

Jhumpa Lahiri's Gogol: In Search of Identity for the Nowhere Man

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Abstract Cultural alienation and consequent loss of identity forms a central issue in the diasporic discourse. The pain of displacement continues to pinch not only the immigrants but also their children who are rendered incapable of belonging to the country of their birth. The tragedy of alienation is felt as much by the immigrants as the next generation because the sense of estrangement is more intense in proportion to the sense of affinity with roots. Immigrants find themselves unable to adapt to their adopted country failing to adjust to the foster culture; however, their predicament is not as pathetic as that of their children. They are half-lost as there is at least one place where they wholly and absolutely belong whereas their children do not belong anywhere becoming truly and pitiably nowhere persons. There are two fictional characters that come to mind Willie Somerset Chandran and Nikhil Gogol Ganguli that occur in V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life* (2001) and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) respectively. I shall attempt to trace the dilemma of Lahiri's Gogol who is born to Indian immigrant parents but is a naturalized citizen of America by dint of his birth. My paper attempts to read how an Indian-American, Gogol lives like a pendulum till he finally attains maturity to move towards self-realization. Gogol's story is the story of a nowhere man searching for his rightful place in his home that remains for long a place of exile.

Keywords Postcolonial, Identity, Diaspora, Women's Writing

1. Introduction

He's a real nowhere man,
Sitting in his Nowhere Land,
Making all his nowhere plans
for nobody. [1]

No one, nowhere has ever recorded the human existential dilemma as simply and as accurately as this 1966 Beatles' song. Dilemma, feeling of in-between-ness and a sense of being where one does not belong from is the major pain that marks the diaspora discourse today thus, foregrounding the

sense of alienation more than ever. A sense of home and homelessness which is at times coterminous, is at the root of the basic alienation that infests people who are displaced either voluntarily or due to outside coercion.

What, then, does it mean to be Asian American? To me, it means living in a place where I don't look much like anyone else but in most respects act like them, knowing all the time that halfway across the globe is a densely populated region full of people who look just like me but don't particularly act like me. It means forever holding the contradiction of belonging and not belonging, of feeling "at home" and wondering where home is.

Chow [2] encapsulates immigrant experience so beautifully in these lines. Diaspora might have begun as a forcible migration, in the post modern times it is, in most cases, voluntary. While migration is often associated with a loss of identity it is, actually, initiated by a quest for identity. Diasporas are initiated by (in most post-modern cases) a desire to look for greener pastures when the original/home pastures do not hold any appeal, or at best lose much of their charm. The greener pastures on the other side then appear as the promised *El Dorado*. When migration brings forth the stark reality, the disillusioned migrants start searching for the cozy domesticity of the culture of their origin.

A flip side, of much interest here, would be Benedict Anderson's [3] concept of nation. He famously describes nations as "imagined political communities, because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in minds of each lives the image of their communion". If this premise is accepted, there would be no real nation consequently the issue of diaspora would also be diluted. A national identity would then be an imagined identity; diaspora would then involve a loss of that imagined identity and hence not a matter of grave concern. Since the boundaries of nation have broken considerably, it is important to trace the shaping of those imagined identities in an interesting way. Also, it is in view of this imagined identity that a discourse on the naming habits of immigrants becomes important because then, there is no name that would have foreign-ness. For our present discourse, however, we focus on the diasporic invasion of identities.

An individual or a race disseminates with a fixed motive of looking for identity outside of their familiar natal world and this happens when their original identity seems to be endangered/ belittled in their homes. With this it will be relevant to explore the feeling of exile which again, is marked with the feeling of not belonging. Again migration/immigrant experience is also marked with a certain disability seated in the immigrant's sense of guilt at leaving/ relinquishing their original/ parents' home. The second generation inherits this guilt from their parents. I would suggest it is their guilt that renders the migrant incapable to adapt and adopt. Guilt of having rejected their native home/culture and guilt of not being particularly loyal to the adopted one too. Benedict's [4] proposition could be of much help here, as when you understand the no-boundaries notion, the sense of guilt ameliorates.

The second generation migrants grow up in an atmosphere of guilt, only to find themselves like *Trishanku*¹, not belonging to anywhere. The plight of the immigrants is still better than that of their second generation who does not have a definite *locus standi* in terms of a home culture. Physically (and even mentally too) the second generation immigrants belong to the country where they grow up i.e. the adopted culture/ country of their parents' but socially they remain queer in that place. The colour of their skin, their accent, their allegiance to their parents all mark them as strangers for the natives and their parents' country/ culture also looks upon them as queer characters. These hyphenated characters are, to borrow Bhabha's [5] expressions, "almost the same, but not quite". The albatross of mimicry is heavier and the pain more pronounced in case of the second generation immigrants on whom it is incumbent to either present a semblance of the native or to be looked upon as the other "almost the same, but not white".

On close observation it will be clear to a discerning reader that mimicry begins with the first generation and reaches its culmination in the second generation after which the difference between the host and the migrant becomes blurred thereby minimizing (completely ruling out) any need for mockery/ mimicry. Also, when on this discourse, it would be befitting to explore a little into the nature of a pure nation. Is there something like a pure nation? Hasn't dissemination been so huge that 'purity' does not hold any grounds today? Another point of interest in this context may be the fact of Indian diaspora being a misnomer inasmuch as India- the nation is inhabited mostly by people who came from outside- the Aryans. Indians abroad are then diaspora-in-diaspora rather than a nation in diaspora. What Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Rau Badami, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are writing is not the tale of a nation in diaspora, then. India itself is then, a motley nation. If diaspora faces a threat to identity outside of its professedly original space, the stark fact cannot be

ignored that Indians have to struggle to maintain the shape of their identity even in India. There is a Bengali identity, a Gujrati identity, a Punjabi identity instead of there being an Indian identity. Badami writes the Punjabi identity, while Lahiri writes the Bengali identity and Indian identity can but be seen in glimpses through these. These characters face more or less the same kind of culture- shock that they would face anywhere in India outside of their state of birth.

Immigrant experience also encompasses the question of allegiance. X owes allegiance to -Y hence X feels lost everywhere away from Y. The first generation undergoes an experience of shifting allegiance, being inclined sometime to the state/ nation of origin and sometime to that of adoption. Allegiance may very clearly be understood as independent of 'slavery'. Slavery might also be one issue in the diaspora discourse but the relation between the colonizer/ colonized does not run parallel to that of host nation / immigrant. The former is /may be marked by slavery but under almost all circumstances the latter if it is healthy is marked by allegiance only. The first generation immigrant struggles all his life to establish some kind of relationship based on allegiance and suffers to some extent due to his failure to maintain such relationship. The second generation suffers, ironically because of its allegiance. The pull of the mother nation is magnetic enough to disrupt the bond between the immigrant and the host culture but in the case of second generation this pull becomes very weak, almost non-existent, thus, allowing full scope for allegiance to the foster nation. However, the second generation suffers because of the host nation's intermittent discovery of its "almost the same, but not quite" nature.

Chitra Banerjee's novel *Mistress of Spices* [6] narrates the story of Tilottama who becomes ordained in the art of spices and is metamorphosed into a mistress practising magic to heal the aching hearts in diaspora. Failing to cure her own heartache, when she falls in love, Tilo gets back to being her original self. Tilo's story, to me is every immigrants' dream who would adopt a different 'self' for some time but ultimately would want to go back to being their original 'self'. This dream, needless to say, is doomed to remain unrealized. The problematics of shifting identities is a complex one, not as easy as it seems in Banerjee's hands.

2. Diaspora vs. Search for Identity

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* cites Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Custom- House*: "Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth" [7]

Cultural alienation and consequent loss of identity forms a central issue in the diasporic discourse. The pain of displacement continues to pinch not only the immigrants but also their children who are rendered incapable of belonging

¹ . King *Trishanku*, in his arrogance wanted to visit heaven while still alive, in this he was helped by the sage *Vishwamitra* who by his magical powers sent him to heaven but gods then stopped his entry into the heaven. *Trishanku* has since then been cursed to stay where he is i.e., neither heaven nor earth. People in limbo are said to be in the *trishanku* phase of their life after the mythological king.

to the country of their birth. The tragedy of alienation is felt as much by the immigrants as the next generation because the sense of estrangement is more intense in proportion to the sense of affinity with roots. Immigrants find themselves unable to adapt to their adopted country failing to adjust to the foster culture; however, their predicament is not as pathetic as that of their children. They are half-lost as there is at least one place where they wholly and absolutely belong whereas their children do not belong anywhere becoming truly and pitifully nowhere persons. Uma Segal [8] in her discourse on the plight of Asian Americans, observes: "For the second and subsequent generations, identity formation becomes even more perplexing, for they must decide the level at which they will become Asian."

Commenting on her own writings, Jhumpa Lahiri [8] explains that her stories are "less a response to [her] parents' cultural nostalgia, and more an attempt to forge [her] own amalgamated domain". Discussing this dilemma Segal [10] writes:

[...] identity is not merely the sum of their Asian and American identities, nor does it merely involve the inclusion of certain American characteristics and the rejection of others or the retention of only some Asian characteristics. What emerges is a synthesis of both American and Asian identities, in fact neither Asian nor American but a unique amalgam of both.

Indeed, Lahiri's fiction is a unique addition to the existing Asian American literary corpus. When compared with other popular works set in postcolonial South Asia and narrated from immigrants' perspectives, Lahiri's is definitely a firm voice. Many of her stories are located in America and written from a second-generation Indian American point of view. Immigrant experience is Jhumpa Lahiri's favourite theme and also one of her major concerns. Talking to Isaac Chotiner about the recurrence of 'exile' in her fiction, Lahiri [11] said: "It interests me to imagine characters shifting from one situation and one location to another for whatever the circumstances may be."

In her fiction Jhumpa Lahiri addresses the issue of the intersection of cultures and threat of the loss of cultural identity. Through some favorite metaphors she unfolds the strangeness of the situation in her stories as well as her novel. In her collection *Interpreter of Maladies* the story "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" [12] has Pirzada yearning for his roots, his country and his family in America. Dinner time becomes his savior as it brings him closest to his country with the same kinds of food and similar eating habits shared by the host family of Lilia. Asha Choubey [13] notices the food metaphor working through many a stories in this collection: "Food serves more as a symbol and acquires a metaphoric stature than mother tongue for the simple reason that even in India most of these characters speak English, but English food, though enjoyed occasionally, is still not an intrinsic part of the Indian cuisine or diasporic identity."

Lahiri's [14] "Mrs. Sen's" has the protagonist clutching desperately to her native culture by clinging to her closet full of colorful saris and her frequent visits to the fish store. Her

[15] "This Blessed House" has Sanjeev detesting the Christian paraphernalia that his wife is delighted to discover and preserve. For him it is just the drifting away from her natal roots, which he does not appreciate. "The Third and Final Continent" [16], is the story of a Bengali gentleman who migrates to America, weds a docile girl from Bengal and has a son whom he sends to Harvard to study but makes it a point to bring home during holidays so that: "He can eat rice with his hands and speak in Bengali". Apart from these intermittent sojourns to his natal home, the son's identity as an Indian is shaped by proxy by American sources. He does not have an idea of his own roots, his own culture outside of his American course books. India for him is a geographical mass and not a nation.

In this context what is also remarkable is the terms—'amalgam' and 'synthesis'. Synthesis considers 'difference' and sameness as one because difference is contained in the sameness according to Braziel and Mannur [17]. Here let us dissect the two terms: Amalgam is the formation of something new, an altogether different structure, by combining two sets of systems/cultures/elements. It needs to be examined whether what we know as immigrant is an amalgam in this sense in Lahiri's literature. In her stories while all characters in diaspora tend to appropriate the white ways, they also practise what may be termed as reverse-mimicry inasmuch as they desperately cling to their 'Indian ways in an attempt to be saved from a complete loss of identity.

3. *The Namesake* : The Tale of *Trishanku Gogol*

The Namesake revolves around the metaphor of name which is the most integral part of an individual's identity, Lahiri extends the theme of "The Third and Final Continent" in her debut novel. Article 7 Sec. 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly states:

The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents. [18]

Personal names are so important. They define in large part who we are, how we are perceived, and even how we perceive ourselves. When we meet someone new, the first thing we tell that person about ourselves is our name. So much about us changes as we grow older, but our names are the only things constant. We change it only rarely and the change marks a turning point in our lives e.g., Women's name change after marriage. When we choose a name for our child, it is usually a very careful and deliberative act. Name is the most important dimension of an individual's personality inasmuch as it is through their names only that the individuals become a part of the history of society finding a meaningful existence. Our name is our identity and a window on our culture and self. The first, immediate answer to the question: "Who are you?" is our name. Certainly then, the importance and even sanctity of name cannot be denied.

Indeed, every individual is sensitive toward their name. Since names have cultural connotations, they denote the cultural identity of individuals and become as dear to individuals as their culture itself. If by any chance, a child is given a name that has the connotations of an alien culture, it becomes extremely painful for the child to even understand and realize its own identity. Besides other problems, the de-culturation of one's name is another important issue in the diaspora. The pronunciation and accent if it be foreign spoils the beauty of names making them sound alien even for the holders. What then, is the plight of people who have to bear the pains of living with a name that is essentially alien. There are two fictional characters that come to mind Willie Somerset Chandran and Nikhil Gogol Ganguli that occur in V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life* [19] and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* [20] respectively. I shall attempt to trace the dilemma of Lahiri's Gogol who is born to Indian immigrant parents but is a naturalized citizen of America by dint of his birth. An Indian-American, Gogol lives like a pendulum till he finally attains maturity to move towards self-realization. Gogol's story is the story of a nowhere man searching for his rightful place in his 'home' that remains for long a place of 'exile'.

The Namesake which revolves around divided identities and the conflicts in multicultural society is Jhumpa Lahiri's second book and her only novel till date. As the title indicates name plays a pivotal role in the narrative. The protagonist's cultural identity begins to blur with his naming ceremony, thus, pushing him into a limbo he struggles all his life to liberate himself from. The novel opens with the description of the quintessential Calcutta snack *jhalhuri* in a truly postcolonial parlance. Ashima's munching on rice crispies mixed with peanuts and onions is an image which speaks volumes about the immigrant's yearning for her roots. The snack gives her immense satisfaction because of its proximity to *jhalhuri*--the Calcuttan snack which has been a part of Ashima's growing up.

It's not without reason that Lahiri delves into the details of clothing and food, as these are apt metaphors of ethnicity. Her characters cling to the native items as they would cling to their parents, to their homes and to their homelands. Ashima is an Indian woman--predominantly Bengali having been forced to settle in America but clinging to the Indian--rather Bengali ways of life. She makes it a point not to call out the first name of her husband; she could never bring herself to accept the American culture or point of view. The very thought of having to deliver her child in a foreign land is frightening though she knows that they have to settle in America for a long time to come. It is as if to ward off the evil effect of the foreign culture that she clings to the "tattered copy of *Desh* magazine that she brought to read on her plane ride to Boston and still cannot bring herself to throw away." (6) While Ashoke does not feel disturbed by the American impact, Ashima nourishes the Indian culture assiduously lest she may lose her identity. The conflicting points of view may be seen in Ashoke's enjoying reading *Boston Globe* while Ashima clings to *Desh*.

With the birth of Gogol the story gradually becomes his, with Ashima and Ashoke taking a backseat. The threat of the loss of identity is faced more by Gogol than by his parents. Ashoke and Ashima have always, in their heart of hearts, had a place they could connect to, a culture they could associate with, but with Gogol the identity issue becomes complex. The shadow of this crisis has loomed large on the child since birth--rather even before birth. On his birth, the child should be given a name but in obeisance of Bengali culture, his parents wait for the elders to sanction him a name. Naming is an auspicious ceremony in India and is marked with much fanfare. Gogol's naming takes a deeper significance right from the start. The fact that his name is to travel from India to U.S., as Ashima's grandmother has been requested to bless the child with a name, is not without a subtext. Ashoke and Ashima's efforts to order a name from India speaks of their sincere intentions to cocoon the child in their Indian identity. As ill luck would have it, the letter bearing the name never arrives and in the meanwhile the great-grandmother dies. The letter never reaches its destination and the loss becomes irrevocable with the great grandmother's death, making it sure that the natal home is not for the child. The loss of one letter then takes greater dimensions and becomes a trope for the boy's lost and confused identity. Gogol's identity also remains in a limbo, never finding its destination. He has to live with this sense of loss all his life, it's a loss of home and consequent exile. This then, becomes the central fact that shapes his life; all the other events generating from this one fact only. Called Gogol by his father in honour of the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, as a "backup" (28) plan, The boy struggles to transform himself and escape the traditions of his family and the community of Indian immigrants to which his family belongs. His escape plan also includes changing his name; wanting to survive, as he is amongst "the Johnsons, the Mertons, the Aspris, the Hills" (51).

For Nikhil Gogol Ganguli the double-ness of his middle name in fact, adds a third dimension to his identity. An American by birth, Gogol looks every bit an Indian but has a Russian name. He is no Shakespeare who could shrug off saying: "What's in a name?" For Gogol his name is his being and one does not compromise with one's being. Torn between a good name and a pet name Gogol's life becomes an endless pursuit, an unending search for a name that could be him, that could substitute him authentically and that he could identify with. While at birth a strange identity is imposed on Gogol, it is his sojourn to a graveyard as a school boy that makes him suddenly conscious of the crisis facing his being. While on a drawing project the children start searching for names they can associate with. The search of most of the American children bears fruit making Gogol strikingly aware of the fact that on this land he will never find a name he can connect to. And his being a Hindu may be one reason, while the other and the more important reason is the fact that he is an alien in this country. The American-ness of Nikhil Gogol Ganguli has no room in America and his Indian-ness is something he is not comfortable with. Gogol's pain is representative of a number of second generation

Asian-Americans. Again one has to go back to Segal:

The experience of most Asian Americans, however, is that they can never completely blend in with the dominant U.S. society and yet do not feel quite at home in their countries of origin. They must therefore carve a niche for themselves. Regardless of how “American” they feel, they still look Asian. If they ask themselves the question “When do I become an American?” in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the answer is “Never!” Although they may become (or be) Americans under the law by virtue of having attained U.S. citizenship, the general U.S. society does not yet see itself as sufficiently pluralistic to embrace the variety of peoples who have committed themselves to this country. While the immediate circle of friends of Asian Americans may be able to transcend perceptions based on physical characteristics, many individuals in the society will continue to reinforce the differences, responding to them only as Asians and aliens. Thus Asian Americans must always deal with issues of bicultural identity [21].

4. Changing Names, Shifting Loyalties

Jhumpa makes use of the shifting loyalties in her diaspora discourse; there is always a pendulum like, hanging-in-the-limbo sense that troubles her characters. The problem of nomenclature is resolved as far as his sister Sonali is concerned. Sonali becomes Sonia- a name which breaks across the borders. To Gogol his name sounds so ridiculous that he finds himself shying away from girls when his friends have a good time dating all the girls they can. When he feels sufficiently attracted to a girl to be moved with an irresistible need to date her, he cleverly introduces himself as Nikhil, remembering for the first time the name he was originally intended to hold. Strange it is that as a child Gogol had once refused to be known as anyone but Gogol. His father had wanted to register him as Nikhil at the time of his admission to school. Nikhil serves the dual purpose of being a Bengali good name and bearing a “satisfying resemblance to Nikolai, the first name of Gogol’s Russian namesake” (56). But the child refused to respond to the name which sounded too strange to identify with. Since then the name Gogol hangs like an albatross around his neck. The only difference being that he has got used to the name and has come to associate it with home. Though he wants his girlfriend to call him Nikhil, for his parents he wants to remain Gogol, basking in filial familiarity. It is a double identity that Gogol himself sometimes projects, but at other times his assimilation seems complete.

Ashoke and Ashima face the pressures of both the worlds and they also have the pleasure of both the worlds but Gogol is destined to oscillate between his two names Nikhil and Gogol—never finding refuge, ever yearning for an axis around which to revolve. His Russian name has never had any Russian connotations for him. For Gogol his name becomes a metaphor for his Indian origin. Gogol vs. Nikhil is in fact, Indian vs. American allegiance. And right since his birth his struggle for existence has involved his struggle

against his Indian-ness, reaching its climax in his revolt which comes when he moves in with Maxine Ratliffe. Staying with the Ratliffe’s for a while Gogol seems to reach a point of no return as far as his parental and cultural roots are concerned. His father’s death, however, marks the end of his absolute American propensities, making him aware of his Indian responsibilities. The boy who had wanted to get away from his desi shadow announces flatly to Maxine: “I don’t want to get away”(186).

Frantz Fannon [22] uses the expression “black faces, white masks,” for what Bhabha [23] terms as “mimicry”. Gogol’s shifting loyalties bring forward much of his black skin pushing the white mask by allowing it to relegate. Since the names Nikhil and Gogol gradually come to represent two separate spaces that Gogol seems to occupy, an interesting irony builds up in the fact that later on Gogol easily bids goodbye to his girlfriend but he sticks with his parents and their propensities despite himself. His identity as Gogol becomes more of himself than that as Nikhil. Nikhil though an Indian name represents the American space that Gogol occupies outside of his parents’ home; while Gogol comes to stand for his Indian identity. Like his creator Gogol’s affinity to the American culture is only partial and at the same time he cannot call India home as it plays a significant yet marginal role in his life. Ashutosh Dubey while analyzing the pain of migration in *The Namesake* makes an interesting comment: “The immigrant experience is complicated as a sensitive immigrant finds himself or herself perpetually at a transit station fraught with memories of the original home which are struggling with the realities of the new world”(22). Gogol is much like her creator and suffers her agony. In this sense the second generation is more in a nowhere state than the original immigrants. Name becomes such a big issue with Gogol that participating in a light friendly discussion he flares up at the prospect of finding a perfect name: “There’s no such thing as a perfect name. I think that human beings should be allowed to name themselves when they turn eighteen. Until then, pronouns [24].

Lahiri does not play this name game with Gogol only but goes on to prove the impact of name on a person’s personality and behaviour. Gogol has a parallel in his parents shifting identities from being Ashoke and Ashima to being Monu and Mithu. As Ashoke and Ashima his parents are reserve, taciturn and aloof but as Monu and Mithu they are absolutely metamorphosed:

Ashima, now Monu, weeps with relief, and Ashoke, now Mithu, kisses his brothers on both cheeks, holds their heads in his hands. Gogol and Sonia, know these people, but they do not feel close to them as their parents do. Within minutes, before their eyes Ashoke and Ashima slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles broader, revealing a confidence Gogol and Sonia never see on Pemberton Road (81-82).

A trans-cultural existence has been Gogol’s tragedy as much as it has been that of his parents. Displacement and inacceptance of assimilation leads to strife and conflict at two levels. On one hand the Ganguli’s as a family struggle

for their rightful place in a society which seems quite antagonistic on the other hand they are divided amongst themselves in children vs. parents groups. In their struggle for survival Ashoke and Ashima frantically cling to their Indian-ness whereas the children stretch out to the culture of their birth. But at the same time one also finds the children having their American ways and the parents succumbing to the children's demands: "In the supermarket they let Gogol fill the cart with items that he and Sonia, *but not they*, [italics mine] consume..." (65). "From an early stage, Asian immigrant parents experience differences in traditional norms and relationships with U.S.-born (second-generation) or U.S.-reared (one-and-a-half-generation, who came to the United States pre-puberty) children", observes Segal [25].

Gogol's foreign-ness in America is different from that of his parents. While they relate to their Indian/Bengali culture, Bengal itself welcomes them in its warm cultural fold; but Gogol's ordeal is more pathetic as he will always bear the label ABCD—American Born Confused Desi on the land which he likes to think of as his own. He is equally a foreigner in India a predicament partly experienced by Lahiri herself.

As children Gogol and Sonia are much inclined to their "white masks," as they are concerned about hiding their "black skins". In America Gogol religiously avoids enrolling as a member of the India Association. Even the family's eight months sabbatical to India is considered "cumbersome, irrelevant to their lives." (88) Gogol comes to dislike not only the Indian ways but also, for a while, all that is associated with his parents:

But after four years in New Haven he didn't want to move back to Massachusetts, to the one city in America his parents know. He didn't want to attend his father's alma mater, and live in an apartment in central square as his parents once had, and revisit the streets about which his parents speak nostalgically. He didn't want to go home on the weekends, to go with them to pujos and Bengali parties, to remain unquestionably in their world (126).

The problem of identity cannot be taken lightly as it is not a simple name-game that Gogol is trapped in. In the final acceptance of his original name Gogol also accepts his trans-cultural reality---for once emerging out of the ABCD shadow and becoming himself instead.

An English professor's comments may also shed some light on the novel's place in the discourse of diaspora: "Lahiri's *The Namesake* is a novel of catachresis,² at once an American immigrant story and an intriguing contribution to a growing postcolonial canon" [26]. Jhumpa Lahiri clearly, explores this petname/real name as a part of exploring her own identity. She confessed in an interview with Charlie Rose, that Jhumpa is actually her pet name. Nikhil alias Gogol's story is then, a coming-to-terms story of a generation that rejects the location between two

nation/cultures. Gogol finally realizes and takes delight in a locus that though not in-between, is certainly enriched by the cultural values of not one but two systems. This in fact, is/can be the point of final redemption of the second generation.

Thus, Gogol presents the hyphenated space that Jhumpa Lahiri seems to occupy in America: "It is the complications of being a hyphenated American that informs her work, the same challenges that face Gogol, the American-born protagonist in *The Namesake*" [27]. In this sense writing is a voyeuristic exercise for Lahiri in finding and fixing her existence, as it is for the other writers in diaspora. For Gogol his name becomes at once his nemesis and his redemption. As long as he strives to run away from his cultural identity, it remains his nemesis but once he realizes its inevitability, it brings redemption. Talking to Alden Mudge in the course of a telephonic interview Lahiri explains:

I realized that it was important and inevitable for him to accept his name per se. It is more about what we inherit from our parents---certain ideas, certain values, certain genes---the whole complex set of things that everyone gets from their parents and the way that no matter how much we create our own lives and choose what we want out of life, it's very difficult to escape our origins [28].

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