her "comparative Literature and Cultural Identity" "The problem of cultural identity involves the question of the self and of culture. In other words, this means reflecting on the essence of culture itself and the implication that there is a reasonable motive of self-questioning." (٢)

*The Namesake* explores the one's own identity and the power of his name. It deals with the theme of identity crisis and adaptation in another country. The novel has had a story of two generations – Ashoke and Ashima on the one hand and their children Gogol and Sonia – on the other. It depicts the different attitudes, outlooks and directionality of two generations in dealing with the problems in a foreign country.

They face different problems such as the meaning of culture differs for both the generation. The first generation is directly related to his/her homeland and the second generation formats an image of culture based on the information transmitted by the first generation. The novel starts with Ashima, the wife of Ashoke, the protagonist, in her advance stage of pregnancy. She is eating puffed rice with lots of spices and lemon, an Indian concoction sold in Calcutta's sidewalk for pennies, but the taste being not the same brings her memories of her homeland. Ashima tries to settle in a new way of life. She felt uprooted and lived in a world of nostalgia.

Ashima gave birth to a child in a foreign country. The boy was named Gogol, after the name of the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol who is associated with the memories of the train accident. Throughout the novel Gogol failed to establish his identity either as American or Indian. As Gogol grew, Ashoke and Ashima's circle of Bengali acquaintances also increased. The fact that all belong to one country is reason enough for them to relate and from their own ethnic group and community. The immigrants construct a sense of community, culture and nation in a country where they see themselves as different. Lairi says: "They all come from Calcutta and for this reason alone they are all friends. Most of them live within walking distance of one another in Cambridge." (٣٨)

On another hand, for the second generation Diaspora such as Gogol and Sonia, identity is rather different, they have a sense of pride and affinity to India, but they consider America as a home. The first generation Diaspora wants to retain their homeland culture and transfer it to the second generation. Ashoke and Ashima learnt to celebrate some of the main festivities of the dominant culture. "for the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrated with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati." (Lahiri ٦٤)

The Ganguli family is an Indian immigrant family to America and their experiences in America offer a glimpse into life as an Indian immigrant to the United States. Ashoke and Ashima provide

a unique perspective within American society, and together they embody two sides of the immigrant experience. Ashima misses her life in India intensely, and often finds life in Massachusetts to be cold and lonely.

At the beginning of the novel, Ashima stands in the kitchen combining rice krispies and planters' peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl. This snack is sold on Calcutta sidewalks and on railway platforms in India. Lahiri writes:

Ashima has been consuming this concoction throughout her pregnancy, a humble approximation of the snack sold for pennies on Calcutta sidewalks and on railway platforms throughout India, spilling from newspaper cones. Even now that there is barely space inside her, it is the one thing she craves. Tasting from a cupped palm, she frowns; as usual there's something missing."<sup>(١)</sup>

Ashima provides an emotional center and working most actively to hold her family together and maintain their Bengali traditions. The intense isolation she often feels demonstrates the difficulty that can be involved in fitting into an entirely new culture while struggling to retain one's own cultural heritage. As for being a foreigner, Ashima began to realize, it is a kind of lifelong pregnancy, a constant burden, a sense of constant responsibility, to

discover that previous life has disappeared, and has been replaced by something more complex and demanding. Being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that arouses the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect. As Lahiri indicates below:

For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a 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. (٥٠)

Gogol and Sonia represent the second generation of immigrants and the first American-born generation. They grow up speaking English natively, unlike their parents, and are much more interested in American food and pop culture, since they have attended American schools their whole lives. For them, it is India that seems foreign. On their visits to family, they are homesick for American food and confused by common Indian rituals. Gogol and

Sonia's parents told them that they will all be going to Calcutta for eight months.

When they arrive in Calcutta, Gogol and Sonia know these people, but they don't feel as close to them as their parents do. Their parents in a matter of minutes became bolder and less complex versions of themselves, their voices louder, and their smiles wider, revealing a confidence that Gogol and Sonia never sees on Pemberton Road. Sonia whispers to her brother in English that she is afraid of him, asks for his hand and refuses to leave her. Lahiri writes:

Ashima, now Monu, weeps with relief, and Ashoke, now Mithu, kisses his brothers on both cheeks, holds their heads in his hands. Gogol and Sonia know these people, but they do not feel close to them as their parents do. Within minutes, before their eyes Ashoke and Ashima slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles wider, revealing a confidence that Gogol and Sonia never see on Pemberton Road. "I'm scared," Goggles (٧١)

The theme of name and identity is introduced at the very beginning of the novel, when Ashima calls out for her husband. She

doesn't use his name when she calls for him because it's not the type of thing Bengali wives do. Their husbands' names are considered too intimate to be used. Lahiri said: "When she calls out to Ashoke, she doesn't say his name. Ashima never thinks of her husband's name when she thinks of her husband, even though she knows perfectly well what it is." (٢)

The Bengali tradition of pet names and good names are explained. Only close family uses the pet name in the privacy of the home, while the good name is used in formal situations like work. Ashima and Ashoke have to wait for the good name suggestions to arrive from Ashima's grandmother, but the letter from Calcutta never comes. So, they gave their child a pet name.

In Bengali, the word for pet is Daknam, which literally means the name given to one, by friends, family other relatives, and at home. In Bengali, They all have pet names. For example, Ashima's pet name is Monu, and Ashoke's is Mithu. Lahiri wrote: "In Bengali the word of pet name is daknam, meaning, literally, the name by which one is called, by friends, family, and other intimates, at home and in other private, unguarded moments..... They all have pet names. Ashima's pet name is Monu. Ashoke's is Mithu." (٢٥-٢٦)

Ashima and Ashok believe that their son cannot be named themselves. This tradition does not exist for Bengalis, naming the son after the father or grandfather, and the daughter after the mother or grandmother. This would make fun of India. Within Bengali families, individual names are sacred and untouchable, and

are not meant to be passed down or shared. So, they decided to give him temporarily a pet name until Ashima's grandmother answer arrives with the name. Lahiri wrote:

This tradition doesn't exist for Bengalis, naming a son after father or

or grandfather, a daughter after mother or grandmother. This sign of respect in

America and Europe, this symbol of heritage and lineage, would be ridiculed

in India. Within Bengali families, individual names are sacred, inviolable.

They are not meant to be inherited or shared." (٢٨)

Ashoke decided to name his son Gogol after the Russian writer Nikhil, and Ashima accepted this because it stands for the life of her son and husband. She knows the story of Ashoke's accident. It is only a pet name, not to be taken seriously, to put on the certificate to release them from the hospital. Ashoke said: "Hello, Gogol." (٢٨)

The theme of name and identity is important in Chapter ٣, when Gogol begins Kindergarten. His parents intend to change his name to 'Nikhil' at school and 'Gogol' at home, but Gogol is confused and does not want a new name. He fears it might be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know. As a child, he would associate a new name with a new identity. Lahiri wrote:



"But Gogol doesn't want a new name. He can't understand why he has to answer to anything else. "Why do I have to a new name?" he asks his parents, tears springing to his eyes. It would be one thing if his parents were to call him Nikhil, too. But they tell him that the new name will be used only by the teachers and children at school. He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know.... His parents tell him that they each have two names, too, as do all their Bengali friends in America, and all their relatives in Calcutta." (٥٢).

The naming and surnames are also symbolic of the bonds shared by the various characters throughout the novel. When Ashoke and Ashima return to Calcutta for family vacations, they become "Mithu" and "Monu", transforming into more confident versions of themselves. This abundance of names is also a sign of the different worlds in which the main characters of Lahiri's novel live simultaneously. Lahiri said: "Ashima, now Monu, weeps with relief, and Ashoke, now Mithu, kisses his brothers on both cheeks, holds their heads in his hands. Gogol and Sonia know these people, but they do not feel close to them as their parents do." (٧١).

In the novel , Gogol continues to search for identity because of growing up into divided worlds, by origin he is Indian and so living as an immigrant in England. The culture of India is alien for him. Many of the choices that he makes seem motivated by a desire to live as a normal American and to escape from his family's influence. In an interview, Lahiri states: "The question of identities is always a difficult one, but especially for those who are culturally, displaced as immigrants and who grow up in two worlds simultaneously." (٩)

The family plays a very important role in Gogol's life since his birth. There are many different types of families in the novel such as Bengali families, American families, rich families, and small families. There are different types of families to which Gogol belongs, such as his traditional Bengali family and the sophisticated American Maxine family. Gogol decided to stay with the Maxine family, follow their customs and completely abandon the habits of his parents.

When he started dating Maxine, the Maxine family introduced different values that allowed Gogol to be happier than when he was with his parents. However, at the end, the death of Ashoke brings everyone together once again and made Gogol realize how important his own family is to him. He realized that it was important to make them happy, staying with them and following their customs.

One of major themes in *The Namesake* is the theme of family. The theme of family is shown throughout the novel by showing the

different relationships that Ashima and Ashoke have with their family compared to the relationship that Gogol and Sonia have with their family. The most important part of Bengali culture that *The Namesake* focuses on is the idea of family unity and support. For Ashima and Ashoke, family had always been the most important thing. This is different for Gogol and Sonia as they did not grow up in India. Unlike their parents, the Gogol and Sonia aren't as close to their family therefore they do not understand the importance of family.

In *The Namesake*, the Indian food is one of the strongest ties back to India, and connects the family back to their original culture. Lahiri uses it to show either a connection or disconnection from culture. For example, Gogol talked about American food, explaining how he began to prefer American culture to his native Indian culture, especially when he resides in the house of Maxine. He mentions that he got more used to food and began to prefer it to traditional Indian food. On the other hand, Ashima is trying to make a traditional Indian food but is unable to showing just how far she is from India within America.

Ashima feels alienated in raising a son in a foreign land. Her relationship with her family in Calcutta remains of paramount importance to her. She and Ashoke miss their families in Calcutta. Soon they make Bengali friends to make Ashima feels less alone. Ashima said: "I'm saying I don't want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It's not right. I want to go back." (٣٣) There were main differences between Ashoke's childhood in Calcutta and Gogol's

childhood in the Boston area. Ashoke says this to Gogol when they are eating dinner together during Ashima's difficult pregnancy with Sonia. Later, after Ashoke's death, Gogol will regret having to throw away the food in the refrigerator since his father would never have done so. Ashoke said: "Finish it, Gogol. At your age I ate tin." (٥٥)

Gogol said: "I don't want to get away." (١٨٢) In this is quotation, Gogol response to Maxine's question, regarding whether or not he still wants to go to New Hampshire with her family to celebrate New Year's Eve. After his father's death, she feels out of place at his father's funeral celebration; for once, she is alienated, not Gogol. She asks him to "get away from all this," and he responds that he doesn't want to do so; now, he feels connected to his family in a way that he hadn't before.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* is a story of culture, ethnicity and race and how these factors mold our attitudes and direct our lives in an ever-changing society. The novel tells the story of Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli who left behind a life in India that they had grown and want to live the American dream and provide the best life for themselves and their children. Gogol struggles to remain loyal to both worlds. So, the theme of identity and family are portrayed as one of the major themes in the novel. These themes are illustrated vividly by examining the importance of one's culture, background and gender.

The novel's characters such as Ashima, Ashoke, Gogol and Sonia contact with many other characters and incidents, so they explore new knowledge and have a global outlook. Characters' interfaces and encounters enable them distinguish between good and evil, and provides individuals with the old notion that east is east and west is west. The meeting of the east and the west is a global need, it can't be forbidden but respected.

Lahiri's works offer an image of the complicated cultural relationships between India and the west. Most of characters search for their real self. In this respect, Michiko Kakutani observed: " Many of Ms. Lahiri's people are Indian immigrants trying to adjust to a new life in the United States, and their cultural displacement is a kind of index of a more existential sense of dislocation." (٤٨)

Individuals' immigration and the encounter between the East and the West help Lahiri to probe deep into the difficulties generated by the encounter between the self and the other. Lahiri's writing are interested in the essence of the individual consciousness and in the self as the converging point of various cultural forces, considering the way in which they interact and influence each other. The clash between national cultures represents her main interest, although some of Lahiri's protagonist conforms to the typical image of migrant. In this respect, according to Salman Rushdie, the individual: " served from his roots, often transplanted into a new language, always obliged to learn the ways of a new community .... forced to face the great question of change and adaptation." (٤١٥)

The Namesake illustrates the theme of the East-West. The main protagonist Gogol shows a blend of two cultures that creates fissures in his identity. Gogol often cursed the moment he was born and hated his namesake, Nikolai Gogol. His name becomes a mystery for everyone. He grows up and hates his own name. When his father presented him a book on his fourteenth birthday, he feels himself devoid of his identity. Finally, he realizes that he has been named after the last name of an author. Lahiri says: "Not only Gogol Ganguli has a pet name turned good name, but a last name turned first name. And so it occurs to him that no one he knows in the world, in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake." (٧٨)

The first generation of Indian immigrants preserve homely Indian atmosphere through and social customs such as food, clothing, etc on the American soil as to bridge the gaps what they have left behind , but the second rarely appreciated. For example, Maxine argues with Gogol: "She is surprised to her certain things about his life: that all his parents' friends are Bengali, that they had had an arranged marriage, that his mother cooks Indian food every day, that she wears saris and a bindi. 'Really ?' she says, not fully believing him. ' But you're so different. I would never has thought that." (١٣٨)

The language barrier is important in the case of immigrant experience. In Lahiri's writing, it plays an important role because it can either help or prevent integration. Adaptation is seen as both a way of giving in to the new culture, and as one of giving up various remnants of the old one. For example in the *Namesake*, Lahiri wrote: " Though Ashima continues to wear nothing but saris and sandals from Bata, Ashoke accustomed to wearing tailor-made pants and shirts all his life, learns to buy ready-made." (٦٥)

In the *Namesake*, Lahiri has been able to establish the fact that east-west encounter is a reality. One has to look forward to accepting the differences. The east-west interface solidifies Lahiri's characters, who transcend space and time. Humans are migrant by nature as a new knowledge cannot emanate without migration. Navarzo Tejero observes that:

Lahiri writes with sensibility about her family's ethnic heritage and the lives of South American immigrants in the United States. She is an interpreter of conflict between humans, sometimes between immigrants and natives, some other times among natives, or immigrants only. So from my point of view, Lahiri transcends narrow nationalism and evokes universality." (٧٨)

Alienation is another theme of the main themes in the *Namesake*. In the *Namesake*, some characters suffer from alienation

such as Ashima, Ashoke and Gogol. Ashima is an Indian woman stuck in her native culture and traditions. She faces the cultural clash because of her resistance to change. She feels alienated because she is unable to adjust into the changed environment and she clings to the traditional customs. Lahiri states: " It is the first time in her life she has slept alone, surrounded by strangers, all her life she has slept either in a room with her parents, or with Ashoke at his side. She wishes the curtains were open so that she could talk to American women." (٣)

Ashima's alienation thins as Gogol grows in months and years. On Gogol's annaprasan ceremony in the ambience of Bengali couples, she finds little relieved as they were discussing issues having a native flavor. But all these still are less compared to her family member's reminiscences. Lahiri wrote:" She cannot help wishing her own brother were here to feed him, her own parents to bless him with their hands on his head. And then the grand finale, the moment they have all been waiting for." (٤٠)

Ashima feels empty most of the time. Ashima seems to lack the fighting spirit which Ashoke has, but she had to move out for rice. she discovered a routine for herself. She is flanked by American's smile on showing their appreciation for the child in the pram. She realized for the first time that her isolation and closed nature troubles her not the foreign country.

Lahiri mentions Ashima's alienation in the following lines: " Without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at her side,



the baby's birth like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true. As she strokes and suckles and studies her son, she can't help but pity him. She has never known of a person entering the world so alone so deprived." (٢٤-٢٥)

On the contrary, is Ashoke as he has the qualities of adjustment. He is looking forward to having a character attracted towards foreignness. He loves making adventures and he is not the typical stuck to traditional beliefs. He put Ghosh's advice in consideration to see and experience the outside world.

Ghosh advises Ashoke: "Do yourself a favor. Before it's too late, without thinking too much about it first, pack a pillow and a blanket and see much of the world as you can. You will not regret it. One day it will be too late." (١٦) Ashoke is a post- modern person who thinks that the boundaries that exist in our thoughts hamper our growth. Lahiri wrote: " His siblings had pleaded and wept. His mother, speechless, had refused food for three days. In spite of all that, he had gone." (٢٠)

He is not verse to his Indian roots, but he tries to adjust himself with changing times and places. For example, Lahiri shows the couple's admiration for celebrating the birth of Christ as their children love to do so. Ashoke makes sure that their children might be victims of oscillation between two cultures. He tries a lot to balance these conflicts of his children. Lahiri states: "Though he is now a tenured full professor, he stops wearing jackets and ties to the university. Given that there is a clock everywhere he turns, at the

side of his bed, over the stove where he prepares tea, in the car he drives to work, on the wall opposite his desk, he stops wearing a wrist watch." (٦٥)

Gogol is another character who feels alienated. He feels himself insignificant because he does not have date with any girl like his American friends and his Indian atmosphere at home does not encourage such moves. He feels his identity at stuck. He changes his name from Gogol to Nikhil, but this change also puts him at a sea of troubles. Lahiri describes his division:

Part of the problem is that the people who now know him as Nikhil have no idea that he used to be Gogol. They know him only in the present, not at all in the past. But after eighteen years of Gogol, two months of Nikhil feel scant, inconsequential. At times he feels as if he's cast himself in a play, acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different. (١٠٥)

Gogol starts realizing the cultural differences once he befriends Ruth. Ruth is an American girl who he loves her. He marks cultural gaps in his parents and Ruth's thought process. Lahiri writes: "Ruth tells him she doesn't mind his parents' disapproval that she finds it romantic. But Gogol Knows it is not right. He wishes

his parents could simply accept her, as her family accepts him, without pressure of any kind." (١١٧)

Cultural displacement is also an issue which Lahiri has experienced in *The Namesake*. Because of a large scale of immigration around the world, many people have experienced cultural displacement. Lahiri is herself a victim of cultural displacement as she is Indian by origin and she lives in West. She says:

I never answer the question " where are you from" If I say I'm from Rhode Island, people are seldom satisfied. They want to know more, based on things such as my name, my appearance, etc. Alternatively, if I say I'm from India, a place where I was born and have never lived, this is also inaccurate."

Most of parents of immigrant children fear that their children could influence by American liberal and modern culture, so they follow their own customs and traditions. For example, Ashoke and Ashima find that their children more inclined towards western traditions than towards Indian. Gogol and Sonia are emotionally attached to India, which is the country of their origin or the country of their father and forefathers. Lahiri has experienced all these feelings and reflected them in her writings, *The Namesake* is a good example for it.

The Namesake explores the theme of immigrant's experience and the clash of cultures in the USA. Lahiri depicts the cultural dilemmas experienced by the Gangulis' family and their American born children and the cultural dislocation which they suffer. Lahiri states: " Like many professional Indians, who as a part of brain drain went to United States, the protagonist of the novel is a young man named Ashoke Ganguli who comes to the USA for higher studies and research in fibreoptics with a prospect and setting down with security and respect." (١٠٥) After he stays at the USA for two years, he comes back to India to marry a Bengali girl named Ashima. She flies alone to stay with her husband.

Lahiri confirms that immigrants have enthusiasm to their own customs and cultural beliefs, they also gradually integrate into the culture of host land, too. First, Ashoke didn't like the celebration of Christmas, but he tries to accept for sake of his children Gogol and Sonia. Ashoke and Ashima also invited American children on the birthdays and a few other Bengali celebrations. Lahiri said: "it was for him, for Sonia ( the younger sister), that his parents had gone to the trouble of learning these customs." (٢٨٦)

Gogol tries all the time to be different from his parents and he wants to live in a free world from the Bengali culture and history, but as a sensitive child he experiences the culture dilemma and identity crisis. For example, while living with Maxine in her parents' home, he feels effortlessly incorporated into their lives, and makes comparison in their way of life and of his parents. He experiences the sense of belonging nowhere. For example, during his school

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trip to Cemetery where finding no grave of his ancestors, he felt that being Bengali, Lahiri wrote: " He himself will be burned not buried, that his body will occupy not plot of earth, that no stone in this country will bear his name beyond life." (٦٩)

First and second generations suffer all these problems in different ways. First generation includes Ashoke and Ashima who try to keep their customs. But all the second generation such as Gogol, Sonia and Moushumi do not react in the same way. For example, Moushumi had a lot of relations with men in Paris and America, break ties with Gogol, goes to live with Dimitri who is German and she plans to leave for Paris as she do not want to remain with any cultural roots.

## Conclusion

In *The Namesake*, Lahiri tries to put her characters into a large canvas of co-ethnicities where characters try to strike balance between Indian ethnicity and the host land's culture. So, her novel *The Namesake* can be considered as a document for migration studies and cultural studies. Lahiri is one of ethnic writers who has been gaining momentum in recent years. In her works, the issue of redefining homeland becomes a matter of redefining identity.

In the *Namesake*, Google's search for identity is a controversial process because he cannot reject Indian culture, and at the same time he cannot cope with Western culture. It is also because being Indian by origin and so living as an immigrant in England, so India is alien for him. Shakespeare states that the importance of existence of human being is over everything else, even his name. On the other hand, Lahiri has opposite to claim in *The Namesake*. According to her, names defines people and gives them a specific identity, as identity of people lies in their names first. In the novel, Lahiri says: " Not only is it perfectly respectable Bengali good name, meaning he who is entire, encompassing all, but it also bears a satisfying resemblance to Nikolai, the first name of the Russian Gogol. " (٥٦)

Gogol continuous to be called Gogol, the name is not Indian or American but Russian. Lahiri states: " He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second." (٧٥) Thus, Gogol can't construct his identity through his name which is more ambiguous than his identity. Through this

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identity crisis, Lahiri sheds light on the cultural plight of the non-Americans in the USA as they want to be passed off as Americans born and brought up in America.

Lahiri point out the second generation of immigrants who face another cultural crisis, it is the notion of India and its culture. The second generation prefer to use American culture because they were born in America and they also grew up as American citizens whereas physically they are Indian. Finally, in the novel the readers come across the fact that the first generation diasporians attached to their homeland through their memories. On the other hand, the second generation build a connect to their birth land. Home is where the heart is, which for both generations are two different lands. They live in an atmosphere of multi- culturaism which leads to alienation. So, *The Namesake* is a perfect example to describe the immigrant experience of the Indians and highlight their diasporiac consciousness.

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