CHAPTER V --- REFLECTION OF DIASPORIC SENSIBILITY IN LAHIRI’S THE NAMESAKE

5.1 Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri, in her second work and first novel, The Namesake spotlights the private, restricted spaces of middle-class Bengali immigrants in America. The narrative is a documentary of their lives, displaced in the foreign land far away from home. The novel is a story of the adjustment problems of first and second generation Indians who have now established in America. The strain of following Indian culture and grasping American culture, between keeping family tradition and fascination for the individual freedom and consciousness that one is an ‘outsider’ and ‘other’ even though one is born there is realistically highlighted in The Namesake.

Characters portrayed by Lahiri in this novel are hyper movable global citizens, navigating several spaces while surpassing established geographic, social, and political restrictions. Though the novel comprises several examples of cultural transformations, her second book gradually shifts the focus towards the hybridity of second generation characters.

The Namesake deals with the story of Gogol Ganguli, the American-born son of Indian immigrants, straddling from his birth in 1968 to adulthood in the year 2000. Lahiri investigates the social and, most of all, the psychological stages he goes through while dealing with his hyphenated condition and ultimately emergent a transnational identity. In fact, all the main characters in the novel span multiple nation-spaces and cultures, blending factors from past and present in their efforts to form a sense of identity. This identity is ruptured, but by declining a single,
harmonized concept of self it actually recognizes the individual’s attachment to multiple nations and cultures.

The novel convincingly unfolds the story of Ganguli family that echoes feeling of alienation and displacement, identity crisis in the first and second generation immigrants, family relationship in diasporic dilemma, and nostalgia, and cultural assimilation, intergenerational gap as all these aspects prominently forms diasporic sensibility of Bengali immigrants depicted in the novel. The present chapter will attempt to explore, interpret, and analyze all the four aspects of diasporic sensibility reflected in the novel. In addition to this, the chapter will undertake to analyze and examine the film version of the novel.

5.2 Sense of Displacement and Alienation

Loneliness, alienation and sense of displacement are some of the intense problems of the immigrant community in the nation of their selection. As a part of the diasporic community, immigrants sometimes feel nostalgic, displaced, isolated and alienated because of the absence of the native culture and the language in alien countries. Alienation creates a condition of psychological imbalance, a state of rupture where a person feels his/her helplessness acclimatize with an alien culture and feels uncomfortable and lonely as well. In the foreign countries due to lack of adaptability, lack of acculturation, multiple identities of the immigrants make them feel isolated and lonely. It becomes difficult for the immigrants to feel at home with the alien environment, and the sense of displacement and alienation links the immigrants with the native land.

In the novel *The Namesake* the Bengali Indian couple Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli experiences this issue with varying extents. On landing in Cambridge/Massachusetts; of the two, it’s the wife who undergoes this disturbance more than the husband as the male goes out and meets his companions in his workplace or learning environment. As the woman is mostly restricted to the kitchen and the bedroom in the early days of the couple’s stay in the US, she has to bear the burden more than her husband. When Ashima is pregnant and is expecting her baby in a couple of week’s time, she is hospitalized but there is no one to be with her, on the other hand, had it been in India, there would have been plenty of relatives to stand by
her. Lying in the hospital, she recalls that when she was boarding the aircraft for the States, there were twenty-six members of her family to bid her an affectionate send-off. Now there is just a thin looking obstetrician Dr. Ashley to examine her. The doctor tells her that everything is normal, but Ashima does not feel normal. The couple arrived in Cambridge eighteen months ago; ever since nothing has been normal to Ashima. She can experience the pain all by herself; she is very much anxious about motherhood in a foreign land. Lying on her bed, as there is nothing to think about, she is amazed at her body’s capacity to bring out a new life into the world just as her mother and grandmother have done. Her concern is that it is being taken place so far from home without being supervised and observed by those she loved. All of a sudden she is engrossed in fear as the text describes; ‘…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. (Lahiri, 2003:06)

The account of her hospitalization during her pregnancy, her labour pain highlights her emotional connectedness with India and sense of loneliness in an alien land.

It should be noted that Ashoke does not experience the sense of loneliness and alienation as is experienced by Ashima. He never attempts to know how sad Ashima is. She goes into a depression and keeps herself engaged in household duties. The newborn becomes the center of Ashima’s life and all her time now revolves around the child. Throughout the novel, Ashima plays conventional role of Indian mother and wife. Ashima feels all the more lonely after the death of Ashoke and decides to depart for India. Even after thirty years of stay, she is not completely at home in America. This fact highlights that the first generation immigrants can never feel at home however long their residence they might have in the adopted country. As Salman Rushdie rightly comments; ‘A full migrant suffers traditionally a triple disruption. He loses his place. He enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose behavior and codes are unlike and sometimes even offensive to his own.’(Rushdie, 1991:429)

It should be noted that in the passage of time Ashima learns to live lonely even in an odd atmosphere with courage and confidence. When her husband gets a research allowance and moves to Ohio from Massachusetts, everybody imagines that the Gangulis would rent out their house to the University students and move out to Ohio.
But Ashima astonishes them all, saying that there would be nothing for her to do in Ohio, and Ashoke would be very busy all day at the lab, and she favors to stay in Massachusetts, even if it implies staying in the house all alone.

Another point is that the feeling of alienation and displacement becomes sharp for the immigrants when they find it practically impossible sometimes to be the co-shares in joys and grief of relatives staying in the home country. The young generation that has moved out of India to countries like America, has the old parents back in India. Due to strong family bonds, both sides feel the absence of each other. When a close relative or one of the parents of the expatriate passes away and he or she is unable to go back to India to be with the other members of the bereaved family, a feeling of guilt engulfs the immigrant. When Gogol departs Cleveland for Boston with the ashes of his father, his state of mind is similarly described by the text as; ‘He knows now the guilt that his parents carried inside, at being able to do nothing when their parents had died in India, of arriving weeks, sometimes months later, when there was nothing left to do.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 179)

Jhumpa Lahiri portrays immigrants’ sense of alienation and loneliness in all its poignancy without over-sentimentalizing it. Away from home and kith and kin, each member of the Ganguli household leads a lonely life. Ashoke is busy from morning till evening at the University. Ashima has to find ways to keep herself busy in order to avoid the sense of emptiness and seclusion. Therefore, she spends time in the library of her son’s school, getting employment there later. When Ashoke moves out to Cleveland, she has more time at hand and makes her own Christmas cards. A grown-up Gogol moves away from family, but he too faces loneliness and is not able to retain any female partner for love. At the end of the novel, we find Gogol alone and his mother ready to do the role of a lone traveler. Ashima’s deep loneliness after her husband’s unexpected death shows how towards the end when partying people are gone, the house stands cold, Gogol and Sonia are ready to live in their own apartments and she stands eventually to go back alone. The people and things she and her husband were pleased about are dispersed. Everything changing in a flux does not comfort her. The text captures Ashima’s situation in very apt words as it writes; ‘Ashima feels lonely suddenly, horribly, permanently alone, and briefly, turned away from the mirror she sobs for her husband. She feels overwhelmed by the thought of
the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and now in its own way foreign.’ (Lahiri, 2003:278)

By showing Ashoke’s death in America, Jhumpa Lahiri highlights the diasporic elements of psychological and cultural displacement as suggestive of an eternal condition of man. Ashoke’s death offers Lahiri with an opportunity to think about the predicament of the expatriates who had deserted everything to go to the dream land and Lahiri raises her doubt about the reason for immigration as she asked whether to make a better life or only to die in foreign land. Ashima, at first does not wish to go to Calcutta but wants to stay here where her husband breathed his last. This again reflects the value of emotions and family bonds in the life of Indians as against the practical Americans. But finally she is overpowered by Ashoke’s philosophy of life, which were also Nikolai Gogol’s and Mr. Ghosh’s and every immigrant. She would, therefore, spend half a year in America and the other half in India.

Although she still dresses in saris and puts her long hair in a bun, she is not the same Ashima who had once left Calcutta. Her papers like American passport, Massachusetts driving license, social security card confirm her formal belonging, but they cannot describe what a long journey it has been for Ashima, and they do not reveal the whole story of the changes she has undergone. Unlike other Indian women, she has not opposed driving or getting a job, but has tried her best to cultivate her children with a sense of balance between India and America. She has used the knowledge of living in a foreign country to her benefit, having got access to things unavailable to women in her traditionalist home country and having become a transnational character from her earlier condition of an alien and displaced. Immigration is empowering for Ashima, who in the end can afford to pursue with her plan of regularly traveling between Bengal and New England.

Gogol also becomes a victim of alienation because of his name problem and diasporic situation. The sense of alienation in Gogol becomes acute when he goes on a school trip and misses the graves of his ancestors in a cemetery. He painfully understands that beyond life his body would never reside in any land nor would there be a stone indicating his name, as in India the dead are cremated. Ashima is shocked that her young son was taken to a graveyard as Indians tend to keep children away from things related to death. Gogol lives a nomad like life with a chain of broken
relationships and an unsuccessful marriage. Due to this twin cultural background, both Gogol and his parents suffer from a sense of psychological and sociological displacement as they can neither totally submerge themselves in American culture nor rupture ties with their inherent Indian culture.

Jhumpa Lahiri shows that it is not just the Indians, but Americans too are suffered by this sense of alienation and feeling of dislocation when they go to another country. Just as Gogol is made to feel an alien in American culture, Graham, Moushumi’s ex-fiancé, also feels something similar when he goes to India to meet her relatives. When in Calcutta, he finds the Bengali customs and culture irksome and awkward and dislikes the lack of freedom to drink openly and express his love for Moushumi before her family members. He understands his inability to adjust and so breaks up with her just before wedding. After the death of his father Gogol is ridden by remorse. He shaves his head and follows all the traditions. In spite of their closeness, Maxine suffers the impairment of being an alien in Gogol’s house at his father’s funeral ceremony. She is disqualified from the plans made by the family for the last rites, and her offer to go with them to India for the immersion of the ashes is rejected. Even earlier, she felt awkward in the presence of Gogol’s parents when she visited them, and the cultural gap yawned between the two.

After early sentiments of alienation and displacement, the manner in which the Gangulis settled down in America is a brilliant instance of how gradually these immigrants are able to develop a hybrid culture. They cultivate hybrid identities by striking an amazing conciliation between their home culture and host culture. This is apparent in Ashima’s efforts in preparing that year’s Christmas cards with an elephant decked with red and green jewels pasted on to a silver paper instead of buying Merry Christmas cards with angels. This was a fusion of both the cultures that shows the immigrants have come a long way from their marginalized condition and sense of alienation in the western countries.

In The Namesake, Lahiri has not only dealt with the immigrant experience but also given it a deeply philosophical undertone. Lahiri shows a man is born in one land, leaves it to go to a new land but eventually leaves that too when death calls him. This was the destiny of Ashoke, and in a very mature manner she shows that this is the fate of every man. Her novel is a transcultural novel that brings out the immigrant
angst very clearly. It spotlights their initial inability to adapt themselves entirely into an alien culture and society. They stick onto their roots. Though their ultra modern environment is enjoyable and promising, yet they are conscious of the emptiness and alienation in their hearts. The bicultural conflict of Eastern and Western values bothers them eternally, yet her characters keep on marching ahead towards a pleasant future as they slowly conquer their sense of alienation and displacement.

This aspect of diasporic community is clearly pointed out by Brah Avtar in his following observation;

The word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure. (Brah, 2003:193)

5.3 Nostalgia and Cultural Assimilation

The feeling of biculturalism is individually experienced by Jhumpa Lahiri. She has gone through the same emotions like so many children who were born in a foreign country but have parents that are still very deep-rooted in India. Her portrayal of the dilemma of Gogol is life-like. The cultural bewilderment in his mind is a part of the mindset of all Indians settled abroad, so much so that the ABCD concept, American born, confused desi comes out vividly in her writing. The characters are an in-depth psychoanalysis of the twin cultures warring in their minds, one that they have inherited from their parents and the other that they see all around them.

Ashoke Ganguli, who like many other professionals from India, comes to America to do research in ‘fibre optics’. He returns to India after two years’ stay and marries a 19-year-old girl from Kolkata named Ashima. Ashima flew to USA. Filled with anxiety and with a heavy heart with instruction ranging in her ears from her relatives not to wear skirts or cut off her hair. As if that was the only concern for her, there were a million other things that she was leaving behind, a hundred bonds that she was breaking but one is more concerned with the noticeable signs of culture. When the couple arrives in America, the first shock in store for Ashima is the cold
weather. She is inexperienced in the ways of American society Ashima feels the agony of being homesick and alone and feels the pains of nostalgia, emotional displacement from her father’s home filled with loving ones. Her mind is filled with reminiscences of her home, calculating the Indian time on her finger which is ten and a half hours ahead in Calcutta. She reads and rereads the Bengali short stories and magazines that she had brought with her. The letters from India are her connection to her family. They are a treasure of nostalgia for her, and she read and reread them again and again.

Then came an awful experience of Ashima’s pregnancy and motherhood. Her motherhood is without the comfort of loving grandparents or parents or uncles or aunts around her. The hospital, the nurses, the whole experience of hospitalization at the time of pregnancy is confusing for her similarly, like a new immigrant who gets settled in an alien land; Ashima compares things in the host country with the ones in her home country. As she is admitted to the hospital for delivery, time sits heavy on her heart, but no, it is American time and she feels lonely even though there are three other pregnant women – all Americans in the same room, separated by curtains. She is aware of the concern for the privacy of Americans. Lahiri reflects Ashima’s concern as the text writes; ‘But she has gathered that Americans, in spite of their public declarations of affection, in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, in spite of their hand-holding on the street and lying on top of each other on the Cambridge Common, prefer their privacy.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 3)

She also compares the state of being pregnant to that of being foreigner in a new country in the words, ‘…a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 50)

In her initial days, Ashima could not able to associate herself with American culture. She used to cry when alone for days together and become nostalgic about various things. Her middle-class family background prevents her from mixing with people from the majority American culture. Ashima finds the open-minded cultural environment in the US very alien to her background. For her whole life in America she wears Sari and wears Bata shoes. She always prefers Bengali food. It is also observed that immigrants usually maintain their cooking and foodways in an attempt to express their difference and to keep a strong connection with the native country.
Lahiri portrays the character of Ashima as a typical Bengali woman of the 1960s who has no professional objectives. Her only aim in life seems to be a good housewife and mother. For Ashima, her family is of most important, and she always thinks in terms of her husband and children. She never thinks of her own professional life although she is a graduate of Calcutta University. Ashima is completely different from the common American woman who is career oriented. The dilemma of Ashima is rightly captured by Poornima in her following comment;

Lahiri has perceptively portrayed the process of transformation in the subjectivity of her female protagonists, who caught in flux of tradition and modernity, bearing the burden of the past and aspirations of future emerge as a new persona in the diasporic space. (Poornima, 2010:84)

After the birth of new born Ashima determined to bring her child up in Bengali cult and sings Bengali songs that her mother had sung to her. She also adjusts to her new environments, bringing up her child in the Bengali way and learns to converse with Americans around her. Soon they have to shift to University town outside Boston which is very disturbing for Ashima, even worse than the move from Kolkata to Cambridge.

In their initial days, immigrants encountered with the problem of adjustment with a foreign culture. Leaving behind one’s cultural roots is like cutting the ground under one’s feet. It has to be a step-by-step process. Ashima, in the beginning, feels out of place with everything that she sees around her but finds that after the birth of her son there is a sense of belonging as people stopped to admire her baby when she takes him out for walks. Gradually, she assimilates herself with the American way of life yet keeping a strong connection with their homeland.

In an attempt to relive their life in India, the immigrants of different communities make their own groups. It is like a mini India out there as these immigrants tend to gravitate towards other immigrants from their particular region of India. Ashoke and Ashima also expand their group of Bengali friends. They become friends only because they come from the same old Kolkata. In the beginning, the Gangulis are taken into this circle but later on it is they who keep on extending this circle wider and wider as other Bengali students studying at Boston go back to India and come back.
with young brides. Now it is the turn of Ashima to help them adjust to this new culture that they have been brought to, leaving behind their age-old culture.

The immigrant Bengali families get together on different occasions, like the naming and rice ceremonies of their children, their birthdays, marriages, deaths and also in the celebration of Bengali festivals like Durga Puja and Navaratras. Their effort is to protect their original culture in a foreign land by following Bengali traditions, wearing conventional attires and observing the rituals they had seen their parents and grandparents observe as far as possible. In place of the authentic family members, it is the migrant Bengali friends who perform the role of uncles and aunts, *mashis* and *meshos* of the children for different rituals. The ceremonies are held with full enthusiasm although with minor variations according to the land that they have adopted. All weekends are get-togethers at the house of one Bengali family or another where they are served *samosas*, fish curry and rice on paper plates. These Bengalis are totally unable to break bonds with their roots – Indian things join them together- be it music, movies, politics, fashion. They talk about the films of Ritwik Ghatak and Satyajit Ray, and the politics of CPM versus Congress Party or even North Kolkata versus South. As is mentioned earlier they even perform certain rituals and ceremonies as they do so back home, for example, the rice ceremony of Gogol in which Ashoke and Ashima asked one of their friends Dilip Nandi to play the role of Ashima’s brother, to hold the child and feed him rice. It is as if by talking and performing all these things, they are upholding their ties with their homeland. It does not indicate that they are not concerned with America and all things American are also discussed making it a *pot pourri* of India and America as they themselves have become. They have American friends and colleagues but at moments of joy and grief they tend to turn towards their own Bengali brethren.

The reader can observe how Ashoke and Ashima cope with the feeling of loneliness and exile by trying to live closer to other Bengali families. In other words, ghettoisation is their way of survival which relieves immigrants from loneliness, at least to some level. Interacting only with other Bengalis, adhering to their cultural and traditional values, they cut off themselves from the mainstream of American society. They never learn to belong, with the result that even after twenty years Ashima thinks of Calcutta as home.
The bi-cultural pulls play the significant part in the rearing of children because the children of immigrants who are destined to share the twilight vision of their parents.

In *The Namesake* Ashima is panic about the choice of the name of their child indicates the conflict going on within her consciousness for the symbolic success of Americanization on her Bengali cultural beliefs. She is curious every time that her new-born must be named by their elder grandparents in accordance with the tradition of Bengali culture. However, American custom requires that a name be selected at baptism or after the name of family ancestors. Ashoke is caught in a problem when he finds he cannot get Ashima released from the hospital without a proper name to the child. The American Civil authority is not ready to accept a *dakname* (pet name) for the discharge of the baby. Mr. Wilcox stresses the need for an official name for the release of the baby. Ashima feels herself embarrassing in such a state because, in social rituals, the tradition of assigning the name is important. Lahiri admits that the name has become a complete symbol of human identity inclusive of one’s national, social, moral, religious and cultural identity.

In the novel Jhumpa Lahiri also depicts immigrants’ nostalgia for people, places and practices left behind portrays the fervor and determination of learning ways of a newly chosen culture. She describes the confusing, contradictory sense of being in a place but not of it. She investigates the complexities of the mind to analyze the destiny of the Indians who caught between two conflicting cultures, one inherited and left behind and the other encountered but yet not assimilated and absorbed. This is evident in the case of Gogol’s sister Sonia who is in high school. One weekend she engages herself in the work of dying the vast majority of her clothing black. She is already going to parties at which both boys and girls are present; her braces had come off her teeth, revealing a confident, frequent American smile; her previously shoulder-length hair had been cut unevenly by one of her friends. Ashima lived in fear that Sonia would colour a strip of her blond as she had threatened one more than one occasion to do and that she would have additional holes carved in her earlobes at the mall. They argued aggressively about such things, Ashima crying, and Sonia smashing doors revealed that she desires to act and dress like everyone else. This is one way for visible minority children to make themselves invisible, and another is to avoid racial bias of the host people. Most of the young people whose parents keep to the old ways feel entrapped by their differences. It is through the subsequent ghetto
experience that they dislike. Lahiri also spotlights the static feature that nostalgia
bestows upon a culture and the manner in which self-imposed ghettoization interrupts
the process of acceptance of and by the host culture. Though for the expatriates their
networking with each other give them a sense of unity which substitutes for them the
concept of homelessness. The past exists and it also persists in different manners and
forms.

Reaction to parents’ death portrays different cultural outlook for immigrants’
children. Within a decade abroad, Ashoke and Ashima are both orphaned. Sonia and
Gogol are woken by these deaths in the early mornings, their parents shattering on the
other side of their bedroom walls. They stumble into their parent’s room, blank,
uncomfortable at the site of their parents tears. For few following days, they eat only
rice and dal and vegetables plainly prepared. Gogol remembers being bored by it,
irritated at having to follow a ritual, no one else he knew followed, in memory of
people he had seen only a few times in his life. He remembered his father sitting
unshaven in a chair, gazing through them, speaking to no one. He remembers those
meals eaten in complete stillness; the television turned off. Ashoke and Ashima lived
the lives of the awfully aged, those who survived and are relieved by memory alone,
the act of remembering works as healing. Through the performance of hide and seek
game of memory, they relive yesterday once more when the callous blinding lights of
reality are removed, the shadows of past provide support and relief. And thus the need
to journey home is not only to gratify a nostalgic urge but to regain the past, for the
assurance of self, of belongingness. The first generation migrants try to keep their
contact with India alive to a degree by making regular trips to their homeland.
Initially, it is also done as parents are still there. But as time passes and they being to
settle down in the host country, those trips become less frequent. Once they have a
family of their own, these trips are reduced in numbers. By the time Gogol is ten and
when his father gets his vacation, the family makes a decision to go to Calcutta for
eight months despite the children’s school. The novel describes how Gogol and Sonia
feel that within minutes of arriving Calcutta, before their eyes Ashoke and Ashima
converted into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder,
their smiles wider, revealing a confidence, Gogol, and Sonia never saw on Pemberton
Road where they felt cut off from its kind, deprived of its natural environment and
freedom. On the other hand, however, the early attraction of children for India
vanishes in the course of time and they feel entrapped and fed up in India. They felt somehow in transit, disconnected from their lives, bound up in an alternating timetable and coming back they fell free to quarrel, to tease each other, to shout and to scream and say shut up. The parents, however in their own way are trying to hold on to their culture. When Gogol was in third grade, he was sent to Bengali language and culture lessons every other Saturday. For, when Ashima and Ashoke closed their eyes, it never failed to disturb them that their children sounded just like Americans, skillfully communicating in a language that still at times baffled them, in accents they were habituated not to trust.

The nostalgia of Ashoke and Ashima for what they have left behind and memories of their homeland and culture can also be found in the way they decorate their new houses. In her living room, Ashima hangs a watercolor portrait sketched by her father, of a caravan of camels in a desert of Rajasthan. She is very emotionally connected to it as if it is a means of keeping in touch with her father. Other things also are typically Indian in the home of the Gangulis. It is not just the first generation immigrants but even the second generation immigrants like Moushumi who show their cultural beliefs in the way they beautify their homes. In Moushumi’s flat, there is a Kashmiri crewelwork mat on the floor, Rajasthani silk cushion on the couch and a cast iron Nataraj on a bookshelf reflecting the Indian side of her character.

Even in food taste, their style of eating becomes a combination of Indian and American. The first generation immigrants adhere to the food of their childhood whereas their children would prefer hamburgers, pizzas and donuts anytime. When Gogol and Moushumi marry, they do make an effort to cook Indian food sometimes if only to please their parents.

In the course of time nostalgia gives way to assimilation. As time goes by, Ashima involves herself more in the American way of life with much more self-confidence and independence like a typical American woman. She gets a job as a librarian that results in more contact with the outer world and becomes friends with her American colleagues, a kind of attachment that she had never experienced before. She eventually does her husband’s works like paying the bills, buying tickets, driving the car and changing the house that she never did before his death.
After her husband’s death, she decides to break up her time between India and America: living between her roots in India and her family in America. This can be regarded as Ashima’s adaptation to a transnational character. From the initial stage of alienation, Ashima establishes herself as a transnational personality. She is born in Calcutta but lives most of her adult life in Massachusetts. After initial signs of homesickness, she comprehends that she feels at home in her house on Pemberton Road and is upset that she has to sell it after her husband’s death. However, she delicately handles these emotions and decides to carry on her life devoid of a permanent dwelling, at home wherever her family members are.

The readers can notice that after her early struggle in assimilation, Ashima begins to familiarize with American culture and social norms, like people do not take off shoes before entering the house. Even trays of cat litter could be seen in the kitchen. Ashima is horrified to know that Gogol was taken along with other classmates to a graveyard and asked to trace on paper the names carved on tombstones.

As the Americans become a mystery to her, they also view Ashima as “Jell-O ice cream” lady from India, for she would not have any other food. The Americans eat chicken with its skin, whereas Indians would prefer it skinless. Her faulty English is detected by the nurse Patty when she says ‘finger and toe’ for ‘fingers and toe’ because, in Bengali language, the plural form is not different from the singular.

When it comes to naming the new-born, the Gangulis want Ashima’s grandmother to “do the honours.” In India, the elders in the family are respected and seeking their guidance in such a matter is regarded to be mandatory for the young people. But, Mr. Wilcox, the compiler of the hospital birth certificates, is at his wits’ end in understanding the cause for the Gangulis not naming their child themselves. He wants to know the ‘backup’ name in case they do not like the name recommended by the grandmother. But they could not able to answer this question as it has never come to mind to either of them to distrust Ashima’s grandmother’s selection of the name.

In comparison with Ashima, it should be observed that Ashoke undoubtedly segregates the two roles that he carries out as a university lecturer and as a husband and father at home. He got a job as per his wish, and he is not troubled by cultural differences between the native and adopted country. At home, he plays the role of typical Indian father and husband. At work he accepts the dress code, etc. of the
adopted country and at the same time he follows his culture and identity at home. As a university professor Ashoke is well acknowledged by the educational community of the American University. It is quite clear that reason of Ashoke migrating to the US is only to get specialized knowledge and make money, and hence, he is not bothered about questions of belonging or not belonging to the host society. He can accommodate and assimilate himself into the social framework of the university, but at home, he continues to be the typical Indian male whose family life is basically Indian and to be precise, Bengali.

Through the novel, Lahiri also unfolds the disgusting scene of racial discrimination, prejudice, resentment and marginalization by the unfriendly society and Gogol is a victim of it. As a child, Gogol had sketched the picture of his mother in which he had put a dot on her forehead to signify the bindi worn by the Indian women. He had also pictured his father with his spectacles and his little sister Sonia. When Mrs. Merton, the American babysitter has a look at it, she comments; ‘Well, if that’s not the spitting image.’ (Lahiri, 2003:61) There is also another event that shows how neighbourhood ruffians, driven by prejudices of colour and race, wreak havoc on the migrants. In case of the Ganguli family, it begins with the elimination of the letters ‘ULI’ from the name ‘GANGULI’ written on the mail box of the Ganguli house on Pemberton Road. The hooligans have no just left ‘GANG’ but also added ‘REEN’ to it to indicate ‘GANGEEN’ (American for Gangrene,) which is the name of a horrified illness. Gogol feels bad when he has a look at it. Before long, he gets used to this prejudice as the text remarks; ‘…cashiers in stores smirking at his parents’ accent and of salesmen who prefer to direct their conversation to Gogol, as though his parents were either incompetent or deaf.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 67-68)

The words like ABCD’s are often being used for the immigrants/expatriates standing for American-Born Confused Desi. Gogol is also referred to as an Indian even after knowing that he was born in America. His father has, however, learned to manage this biased behavior of the Americans. Such bizarre actions made the immigrants feel unstable and dislocated and their helplessness to do anything in this regard makes them feel alienated from the mainstream society.

Similarly, the Indians also experience the positive features of American life. An incident is described in which Ashima’s shopping bags are left behind in the train and
are regained later when Ashoke phones up the Lost and Found Department of the company running the trains. They get back all the bags with the contents perfectly in place. This aspect of American life overwhelms Ashima, and she talks about it to her friends over the next few days. “Only in America,” the expression which she enjoyed repeating while referring to the return of her shopping bag on the subway train, also found another context – this time not so attractive one – but then things are not the same everywhere. If there is no lock on the door at New Hampshire, in New York, Ashoke’s car gets broken into in just five minutes, and their suitcase is stolen.

Another positive aspect can be found when Ashima comes back from the hospital with her newborn baby, the landlord’s family arrives and they celebrate their return with champagne. They have also brought broccoli quiche and a basket of old baby clothes that their daughters had once worn. As Ashima goes to the market with her infant in the baby walker, she is approached by many Americans who smilingly praise her for being a mother and ask about the baby, its name, sex, etc. When the Montgomery learns about the death of Ashima’s father, they leave a vase of flowers at their door as a mark of condolence.

Over a period, intermixing of cultures is unavoidable. This feature of assimilation is also spotlighted in the novel, as Lahiri describes life of Ganguli family as follows;

Their garage, like every other, contains shovels and pruning shears and a sled. They purchase a barbecue for tandoori on the porch in summer […] They learn to roast turkeys, albeit rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne, at Thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woolen scarves around snowmen, to color boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter and hide them around the house. For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati. (Lahiri, 2003:64)

Ashoke learns to buy ready-made suits now, exchanges fountain pen for ball pen, etc. Their food habits are changing, and the Americanization process is very among the children.
For the Indian parents who beget children in America, the acculturation of their children according to their home culture becomes difficult. They would love to observe their children immersed in old Indian values, but then the American environment has its impact and the children unconsciously interiorize American values. At their age, it is so easy for the young generation to be influenced by their peer group. Once the children pass out of school and start earning, they do not stay with their parents. This fact has to be accepted by the parents. But for Ashima, it is nothing less than double whammy as the following passage explains;

Having been deprived of the company of her own parents upon moving to America, her children’s independence, their need to keep their distance from her, is something she will never understand. Still, she has knit argued with them. This, too, she is beginning to learn. She had complained to her friends at the library, and they had told her it was inevitable, that eventually parents had to stop assuming that their children would return faithfully for the holidays. (Lahiri, 2003:166)

The Bengali community tries to teach their children Bengali tradition and culture. Ashima teaches Gogol Tagore’s poem, names of deities and festivals, etc. The Indian children are taught to call the family friend as ‘uncle’ or ‘aunty.’ Being Bengalis, Gogol is groomed to call Maya Nandi as Maya Mashi. In the Bengali class arranged by the expatriate Bengali community, Gogol is taught to read and write the alphabet used by his ancestors.

Being the son of Indian parents, Gogol is not expected to take on American Values. It is a matter of contentment for his parents that Gogol does not have any affair in high school. He does not present at dances. His parents do not find it odd that their son doesn’t date, does not rent a tuxedo for his junior prom.

It can also be noticed that Gogol is caught between his traditional Indian roots and the totally conflicting liberal American mainstream culture. After his school days, Gogol tries to move away from his parents’ world and attempts to engross himself into the American culture. His relationships with Maxine and Ruth indicate his desire to move away from the world of his parents and their Indian inheritance. Indian parents generally do not support sexual relations before marriage. However, Gogol’s affairs with American women point out his strong desire to go into the open-minded
society of the Americans. He becomes a true ABCD that is an American Born Confused Desi or Indian.

Sonia is another character that shows an instance of assimilation. Though Jhumpa Lahiri does not fully develop the character of Sonia she depicted her gradual assimilation into American culture without much difficulty. She lives on her own in San Francisco, works for an environmental organization and studies for her Law School Entrance Test. However, when she learns the news of the death of her father, she flies back from San Francisco to be with Ashima. She stays with her mother a takes care of her widowed mother. Unlike Moushumi, she seems to have few relationships. Like her own mother, she has a sense of obligation. Like conventional Indian women, Sonia marries her boyfriend Ben and they are happy in their own world. It can also be observed that Sonia does not go through that feeling of alienation that Gogol does. One of the causes maybe her name that is more familiar with the mainstream American culture than her brother. Although the name Sonia bears a Russian connection, just like her brother’s, yet the name is normally used by westerners to name their children. She engages fully into the host American society and leads a happy life.

Like most diaspora exists, the characters too in the novel often exist concurrently in two cultures- the American reality and the legacy of Indian tradition. Lahiri offers a rich description of their nostalgia and cultural assimilation. The novel faithfully depicts the assimilation of an Indian Bengali family from Kolkata, the Gangulis, into America over a period of 30 years during which they settle down and raise a family. It precisely mirrors the cultural dilemma experienced by the parents as well as their America-born children in different ways, and the cultural and emotional displacements suffered by them in different ways, in familiarizing themselves with their new social and cultural surroundings. As Abha Kaushik- Shukla correctly points out one of the important features of Lahiri’s writing in the following remark;

Whether it is the stories in the collection, Interpreter of Maladies or at the novel The Namesake they are the testament of Lahiri’s versatility as a writer. She has the ability to change cultural perspective as easily as a bilingual person’s ability to shift from language to language. She does not paint pretty pictures. Her canvas is made of details that made
up the reality of everyday life. Most of her works are written from a perspective that is between cultures. (Kaushik, 2010:67)

5.4 Identity Crisis and Family Relationship

Jhumpa Lahiri authentically portrayed identity crisis of the first and second generation expatriates in *The Namesake*. This crisis is dealt with immigrant’s families and their inner and socio-cultural dealings with the people of an alien country.

It should be noted that the reason of Ashoke Ganguli’s migration is to attain academic and economic growth. It can certainly be considered under the category of “brain drain”. In fact, he is escaping to USA from the dreadful experience of the train accident and is encouraged by the memories of a chance encounter with Mr. Ghosh—a middle-aged Bengali Businessman.

Ashoke decides to move to the US much against the desire of his family. Sociologically, this would inevitably signify an interface between two cultures, the conventional Indian Culture, and the modern- Western American culture. As an immigrant Ashoke would have to deal with social values totally alien to him. He would have to attempt to come to terms with this new culture, and he has done it successfully. This sociological process has been described as ‘transculturation’.

In the novel, Lahiri depicts cleverly two roles that Ashoke plays in office and at home. Ashoke lives as a University lecturer with his own office and as a husband and father at home. As the perfect professional, he did not worry by the cultural difference of the being one of racial minority. At home, he shoulders his duties as a typical Indian husband and father. His moving from University town to Cleveland on the nine months esteemed grant too is part of his professional life. On the professional level, Ashoke Ganguli seems to become a part of the host country. The goal of people like Ashoke in an alien country was only earning money— a better economic state than the one they had at home. Hence, Ashoke is not distressed by the questions of belonging and not belonging. The adjustment at workplace allowed Ashoke to protect his cultural identity at home. He manages this dual identity cleverly.

Lahiri does not probe deep into the corners of Ashoke’s mind. The reader never knows whether he is upset by those questions that are confronted by Ashima, Gogol,
Sonia and even Moushumi. To manage both identities is not trouble-free for every immigrant. In fact, in adapting themselves to the new values and ideas, the immigrant is constantly faced with options where he is confused and perplexed. He feels a sense of belonging only with his own community and therefore whenever a decision has to be taken Ashoke, and Ashima continuously have deliberation, discussions only with their own Bengali Community.

Among all the characters, it is Ashima who faces the greatest trouble in modifying her social and cultural identity to become a part of an American culture. In fact, Ashima’s depiction is in direct contrast with his husband, Ashoke. Ashima stands for the majority of women expatriates including Indians, who are unwilling to change their cultural identity or to accept the culture of the host country. This could be an effect of the fact that Ashima does not work outside the home. She has not pursued higher studies in the adopted country. The reluctance to change could also be a direct outcome of the fact that she and others like her are not fully exposed to cultural ethics and roots of this new society. Hence, Ashima lacks the incentives to change.

Unaware of any other option, Ashima marries a man whose name she came to know only after betrothal. She shifts eight thousand miles away to a city featured by harsh snowy winters. In this foreign land, Ashima perceives the new land with apprehension, reluctant to make it her home as she feels much distressed during the period of her pregnancy.

She is very much disturbed by the thought of nurturing a child, in a country where she has no relatives and where she knows very little.

Further, she wants to return India to give birth and nourish a child as she expresses her emotions that are her indirect request to her husband as is mentioned in the text;

“I don’t want to raise Gogol alone, in this country, It’s not right, I want to go back.” (Lahiri 2003: 6-7)

The isolation of a woman, all alone in a new city---while the husband is at work all day—is clearly seen in this tentative request of Ashima. Actually, the analogy of pregnancy has been used to portray her feelings as an expatriate.
As a foreigner, Ashima is started to understand is a sort of lifelong pregnancy as the text says: ‘...a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been an ordinary life only to discover that previous life had vanished, replace by something more complicated and demanding.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 49-50)

Ashima’s loneliness and feeling of alienation are further heightened when she is alone with the newborn Gogol at home. Being alone Ashima spends a lot of her time weeping, disheartened at the lack of company, at the distance from her family and at the unfamiliarity of everything around her.

The writer compares and contrasts the steady rise up the academic ranking for Ashoke with Ashima’s life that is a nonstop struggle to adapt to a completely new kind of social and cultural identity as an immigrant woman. A contrast is also seen in the way American woman lives alone like (Unlike the woman in India) as the text writes; ‘Eating, driving herself to work in snow, and street, seeing her children and grandchildren, at most, three or four times a year.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 48)

However, as the novel moves forward Ashima steadily learns to look at US with less problematic eyes. Though she continues to dress in traditional Bengali sari and attend functions of Bengali community, Ashima gradually adopts and adapts her new identity. She begins to learn to do things on her own, lives herself when children move out. After the death of Ashoke, some friends suggest her to move to Calcutta. But she has no desire to do so. Ashima thinks that she has learned to live alone. She also realizes that even in India, she will have to live with this feeling of loneliness as the text puts it in the following words;

Living alone after the death of her husband, Ashima finally learns to cope with the life. She decides to spend six months every year in India. In a way she will be true to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders with a home of her own, a resident of everywhere and nowhere. (Lahiri, 2003: 276)

The above remark of the novelist clearly indicates Ashima’s new identity reflecting true meaning of her name.
Much of the part of the novel revolves around the metaphor of name that is the most basic part of a human being’s identity. Individual names are very important as they describe in large part that who we are, how we are viewed, and even how we recognize ourselves. When we meet someone new, the first thing we report to that person about ourselves is our name. So much about us alters as we grow elder, but our names remained stable. We change it rarely, and the change marks a turning point in our lives. Woman’s name changes after her marriage in conventional Indian culture. When we select a name for our child, it is generally a very careful and deliberative act. Name is the most important feature of an individual’s personality inasmuch as it is through their names only that the individuals become a part of the society and finds a meaningful life. Our name is our identity and a window on our culture and self. The first, instant answer to the question: “Who are you?” is our name. The significance and even sacredness of the name cannot be denied.

This name itself becomes the main reason of identity crisis confronted by Gogol. The novel revolves around his namesake. This identity dilemma also influences Gogol’s family relationship and his social relation with his peers. By the age of fourteen, Gogol has come to despise his first name, which he regards both ridiculous and ambiguous. He detests signing his name on the sketches he makes in class. He grows up hating his unusual and odd name or being asked questions about it which only aggravates his problem. When asked if it stands for anything in India he hates having to say that there is nothing Indian about it. His name sounds “ludicrous” to him “lacking dignity or gravity.” He cannot understand why he has been given a Russian name. And afterward in life he cannot comprehend why his pet name became his ‘good’ name. A matter only deteriorates when he comes to know about Gogol’s life.

He is still ignorant that had it not been for Gogol’s book, his father would have died, and his ancestry would have ended on that dreadful day. However, Gogol does realize that it is his own ‘fault’ as well because he could have accepted to be called Nikhil at school. In that case, he would have been Gogol only fifty percent of the time as the text remarks; ‘Like his parents when they went to Calcutta, he could have had an alternative identity, a B-side to the self.’ (Lahiri, 2003:76)
In fact, Gogol Ganguli’s struggle for searching his identity is twofold. The name that eventually defines a person’s uniqueness becomes a problem for him. It does not offer him an identity but puts him in a dilemma, about his original identity inherited from his parents, as a child of immigrants in America, he constantly has to struggle with contradictions occurring due to his Indian roots. Gogol has had to negotiate two very dissimilar cultures during his life, as well as a third brought about by his name.

Gogol's search for identity is a never-ending exploration; he cannot get rid of the Indian culture and cannot even entirely acknowledge the American values. This turns out to be continuous, challenging and complicated process for him. He cannot fulfill the expectations of tradition and cannot keep himself away from the fascinations offered by a new culture.

After rejecting to date during high school, partially because of his unusual and odd name, one night when his parents are out of town he goes to a party in a dorm. He launches himself as Nikhil for the first time, to a girl simply called Kim. She replicates ‘Nikhil’, and adds that it is a pretty name. This gives him the courage to kiss her; it was thus not Gogol, but Nikhil who kissed for the first time.

It becomes quite clear that Gogol achieve some success to resolve his identity problem by becoming Nikhil once he is going to join the University. The new identity gives him a sense of liberty, and he is able to get rid of his previous shyness. Altering his name is like a ritual of passage to adulthood for Gogol. As Nikhil, it becomes easier for him to disregard his parents, and he feels he is not indebted to live by their system and norms any longer. As Nikhil he is able to do so much more – grow a goatee, start smoking and drinking, lose his virginity – in short, he is able to do all that he was unable to do as Gogol. Gogol’s self-discovery is influenced by three long relationships that unfold different parts of his emergent identity. His first girlfriend, Ruth, stands for Gogol’s desperate desire for American roots. Maxine, on the other hand, stands his aim to access an upper-class position in American society. Moushumi, the one he actually marries, marks a come back to his ethnic roots.

As Nikhil, he doesn’t feel connected to his parents. So when he visits Boston, the text says, ‘Nikhil evaporates, and Gogol claims him again.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 106) He offers us the perfect instance of the split character or the creation of two personae. It
takes place not only because he despises his name, but also because he goes through the sense of denial twice as he feels the sense of exile and alienation too.

The title of the novel reveals the significance that Jhumpa Lahiri attaches to the identity of her protagonist. The naming of the central character as Gogol and afterward as Nikhil brings in a conflict between both names and the identities attached to them. ‘Gogol’ is a Russian name and seems inappropriate to the boy as it is neither American nor Indian. He had to clarify it for his friends and others as to why such a name was given him in the first place. In a way, the problem regarding the name signifies the problem of his identity: who exactly is he – American or Indian or someone else? In the uncertain circumstances in which he is placed – son of Indian immigrant family brought up in America and torn between conflicting pulls of his peers and parents – he fails to comprehend whether he should listen to his mind or heart, his father’s death angles the equilibrium on one side.

It is as Nikhil; Gogol confronts the dilemma of establishing his actual identity. He finds it hard to recognize that Gogol and Nikhil are both becomes part of his own self and twist between this psychological conflict he feels as he is having dual sets of character now – Gogol is the son of Indian parents who wants him to live, act and behave as per Indian culture and values; Nikhil is the free, open-minded person, who has left his history behind and had nothing to do with Gogol. It is as Nikhil that Gogol forgets all the cultural limitations enforced on him by his parents, and wants to live his life just like his American peers.

He manages to have a dual existence - an existence having both Indian and American cultural values. Gogol stands for the Indian part of him whereas Nikhil stands for all the cultural values that America has offered to Gogol. When he experiences these two lives, that Gogol understands the need for an identity, which is not based on his roots. The predicament that Gogol experiences reveals that misery that every immigrant experiences when he has to answer any question associated with his or her identity. Though he is born and brought up in America yet to Americans, he is still an Indian. And when he comes back to the country of his roots he is regarded as NRI. The feeling of belongingness, the yearning to be known by one's root is worldwide, and perhaps it is the only cause that a person eventually returns to the country of his birth. The agony, the pain, the helplessness to adjust to foreign
surrounding, compels the immigrants to desire for their own homeland where their own people surround them. But in the *The Namesake*, Lahiri had movingly depicted the dilemma of the subsequent generation, who has no motherland to be called as their own. They are living in a land, which they ‘own’ by birth, but to which they can never ‘belong’ because of their roots. As Reema Chhabra remarks;

‘Google is constituted as an epitome of an American-Indian hybrid who vacillates between his Indian identity and American nationality.’ (Chhabra, 2005:75)

Through her masterly art, Lahiri gives different aspects to what a name can mean. It is not only the way others know you but also how you consider yourself. She emphasizes the efforts necessary to reconcile between people and situations as also between cultures and social practices.

For the Indian parents, the children are recognized by their special names given for the purpose. We may call them nicknames, but these are not the fixed nicknames like the way Americans use, as, for example, every William will be called Bill and every Elizabeth, Lizzy. So far as the Indian parents are concerned, no parent called a child by his or her good name. Good names had no place within Indian/Bengali family. The good names are the ones used in public, and their need arises when the child enters a school. In Gogol’s example too, the parents wanted to change the name to Nikhil and had filled the form in his first school for this reason, but then Gogol had not been geared up in advance for this change. As an outcome, he failed to react to questions put to him when the Principal addressed him as Nikhil. Sensing the child’s reluctance for it, she changed the name to Gogol. As a young child, is unable to relate to Nikhil and turns out to be Gogol and to which he afterward regrets. This incident of school admission and change of name resulted in disgust when Gogol’s classmates make fun of his name. Sometimes they would harass him, mortifying his name to “Giggle” or “Gargle”. Gogol, even as a child, was conscious of the importance of identity is disclosed by the field visit of his class to the graveyard where other children located the graves of the members of their family as revealed by the surname mentioned in the epitaph, but to his disappointment, he could not find any ‘Ganguli’ buried there. His first name ‘Gogol’ did not link him to either the Indian community or the American, and so it dampened his state of mind. It dismays him that his parents chose the weirdest namesake. When Gogol reaches his teenage and when other boys
were moving out with girls, he could not visualize saying “Hi, its Gogol” under potentially romantic conditions. He wishes he could mask it, abbreviate it somehow, but his name is already short and catchy, it refused to accept any alteration. Gogol sounded nonsensical to his ears, lacking self-respect or importance. He is disappointed by its worthlessness. He wished he could have been known, at school at least, as Nikhil. It was only in 1986, when he entered Yale as a fresher that Gogol changed his name to ‘Nikhil’ but it created an unusual kind of psychological problem for him. As the writer points out, he did not yet feel like Nikhil as the text says; ‘after eighteen years of Gogol, two months of Nikhil feel scant, inconsequential. At times, he feels as if he is cast himself in a play-acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different.’(Lahiri, 2003: 105)

He could transform himself into Gogol only a few times just. Like his parents as they went to Calcutta, he could have had a substitute identity, a B-side to the self. He had the last name of the writer turned first name, a pet name turned good home, and it occurred to him that no one in the world, in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shared his name. Not even the source of his namesake. In his high school, he comes to learn about the biographical facts of the writer Gogol – who was a Russian novelist and dramatist, whose early aims to become a poet and an actor and to move abroad. Unfortunately, all of them were failed. During his last years, he becomes depressive and a religious fanatic. He was morbidly despondent, given to fits of severe depression, had trouble making friends, never married, fathered no children. It was generally thought he died a virgin. He pronounced a death sentence on himself and proceeded to commit slow suicide by starvation. This was more for Gogol to suffer quietly and an article, ‘Second Baptism’ encouraged him to go in for a change of a name lawfully to Nikhil and Gogol become a man whose destiny had pronounced to live not only in two words, two different cultures but as two different personalities- Gogol and Nikhil. He did not want his past yet he could never leave it. His split self become the reality. He felt separated from self, living at the same time in two versions –Gogol was one version linked with family and India, whom at this point he wanted to escape in the new version of Nikhil who was an American. This manifested his struggle to find identity in the nation that considered one an alien even if one was born there.
The name-change was sought to be relegated to past, but its ghost got up once when he visited home in Maxine’s company and his father addressed him as ‘Gogol.’ The writer herself refers to him as Gogol. He had learned, by now, from his father the secret of his naming – the story of the train accident and Nikolai Gogol’s story book. He realized the importance of the name for it symbolized a new life for his father. His father did not want to tell him because it reminded him of that nightmare. Later, when his wife Moushumi revealed out the secret, he felt cheated and upset.

It should be noted that Gogol’s identity is divide/torn between two places India/America, between two names, Indian/Russian, between two value systems and cultures conventions and openness and let go attitude, between science and creativity where his parents wanted him to take up an occupation like an engineer or a doctor or lawyer or an economist and he wanted something creative and became an architect, between his own genetic and ethnic self where hereditarily he has his own values, connected to his traditions and has a unique self, ethnically he’s an alien, a second class citizen in America, between his ego, as the male and the female, where he feels he earns less than what is required, his wife had a better status. His complexes get mirrored through Moushumi, who feels disappointed somewhere having married him, when she reflects, ‘Nikhil has a respectable if not a terribly lucrative job. It would have been different with Graham –he’s made more than enough money for both of them.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 254)

Gogol feels alienated in Paris among his wife’s former friends, and somewhere both start sensing that getting into an arranged-cum-love marriage was a hasty decision, and this is how his identity crisis deepens. His living is concurrently on two fronts, like a pendulum he keeps moving to and fro and when he goes to the home, half way he feels that Nikhil fades away and Gogol takes his place. There is no decision to lie on either side, he feels sliced up, seized and worn out. Gogol moves out of the family and roots as Nikhil, which he felts thrilling and courageous at first but suffers and returns to his roots at last, as his mother too tended to do after Ashoke’s death, moving to India to her roots. At times, he felt as if he’d cast himself in a play, performing the role of twins, impossible to differentiate to the naked eye yet basically different. Lahiri takes note of the dual nature of the expatriate’s life.
After the death of Ashoke, Gogol recognizes the significance of his name to his father. He comprehends how important the name had been for Ashoke as he had always considered the Russian author Nikolai Gogol to be his savior when Ashoke almost died in the train accident in 1961 when he was on his way to meet his grandparents. Gogol starts to see his name and relationship with his father in a new light. Finally, a connection is reinstated between Ashoke and his son, and the latter is able to understand that he is formed by both cultures. He does not have to one or the other; in fact he is made up of both. With this fresh thought, Gogol is no longer uncomfortable with his name or the way he has lived. Gogol comprehends the transnational, trans-generational significance of his name. He now knows that his name carries his father’s heritage formed by his father’s love for literature and reverence for Nikolai Gogol. Gogol begins to recognize his father’s emotional reason behind selecting that specific name. For him now, the name carries his father’s legacy as well as the inheritance of a Bengali Hindu family where naming a child is regarded to be auspicious. The name ‘Gogol’ now traverses geographical boundaries and assume an encompassing importance for the younger Ganguli. Gogol realizes that he is a transnational, influenced by two cultures that have formed his identity. After Ashoke dies, Gogol breaks up with his American girlfriend Maxine and is more worried about his family and preserves some of his unseen Indian side of identity, mainly by taking his mother’s guidance to marry Moushumi, a family friend of his parents’ Indian circle of friends in America. Two major moments in Gogol’s life mark his remarkable alteration. The first is when he hears the story that has led to his naming. He is shocked by Ashoke’s confession, looks at his father as if he were a complete stranger, a man whose previous life he does not really know. He attempts to visualize life without his father, a world in which he does not exist, but is not able to until his father’s death really does happen. This is the second massive shock Gogol suffers; one that finally enables him put together all the parts of his identity and synchronizes past, present, and future.

Gogol realizes the guilt that his parents conceded within at being able to do nothing when their parents had died in India and accuses himself of not having kept in touch more often.

Not only does Gogol understand, but he also feels the need to respect all the stages in the Indian mourning rituals. Thus, he cuts off his hair, a Bengali son’s duty
when a parent dies, and identifies with his father who had done the similar when his father passed away. Gogol stays with Sonia and Ashima during the whole mourning phase, and when Maxine drives up from New York to bring some of his things, he does not concern any longer how his humble parental house might look to her. All through the ceremony she feels of no use and banned in the house full of Bengalis, but Gogol does not bother to interpret what they are discussing or to introduce her to everyone. At this moment, he does not want to get away from his roots and family and feels no longing to return to New York. Instead, he segregates with the American woman who is not able to associate to his culture.

His relationship with Ruth cut off when after she has been in England, he felt that something had altered. Moushumi, his legal wife, after her love affair with Dimitri, leaves after which Gogol is worn out and injured within, though outwards he is all self-control as somewhere he expected those Indian morals, his mother-like commitment from her, not recognizing the truth that she was born and brought up outside India. He found his relationships bereft to true love. Unlike him, all the three women in his life go ahead with their lives, Maxine gets engaged again, and Moushumi takes divorce and moves to Paris and Ruth plans to shift to England again. He thinks of his life at 32, married and divorced, feeling exhausted as his Namesake and if he would ever have a child to name.

Towards the end of the novel, we find that Gogol grows philosophical. His marriage was a failure, and then his father’s death was an awful accident. We find that Gogol has re-connected himself with the family and drawn the right motivation from his father’s life. At thirty-two, he is now grown-up enough to realize fully what his parents went through – how they lived a lonely life, away from their near and dear ones for so long. One has to move on in life. The house in which he and Sonia grew up will be vanished to them. He is ready to start his own firm in the land of promise and build the goodwill of his own name, even as he regrets the loss of his old name due to scattering of the family.

We can also consider the character of Moushumi, another girl born to Indian immigrants. She is Bengali, like Sonia and Nikhil. She feels the same sense of loneliness to start with. Her way of dealing with the clash of cultures is dissimilar from the other two. By choosing to specialize in French literature she decides to
submerge herself into a completely new language and does not a new way of life. Her getting admission into a French University gives her that chance. In Thanksgiving new environment, with a new language and new friends, she puts on a new personality too, even though she does not alter her name like Gogol did to offer himself a new identity.

As she turns her back to the two countries that could ‘claim’ her and escapes to a third, a totally unrelated, where she eventually confirms her individuality by rejecting any roots.

Away from parents and Indian influence she allows herself all the liberty that had been refused to her. She learns to dress fashionably, become sexually licentious, to tempt men who can treat her to a lavish lifestyle and shower her with attention and offerings. Living in this manner she is befriended by Graham, who proposes to her. Her parents had given their consent to her plans, feeling relieved that she is getting married at last (which are what Indian parents always desire and expect of their children). However, unfortunately, he develops cold feet at the last moment. When all is ready, the caterers remunerated, the guests invited, and all essential preparations made, he calls it off.

This becomes another example of ‘no matter how much you are engrossed in the new culture, you never really fit in.’ Both her parents and she have a sense of having been put down in front of everybody. Marriage is something no one wishes to suggest for a while.

Moushumi’s lavish life style in French land can be viewed as her self-conscious, an uncontrolled attempt to wipe out her family’s influence and the restrictions of their Indian attitudes. In some way it also looks like she is taking revenge on herself, decomposing brutally only to recreate a transnational identity.

Nikhil and Moushumi are more or less in the similar dilemma. They set up for a blind date by their mothers. Despite both being quite reluctant to the suggestion, they do meet, and they do get on. She remembers him as the Gogol of her childhood. Moushumi is, in some ways rather pleased, because she feels from the beginning that this will result in marriage. There is a certain level of ease for they had known each other as children and their parents had also known one another. There seems to be a
similarity between them; they are both confused and perturbed people, born into one culture and shifted to another.

However, this marriage does not work for their scales of assimilation differ; their expectations of each other differ. They are looking for different things in marriage. In the beginning they are happy but the moment she is back with her friend, Astrid and Donald, Nikhil begins to observe a change. She begins drifting from him under the pretext of studies.

The final straw comes when she coincidently finds Dimitri’s address and phone number and contacts him. He belongs to her past; she had a crush on him, but he stimulated her only to leave her feelings discontented. Unable to articulate her name he had always called her ‘Mouse.’ Once back together they begin dating and seeing each other quite frequently. She has the excuse of her work. Moushumi suffers no qualms of conscience as she feels she is a dissimilar person when she is with him. The guilt she had felt when noting his phone number is put to rest when she does not write his name. It is surprising as the text informs, ‘the affair causes her to feel strangely at peace.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 266) It helps structure her day in some way.

Aspect of hyphenated identity is also focused in the novel. It is a Ruth is the fact that first generation immigrants try to keep their contact alive with India to a degree by making regular trips to their motherland. At first it is also done as parents are still there. However, as time passes and they being to settle down in the new country, those trips become less frequent. Once Ganguli family settled in their family life, their trips to Calcutta became less. By the time Gogol is ten, his father gets his vacation, and the family decides to go to Calcutta for eight months not considering of the children’s school.

These trips offer Lahiri the opportunity to bring in here the sense of denial, or not belonging, that the children experience. None of their friends are ever interested in knowing where they went or what kind of a holiday they had. There is a total indifference to their life as it were. After the eight-month gap when they are returned, as the text describes; they call up their American friends, who are happy enough to see them but ask them nothing about where they’ve been. And so the eight months are put behind, quickly shed, quickly forgotten, the clothes worn for a special occasions,
or for a season that has passed, suddenly cumbersome, irrelevant to their lives. (Lahiri, 2003: 88)

That is how the children, Gogol, and Sonia, think of these holidays: as something “unrelated” to their lives. At a young age, they understand that India does not give them the sense of belonging that they have in America. Born and bred abroad they are more at home in that country. They cannot think of India as home as their parents can. When they are in America, they are not fully incorporated in that society either. So this sense of not belonging becomes deep-rooted at an early age. Their identity crisis is thus more prominent. That is always the case with the second generation, as the parents know themselves to the Indian. However, the children, who have identified only America as home, find India odd and more alien than America. The paradox is that though they are American citizens the Americans do not accept them. Jhumpa Lahiri tells us in one of her interviews how if she answered she was American, she was questioned still further and asked ‘But, from where?’ So the American identity she gets is hyphenated one: she is Indo-American. This sort of ethnic alienation upsets all the Indian children that crowd the pages of the novel with the effect that in their childhood they grow up wanting to delink themselves from all things Indian. This diaspora dilemma of second generation immigrants culminated in their identity crisis. The different dilemmas of Ashima and Gogol about their identity crisis are pointed out by R. N. Sinha in his following observation;

By and large The Namesake is the novel of dichotomies, portrayed through cultures, values, ethics, and attitudes. These dichotomies only help the characters emerge more directly. With America being the real presence in the novel, India seems nowhere absent. The characters not only come to terms with America and give way to its common sense but some of them like Ashima and Gogol eventually find their niche in life and are apparently all set to embark upon routes that would lead them to their roots. (Sinha, 2005)

Another factor surfaced through The Namesake is dissimilarities between an Indian and the Western family units that draw attention to the family relationship in a diasporic dilemma. Parents from the west rarely intervene in their children’s private
life; they value their privacy and individuality. This is rather contradictory to the eastern parents’ tendency of interfering at every moment of their children’s life.

When Gogol becomes friendly with Ruth and starts dating her, her parents accept the idea of his staying over at their house but he cannot envision the similar condition in his own house. The liberty of premarital sex seems quite acceptable to American parents, would come as profanity to his parents. Moreover, years later, his mother is all right with Sonia’s and Ben’s relationship, even before they are married.

In this respect, Sonia and Gogol can appreciate each other and share their confidence of having a girlfriend or a boyfriend, with each other but cannot share it with their parents. This is not because a generational gap only but partially owing to a cultural gap as well. When his parents do come to know about Ruth they are unable to accept her as her parents had accepted him. On the opposite, they are turning down feeling as they believe Gogol is very young to get caught up in such things and refer to examples of other Bengali men whose marriages with American women resulted in divorce.

Ruth’s going away to Oxford ended the relationship between them as both gradually understand that things had altered between them. Gogol next joins up with Maxine whom he encounters at a party. She is the one who takes the initiative however by going up to him to talk to him when she finds him staying detached from the conversation they had all been contributing in. Again it is she who calls him and invites him over to dinner, to which he cannot say no as she is a pretty girl.

Gogol grows to like her and her house. He finds her parents, Lydia, and Gerald, delightful and is quite enthralled by the entire set-up: Maxine’s easy manner, her big sprawling house, and her parents and their passionate lifestyle. He falls in love with the whole thing about them, their food, their wines, and their holidays and cannot help realizing how diverse in every way his own parents are.

Gogol observes the dissimilarities in their relationship and his life with his own parents as the text depicts; ‘Maxine is open about her past, showing him photographs of her ex-boyfriends in the pages of a marbles-papered album, speaking of those relationships without embarrassment or regret. She has the gift of accepting life; … he
realizes that she has never wished she were anyone other than herself, raised in any other place, in any other way.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 137-138)

Gogol has no trouble in getting into Maxine’s life; Gerald and Lydia, the parents of Maxine too like Gogol very much so he is a welcome guest in their house. Gogol and Maxine often go out for shopping, without any remorse. Soon after his work, Gogol goes to their house and sleeps with Maxine, the whole night he would be making love to her; the young people’s room is just above the one in which Gerald and Lydia lie. Gerald and Lydia feel nothing when they see Gogol and Maxine join them downstairs in the morning for coffee.

The language of endearment usually used by her parents is absent in the lives of his parents. He cannot remember a single example of physical intimacy between them as he gets to see between her parents, there is nothing tempting about his house or lifestyle. Gogol understands that being with Maxine is to deny completely his Indian roots and culture. That gives him a vague sense of guilt at times. The fact that his father dies when he is holidaying with her family, having declined to spend time with his own, only adds to it.

At every step, we have subtle indications and clues of how the emotional bonds that connect Indian parents to their children are differently articulated and shown from the way American parents express and show. No matter how adult Gogol is or how regularly he comes, his father is always there to welcome him at the station. Even the time when the train is very late his father, huddled up in his woolen garments and is waiting for him in the chilly climate. That is possibly the first time Gogol surprises if his father is feeling alone and what his requirements might be.

On hearing about the accident, Ashoke uses the occasion to inform his son why he had named him Gogol. With a pang, he realizes how much of an alien his father is to him. However, we cannot find fault with Ashoke for this. On one of his birthdays when he had presented him the stories of Nikolai Gogol, he had made an effort to give details and tell the story of his accident. However, Gogol increased the volume of the music, at which his father left devoid of explanation. Moreover, now when he tells him and Nikhil asks why he had not told him all those years, he simply says: “I did not want to upset you” (Lahiri, 2003: 123). Caring as always, he does not take him back of the previous attempt but tells a lie easily.
Indian parents become quite disturbed when they discover their children acquire to American ways, which are entirely revulsion to their social and religious attitudes, values and practices. When Ashima’s son Gogol dates Maxine and goes to spend his vacation with the girl’s parents, Ashima feels the rift in her heart.

It is a well-accepted fact that sex between two agreeable adults is a way of life in the US. Pre-marital sex is something that is so common in America. However, it is not acceptable in India; sex before marriage is a banned thing in India. Gogol waits for Ruth at the arrival gate and takes her to a restaurant for one night. The text says, “They’d made love for the first time in a double bed.” (Lahiri, 2003: 119) When Gogol ends his affair with Ruth, he develops one with Maxine; amazingly, it is Maxine who has seduced Gogol. Gogol’s parents are unresponsive about Maxine, but Maxine is so cheerful and social that she attempted to connect with the Bengali immigrant family.

It is almost a common pattern in the US that the first marriage more often than not fails in a year’s time and the second marriage perpetually clicks. In the novel, Ruth is living with her father and stepmother; her mother might have in all likelihood taken another man. For the Americans, it is a way of life, but if such a thing happens to the Indians having abroad, they do get affected by it. Even dating is not a serious affair between the Americanized Indian children. Gogol stops his dating with American women more than once. As the text says; ‘A few months after his father’s death, he stepped out of Maxine’s life for good.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 188) There is absolutely no awkwardness either in him or in his lady love, Maxine. He comes to know from Maxine’s parents’ Gerald and Lydia of their daughter’s engagement to another man. Earlier, Gogol’s father’s death disturbs him very much, and he becomes extremely silent these days. Though he shares his bed with Maxine, there is some coldness in their attitude; at first she tolerates his unresponsiveness in bed; she knows that he has to visit his mother and sister now that his father is no more. Maxine feels jealous of his mother and sister.

In India children rarely go away from their parents even after their marriage. They live with their parents enjoying their love and shelter. However, such is not the case with American children. They seldom live with their parents. The moment they graduate; they rarely visit their parents too. But Maxine looks different. She tells
Ashima that she is living with her parents; Ashima is surprised to hear this; she says, “Really? I thought no one did that in America” (Lahiri, 2003: 149). Indian parents are also awfully concerned about the welfare of their children. Seeing that Gogol is going steady with Maxine, his parents are very much upset. Gogol celebrates his twenty-seventh birthday not with his parents but with Maxine and her people on their farm. He is sleeping then with Maxine placing his arm around her narrow waist. He feels more relaxed in Maxine’s company. Unable to do much to their children, the parents of Gogol and Sonia relieve themselves in the philosophical reminder as the text says; ‘Everybody should live on their own, at some point.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 161)

As compared to Maxine’s parents Ashoke and Ashima’s relationship is very intimate yet not overt. The closest thing that Ashima had ever experienced to the touch of a man before her marriage was when she secretly stepped into her would-be husband’s shoes. When Gogol observes Maxine’s parents, Gerald and Lydia kisses openly and walks through the city just as he and Maxine do. On the contrary, Gogol thinks and the text says; ‘...that in all his life he had never witnessed a single moment of physical affection between his parents. Whatever love exists between them is an utterly private, uncelebrated thing.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 138) When Maxine says that was so depressing, Gogol is upset at her reaction but he cannot help but agree as a Westerner. Gogol since childhood has recognized himself more as an American than as an Indian but through his number of sexual relationships he comes to understand that he simply cannot have a single identity. Being in a diaspora, he is forever exiled.

As per above analysis it can be certainly argued that Jhumpa Lahiri convincingly captured identity crisis and family relationship of the first and second generation immigrants through her minute observation and faithful description of diasporic predicament.

5.5 Intergenerational Gap

Diasporic sensibility is not something permanent; it keeps on altering as time and place changes. This change generates an intergenerational gap which is faithfully portrayed by Jhumpa Lahiri in The Namesake. The diasporic dilemma is one thing to the first generation expatriates and another to the second-generation immigrants. As it is felt to be a must in order to be accepted in the new nation, the Diasporic community
has to prove themselves to some sort of assimilation. However, when it comes to the question of second-generation children in the west, they easily become accustomed to the new surroundings; their assimilation is tension-free unlike their parents. But whether they are acknowledged into the mainstream of western life or not is a debatable point. Consistently, their dilemma is like the predicament of ‘Trisanku’.

The novel depicts how Sonia grows up more American than her brother in many ways. She starts going to dances and does the things her American friends do that Gogol never did. Being the younger sibling, her task of assimilation is made somewhat easier as her brother has led the way. For example, Gogol wants his mother to buy a Christmas tree even before Sonia can miss that they do not celebrate Christmas like the other. He leaves home for New Haven to study, making it easier for her to do so later.

This is only one instance among many others that presents the differences in assimilation between the two generations. It is the children who introduce the parents to the American notions, as they acquire them involuntarily. To give another example, Gogol can refer to New Haven as ‘home’ after only three months of living there while Ashima cannot think of Pemberton Road as home even after twenty years. In the beginning it hurts but the parents soon learn to accept.

Immigrant parents’ children rarely follow their parents; as the children in the west feel matured and free as soon as they matriculate, the Indian children imitate their western counterparts and hardly ever listen to their parents’ advice. When Gogol gets a fellowship, his parent think that he will choose the MIT, which is his father’s dream and move to Massachusetts. However, instead, he chooses Columbia University for his Architectural boyfriend and moves to New York, a place that his parents do not know well. In fact, he doesn’t want to go home on weekends as the text says; ‘to go with them (his parents) to pujas and Bengali parties, to remain unquestionably in their world.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 126) Gogol has his own group of friends and in one of the parties; he meets Maxine, another man’s girlfriends. Russell is a diabetic patient with whom Maxine seems to be exhausted and done with. She is working as a junior editor for a publisher of art books. As she is a blond and an attention-grabber, she is able to get Gogol’s attention spotlighting on her completely. The next morning her phone call wakes him up and without any nervousness she
invites him to dinner at her place. He asks her whether her parents would mind his coming over there. Her reaction is typically American; “Why on earth would they mind?” (Lahiri, 2003:129)

Americanized children very often disagree with their parents when their lifestyle goes totally contradictory to their Indian parents’ expectation. When Gogol goes steady with his girl friend Ruth, his parents are a bit anxious because they know many Bengalis in the US, who have married American women, but their marriages have concluded in divorce. Gogol’s parents are shocked when he tells them that marriage is the last thing in his mind. In this connection the text narrates; ‘…he even pities his parents when they speak to his this way, for having no experience of being young and in love.’ (Lahiri, 2003:117) Gogol’s sister, Sonia, too, has also adopted the American way of life and has a secret boy friend; parents’ warning about these things does not have any effect on them. The ABCDs (‘American-born confused desis’) do not develop any deep affinity with the other desis. Gogol is no exception to this. When his distant cousin Amit asks him, as the text says; “Why he is not a member of the Indian Association in the US?” He says, “I just don’t have the time.” (Lahiri, 2003: 119)

Jhumpa Lahiri also depicts in The Namesake, how the sexual wants of first generation migrant Indians vary from those of the second generation and in general how the sexual wants of the Indian diaspora is different from those of the native Western inhabitants. When Ashima is pregnant with Gogol, she is admitted to a hospital where she finds herself lonely as the curtains cut off the three other women in the room. When she overhears a husband consoling his wife by saying, “I love you, sweetheart” (Lahiri, 2003: 3), she realizes that these words; ‘she has neither heard nor expects to hear from her own husband; that is how they are.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 3)

The first generation diasporic Indians have a sentimental involvement in the country of their origin but the second generation diasporic Indians have no direct link with their ethnic roots; they identify themselves with their traditions and culture via their parents. This estrangement effect helps them in recognizing themselves also as citizens of the Western world. It is as westerners that they are most effective in articulating their anguish against the duality of their identity. It is a regular process of switching on and off from one manner of living to the other that they have to go through. In this state of concurrently living in two worlds, the feeling of rootlessness
creeps in. Broken down by such a condition the second generation diasporic Indians seek shelter in the sense of liberty that the Western world affords—freedoms of thought, speech, expression, lifestyle, sexuality and so on. It is particularly the sexual freedom of the West that offers a ready lifeline as an emotional relief from the pain of being in exile.

_The Namesake_ reveals how the first generation is nostalgic and attempts to keep up the connection alive through visits, observing calls, ceremonies and seeking relaxation and comfort in the letters they get from India. Life without their parents and grandparents therefore seems chaotic only half true to them. Ashima and Ashoke’s never-ending wait for the letter including the prospective name of the child reveals the tie of love, care, and respect that exists for their near and dear ones and till then the boy is given a pet name, Gogol, for the benefit of the hospital record and which Ashima agrees, conscious that the name stands not only for her son’s life, but her husband’s also. Lahiri also talks of the cultural shocks; the obedient housewives from Bengal get seeing the life and living styles of the Westerners. As, when Ashima remembers the apartment of their landlords the Montgomery’s with abiding horror as the text describes; ‘just beyond the ceiling yet so different from her own, piles everywhere, piles of books and papers, piles of dirty plates on the kitchen counter, ashtrays the size of serving platters heaped with crushed-out cigarettes.’ (Lahiri, 2003: 31-32)

The first-generation immigrants are very particular that their children should be nurtured in their own culture. So people like the Gangulis gave ample training to their children in the Bengali language, literature and history at home and made them acquainted with their own religious traditions, beliefs, food habits, etc. Ashima makes it a point to teach Gogol children’s poems written by Tagore and all the names of the deities that they worship – Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Ganesh, etc. Yet at the same time, she exposes them to American programmes like ‘Sesame Street’ and ‘The Electric Company’ to be familiar with the American English taught in school. She is aware that she cannot keep her children in the shield of Indian culture as what they see all around them. All that she can do is to make them familiarize with the cultures, one that she was born in and the other they were born in. She has to become bicultural if she wants to merge with everything around her. There are many things that are very confusing to Ashima, for example, the need to put the name of a baby on the birth
certificate. It was this that gave Gogol his strange name whereas in the case of Sonia they were ready. However, Ashima soon settles down and cannot refuse to accept some of the American customs, like Christmas and Thanksgiving, and celebrates them with the same cheerfulness and passion as they do Durga Puja and Deepawali. The children favor the American festivals as they are accompanied by attractive gifts, and even in food it is the American and continental food that is preferred by the children to the mouth-licking Bengali dishes. These children have assimilated into American culture even though not totally dissociated from their cultural and ethnic roots.

The visits to India bring out the different approaches and intergenerational gap more sharply. The parents look ahead to the reunion with their families and relatives whereas for the children it is a mandatory responsibility. They are painful and worried in this environment that is strange for them. In The Namesake as well as in Interpreter of Maladies Jhumpa Lahiri talk about the interactions of cultures that takes place in the lives of the immigrants. They stick up to the past as they have left it behind, yearning for what they had seen in their childhood and youth. They have settled down in a new land and raised there are like a two different personas in the same body – one in the US and the other in India. In The Namesake, on one of their visits to Kolkata, Gogol and Sonia are stunned at the change that they see in their parents.

The response of the parents is in complete contrast to that of the children. The parents feel at home in Kolkata while the children feel very odd having lived their lives in the US. This contrast is again noticeable when the family returns to America. The children are happy that they are going back. The author repeats the word ‘relief’ again and again to focus the entirely varying reactions at leaving Kolkata with the parents and the children. The cultural rift is apparent as the question here is the fundamental connection to their respective birthplace.

Jhumpa Lahiri, despite her upbringing in the progressive and technocrat Society of America, recreates her affinity with Bengali land and Bengali culture through the experiences of Bengali Indian immigrants settled in America. She investigates the psyche of resistance working within the perception of both the group – the first generation of immigrants who live in their exile as “Indian Americans” and the second generation of immigrants who have accepted their destiny as “Americanized Indians”. The first generation of immigrants suffer the pain of “dislocation” and encounter an American culture with ‘discontent’ and ‘distress’ in a state of nostalgia.
with the pride of their national inheritance. On the other hand, the second generation of immigrants adopts a ‘distant’ and ‘romantic view’ of home culture and look forward to the condition of immigration as a way to understand their dilemma against the burden of conventional cultural bondages.

However, this intergenerational dichotomy mitigates with the passage of time. After staying in America for about thirty years which is considered as one generation the elder expatriates more or less compromise with the desire of their children to come to reality. The concept of home for Ashima steadily changed and was replaced by a new meaning. After her husband’s death, her house in America became a home for her where she began to celebrate Christmas, Thanksgiving and Halloween with her children. She had decided to split her time evenly between India and America, paying no attention to suggestions of her friends to leave America and settle down in India. This process of assimilation in the first and second generation immigrants is pointed out by Tejinder Kaur in the following comment;

They also face cultural dilemma when their cultural practices are mocked at, and there is a threat to their cultural identity. They stand bewildered and confused and show resistance also to the discourse of power in various forms. In the following generations, these confusions, problems and yearnings become less intense as they get less influenced by the culture of that country and also adopt themselves to it. (Kaur, 2002:192)

5.6 Film version of the Novel

_The Namesake_ was adapted as a motion picture in 2006, screened on March 9, 2007 by Fox Searchlight Pictures after its screenings in film festivals in Toronto and New York. It is directed by an Indian-born filmmaker Mira Nair, residing in the US. Sooni Taraporevala modified the novel into a screenplay. Mira Nair herself, a diasporic Indian, has dealt with parallel themes in previous films, particularly 1991’s Mississippi Masala, an interracial romance set in the Deep South.

The film ‘The Namesake’ received positive response from American reviewers and secure ‘Love is Folly International Film Festival’ (Bulgaria)-"Golden Aphrodite"-Mira Nair.’ It was also chosen for many countries’ film festivals.
The film adaptation of *The Namesake* gives a fascinating, corresponding picture of the novel. Lahiri, writing not long after 9/11, spotlights on the second generation and on its attempts to express their Indian/Bengali-American identity. Nair, on the other hand, prefers to detail the experience of the first generation. Although she does not modify Lahiri’s plot, she incorporates more footage meant to build up a most wanted return to the motherland.

The film portrays the conflict between immigrant’s generations with astonishing visual and cultural details. Nair deals with the differences between Bengali immigrants in the United States attempting to preserve parental Indian values and at the same time also imbibing the American way of life. The film uses immigrants’ experiences to discover the meaning of identity.

As in the case of any other film, this film is also a kind of transformation from the verbal medium into musical medium or verbal medium into the cinematographic medium. About adaptation of a novel/text into a film version it should be noted that the core dissimilarity between film and literary work lies in the reality that literature is set in a written structure, while in a film the picture (representation) is sustained by the sound, in form of music or words. Film highlights the transfer of the word into the image. In the film adaptation, the former is rarely used, and dialogue is given much importance. A film version is organized with different elements, such as dialogue, setting, possible voice-overs, music, editing, framing, lighting, photography, perspective, etc.

The cultural aspects portray in Lahiri’s *The Namesake* are diverse Bengali sangeet(s)/songs, There are some limitations forced on Bengali Hindu housewife, upholding Bengali dressing fashion in the diasporic world, choice of a Bengali baby’s name, celebration of a Bengali baby’s rice ceremony, observance of different Bengali Hindu rites, the use of Bengali literature periodicals, different Bengali deities and festivals, the use of Bengali food items in Ashima’s Pemberton’s home and some other cultural features. These elements are also reflected in Mira Nair’s film adaptation. Still, there is a difference between the storyline of the novel and the visual medium of the film. In the narrative, the Bengali diasporic cultures are portrayed in a third-person point of view, sometimes also from the third person omniscient point of view. As there are many incomprehensible parts in the novel asking for interpretation,
the film does not present such ambiguities. Mira Nair reveals Bengali cultures clearly through audio-visual forms and depends on sequences of time and spaces in the printed text. The novel begins with Ashoke’s and Ashima’s journey to the US in the 1960s. The film goes forward the timeframe by ten years, restaging Ashoke’s accident and marriage to Ashima in the 1970s. Whereas the novel begins with Ashima’s delivery, the film commences with the railway journey of Ashoke Ganguli, a youthful Bengali graduate from Calcutta to Jamshedpur in the mid-1970s. Mira Nair alters the progressive, singular, and linear presentation of time that comes out from the space of the hospital with numerous and broken temporalities that reveal in the commotion of the train accident that Ashoke comes across. After the train accident, Ashoke is confined to bed. Immediately follows the mosaic of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning being carried with fanfare. The film starts as Ashima is seen participating in a classical music class. After arriving residence, her mother asks her to come to drawing room as a man is coming up to ‘see’ her for marriage as per the practice of ‘arranged marriage.’ The next scene presents a kaleidoscopic view of a Bengali marriage ceremony. The novel includes only a small paragraph on it. Though these cultures are not diasporic, the visuals show Nair’s capacity as a good translator. A novel can explain all these, but within a limited period of the time span it is not easy to portray all such aspects in a film. When the Ganguli family settles in the US, Ashoke informs to Ashima the road to the Fulton Fish Market. Fish is a significant image in the novel, but in the film ‘samosa’ is used instead of fish. When Ashoke comes to see Ashima along with his parents with the prospect of marriage, the visitors are given samosas. When Gogol and Maxine are parting for Maxine’s parents’ New Hampshire residence, Ashima provides them a lunch box of samosas. After Moushumi’s wedding with Gogol when she visits her in law’s house ahead of the Christmas party, Ashima is preparing big samosas for the party. When Ashima organizes her last leave-taking get-together to her Bengali friends at her Pemberton home before her departure to India, she gives a party with plenty of ‘samosas’ in plates. The Bengali practice of keeping of ‘calling name’ (favorite name) and bhalonam (good name) is also used by Nair. Though Gogol’s rice ceremony is splendidly depicted in the novel, it is not presented in the film. Nair shows only Sonali’s rice ceremony. The reason may be the limited time duration for two rice
ceremonies to be incorporated. Perhaps Nair’s aim is not to portray the complete novel but the Bengali diasporic cultures.

The behavior of a second generation diaspora to the first generation is very complex. Gogol is very uncomfortable by his name and annoyed with his father for his strange name. When he makes harsh comments to his father about his odd name, Ashima reprimands him sternly.

The use of music and songs is a significant feature of the film that is, of course not present in the novel. The baul song is very popular in Bengal. Their subject matter is philosophical and symbolic spotlighting on the condition of disconnect between the earthly soul and the spiritual world. They also focus on love and the many-splendored bonds of the heart, delicately describing the mystery of life, the laws of nature, the verdict of fate and the final merger with the celestial. The great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore was very much influenced and stimulated by the ‘baul’ songs. Tagore’s songs are intensely influenced by baul themes. Other Bengali poets such as Kazi Nazrul Islam have also been influenced by the baul songs and their message of non-sectarian obligation through love. The ‘Bhatiali’ is another kind of folk song. This song is related to particular groups such as fishermen, cart drivers, and hermits. One cannot think of Bengali cultures, more particularly Bengali rural cultures without the ‘baul’ and ‘bhatiali’ songs. They are not only basic to Bengal’s music cultures but are also deeply ingrained in the land and permeate the mind of the people. There are many baul and bhatiali songs in the film, heard when Gogol and Sonali visit India with their parents. Gogol observes a baul singing outside from his maternal grandfather’s home and another one while returning after practicing yoga. Sometimes baul and bhatiali songs depict the unhappy portrait of a person. When Gogol performs the mourner’s ceremony for his father and Maxine comes to meet him, she is not able to recognize this emotion. She fails to encourage Gogol to come out of his family attachment and begins mourn after being discarded by Gogol. In this scene, a background bhatiali song “Oh majhi re, mon kasther nokar majhi…” is used. When Ashima and her family are busy with the concluding part of the mourner’s ritual on the store of the Ganges, that song is heard again from a boatman. In addition to this there are also classical songs presented by Ashima at the commencement and end of the film as well as other background songs and cultural melody.
The different approaches of the first generation and the second generation of immigrants are faithfully depicted in the film. After Gogol gets connected with Maxine as his girlfriend, he starts to move and stay away from his parental residence. He does not even receive his mother’s call. When his father is about to leave his Pemberton house for Cleveland, Ashima calls Gogol who says he cannot come as he wants to make a trip to his girlfriend’s parents’ lake-view residence in New Hampshire. When Gogol and Maxine come to meet Ashoke for few minutes on their way to that house, Maxine behaves as a typical American. Maxine calls Ashima by her name and says, “I’ll get a drink.” Ashima gives her ‘lassi’ instead of alcohol. Gogol cautions Maxine not to hold hands in the presence his parents, but Maxine fails to remember and grips Gogol’s hands at the dining table. She speaks to Ashoke also by his name and kisses him. These create discomfort in Gogol’s family. When they are about to go away, Ashoke tells Gogol to check up on his mother time to time during his absence. However, Maxine remarks that “[n]ever guess the parents and of their subject matters”

Ashima gets a temporary job in the library and builds up the close friendship with one of her colleagues. She shares her worries about the behaviour of her children who avoid them. When Ashoke is dying from a ‘massive heart attack’, Gogol is engaged with Maxine’s writer friend’s party in New Hampshire. These behavioral and cultural dissimilarities are presented properly in the film.

Before his father’s death, Gogol is seen as assimilationist, transculturist and transnationalist in the US. However, after her father’s demise he comes back to his Bengali Pemberton ‘home’, shaving his head before leaving Ohio. Ashima is stunned to see him. She hugs him and placing her right hand on his shaved head says, “You did not have to do this” (Nair, 2007). However, like a son of a Bengali family Gogol for the first time says in Bengali to his mother, “I wanted it” (Nair, 2007). Gogol’s change shows that the second generation has still some attachment to Indian culture. The mourner’s ritual of Ashoke is, possibly, the clearest aspect of Bengali culture in the film and the text in a diasporic world. The telescopic Indian cultural traditions are observed by Gogol as he comes back to his ‘mini India’ the Pemberton ‘home,’ and modifies from an Americanized Indian immigrant into a true Indo-American expatriate.
It should be noted that a text may be prolonged, but when a filmmaker creates a film out of the printed text, some removals are needed to fit the specific time duration. Mira Nair is faithful to the original novel, but some parts are not presented in the film. The important scenes that are incorporated are: Ashima’s moment with the Montgomery family, Gogol’s rice-ceremony, Gogol’s Bengali coaching and journey to Calcutta during Durga Puja, his first teenager appearance with Kim and Ruth and the extra-marital liaison with Bridget, a group conversation about Indian English novels when the second generation Indian diaspora in the US are termed as ABCD (‘American-born-confused-deshi’), Moushumi’s sexual relationships, Graham’s racial insults of Indians, etc.

Mira Nair not only cuts scenes, but also adds a few which seem essential for depicting Bengali cultures, as Bengali folk music that in Lahiri’s novel could not find a place. The film uses Bengali songs like Rabindra Sangeet, Nazrul geeti, traditional Bengali lullabies beside baul and bhatiali.

This film is chiefly made for Anglophone audience as is the novel. Some of the scenes like depicting the poor people in Calcutta and their food preparation by roadside etc. are revealed as Indian poverty that gratifies the Western attitude about the Third World. In a group discussion on Indian English Novels, the immigrant Indians are called “American born confused deshi” (Lahiri, 2003:118). Graham, an American, insults the Bengali people explicitly. These scenes are not there in the film. Thus, there is a kind of unseen manipulation by the filmmaker during translation.

There are many scenes in the film that are not appropriate or credible. The film begins with Ashoke going by railway to Jamshedpur to meet his grandfather. Ghosh, a middle-aged businessman, is a fellow voyager who drinks alcohol in the train. Lahiri’s novel describes Ghosh’s smoking. Drinking alcohol and smoking are not permitted in Indian railway, but, obviously, there can be some exceptions. After their marriage, when Ashoke and Ashima are parting Calcutta, they hold two small bags that may appear to the viewers as going for shopping. Nair could have shown larger suitcases for the recently married couple going abroad to settle there. They dress in long flower garlands as if they come out of a marriage ceremony. When Ashima’s father dies, and Ashima and Ashoke are going to catch the flight to return to India, Sonali, their recently born baby girl is not seen with them. However, after few
minutes we observe the baby girl on Ashima’s shoulder. In a Bengali family after a
death in the family usually after ten days or 15 days male relatives of the deceased
person shave their head. However, Nair’s film depicts that Gogol comes to her mother
from Ohio with his shaved head though his father has expired before one day. Perhaps
Gogol may not know the custom.

Though we can find some Bengali dialogues between Ashima and Ashoke, this is
done to show the diasporic people’s cultural association in familial spaces. This film
is not comparable to the Hollywood’s mainstream films that are marked by enormous
investment, inventive and creative camera settings, use of light contrasts, advanced
and ultra-modern sound tracts, diversities of symbolism and others post-modern
methods. Such creations are not trouble-free for independent directions. Mira Nair
makes her film with techniques that are used by conventional commercial Bollywood
filmmakers. Although this film gained various awards in film festivals and was
selected in different films award categories, it occupies the ‘peripheral’ position in the
leading Hollywood Films’ standard. The critical praise was won for its treatment of
debatable issues and diasporic themes which are contemporary in a multicultural
globalized world.

The use of Bengali language in the film marks the moments of closeness,
difference, and console and some serious moments. After a provisional settlement in
the US when Ashoke is explaining to Ashima how to reach Fulton Fish Market,
Ashima answers in Bengali that if she gets lost then what will happen? Ashoke also
replies in Bengali that he will not let her get lost. Ashima does not have any
information of the procedure of washing system in her new house. When she washes
Ashoke’s clothes, they reduce in size. Ashoke gets annoyed and reprimands her.
Ashima enters in her room and shuts door. Then Askoke attempted to praise Ashima
and speaks in Bengali: “my Ashima, dear Ashima, open the door” and “crazy girl”
(Nair, 227). As time goes by, Ashoke and Ashima speak more in English, but their
last phone conversation just before Ashoke’s demise is in Bengali. When Gogol
comes back from Cleveland with shaved head, his mother is astonished and tells him
that it was not required. He suddenly talks in Bengali to inform his mother he wanted
do this. When Ashoke and Ashima are walking in an attractive place near a school,
Ashoke wants to listen to from Ashima’s mouth the sentence ‘I love you’. In this
warm scene, Ashima says “yes” in Bengali. Perhaps what Nair intends to hint is that
language not only makes a difference but it also works as a tool of intimacy. The film always attempts to remind us that language plays both parts-as a bridge and as a barrier to communication.

Journeying in a diasporic world will not be complete without the reference of suitcase and airport, and more significantly, crossing bridges. These three things in the film appear like ‘leitmotif’. At the commencement, Ashoke is moving with a suitcase to meet his grandfather in Jamshedpur. Later Ashoke does the similar when the whole family visits India and travels to see Agra’s the Taj Mahal. Although this trip is not to the diasporic world, but traveling with suitcase for the journey is a universal sign of mobility and Odyssey of displacement and dislocation in the diasporic milieu. The other frequent image in the film is the airport. The airport is the symbol of the meeting point of characters that voyage into another place leaving their native home. The showcasing of the airport is a voyage of grief for Ashima when she is seen at an airport to come to India after her father’s death. Gogol is also seen at an airport before returning to Pemberton ‘home’ after his father’s demise with his shaved head. But the most inventive aspect in Nair’s film’s diasporic world is the way the director made use of two bridges in the film: one is the Howrah Bridge, the busiest cantilever bridge in the world which links Calcutta; and the other is the 59th Street Bridge in Manhattan which connects the New York City. What Nair perhaps wants to suggest is that journey with the suitcase is about to join the places, i.e., the bridge to cross over. These two bridges of two countries stand for the diasporic people’s mobility and connection with the past and journey into the future.

In Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* though we can locate some ‘spaces’ of western culture in Ashima’s life, but in familial spaces she is totally a submissive, passive and true Bengali housewife. Mira Nair alters, to some degree, this image of Ashima. Though Ashima at the first stage of her life in the US reveals her timidity to the outer world around her Boston home, but slowly she begins adapting the surroundings and way of life of New York City. She begins going out for laundry and purchasing fish from Fulton Fish Market. Ashoke remembers his adolescent experience of the train accident. In the film, Ashoke is dreadful about the accident and begins sweating even in a cold winter night. Immediately Ashima attempts to make Ashoke relaxed by keeping his head on her lap and singing a song. It is like a mother’s lullaby. When her husband goes to Cleveland for nine months, she engages a part-time job at the library.
to pass her time. The film portrays how Ashima struggles and changes from an all-accepting wife to an independent widow. In the novel Moushumi has many sexual affairs before marrying Gogol and shows her sexual laxities. Mira Nair also shows this in her characterization of Moushumi.

5.7 Summary

In the final analysis it can be argued that Lahiri’s *The Namesake* faithfully deals with the theme of diasporic sensibilities of a Bengali family living in US. She hardly uses Bengali cultural words/phrases/slangs in the novel. It may be because the text is mainly aimed towards the international readers. Thus, perhaps she attempts to internalize the Bengali diasporic sensibilities through her text, particularly for Anglophone World. Nair also tries to internationalize the Bengali diasporic culture in film version. It is very difficult to reconstruct the same thing through a visual medium, i.e. film as it displays something within a restricted and predetermined time. Though one can get the main cultural transmission of the source text like a living picture in the film, but it lacks the diasporic sensibilities revealed in the novel. The text depicts the Bengali diasporic sensibilities, but it does not go into the milieu of Bengali culture in its fullest sense. Mira Nair eliminates many diasporic factors in the film version, but it shows the Bengali cultures in a much better way even than the source text.

The present chapter attempted to emphasize double dislocation encountered by Gogol as his naming heightens his identity crisis in the foreign land. The chapter also unfolds a journey of Ashima from nostalgic alien to the transnational citizen. It also focuses diasporic sensibilities of Ashoke, Sonia and Moushmi as all of them negotiate cultural encounters in different manners. The chapter discusses intergenerational gap as it explores the psychology of both first and second generation immigrants. The chapter also deals with the film version of the novel.

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