

## AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF THE IDENTITY CRISIS AS DEPICTED IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S WORK

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### ABSTRACT

*In her debut book, the Namesake, Jhumpa Lahiri accurately captured the identity issue of first- and second-generation expats. Families of immigrants and their internal and socio cultural relationships with citizens of the host nation are used to address this challenge. It addresses the issue of the cultural identity crisis that both immigrant generations are now experiencing. Due to the language, way of wearing, and eating customs, immigrants in the first generation often have difficulty, a sense of alienation, and a crisis of cultural identity. However, second generation immigrants mostly struggle with personality, identity, and cultural acculturation issues. This essay makes a small effort to analyze the identity problem that immigrant's experience, as it is shown in Lahiri's book The Namesake. The essay also made an effort to illustrate the dual displacement that many individuals, like Gogol, experience as a result of their names, which exacerbates his identity dilemma in an unfamiliar environment.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the literature they are creating now, authors who are cultural hybrids like Jhumpa Lahiri, Alice Walker, and many others are tackling topics like identity crises and discourses of hegemonic authority. Notably, a variety of authors of Indian ancestry have established themselves globally. While they travel the globe, they maintain a strong cultural connection to their home country. Jhumpa Lahiri is one of these authors who, through her writing, shapes India from the outside looking in. They bring India with them wherever they go.

The Namesake, Jhumpa Lahiri's charming first book, extends on her Pulitzer Prize-winning short tales about Indian acquisition. This book addresses the issue of the quest for identity and belonging. A prevalent topic in contemporary literature is the aimless wandering, search for identity, and alienation, yet for the majority of Indian authors writing in English, this quest has a distinct Indian immediacy. Identity is a challenging topic for everyone, but is particularly challenging for those who have been culturally displaced. The current study investigates how much an immigrant writer can find and maintain their identity in their writing. Her search for identity is a sense of exile, and the active interaction of two cultures Indian and Western is the driving force behind her quest.

The Namesake in many ways meets up to the expectations that were created by the popularity of her excellent short tales. The description of family life, the intricacy of relationships, and the challenging process of attempting to adapt into a new culture while maintaining one's own cultural links, identity, and sense of belonging is vivid and profoundly felt.

The essay also looks at instances when an immigrant writer deviates from accepted thinking and invents a "third space" where they may express their transnational identity. Jhumpa Lahiri emphasizes the never-ending process of coming and leaving that forges family, cultural, linguistic, and economic relationships across international boundaries in addition to the immigrants who leave someplace they call home to find a new home in the United States.

Her characters are transnational in nature since they exist in two different realms.

One further outstanding subject in Lahiri's story is the problem of identity crisis. Through Gogol, the main character, Lahiri discovers her identity. Gogol chooses the greatest aspects of both their host country's and their own culture. By highlighting the lives of the characters Ashok, Ashima, and their son Gogol, as well as their yearnings for their ancestors' origins and customs, traditions, and viewpoints, she paints an accurate portrayal of diasporic culture.

A good examination of "names, relations, families, inheritance, and cultural assimilation" can be found in the book. The story explores the never-ending search for identity buried in the dark seas of uprooting, and from this dark water, a new culture emerges that suggests how two cultures may mix through reflection and self-analysis.

### **Jhumpa Lahiri said in an interview on identity:**

The issue of identity is always challenging, but it is particularly challenging for people who are culturally dislocated, as immigrants are, or who have children who concurrently experience two different cultures. Even though I am more American than my parents in many respects, the older I become, the more I realize that I have inherited a feeling of exile from them. In actuality, I still have very difficult time thinking like an American.

For immigrants, their children are more directly and distressingly affected by the problems of exile, loneliness, a persistent feeling of estrangement, and awareness of a lost world. On the other side, the issue for immigrant children and those who have strong links to their nation of origin is that they do not feel either way. Growing up, I struggled with the notion that there was no one place where I really belonged.

Jhumpa Lahiri's characters similarly extol the virtues of everyday existence: "I realize that my accomplishment is pretty commonplace. I am not the first or perhaps the first guy to pursue his wealth distant from home. Even while it all seems commonplace, there are occasions when it goes beyond my imagination.

The Namesake, Jhumpa Lahiri's first book, examines the agony of cultural displacement and the concept of global identity. Aditya Sinha notes that Lahiri "mines the immigrants' experience in a way superior to Bharti Mukherjee and others" because she is "Indian by ancestry, British by birth, American by immigration, and her parents having the experience of "the perplexing bicultural universe" of Calcutta in India and the United States."

In this book, Gogol Ganguly, the protagonist, shares many of Lahiri's experiences as an immigrant kid growing up. Lahiri is a member of the second generation of Indians living abroad, a group that is always searching for its identity. Between the nation of their parents and the nation of their birth, they feel trapped.

They must continue to foster bridges between the diametrically opposed ideas of these two nations. However, individuals get trapped in a severe identity crisis throughout this process, from which there is no escape. Lahiri discovers that she is quite a stranger in both nations given that she is an American living in India and an Indian living in America.

Gogol, the main character in the book The Namesake, has an identity problem since he prefers to be called Nikhil, the name he was given as a kid, and then Nicky, the Americanized form of that name. The Namesake, the book's title, does underline the protagonist's identity issue. Changing his name at this point is crucial for Gogol in his search for his real identity because it represents how he sees himself and how he wants others to view him.

Later, Gogol decides that the name Nikhil better captures his dual identities as an American

and an Indian. Although the name Nikhil is in fact Bengali, it may also be reduced to the American moniker Nick. As a result, it is a hybrid name that will make it simpler for him to manage his dual identities.

The Namesake, the book used for the research, captures the difficulties Indians have while interacting with a new society. This puts the novel's themes of culture shock, rootlessness, feeling unsettled and in-between, conflicting ideas of "home," nostalgia, and immigrant identity crisis into perspective. In order to portray the transformations, cross-cultural contacts, prejudice, and challenges of moving in a new country in this instance, America Jhumpa places her characters in a developed nation.

The book examines the attitudes of first- and second-generation immigrants as well as the tensions that result from these attitudes. Ashima and Ashoke's characters explore the themes of nostalgia, culture shock, and the uncomfortable, while Gogol and Moushumi's experiences deal with the themes of identity crisis and cultural stereotypes.

Jhumpa Lahiri's debut book incorporates the Indian-acquired short pieces that won her the Pulitzer Prize. The circumstances of immigrants in the host nation are often brought on by loneliness and cultural misunderstanding. Generations of immigrants struggle with the cultural identity problem owing to language, eating habits, clothing code, and personal identity. For Gogol, it's because of his name. The emotions of longing, loneliness, and homelessness are also separated in a methodical manner. In Ashima's case, migration is the cause.

Due of the blending of cultures, Gogol and Moushumi must deal with it. Ghosh and Ashoke are cut off from the outside world forever. They arrive at the other realm after leaving their homes behind.

The Namesake is a book about identifying oneself that is set in Kolkata and the US. Over the course of our lives, we encounter a variety of identities, including one that is automatically bestowed upon us at birth, identities created from nothing in distant countries, and identities that we choose for ourselves. Determining who we really are also gets difficult when there are so many options available to us. The son of Ashoke Ganguli, Gogol, who was hastily named after Ashoke's favorite author Nikolai Gogol, gets caught in this web of identity problem.

Family is not a loss to be lamented in The Namesake for Gogol; rather, it is a burden, an unavoidable and often undesired presence. As a second-generation immigrant, Gogol unintentionally carries the burden of his immigrant parents' feeling of loss and their clumsy efforts to adapt to a new culture. As he navigates life as a translator attempting to balance two cultures and expectations, this simultaneous loss and load manifests as a protracted identity crisis.

As he aged, Gogol struggles with his name and identity, and paradoxically he comes to want for the same dual identity that he once rejected. When Gogol is eleven years old, "the peculiarity of his name becomes apparent", yet he does not resent the uniqueness of his name. Unsurprisingly, Gogol first consciously realizes the emotions of alienation, guilt, and self-loathing that signal another identity crisis at the start of puberty. He displays polite indifference when his father presents him with a copy of The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol for his fourteenth birthday.

But underneath, hatred bubbles to the surface since he now despises being asked questions

about his name and having to continuously explain. He despises having to explain that it has no meaning "in Indian" to people. He despises the fact that his name is silly and obscure, has nothing to do with who he is, and is, of all things, Russian rather than Indian or American.

The significance of namesake and identity is discussed often in the narrative and emerges as a key idea. Gogol endures suffering throughout his life due to the rarity of his name. Individual names are holy and unbreakable in Bengali households. They are not intended for sharing or inheritance.

Gogol suffers from trauma since he identifies with his Russian name. Gogol, the main character in the book *The Namesake*, is given a name that he deems inappropriate for his character and strangely repulsive, useless, and shapeless. He loses his identity while changing his name. Gogol came to see that his identity was forced as he grew up in an American society.

He feels terribly constrained by the fact that his name is neither American nor Indian, but rather just unimportant, ridiculous, lacking in dignity and gravitas. He believes that his Russian name has nothing to do with India. He has an identity dilemma that becomes obvious when he reaches fourteen. His predicament becomes even more pitiful when he realizes that it was he who allowed his pet name to become his real name in kindergarten; otherwise, his parents would have registered him as "Nikhil," but he would not have responded to that name at the time because his ear was not yet accustomed to it.

Ashoke and Ashima are also experiencing an identity crisis. In India, where caste systems are still in force, immigrants of Indian heritage, such as Ashoke and Ashima, experience identity loss and displacement. Since the British colonial period, the caste system, which formerly solely affected Hindu society in India, has affected all of India. The caste system mostly dictates what individuals should do and how to act according to what caste they belong to, even if it may seem to restrict their way of life. They undoubtedly have no notion about themselves when they move away from their country of origin and live abroad.

Gogol allows Lahiri to convey an identity problem that she herself has experienced severely. She is fixated on all the components of a name. Name denotes the initial identity. But when it comes to the second generation of Indian Diaspora, this identity suffers a setback.

The persona of Moushmi is similarly entangled in a multi-cultural web. She is proud to be regarded as French or partly French. She engages in multiple sexual encounters with various guys in Paris in an effort to deal with her identity dilemma. She discovers that she has adopted a whole new identity as a French person, rejecting the "forced" Indian identity and the "given" American one.

Sonali, on the other hand, exhibits a more sensible way of living. By wishing to wed a white American in accordance with Bengali customs and traditions, she displays a hybrid identity that is both American and Bengali. Sonali takes care of both traditions with a holistic approach.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, determining one's identity is a decision, however for those who are completely lost, doing so will be challenging. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, which could aid in comprehending the situation of identity crisis that affects diaspora individuals. Beginning with an identity crisis, Gogol eventually realizes that there is no way to avoid action and identity, and that taking action is preferable than doing nothing. He searches for his origins

and identity before ultimately understanding the existentialist philosophy's call to action. He understands that accepting his multiple, fragile, and hyphenated identity is the only way an immigrant may stop experiencing identity conflicts. The most fundamental aspect of a person's identity, the Gogol's name, occupies a significant portion of the story. This moniker itself becomes the primary contributor to Gogol's identity dilemma. Gogol's connection with his family and his social interactions with his classmates are both impacted by this identity issue. One must think on and negotiate with oneself in order to come to terms with one's own identity, which is constantly influenced by society. Her art explicitly addresses immigrant experiences, cultural conflicts, integration and adaptation, and other related topics. They explain how socio-cultural factors, ethnicity, and gender have shaped the characters who are expatriates and highlight their fears, unease, nostalgia, rootlessness, alienation, relational estrangement, and identity crisis. Finally, this essay draws the conclusion that Lahiri's works deal with identity crises and identity losses and that "identity" is a significant element in post-colonial expatriate literature.

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