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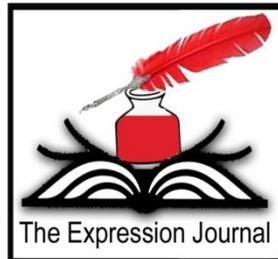
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**DISPLACEMENT AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE NAMESAKE***

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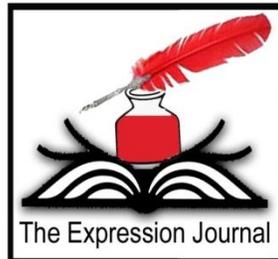
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**Abstract**

Jhumpa Lahiri novel *The Namesake* is the story of a Bengali couple Ashoke and Ashima and their son Gogol who is named Nikhil later. Ashok and Ashima are migrated from West Bengal to the United States. Especially these three characters of the novel suffer from the problem of displacement in the United States. Ashoke puts name of his son's name on the name of the Russian writer Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol just because his own life matches with this Russian writer. But his son, Gogol does not like his name because he hates this name. He wants to strengthen his roots on a foreign land but remains unsuccessful. Like him, his father, Ashoke and his mother, Ashima also feel the crisis to retain their identity in the United States. After the death of Ashoke, Ashima loses her roots and decides to stay for some time in India and for some time in the United States. She lives the life of nostalgia throughout and wants to take some souvenirs so that she may be able to live happily with her past memories.

**Key-Words**

Jhumpa Lahiri, Namesake, Identity, Displacement, Hybridity, Roots.



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Jhumpa Lahiri is a famous novelist and short-story writer. She basically hails from West Bengal. Her real name was Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri. When she was just two years old, her family migrated to the United States. She has done her B.A. in English Literature from Barnard College. Later she did her M.A and Ph.D. Her short-story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* was published in 1999 which won 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. *The Namesake* (2003) is Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel. Lahiri's second short-story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* was published in 2008. Her second novel is *The Lowland* (2013).

When the novel *The Namesake* starts, Ashima and Ashoke are seen in her flat in the United States. Ashima is expecting a baby. She is a traditional wife who does not call her husband by his name. She respects her husband and that's why doesn't think to call him by his name, "When she calls out to Ashoke, she doesn't say his name. Ashima never thinks of her husband's name when she thinks of her husband, even though she knows perfectly well what it is. She has adopted his surname but refuses, for propriety's sake, to utter his first. It is not the type of thing Bengali wives do. Like a kiss or caress in a Hindi movie, a husband's name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over. (2) Ashima's labour pains start and they rush to the hospital. After reaching hospital, nurse tells them that it will take time in the birth of the baby. She says, "Don't you worry, Mr. Ganguli. She's got a long ways to go. We can take over from here." (3)

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Ashima has to stay in the hospital in this critical situation and she remembers that, "It is the first time in her life she has slept alone, surrounded by strangers; all her life she has slept either in a room with her parents or with Ashoke at her side. She wishes the curtains were open, so that she could talk to the American woman" (3). When she tries to talk to other American women, she finds them much reserved in negotiations. Thus, she feels very lonely in that hospital and remembers the Indian scene where at the time of delivery, women go to their parents' home to deliver the baby and many persons take care of them:

In India she thinks to herself, women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares, recreating briefly to childhood when baby arrives. (4)

A boy is born at 5:05 AM in the morning. Then they face problem in the name of the child and the hospital staff does not discharge her without the name on the birth certificate. Without name they don't discharge him, and that's why Ashoke puts the name Gogol on the name of Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. Ashima does not want to stay there and bring up her child in that environment but Ashoke does not want to return. She misses her home in India where she could have felt so comfortable and she could have brought up her son without any problem. Thus, the home emerges as a big factor here in the novel,

Home is where one dreams of the world. (Irvin Schick 26)

He fears that returning to India may not be good for them, "He (Ashoke) remembers suddenly about Ghosh, his companion on the train who had returned from England for his wife's sake. "It is my greatest regret coming back," Ghosh has confessed to Ashoke, mere hours before he was killed." (33)

When Ashoke gets a job in a university, they move to the university town outside Boston. They find a strange thing there that it was the only Bengali family. But Ashoke feels satisfied as his dream of a teaching job in the university has been fulfilled, "The job is everything, Ashoke has ever dreamed of. He has always hoped to teach in a university rather than work for a corporation." (49) Tejinder Kaur writes about the surroundings of their new residence, "The shift to this suburban area with no streetlights, no public transportation, no stores for miles makes Ashima feel more drastic and distressing than the move from Calcutta to Cambridge had been" (268).

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Time passes and Ashima is again pregnant and Gogol starts going to school. He finds that he is now given a new name Nikhil by her own parents in the school. Thus, he gets his new name, "His parents have told him that at school, instead of being called Gogol, he will be called by a new name, a good name which his parents have finally decided on, just in time for him to begin his formal education. The name, Nikhil, is artfully connected to the old. (56)

Gogol is unhappy by his new name. He starts weeping but his parents tell him that he will be only Gogol for them. Only students and teachers will call him by this name, "Don't worry... To me and your mother, you will never be anyone but Gogol." (57) When he goes to school, he is called by his new name by the school principal.

Ashima and Ashoke try to bring up Gogol according to Bengali culture and that's why they send him in Bengali language and culture classes. He wants to adopt the American culture and his parents don't want that he may be like other American boys. When he is sent in the weekend drawing classes he doesn't take any interest in them, "The children in the class study without interest, wishing they could be a ballet or softball practice instead. Gogol hates it because it keeps him from attending every other session of Saturday-morning drawing classes he is enrolled in, at the suggestion of his art teacher." (66) He does not write his name at the bottoms of her drawings just because he feels shame by writing this Russian name given to him:

He even hates signing his name at the bottom of his drawings in art classes. He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian. He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second. (76)

Students and her sister make fun of his name and call him 'Giggle' or 'Goggle'. He is become a butt of mockery in the class. Even the teachers also face problem in pronouncing his name properly and they stop when there is a turn of calling his name. When the teacher stops to pronounce his name from the roaster, he himself has to say hastily, "That's me (67)

At the occasion of Gogol's fourteenth birthday, Gogol gives a treat to his Bengali friends and celebrates his birthday with them. Moushumi is the only girl who is closer to him in the age and her parents have been migrated here from West Bengal. Gogol doesn't invite his American friends in the party and keeps a gap. Thus, there is a cultural-clash that is explicitly found in the novel.

Gogol's father reveals in front of his son the secret of putting his son's name Gogol, "Apart from that. He spent most of his adult life outside his homeland. Like me." (77) When Gogol and her sister Sonia go to India with their parents to meet their relatives in India then the environment of India does not suit then and they fall ill:

Upon returning to Calcutta, Gogol and Sonia both get terribly ill. It is the air, the rice, the wind, their relatives casually remark; they were not made to survive in a poor county, they say. They have the constipation followed by the opposite. Doctors come to the house in the evening with stethoscope in black leather bags. (86)

Gogol starts having affairs with the girls also under the sway of the western culture. It is Kim in front of her he tells his new name with "I'm Nikhil." (96) He dares to kiss her also and even his friends are also surprised with this act. He himself accepts that Gogol could not do this. It was only Nikhil (his new Identity) who can do it, "He says, "It wasn't me." he nearly says. But he doesn't tell them that it hadn't been Gogol who'd kissed Kim. That Gogol had nothing to do with it." (96) Gogol intends to change his name legally also just because he hates his name, Gogol, "I hate the name Gogol," he says. I have always hated it. (102)

Thus, Gogol becomes Nikhil (a symbol of American culture) and he starts his journey of life like other American boys do. He has physical relationships with Ezra Stiles at the party for the first time. After her, he has an affair with Maxine. He finds again that the environment in the house of Maxine is totally different from his own home. In his own home his parents have never exposed their love in front of Gogol and Sonia but in Maxine's home, her father, Gerald and her mother, Lydia live a life like romantic lovers who expose their love openly:

But their lives bear no resemblance to Gerald and Lydia: expensive pieces of jewelry presented on Lydia's birthday, flowers brought home for no reason at all, the two of them kissing openly...Seeing the two of them curled on the sofa in the evenings, Gerald's head resting on Lydia's shoulder, Gogol is reminded that in all his life he has never witnessed a single moment of physical affection between his parents. Whatever love exists between them is an utterly private, uncelebrated thing. (138)

When Gogol's father dies in the hospital due to his stomachache, Gogol starts staying with his mother and her sister, Sonia at this odd time. When he spends most of his time with his family, Maxine gets angry with him and deserts him. Gogol is married with Moushumi but she also does not prove loyal to him. She also leaves him. Ultimately, Gogol becomes lonely again.

On the other hand, Sonia gets married and Ashima also feels lonely. She decides to return India again. She thinks to bifurcate her remaining time in India and America both. She misses the time spent in America with her husband. She wants to keep some memories in her heart that's why she says Gogol to take some pictures. The world becomes dull for Ashima. Their lives are completely changed, "One dead. Another, a widow, on the verge of a different sort of departure, in order to dwell, as his father does, in a separate world. She will call him, once a week, on the phone." (289)

Thus, the novel is about two contradictory cultures. Preeti Puri rightly says "... the novel examines the nuances involved without being caught between two conflicting cultures with their highly distinct religious, social and ideological differences. The novel uses Gogol's struggle over his name as a jumping off point to explore large issues of integration, assimilation and cultural identity. (Puri 191) Salman Rushdie concept of 'imaginary homelands' (11) is beautifully proven in the novel. Thus, this novel portrays the beautiful pictures of diaspora, identity crisis and displacement.

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