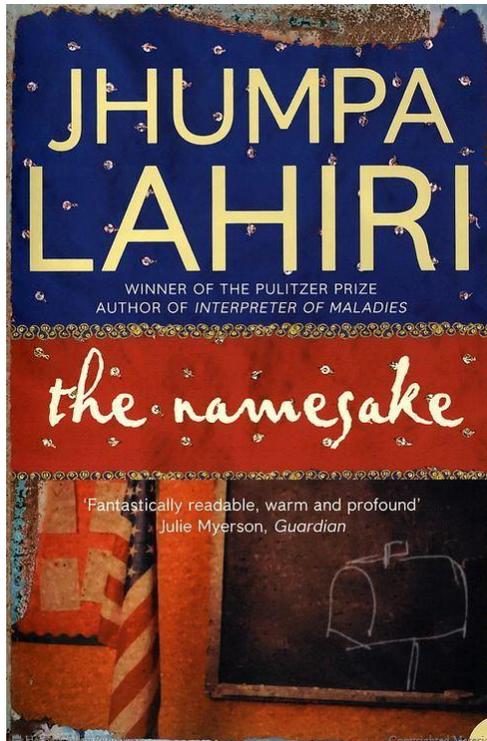


## Dual State of Migrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

Radha Devi. K. and Dr. G. Arputhavel Raja

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### Abstract

The aim of the paper is to bring forth the way in which Jhumpa Lahiri, a Pulitzer winner novelist explores the dilemma of name and immigrant's sense of identity and belongingness in the novel, *The Namesake*. The paper discusses the term 'diaspora' and their role in the present-day world. The protagonist of the novel, Gogol belongs to the second generation of migrant struggles for name, identity and belongingness, was pathetically portrait by the author. The Diasporic consciousness manifests itself in a variety of ways - a sense of loss and dispossession, a feeling of remaining straddle between two cultures and anxiety to belong. The condition of a migrant is always in dual state. A migrant, who is the stranger of the new land, also becomes a stranger in his own land. He tries desperately to become a 'new self', without really letting go of 'old self'.

**Keywords:** Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*, Immigrant, Diaspora, Dispossession, Straddle, Stranger, Dual state.

## Introduction

Diaspora originally refers to the Jewish dispersion from their homeland, but at present, any kind of exile from the homeland is called Diaspora. It disrupts the fix nature of roots with journeys along various roots and reinvention of identities. Indian writers can be grouped into two distinct classes. One class comprises those who have spent their life partly in their homeland and partly to other countries. The other class comprises those who have been bred since childhood outside India. The writers of the former group have a literal displacement, whereas, the latter group find themselves rootless. The second Diasporians face two cultures, two languages, two countries and remain suspended them. The sense of belonging of immigrant writers is worked out through retelling of the past in various ways (using the event but arranging in different manner). They experience the preoccupation with the past, the lost homeland and the loss of identity.

## Indian Diaspora

Indian Diaspora can be classified into two kinds - Forced migration and Voluntary migration or Modern Diaspora. Forced migration, people migrated from their own country to other country as a slave to accomplish their own basic livelihood. This was happened in pre-independence India. In the case of Voluntary migration, people are eagerly migrated to other countries for their benefits such as professions and academic purposes, in particular to acquire the contemporary advanced technology and communication. Diaspora Literature comes under the second category. The members of a Diasporic community often link with the past migration history. Even the children of the migrant family are influenced by their past migration history. Homi Bhaba calls it 'a third space' in his 'The Location of Culture'. The Diasporians are non-resident natives of their homeland and resident-aliens of their current place of living. This shows the dual nature of the migrants.

## Dual Nature of Diaspora

The diasporic experience can serve as a form of transcultural critique, offering the possibility of reading one culture's space and time from the space and time of another. We can see the strategic value of 'doubleness' in terms of identity constructions and self-reinventions and also the concept of creolisation as a strategy for cultural resistance. Their sense of yearning for the homeland, a curious attachment of its traditions, religions and languages gives birth to Diasporas literature. There are two types of migration one is physical and another one is mental migration. The mental migration is a challenging one for the Diaspora community. The question of settling themselves in foreign countries remains unanswerable to any Diasporas unless they associate themselves with the two lands. Their mind swings back and forth to their homeland and the alienated settled foreign land. This induces their suffering and agony out of cultural change. These are expressed by the Diaspora in different genres of Literature. This kind of trauma was soothed by their nostalgia.

## Theme of Exclusion

The theme of exclusion is all-pervasive in literature. But the Diaspora literature particularly is replete with moods, moors and experiences caused by cultural exclusion of the expatriate community. Displaced and dislocated from the roots suffers from spatial, emotional and cultural dislocation revealed in various forms of 'cultural shock', 'cultural cringe' as well as

‘cultural hybridization’. The theme of cultural alienation and loss of identity that immigrant faces in making a new home in a foreign land receives evocative treatment in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*. It stresses the need to cultivate the best of modernity by intermingling of the best in the East and the West. But, at last, the protagonist tries to bounce back to their own culture.

### **Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake***

Jhumpa Lahiri, the representative of Indian Diaspora, born to Bengali parents in London and raised in Rhode Island. Lahiri is British by birth, American by citizenship and Indian by origin. As a representative of Indian Diaspora, she feels a strong sense of loss, displacement and homing desire. When she talks of India, she has a kind of intensive attachment for the country. She expressed these experiences in her works, through her characters. As a daughter of Indian American parents, Lahiri is always living in the shadows of two cultures. She was brought up in a traditional Indian American family; she shares her parent’s sadness of loss and displacement in an exile life. Her writings are always concerned about such issues like belongingness, home and identity. Most of the Diaspora writings reveal certain features that are similar. There are most autobiographical with reference to the narration of self.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* illustrates the lives of both the First and Second generation Indian migrants in the USA. A sense of coming home in distant lands set the tone of Diaspora Literature. The recurrent theme in Lahiri’s writing is the bitter-sweet experience of immigrant to America from India. Her characters are often caught in a cultural indeterminate state - excited about their new home but grieving the loss of their country of origin. Lahiri also belongs to the second generation of Indian Diaspora whose ongoing quest for identity never seems to end.

*The Namesake* depicts an imaginary homeland created by Indian American couple, Ashoke and Ashima after they moved to America from Calcutta. The imaginary homeland consists of dynamic community of Indian Americans who keep an interactive relationship with each other. The members in this community are Bengali professionals who moved to America as intellectuals. In the midst of white society, their community seems to be minor. So this makes them to feel a sense of dislocation and displacement. To escape from this sense, they often associate with each other by holding parties, celebrating traditional holidays and traveling together.

### **Gogol**

In *The Namesake*, the protagonist, Gogol is the representative of the second generation of Indian Diaspora. His quest for identity never seems to end. The title *The Namesake* reflects the storm in the mind of Gogol goes through to identity with his unusual name. The novel centres around the couple and community of Bengali origin in the USA migrated for various reasons. Narrating the story of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, Lahiri focuses on the cultural dislocations of a family, immigrants from Calcutta who settle in Boston to study, work and raise a family. The novel moves quietly, eloquently across its central arc from the birth of a son to the death of a father.

### **Dual Nature of Gogol’s Mind**

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The main concern of the novel is the name of the protagonist. He is the representative of the community without a name and misnamed as Gogol. The name itself represents that he is neither belongs to American nor belongs to an Indian. This shows symbolically the dual mindedness of the character. He struggles with a name, he is embarrassed by heritage either Indian or American, he is not sure of either. In order to get self-definition, he abandons the name Gogol and tries to become else. The question of identity becomes crucial when a person is culturally displaced and he cannot co-relate with any of the two worlds in which he is living. While experiencing identity confusion from a change of names, Gogol is nonetheless able to define his identity. Since Gogol is born after his father survives in a horrifying train accident, his father sees the Gogol as a pet name as a gesture of his rebirth. But Gogol does not understand the meaning of his name when he is young.

### **Cultural Escapism**

As he grows up, he recognizes the uncommon nature of his name creates problem with his identity. He doesn't understand the emotional significance of his name. Gogol is a Russian name, he feels uncomfortable with the Russian name. It makes him to detach himself from his family members. Later on, he develops such a kind of resentment towards his name, so he decides to use his legal name, Nikhil, as an overcoat to escape from Indian culture. Although the new name brings him confidence, Gogol is always present inside him. Soon he feels a sense of dissatisfaction about avoiding his roots. "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 once, and so, cease to exist... It provides no solace at all" (Lahiri, 289). All his effort pays back with confusion about who he truly is. He sees himself as Nikhil striving to be truly American, yet he fails to eradicate Gogol. By the end, he chooses to stick with Gogol is Indian identity. At last he realizes the hope behind Gogol is the meaningful fragment to define who he is.

### **Immigrants Are in No Man's Land**

The Namesake is a perfect reference for Lahiri's story about the strangeness of the Indian immigrant experience in US. The child of immigrants begins in a kind of nowhere place. Gogol is not quite an American in part because he is not recognized as such by others. He desired to blend in American society but American not viewed as of theirs even though he is a native-born citizen. He tries to set a wall between past and present but this is not easy. He adopts the name 'Nikhil' is a part to live only in the present, but Gogol clings to him that he signs his old name unconsciously. He doesn't respond immediately while anyone calling his new name 'Nikhil'. Gogol struggles to carry the burden of two names. He experiences a feeling of being in-between like a person belongs to no man's land. The problem of Gogol's name symbolizes the dual nature of the Indian born American settled migrants.

When Ashima and Ashoke do their utmost to create Bengali ambience for Gogol and Sonia by arranging all Bengali get together, but the two as they grew in hybrid culture, they respond gingerly. This shows that Gogol is always sailing in two boats simultaneously, one with his Bengali speaking parents and living Bengali style and the other of American Indian.

### **Conclusion**

*The Namesake* illustrates the lives of both first generation and second generation Indian migrants in the USA. Alienation is a part of the experience of the Indian Diaspora. The novel shows the immigrants face cultural dilemmas in the foreign system. Not only the first generation immigrants face cultural dilemmas, the second generation also groomed to be 'bilingual' and 'bicultural' face cultural dilemmas and displacement more. Diasporians are like to be standing in no man's land. They neither fully accepted the alien country, culture, etc nor fully give up their own culture, country etc. They faced "Doubleness" throughout their life. Only through their nostalgic mood they try to soothe their minds.

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