

Degree Project

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Diaspora and Cultural Hybridity

A Study of the First and Second Generation Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri, the author of *The Namesake*, was born in London to Indian parents in 1967, and debuted in 1999 with a collection of short stories entitled *Interpreter of Maladies*. The collection, which mostly concerns the lives of Indian immigrants in America, won the Pulitzer Prize in 2000. Following her debut short story collection Lahiri remained faithful to characters of Indian origin who find themselves outside their country of origin, as evident in her second short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008). The fact that Lahiri is a child of Indian immigrants and that she also crossed borders when she migrated from England, where she was born, to America, brands her both as a migrant and diaspora writer. She writes on the Indian Diaspora and narrates stories that concern the diasporic postcolonial situation of the lives of Indian and Indian-Americans whose hyphenated identity has led them to be caught between the Indian traditions that they have left behind, and a totally different life in the western world. This diasporic experience is characterized by an ongoing struggle to adjust between the two cultures that shape their identity. Lahiri's works thus deal with immigrant experiences, and as Nathalie Friedman puts it in her work "From Hybrids to Tourists: Children of Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*," "scholars and critics have dubbed her [Lahiri] a documentalist of the immigrant experience" (111).

Lahiri is a second generation Indian diaspora subject and has personally experienced what it feels to be an Indian growing up in America. In the article entitled "My Two Lives" published in *Newsweek* on March 6, 2006, Lahiri discusses her confusion in being a second- generation Indian diaspora subject: "Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to

the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen. Looking back, I see that this was generally the case” (Lahiri). In discussing also her parents’ experience as first generation immigrants, Lahiri stated that “home was not our house in Rhode Island but Calcutta, where they were raised. I was aware [of] the things they lived for—the Nazrul songs they listened [...], the family they missed, the clothes my mother wore that were not available” (Lahiri “My Two Lives”). While discussing the experience of diaspora, Salman Rushdie states “that almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost, that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities, villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of the mind” (76).

The phenomenon of diaspora is increasing in this era of globalisation; this is because of the increasing interconnectivity between the local and global due to communication technologies, and voluntary and involuntary migration of people from their place of origin, especially from the third world countries to others in search of a better life. As the world changes through the process of globalisation, people move beyond the boundaries of their own countries to go to other countries. This movement often creates a number of dilemmas, such as redefinitions of home and belonging, particularly for the migrating people, and this process of movement often makes people alien to the world they are living in. Diasporic studies presuppose the existence of displaced groups of people who retain a collective sense of identity. In today’s world, the term diaspora denotes a wider meaning with variations. According to Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist’s *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods* most of the definitions are summarised as embodying three characteristics; the first “relates to the causes of migration or dispersal”, the second “links to cross-over experiences of homeland

with destination”, while the third characteristic concerns “the incorporation or integration of migrants and or minorities into the countries of settlement” (12-13). Yet, beyond these ideal shared characteristics, diaspora awakens transcultural movement and transnationalism, a sense of solidarity crossing both spatial and temporal borders. Diaspora and transnationalism are connected but contrasted terms; as Bauböck and Faist contend, “as the uses of these terms often overlap and are sometimes even interchangeable, no clear separation is to be expected” (14). Described by Bauböck and Faist as “awkward dance partners” (9), the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism run parallel in some of the academic literature, merging particularly in analyses of migrant identities. As the two terms refer to cross-border processes, the difference is that diaspora mostly refers to religious, ethnic or national groups, whereas transnationalism is often used both more narrowly – to denote migrants’ durable ties across countries - and more widely, to capture not only communities, but all types of social formations, such as transnationally active networks, groups and organisations (Bauböck and Faist 9). According to Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk, transnationalism “is able to describe wider sets of processes that cannot comfortably fit within the diaspora rubric [...], the transnational also manages to avoid the group or human centred notions that diaspora evokes” (34).

Diaspora has been celebrated as expressing the notion of hybridity. Hybridity, in the context of postcolonial studies is celebrated since straddling two cultures leads to the ability to negotiate difference (Hoogvelt 158). Homi K. Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture* that cultural encounters result in something new and substantially different that cannot be traced back to a specific origin (10). The concept of hybridity formulated in the work of Bhabha is

foundational in the development of postcolonial studies. Thus, the power that is found in hybridity is that hybrids take the dominant culture and come to create something of their own; hybrids can turn dominance into difference. Bhabha's concept/definition of hybridity is developed within the conditions of colonization in which the colonized has been traditionally regarded as a passive subject forced to accept the hegemonic colonizer's ideology and culture. According to Bhabha when two or more cultures interact a space is created, which he termed as the third space of enunciation (Bhabha 37). This third space breaks open the fixity of cultures, brings diversity to enrich it further and enables the construction and contestation of identities in an unending process. Hybridity is applicable to diaspora in the contemporary context of globalization; the flow of information and the movement of people in this ever evolving, interconnected and interactive world have played a crucial role in the creation of new cultures in the form of the interplay of local and foreign ideas and values.

In *The Namesake*, Lahiri recounts the lives of Indians and Indian-Americans who are caught between two cultures and two worlds. It deals with clashes between the two different worlds that the Ganguli family simultaneously inhabits, namely the world of Bengali immigrants, who struggle to integrate into mainstream American culture while maintaining the customs of their homeland, and the American world into which they try to integrate. The novel is set against the backdrop of the 1970s and 1980s when Indian migration to the West, especially the United States, was increasing due to the effect of rising globalization. In this novel, Lahiri emphasizes how immigrants, with their ceaseless process of transnational migration, inevitably create cultural connections

across borders. The novel narrates the experiences of the migrant family where each generation undergoes the dilemma of living in an alien land.

A substantial amount of research has been undertaken on *The Namesake*, particularly relating to its narrativisation of the generational differences in the migrant experiences. Peggy Levitt and Mary Waters's *The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation* explores the importance of transnationalism for the lives of second generation migrants within the United States; they point to the uniqueness of their experience by calling the second generation "the generation of identity", arguing that the transnational experience plays a central role in the identity outcomes of those who grow up in a transnational social life (168-211). For the second generation, transnationalism is often purportedly, a way of belonging first, and secondly, a way of being. According to Puttaiah Venkatesh's "Paradoxes of Generational Breaks and Continuity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*" the differences between generations can be seen in their travel to India: while for the first generation Ashima and Ashoke the trip to India is a "homecoming", for their children, Gogol and his sister Sonia, "it is an ordeal" (86). Venkatesh adds that while dislocation, stabilisation and opportunity form the order that defines the lives of the first generation, the lives of the second generation revolve around the matters of belonging, whether they belong to the country of their origin or to the country of their birth; whether to adhere to the culture and tradition of their parents or to subscribe to the standards of their immediate world outside their home. In addition to this, Manjula Vijayakumar and Banu Parvin, in their study "Diasporic Perceptions and Cultural Disorientations in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*" point out that "the first generation Indian Americans [...] never fail to follow what they

carried with them from their mother country whereas the second generation [...] find it difficult to identify themselves either with the people at home or with the society outside” (1664). In spite of the fact that there are differences in how both generations perceive America and India, each generation sees home in different ways. For the second generation, as Nathalie Friedman states in her article, “From Hybrids to Tourists: Children of Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*” “the children do not see India as their country of origin [...] and they can only define home as the place where their two cultures merge; the literal and metaphysical location is in their parents’ house” (115). For the first generation immigrants, India is a place to which they are connected, because it represents their childhood and their parents, whom they miss when they are in America. Lahiri’s work illustrates the stories of in-betweenness, dislocation, relocation, assimilation, nostalgia and cultural vacuum in the first generations’ efforts to settle and adjust to the new life. The first generation feel culturally displaced as they are simultaneously living under the pressure of two cultures; they cannot fully adopt the identity of the new culture and are thus unable to get accepted among the members of the new culture.

In contrast to the previous studies that engage with the narrativisation of generational dissimilarities in the migrant experiences and which read *The Namesake* as a travel narrative, this thesis will focus on both the cultural hybridity and diasporic experiences of the first and second generation immigrants. It will be a useful resource to study the diasporic experiences and cultural hybridity of both generations from the perspectives of home and belonging; language and customs; and cultural clash and duality. Furthermore, this study intends to offer fresh insights into the novel through the use of both concepts of diaspora and hybridity

to study the first and second generation's encounter in diaspora. This thesis will therefore examine the diasporic experiences and cultural hybridity faced by both the first and second generation immigrants as portrayed in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and demonstrate that, thanks to their liminality where the cultures merge, the second generation is better positioned than the first generation to construct a multiperspectival sense of identity, deprived of the nostalgia that characterizes the diasporic experience of the first-generation migrants.

Concepts of Diaspora and Hybridity

The term 'diaspora' comes from the Greek word *diaspeirein*, meaning 'to scatter'. Sudesh Mishra elucidates how the word was earlier used "to account for the botanical phenomenon of seed dispersal" (vi). In the same line, Kalra Virinder, Raminder Kaur, and John Hutnyk state that diaspora originally refers to the scattering of seeds, and always implies some kind of dispersal (9). In its application in describing human mobility across borders, originally, the concept of diaspora refers to the Jewish diaspora indicating the dispersal of Jews from Israel back in the sixth-seventh century BC and later in the second century AD from Jerusalem. In the era of globalization, people move from one country to the other. Thus, the term 'diaspora' is an old concept whose uses and meaning have undergone changes, and in recent times, it has become a significant subject of study among scholars.

Diaspora has become an academic area of research not only in migration studies, but also in many disciplines such as anthropology, history, sociology, cultural studies and literature. As Ien Ang observes, the term "was once reserved as a descriptor for the historical dispersion of Jewish, Greek and Armenian people;

today it tends to be used much more generically to refer to almost any group living outside its country of origin” (142). Through transnational belonging, diaspora dismantles homogeneous perspectives of the nation state. Until quite recently, the diaspora concept has been almost indistinguishable from the experience of Jewish exile communities. Since the late 1970s, ‘diaspora’ has experienced what Bauböck and Faist term “a veritable inflation of applications and interpretations” (12). By its very nature, the term diaspora is a term incline towards transience. Consequently, as the meaning of the concept has expanded so has the number of different scholarly interpretations and applications. Thomas Faist calls the concept of diaspora an “all-purpose word” (14), and Sunil Amrith, on the other hand, notes that, at its most imprecise, diaspora has become synonymous with migration, almost any migrant group is now labelled a diaspora (Amrith 57). The crossing of borders is significant in terms of the cultural changes that it entails, as well as the transformations that the dislocated self undergoes. The discourse of diaspora entails many aspects, such as loss of homeland and longing for it, alienation in the new land, fixities, compromises and redefining identity. Diaspora has its complexities in terms of its types and degrees of displacements. William Safran identifies six features of the diaspora, namely dispersal, collective memory, alienation, respect and longing for the homeland, a belief in its restoration, and a self-definition with this homeland (Safran 83-99). These features amply point towards the complexities encountered in dealing with the subject of diaspora.

Diaspora studies emerged in the late twentieth century to study dispersed ethnic populations, which are termed diaspora people. The members of each diaspora share the same homeland and form communities through which they can hold on to their origins. Such diasporas then extend and expand to include not only

original immigrants known as the first generation but also their subsequent generations. Moving away from one's homeland and settling elsewhere on a long-term basis does mean dislocation, which often brings a sense of loss and nostalgia. This is followed by an attempt to relocate in a foreign environment through adjustment and negotiation. Diaspora studies explore the significance and intricacies of diasporic movement. This movement is emotionally charged as it relates to the experience of dispersion, the idea of homeland and the impact of lost homeland on individual and collective identity formation in the host homeland. Concerning the focus of this thesis, *The Namesake* is contextualised in the field of diaspora studies as it conveys the stories of subjects who have migrated from India to the United States and focuses on the narration of their migrants and diasporic experiences and cultural hybridity.

In relation to this, hybridity was originally a physiological phenomenon, a cross between two species (Young 8). In the eighteenth century, it emerged as a word for interracial encounters led by Western colonization. At that time, it did not theorize multilateral cultural flows; however, it was used "to justify ideologies of White racial superiority and to warn of the danger of interracial breeding, described as 'miscegenation' and 'amalgamation'" (Kraidy 319). Thus, hybridity transformed into a cultural phenomenon in the twentieth century (Young 1995). The theorist Homi Bhabha redefined the term 'hybridity' in the context of postcolonial studies, and for him, hybridity is about the fact that "when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them" (Bhabha 216). Hybridity is the creation of transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation; it is bringing together two cultures and offering the possibilities of a third way.

Hybridity provides for a third space of resistance, negotiation and articulation of new meanings in the face of ambivalences. Bhabha defines the area of interweaving and the creation of a new mode of being as a third space (218), which is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no primordial unity and fixity (Bhabha 176). Bhabha also states that cultures are never unified or whole nor can they be thought of as merely “dualistic in the relation of Self to Other” (52). He refers to the “in-between” as a state that signifies the immigrant experience. Bhabha further describes the in-between as “neither one nor the other”, “the colonial signifier [...] literally splitting the difference between the binary oppositions and polarities through which we think cultural difference” (180-182). Thus, hybridity is useful when exploring the contemporary transcultural phenomena, in which “increasing volumes of people move from one place to another, create new cultural sociodemographic spaces and are themselves reshaped in the process” (Luke 379).

Therefore, hybridity is not the consequence of one or more cultural forms thrust together; it is much more than a simple mixed-ness of cultures. The interaction of the cultures undoubtedly leads to a number of conflicts, but it concomitantly opens new routes and modes of thinking for the individual and group identities of the diaspora and the host country. The concept of hybridity dismantles the notion of homogeneity. Ang contends that we can live together-in-difference without falling into a pitfall of the old, Eurocentric essentialism. In this sense, Ang sees hybridity as “the very condition of in-betweenness” (149), forming multiple national/cultural identities, just as Bhabha owes to it creating “the third space”, that is “the ‘inter’-the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (Bhabha

38). Ang further states that we inhabit “a world in which the complicated entanglement or togetherness in differences has become the rule rather than the exception” (Ang 153). It is within the context of two cultures influencing an individual to different degrees that the concept of hybridity becomes relevant. In other words, hybridity opens the door for the emergence of transcultural identity formation. Consequently, the two interrelated concepts diaspora and hybridity will be used as framework for the analysis of Lahiri’s fictional text.

Home and Belonging

To find a place of belonging or a place called home is a wish in the heart of every human being. The concept of home in relation to diaspora is intricate and multifaceted, characterized by the plurality of ‘homes’ and ‘belongings’. According to Jopi Nyman, the idea of home is “not necessarily a stable issue or a merely positive and empowering site” (Nyman 24). The complexity of the concept of home in the diasporic experience is one of the central themes in *The Namesake*. In the novel, the first generation immigrants represented by Ashima and Ashoke, and the second generation, by their children Gogol and his sister Sonia, have different perspectives of the concept of home. As Homi Bhabha asserts, “home and community are ideological determinants of identity; however, individuals respond to these determinants in different ways” (Bhabha 292). Both generations are in constant search of the place they can call home. Ashima leaves India, her home country, after her marriage with Ashoke. After settling in the United States she feels lonely in the new place and misses her family in India. Ashima describes the area where they live as “leafless trees with ice-covered branches [...]. Not a soul on the street” (Lahiri 30). She feels frustrated because she misses her home

back in India and that influences the way in which she perceives the new place. Besides, she does not feel her new house is her home: “it is not at all what she had expected. Not at all like the houses in *Gone With the Wind* or *The Seven-Year Itch*” (30). In India, Ashima’s life was filled with a number of relatives but in the United States, she finds no one to communicate with. The feeling of loneliness makes Ashima depressed, and she does not find any solace from the new environment: “being a foreigner, [...], is a sort of lifelong pregnancy -a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts [...]. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, [...]” (49-50). Ashima remains lost in memories of her home. She complains that “ever since she’s arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all” (6), “there’s something missing” (1). She spends time re-reading Bengali poems, short stories, books, and articles from the magazines she brought with her from Calcutta (35). She “keeps her ears trained between the hours of twelve and two, for the sound of the postman’s footsteps on the porch followed by the soft click of the mail slot in the door” (36), waiting for her parents’ letter. Thinking of motherhood in an alien land terrifies her: “That was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved, [...] But she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows little, where life seems so tentative and spare” (Lahiri 6).

As is the case with Ashima, the diasporic communities share a sentimental affection with the homeland with an eagerness to maintain their cultural identities, and some maintain a desire to return to their homeland (Raj 85). Ashima sinks into homesickness, “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” (4). When Ashima gives birth to Gogol, she feels alone without a single grandparent or other relations at her side, and the baby’s birth feels somehow haphazard: “she has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived” (25). Ashima desires to go back to Calcutta to raise her child there in the company of dear ones: “I’m saying I don’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It’s not right. I want to go back” (33). The concept of homelessness for the first generation is considered as one of the major troubles of existence. Therefore, they live in a place of uneasiness, instability, as they do not fit into homogeneous definitions of home and communal belonging. These create a constant uneasiness for the diasporic subjects. Moreover, it creates a never ending nostalgia about home and an ambition to reach home, wherever it is.

Ashima experiences the difficulties of belonging; as someone of Indian heritage who once lived with her family in Calcutta, she undertakes the formidable migration to America, following Ashoke, her husband. Moving to America is a monumental discovery of the unknown. Ashima is confronted with her fear of letting go of her culture and losing herself in a foreign country. For Ashima, India, and Calcutta in particular, are very definitely home and her children’s identification with America as home disturbs her; for all her years in America, she still does not feel at home on Pemberton road “after twenty years in America, she still cannot bring herself, to refer to Pemberton Road as home” (Lahiri 280). This demonstrates that even after living longer in America than in India, Ashima still considers India as home; the time she spends there does not lessen her connection to India. She has no doubt where she belongs to even after years in the United States. However, at the end of the novel there is a greater sense of identification;

subsequent to the death of her husband, Ashima decides to stay for six months in India and other six months in America.

The idea of home also influences Gogol's search for his sense of identity although the way he constructs his sense of home is dissimilar from Ashima's. Gogol grows to become fully independent, veering away from his Bengali culture, and escaping from his family home and the clutches of his persistent, traditional parents. He struggles against his parents' wish to continue an attachment to their Indian culture while wanting to fit in with his American peers. Friedman states that for the children, that is the second generation: "it is not only India to which they turn for comfort or to reinforce any nascent nationalist impulse; for them the return must be to their parental home in America, a place where India is re-created, albeit in a diluted form" (Friedman 114-115). Friedman added that "these children do not see India as their country of origin or as a putative homeland, and they can only define home as a place where two cultures merge" (115).

There are variations in how the first and second generations perceive America and India, each generation seeing their home in different ways. The first generation's connection to the host country is shaped through the second generation, who are American born. Even though it is hard for the first generation to live in a culture so different from that of their home country, Puttaiah Venkatesh states that they "make efforts to create a home away from home as its members speak Bengali at home and among fellow Bengalis; they also makes an attempt to absorb aspects of the prevalent culture" (88). While Lahiri's first generation cherishes their roots, her second generation reflects both nearness and distancing from their Indian root. More particularly, since they are born and raised in

America, the members of the second generation like Gogol look forward to enjoying their hybridization in the increasing diverse space of the United States.

The difference between the first and second generation immigrants is visible when the family moves to Calcutta for eight months. The diasporic characters of the first generation often travel to their homeland; the couples always look forward to seeing their families and relatives again, people that the second generation, Gogol and his sister Sonia, barely know. What Gogol sees in the voyage to India is a time “without a room of his own, without his records [...], without friends” (Lahiri 79), that is without those elements that confirm his sense of home and belonging. Ashoke and Ashima feel at home and well-adapted while Gogol and Sonia are the opposite of their parents: “Within moments before their eyes Ashoke and Ashima slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles wilder, revealing a confidence Gogol and Sonia never see on Pemberton Road” (81-82). Sonia is so surprised when witnessing her parents’ transformation that she hardly recognizes them: “I’m scared Goggles’, Sonia whispers to her brother in English, seeking his hand and refusing to let go” (82). As Natalie Friedman points out, “As Gogol’s parents go back to their home again and again [...] America for them, is not entirely a new adopted home, and India is never completely forsaken” (Friedman 114). Gogol’s parents enjoy their stay in India and they feel at home in the place where they know how things work. Ashima “wanders freely around the city in which Gogol, in spite of his many visits, has no sense of directions” (Lahiri 83). According to Manjula Vijayakumar and Banu Parvin, cultural conflict in India affects the second generation, “[...], for Gogol and Sonia, they feel like losing their identity; they feel alien in their real root, they feel like losing their privacy, [...] overflowing affection of so many

relatives is distressing. Only on their return to America, they feel at home” (Vijayakumar & Parvin 1665).

At this stage in their lives, neither Sonia nor Gogol are prepared with a binary lens through which they can perceive and comprehend the American and Indian cultures from an insider’s viewpoint. During his stay in India Gogol realizes that “Of all the people who surround them at practically all times, Sonia is his only ally, the only person to speak and sit and see as he does” (Lahiri 84). Neither of them is used to the situations and environment in India and fall sick after the first month in Calcutta “It is the air, the rice, the wind, their relative casually remarks; they were not made to survive in a poor country” (86). For the second generation “the return must be to their parental home in America, a place where India is recreated” (Freidman 115); they are glad when it is time to return to America. When they are back in America, “they still feel somehow in transit, still disconnected from their lives” (Lahiri 87), and thus the “eight months are put behind them, quickly shed, quickly forgotten, like clothes worn for a special occasion, or for the season that has passed, suddenly cumbersome, irrelevant to their lives” (88). Gogol “is at home in America” (Freidman 114). This defines the second generation’s position of being in-between, inhabiting a third space, which Bhabha designates as the “preconditions for the articulation of cultural difference” (Bhabha 56). Homi Bhabha points out that although the third space is one of contradictions, ambiguities and ambivalences, it enables negotiation of inclusion rather than exclusion, and becomes a site for innovation, collaboration and contestation of meaning. Gogol inhabits this third space, being neither truly Indian nor authentically American; this feeling is most present while traveling physically between dual places.

Cultural Clash and Duality

Diaspora individuals' cultural practices are in constant friction with the practices of the host country. Sometimes there are clashes of cultural norms which create hostility; for example when Ashoke and Ashima wait for Gogol's grandmother's letter which will contain a name for the new child. However, since the letter does not come soon enough, they are forced to name their son a pet name which is used as an official name. Gogol is given a pet name because his parents are not aware that the American system needs a particular name of the child just after the birth to register the birth certificate and this is because of their deficient knowledge of the foreign culture of their host country. In America newborn children are given a name as soon as they are born and get registered with a birth certificate, whereas in India, newborn babies get an official name mostly when they enter school. Till then, they are known by their pet name which is usually meaningless: "Names can wait. In India parents take their time. It wasn't unusual for years to pass before the right name, the best possible name, was determined" (Lahiri 25). The inflexible rules of the host land challenge their Bengali customs. However, the child born to Indian parents actually carries a Russian name in America. In contrast to a good name, a pet name is "never recorded officially, only uttered and remembered. Unlike good names, pet names are frequently meaningless, deliberately silly, ironic, even onomatopoeic" (26) The American way and the Indian way clash here.

The name intended as a pet name, eventually turns into a good name and retains this status for the rest of Gogol's youth. But later in life, when Gogol realizes the oddity of his name, he finds it difficult to continue with the name which he thinks is an embarrassment to him and which causes him some problems.

He gets embarrassed by the name because it is neither American nor Indian which actually portrays his state of mind, where he constantly questions himself about being an American of Indian origin: “he’s come to hate questions pertaining to his name, [...]. He hates having to tell people that it doesn’t mean anything “in Indian” [...] that it has nothing to do with who he is, that is neither India nor America but of all things Russian (Lahiri 75-76). He wants to redefine himself as born and brought up in the United States rather than be known by his parents’ Indian culture; that is why Gogol abandons the name that his parents have given him and tries to become someone else. Gogol wants his name to be an Indian or American name, not a Russian one. Subsequently, in 1986 when he enters Yale as a freshman, Gogol changes his name to Nikhil. Thus, the entire naming story is a significant marker of Gogol’s hybridity. As Ang contends, “hybridity always implies an unsettling of identities. It is precisely our encounters at the border-where self and other, the local and the global, [...] meet- that make us realize how riven with [...] intercultural conflict[s] these encounters can be” (Ang 149). Following Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, Gogol’s two cultures, the Indian and the American, translate into an identity which emerges from the two sides of him, making him the one who encompasses all in the “third space”. Gogol struggles to be American, yet he fails to eliminate his name - Gogol.

The two generations have different views on the cultures of the host and home country, and this shapes the characters and their experiences. When Gogol introduces his girlfriend Maxine to his parents at their home in Pemberton Road, it causes a clash of two cultures: “The restrictions amuse her [Maxine]; she sees them as a single afternoon’s challenge, an anomaly never to be repeated. She does not associate him with his parents’ habits. She still cannot believe that she is to be

the first girlfriend he's ever brought home" (Lahiri 146). Towards the end of the great ordeal for Gogol, as they start on their journey to Maxine's lake house, Ashoke and Ashima respond awkwardly to Maxine's farewell hugs and kisses. For the second generation, the confusion of cultural identity is something with them from the very first moment of their lives. In most cases, the second generation has some difficulties in terms of the conflicting nature of two cultures in the beginning, but as they grow up, they feel inclined to the culture of the host country. Whereas the first generation immigrants find it difficult to accept being American-Indian due to their strong ties to and nostalgia for their roots, their children are usually averse to being regarded as Indian because they consider themselves simply American. However, the second generation also acknowledges a sense of cultural responsibility towards their roots and learns to accept their identity confusion and hybridity. After their experiences, they often become more open to new possibilities offered by the process of hybridization.

Language and Custom

When people cross borders, their custom and language also undergo a transition. In spite of Ashoke and Ashima's struggle to enculturate their son Gogol, he is not comfortable with Indian customs. The couples try to use their Bengali language with Gogol; they are of the opinion that Gogol will be able to learn the language of the host country when he moves out in the outside world, but the only way to learn Bengali is to use it at home. When the time to register Gogol into school-kindergarten comes, his father Ashoke convinces and tells the principal of the school that Gogol his son is "perfectly bilingual" (Lahiri 58). In the third grade, Gogol's parents send him to Bengali language and culture lessons held every other

Saturday in the home of one of their friends (65). Gogol is taught to read and write his ancestral alphabet in the Bengali class, “which begins at the back of his throat with an unaspirated *K* and marches steadily across the roof of his mouth, ending with elusive vowels that hover outside his lips” (65-66). But this challenges Gogol because he misses the Saturday morning drawing class he is enrolled in at the suggestion of his parents. Gogol’s parents, his American school mates and teachers make Gogol to be in-between the two cultures, that is, between speaking his mother tongue at home and English at school, consuming American food like hamburgers at school and Indian food, such as fish, rice, and dal at home. Ashima also has an urge to make her children acquainted with American English so that they acquire an American accent in order not to be isolated in their school due to their Indian accent. Thus, every afternoon Ashima has a nap, but before dozing off she changes “the television to channel 2, and tells Gogol to watch Sesame Street and The Electric Company, in order to keep up with the English he uses at nursery school” (54)

By the time Gogol is ten he has visited “Calcutta three more times, twice in summer and once during Durga pujo, and from the most recent trip he still remembers the sight of it etched respectably into the white-washed exterior of his paternal grandparents’ house” (67). When Gogol grows up, he desires to relate himself to the American milieu but his name poses an obstacle: “he does not feel like Nikhil” (105). He experiences a feeling of being in-between. Gogol is considered by Americans as “‘ABCD’ American Born Confused Desi”, and although he regards himself an American, American society remarks “But you’re Indian” (157). After Gogol’s father’s death, he knows that he cannot abandon the significance of either American or Indian cultures, but he tries to fuse them

together. According to Friedman, he experiences “a sudden reconnect with lost Bengali rituals; this desire culminates in marriage to an Indian American woman” (Friedman 115)

Concerning Ashima, she is fond of practicing Indian customs at home. She continues to “wear nothing but saris and sandals from Bata, [and] Ashoke [is] accustomed to wearing tailor-made pants and shirts all his life” (Lahiri 65), and Ashima also likes to prepare Indian food. Gogol’s parents allow him to have separate American and Indian celebrations of his birthday. On the occasion of the celebration of Gogol’s fourteenth birthday, nearly forty guests from different states visit the family house. Ashima throws a party conforming to the Bengali cultural traditions. Women are dressed in saris far more dazzling than the pants and polo-shirts their husbands wear (73). Ashima cooks “lamb curry with lots of potatoes, lunchis, thick channa dal with swollen brown raisins, pineapple chutney, sandeshes molded out of saffron -tinted ricotta cheese” (72). Gogol’s school friends are also invited, and Gogol’s mother finds it stressful to feed “a handful of American children, half of whom always claim they are allergic to milk, all of whom refuse to eat the crusts of their bread” (72). This demonstrates that Ashima has become a cultural hybrid by struggling to uphold her Indian cultural traditions and trying to accept the American ways of life for her children’s sake.

The sense of Indian community is very strong in the host country, which is a kind of devise created by the first generation living in America to feel they belong and to hold on to their customs. Ashima comprehends this condition and till the very end of the novel she upholds community relations very well. Ashima occasionally organizes parties on the events of Bengali festivals like Durga pujo at her house, invites Bengali friends to the parties, serves them Bengali food and tries

to preserve the cultural identity of her Bengali family. At these parties, the Bengali people sit on the floor, sing songs of Bengali poets such as Nazrul, play different kinds of games and create an atmosphere full of and with Indianness. According to Ang “it is undeniable that the idea of diaspora is an occasion for positive identification for many, providing a powerful sense of transnational belonging and connection with dispersed others of similar historical origins” (Ang 142).

The influence of tradition can also be analyzed in the character of Ashima and Gogol in their approach to food. Food is a vital cultural element that makes diasporic people’s culture change, and it is a way of keeping their connection to their homeland while shaping them in the host country. Food makes Ashima revisit her homeland and shapes her present attitude in America. She cooks Indian recipes, but she is not completely satisfied because the lack of mustard oil will result in a different taste from that of the original recipe. By the end of the novel, Ashima realizes that once in India, she will not make her own croquettes, as she will be able to have them in a restaurant, and these will bear “a taste that after these years she has still not quite managed, to her satisfaction, to replicate” (Lahiri 277). On the other hand, after the death of Ashoke, Gogol gives meaning to his cultural roots; to mark the end of the mourning period: “They prepare an elaborate meal [...], cooked as his father liked [...].” (118). However, Gogol cannot “completely disown his native culture during his father’s sudden death which forces him to look back at his own culture” (Vijayakumar & Parvin 1665).

The life and experiences of the second generation compared to the first generation are very different. The second generation live American lives, watch American cartoons, go to school and have friends. They also eat American food and enjoy many different types of food that their parents, the first generation

refuse to consume. At Gogol's insistence, for example, his mother prepares him an American dinner once a week "Shake'n and Bake chicken or Hamburger Helper prepared with ground lamb" (Lahiri 65). The first generation holds on strongly to their Bengali ways and values. Thus, Ashima confesses that she has to give in with the children: "In the supermarket, they let Gogol and Sonia fill the cart with items that he and Sonia, not they, consume: Individually wrapped slices of cheese, mayonnaise, tuna fish, hot dogs" (65). For the sake of Gogol and Sonia: "they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati" (64). Ashoke and Ashima do not always necessarily want to do as they are expected, and they are sometimes even reluctant to do it but they do it because of Gogol and Sonia. In America, the first generation has become a cultural hybrid struggling to preserve their Indian cultural traditions while trying to accept the American way of life for their children's sakes. Natalie Friedman states that the children of immigrants are "the conduits of change, importing American culture into their Indian homes and creating a kind of *métissage* that does not threaten their ethnic or cultural identity, but that enriches their experience" (116). Thus, for the children of immigrants, nothing turns out totally American or Indian. Although the parents learn how life in America works, they never desert their tradition but stay loyal to Indian customs and strive to pass them on to their children: "During Pujos [...] Gogol and Sonia are dragged off to a high school or a Knight of Columbia hall overtaken by Bengalis, where they are required to throw marigold petals at a cardboard effigy of a goddess and eat bland vegetarian food" (64).

Another aspect of Indian customs can be seen in Gogol's marriage with Moushumi, which is held in Indian tradition: "There is an hour-long watered-

down Hindu ceremony on a platform covered with sheets. Gogol and Moushumi sit cross-legged, first opposite each other, then side by side. [...] Shenai music plays on a boom box” (222). Although Gogol holds a Hindu ceremony during his wedding, he also slips American tradition into it by cutting the wedding cake: “A cake is wheeled out, Nikhil weds Moushumi (224). Cutting the wedding cake during a wedding reception is customary in Western weddings. This shows that Gogol combines the traditions of India and America in his wedding with Moushumi.

The Namesake shows how the first generation of immigrants experiences language as well as their stigmatization due to having a foreign accent. Though Ashima comes to America with an already high level of English proficiency, she is still disturbed by conversation with Americans, always frightened of making a mistake. She dreads people’s judgement of her when they are reminded of her foreignness by her accent. At Gogol’s birth, the nurse asks Ashima if she is hoping for a boy or a girl: “‘Hoping for a boy or a girl?’ Petty asks. ‘As long as there are ten finger and ten toe’, Ashima replies [...] Patty smiles a little too widely, and suddenly Ashima realizes her error, knows she should have said ‘fingers’ and ‘toes’”(7). This error pains Ashima a lot as “English had been her subject. In Calcutta, before she was married, she was working towards a college degree” (7). Ashima’s self-consciousness of her Indian English influences her identity, the language with hybrid features given by the mixture of British English imposed during the British rule in India. The first generation bears the stigma of their Indian accent and has more difficulties in forming part of the new culture; they experience more problems in adapting to the new language while their children, the second generation, because of their school education, embrace the language

more easily and are better at feeling part of the American society. Gogol and his sister Sonia speak English like native speakers. They also know Bengali, the language that they use when speaking to their parents and when they are in Bengali language and culture lessons (65) to which their parents send them. While in India, their language reminds their family members of their otherness: “On trips to India his America-accented English is a source of endless amusement to his [Gogol’s] relatives and when he and Sonia speak to each other, aunts and uncles and cousins always shake their heads in disbelief and say, ‘I didn’t understand a word’” (118).

Ashoke and Ashima are frequently unsettled by the fact that “their children sound just like Americans, expertly conversing in a language that still at times confounds them, in accents they are accustomed not to trust” (65). Gogol sometimes includes Bengali language in his conversation. For example, he mixes Bengali and English in his conversation with his wife Moushumi “At restaurant and bars, they sometimes slip Bengali phrases into their conversation in order to comment with impunity on other dinner’s unfortunate hair or shoes” (211).

Conclusion

The thesis examines the diasporic experiences and cultural hybridity in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* focusing particularly on the differences between the first and the second generations in America. The study argues that, thanks to their liminality where the cultures fuse, the second generation is better positioned than the first generation to construct a multiperspectival sense of identity, deprived of the nostalgia that typifies the diasporic experience of the first-generation migrants.

It is observed that the first generation is more closely attached to Indian culture than the second generation. Ashoke and Ashima, who represent the first generation immigrants, attempt to hold on to their culture and traditions. Diasporas often have strong attachment to their homeland. For the first generation, home is undoubtedly India and they try to maintain their tradition in the host country. Ashima feels homesick and upset; she feels spatially and emotionally dislocated from her parents' home full of loved ones and wishes to go back. The first generation strive to preserve and transmit their culture to their children, Gogol and Sonia, namely the second generation, who are therefore surrounded by and taught to live according to two contrasting cultural sets of traditions. The second generation is predominantly replete with the experience of being caught in-between, inhabiting the 'third space', which is the space of negotiating two dissimilar cultures. As for the second generation, however, their weaker bond with their parents' home country and culture, together with their acceptance of the American culture results in hybridity. As they grow up, they find themselves divided in two worlds and cultures, yet they cannot cut themselves off totally from India due to its strong presence in their parents' lives. After their experiences, they become more open to new possibilities offered by the process of hybridization, which implies "making difference into sameness" (Young 24).

The first and second generations differ in language and custom, and both encounter cultural hybridity. Ashima is deeply conscious of her accent, and the unsurmountable barrier it poses to her integration into American society. The second generation, however, their children, grow up to speak perfect American English, and at the same time they have the knowledge of and speak Bengali, since their parents try to ensure the use of the mother tongue at home and send them to

Bengali language and culture lessons and expose them to their own lineage, customs, and rites. Gogol and Sonia wear western costumes without any hesitation but Ashima, their mother even after a long stay in America, is traditionally wearing a sari which shows her strong sense of attachment to her native land. As first generation immigrants, Ashoke and Ashima make their circle of Bengali acquaintances, and these Bengalis celebrate different customs and ceremonies such as death, marriages, festivals and childbirth together. They celebrate these as per Bengali traditions, wearing their traditional attire, thus trying to preserve their culture in the host society. The second generation practice aspects of both Indian and American cultures, Bengali culture to pacify their parents, but they live as Americans because America is the place where they were born. They incorporate both American and Indian traditions, and their experiences of both cultures, just like dual birthday parties, vacations spent in India, parties given by their parents, celebration of Christmas and thanksgiving, school friends and relationships, help them blend aspects of the cultures involved. Gogol finally identifies himself as both Indian and American; he acknowledges a sense of cultural responsibility towards his roots and learns to accept his identity confusion and hybridity. The second generation is groomed to be bilingual and bicultural, face cultural dilemmas and displacement. In these ways, the study concludes that the second generation is better positioned than the first generation to construct a multiperspectival sense of identity, deprived of the nostalgia that typifies the diasporic experience of the first-generation migrants.

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