

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Freedom of Choice and Crisis of Existence in Jhumpa Lahiri's

The Namesake

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U. in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in

English

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June 2011

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Letter of Recommendation

Mrs. Rekha Wagle has completed her thesis entitled “Freedom of Choice and Crisis of Existence in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*” under my supervision. She carried out her research from September 2010 to June 2011. I hereby recommend her thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Freedom of Choice and Crisis of Existence in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Rekha Wagle has been approved by the designed members of the research committee.

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Acknowledgements

I welcome this opportunity to thank Mr. Chitra Kumar Karki, an assistant Lecturer at the Central Department of English, T.U., who supervised this research work. His wide-ranging knowledge and study have led to many improvements in the substance and helped me give the final shape to this thesis.

I would like to extend my profound gratitude to Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, the present Head of the Central Department of English for his invaluable suggestions. I am especially grateful to Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, the former Head of the department for granting me an opportunity to carry out this research. I would like to thank my friends Tarani, Nirajan, Shubhekchha, Dipak and all those who supported and encouraged me directly or indirectly in this course.

I am heavily indebted to my parents, Uddab Wagle and Uma Wagle; brother Peshal, sisters Srijana, Bandana and especially my husband Mohan Baral who constantly supported and provided encouragement to carry out this research work. Finally, I am thankful to NP communication for typing and bringing this research work into this present form.

July,2011

Rekha Wagle

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Abstract

The present research on Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) explores the existential predicament experienced by the Indian immigrants and their American born children in America, the land where they feel more alienated and estranged in spite of their freedom of choice. In the novel, the major characters like Ashima and Gogol makes the essence of their life through the freedom of choice, but they are doomed to suffer once their choice turns out to be curse. However, they are responsible for the universal sense of alienation and the estrangement and the anxiety in their life. Lahiri has depicted the power in the name, the problem which brings the crisis in the individual identity of the protagonist throughout his life. Torn apart between two selves of Gogol and Nikhil i.e. the private and public, he is doomed to be an alienated and fragmented being in the state of dilemma and crisis. At last, after his father's death and breaking up his marriage, his understanding of the futility and the absurdity of life makes him more determined to confront with his tragic situation he is living with.

I. An Existential Quest of Selfhood in *The Namesake*

This research endeavors to explore the way Jhumpa Lahiri has presented human predicament of futile suffering owing to their freedom of choice throughout her novel *The Namesake* (2003). It focuses on the universal sense of alienation, despair, depression, anxiety and meaninglessness resulted out of personal freewill, through which they make themselves. This study brings forth the protagonist's consistent quest of authentic existence as an act of defining his self amidst the absurdity of his loathing name 'Gogol' and his desire to become 'Nikhil' as the quest of concrete subjectivity. This dissertation seeks to excavate existential crisis that Gogol, the protagonist, and his mother Ashima undergo which results out of their wrong choice and struggle in American land.

In *The Namesake*, Lahiri basically writes about the problem faced by the two different generations of Indian immigrant family in America. For the immigrants, the challenge of exile, the loneliness, the knowledge of and longing for a lost world are more explicit and depressing. On the one hand the problem of the children of immigrants, those with strong ties to their country of origin is that they feel neither one thing nor other. Consequently the children of immigrants feel the conflict during their growing up. It is always the question of allegiance, of choice through which they make their essence

and nobody is responsible but themselves. They want to please their parents and meet their expectations of their peers and there are the expectations they put on themselves to fit into society. Depending on the degree to which immigrants in questions are willing to assimilate, the conflict more or less pronounced. In this regard Judith Ceaser criticizes the novel as a story of “guilt and liberation” which tries to “extricate” oneself from the past and the present obligation (107).

In *The Namesake*, first generations of the immigrants are fearful and suspicious of America and American culture when their children are growing up. Ashima, the first generation Indian immigrant, is condemned to live her life in America poorer than her life in India. The failure to get what she has expected in the alien land of America brings disillusionment and ultimately the despair and depression where she is doomed to confront with the absurdity of life. In the same way, it is difficult to her to understand the views of her American born children when they reach in their adolescent age. At times, both Ashoke and Ashima feel that their expectations from their children are in direct opposition to the reality of the world they live in. Things like dating, living on one’s own, having close friendships with Americans, listening American music and eating American food- all of these are not only mystery for them but also the things that makes them alien even if they are living within the family. The alienation within their own family is the source of anxiety in their life.

Reflecting on the power of the names as makers of identity, Jhumpa Lahiri takes the reader through the existence of Gogol Ganguly. As the novel

begins, Gogol Ganguly's parents are living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with their transformation from Calcutta after their arranged marriage. The process of nomenclature to an alien society resonates throughout the novel. Lahiri discusses the practice of assigning two names: a pet name and a good name. Gogol Ganguly's problem is that he has been saddled with a strange name which does not reflect his self. Before he leaves for Yale, Gogol reinvents himself by legal deeds as 'Nikhil'. And the name does free him from his parents' constraints. It is that Nikhil that embarks on his adult life, as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party, as Nikhil that he begins to have relationships with American women keeping his private life secret from his parents.

Gogol is in the process of discovering his private new life, new identity and subjectivity but he has gone through the contradiction, ambivalence and crisis. In fact, he is torn apart between two selves of Gogol and Nikhil i.e. private and public. The private self is traumatic that always haunts him and the public that he does not fully assimilate. He is doomed to be an alienated and fragmented self, living in the state of dilemma and crisis.

The anxiety and despair that Gogol is facing is his realization of the forlornness, anguish and meaninglessness of his existence and the desire of changing his name is his conscious act of seeking the concrete and authentic existence through the implication of his freedom of choice and individual freewill which turns out to be wrong and falls into the existential crisis.

Nikhil's university years and his job at a large architecture consulting company in New York for he has broken free of the Indian immigrant parents

insistent in medicine engineering or some other established profession enable himself to distance himself further from his background. Throughout his relationship with Maxine, Nikhil moves as far as he can from his parents world trying to avoid being Gogol. But the sudden demise of Ashok brings a storm in the life of Gogol, which not only makes him alien from his father as there remains no more than the memory of his father, but also detaches himself with Maxine for her lack of understanding his new priorities; he gravitates towards his family and tries to support his mother through her grief. After sometimes, Nikhil introduces himself with Maushami, a girl whom he had known as a child since both of them belong to the second generation Indian immigrant in America. Maushami, who had fled the pressure of her parents to become a scholar of French literature, agrees to the match, and soon they marry. They have much in common. Yet, Maushami feels drawn back to the world that had threatened to stifle her and the marriage breaks up. With the sorrow and pain, Gogol searches for the value of meaning of life out of such dilapidation, which enables him to overcome the anguish of contingency, by giving him the rich feeling of his own existence.

The novel can be viewed as the exotic outpourings of Indian immigrants writings in English for whom the home country provides the canvas of the magical interpretations. Here, Lahiri writes of people who need to make sense of their own destinies in their own terms. The novelist herself is an American born to Indian parents. Because of all the literatures coming out of south Asia and the various sites of an Indian diasporas in recent years, some critics have immediately assigned Lahiri's work to the category of post colonial. But what

differentiates post colonial concern about identity and naming from the immigrant novels by Jews Irish and German of the mid twentieth century, is the interplay between the individual character's struggle and the larger issue of national identity after imperial power have been withdrawn or cast off.

However, there may be resonance with this twentieth century novels of earlier American immigrants and they too trace their defining narrative dynamic of a character struggling with the norms of his parents and his society towards the achievement of self defined moral identity to the roots of nineteenth century realism. In *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri's major concern is with the consistent struggle of an adolescent boy against the difficulties that he is condemned to encounter while adjusting himself with the domestic environment and public environment. Despite the traces of cultural conflict seen in the text, the research explores the human enthusiasm in the stage of existential crisis through the life of Gogol, who has gone through the similar kind of situation in the novel.

In the novel, Lahiri expresses her view that individuality is not the quality which can be superimposed externally but it can be achieved by a decision of a person. Moreover, the concentration on the individualism and alienation from the society has also been reflected in her novel. Through her characters, she has depicted a new dimension of subjectivity and freedom. The spirits of existentialism i.e. loneliness, alienation, anxiety, choice are encompassed through the entire spectrums of the novel.

Since the time Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* appeared in the literary scenario in 2003, it became able to attract the attention of many critics

and scholars. In the dawn of twenty first century, this novel was read by a considerable number of critics whose interpretation is different according to their own understanding. Lahiri's *The Namesake* has various qualities. It can be judged from different point of views. Therefore, the criticism depends on the reader how s/he interprets. In this connection, Don Sea Man comments in that:

Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* serves up without a hint of ostentation truing the banal trajectory of an unremarkable life of advantage finding subtle patterns in a stream of accidence, unforeseen and unintended details. Through the irony embedded narrative, Lahiri wants to reinvent herself through the critical act of writing where she always finds herself through the critical act of writing where she always finds herself dislocated and fragmented through her cultural memories of Bengli heritage.

(171)

Here, Sea Man tries to convey the message that the novel *The Namesake* is about the trans-cultural experience of migrants who always find difficulties in both the rejection of their culture and the assimilation of the new one. His focus is upon the fragmented self as the result of dislocation. The strangeness that one feels in a new land makes him estranged to himself. In this regard his view seems to be redirected towards the concept of cultural gap experienced by Diasporas.

In the same way, concerning on novel's postcolonial pang and its association with the issue of hybridity and rootlessness, critic Starre E. Smith interprets the novel from the postcolonial perspective:

The novel explores the concepts of cultural identity of rootlessness, tradition and familial expectations which never succumbs to the clichés of those themes which so often entails. Exploring the transcultural experiences setting in the backdrop of drift and confusion which moves from the voyage between two worlds, it tries to identify the deep rooted loose of personality. (123)

The above mentioned commentary tries to assert that the novel is the epitome of postcolonial reality that brings forth the issue of migration, alienation, homelessness and identity crisis.

Natalie Fredman in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* interprets the novel as an immigrant narrative:

Lahiri's *The Namesake* is an example of the contemporary immigrant narrative, which does not place the idea of an "American Dream" at the center of the story, but rather positions the immigrant ethnic family within a community of cosmopolitan travelers. Examining the experience of upper-class South Asian immigration through the eyes of American-born children, Lahiri's novel contains moments and tropes that resemble those of the travel narrative genre, particularly in its detached tone and digressive, pluralist narration. (111-28)

In the above interpretation, the critic tries to prove the novel as an travel genre with multiple narration. He strongly rejects this novel as the critique on American dream. In other words, he does not want to blame the modern American world as the sole cause of alienation, anxiety, and depression that Gogol and Ashima has gone through in the novel.

Madhoo Karma and Sumiparna Maiti reads the novel from the psychological perspective where they focuses on the emotion of the characters:

The novel *The Namesake* is exhaustively charged with emotional overtones, where Lahiri enriches the themes of immigrant experience, the clash of cultures, the conflict of assimilation, and most poignantly, the tangled ties between generations. Here again Lahiri displays her deft touch for the perfect details, the fleeting moments, the throb of phrases that open the whole worlds of emotion. (295-96)

The above interpretation focuses upon the emotions in relations to the immigrant experience where the divided self feel difficulty in adaptation the new culture and the alien land. The problems of maladjustment and alienation and its effect on human psyche, for Karma and Maiti, is the major theme to be further analyzed in the novel.

Though the above mentioned critics have presented and interpreted Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* from different critical perspective none of the critics have analyzed it from the perspective of the characters' freedom of choice and their crisis of existence in the alien land as their own predicament of life. That is to say none of the critics have observed it from the perspective

of Existentialism. Therefore, the present research purposes to carry out the research from the point of Existentialism and the concepts developed by Jean-Paul-Sartre, Albert Camus and other theorists, who are called Atheist. As Existentialist are of two group the former, Theistic a group who believe on God as a redeemer and the later Atheistic negates the existence of God and his relation with the people and the world. This group stress man's absolute freedom to choose. They reject the god and focus on man's responsibility for his own action. As Sartre says:

There are two kind of existentialist, first those who are Christen, among whom I would include Jasper and Gabriel Marcel, both Catholic; and on the other hand the atheistic existentialist, among whom I class Heidegger, and then the French existentialist and myself. What they have in common is that they think that existence precedes essence. (13)

As told by in the above lines, the novel also depicts the problem of Indian immigrants and their American born children as the nuisance of their freedom of choice. It portrays their existential struggle in the American land and the absurdity of life in contemporary American society. It presents how the Indian immigrants and their children are longing for their stable pattern of life in one or the other ways as they are victimized, alienated and their identity fall in between position. They are living in the land where they can neither get full assimilation nor are able to detach from their culture. They make the choice in one or the other ways and quest for stable pattern of life. The freedom of choice becomes a curse for them. Why they are not able to maintain fixed

identity? As the novel is based on the story of the first generation Indian immigrants and their son Gogol, who having no fixed identities makes multiple choice in one or other ways as being dislocated, having betrayed, having the sense of alienation, feeling of loneliness accept it with the optimistic view. It will not be the justice on the behalf of the character to analyze the text from other perspective rather than Existentialism.

Existentialism is a 20th century movement that is centered upon the analysis of existence and the ways human beings find them exist in the world. It is devoted to an interpretation of human existence in the world that stresses its concreteness and its problematic character. Existentialism is largely a coherent development within the traditional philosophy. Existentialists take man as the central theme of philosophy, and that by man they mean the free, self-creating, self-transcending subject.

Existentialism can be regarded as a revolt against absolute idealism and as a revolt against positivism, materialistic determinism and psychological determinism, against any form of philosophy which would reduce man to an item in the physical cosmos, so far as this would imply determinism, and against any form of philosophy which excludes a consideration of man's inner life and destiny matter. It rejects the traditional epistemology and attempts to ground human knowledge in the external world. It emphasizes the subjective realities of individual existence, freedom, and choice.

Furthermore, existentialism is a philosophy concerned with finding of self and meaning of life through will, choice, and personal responsibility. The individual is not detached observer of the world but 'in the world'. A person

exists in a special sense in which entities like stone and trees do not. The notion is that human exist first and then every individual spends life time changing their essence or nature. That is to say for existentialist 'existence precedes the essence'. One determines one's life by choice and action. Human make what they are by choices the individual are free to choose their own path and must accepts the risk and responsibility themselves.

Existentialism, according to Ellmann and Feildelson is "A very instance and philosophically specialized form of quest for selfhood" (803). Jean Paul Sartre the leading advocate of existentialism defines it as "A doctrine which makes human life possible and in addition declares that every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity." (10) It is a philosophy which gives priority to human existence, that is to say subjective experience of the world rather than to abstract or 'objective' structures or essences. Existentialism explores human existence in its hopes and fears, its fragility, its conflicts and insecurities. Its expressions emphasizes freedom, angst (anxiety, anguish, dread) and absurdity. It sees trust on pleasure, happiness, economic success, and security as a low inauthentic existence. Thus existentialism is the reaction in favor of individualism, subjectivity and feeling. It is the pure philosophy of human situation not of other objects. Existentialism is the most dynamic and appropriate philosophical movement to define and interpret anxiety, uncertainties and absurdities of the people.

All existentialists are concerned with ontology, the study of being. The existentialists conclude that existence precedes essence. A man's self is nothing except what he has become; at any given moment, it is the sum of the

life he has shaped until then. The ‘nothing’ he begins with is thus the source of man's freedom, for at each moment it is man's will that can choose how to act or not to act. However, each such decision affects the future doubly: a man is or should be responsible for the consequences of his actions and each action necessarily excludes the other potential actions for that moment, and their consequences, and thus at least partially limits the potentialities for future actions.

If human beings lives and dies only as one of the crowd, never aware of his special possibilities as a free agent and therefore never positing himself as an individual, he misses the chief glory of human existence. For Sartre, human existence is conscious being, “being-for-itself” (*pour-soi*). Human existence as “being-for-itself” is temporal—always in some present, always on the way from some past toward some future. Another characteristic of human existence is its dependence on things. Things have a fundamentally different mode of existence: ‘being-in-itself’ (*en-soi*). They have no consciousness, possibilities, and freedom.

Albert Camus presents the world that is absurd, void, meaningless and irrational. And for him modern men are living the absurd life like that of the mythical figure Sisyphus. The search for any purpose in this alien universe is meaningless, fruitless and futile. When the absurd man becomes aware of his futile living, he is naturally filled with anxiety and hopelessness but he does not surrender and attempts suicide, rather keeps on struggling in the hope of resolving the conflict and to make meaning of his existence.

Thus to sum up, existentialism attempts to find out happiness and meaning in the world characterized by alienation, isolation, loneliness, frustration, in-authenticity and absurdity. Man simply exists to make choice and because of choice he creates his self himself. Man's alienation or estrangement, his struggle for existence, anxiety, absurdity, failure and frustration, betrayal is some instance for existential struggle. *The Namesake* also deals with the freedom of choice and existential struggle and the quest for the stable pattern of life. Lahiri's protagonist passes through ups and downs of his life by experiencing betrayal, victimization, dislocation, feeling of alienation, failure in material relationship, denial of social norms and values, but Gogol takes it with the optimistic view so as to create meaning and purpose of his existence, even from the absurdity of life.

On the basis of above mentioned existentialist theorists, the present project aims to excavate the human predicament of undercurrents of sense of alienation, anguish and anxiety as a consequences of their own freedom of choice through the study of Gogol, the protagonist and his mother Ashima, who has transformed from Calcutta to Cambridge in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*. Moreover, it explores the way Jhumpa Lahiri sketches her characters as made by their own 'choices' and responsible for all the results. The choice of Gogol and Ashima turns out to be curse which ultimately brings the crisis in their existence. Gogol, even in the time of alienation, despair and depression does not think for 'suicide', faces the tragic life, which shows his full understanding of absurdity of life. In such ground of Gogol and his mother's condition, I have shaped my research through their analysis within

the existentialist framework in general and the concept of Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus in particular.

The research has been divided into three chapters on the basis of the content therein: the first chapter presents the brief introduction on the characters and their freedom of choice and the futile suffering that they undergo in American land in relation to the problem of stable cultural identity along with the literature review and the discussion on the tool that is existentialism, to prove the hypothesis and the significance of the topic freedom of choice and crisis of existence. The second chapter will be a textual analysis in which the theoretical tool of existentialism will be applied throughout the text in order to prove the hypothesis whereby lines from the texts will be adopted to strengthen the argument claimed in the hypothesis. Finally, the last chapter will be the conclusion of the whole research on the basis of the textual analysis that has been done in the second chapter.

II. Freedom of Choice and Crisis of Existence in *The Namesake*

This research explores the way Jhumpa Lahiri attempts to portray the existential crisis faced by the Indian immigrants and their descendents particularly the first generation in America as a result of their own freedom of choice in her novel, *The Namesake*. In the novel, Ashoke chooses to leave India for abroad study in America, and so does Ashima by choosing Ashoke as her bridegroom. Both of them are doomed to suffer in their upcoming life, for it is obvious in the life of every human being to be suffered owing to their own choice. Similarly, Lahiri tries to depict the descendents of immigrant's in between position in the American land, their existential struggle and the absurdities of life in the contemporary American society through the character Gogol, the son of Ashok and Ashima.

As a novelist, Jhumpa Lahiri exhibits a strong sense of inclination towards the existential interpretation of the human predicament through her character in *The Namesake*. Her characters, like Sisyphus, are living with full of choices, however ultimately that leads to the sufferings. Ashima, before her marriage, has full of choices to make herself. If she does not choose that would be also a choosing of not to choose. But the fact is that she must suffer to what she makes herself by choosing one from the multiple choices of her life. As

Jean P. Sartre in his *Being And Nothingness* (1943) writes “Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does”(35). In her freedom Ashima creates her own individual essence through the action that she has chosen, and nobody is responsible for all of those things but Ashima.

Sartre in his *Being and Nothingness* (1943) argues, “we are free and create our own individual essence through our action, we are also responsible for who we actually become” (44). He further says that there is no God to blame our suffering, “there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive of it” (274). Human Freedom in existentialist view is concerned with nothingness and consciousness; it owes this status to its role as a formal property. It characterizes the metaphysical status of nothingness and the nature of reflexivity in consciousness. Consciousness is not what it is what it is not, since it cannot be what it is in the manner of a substance having properties. Raider Due says that “By the defining role of freedom at the same time precludes freedom from having the same extraordinary role in the argument in the genetic and explanatory concept if nothingness and consciousness” (139). It is because freedom is not some sort of abstract power to rise above the human condition: it is rather, as O’Donohoe says, “the most absurd and inexorable commitment” (73). Ashok is free with multiple choices in his youth when he chooses to go abroad as per the suggestion of Ghosh, a middle-aged Bengali businessman whom Ashok has meet in the train journey, the journey where he got an accident. Ghosh has considered him as the free being to act and to make his own essence in his life:

You are still young. Free. Ghosh said, spreading his hands apart for emphasize. “Do yourself a favor. Before it’s too late, without thinking too much about it first, pack a pillow and a blanket and see as much of the world as you can. You will not regret it. One day it will be too late. . . . If you have changed your mind and need contacts, let me know. I live in Tollygunge, just behind the tram deport. (16)

The above quotation suggests that human beings are free to choose from the multiple choices in their life but the human predicament is that it leads him to confront with the absurdity of life wherever he goes. Unfortunately, Ghosh dies in the train accident but Ashoke is rescued alive and after sometimes he chooses America for further study. Though he goes America according to his freewill and “makes himself” but it leads him to existential crisis where freedom of choice became a curse.

Ashoke and Ashima are settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts after being transformed from traditional- bound life in Calcutta to America. An engineer by training, Ashoke adopts far less warily than his wife, who resists all things Americans and pines for her family. Their personalities in togetherness undergo a lot of emotional upheavals in order to achieve a purposive life. Their correlative expressions define not only their sensory impressions but also the helpless and the oppressed condition they try to remove. Lahiri examines Ashima as individual who finds herself forced into uncongenial environment fighting against odds. The problem of the tragic tension between the individual and the unfavorable environment acquires the dimension of

existential self. Ashima does not find the America as she has expected which brings despair in her life. Lahiri writes by describing the pathetic condition of Ashima in America in her first page:

She stares blankly at the pegboard behind the countertop where her cooking utensils hang, all slightly coated with grease. She wipes sweat from her face with the free end of her sari. Her swollen feet ache against speckled gray linoleum. She opens a cupboard, the shelves lined with a grimy yellow-and-white-checked paper she has been meaning to replace, and reaches for another onion, frowning again as she pulls at its crispy magenta skin. Curious warmth floods her abdomen; followed by a tightening so severe she doubles over, gasping without sound, dropping the onion with a thud on the floor. (1)

The above discourse vividly exposes the disgust, loneliness and the undercurrents of the sense of estrangement that Ashima has been gone through in the American life. As Ashima does not find what she has expected she feels alienated from world with full of anxiety, despair, and human solitude, the condition that leads her towards the existential selfhood.

Sartre, who ranks himself in a group of existentialists along with others, insists that “existence precedes essence” (qtd. in Gaarder 456). Sartre’s straightforward vision of existentialism lays emphasis upon the existence of individual –“first of all man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and only after wards defines himself” (13). For existentialists, man himself is responsible for his action and effect. Sartre says that “it is the feelings of

freedom and responsibility that is the source of man's anguish" (15). Anguish is an emotion to all man's problems. For Heidegger, man's existence in the world is fundamentally different from the being of others only because man exists, while other does not. Heidegger says, "the being whose manner of being is existence is man: man alone exists. A rock is, but does not exist. A tree is, but it does not exist . . . God is but does not exist" (65). This proves that God is an object like tree. Though tree and God in existence, albeit the latter in our minds only, they do not exist in the real sense of the term because they cannot as men do. So, God is just an idea. Sartre in his *Existentialism as Humanism* argues:

And when we speak of 'abandonment' we only mean to say that God does not exist, and that it is necessary to draw the consequences of his absence right to the end. . . we are alone without excuses. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free. There is no power of "beautiful passions" which propel men to their actions; we think rather, that man is responsible for his own passion. (72)

For human beings, to be free is not the blessing because it compels them to select the action from the multiple choices which ultimately makes them suffer in the world with full of anxiety, anguish and the loneliness. Anxiety has no object, it cannot be controlled, and there is nothing that can combat it.

Whoever has to deal with anxiety has to allow it to run its course turns out to

When she becomes pregnant and hospitalized, she is put in the strange room, stinking medicine intensifies her loneliness. Her feeling and thinking are

interchangeably denoted. She remembers her parents and her husband who have been regular companionship at various stages. Jhuma Lahiri describes the sense of dislocation and ultimately the crisis of existence in the life of Indian immigrants in America during late twentieth century through the character Ashima, the collective self of whom turns out into singular self as she is detached with all of her relatives:

Now she is alone, cut off by curtains from three other women in the room. One woman's name, she gathers from bits of conversation, is Beverly. . . . It is the first time in her life she has slept alone, surrounded by the strangers; all her life she has slept either in a room with parents, or with Ashok in her side. She wishes the curtains were open; she could talk to American woman. Perhaps one of them has given birth before, can tell her what to expect. But she has gathered that Americans, in spite of their public declaration of affection, in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, in spite of their hand-holding on the street and lying on top of each other on the Cambridge Common, prefer their privacy. (3)

What above mentioned extract seems to be suggesting is that one of the causes of forlornness that most of the Asian-American is undergoing is the lack of adjustment to the Americans and their nature of indifference. In spite of her desire, Ashima is condemned to be silent among the other women in America. She only opens her curtain to look and hear their interaction. The lack of communication makes her a lonely creature even among the crowd. She

becomes alone in the crowd of American society. This shows the relationship of anxiety to the individual in the society.

As Ashima gives birth to her first child in hospital, Ashima and Ashoke are bewildered at the task of naming him. Both of them are desperately waiting for her grandmother's letter with a name for the baby but the hospital norms forced them to decide a name before Ashima is discharged from the hospital. "The bad news is that they are told by Mr. Wilcox, complier of hospital birth certificates, that they must chose a name for their son" (27). All speculations about Indian rituals of naming fails to convince the hospital authorities and out of desperation they compromise with the ethics of other world with heavy heart. At this point we come to realize about pet names and good names that officially creates two versions of the self. Ashoke Ganguly is Ashoke for the outside world but Mithu for his relatives. Similarly, Ashima is Monu for her relatives. In America, Ashok and Ashima are actually tired of being Ashoke and Ashima only. They wish to be "Monu" and "Mithu". Since there is not favorable condition, they are estranged from their real selves:

Pet names are a president remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is always not so serious, so formal, so complicated. They are reminder too that one is not all things to all people. They all have pet names. Ashima's pet name is Monu, Ashoke's is Mithu and even as adults, these are the names by which they are known in their respective families, the name by which they are adored and scolded and missed and loved. (26)

What the above lines tries to convey is that good names are given for symbolic identification in the outside world. Unlike pet names which are frequently meaningless, deliberately silly, ironic, and even onomatopoeic. Interestingly, in childhood there are dozens of pet names until one eventually sticks. In a sense, pet names represent original fluid self of a person having no any fixed signification. Good name is only one. One does not acquire good name until he is ready to enter into the outside world through schools.

The process of naming the child 'Gogol' as a tribute by Ashok to his rescuer surfaces a flux of emotions constituting memory. Their choice of name is their predicament of suffering. To choose this or that is at the same time to affirm the value of what is chosen; for we are unable ever to chose the worse.

What we chose is always the better and nothing can be better for us unless it is better for all. As Satre in his *Existentialism is Humanism* (1957) says, "When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that everyone of us must chose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men" (15). While choosing the name of child as Gogol, the couple has done their best to choose the good, which is not only for them but for many others. However, the human predicament is that the things, chosen as better turns out to be worse and it brings the human beings towards the sense of alienation and despair.

Ashima, whose actual charm is appeared in her homeland, does not desire to return back as her husband dies by heart attack. She learns to live alone. Ashima's alienation bears the constant notion of feeling of a stranger because of which she feels alone even among his friend and relatives.

But for the first time in her life, Ashima has no desire to escape to Calcutta, not now. She refuses to be so far from the place where her husband made his life, the country in which he died. “Now I know why he went to Cleveland,” she tells people refusing even in death, to utter her husband’s name. “he was teaching me how to live alone.” (183)

The above lines vividly portrays the pathetic situation and the human predicament of undercurrents of sense of alienation and helplessness that afflict the whole humanity where Ashima is not the exception. The death of her husband has dissociated herself from her own self, which has led her towards the estrangement and anxiety. Although she feels bored, ‘I’m bored’ she cannot escape from it for there is not any weapon to combat with the anxiety, for it is present at every moment of human existence.

Gogol and His Quest of Authentic Existence

Gogol is living inauthentic life and is struggling to achieve an authentic one. The authenticity of life demands it to make a free choice which ultimately takes the responsibility for future, the existentialist give stress upon the subjectivity of the individual. As Sartre focuses that “Man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfills himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his age nothing else than his life” (121).

Samuel Stump raises the issue that according to the concept of authenticity, “an individual . . . is aware, notwithstanding his variety of sense experiences, that his life consists, or ought to consist, more than his emotive and sense experiences” (459). In fact, the existentialists believe that the act of will of authenticity is required to transcend alienation.

Gogol, like all other human beings, is thrown into the earth, whose freedom of choice makes his essence. The existentialist believes that we human beings are not born by our intention, we are born mistakenly so it is better to die, if we cannot die it is better to live a meaningless life. Camus says that. There is no way out than death for the human beings from their anxiety so finding the happiness around the absurdity of life is the only solution. To exist one must rebel. John Killinger puts forward:

The absurdity of man's situation is apparent to anyone who tries to exist as a subject in the world of objects. Like Meursault in Camus' novel *The Stranger*, he finds the world antipathetic and even hostile to the one who dares to affirm his selfhood. He becomes aware of the insane character of daily living; and in the instant that he is divested of his illusions he realizes that he is an alien in the world. Authentic existence, for Camus, is for man both to accept and to rebel against this absurdity. He accepts it inasmuch as he is willing to maintain his awareness of it and not retreat into a disregard for the facts; but he rebels against it by loving existence and grip to life in spite of it. (310)

Born to the Indian-American parents in America, Gogol is condemned to encounter with the world of anxiety, despair and the futility of human existence from his young age. There is a problem with his name. His parents have been busy since he was discharged from the hospital to give him a proper good name. Both of them consciously or unconsciously want Gogol to be only pet name not the public one. The name Gogol means very different things to

Gogol and his parents. To Ashok, the name Gogol is first of all reminder of the way in which the reading of Gogol's short story saved his life, how it was his dropping of the page from the story that alerted rescuer that he was still alive after the train wreck and made them stop and pull him out of the wreckage where he would otherwise have perished. It is rebirth of himself in different form, as a person who wants to leave India and travel to other places. So in a way is the birth of his son. Since it has the connotation of Ashok's painful past experience, they do not feel like display in public that name.

But to Gogol, his name is simply a strange one. It makes him too different. And probably it does not help that when pronounced correctly, the name sounds like English word goggle. When Gogol is admitted to kindergarten, there is this conflict between parents and son:

There is a reason Gogol does not want to go to kindergarten. His parents have told him art school instead of being called Gogol, he will be called by a new name, which his parents have finally decided on, just in time for him to begin his formal education . . . but Gogol does not want a new name. He can't understand why he has to answer to anything else. "Why do I have to have a new name" he asks his parents tears springing to his eyes.... he is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he does not know him. (57)

Gogol's resistant to assume new self as a "Nikhil" in school and "Gogol" in home and his parents' willingness to impose a new self on their son marks the central conflict in the novel. No matter how honestly he tries to emphasize his feeling, his parents fail to understand the emotional constituents of his

behavior due to which he feels align to his own surrounding. 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).

When he is in high school and supposed to study Gogol’s story in English class, he refuses to read it. And strangely, instead of leading a discussion of the story itself, his teacher tells them about Gogol’s life, focusing on Gogol’s inner torment and his death by self-starvation. Gogol’s agitation is exacerbated when Mr. Lawson, his teacher, starts to inform about the author’s life:

Now your ordinary guy, Nikolai Gogol, Mr. Lawson says, “he is celebrated today as one of Russia’s most brilliant writers. But during his life he was understood by no one, least of all himself. One might say he typified the phrase “eccentric genius”. Gogol’s life, in nutshell was a steady decline into madness”. . . . He looks at his classmates but they seem indifferent, obediently coping down the information as Mr. Lawson continues to speak, looking over one shoulder, his sloppy handwriting filled up the board. He feels angry at Mr. Lawson suddenly. Somehow he feels betrayed. (91)

The above lines clarify the condition of Gogol who has been undergoing the crisis of existence as he begins to identify himself to the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. Lahiri, here, has portrayed the painful condition of her

protagonist, the cause of which is nothing more than the similar name. His anger in the classroom is aroused due to his feeling of his existential crisis.

Gogol the writer is reduced to what was most bizarre about his personal life, for the diligent horror of American teenagers. He is treated in exactly the way the living Gogol must be treated. Gogol becomes the identity of a foreign madman who never experienced sex or any of the other initiations that lead to an adult identity for modern American. And yet he is still ambivalent. As Lahiri explains, “to read the story, he believes he would mean paying tribute to his namesake, accepting it somehow. Still listening to his classmates complain he feels perversely responsible, as if his own work were being attacked” (92). The very conflict leads him to the sense of alienation and estrangement, which ultimately creates his existential self.

Gogol’s anxiety aroused by the name further intensifies when he begins to blame his father. His loathing of author and even Mr. Lawson (his teacher) is disguised contempt for his father. In the classroom it seems that he feels betrayed by Mr. Lawson for his boring lecture about the author, but in real sense, he feels betrayed by his parents (particularly his father) for associating him with such a strange writer. His anger bursts out at his teacher when he says all of a sudden in class. “Please stop, he says mouthing the words. And then, suddenly there is silence. Gogol looks up sees Mr. Lawson drop his chalk on the blackboard ledge” (92). He even refuses to read the story by Nikolai Gogol, as he has refused to look closely at the book given as a gift by his father on his fourteenth birthday. “To read story, he believes would mean paying tribute to his namesake, accepting it somehow” (92).

The authenticity of life demands it to make a free choice. In this world, the possible way of authentic existence is to create one's own image through right choice. Man makes himself what he is by freedom of choice. Gogol and his freedom of choice and his responsibility toward the family that he learns years later, "Bengali son's duty to shave his head in the wake of the parents' death" make the realization of his authentic existence (179).

Constructing Meaningful Self

Gogol realizes that the material self is not the real self. Ashoke has created a material self of family rituals, places, and social self in his relationship with other Bangladeshi families, both of which have formed a buffer for him, allowing him to live a complex human life in a country which still seems foreign to him. When Ashok dies, all that is left of him are his material and social selves, the anonymous apartment where he was living by himself while on a fellowship at another university, his clothes which Gogol collects from the hospital, his rental car, the meager passion in the apartment and the scores of condolence letters that come from colleagues represents his relationship. These things both are and are not Ashok. They make the absence of his living self in all its potentials. The absence of his living self is the end of his existence but by driving the car and living in his father's apartment, he is desperately searching his existence, for he has undergone the sense of alienation after his father's death.

Lahiri's own unique literary style, seem to suggest that some of the characters' unnecessary unhappiness arises from the tendency to identify oneself with the aspect of selfhood that William James called the material self,

one's surroundings, clothing, food, and possessions, and the social self, the loves and friendships that surrounds us. Furthermore, in a mobile society like modern America, unfortunately, the relationship of the social self are apt to be transitory, this seems to be part of the Gogol's problems in *The Namesake*.

In addition, although James includes the immediate family as part of the material self, the protagonist does not seem to realize the extent to which this is true until too late, which is also not uncommon. In any case, what is often left underdeveloped is the essential self, the organizing consciousness that strives to understand the meaning and patterns of the events of one's life in this world that searches for continuity.

As existentialist concern upon the problem of man, F. C. Copleston writes "...existentialists, therefore, including Heidegger that they take man as the central theme of philosophy, and that by man they mean the free, self-creating, self-transcending subject" (22). They focus upon man's concrete existence and personal freedom. Man being hurled up in the world, he is responsible for every action. For that purpose man chooses and makes his identity himself. Thus, the human beings through conscious choice create their own values and determine a meaning of life.

Gogol's choice of Maushami as a lover and then a wife seems to have been part of an unconscious attempt to concretize his existence with the stable identity that would connect him to his childhood world and to his family. She is the daughter of a Bengali couple whom Ashima and Ashok had known since coming to America. When Moushumi turns out to be attractive and interesting, the two begin dating and decide to get married. Although there are habits and

traits he loves about her, a factor in both for her and hers for him is not just the person him/herself, but the image of the self reflected back through the others. In fact a waiter in restaurant wants mistakes them for brother and sister rather than lovers, we suggests the way in which they are mirror images of one another, versions of the same experience, both seeking existence from material things and from sequential and temporary relationships.

Gogol faces the problematic situations by his own choices as the self of his own wife seems in many ways more incomplete and insecure than Gogol's, at least in a way in which she is presented through Gogol's perception of her actions. Like Maxine, Maushami has undergone a broken relationship just before she met Gogol, but unlike Maxine, Maushami was totally devastated by this breakup because she has invested so much of her in it. Its ending is a kind of death of her 'self'.

She seems to have found little ease to sustain and confirm her when this part of her 'self' is gone- except material self and the self created with Gogol. One of Maushami's friend accidently calls Gogol "Graham", the name of Maushami's former fiancé, which suggests that Gogol is nothing more than the substitution. Maushami loves the sense of herself as brilliant, sensual, exotic and cosmopolitan. But this self seems primarily material. She also likes the American self she has created through her academic friends who also seems to posses nothing more than the material self, that they shared with thousands of educated urban upper middle-class Americans. Maushami gets the American material self that Gogol feels he neither has nor wants a part in. As Lahiri writes:

By the time she has meet him she'd begun to fear that she was retreating into her former self, before Paris- untouched, bookish, alone. She recalled the panic she'd felt and all her friends married. . . And the familiarity that had once drawn her to him has begun to keep her at bay. Though she knows it's not his fault, she can't help but associate him, at times, with a sense of resignation, with the very life she has resisted, had struggle so mightily to leave behind. (249-250)

Though both of their parents are from India adopting the Indian culture, Gogol and Maushami are different in nature. From the very beginning, their relationship is troublesome, which last no longer. As a matter of fact, Gogol again is doomed to suffer in his life, as his wife leaves him to her boyfriend. Gogol's choice of Maushami instead of Maxine in his full freedom turns out to be curse to which nobody is responsible other than himself.

Quest of stable identity

Ashok has given his son two names, two identities, but Gogol must find their meaning for himself in the country and the time in which he has been born. And with his acceptance and rejection of his two names, he begins a pattern of first accepting and then rejecting outer identities that seem imposed on him by others and which he fails to distinguish from his essential identity. Such multiple identities make him realize the lake of even the single essential self. In fact, it creates the existential crisis upon him. Judith Caesar analyzes the novel from the cultural perspective where she associates the multiple identities with the multiple cultures:

The conventional wisdom about first generation Asian-American is that an awareness of two cultures is a kind of curse which makes them unable to understand who they really are, as if identity is nothing more than the cultural identity. The novel is much more clearly an elucidation of the causes and meaning of the confusion, which comes not only from multiple cultural identities, but from some of the ways in which people in modern American society tend to view identity. (2)

Although Caesar focuses upon the cultural matter, the major factor is the freedom of choice Ashoke and Gogol have. It is their freedom of choice that enables them to choose and reject one after another which ultimately condemns them to suffer from the lack of stable existence throughout their life.

For Gogol, the several identities that he takes on in the course of the novel are a source of pain, perhaps in part because he passively accepts them one after the other often conjoined to a relationship with a woman, apparently confusing a series of material and social selves for who he is. Moreover, they provide him with no sense of continuity which is part of their function in the lives of more contented and secure people.

Existentialism is a philosophy exclusively meant for viewing human beings and their existence in the universe not as a mass but as a collection of individuals. Existentialists like Kierkegaard and Sartre talk about individuals and their subjectivity. Sartre defines subjectivism in two senses: "Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject and on the other, that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity. It is latter which the deeper

meaning of existentialism is” (Jaspers 4). Thus, he focuses on human freedom and subjectivity. The way Jaspers defines is the way Gogol’s beloved seeks for freedom of choice:

She is surprised to hear certain things about his things about his life: that all his parents’ friends are Bengali that they had had an arranged marriage that his mother cooks Indian food every day that she wears saris and a bindi. She says not fully believing him. But “you are so different. I would never have thought that.”

(138)

In this condition too Gogol “does not feel insulted” (138), he provides freedom to his beloved and does not become hindrance in her way. Existentialism always seeks freedom in life which is essential phenomena, Gogol as a existential hero, “feels free of expectation, of responsibility, in willing exile from his own life” (142) understands hidden properties of existentialism and provides freedom to his beloved. Lahiri has given full freedom to her protagonist, so that he can make himself in the way he likes. He spends a night outside with his beloved where there is not bounded by anything else, “And then he remembers that his parents can’t possibly reach him: he has not given them the number, and the Ratliffs are unlisted. That here at Maxine’s side, in this cloistered wilderness, he is free” (158). But it no longer remains the same when undergoes through the anxiety of life.

Jean-Paul Sartre saw rationality as a form of “bad faith,” an attempt by the self to impose structure on a world of phenomena – “the other” – that is fundamentally irrational and random. According to him, rationality and other

forms of “bad faith” hinder us from finding meaning and freedom. So Sartre defines existentialism as an “attempt to make life persistent by creating a system in which one realizes “human loneliness and human subjectivity” (10). So, the focus of existentialism is on “being” and subjectivity as opposed to the logical reasoning or “objectivity” individual experience rather than abstract thought and philosophy is given importance in existentialism.

The rejection of reason as the source of meaning is a common theme of the existentialist thought as it focuses on the feelings of anxiety as dread that we feel in the face of our radical freedom and our awareness of death.

Kierkegaard saw rationality as a mechanism humans use to counter their existential anxiety, their fear of being in the world. He says, “If I can believe that I am rational and everyone else is rational then I have nothing to fear and no reason to feel anxious about being free” (135). So, not being rational makes us anxious about being free.

After his father’s death, and in part perhaps because of his guilt over the way he had distanced himself from his parents, he separates himself more and more from his Maxine and her world, presumably to Maxine’s confusion and distress. He suddenly realizes that he never took care of his father’s life. He cannot remember when he talked with him for the last time. At this point in the novel, Maxine no longer is relevant in his life. During the time of mourning when Maxine visits him, his indifference towards her can be sensed:

This time he does not care how the house, how the piles of guests shoes heaped by the door way might appear to her eyes. He can tell that she feels useless, a bit excluded in his house full of

Bengalis. And yet he does not bother to translate what people are saying, to introduce her to everybody, to stay close by her side.

(182)

This sudden lack of interest for Maxine heralds Nikhil's entrance into new phase in his life one day he fails to argue when she admits her jealousy towards his mother and sister, which struck him as so absurd and he "stepped out of Maxine's life for good" (188). However, he is yet another attempt from his side to reinvent him. In fact, his changing in his life is not the result of his reason rather the decision of his own individual subjectivity as he himself does not know why he is doing this. He lacks the rationale in his doing. Lahiri, as an existential writer, does not give the objective reason behind his activities, rather tells about his individual subjectivity through which he forms his own truth.

Kierkegaard believes in "subjective truth". Search for objective truth is meaningless for him. There cannot be any truth that is universal, rather it is individual. Instead of single truth there are many truths which are personal. Jostein Gaarder comments on the point as he says, "According to Kierkegaard, rather than searching for the Truth with capital 'T', it is important to find the kind of the truths that are meaningful to the individual's life. It is important to find the kind of truths to the individual life. It is important to find "the truth for me" (379). Real existence for him is possible only when one becomes aware of the paradoxical presence of God. Suffering observers Kierkegaard is born peacefully and happily.

The failure in relation merely leads to alienation. Alienation means having feeling of being strange-self from the society and itself. Gwynn Nettler defines alienation as a certain psychological state of normal person, and an alienated person is one who has been estranged from, made unfriendly towards his society and the culture it carries. The existentialist focuses that all the personal human relation is poisoned because of alienation. As Josten Gaarder writes, "Man's feeling of alienation in the world creates a sense of despair, boredom, nausea and absurdity" (457). Gogol cannot make a way in his life so he feels alienated. Alienation affects the relationship of love. The sense of alienation creates self-estrangement which results in the feeling that his own self and abilities are something strange to him. Gogol cannot think of his life as fruitful rather is surrounded by pain and failure. After the failure of his marriage, Gogol is alienated from the society as well as from the family but is searching way for his identity in his loneliness. Gogol, in order to maintain his daily existence in the alien universe lives being humiliated and keeps on struggling to assert his selfhood.

Existentialism valorizes existence over essence. Killinger further writes "Man's nature is not "fixed" as a stone's or a tree's is; he is a creature with the ability to choose, and decides what he shall become. Because man can choose, within the limits of his finitude, how he shall live, his existence occurs before his essence is determined" (304). It laid emphasis upon the existence of the individual. In this connection Sartre argues; "First of all man exist, turns up, appear to the scene and only afterward define himself. If man as an existentialist conceives is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only

afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be". (15) The mode of being of a man is determined by his nature. In a way Sartre define existence Gogol creates his identity by choices and he himself is responsible for his condition as well as his down fall.

The existentialist frankly states that man is in anguish. His meaning is as follow when a man commits himself to anything, fully realizing that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole mankind –in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility. As Sartre says, “Many people think that in what they are doing they commit no one but themselves to anything but we affirm that they are merely disguising their anguish or are in fight from it” (134). There are many, indeed, who show no such anxiety. But in truth , one ought always to ask oneself what would happen if everybody do as on has done; nor can one escape from that disturbing thought except by a kind of self deception. By its very disguise his anguish reveals itself. This is the anguish that Kierkegaard called the “anguish of Abraham.”

Gogol’s way of living with Maxine and thinking about himself changes when Ashok dies suddenly and unexpectedly by a heart attack. To create his subjectivity he thinks up his relation with his older friends and those who came in his life in one or the other ways. They all gave him disillusionment in life rather than a hope. Despite all of these things he gets nothing more than the anxiety

Indeed, Gogol defines himself primarily by who he is not, by rejecting or refusing to choose potential definitions, as he did when he was a baby and

refusing to choose the object that was supposed to foretell his occupation in life. There seems to be in Gogol a reluctance to explore on his own self, to make the active choices through which some people can gain a sense of self. After his father's death, a memory returns to Gogol, a memory of one of the few significant exchanges between father and son. Ashoke takes Gogol Ganguly on a walk on Cape Cod, picking their way over the rocks to the last point of land, the furthest point east, the place where they can go no further, with Gogol literally following in his father's footsteps. "Try to remember it always," his father tells him. "Remember that you and I made this journey, that we went together to a place where there was nowhere to go" (187). His loneliness grew up as he lost his father and begins to live with his memory. Here, Lahiri projects a tragic vision in order to confront the "being" of her protagonist with the inauthentic existence. She further examines her protagonist as individual who finds himself fighting against his own self. In such situation, Gogol is leading a life of isolation and introspection. This problem of tragic tension in the life of individual acquires the dimension of existential angst.

Gogol is alienated from the society as well as from the family but is searching way for his identity in his loneliness failure in married life, he possess inauthentic existence in the family and the society he lives in. Gogol is frustrated with all aspects of his life. Because of alienation, one has the skeptical doubts about the other's reality; one objectifies other and objectifies us. Gogol's alienation bears the constant notion of feeling of a stranger because of which the he feels alone even among his friend and relatives. He

feels his life worthless because of his divorce with Maushami . The worth of living is achieved only when there is harmony in marital relation but failing to sustain harmonious relation results in alienation, which Gogol is passing through.

Gogol is always a prey to his truths. Once he has admitted them, he cannot free himself from them. His life, like Sisyphus, is full of tragedy, that lead him to understand the absurdity of life which lacks the meaning but one should live his life with the hope of meaning. For existentialism, the most important thing is the knowledge of the absurd existence, which awakens the human beings to freedom and choice, and therefore, presents us from being simply things. In this regard, Abrams says:

Existential philosophy views a human being as an isolated existent who is cast into an alien universe, as possessing no inherent truth, value, or meaning and to represent human life – in its fruitless search for purpose and meaning, as it moves from the nothingness where it came toward the nothingness where it must and as an existence which is both anguished and absurd. (1)

This implies that human condition at the modern time is completely ridiculous and nonsensical. Similarly, Camus in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* says that “in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity” (13). Rene Wedlock writes that existentialism is a last and vital trend in this century. It dominated French and German intellectual scene after World War II. He

further classifies that “if we interpret existentialism as a philosophy of despair, of fear and trembling, of man’s exposition to a hostile universe the reasons for its spread are not far to seek” (82). Thus, he says the world is void, alien meaningless, irrational and absurd.

It is the predicament of Gogol’s life to confront the world with full tragedy. He has to undergo the futile suffering. Time and again the situation deceives him and he becomes estranged to himself. His various attempts to maintain the life systematic turns out to be failure. In the quest of success and happiness he encounters with the absurdity of life. As Lahiri writes about his whole tragic life:

In so many ways, his family’s life feels like a string of accident, unforeseen, unintended, one incident begetting another. It had started with his father’s train wreck, paralyzing him at first, later inspiring him to move as far as possible, to make a new life, on the other side of the world. There was the disappearance of the name Gogol’s great grandmother had chosen for him, lost in the mail somewhere between Calcutta and Cambridge. This had led, in turn, to the accident of his being named Gogol, defining and distressing him for so many years. He had tried to correct that randomness that error. And yet it had not been possible to reinvent himself fully, to break from that mismatched name.

(286-87)

What the above lines express is that the human life full of tragedy. From the birth of Gogol the problem comes in his life, at first, through the name when

his actual name that his grandmother has chosen for him is lost in the way from India to America. And the loss of the name brings the despair in his life with the new name Gogol, which carries the deep connotation of Ashok's tragic accident in India.

From the sudden death of his father the depression begins in his life. It leads him to be detached with Maxine and live in isolation. Again he attempts to overcome his distress by getting the happiness in an accompaniment of Maushami. His continuous temptation with happiness brings in the situation where he faces the absurdity of life and gets comprehension over it. As Camus says, "Happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable. It would be a mistake to say that happiness necessarily springs from the absurd discovery. It happens as well that the feeling of the absurd springs from happiness" (76). As has been said by Camus, absurdity springs from happiness in the life of Gogol, the existential hero of the novel.

Like Sisyphus, Gogol determines to confront the absurdity of life in the meaningless world. His choice of struggle even in the tragic life with perpetual alienation makes him an existential hero. Lahiri, at last, shows her protagonist in the world of books, "he starts to read" which is the only means to lead his life further. The world of book is the world of isolation with the help of which he ceaselessly rolls his life even in the meaningless.

III. From Choices to Crisis in *The Namesake*

This research work studies Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* from the perspective of existentialism, mainly from the conceptual framework developed by Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. This thesis has attempted to trace out 'freedom of choices' in the life of Gogol, the protagonist and his parents and how they are responsible to their own choice. In the novel, it is the choice of the characters that forms the essence of their own life but it brings crisis in their own existence once their choice turns out to be the wrong one.

In this novel, we find the Indian immigrants in in-between position and the absurdity in the American land. Indian immigrants and their children in American land bear the loss of identity, common feeling of disaster, and sense of loss, isolation and great drift. So instead of feeling more at home in America, they feel even more alienated. This research has excavated the way Lahiri tries to bring to light their situation in American land through the characters like Ashima, Ashoke and their American born son, Gogol.

Focusing upon the power of name as the marker of one's identity, Jhumpa Lahiri depicts the crisis of existence of the protagonist having two different names; a pet name and a good name. When the letter from his grandmother is lost somewhere between Calcutta and Massachusetts, his name is also lost, that became the lost of his identity, as his father gives him the

name 'Gogol' but reluctant to take it as public one, for it connotes his traumatic experience. Gogol's problem is that he has been saddled with a strange name which does not reflect his self. Before he leaves for Yale, Gogol changes himself by legal deeds as 'Nikhil', though he has rejected it in his childhood. It is that Nikhil that embarks on his adult life, as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party, as Nikhil that he begins to have relationships with American women, keeping his private life secret from his parents. However, after his father's death he regrets on his own habit of being indifferent towards his parents and determines to fulfill his responsibility as a son of Bengali parents by conducting the death procession according to the Indian culture. His fleeting identity paves the way of to the crisis of existence.

Lahiri's protagonist, Gogol makes the free choice according to Sartrean philosophy to get the meaning of his existence, but is extremely depressed by his freedom of choice. Loneliness, alienation, hopelessness, betrayal, denial of social values, failure in marital relationship is some instance of protagonist existential problems. He is seen as alienated, victimized, and depressed and is always in trouble. When his marriage life is turned into failure, his life becomes so much tragic.

Even in such tragic life with full of anxiety Gogol does not feel failure with the life rather determines to confront with futile suffering as human predicament. Here, Gogol understands the absurdity of life in meaningless world which makes him an existential hero in real sense.

While focusing upon the individuality of the characters, Lahiri says that individuality is not the quality which can be superimposed outwardly but it can

be acquired through the decision of a person. Moreover, the concentration on the individualism and alienation from the society has also been reflected in her novel. Through her characters, she has obviously depicted a new dimension of subjectivity and freedom. The spirit of existentialism, loneliness, estrangement, anxiety and choice is encompassed through the whole novel.

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