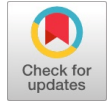


Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* Through the Lens of Diaspora Literature



Amirmohammad Mohammadi

Abstract: *Abundant papers have been written on Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake, endeavoring to elaborate on alienation, ecologic overtones, cross-cultural conflict, feminism, existentialism, and identity crisis, to name a few. However, navigating through a labyrinth of complexities, this study, in addition to cultivating the results found hitherto, aims to crack the case of two acculturation strategies opted by Gogol, namely assimilation and integration. To further the point, this qualitative research which has been done based on a close reading approach, will reveal Gogol's shift of strategy from assimilation to integration. In the second place, the lights are to be shed on the remarkable traces of re-orientation in the selected work, especially during the arrival of Gogol in Maxine's house where binary opposition, i.e., the Occidental Culture/ Oriental Culture will be visible. Furthermore, this paper sets out to lay bare Moushumi as a foil character for Ashima, who, unlike Ashima's vigorous allegiance to her husband, Bengali roots, and Patriarchal norms, is a Byronic-like character with intelligence, selfishness, refractoriness, complacency, and penchant for infraction of patriarchal rules. Last but not least, this study aims for a deeper understanding of the kernels of this diasporic novel including alienation, uprootedness, nostalgia, and search for genuine identity.*

Keywords: *Alienation, Nostalgia, Uprootedness, Identity, Double-consciousness, Re-orientation, Hybridity, Third Space, Integration, Acculturation, Assimilation*

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Namesake* 2003 is the earliest novel written by the English-born American novelist Jhumpa Lahiri which was originally published in *The New Yorker*, a magazine in which eminent fictions, criticisms, satires, and poetry to name a few are published weekly. This Pulitzer-winner novel narrates the labyrinthine life of a Bengali family called Gangulis. The parents who have been born in Calcutta, decide to emigrate since the head of their family has set out to be educated in America. This story displays the arduous internal and external tensions, against which, members of this family encounter in Land of the Freedom. In contrast to manifold novels set in America, which revolve around the enthralling concept of the American Dream, this work scrutinizes the ups and downs experienced by the first and second generation of the diaspora who have moved to a new and prepossessing country.

It is also worthy of note when Lahiri published *The Namesake*, it received a cornucopia of accolades and homage from high-profile critics such as Stephen Metcalf, an American columnist at *Slate Magazine*, David Kipen an author and critic from California, and Gail Caldwell a critic from Texas who won Pulitzer Prize in 2001 for Criticism and more. Four years after *The Namesake* was in the limelight of literary readers and critics, a film adaptation was made by an erudite Indian director Mira Nair, who is an alumna of Harvard University. This adaptation stars Kal Penn as Gogol, Tabu as Ashima, and Irrfan Khan as Ashoke. Having said that it drew a plethora of attention from movie critics, and based on an American review-aggregation website called *Rotten Tomatoes*, 86% of critics provided the film with positive reviews based on 126 reviews. Moreover, this novel was later published in Bengali version in 2005 by *Ananda Publishers* with the title *Samanamiie*. In view of the above-mentioned points, it is not that difficult to identify what a precious belletristic work is aimed to be analyzed in this research paper. Before bringing *The Namesake* under the critical lens, getting acquainted with its author is highly suggested, since having knowledge of her life and experiences could give her readers bright insights into the reciprocal relationship between the selected work and her life. Jhumpa Lahiri or Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri based on her nickname is a prolific novelist who was born on July 11, 1967, in London. Her well-educated parents are originally from Calcutta; her father was a University librarian and her mother taught at school. First, they emigrated to England and then America; nonetheless, they sought to preserve their Indian traditions, yet they were living in a totally different country. What seems of paramount importance is that Lahiri was heartened by her schoolteachers to keep her family nickname which is somehow akin to what happened to Gogol Ganguli in the story. When it comes to her education, it is worth mentioning that she got her B.A. in the realm of English Literature from Barnard College, and then surprisingly attained three master's degrees in spheres of English, Creative Writing, and Comparative Literature which indicates her great penchant for learning. Eventually, she accomplished her PhD in Renaissance Studies at Boston University. Needless to say, such a well-learned author has published several well-known books and short stories including *Interpreter of Maladies* 1999, *The Namesake* 2003, *Unaccustomed Earth* 2008, *One World* 2009, *The Lowland* 2013, *In Altre Parole* 2016, *The Clothing of Books* 2016, *Whereabouts* 2018, and *Translating Myself and Others* 2022.

Diasporic literature has exhaustively impacted the literature of the world regardless of its language. As a matter of fact, diasporic literature is any belletristic work that has been authored by those who are living outside their own mother country, however, the tropes and themes of their works are germane to their native country.

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The kernels of this ilk of literature are alienation, uprootedness, nostalgia, and search for genuine identity. Indian poet, playwright, and short-story writer Uma Parameswaran posits that the immigrants experience different phases; “first is one of nostalgia for homeland left behind mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is a stage in which one is busy with adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is the shaping of diaspora existence by involving themselves ethnocultural issues. The fourth is when they have arrived and start participating in the larger world of politics and national issues [12]. Regarding nostalgia, the emigrants will take umbrage at visiting anything reminiscent of their past; in other words, nostalgia and emigrants are interwoven in a dolorous way. William Safran postulates that “they continue to relate personally or vicariously, to the homeland in a way or another, and their ethnic-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship” [13]. Furthermore, Stuart Hall claims about the inherent interest of emigrants to be back in their motherland “this New World is constituted for us as a place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to lost origins, to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning” [7]. Then he asks a thought-provoking question and posits “who has not known, at this moment, the surge of an overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins, for times past? And yet this return to the beginning is like the imaginary in Lacan — it can neither be fulfilled nor requited, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery — in short, the reservoir of our cinematic narratives” [7]. It is a glaring point that memories play a pivotal role in diasporic literature which is painted by the fantastic visions of the author; to put it differently, these authors engender two contrasting worlds of real and chimerical whose divider line is dim. Apart from nostalgia, the immigrants strive to protect their traditions and native cultural codes even in the second country, and these efforts are conspicuous and tangible especially in the first generation of diaspora compared to the second generation, whose tendency for assimilation into the adopted country is more vigorous and their inclination to conform to their origin's culture and customs is stunningly tenuous. In layman's terms, the first generation insists on preserving their habits of eating, wearing, reading, and communication to name but a few, however to their stark contrast, their children abstain from imitating their parents' habits. Jaiwanti Dimiri a bilingual writer, critic, and former professor of English at Himachal University maintains:

Expatriate experience is problematic for the second generation immigrants of the third world for specific reasons. Born and brought up on foreign soil expatriation for this neo-class of immigrants hangs the background as an imaginary reality, free from the stigma of nostalgia and the popular symptoms of angst, loneliness existential rootlessness, or homelessness, their predicament is in many ways worse than that of their predecessors. Despite their assimilation and acculturation, they cannot escape from being victimized and ostracized [6].

This imbroglio makes them feel they belong neither to the native country nor the adopted one; that is to say, immigrants

suffer from double consciousness. It is proper to take note of Lois Tyson's quote which maintains that “Double consciousness often produces an unstable sense of self which was heightened by the forced migration colonialism frequently caused. Being unhomed is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak” [16]. Stuart Hall contends that “in post-colonial societies, the rediscovery of this identity is often the object of what Franz Fanon once called a ‘passionate research...directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others” [7]. With this quote in mind, diasporic literature is a narration of characters who are residents of nowhere. Avtar Brah, a pioneer of diaspora studies holds:

What is home? On the one hand, home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin. On the other hand, home is also a lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, somber grey skies in the middle of the day, all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday social relations. In other words, the varying experience of pain and pleasures, the terrors and contentments or the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture that marks how, for example, a cold winter night might be difficultly to experience sitting by a crackling fireside in a mansion compared to withstanding huddled around a makeshift fire on the streets of nineteenth-century England [14].

This predicament leads them to a liminal space, namely in-betweenness which creates a hybrid identity, about which, Tyson claims “many post-colonial theorists argue that postcolonial identity is necessarily a dynamic, constantly evolving hybrid of native and colonial cultures” [15]. Admittedly, immigrants' alienation is a threefold plight; they become far from their children, their adopted country, and their motherland. It should be also noted that diasporic writers include so many renowned writers such as Seamus Heaney, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Sylvia Plath, Ezra Pound, V. S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, and more, and it couldn't be limited to only one region of the world; to put it another way, every country in the world has its specific diasporic writers who narrate the concerns and vicissitudes of the diaspora. It is apt to know Safran's exact definition of ‘diaspora’ which is related to “expatriate minority communities which have dispersed from an original center to two or more peripheral or foreign regions, to people who retain their myths about their motherland and feel alienated in the new land” [13]. Indeed, the concept of ‘diaspora’ has been defined by *Oxford Dictionary* as such: “the movement of the Jewish people away from their own country to live and work in other countries.” Leaving India actually commenced in the 17th century and found momentum in the 19th and 20th centuries.

However, these Indian emigrants were crestfallen and disappointed when they faced an almost execrable situation in adopted countries like what they had experienced in their own countries such as low wages, oppression, and discrimination. As a result, these oppressed Indian emigrants decided to form a mutinous party called Ghadar against British rule in India. Sadu Singh Dhama, a Punjabi spokesman for the rights of immigrant compatriots and advocate of Indian independence has depicted this movement in his cliff-hanger novel *Maluka* 1997 as such: a novel respect of this life in exile was added in the post-independence era in India when abundant people in the sixties and seventies started to move towards advanced lands of their own volition either to refrain from political or economic hardships of their motherland or to study as experts which Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls as a section of 'brain-drain.' Later on, this propensity to move to other countries has been on the trend. It needs to be pointed out that no matter what their reason for emigration, they will tend to one experience displacement and unbelonging. They might give their all to assimilating themselves to new cultures but they will be treated as an outsider. As it has been propounded by Stuart Hall, regrettably "they have the power to make us see and experience ourselves as other" [7]. While staying on the edges of most cultures, they will go through intricate experiences of yearning, aspiration, and confusion. These emigrants reside in what Homi Bhabha calls in-between situation which is burdensome to them, and there is a craving for a motherland which remains a "mythic place of desire in diasporic imagination" [4]. One of the overriding problems immigrants encounter in an adopted country is loneliness; in view of 'double-consciousness' which was earlier discussed in this paper, by and large, diasporic characters are not received well neither by the host country nor their motherland, due to departure from their origins; therefore, these characters are most likely to feel desolate, even if they have someone in their company which leads them to alienation from the world surrounding them. Concepts like identity, subjectivity, communal relationships, and nation are human beings' latest needs which were shrugged off last centuries, especially before the 20th century; however, after the emergence of state-of-the-art technologies and the development of humanities, these concepts have become monumental. Accordingly, the quest for identity is of paramount importance for immigrants who find themselves residents of nowhere; to express differently, the problem of identity is an inextricable part of diasporic works, and items like language, food, clothing, and culture exacerbate this problem. On diasporic identity, Stuart Hall has posited that "diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" [7]. Consequently, diasporic characters have oceanic and fluid identities which lack any fixity. Stuart Hall propounds:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity', lays claim [7].

With regards to the point that current research aims to analyze an Indian diasporic novel, it could be outstandingly beneficial to know Indian contributors to diasporic literature. Whittling down the list of Indian diasporic writers, we get to top authors including V.S. Naipaul, Marina Budhos, Cyril Dabydeen, Sam Selvon, Dean Mohamed, and Jhumpa Lahiri to name but a few. A key point to remember is the sharp difference between the old generation of Indian diasporic writers and the newer generation such as Jhumpa Lahiri; in effect, the former group looks at India with a rousing and fresh sense of nostalgia whereas the latter feels plaintive and backwardness in retrospect and that's what exactly happens in *The Namesake* and will be covered few pages later. It should be pointed out that Jhumpa Lahiri attempted to indicate diaspora as a mixed blessing; in other words, her characters wittingly seek to preserve the family bonding, dealing with the cultural codes and lifestyles of the adopted country which have been picked up by their children, however, it is an unwieldy burden on their shoulders. Lahiri is inclined to show that the intersection of two cultures may beget a third space which wouldn't be so noxious for the diaspora, because it could provide them with exceptional opportunities to learn new things in terms of culture, politics, social etiquette, family relationships and more from the people with whom they have close contact.

A closer inspection of Indian diasporas who reside in the United States reveals that they are divided into two groups; those who have been born in India and have moved to live in the United States for any reason and the latter group encompasses those people who have been born in the Land of Freedom, but they are of Indian origins regarding the birthplace of their parents and grandparents. Indian diaspora is deemed as well-to-do residents of America who have occupied the urban areas of this country and have plain sailingly coped with the hurdle of language, since they used to be a colony of the British Empire and as a result, they learned and internalized this language; after all, Indian diaspora has no stunning problem to communicate with Americans. It goes without saying that the cardinal wave of emigration from India to America began in the 20th century namely, 1904. The wave which began after 1965 and is the main concern of this paper since as you may know Ganguli family moved to Massachusetts in 1968, embraces educated people who fancied the improvement of their class and knowledge in the United States. To remind you of groundbreaking diasporic novels that are in sharp contrast to old-fashioned traditions of the East which invited Easterners to ponder their mores written by an Indian author, these novels by Bharati Mukherjee could be mentioned: *The Tiger's Daughter* 1971, *Jasmine* 1989, *Darkness* 1992, and *The Middleman and Other Stories* 1999.

Additionally, Jhumpa Lahiri is known as an ABCD writer, i.e. an American Born Confused Desi; she is confounded since she doesn't know to which country she really belongs, America or India. Perusing *The Namesake*, you will find out Lahiri is knowingly or unknowingly comparing these two countries, especially in terms of culture and family relationships.

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Furthermore, she has deployed mettlesome characters like Ashoke and Ashima who dare to preserve their ethnic identity in a new country at all costs. However, Stuart Hall in some respect negates these efforts; he suggests:

Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere and have histories. But, like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past [7].

In the true essence of the word, Lahiri is an odd-one-out Indian diasporic writer who, unlike the majority of her counterparts, was born in London then moved to Connecticut, and currently lives in New York. The vast majority of her works include Bengali characters who grapple with grueling issues like loneliness, alienation, dislocation, uprootedness, and quest for identity. Her works' language is unembellished as well as cut-and-dry which makes the act of reading enrapturing even for readers who have just stepped into the world of diasporic literature. To put the matter another way, when you read her novels you will most likely find vestiges of her personal life including her acquaintances.

II. DISCUSSION

This novel illustrates 32 years of a Bengali family's life who have emigrated to the New World in search of new opportunities, especially in terms of education. Indeed, after Ashoke and Ashima get married, they move to Cambridge and leave Calcutta; however, this act of departure doesn't endure a long time since they are on and off back in their motherland. It is significant to highlight that Ashoke deals with new situations much easily compared to his wife Ashima and his son Gogol. Ashoke is a doctoral nominee in electrical engineering at MIT. Unlike him, Ashima initially cannot easily acculturate to the new environment and its people's mores and consequently, it brings about a low spirit in her. This onerous situation is limpid from the onset of the novel when she is prepared to give birth to her son Gogol. As a matter of fact, the hardship of emigration is more vehement for women compared to men and as Spivak has contended, these diasporic women are "super-dominated and super-exploited" [15]. In other words, Ashima becomes a victim of emigration who loses her agency due to the upshots of her marriage to Ashoke. The following excerpt illuminates to what extent she is forlorn in dire straits:

Now she is alone, cut off by curtains from the three other women in the room. One woman's name, which she gathers from bits of conversation, is Beverly. Another is Lois. Carol lies to her left. "Goddamnit, goddamn you, this is hell," she hears one of them say. And then a man's voice: "I love you, sweetheart." Words Ashima has neither heard nor expects to hear from her own husband; this is not how they are. It is the first time in her life she has slept alone, surrounded by strangers; all her life she has slept either in a room with her

parents or with Ashoke at her side. She wishes the curtains were open so that she could talk to the American women [8].

Based on the above excerpt, Spivak's claim is substantiated that when a family emigrates abroad, the cardinal victim whose vulnerability makes her despondent and desperate is the woman. It is mentionable that in India when a woman is about to give birth, she enjoys the support of her relatives who succor and support her both physically and mentally, but when it comes to Ashima, she has to take this cumbersome burden by herself which makes her feel lonely and dejected. However, it is not the end of this bitter story; when she encounters the reality of American society in which women are loved and caressed by their husbands even in front of others without any inhibition, she feels alienated. To put the matter differently, the 'curtains' in this excerpt have symbolic overtones and they show the barrier between Ashima as an emigrant in a foreign land and those who are native residents of this country, and that's why she wishes the curtains were open so that she could talk to them. The author has made a critical point about this moment in the novel; she has recounted that:

Ashima thinks it's strange that her child will be born in a place where most people enter either to suffer or to die. There is nothing to comfort her in the off-white tiles of the floor, the off-white panels of the ceiling, the white sheets tucked tightly into the bed. In India, she thinks to herself, women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares, retreating briefly to childhood when the baby arrives [8].

As it was mentioned earlier in this paper, Ashima feels in-betweenness in America; to rephrase it, she is not able to cope with the American lifestyle and moreover, leaving her past behind is approximately impossible for her. With regard to the following excerpt, it becomes clear to what extent she is stuck in her past; to express it differently, it is as if Ashima's body resides in America but her soul is still in Calcutta, her motherland:

She calculates the Indian time on her hands. The tip of her thumb strikes each rung of the brown ladders etched onto the backs of her fingers, then stops at the middle of the third: it is nine and a half hours ahead in Calcutta, already evening, half past eight. In the kitchen of her parents' flat on Amherst Street, at this very moment, a servant is pouring after-dinner tea into steaming glasses, arranging Marie's biscuits on a tray. Her mother, very soon to be a grandmother, is standing at the mirror of her dressing table, untangling waist-length hair, still more black than gray, with her fingers [8].

Although Ashima is a devotee of Bengali customs to the core and throws parties with her Indian friends who inhabit America, she somehow attempts to keep in touch with Americans and their way of life. For instance, she drives, works in a library, buys groceries on her own, and establishes amity with American women to name a few. It should be noted that as regards Bhabha's standpoint, Ashima's efforts to fit into American society stands for the concept of 'mimicry' which is "a double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" [3].



To put it another way, Ashima is not enamored of American cultural or social codes, but she has to adapt to them so that her children feel at home. To illustrate the point, it should be mentioned that:

In the supermarket they let Gogol fill the cart with items that he and Sonia, but not they, consume: individually wrapped slices of cheese, mayonnaise, tuna fish, and hot dogs. For Gogol's lunches, they stand at the deli to buy cold cuts, and in the mornings Ashima makes sandwiches with bologna or roast beef. At his insistence, she concedes and makes him an American dinner once a week as a treat, Shak 'n Bake chicken or Hamburger Helper prepared with ground lamb [8].

It is deserving of attention that her attempts to correspond to the American way of life along with her great predilection to preserve the family's Bengali roots at the same time, reminds its readers of 'hybridity' which appears at the intersection of two different cultures. In effect, hybridity is a "problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other "denied" knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority — its rule of recognition" [3]. However, as her American individualism grows, she still holds reservations if she is taking the right path since she supposes that her cultural identity might be at stake. Shirin Zubair an English professor at the University of Essen posits that:

The question of cultural identity lies at the heart of current debates in cultural studies and social theory. At issue is whether those identities that defined the social and cultural world of modern societies for so long — distinctive identities of gender, sexuality, race, class, and nationality — are in decline, giving rise to new forms of identifications and fragmenting the modern individual as a unifies subject [16].

About cultural identity, above all, Lahiri insinuates that it has no fixity and is recreated especially in the minds of the indigenous people living in the adopted country. She argues that:

I spend half the time in interviews trying to explain to people that I'm not from India. And I think there's a large population of readers out there who, when they read my book, see the jacket, see the design, see the motifs, see my name — assume certain things about me. They assume that I'm Indian. Or that I'm Indian in the way that they think of me as Indian, having been born and brought up there, and that I'm a foreigner in this country [9].

In addition to the lack of fixed identity, diasporic literature narrates the story of characters who lack a permanent home, and considering this excerpt, the name of Ashima herself indicates this unhomeliness; "In spring and summer, she will return to the Northeast, dividing her time among her son, her daughter, and her close Bengali friends. True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere" [8]. The execrable aspect of being stuck between two worlds will turn into alienation and it holds true for Ashima who "feels too old to learn such a skill she hates returning in the evenings to a dark, empty house, going to sleep on one side of the bed and walking upon another" [8]. A perceptive reader should consider the relationship between what happened in Gogol's *The Overcoat* and what befell Gogol in *The Namesake*. The

protagonist of *The Overcoat* is Akaky Akaviech Bashmachkin, a destitute government clerk who works as a copyist and notwithstanding being assiduous at his job, he is taken for granted in his department. The story becomes enthralling when Akaky becomes a different character to the core after wearing his new overcoat, which has been made by a drunkard tailor called Petroviech; in fact, he becomes an exuberant clerk who is received well by his colleagues. In the same fashion, the identity and character of Lahiri's Gogol goes worlds apart from his Bengali roots after changing his name; for instance, he goes through several unprecedented rousing relationships with Ruth and Maxine, which make his life more exhilarating than its former lackluster state. Nevertheless, regarding the aimlessness of these ties, Gogol gets discombobulated, and his cultural identity is impacted over and over during the course of the novel. Judith Caesar, a Professor of English at the University of Sharjah spells out this sense of disconcertedness and contends that "the novel is much more clearly an elucidation of the causes and meaning of that confusion, which comes not only from having a multiple cultural identity, but from some of the ways in which people in modern American society tend to view identity" [5].

After all, Gogol's romantic relationship and marriage with Moushumi prove Pal's claim that "from the second generation onward, ties with the homeland gradually gets replaced by those with the adopted country" [11]. It goes without saying that Moushumi's acts and thoughts, as a second-generation immigrant, firmly demonstrate her deviation from accepted Indian beliefs and traditions. Moushumi doesn't deem India as her motherland and has had manifold romantic ties with men of different multifarious nationalities "French for the most part, but also German, Persian, Italian, Lebanese" [8]. In this sense, she corresponds to Gogol because he had dated several girls; however, the extent she abominates returning to her roots is much more vehement compared to him. Though their marriage initially seems to be sustainable as regards their same cultural roots, they split up together when she cheats on him on her vacation with Dmitri Desjardins, his middle-aged boyfriend who is untidy and resides in a bachelor pad on the small inheritance from his parents: "She believed that he would be incapable of hurting her as Graham had. After years of clandestine relationships, it felt refreshing to court in a fishbowl, to have the support of her parents from the very start, the inevitability of an unquestioned future, of marriage, drawing them along" [8]. In addition to this rebellious act of Moushumi against her Indian traditions, this novel abounds with other examples of her glaring insubordination with her mother country's conventions. For instance, it is customary to change one's surname after marrying an Indian man, yet she dissents from doing so after marrying betrothal to Gogol:

Only she is not Mrs. Ganguli. Moushumi has kept her last name. She doesn't adopt Ganguli, not even with a hyphen. Her own last name, Mazoomdar, is already a mouthful. With a hyphenated surname, she would no longer fit into the window of a business envelope.

Besides, by now she has begun to publish under Moushumi Mazoomdar, the name printed at the top of footnoted articles on French feminist theory in a number of prestigious academic journals that always manage to give Gogol a paper cut when he tries to read them [8].

In reality, Lahiri has skillfully made a foil character for Ashima by incorporating Moushumi into her story; to put the matter another way, unlike Ashima who is utterly steadfast to her husband, vigorously adheres to Bengali roots, and is willingly obedient to Patriarchal norms, Moushumi is a Byronic-like character who is savvy, conceited, refractory and strives to violate patriarchal rules.

At this juncture, it is propitious to find a felicitous answer to the second research question, namely the acculturation attitude opted by Gogol. Before that, it is necessary to know the concept of acculturation. The fact of the matter is that acculturation is one of the concomitants of immigration. John Berry defines it as a concept "employed to refer to the cultural changes resulting from these group encounters, while the concepts of psychological acculturation and adaptation are employed to refer to the psychological changes and eventual outcomes that occur as a result of individuals experiencing acculturation" [1] [17] [18]. In respect of acculturation, two strategies are preferred by immigrants, namely *assimilation* and *integration*, about which, this study through close reading and textual analysis will shed light on the strategy Gogol went for. Before the textual analysis, the reader is in pressing need of appreciating these two strategies; briefly put, "when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures the assimilation strategy is defined" [1] [20]. According to this point, Gogol at first was inclined to assimilation, however it shifted later. To demonstrate Gogol's assimilation, this paper will delve into Gogol's change of his name, his ample interest in Maxine's intimate treatment of her family, and spending a lot of time with Ruth and her family rather than his own family.

It goes without saying that this story is mostly concentrated on the son of Gangulis who is called Gogol, about whom, the title has been made. In fact, *The Namesake* centers on the ordeals of Gogol who goes to great lengths to find a connection between himself and his name. It is highly significant to demystify the story behind his name; actually, based on their Bengali traditions, Ashoke was waiting to receive the good name of his son, but meanwhile, he decided to put the name of a high-profile Russian novelist called Gogol on his son, and the shrouded impulse behind it was when he was about to die in a train crash, he accidentally survived by the fluttering page of Gogol's short story called *Overcoat*. Although this name is reminiscent of Ashoke's survival or rebirth and that's why he called his son Gogol, his son finds it a beast-like killer which has ruined his mirthful moments of childhood and adolescence in part. It is apt to say that he leans towards being identified as an American rather than an Indian, however, his name turns into a big hurdle in his way; that is to say, this name seems like a cumbersome load on his shoulder which makes him blush. To further the point, he feels his name lacks sufficient majesty and it neither belongs to America nor India, which gradually results in both self-alienation and alienation from others. To depict the extent of his embarrassment with his name, it is noteworthy

that when his English teacher Mr. Lawson assigns his students to go over Nikolai Gogol's *Overcoat*, he starts getting uneasy, though none of his classmates care about this association. The narrator states:

Warmth spreads from the back of Gogol's neck to his cheeks and his ears. Each time the name is uttered, he quietly winces. His parents have never told him any of this. He looks at his classmates, but they seem indifferent, obediently copying down the information as Mr. Lawson continues to speak, looking over one shoulder, his sloppy handwriting filling up the board. He feels angry at Mr. Lawson suddenly. Somehow he feels betrayed [8].

A luminous example of Bhabha's 'mimicry' is Gogol's efforts to change his name to Nikhil in order to be accepted easily within American communities like those parties thrown by his university classmates. It seems to Gogol that changing his name is the only way to get rid of this crisis of identity; consequently, he attends the court following his parents' consent during which, his great discomfiture and disquiet with his pet name becomes limp:

What is the reason you wish to change your name, Mr. Ganguli? The judge asks. The question catches him off-guard, and for several seconds he has no idea what to say. Personal reasons he says eventually. The judge looks at him, leaning forward, her chin cupped in her hand. Would you care to be more specific? At first, he says nothing, unprepared to give any further explanation. He wonders whether to tell the judge the whole convoluted story, about his great-grandmother's letter that never made it to Cambridge, and about pet names and good names, about what had happened on the first day of kindergarten. Instead, he takes a deep breath and tells the people in the courtroom what he has never dared admit to his parents. I hate the name Gogol, he says. I've always hated it [8].

The second reason which substantiates this paper's claim about Gogol's assimilation could be found through his relationship with his girlfriends, namely Ruth and Maxine; however, in addition to Gogol's assimilation, the author's attempts for re-orientalization transpires through the close reading of the novel. In other words, a substantive investigation of Gogol's romantic bonds is indispensable, since it will unravel the fact that the second generation of immigrants get every so often appalled when encountering the sharp differences between their native and adopted culture. Furthermore, negative stereotypes such as cultural backwardness, emotional distance within the family, and patriarchy to name a few are wittingly or unwittingly put forward by the author; to put it another way, Lahiri as an American writer of Indian roots has been in part embroiled in *Reorientalization* which has been elaborated on by Nayer in this way:

Orientalizing is now performed by the Orientals themselves, especially by diasporic Oriental authors from the South Asian region. Whereas in colonialism the outsider European represented the Oriental, in re-orientalism the power of representation is in the hands of somebody who is at once insider and outsider — being a diasporic member of the Orient.

Unlike the Europeans, these diasporic authors are not entirely alien to the cultures they represent, and their identities are drawn from their oriental ancestry and affiliations [10].

A cut-and-dried binary opposition, namely the Occidental Culture/ Oriental Culture which has been exerted by Lahiri in *The Namesake*, could be detected when Gogol goes to her girlfriend's house Maxine, whose lifestyle, dwelling, social class, and culture is a far cry from Gogol. Additionally, the close affinity between Maxine and her parents and their courteous dialogues seem quite uncanny and unfamiliar to him: "The four of them go quickly through two bottles of wine, then move on to a third. The Ratliffs are vociferous at the table, opinionated about things his own parents are indifferent to...Gogol is unaccustomed to this sort of talk at mealtimes, to the indulgent ritual of the lingering meal, and the pleasant aftermath of bottles and crumbs and empty glasses that clutter the table" [8]. In respect of this excerpt, a learned reader could easily find the marked vestiges of cultural encounters between the Orient and Occident; now we take these questions into our unbiased but grave consideration. Why is Gogol flabbergasted at the close relationship between Maxine and her parents? Why is he unaccustomed to the intellectual arguments between them, while his motherland was laden with intellectuals including Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Brajendra Nath Seal, and Manabendra Nath Roy? The narrator says that "he is continually amazed by how much Maxine emulates her parents, how much she respects their tastes and their ways" [8]. Is it really jaw-dropping that a child emulates her parents and has amity with them and couldn't it be found in India in the 20th century? Indeed, the strong engrossment of Jhumpa Lahiri as a Re-orientalist author in the American ostentatious way of life is greatly portrayed, when positive traits of Indian lifestyle such as subordination of children to their parents, silence during eating the meals, not talking about former romantic relationships to keep one's dignity and not offend the current love, tidiness, frugal weddings, and wearing saris as a traditional Indian clothes and more, seem odd to Maxine as an embodiment of Western culture. The following excerpts potentially throw how the positive features of the Bengali lifestyle have been represented in a negative way and negative features of Maxine's way of life in a positive one into relief.

"Showing him photographs of her ex-boyfriends in the pages of a marble-papered album, speaking of those relationships without embarrassment or regret..." [8].

"He loves the mess that surrounds Maxine, her hundreds of things always covering her floor..." [8].

"She is surprised to hear certain things about his life: that all his friends are Bengali, that they had an arranged marriage, that his mother cooks Indian food every day, that she wears saris and a bindi" [8].

"But their lives bear no resemblance to that of Gerald and Lydia: expensive pieces of jewelry presented on Lydia's birthday, flowers brought home for no reason at all..." [8].

Mulling over the above-mentioned excerpts, Lahiri has wittingly or unwittingly presented several negative images of India by showing specific parts of their customs and habits in an unfair way. In fact, forbearing totalizing views is one of the most vital duties of a notable and world-famous novelist

like her which has been disregarded within the dialogues between Gogol and Maxine.

Gogol's first girlfriend is Ruth, who is an English major at the University of Yale. To put it in a nutshell, Gogol and Ruth first meet each other on a train from New Heaven to Boston, and afterward, their serious relationship starts. Having said that, their relationship doesn't last long, and when Ruth heads to Oxford to study, after one semester, they break up. It's not this paper's task to delve into the romantic relationship between these two characters, but rather, through close reading, it will endeavor to reflect that insofar, Gogol was impressed by Ruth and her family, which makes us mull over his assimilation into a different culture; evidently Gogol evinces a sense of inferiority, in comparing his family with Ruth's. He says, "he cannot imagine coming from such parents, such as a background, and when he describes his own upbringing it feels bland by comparison" [8]. Another example of Gogol's insecurity and abashment with his origins transpires when Ruth lauds the drinks and meals, and he gets kindled. After telling Ruth about Indian viands and beverages, "her appreciation for these details flatters him; it occurs to him that he has never spoken of his experiences in India to any American friend" [8]. Given Gogol's reluctance to speak of his experiences in India to any American friend is not bereft of significance; to further the point, it is as if Gogol's origin is akin to a burden on him, while he is already open to the new culture, which corroborates Berry's claim that "assimilation is the way when there is little interest in cultural maintenance combined with a preference for interacting with the larger society" [2] [19].

As it has been already stated, Gogol gradually moved from assimilation to integration. John Berry reckons that integration is "an interest in both maintaining one's original culture, while in daily interactions with other groups" [1]. He also avers that "integration is present when both cultural maintenance and involvement with the larger society is sought" [2]. Gogol's regret for changing his name, marrying Moushumi, and deciding to read the book earlier recommended by his dad Ashoke, are reflective of his integration. Despite changing his name and earning more self-esteem in society, he starts to feel emptiness with forbearing his Bengali foundations:

As for all the people in the house, all the mashis and meshos to whom he is still, and will always be, Gogol—now that his mother is moving away, how often will he see them? Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so, cease to exist. Yet the thought of this eventual demise provides no solace at all [8]. To underscore the significance of integration, it is vital to know that Gogol's marriage with Moushumi is reflective of his propensity to maintain ties with his Indian culture and traditions. Gogol and Moushumi, both are Indian Americans and, hence share a common background; their parents are both from Bengal, however, the couple grew up in the US. To put simply, this marriage sheds light on the cultural change strategy preferred by Gogol, namely,

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* Through the Lens of Diaspora Literature

Integration; however, it turns out to be a chimera, when the reader finds out their routes are to be diverged, due to Moushumi's treacherous act of having a secret relationship with Dimitri Desjardins, which is in stark contrast to her Bengali tradition of sheer allegiance to her husband.

III. CONCLUSION

Totally, based on what has been discussed throughout this research, the kernel of this diasporic novel is alienation, uprootedness, nostalgia, and the search for genuine identity. When it comes to Ashoke and Ashima who are taken into account as the first generation of diaspora, their efforts to preserve their customs and native cultural codes in the second country are more marked and palpable than the second generation whose liking for assimilation into the adopted country is stronger and their propensity to conform to their origin's culture is stunningly puny. The data also illustrates that the second generation moves from assimilation towards integration and it becomes evident through Gogol's regret for changing his name, marrying Moushumi, and deciding to read the book earlier recommended by his dad Ashoke. Also, it is worthy of note that emigrants are stuck in a maelstrom which makes them feel they belong neither to the mother country nor the adopted one; in other words, emigrants suffer from double consciousness based on which, emigrants are not welcomed with open arms neither by the host country nor their motherland due to having left their origins; thus these characters are most likely to feel reclusive, yet they have someone in their company which accounts for alienation from the milieu surrounding them. Accordingly, this plight results in the creation of a liminal space, namely in-betweenness which engenders a hybrid identity about which, Lahiri is inclined to show that this intersection of two cultures might bring about a third space that wouldn't be deleterious for the diaspora, because it could provide them with superb opportunities to learn new things in terms of culture, politics, social etiquette, family relationships and more from the people with whom they have a close contact. As was discussed throughout the paper, Ashoke deals with the new situation caused by emigration much easier compared to his wife Ashima and his son Gogol. This burdensome situation is overly clear from the beginning of the novel when she is priming herself with giving birth to her son Gogol. In fact, the difficulty of emigration is, so to speak, more intense for women; that is to say, Ashima becomes a victim of emigration who loses her subjectivity following her marriage to Ashoke. It is important to remember that her efforts to imitate the American way of life along with her great predilection to preserve the family's Bengali roots simultaneously, bespeaks both Bhabha's mimicry and hybridity which emerge at the junction of two different cultures. Another clear instance of Bhabha's 'mimicry' is Gogol's striving to change his name to be accepted within American communities; be that as it may, it ushers in a feeling of emptiness. This research also has shed light on a binary opposition, i.e., the Occidental Culture/ Oriental Culture which has been exerted by Lahiri in *The Namesake* which could be discovered during the moments Gogol is at her girlfriend's house Maxine. Indeed, Lahiri has presented several noisome images of India by showing specific parts of their customs and habits in an unjust way. Finally, Lahiri has masterfully made a foil character for Ashima through Moushumi; to express the matter differently, as opposed to

Ashima who is excessively steadfast to her husband, strongly glued to Bengali roots, and keen on following Patriarchal norms, Moushumi is a Byronic character who is shrewd, smug, intransigent, complacent and strives to breach patriarchal rules.

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