Chapter IV

_The Namesake_

Jhumpha Lahiri’s _Namesake_ is a novel published in 2003. It is a narrative about the assimilation of an Indian Bengali family from Calcutta, the Gangulis, into America, over thirty years. It recounts the cultural dilemmas experienced by them and their American born children in different ways, and the spatial, cultural and emotional dislocations suffered by them in their efforts to settle home in the new land. The story begins as Ashoke and Ashima leave Calcutta, India and settle in Central Square, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Through a series of errors, their son’s nickname, Gogol, becomes his official birth name, an event that will shape many aspects of his life in years to come.

The novel deals with the second-generation immigrants and their lack of belonging. The experiences of the second-generation immigrants are in contrast to the sanctified familial traditions of the first generation. The first generation strongly disapproves of the American life style, but the second-generation immigrants discard the cultural values that they inherited, and view them as hindrances in their course of assimilation into the host culture. Thus, the family
space is contaminated through cultural hybridization. The homogeneity of Bengali culture, that the first generation is trying to preserve in the family space, concedes to a heterogeneous one. The inevitability of assimilation in the host culture in the second generation gives rise to the divergences and complexities of relationship and opinions.

Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli represent the first generation immigrants. They manage to preserve the cultural traditions of Bengal. The first blow to the cultural traditions occurs at Gogol’s birth. At the time of discharging the baby from the hospital, Ashoke is told to name the child to get the birth certificate. This puts the couple into a dilemma, as they have to wait for the letter from Ashima’s grandmother. The letter contains a bhalonam (a good name) for their child. As the letter does not arrive, the couple is forced to name the child instantly. The Bengali custom is to giving two names to a child; the bhalonam (a formal name) that is used in the public spaces and daknam (meaning “a pet name”) that is used in the family by near and dear ones.

But the child is named “Gogol Ganguli.” Gogol is a Russian writer whom Ashoke treats as a saviour. The peculiarity of the name, Gogol, which is neither an American name nor an Indian one, increases the child’s dilemma. The name becomes a cause of
exasperation for him in school. The sense of alienation continues in
the following years. One day, on a school trip of some historical
intent, he has to visit a cemetery. There, he experiences a delinking
from the land where he was born. He realises that being a Hindu, “he
himself will be burned, not buried, that his body will occupy no plot of
earth, that no stone in this country will bear his name beyond life”
(NS 69).

The cemetery is thus employed as a metaphor, suggesting
Gogol’s lack of roots in the country. He does not have any ancestral
history in the land that would connect him to any tradition in the
national space; he is so different that his social and religious rite will
be incompatible with those of the new country. This discovery may not
be much of a shock to the members of the first generation Indian
Americans, but it is certainly a source of anxiety for their children
who passionately seek acculturation and integration.

Moreover, a generation gap between father and son is visible on
Gogol’s fourteenth birthday. After the party is over, Gogol is listening
to American music. Ashoke’s entrance into Gogol’s room is analogous to
the first generation’s intrusion into the lives of the second-generation
immigrants. The music album by John, Paul, George and Ringo of
whom Gogol is a devotee is in the sharp contrast to the cassette of
classical Indian music that Ashoke has bought for Gogol, “still sealed in its wrapper” (NS 78). Gogol’s lukewarm response towards Indian classical music demonstrates the second generation’s indifference towards Indian culture and tradition. Gogol’s eagerness to return to his lyrics (NS 75) during his confabulation with his father is equivalent to his aversion towards the interference of the older generation. By now, he is old enough to realise the peculiarity of his name that becomes an obstacle in the formation of his identity either as an Indian or as an American.

He hates having to tell people that it doesn’t mean anything ‘in Indian.’... He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian. He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second. (NS 76)

However, Ashoke Ganguli gave him the name that consolidated his Indian roots. Because of the peculiarity of his name, he does not court girls as other boys of his age had already done. His first encounter with a girl takes place when he hides his name and introduces himself as Nikhil. Ironically, Gogol reverts to the culture of
his ancestors to initiate the process of merging into American culture. He kisses a girl during a party for the first time in his life. From now on, he casts off his peculiar name, as well as the cultural values that he has inherited from his parents.

It’s the first time he’s kissed anyone, the first time he’s felt a girl’s face and body and breathe so close to his own.

“I can’t believe you kissed her, Gogol”. His friends exclaim as they drive home from the party. He shakes his head in a daze, as astonished as they are, elation still welling inside him. “It wasn’t me”, he nearly says. But he doesn’t tell them that it hadn’t been Gogol who’d kissed Kim. That Gogol had had nothing to do with it. (NS 96)

Jhumpa dichotomizes the self of the protagonist Gogol. As Gogol, the son of Indian parents he has grudgingly imbibed cultural values and traditions. His response towards the tradition and culture of his parents is distasteful. As Nikhil, he is integrated into American society. His angst towards his name, Gogol, given by his parents, reflects his indifference towards his Indian roots as he considers his cultural roots an impediment to his acculturation. His parents’ adherence to their Indian roots is an instance of contra-
acculturation. He changes his name, and apparently, he feels relieved of the burden of bearing a ludicrous name as well as the burden of values and regulations, laid down by his parental culture.

But now that he’s Nikhil it’s easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas. ... It is as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party at Ezra Stiles, with a girl wearing a plaid woollen skirt and combat boots and mustard tights. By the time he wakes up, hung-over, at three in the morning, she has vanished from the room, and he is unable to recall her name. (NS 105)

The second generation American-Indians often demonize Indian culture. The parental indication that imbibing American values would not be appreciated by the conservative elders back home result in negative reactions. The more close he gets to American society, the more he is detached from his parents. Their constant endeavours to make him realize his Indianness serve as irritants. His courtship of Ruth, the girl, he meets on the train represents another attempt to identify himself with American culture. His parents distrust and discourage his relationship with Ruth for they have witnessed the marital disharmony and consequent divorces in the lives of Bengali men married to American women. The termination of this love affair
leaves Gogol depressed. Next, Gogol starts dating Maxine. Eventually he moves to Maxine’s home that she shares with her parents. Gogol’s affair with Maxine and his subsequent shifting to her parental home is his endeavour to erase the painful memories of his affair with Ruth. He also wants to forget everything that pertains to his earlier days. He detaches himself totally from his parents. The sense of alienation from Indian culture makes him so disorientated that

He feels no nostalgia for the vacations he’s spent with his family, and he realises now that they were never really true vacations at all. Instead they were overwhelming, disorienting expeditions, either going to Calcutta, or sightseeing in places they did not belong to and intended never to see again. (NS 155)

In his pursuit of identity, he shuns everything that belongs to his parents. He spends his vacations with Maxine’s family. He wants to be as far as possible from the remnant of his life as Gogol. The third person narrator points out that beneath his outward Americanness that he creates during his stay at Maxine’s house, there lurks an Indian sensibility. The narrator comments, “he is conscious of the fact that his immersion in Maxine’s family is a betrayal of his own.” The narrator proves to be true as the death of Ashoke Ganguli, his
father, shakes him and he becomes conscious of his filial duties, incurred by his Indian heritage. He returns to his family in order to mourn his father’s death. His attachment to his family serves as a jolt to his affair with Maxine. Gogol realises the cultural distance between himself and Maxine. He is aware that “his father’s death does not affect Maxine in the least” (Ns 182). Conversely, he has a wide circle of his father’s Bengali acquaintances that are deeply moved by his father’s death. Gogol notices Maxine’s self-centred attitude even at the mourning of his father’s death when she asks about his plan for New Year’s Eve. Gogol now has the strength not to succumb to Maxine’s invitation of escape from his roots:

“I miss you, Nikhil.”

He nods.

“What about New Year’s Eve?” she says. “What about it?”

“Do you still want to try to go up to New Hampshire?”

For they had talked of this, going away together, just the two of them, Maxine picking him up after Christmas, staying at the lake house. Maxine was going to teach him how to ski.
“I don’t think so.”

“It might do you good,” she says tilting her head to one side. She glances around the room. “To get away from all this.”

“I don’t want to get away.” (NS 182)

Consequently, Gogol faces another split in his affair due to the cultural differences, as Maxine could not understand his adherence to his family and cultural traditions. Eventually Maxine admits her dislike for Gogol’s mother and sister that prompts Gogol to step out of Maxine’s life forever. Gogol succumbs to his mother’s pressure to get married. Ashima arranges his marriage with Moushumi. However, tragically this marriage also is subjected to disharmony and a consequent split owing to Moushumi’s wayward attitude. She still dates Dimitri, her first love. This causes another failure in Gogol’s life. Gogol tries to establish a relationship with Moushumi on the grounds of cultural similarity, but Moushumi’s unruly sexual behaviour proves fatal to Gogol’s marital life.

At the end of the novel, Gogol is bewildered and has no objective. The identity, he has created as Nikhil, provides no solace.
He lives with a sense of failure and shame. All his endeavours to identify himself with American life end in a fiasco.

Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist. Yet the thought of this eventual demise provides no sense of victory, no solace. It provides no solace at all.

(NS 289)

In short, Gogol epitomizes existential traits, searching for his identity, living with a sense of alienation; he exemplifies the predicament of human life.

Tejinder Kaur in her article “Cultural Dilemma’s and Displacement of Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Namesake* analyses Gogol’s predicament:

Gogol (Nikhil), though having passed through many emotional setbacks because of his ‘bicultural’ identity, is shown to be feeling dejected, distressed, displaced and lonely in the end not knowing what to do after thwarting of his dreams, his father’s death, his wife’s desertion and his mother’s impending departure to India, but his desires to
settle a home, have a family and a son and rise professionally in other countries hint at his quest for the new “route” which will dawn on him after his reflections in the company of the stories by his namesake, Nikolai Gogol-gifted to him by his father. (127)

The novel represents Gogol’s attempts to piece together a fractured identity. He ultimately returns to where he started from.

Moushumi is another character who exemplifies existentialism. She suffers from a lack of belonging and her quest for belonging urges her to find her roots in the third language and culture of France. Gogol suffers from the same dilemma and tries to mingle with the Americans. Despite their continual efforts to imbibe the host culture, they are not identified as fully American because of the colour of their skin. The colour of their skin becomes a major impediment in the course of formation of American identity. They are called A B C D (American born confused Desi) because of their sense of alienation for either culture (American and Indian). Lahiri demonstrates her experiences through the character of Gogol Ganguli. As a child, she did not understand her parents’ adherence to Indian culture. As an adult, she admits that she sympathises with her parents’ predicament
of being immigrants. Gogol as an adolescent, even as an adult, is averse to his parental adherence to Indian culture. This realization comes to him only after the death of his father.

Gogol gets married to her in order to enculturate his Bengali identity. Moushumi shares the ethos of the second-generation Bengali immigrants. She is a research scholar, working on the French Feminist Theory. She has a peculiar sense of alienation, as she neither opts for her parental Bengali identity, nor does she fully belong to American culture. Rather, she goes to a third language and culture, in order to formulate her identity. She indulges in wayward behaviour and sexual adventures in France. During her stay in France, she had affairs with men of different nationalities. Like Gogol, she also had failed love affairs with Graham and Dimitri. The engagement with Graham breaks up due to the cultural dissimilarity, for Graham ridicules Bengali cultural traditions that he had witnessed during his visit to Calcutta in order to ask for her grand parents’ blessings. After the split, Moushumi gets married to Gogol, retreating from her previous vow “never to marry a Bengali man” (NS 213). Her marriage is an attempt to bridge the gap between two cultures; however, it ends as she is disposed to sexual anarchy even after her marriage. Her relations with Dimitri Desjardins devastate her marital
life. She establishes relations with Dimitri only to assert her individuality, as she does not want to be controlled by any outward agency. “In retrospect she saw that her sudden lack of inhibitions had intoxicated her more than any of the men had” (NS-215). She embodies existential traits. From the beginning she does not belong either to the place of her birth, i.e. America, or to the place of her parents’ origin i.e. Bengal. Moushumi’s suffering is due to her hedonistic life style. In order to cash every moment of her life, she transcends the Rubicon of morality even in her conjugal life. Her dissoluteness is analogous to the meaning of her name because Moushumi is a season that keeps changing. The relationship between Gogol and Moushumi is void of love and mutual understanding. Moushumi is totally disenchanted and distracted from her marital life:

They didn’t argue, they still had sex, and yet he wondered. Did he still make her happy? She accused him of nothing, but more and more he sensed her distance, her dissatisfaction, her distraction. But there had been no time to dwell on this worry. [...] Part of him wants to bring it up with her. “Are you happy you married me?” he
would ask. But the fact that he is even thinking of this question makes him afraid.

(NS 271)

Her urge for fulfillment leads her to establish sexual relations with Dimitri, her first love. The pangs of unfulfillment in the first affair remain afresh in her mind all through the years. Her disenchantment regarding marriage is a result of boredom. She resumes relations with Dimitri. Moushumi’s efforts to trace Dimitri are described by the narrator as an act of self-deception.

She tells herself she’s calling an old friend. She tells herself the coincidence of finding his résumé, of stumbling upon him in this way, is too great, that any one in her position would pick up the phone and call. She tells herself he could very well be married, as she is. (NS 262)

The narrator says that she feels the pricks of conscience at the resumption of her relationship with Dimitri, though she attempts to suppress it. He has the liberty to remain in this mud and thus lead a passive, supine, acquiescent existence in a semi-conscious state in which he is scarcely aware of himself. Moushumi’s actions are not governed by any outward agency and she has created her essence according to her existence. Despite her various sexual affairs, she is
alienated even at last because Dimitri, for whom she ruined her marital life, is not going to marry her. Hence, her pursuit of self-satisfaction ends in utter failure as eventually she does not find the purpose of her life. As in her other works, Lahiri delineates how the second-generation immigrants blunder in their attempts to frame an identity. Often they are unable to get out of the in-between state.

Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli representing the first-generation Indian immigrants epitomize a sense of alienation and strict adherence to native cultural values. Ashoke’s dislocation from his native land and culture is due to his desire to pursue higher studies and find better future prospects “with security and respect” (NS 108). Ashoke’s migration specifies the phenomenon of “brain drain.” As Ashoke’s migration is purely for professional progress, he has a strong sense of acculturation. He easily overcomes all the odds in the course of his adjustment into American culture. Despite his disposition to adjust in the host culture, he has an affinity with his native Bengali cultural values and traditions. His efforts to socialize with other Bengali expatriates and the gatherings of Bengalis at his home to celebrate various Bengali traditions are due to his urge to stick to his ancestral, cultural roots. He wants to instill the values that he has inherited from his parents into his children in order to
preserve his Bengali identity. His act of naming his son after Nikolai Gogol can be interpreted as his efforts to revive the memories of his past. Though these reminiscences are painful, they are an essential part of his psyche.

The third person narrator does not delve into the depths of Ashoke’s mind. In spite of his adjustment in America, his lonely death symbolizes the alienation of the diaspora in a foreign land. Ashoke’s death raises a question in Gogol’s mind regarding the existence of the diaspora “Who had forsaken everything to come to this country, to make a better life, only to die here?”(NS 180). The question reveals an existential aspect of diasporic communities. Ashoke Ganguli, notwithstanding his strict adherence to cultural, moral values, dies in his pursuit of being identified as a successful professional but his dreams of leading a contented family life are shattered as at the time of his death he is alone, converse to Calcutta where he has an extended family. From a cultural view point, he is an amalgam of native Bengali and American cultures.

Ashima Ganguli is an archetypal Bengali immigrant woman who strictly observes Bengali cultural values and abhors the Americanized ways. At the outset of the novel, she typifies loneliness, isolation and nostalgia. From the feminist view point, she consolidates the
patriarchal niche of women. Her concern and attempts to conserve her native culture presents her as an emblem of Indian culture, as the patriarchy has assigned responsibility of cultural preservation to women. Her concern and adherence to the native traditions can be construed as her attempts to keep her family space culturally unadulterated from the profane activities of the host culture. She represents the traditions and rituals observed strictly by the family and hence she represents the inner domain for women as prescribed by the patriarchy.

From the beginning she conforms to the patriarchal norms of a daughter, a wife, and a mother. She sticks to the duties of a widow to her late husband. Through Ashima, Lahiri portrays the status of a widow in Indian culture. She has to abandon all the embellishments. Widowhood in Hindu society has ever been a scourge for women. Widows remain at the margins of society.

Despite various social reforms to enhance the status of widows in Hindu society, they are destined to lead a life of social ostracism. A widow is disallowed not only the use of ornaments and embellishments but also the use of honey, meat, salt, perfumes, flowers, and dyed clothes. They are not permitted to re-marry. In order to disfigure their beauty, their heads are forcibly tonsured. Hundreds
of widows are ostracized by their families and expected to spend time in prayer. These widows have only one piece of cloth to cover themselves. Their marginalization is not only economic and social; they are subjected to the most degrading marginalization in the form of prostitution by some widow Ashrams.

As a daughter, her acquiescence to the patriarchal norms is apparent as her marriage is arranged by her parents, without checking her approval. The intensity of marginalization can be gauged by the fact that it was only after the betrothal that she had learnt his name (NS 9).

As a wife she is left alone to suffer the trauma of exile at her apartment. At the time of giving birth to her son, she is full of apprehensions for her baby as she has not adjusted yet in the alien land of America.

But She is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare. (NS 6).

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. (NS 25)

Ashima remains in the house representing the patriarchal
apprehension that the women are more susceptible towards cultural
denigration or cultural contamination. However Lahiri does not
present any gender discrimination on financial and educational basis,
rather her concern is culture, so she represents the issue of gender
only in the cultural context. Despite her long stay in America, she
still wears saris, likes Indian food, observes every Bengali tradition.
The acquaintances of Ganguli family are mostly the Bengali
immigrants. This signifies the family’s attempts to stick to their roots.
Lahiri shows a slow process of adjustment in the character of Ashima.
Her desperation and the trauma of exile lead her to persuade Ashoke
to leave the USA and return home:

I’m saying hurry up and finish your degree.” And then,
impulsively, admitting it for the first time: “I’m saying I
don’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It’s not
right. I want to go back. (NS 33)

As time passes she adjusts. However, her adjustment to
America is slower than her husband’s. The birth of Gogol accelerates
the process of her adjustment, though initially she is terrified to raise
the child in an alien country. Necessities compel her to contact the outside world. As soon as she participates in the outside realm, her nostalgia and sense of exile recedes. Her family connections in Calcutta haunt her time and again in the form of the news of the deaths of near and dear ones. The first trauma of mourning that she undergoes is her father’s death. The plight of the diaspora, represented by Ashima is well portrayed by the narrator. Ashima realizes that being a foreigner

... 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 previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. (NS 49-50)

Ashima harbours a strong urge to link with the relatives back home in Calcutta. Her continual visits to Calcutta attach her roots to the soil of her motherland. She eagerly waits for the letters from home.

Constantly suspended in a mental voyage between the countries, they seem to be caught in an enigmatic state of
in-betweenness. These expatriates keep the channels of communication open between themselves and their families back home. (Indira 104)

The family visits to Calcutta open a rift between the first and second generations as Ashok and Ashima come to Calcutta to revive the memories. In contrast, their children have an aversion towards India and treat it as an alien land having no emotional propinquity except the feeling that it is the land of their ancestors.

Despite her long stay in America, Ashima is indisposed to internalize the American way of life and does not comprehend her offspring’s fascination towards it. She gradually adjusts, adapts and adopts it as she has learnt to do the things on her own. During Ashoke’s deputation at a university in Cleveland, she learns to cope with the solitude on her own. Meanwhile, she gets a job to while away the time. Another thing that offends her is “her children’s independence, their need to keep distance from her” (Ns 166). She dislikes this liberty as this is in contrast to the Indian notion of an integrated family. Ashima is the main character who projects cultural displacement and the trauma of exile. Her character posits existential characteristics because she is in constant search for identity and belonging. After the death of Ashoke, she is still in a dilemma. Even at
the end, she is portrayed as a lonely character. The narrator exposes
the inner workings of her mind: “Ashima feels her loneliness
suddenly, horribly, permanently and briefly, turns away from the
mirror she sobs for her husband” (NS 278).

In order to bridge the gap with her relatives back home, owing to
distance, she decides to spend six months in India. Simultaneously to
keep alive the memories of her husband, she will spend six months in
America. In the last chapter, the narrator depicts the predicament of
Ashima: “True to the meaning of her name, she will be without
borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and
nowhere” (NS 276).

The character of Sonia embodies acculturation. Her character is
not portrayed in detail. She is well adjusted in American culture and
does not suffer from any identity crisis. Her sense of belonging
consolidates her efforts of identity formation, albeit she does not cast
off Indian values as Moushumi, Ruth and Maxine did. She does not
have several love affairs.

Lahiri has projected various themes in the novel. Besides the
dilemma of belongingness, sense of exile, feminism and existentialism,
she has presented the problems of American insensitivity in the novel.
The immigrants are not recognized as American. They are ridiculed for

the peculiarity of names by the natives. Gogol realizes this marginalization and humiliation when somebody shortens the spelling of Ganguli into Gang, written on the nameplate of the mailbox. He also realizes that his father’s Indian accent makes him a butt of ridicule and marginalized.

Another issue, Jhumpa Lahiri, posits is race. The colour of skin is a bottleneck in the course of their identity formation in the host culture. Notwithstanding their acquiescence to the pressures of the host culture and their consequent assimilation in it, race becomes an impediment in being recognized as American. Gogol’s confabulation with Pamela at a party unfolds the American psyche towards India and Indians living abroad. Pamela represents the fascination of Americans for Indian culture. In a neo colonial stance, they consider India only as a country of adverse climate and dirt as well as unusual customs and cultures. Gogol, in order to identify himself with Americans, bolsters Pamela’s views. His views on climatic disorders in India are based on the same logic.

“I mean, you must never get sick.”

“Actually, that’s not true,” he says, slightly annoyed. He looks over at Maxine, trying to catch her eye, but she’s speaking intently with her neighbor. “We get sick all the
time. We have get shots before we go. My parents devote the better part of a suitcase to medicine.”

“But you’re Indian,” Pamela says frowning. “I’d think the climate wouldn’t affect you, given your heritage.” “Pamela, Nick’s American,” Lydia says. (NS 157)

Graham is another character who embodies the whites’ disregard and contempt for the culture of India. His disrespect and humiliation of Indian culture becomes raison of rift between him and Moushumi. Graham represents an age-old superiority, treating third world countries as uncivilized, orthodox, and circumscribed to the cocoons of their cultures. Lahiri has presented a strange type of consciousness in Moushumi regarding her heritage. Though she is disposed to the American way of life, she cannot tolerate the rejection of her background: “For it was one thing for to reject her background, to be critical of her family’s heritage, another to hear it from him” (NS 217). Moushumi’s disgust with Graham evinces that the second generation immigrants, somehow, are tied to their ancestral roots and despite their disorientation towards the culture of ancestors, they are ambivalent towards it.

In The Namesake the distressing situations involving the name “Gogol” can be read as a metaphor for both the feeling of dislocation
and relocation of the diasporic and hybrid subjects. First, when Ashima and Ashoke are forced to choose a name for their son in the hospital, it seemed like a betrayal of Ashima’s grandmother’s wish. Afterward, when Gogol’s school refuses to accept his good name, they are constantly reminded that they are not at home, but in a place that does not understand their culture and traditions. As a consequence, the process of choosing their son a name shows how dislocated they feel in their host country, how painful the relocation is as they constantly feel like betraying their heritage.

As far as Gogol is concerned, naming is a metaphor for his feeling of a dislocated subject and, his new name a metaphor for the acceptance of his identity as a hybrid subject. Accordingly, it is possible to say that the name “Gogol” stands for his identity. Just as he sees himself neither as American nor as Indian, his name is also neither American nor Indian. However, when he changes it to Nikhil, he feels that it reflects better his hyphenated self as it is a Bengali name that can also be shortened to an American nickname, Nick. Therefore, it is a hybrid, ambivalent name and with it he is able to deal better with his private and public life, and he can easily deal with both ends of his hyphenated identity.
In conclusion, *The Namesake* deals with both the process of dislocation and relocation that is characteristic of the postcolonial diasporic subject. Lahiri uses naming as a metaphor of the effects the processes of dislocation and relocation have on the diasporic subject that has to deal with a double belonging, that is, to a place of residence as well as to an imaginary homeland that makes itself present in the heritage and memories of its subjects.

Towards the end of the novel, pondering upon his life and relationships, Gogol is different. He feels guilty about his own ways of life through the years. Family is vital for him now. And looking into the past he is frightened to see that not only it has been his own routine to abandon the family but also it is a family tradition done by his parents as well: “He wonders how his parents had done it, leaving their respective families behind, seeing them so seldom, dwelling unconnected, in a perpetual state of expectation, of longing” (NS 281). Contemplating “with a stamina he fears he does not possess himself. He had spent years maintaining distance from his origins . . . a distance that had not troubled [him] in the least, until it was too late” (NS 281). He does not hate his name any more. He starts losing the emotional network of family one by one and he misses the name:
Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist. Yet the thought of this eventual demise provides no sense of victory, no solace. It provides no solace at all.

(NS 289)

The last lines of the story illustrate Gogol’s preoccupation with his future. He has plans: “A month from now, he will begin a new job at a smaller architectural practice, producing his own designs” (NS 289). As an architect working for other firms and designers up to now, he intends to be more original regarding his job. Like his decision regarding his job, he seems to be ready to be an architect of his own life, self and identity. At this point the story comes to its end, leaving the reader unaware of what could follow.

*The Namesake* suggests bondage and symbolized in a name. The protagonist of the novel, Gogol Ganguli, is never really relieved of his name and namesake. According to Victor Brombert, one can never be totally free of an overcoat and there is no such thing as a pristine and authentic identity which might then be covered by a free choice of cultural, personal attire, habits, norms (qtd. in Heinze 197-98).
Despite all the description of Gogol’s troubles with his true identity and displacement during his life, there is a hidden desire of freedom in him. His self suffers from its cultural captivity which is caused by his parents’ roots, and not finding solace in his American side is related to his instinctual desire for freedom and emancipation from the identity-related captivity. To be identified as a pure American subject does not save him from his psychological captivity, neither does his symbolic return to his supposed identity associated with his parents’ life-roots in India at the end of the novel. Seeing this matter from such an angle would reveal opposite aspects to the theme of displacement which is commonly regarded as abject. Just like the desire for a fixed identity in human beings, there is a parallel opposition in their nature to escape boundaries caused by fixed identities. A fixed identity is as much restrictive as the lack of it. All human phenomena have their own opposites just like the “self” and the “other”. For Gogol, the family represents India and outside is America but in fact it is the family that is outside for him.

Identities are made in, and by, cultures of people. Both these interrelated phenomena are changeable and not fixed. According to Charles Altieri, “the effort to construct identity gets transformed into a celebration of participating in multiple identities, and sophisticated
theory provides a self-congratulatory alternative to the kind of cultural
work that requires aligning the self with specific roles and fealties”
(qtd. in Heinze 199).

Accordingly, it is rather difficult and even impossible to draw the
demographics of a fixed identity. The displaced has more than one
choice. Making one choice among many choices often leaves him/her
ambiguous. The problem does not come from making the wrong
choice-which is misplacement-but it is the realization of the
multi-sidedness of his/her identity and benefiting from all the choices
equally. Any limitation in one choice can be compensated for by the
other. In this sense displacement could alternatively be called
emancipation or freedom, and accordingly The Namesake can arouse
as much sympathy as the joy of this feeling at the end.

The next chapter deals with the presentation of the Indian
diasporic womanism as found in Jumpha Lahiri’s Unaccustomed
Earth.