

## Chapter: One

### Jhumpa Lahiri and *The Namesake*

The present research focuses on the emergence of new types of culture from the mixture of two different cultures in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), a story of two generations of an Indian family and their struggle to acculturate themselves in the west. On the one hand, the protagonist's parents struggle to adopt new culture, which is quite different from their native culture. On the other hand, their children Gogol and Sonia are uninterested towards their ancestor's roots and culture. They struggle to assimilate with the American culture and lifestyle. Since Lahiri's narrative echoes much of her life, it is relevant to trace the author's personal life experience including family background for in-depth interpretation about their efforts to acculturate.

Lahiri was born in London in 1967. She was the daughter of Indian immigrants from the state of West Bengal. Her family moved to the USA, when she was three. Lahiri grew up in Kingstown of Rhode Island, where her father Amar Lahiri worked as a librarian at the University of Rhode Island, and her mother was a teacher. Lahiri's mother wanted her children to grow up knowing their Bengali heritage. While growing up, Lahiri often visited relatives in Calcutta with her parents.

When Lahiri began kindergarten in Kingstown, her teacher decided to call her by her pet name, Jhumpa, because it was easier to pronounce than her proper name 'Nilanjana Svdesna'. Lahiri, in *The Namesake*, presents her protagonist to face the same problem of identity crisis.

*The Namesake* was originally a novella published in *The New Yorker* and was later expressed to a full-length novel. *The Namesake*, a major national best seller, has been named the New York Magazine Book of the year. It is an autobiographical novel

of Jhumpa Lahiri herself. It explores many of the similar types of emotional and cultural themes as her Pulitzer Prize winning short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* has done. Moving among the events in Calcutta, Boston, and New York, the novel examines the nuance involved in being caught between two different cultures with their highly distinct religious, social and ideological differences. The story spans over thirty years in the life of the Ganguli family. The Calcutta-born parents immigrate as young adults to the United States, where their children, Gogol and Sonia, grow up experiencing the constant generational and cultural gap with their parents.

Lahiri's writing is characterized by her plain language, and her characters are often Indian immigrants to America, who must move between the cultural values of their homeland and their adopted home. Lahiri's fiction is autobiographical and frequently draws upon her own experiences as well as those of her parents, friends, acquaintances, and others in the Bengali communities with which she is familiar. She examines her characters' struggles, anxieties, and bias to chronicle the nuance and details of immigrant's psychology and behavior.

The main objective of the present study is to explore the cultural hybridity in the chosen text. The term 'hybridity' refers to creation of new-trans-cultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. Hybridity is particularly used in horticulture to refer to the cross breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a 'third' (Ashcroft et. al 118). It incorporates many different aspects like linguistics, culture, politics, etc. *The Namesake* contains the elements of multicultural, linguistic, ethnic aspects of globalization with their harmonious setting.

Cultural hybridity in *The Namesake* brings the existential crisis and alienation in the life of different characters. The young generation represented by Gogol, Sonia,

and Moushumi are influenced by western life style and they feel proud of mimicking this style while characters like Ashima and Ashoke have nostalgia for their own root and Bengali cultural heritage in Boston.

In this situation, the study is oriented to explore the crisis of cultural identity of the protagonist because he neither becomes true Indian nor true American but different one. The name of the protagonist 'Gogol' is also hybrid one because he is neither American nor Indian but Russian. Hybrid is something that is mixed. It is a cross between two separate cultures or races. When two different cultures are mixed a new kind of hybrid culture appears. Thus, the research work deals with the cultural hybridity and condition of diasporic people in an alien land and their culture as an issue which is represented in *The Namesake*.

### **Literature Review of *The Namesake***

Lahiri's *The Namesake* explores the plural and partial identities of the immigrants. This novel has been examined and interpreted by many critics. They have judged the text from different angles. On her interview with Edward Nawotka, Lahiri remarks connection between names and meanings:

I think names represent destiny in fiction. Authors can choose names for characters knowing what they want to happen in that person's life. In real life, it's a bit more random- you can fulfill your name in a profound way or it can become an arbitrary label. [...] I just wanted to write something focusing on the experiences of a Bengali - American kid, I know that [Gogol] would be this person who had real trouble with his name. (49)

Lahiri underscores authors' choice of names to represent specific meanings. The novelist believes in characters' embodiment of life and the world through their name.

In this novel the protagonist Gogol has a trouble with his name. He feels embarrassed to tell his name, for him his name is not modern as his friends. Through name also he wants to be like a westerner.

Similarly, Julie Myerson associates characters and their meanings that writers try to demonstrate in their fictional works. According to Myerson: “This is a novel that explores the concepts of cultural identity, of rootlessness, of tradition and familial expectation but never succumbs to the clichés those themes so often entail” (28).

In Myerson’s observation of *The Namesake*, Lahiri recounts that immigrant parents want to continue their cultural heritage in foreign land but their children do not understand and try to push aside which make them rootless from their culture and tradition.

Likewise, Mandira Sen critiques “Gogol Ganguli’s problem as she sees it, that he has been saddled with a ‘darknam’, literally meaning the name by which he is called by friends, family and other intimates at home and other private warded moments, in the place of ‘bholonam’, a good name for identification in the wide - world” (9). Mandira Sen analyzes that Gogol’s problem, however, is not with ‘darknam’ or ‘bholonam’ as such, his great problem is that his parent given name of Russian’s surname creates a series of humiliation within him. He cannot be a true American or a true Indian which naturally leads him to take with clear identical root.

Regarding immigrant’s experience in the American dreamland, critic like Sabhamory Das has analyzed the novel from the perspective of cultural assimilation of the immigrants in the USA. According to Das; “The Namesake is the cross cultural multigenerational story of Hindu Bengali family’s journey to self acceptance in Boston” (1). Sharing the identical views to Das, Boris Kachka views; “Writing about immigrants torn between cultures [Lahiri] displays the knowingness of the native with

the newcomer's every detail" (46). Both of the critics support that, Lahiri's work deals with the issues of immigrants and cross-cultural experiences.

Moreover, Aditya Sinha suggests that, "Jhumpa Lahiri's novel not only speaks to immigrants but also to the original settlers on different levels" (9). Sinha has opinion that Lahiri's novel speaks for the common level people not only to immigrants. It speaks for the people of different level. In the lens of Hephzibah Anderson; "each of Lahiri's characters patches together their own identity, making this resonant fable neither uniquely Asian nor uniquely American, but tenderly, wryly human (30)." According to Anderson Lahiri's novel bitterly exposes the hybrid human condition of identifying themselves.

Moreover, in foreword of the book, *Sunday Times* praises the novel as: "an extremely good first novel, a glowing miniature of a tiny family making the voyage between two worlds." It cheers the novel for exposing experience from the two different worlds.

In addition, Lee Langley also analyzes *The Namesake*. He declares, "The Namesake is her first novel, graceful, funny and sad, its theme dislocation and the pain of building a new life in a different world. In building that new life, something must also be destroyed" (39). Here Langley, strongly exhibits the pathetic condition of the characters of *The Namesake*. The characters in the process of assimilation learn one thing from the new culture but they lose something from their native culture.

Moreover, David Bromwich claims Gogol to be a man without qualities by saying "[Gogol] is a passive character" (35). But when we go through the whole novel, we find Gogol rather a round character. He leads his consciousness concerns with the names he owns. Finally, it leads him to the quest for his root, prepares not only the route of his life but also prepares a pattern for the whole novel.

Likewise, Christopher Ruddy in the article “Stranger in a Train” depicts T.S. Eliot’s words, as such “Both Gogol and Lahiri seem to have had the experience but miss the meaning” (19). Lahiri and Gogol both are children of Indian Immigrant parents to America. Both of them have experience of growing up as the child of immigrants, having a divided identity, loyalties and living two lives in one.

It becomes clear that the text has been analyzed from more or less similar perspectives about complexities of immigrant’s experiences. The proper study of the novel from this approach will provide different insights to the meaning of the novel. When a person moves from one place to another, along with him his culture also moves. In the new land people try to mimic the other’s culture to adjust there and form a hybrid culture. Thus, this study will raise the issue of cultural hybridity of Indian immigrants.

### **Diaspora**

The concept of diaspora goes back to a very long history of human civilization from the Babylonian captivity to the colonial and postcolonial phases. The term diaspora coined from Greek word ‘Diaspeirein’ means to scatter about, or disperse, where ‘Dia’ means “about, across” and ‘Speirein’ means “to scatter.” It was used by the ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of a dominant city-state who emigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization, to assimilate the territory into the empire. Defining diaspora, Bill Ashcroft et al. remarks:

Diaspora, the voluntary or forcible movements of people from their homelands into new regions, is a central historical fact of colonization. Colonialism itself is a diasporic movement, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlements of millions of European over the entire world. (68-69)

Under Colonialism, the meaning of diaspora has been extended to cover a range of different cultural and ethnic group held together by shared cultural or religious commitments and having some senses of exile from a place or state of origin or belonging. The term, with the transformation of time, has also been extended now to include the descendents of diasporic movements generated by colonialism. The diaspora has developed its own distinct culture, which both preserves and often extends it. F. Allan Hanson observes, “The term ‘diaspora’ not only transmits a certain sense of shared destiny and predicament, but also an inherent will to preservation and celebration of the ancestral cultural and equality inherent impulse toward forging and maintaining link with the ‘old country’” (12). According to Hanson, diasporic people even though they face struggle in the new land, have inherent will to preserve and celebrate their native ancestors’ culture. Which help them to connect with their native land. Hanson’s concept of the diaspora, however, is rather simplistic. For at the heart of the theory of diasporic mediation lie such key concepts as dislocation, cultural identity, hybridity, nativism, exile ethnicity, etc. This chapter seeks to clarify these critical concepts fundamental to the theory of diasporic mediation.

Diasporic discourse is related with displacement, detachment, uprooting and dispersion. It deals with the strategic disintegration of territory, race, language, culture, religion, history and sovereignty. Diaspora, ghetto, stranger and marginal man, as concepts in the social sciences, have been generalized from a reading of Jewish predicament. Early studies of Jews were guided towards Jews’ religion, race nation and its corollary, their integration into the larger society in which they lived.

Within the cultural studies, the term diaspora is used to describe the dynamic network of communities without the stabilizing allusion to an original homeland or

essential identity. To live in diaspora is to experience the trauma of exile, migration, displacement, rootlessness and life in a minority group haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back. Rushdie declares, “I have been in a minority group all my life- a member of an Indian Muslim family in Bombay, then Mohajir – migrant- family in Pakistan and now as a British Asian ... creating as an ‘Imaginary Homeland’ and willing to admit, through imaginatively, that she/he belongs to it” (4). Rushdie opines that the writers in their position, exiles, emigrants, or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. Moreover, he says if we look back, the hindsight will give rise to profound uncertainties and that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be able to reclaim precisely the thing that was lost; that we will create fictions, not actual cities or villages but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, imaginary Indians. Diasporic writers have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths and all certainties.

Theme of alienation, national longing, and trans- nationalism and generation gap mark the experience of diaspora. One of the things that engages the theorists of study is how the two generations engage each other. The two generations have different starting points, “The older generation cannot afford to involve India in authoritarian mode to resolve problems in diaspora and the younger generation would be ill advised to indulge in spree of forgetfulness about where they have come from” (Radhakrishnan 206). Here, Radhakrishnan highlights the problems of generation gap in the diasporic society. He views that each place or culture gains space when we open it to new standards. It is vital that the two generations emphasize and desire to understand the histories of his/her homeland. Radhakrishnan’s main point is that “the diaspora has created rich possibilities of understanding different histories” (210).



According to him, these histories have taught us that identities, selves, traditions, and natures do change with travel and that we can achieve such change in identity intentionally.

Diaspora denotes a condition of being deprived of the affiliation of nation, not temporally situated on its way towards another totality, but fragmented, demonstrating provisionality and exigency as immediate, unmediated presences. In relation to this issue, Geok- Lin Lim offers this remark, “The discourse of diaspora is that of disarticulation but is not restricted to it” (297). Diaspora has generated new and complex identities whose analysis demands new conceptual tools. On the one hand, there is no such thing as uncontaminated white and European cultures. On the other, as Stuart Hall points out “the black subjects and black experience are .... (also) constructed historically, culturally, politically (176).” The experience of diaspora is also marked by class, and by the histories that shape each group that moves.

Diaspora studies as an academic field was established in the late twentieth century to study dispersed ethnic populations, which are often termed Diaspora people. Initially, diaspora was concerned narrowly to the migration of the people. But in English literature, it is studied along with cultural studies. The new concept of diaspora insists the idea that it explains the complexity, diversity and fixity of migrant identities and experience. It relates the idea of uprooting of migrants from their societies and cultures of origin, and given the sense of alienation, displacement, exile and dislocation. Migration causes migrant people to feel the diasporic experiences.

### **Migration**

Migration, being the subject of postcolonial discourse, is not a new phenomenon. It has problematized more because many people are uprooted and forced to leave their homes behind that invites humanitarian challenges to the

neighbouring countries and also to the developed nations of the west. The voluntary and unwanted migration accelerates to challenge the cultural and demographic stability of the western world and other regional areas of the globe as well. Migration breeds the state of cultural and geographical rootlessness, leading to the sense of displacement and dislocation.

### **Dislocation**

Dislocation refers to the outcome of willing or unwilling movement from known to unknown location. On the literal meaning it refers to a feature of all invaded colonies, where indigenous or original cultures are often dislocated. They are moved off from their territories. They are metaphorically dislocated because their cultures are marginalized and white people ignore blacks' norms and values in favour of the values and practices of colonial culture. A term often used to describe the experience of dislocation is Heidegger's term '*unheimlich*' or '*unheimlichkeit*' – literally 'unhousedness' or 'not-at-home-ness' which is also sometimes translated as 'uncanny' or 'uncanniness'. It is also related with 'homelessness'. Someone, who had forsaken his original root and now realizes or his loss haunts him. People often realize the fact of loss of their originality, which makes them feel a 'sense of dislocation'.

Dislocation in the postcolonial discourse is the result of transformation from one country to another. In *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* Ashcroft et.al defines the term as:

A term for both the occasion of displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this even...

The term is used to describe the experience of those who have willingly moved from the imperial 'Home' to the colonial margin, but it affects all those who, as a result to colonialism have been placed in a

location that, because of colonial ‘hegemonic’ practices, needs, to be ‘reinvented’ in language, in narrative, and myth. (73)

Dislocation includes the psychological and personal displacement resulting from cultural denigration as well as voluntarily chosen status. Dislocation in many cases exists within the country. Defining the term from this perspective Ashcroft et.al remarks “... dislocation is a feature of all invaded colonies where indigenous or original cultures are if not annihilated, often literally dislocated i.e. moved off what was their territory” (75). This definition exhibits the characteristics of dislocation. It claims dislocation is a state where original or indigenous cultures are destroyed.

In the past, dislocation was developed physically, socially and individually in the institution of slavery and system of indentured labor. Ashcroft et.al asserts; “The practice of slavery and indenture labor resulted in world-wide colonial diaspora” (69). In this way, diasporic communities formed by slavery, indentured labor or voluntary migration are dislocated and alienated in the new socio-cultural milieu.

According to Hall, society is that ruptured place where there is instability of the identities. It happens so that the dislocation and displacement can be created within the social structure. The reason behind is that of the decline of old identities, which stabilizes the social structure for a long time. That is why, it gives rise to new identities and fragments the modern subject. It indicates the identity crisis.

Dislocation can also be defined to describe both displacement that occurs because of imperial occupation, and the experience related with it.

Dislocation, in a different sense is also a feature of all invaded colonies where indigenous or original cultures are often literally dislocated that is moved off what was their territory. At best, they are metaphorically dislocated, placed into a hierarchy

that sets their culture aside and ignores its institutions and values in favor of the values and practices of the colonizing culture.

### **Race**

The term 'Race' classifies human beings into physically, biologically and genetically distinct group. Humanity is divided into unchanging natural types, recognizable by physical features that get transmitted through the blood and permit distinctions to be made between 'pure' and 'mixed races.' In addition, the term implies that the mental and moral behaviour of human beings as well as individual personality, ideas and capacity are related to the racial origin. Ashcroft et.al defines race as; "a way of thinking that considers a group's unchangeable physical characteristics to be linked in a direct, casual way to psychological or intellectual characteristics, and which on this basis distinguished between 'superior' and 'inferior' racial groups" (199). According to them, race is a way of thinking that a group links in a direct and casual way. It includes psychological and intellectual characteristics.

In the past 'race' was used to refer to a class of persons or things but in late eighteenth century 'Race' came to mean a distinct category of human beings with physical characteristics transmitted by descent. The term race has always provided an effective means of establishing the simplest model of human variation or colour difference. Human skin colour became the means of distinguishing between groups of people and identifying the behaviour. French writer Georges Cuvier in his book *Animal Kingdom* classifies the race into three categories on the basis of skin colour: The white, the yellow, and the black. He placed the white race at the top and the black race at the bottom. Ashcroft et al. adds, "The Negro or black African category was usually relegated to the bottom, in part because of black Africans' colour and allegedly 'primitive' colour, but primarily because they were best known to European

as slaves” (199). Negroes are always looked through stereotyped eyes and they are supposed to be slaves. It creates problems in ethnic belongingness.

The classification of race on the basis of skin colour is superseded by the implication of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859). Darwin claims the race through natural selection. Natural selection offered a mechanism for species alteration – either the superior races might be contaminated through contact with the inferior, or deliberate human intervention might maximize the benefits of selections and advance the emergence of pure races. What he had admitted, the probability for racial developments was known as social Darwinism.

Likewise, Earnest Hooton conceptualizes race as a shared feature. A certain group of people have genetically common root:

A great division of mankind, characterized as a group by the sharing of a certain combination of features, which have been derived from their common descent, and constitute a vague physical background usually more or less obscured by individual variations, and realized best in a composite picture. (75)

Hooton defines race as a composite picture, which combines great divisions of mankind and their common descents. In practice, race can be a major constituent in determining ethnic categories.

### **Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is a term that refers to different racial or national groups, which identify different practices, and belief systems. The very term, ethnicity denotes self-awareness on the part of a particular group with its distinction from other cultural groups. The assertion of ethnic identity can be unifying or divisive in equal measure. In a sense, ethnicity is a broader and more flexible cultural description than the

biologically based or influenced categorization by race. Chiefly, ethnic identity implies a sense of belongingness. It is founded on an actual or possible homeland and its cultural heritage. Ethnicity is not to be read as a political expression of genuine interests. In some situations, the self-aware possession of an ethnic identity could be a unifying experience.

A person's ethnic group is such a powerful identifier because while he or she chooses to remain in it, it is an identity that cannot be denied, rejected or taken away by others. Ethnicity refers to the fusion of many traits that belong to the nature of any ethnic group. According to Schermerhorr an ethnic group is "a composite of shared values, beliefs, norms, tasks, behaviours, experiences, and consciousness of kind, memories and loyalties" (2). That is to say the ethnic group shares same values, beliefs, norms, tasks, etc.

Ethnic group is socially distinguished by others or by itself on the basis of cultural or national characteristics. *In Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies*, Ashcroft et al. cites Max Weber to define an ethnic group. Weber used the term ethnic group to connote certain human groups. He claims:

human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent – because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration- in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of the non kinship communal relationship. (qtd. in Ashcroft et. al)

According to Weber because of ethnicity, ethnic people believe in their common descent. They bring their belief with them even when they are colonized or migrated.

The name by which an ethnic group understands itself is most often the name of an originating nation. Ethnicity, however, achieves wide currency when these

national groups find themselves as minorities within a larger national grouping, as occurs in the aftermath of colonization either through immigration to settled colonies such as USA, Canada, New Zealand or by the migration of colonized people to the colonizing centre. In the context of immigration, In *Definition of Ethnicity* W.W. Isajaw mentions ethnicity as, “A group or category of persons who have a common ancestral origin and the same cultural traits, who have a sense of peoplehood and of group belonging, who are of immigrant background and have either minority or majority status within a larger society” (118). Isajaw sees ethnic people as human groups who have the same cultural traits, and immigrant background. They are either in minority or majority status within a large society.

Regarding the issue of ethnicity in the United States, Radhakrishnan puts: “the immigrants suppress ethnicity in the name of pragmatism and opportunism” (205). To be successful in the new world, they must act actively, assimilate, and hide their distinct ethnicity. He also talks of the hyphenated integration of ethnic identity with national identity under conditions that do not privilege the national at the expense of the ethnic. The ethnicity in America can be approached only through the lens of pluralism and assimilation. Radhakrishnan remarks:

Ethnic reality realizes that it has “name”, but this is forced on it by the oppressor. That is, it is the victim of representation, it achieves a revolution against both the oppressor and the discourse of the oppressor and proceeds to un-name itself through a process of inverse displacement; it gives its name, that represents itself from within its own point of view, and it ponders how best to legitimate and empower this new name. (69)

He says that ethnicity is the victim of representation. The ethnic discourse of

marginality maintains its own name. It tries to represent itself from within its point of view to legitimize and empower the new name.

Ethnicity is often forced to take the discourse of authenticity just to protect and maintain its space and history. The term 'ethnicity' is used to indicate biologically and culturally stable identities (Loomba 176). Regarding the issue of identity in relation to ethnicity, Radhakrishnan comments that the legitimate affirmation of any identity cannot but constitute, in the long run, another determinate alertly unless this very problematic is critically thematized in the very act of affirmation (199). The purpose of ethnic identity is to be recognized and valorized as ethnic and at the same time to be empowered and legitimated as national identity, even though the ethnic population shows the tendency of suffering from a sense of exile as they feel themselves cut off from their land of origin.

### **Exile**

In postcolonial studies, exile refers to the condition of separation and distancing either from a literal homeland or from one's cultural and ethnic origin. According to Ashcroft et al., "A distinction should be drawn between the idea of exile, which implies involuntary constraint, and that of expatriation, which implies a voluntary act or state" (92). The situations of the increasingly large number of diasporic people throughout the world further problematizes the idea of 'exile'. So, the place of home for such people is very difficult to be located. The state of exile is the consequence of colonialism that causes the colonized people to be away from their own culture, language, and tradition. Paul Tabori expresses his views in the issues of exile:

A person compelled to leave or remain outside his country of origin on account of well- founded fear of persecution or reasons of race,



religion, nationality, or political opinion; a person who considers his exile temporary (even though it may last a lifetime), hoping to return to his motherland when circumstances permit- but unable or unwilling to do so as long as the factors that made him an exile. (13)

According to Tabori exile is the state of a person being outside of his country voluntarily or unwillingly. The exiled person hopes to return to his native land but the circumstances may not allow him.

The condition of exile is a discontinuous state of being which leads to the crisis of identity. Changes in the environment have led to change in the frame of reference by which personal identity is formed and maintained. Lloyd S. Kramer asserts about experiences of the foreign intellectual in his book *Threshold of a New World*. He argues:

Exile challenges more than the social and intellectual identities, however, for it often brings about major psychological adjustment as well. The experience of living among alien people languages and institutions can alter the individual's sense of self about as significantly as any of the traumas known to psychologists. The referents by which people understand themselves change dramatically when they are separated from networks of family, friend, work and nationality. (192)

Kramer views exile as a much powerful factor as the social and intellectual factor for it brings psychological adjustment too. It causes the individual to tolerate the traumas living among alien people. While a person separates from his nation or homeland, he tries to adapt to the new setting, in that new land he becomes estranged from his own self. Exiled people no longer feel themselves to be the same person as they were in the past nor they fit into their present, which makes them feel alienation.

In some accounts, the experience of exile is like the experience of immigration. In this regard, critic Shirely Geok Lin Lim claims:

The exile experience, like that of immigration, is the condition of voluntary separation from one's place of birth, but unlike immigration, this physical separation is offset by continued bonds to the lost homeland, together with non- integration into the affiliate order in which the exile subject is contingently placed. (296)

Lim views that the condition of exile experience is caused because of voluntary or involuntary separation from one's place of birth. He further says that the physical separation is upset by continued bonds to the lost homeland that is different from the state of immigration.

Likewise, George Lamming offers his view in *Pleasures of Exile* that "exile is a universal figure" (180). Lamming tries to elaborate the theme of exile in universalized terms. To some extent, exile situation has been able to contribute to the generation of new social and cultural practices and the questioning of the old traditions.

### **Organization of the Study**

The study has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with a brief introduction to Jhumpa Lahiri and her writing trend in the field of literature. The theme of dislocation and diaspora of *The Namesake* has been searched along with the criticisms from different critiques and literature reviews. The theoretical ideas of different critiques about the term dislocation and diaspora culture are discussed in this chapter.

The second chapter deals with the theme of cultural hybridity and its complexities. The theoretical ideas especially of Homi K. Bhabba and other critiques

will support this chapter to analyze the novel from different points of view related to cultural hybridity. This chapter analyzes the protagonist and other second-generation characters' hybrid mentality and its consequences. It also discusses how the characters become the victims of cultural hybridity. Likewise, this chapter tries to explore the struggle of immigrants in a foreign country. The final chapter is the conclusion of the research work entitled consequences of cultural hybridity. The discussion is focused on the result derived by cultural hybridity. Thus, the study deals with cultural hybridity as an issue, as it is represented in Lahiri's *The Namesake*.

## **Chapter: Two**

### **Cultural Hybridity**

Culture is a rope that ties various people in a single bond, giving the feeling of being. In simple terms, it covers a broad area of society. It is a form of human identification. Since ancient time, culture has made human beings civilized creatures. People at first were barbaric, later different cultures taught them about civilization. Culture is a way to be civilized. Culture includes all the things around us like norms and values, behavior, knowledge, belief etc.

Raymond Williams has analyzed culture in three categories. Firstly, “culture is a state or process of human perfection in terms of certain absolute or universal values”. Secondly, “culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded.” Thirdly, “culture is description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior” (48). Culture is the total pattern of human behaviour. It covers all aspects of human behavior embodied in speech, action, and different objects which transfer from generation to generation.

According to anthropologist Edward B. Tyler “culture is a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society” (45). Culture is a phenomenon to describe man and his behavior. In perfect sense, culture is the acquisitions of man from his/her birth to death. It always shapes human mind and one’s attitudes while he/she lives in a society. The concept of culture has something to do with identity.

### **Cultural Identity**

The issue of identity that is related to the quest for origins is central to cultural

studies. Cultural studies draws on those approaches that hold the identity in response to something external and different from it. Identity is the meaning of self-concept that one gives to oneself or the meaning in general that human beings give to themselves. In other words, it is the sum totality of values attached to individuals by an age and community, in terms of their class, caste, group, or culture and institution of any kind. With the change in values or the intellectual developments in human history, man's concept of self has always changed.

In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* Stuart Hall defines identity. Identity is a production, which is never complete and is always in process, and always constituted within representation. According to Hall, there are different ways of thinking about cultural identity. Hall defines cultural identity in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective self which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Hall writes; "Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which provide us, as 'one people' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning" (111). In the above quote, Hall says that a conception of cultural identity has played a critical role in all the postcolonial struggles that have so profoundly reshaped our world. Postcolonial reality demands multiple, no synchronous narratives in place of a single master story. Like deconstruction, postcoloniality is involved in the contradiction of a double writing. On the one hand, it organizes itself as if nationalism was desirable, but on the other, it questions the very authority of the Euro-centrism inherent in nationalism. Like deconstruction, it also looks for other and different options.

Cultural identity, which follows along the many points of similarity, has critical points of deep and significant differences that constitute what we really are, or rather what we have become. Hall writes about this notion of cultural identity:

Cultural identity ... is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, times, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere and have histories. But like everything, which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.

(112)

In this sense, identity is subject to a continuous play of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere recovery of the past, waiting to be found, identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. It is only from this second position of the identity proposed by Hall that we can properly understand the traumatic character of the colonial experiences out of which are constituted the identities such as Indianness, Africanness and Blackness. Edger and Sedgwick takes identity as, "Merely constructed, but (as one which) depends upon some other, opens up the theoretical space for marginal or oppressed groups to challenge and re-negotiate the identities that have been forced upon them in the process of domination" (187). Here Edger and Sedgwick does not view identity as self- construction; rather it is a social construction that is based on social milieu.

### **Hybridity**

Hybridity is one of the most widely employed and disputed terms in postcolonial theory. It is borrowed from horticulture, which refers to the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or crosspollination to form a third 'hybrid' species. Hybridization can take many forms including not only cultural but also political, racial, social, and linguistic aspects. Linguistic examples include Pidgin and Creole language. However, while coming to postcolonial context, it refers to cultural

breed that is the result of bringing together of people and their culture from different groups or civilizations. On the issue of hybridity, Ashcroft, et al. claims:

Hybridity occurs in the postcolonial societies both as a result of conscious moments of cultural suppression, as when the colonial power invades to consolidate political and economic control, or when settler-invaders dispossess indigenous peoples and force them to 'assimilate' to new social patterns. It may also occur in later periods when patterns of immigration from the metropolitan societies and from other imperial areas of influence continue to produce complex cultural palimpsest with the post colonized world. (183)

Hybridity concerns various problems in which people are dislocated and displaced from their familiar social environment and indigenous culture when they are compelled to assimilate to new social patterns.

The term hybridity has received different kinds of treatment in the hands of different critics. Its implication gets altered when it is described and defined from different angles. Regarding the term 'hybridity,' prominent post colonial critics like Homi K. Bhabha, Robert Young, and Frantz Fanon advocate basically colonial experience. Hybridity is not limited to a narrow space, but has a broad area. Mikhail Bakhtin also supports this view by presenting his concept of multicultural language situations and multivocal narratives. He prefers multicultural language situations and narratives because it really bears originality and reality. He blames monovocal narratives as a capitalist weapon.

Hybridity is mostly known as a post-colonial experience. It has occurred since the time of cultural mixing hundreds of years ago. Local cultures at initial stages can become global cultures after their expansion through the process of globalization.

Hybridization actually occurs out of recognition of differences and produces something new. It refers to the creation of new transcultural forms. Most recently, it is associated with colonizer or colonized relations. It is related with their independence and the mutual construction of subjectivity. Hybridity is the in-between space that carries the burden and meaning of culture. Therefore, postcolonial situation is not a monolithic one, it follows from not only west to east but also from east to west. The impact even of non-western ideas and practices can be seen on the west. Thus, mutual cultural flows between the west and east develop the situation of cultural hybridity. Hybrid identity is always in a place of territory, rather fixed and stable.

### **Transculturation**

Transculturation is the creation of a new culture, and that new culture may create moments of harmony and tension. In other words, it is the state of in betweenness, where people are neither separated nor assimilated. Transculturation is the way to exchange cultural traits between societies in close contact. In *Cuban Counter point* Fernando Ortiz considers transculturation as an exchange:

Transculturation is a set of ongoing transmutations; it is full of creativity and never ceases; it is irreversible. It is always a process in which we give something in exchange for what we receive: the two parts of the equation end up being modified. From this process springs out a new reality, which is not a patchwork of features, but a new phenomenon, original and independent. (99)

According to Ortiz, transculturation describes the process of exchange. People neither can reject their native culture nor assimilate new culture totally. This process gives to birth to a new culture or reality.



Mary-Louise Pratt also employs the idea of transculturation, to indicate “inter-cultural negotiation that is a constant feature of what she calls ‘the contact zone’ or social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relation of dominance and subordination” (4). In simple words, contact zone is the space where one culture meets with another culture and merges. Likewise, this term has been used by ethnographers to describe how the subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from material transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture.

Transculturation includes more than transition from one culture to another. It does not consist merely of acquiring another culture or of losing or uprooting a previous culture but rather it merges these concepts and additionally contains the idea of creation of new cultural phenomenon. To make it clear, Ortiz further says, “Transculturation is the process of acculturation, decolouration, and neoculturation provides a useful framework for examining the cross-cultural adaptation any hybridization that takes place when two or more cultures meet” (97-98).

Transculturation takes place when two or more cultures mingle with each other and it cannot be separated totally. Hence, transculturation is the process of human cultural transmission that constitutes the basis for the development and spread of human civilization in the world.

### **Hybridity in Postcolonial Theories**

Hybridity is the result of the bringing together of people and their culture from different parts of the world. The term is related to the traumatic colonial experience. The term hybridity is connected with the work of Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha contends that “all cultural statement and systems are constructed in a space that is the ‘third

space of enunciation' (118). In Cultural theory, meanings have been extended to refer to the mixed or hyphenated identities of persons or ethnic communities.

Regarding the issue of hybridity, Bhabha claims that hybridity is revaluation of the assumption and belief of colonial identity in which there may be repetition of dominant identity. He states:

Hybridity is the sign of productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal that is the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority. (112)

Thus, hybridity is the product of colonialism. The colonizers are more powerful to secure their identity. Colonized people lose their identity, and go under the system of colonizers but they cannot adopt the new system completely. At this moment the colonized people neither can adopt the colonizer's culture nor they avoid native culture. So, they remain hybrid.

Bhabha argues that hybridity subverts the narratives of colonial power and privileges the colonized culture. Although hybridity exists within both colonial center and colonized space, Bhabha believes that it is a position in which the hybridized do not belong clearly to the world of either the colonizer or the colonized. They are rendered as the other, but they resist the colonial center. So, hybridity becomes a cultural mix and creates a new form of identity. In *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba cites Robert Young to define hybrid as a cross between two different species, "A hybrid is technically a cross between two different species therefore the term 'hybridization' evokes both the botanical notion of inter- species grafting and the 'vocabulary of the Victorian extreme 'right' which regarded different races as

different species” (145). Here, Young talks about hybridity as a cross between two different species and ‘hybridization’ as the botanical notion of inter-species grafting. However, in postcolonial theory hybridity is meant to evoke all those ways in which this vocabulary was challenged and undermined.

Hybridity is more self-consciously invoked as an anti-colonial strategy by the Cuban writer Robert Fernandez Retamar. Loomba cites from Retamar’s *Caliban* and other *Essays*; “Our mestizo America is unique in the colonial world because the majority of its population is racially mixed, it continues to use ‘the language of our colonizer’, and so many of their conceptual tools...are also our now our conceptual tools” (146). According to Retamar, America is hybrid place and its effect can be seen on population. Majority of population uses the language and conceptual tools of the colonizers.

Post-colonial critics have been influenced by the issues of hybridity, creolization, and inbetween. They argue that each culture either of colonizer or of colonized loses its identity in a colonized society. In addition, this situation gives birth to a new culture. Thomas B. Macaulay presented such new culture in his treatise “Minute on Indian Education.” According to him British government has given European Education to Indians to create an intermediates class of people. On this issue, it illustrates that by training certain Indian elites in English or western education, language and culture, the British rulers would be able to create an intermediate class of the people who would be distinguished from the general mass of people or native population. Macaulay means “... a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste in opinion in morals, and intellect” (91). Such intermediate classes of people would be as interpreters between the British and millions of Indian they ruled. It means intermediated classes of people would be

'brown' in terms of their skin only they would be almost white in terms of their cultural training, manners, languages, mode of speech.

Likewise, in *Black Skin White Masks* Frantz Fanon views that "the colonized behaviors are thought of as superior to the native ones" (21). Like Macaulay, Fanon also developed his idea of a comprador class or elite who exchanged rules with white colonial dominating class and argued that these "comprador" were masked by their partnership with the values of white colonial powers. In *Black Skin with White Masks* by inviting black subjects to mimic white culture, Fanon views, "Every colonized people in other words every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation that is white culture of the mother country" (18). Fanon says the colonized people suffer from inferiority complex. Due to the death of its local cultural originality they have to encounter with the language of the colonizer or the white culture.

Similarly, the concept of hybridity, for Bhabha, is the way to the notion of ambivalence. For him, 'ambivalence is the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized' (Ashcroft 12). Moreover, the relationship would be ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to that of the colonizer. Ambivalence also refers to a simultaneous attraction towards repulsion from an object, person or action. The complicity and resistance do exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject. Bhabha illustrates, "Ambivalence at the source of discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the wound of intervention" (112). Ambivalence is unsettling to colonial dominance. In fact, controversial proposition lies at the center of ambivalence. Colonial relation is compelled to be ambivalent

because it never really wants colonial subjects to be exact replies of the colonizers. The ambivalent colonial discourse implicates the colonizing and colonized subjects. Therefore, it can be said that the concept of ambivalence is related to hybridity.

In addition, Bhabha tries to clarify mimicry and ambivalence that function within colonial discourse. When there are two cultures interacting with each other, one cultural group copies other group's cultural traits. Mimicry describes the ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized when colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to mimic the colonizer by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumption, institutions and values. In another word, the colonized mimic the colonizer by adopting colonizer's culture, language and values. Whatever they mimic, it appears as mockery or parody. It also supports the idea of hybridity. While mimicking other's culture, there appears a third culture, that is, hybrid culture.

The colonized wants to acquire the superior position of the colonizers through mimicry. The colonized people mimic the colonizers by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, values and behaviors. But the colonized subject imitates everything of the colonizer, which seems similar to the colonizer but not exactly the same. Homi K. Bhabha, remarks, "The menace of mimicry in its double vision which is disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourses also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation recognition of the colonial object" (88). He uses mimicry to define the colonized as a mimic man who is not the same person as the colonizer just by wearing a mask to imitate the colonizer. Mimicry of the colonizer places the colonized in an ambivalent, hybrid space or in-betweenness.

For Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, "It is the in-between space that carries the burden and meaning of culture and this is what makes the notion of hybridity so

important” (119). There is always a gap between two cultures and these two cultures create another hybrid culture. That hybrid culture neither covers the colonized’s whole original culture nor adopts the whole colonizer’s culture, which creates the in-betweenness. In this regard, in-betweenness creates the sense of unbelongingness to a particular culture, which creates a sense of dislocation.

In summing up, hybridity refers to the creation of new trans-cultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. It is formed by colonization when two cultural groups mix up together in the process of colonization. It is, in another sense, ethnic hybridity too. Because of long contact between two different cultures there appears another culture that is hybrid culture.

## Chapter Three

### Hybridity in *The Namesake*

*The Namesake* depicts the multiple effects of cultural hybridity in the life of the protagonist. Lahiri presents a dual state of an immigrant Bengali family in Boston. Gogol is the central character of the novel. The protagonist Gogol is the son of Bengali parents born in America, and is accustomed to American life-style. As he grows older, he is starting to assimilate the western way of life. In course of his namesake, he gets knowledge as such, he is neither entirely south Asian nor American but a different one, i.e. a hybrid fellow/ which makes him almost serious about his role as a diasporic mediator of his heretical past in Bengali root and his present state of American adoption.

Ashoke Gangali with his newlywed bride Ashima, migrates to America and settle in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The settlement leads them from their tradition bound life to their transformation into Indian – American citizens. Ashoke adopts the new culture far less early than Ashima, who resists all things American and pines for her family. When the novel begins Ashima is about to deliver her first child in a hospital in Massachusetts. Ashima gives birth to a child. The task of naming their newly born baby boy appears tough to Ashima and Ashoke. In Bengali tradition, elders of the family do the naming process. For this honor, they have chosen Ashima's grandmother. But the letter having the pet name and good name sent by her grandmother has been missing somewhere between India and America. They have confusion about naming the baby with the Bengali name.

In America a baby cannot be released from the hospital without a birth certificate and that the birth certificate needs a name. So, Ashoke decides the name 'Gogol' for the baby. Ashoke gives this name to his son because Gogol is the name of

his favorite Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol, the writer of *The Overcoat*. So, their son's first identity comes from the *Overcoat*. As Gogol grows older enough to be conscious of the national identity and that of ethnicity, he gets his tradition-based name. Named as Gogol, as the first name or the official name from a Russian's surname makes him neither an American nor a Bengali, but rather the one that differentiates both his present home America and his ancestral home India. In this sense, the name of the protagonist itself is hybrid because Gogol is neither Bengali name nor American but Russian.

As Gogol grows older he starts to hate his name and during his college life in Yale, he re-invents himself by his legal name 'Nikhil,' the official name for him given by his elders at home. Gogol feels embarrassed to tell his real name to his friends because his name is not modern like that of his friends. When his friends' names Alexander was shortened to Alex and Andrew to Andy similarly Gogol would have preferred to have something like that for his name as well. But, to have a modern name like that of his American friends he changes his name. The new name sounds far more sophisticated and most importantly could pass for a western name. It shows the hybrid mentality of the protagonist. He hates the Russian name given by his father. He likes to introduce himself with an Indian name Nikhil. Not only this, he starts to step in a hybrid culture at the same time. He wants to shorten his name as Nick just like that of his American friends. He remains somewhere between his own native culture and American culture that is a hybrid culture.

By changing the name from Gogol to Nikhil he feels free from all the ethical constraints of his parents. It is as Nikhil that he embarks on his adult life that he begins to have relationship with white American women. But all these take place at Gogol's private life as Nikhil, secret from his parents. The narrator projects "Gogol's



successful affair with Ruth (the first white girlfriend of Gogol) and his happy relationship with her becomes his such accomplishment in life about which his parents are not in the least bit proud or pleased” (116). Gogol tries to adopt the American culture but at the same time he can not confess that in front of his parents. It makes him maintain a double identity. He is forced to obey his Bengali culture at home in spite of his fascination toward the American culture. It's because one does not have to maintain double identity if he or she is not guided by hybrid mentality. It shows that stepping into adulthood, Gogol is openly exposed to the dominant high culture. He wants to leave behind Bengali values of his parents. So, assimilating with other culture and ignoring his own root or culture can be taken as an example of cultural hybridity.

Although Gogol's parents live in America, they want to limit themselves within a family boundary and Hindu religion and customs. But Gogol wants to go beyond such traditional forms of life, and desires to live an individual life beyond any restrictions from his parents. He starts smoking, drinks wine and goes to party with his friends secretly, which his parents had never expected from him. In this regard the narrator states, “It is Nikhil that he takes metro-worth into Mannhhttan one weekend with Jonathan and gets himself a fake id that allows him to be served liquor in New Haven bars. It is Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party at Ezra stile [...]” (105). Gogol, although he is not interested in his native culture, he is compelled to follow the rules and regulations at his home. He tries to overcome the boundaries created by his native culture following the foreign culture. That is to say the protagonist can not go beyond the cultural restrictions being Gogol so he tries to fulfill his desire to live a carefree life with the name of Nikhil. Going to late night party, visiting bars, and losing virginity, are not acceptable in Indian culture.

Though Ashima and Ashoke are also in an alien land, they respect their culture by celebrating different rituals and customs of the Bengali culture. But for the sake of their children, they celebrate Easter and Christmas. Gogol and Sonia celebrate Easter and Christmas more interestingly than worship of Durga and Saraswati. They mimic the American culture by celebrating the foreign rituals and customs. Their interest more in foreign rituals than in Bengali culture supports the idea of cultural hybridity. It's because while they mimic other's culture, there appears the third culture, the hybrid culture.

Likewise, we can see the hybridity in food also. Ashima and Ashoke prefer Indian food, so Ashima makes tandoori, dal, lamb curry whereas their children want to have American foods like hot dogs, sandwiches, roast beef; "For Gogol's lunches Ashima makes sandwiches with bologna or roast beef. At his insistence, she concedes and makes him an American dinner once a week as a treat" (65). And at dinner Gogol sometimes uses a fork.

After completing his University, he starts his first job as an architect in a large architecture consulting company in New York. It is also his attempt to make himself free from his Indian immigrant parents. His father wants his son to join work as an engineer, doctor or some more established profession. As time proceeds on, he comes across another white lady Maxine Ratliff who turns to be his second girlfriend.

After being very close to Maxine, Nikhil detaches himself from his parents. He starts living in Maxine's home, simultaneously he starts to forget his duties and responsibilities as a son. He is even distracted by the telephone calls from his parents. Nikhil enjoys his life in his own way, kissing Maxine while on the road and having physical relationship with her. In this regard, the narrator mentions, "Gogol and Maxine [...]. They stray to the lower stories, making love on countless pieces of

furniture, on the floor, on the island in the kitchen [...] wander naked from room [...]. They live off sushi and cold poached salmon” (142). Living together of unmarried couple is not allowed in Hindu culture. Nikhil’s such activity are one of the signs of being westernized, this sort of activities is strictly prohibited in Hindu culture and tradition. Before marriage to have, a sexual relationship is not accepted in Hindu culture and Indian society. But, Jhumpa Lahiri’s protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, is attracted towards western culture in the novel.

Cultural hybridity is found in the other characters of *The Namesake* too. Sonia is one of them. The daughter of Ashima and Ashoke, Sonia is also influenced by western way of life like her brother Gogol. She is extremely attracted to the western form of lifestyle. She wears short skirts, trims her hair and makes it rather short, and goes to dance parties. And she also makes a boy friend secretly while in high school. She likes to eat sandwiches, pizza, hamburger etc. rather than her own Bengali food. In Indian culture, girls wear long skirts or kurtha salwar and keep long hair. Girls have no permission to go to late night party or dance party, and their parents choose grooms. Therefore, in Sonia’s characteristic also we find cultural hybridity because she is very different from other girls of Indian origin. She seems to be the victim of inferiority complex due to the loss of her cultural originality. Being a hybrid person like her brother, she also has to maintain double standard.

Sonia and Gogol visit Calcutta, their native land, with their parents in vacation. Once when they went to Calcutta with their parents for eight months they visited lots of their relatives in India. During their visit, she feels a kind of boredom like her brother Gogol. They express a great dislike for the life they have to spend in Bengal and find life over there very pathetic. In India, they adjust to sleep inside a mosquito net, bathe by pouring tin cups of water over their heads. While Sonia

experiences these things, she feels the way of life people in Calcutta ridiculous. She does not understand the fact how much she is cared for by the relatives in India. When they return to America, Sonia along with her brother Gogol feels free. Their visit to India and the experience of the Bengali life make them feel ridiculous and pathetic. Their disgust for the native land and native people can be seen throughout the novel. They find themselves suffocated in their native land. It is all because of the hybrid culture they have grown up. Therefore ridiculing Indian culture and life of experience is also example of cultural hybridity.

Gogol's father Ashoke dies of heart attack. After the death of his father, he spends more time with his mother and sister. For the sake of his family, he breaks up his relationship with the American girl Maxine. After sometime of his father's death, Gogol, with his mother's desperate wish, marries Moushumi Mazoomdar. Gogol's ambivalent attitude is a strong example of cultural hybridity. He cannot leave his mother and sister just because of the influence of his native culture he has within. He gives up his relationship with his girlfriend. Not only this, he gets married with the girl of his native culture.

Moushumi is also second-generation Indian immigrant whom he knows from his childhood. Like Gogol, Moushumi also enjoys her life in her own ways. She also does not like any restriction from her parents' side. She wants to do whatever she wishes. She longs for freedom in her life. Though she is a daughter of Bengali parents, she has changed herself totally in western style. Smoking cigarette, drinking wine etc are common things for her. "She asks for a glass of champagne and looks carefully at the wine list" (198). She has a boy friend before her marriage. When she chooses to marry Gogol, she has already abandoned her American lover. Gogol and Moushumi stay together as a 'living – relation' before marriage. Being a modern girl

she does not feel any guilt to have sex with Gogol before marriage. Living together before marriage is quite contrary to Hindu society and system.

Hence, Moushumi's life style and her behaviour also is a good example of cultural hybridity. She breaks up her affair with her American boyfriend easily when she decides to marry with Gogol. She is inspired by her native culture for a short period. She tries to assimilate herself with her own culture. Her attempt to reject her boyfriend and chooses an Indian husband.

Moushumi's and Gogol's wedding ceremony is performed according to Indian culture. Though both of them are highly inspired by American culture, they do not marry in the church. They remain somewhere between both the culture. But after some months of wedding there comes a catastrophe in the married life of Gogol and Moushumi. She turns out to be an unfaithful wife. Moushumi starts to feel unsatisfied and finds it hard to settle down in her married life. She spends most of her free time with her friends leaving Gogol. And she starts having extra-marital relationship with a man, called Dimitri and ignores Nikhil. Sometimes she sits at a restaurant alone, at the bar, ordering sandwiches and a glass of wine. She takes relation with Dimitri just for the sake for enjoyment. This type of activity of a married woman is a thing of immorality and shame for those people who are bound with traditional rite and rituals. In Hindu culture extra-marital affair not regarded as good. For her extra-marital relation is simple, she takes it without any hesitation, and humiliation.

Gogol cannot tolerate his wife's extra marital affair though he is overwhelmed by American culture. He cannot take it easily. As a typical Indian husband, he cannot forgive his wife for her adulterous relationship. Though he mimics the American culture, he cannot give up his typical Indian mentality. Neither he

purely becomes an American nor remains a pure Indian. His ambivalent attitude generates a third culture, the hybrid culture.

Because of her extramarital affair, Gogol and Moushumi's relationship becomes weaker day by day. She shows no interest towards her husband and she increases her distance from Gogol. Because of her indifference towards her husband and extra-marital affair with other males becomes the reason of their divorce. As the narrator tells, "She wanted nothing of the brief life they had together; when she appeared one last time at his office a few months later, so that he could sign the divorce paper" (283). In Hindu culture, love does not mean only physical relation; it rather means being in each other's thought; when male and female get married their relationship is sacred. Divorce is totally against Hindu culture, whereas divorce is common for westerners. Although Moushumi is Indian parents' daughter, she is totally influenced by the western culture. Hence she takes divorce as a common thing as westerners do. Her marriage and divorce with Gogol is a strong evidence of her cultural hybridity.

*The Namesake* is a story of Indian immigrants' experience and it depicts the effects of migration and settlement. Especially the America born children of Indian immigrants are influenced by western culture. In this novel Gogol, Sonia, and Moushumi belong to the second-generation immigrants in America. They are influenced by American culture and they behave like westerners. They cross all limitations of Indian culture. Their behavior, life style all seem like American although their heritage is from India. While they speak, they sound like Americans. Their ambivalent attitude can be seen throughout the novel. They mimic the American culture and try to assimilate their native culture with a foreign one. But neither they avoid their native culture nor fully accept the American one. They become a hybrid

person. The mutual cultural flow between the west and the east has developed the situation of cultural hybridity in the novel. After all hybridity is the result of bringing together of people and their culture from different parts of the world. In this regard, there is no doubt to say that, this novel *The Namesake* deals with the theme of cultural hybridity and circumstances derived from it.

The novel begins with the departure of Ashoke and Ashima from India and their settlement in Massachusetts of the USA. He is inspired by the dream of having better future in America for him and his family. Ashoke is a student of engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Ashima, though in alien land, has not changed herself as westerners by adopting modern dress. She always wears saris and blouses and puts *Tika* on her forehead, which shows the love for her own native culture even though she is in foreign land.

Ashima gives birth to her first child in foreign land, America, where she feels the life of exile. She feels awful at the time of delivery in the hospital, her eyes are searching her relatives but all her efforts become futile as she is all surrounded by strangers, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved. In Hospital, she is the only Indian person. When she is in hospital, her suffocation rises when she has to stay alone among the strangers. The narrator remarks; “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” (3). Meanwhile she thinks if she was in India at the period of delivery women go to their parents home to give birth, away from husband and in-laws and household cares. So here is the feeling of exile and nostalgia.

Having two names, pet name ‘daknam’ or good name ‘bhaloname’, is the common practice of Bengali families. As for a name, they have decided to let Ashima’s grandmother, who is past eighty now:

When her grandmother learned of Ashima's pregnancy, she was particularly thrilled at the prospect of naming the family's first *sahib*. And so Ashima and Ashok have agreed to put off the decision of what to name the baby until a letter comes, ignoring the forms from the hospital about filling for a birth certificate. (25)

In the novel the task of naming the newly born child, a baby boy of Ashoke and Ashima appear tough to them to maintain their heritage in a new land. For now, the label on his hospital cot reads simply Baby Boy Ganguli. The letter having pet name and good name sent by their grandmother has been hovering somewhere, between India and America. Ashima and Ashoke did not know the name sent by the grandmother when the letter gets lost, they have a confusion about naming the baby with a Bengali name.

Though Ashima is in a western land, she has not changed herself. She does not eat beef, she does not wear skirts and pants, and she has not cut off her hair. Ashima tries to form her own culture in an alien land to be free from alienation. Her grandmother suggests Ashima at the time of departure from their homeland as, "Ashima not to eat beef or wear skirts or cut off her hair, not forget her family the moment she landed in Boston" (37). Moreover, Ashima being away from her homeland feels a kind of boredom in Boston. To fulfill her inner quest and maintain her traditional norms, values and native identity in a foreign land she speaks Bengali language with her husband, reads Bengali poems and stories repeatedly. The narrator thus states, "The printed pages of Bengali type, slightly rough to touch, are a perpetual comfort to her. She reads each of the short stories and poems and articles a dozen of times" (6). Ashima tries to overcome her loneliness by reading the Bengali stories, poems and articles times and again. She wears sari and blouse, puts *tika* and



*sindur* on her forehead that shows her respect for own original customs and her Indianness.

A sense of alienation exists in the heart of the people who are far from their homeland. Ashima and Ashoke try to form their own culture in an alien land to get intimate with their own native culture. That helps them to overcome alienation. They celebrate their son's rice ceremony, Annapasan, inviting their Indian friends living in Boston. They dress up Gogol in pure Indian style though they are in a foreign land. They wear traditional jewelries and apply of sandalwood and kohl, express their love towards their culture and tradition. From the lens of the narrator:

Gogol is dressed as an infant Bengali groom, in a pale yellow pajama Punjabi from his grandmother in Calcutta. He wears fourteen- karat gold chain around his neck. His tiny forehead has been decorated with sandalwood paste to form six miniature beige moons floating above his brows. His eyes have been darkened with a kohl. [...] Ashima wears a silvery sari, a wedding gift worn for the first time, the sleeves of her blouse reaching the crook of her elbow. His father wears a transparent white Punjabi top over bell-bottom trousers. (39)

Gogol's parents are trying to create an imaginary homeland or establishing a little India in the New World (America). Though they are far away from their native land, they love their Bengali rituals and tradition. They have respect for their cultural heritage. Their visit to Atlanta, Toronto, or Chicago was made solely to visit other Bengalis. They also visited their hometown (Calcutta) despite the unwillingness of their children.

Ashima during her pregnancy wishes to eat salty and sourly food mixed by different items. Ashima, combining Rice crispies and planter's peanuts and chopped red

onion in a bowl, adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chilli, pepper, wishing there was mustard oil to pour into the mix. She consumes this concoction throughout her pregnancy, a humble approximation of the snack sold for pennies on Calcutta sidewalks and on railway platforms throughout India, spilling from newspaper cones that she still craves. The narrator remarks: “Even now that there is barely space inside her; it is the one thing she craves. Tasting from a cupped palm, she frowns, as usual there is something missing” (1). Ashima makes salty and sour Indian snack by combining different items but she feels the taste of that concoction is not as tasty as she had eaten in India. She feels something is missing in that food item.

Moreover, in Ashima’s view, people cannot forget their own tradition and nationality wherever and however they are. It is her belief that if they forget their traditional norms and values, they will forget themselves. Culture and nationality are the integral part of any person who may be far away from the point of origin. So Ashima and Ashoke send their son Gogol to learn Bengali language and culture. As the narrator remarks: “When Gogol is in third grade, they send him to Bengali language and Culture lessons every other Saturday , held in the home of one of their close friends” (65). In Boston, Ashima feels physically dislocated from her home in Bengal, a separation results into the state of nostalgia. She always finds herself in the pond of nostalgia and memory since she is away from Bengal. As narrator she depicts; “Ashima sits by the three –sided window in the living one of the triangular chairs and cries the whole day. She cries as she feeds him, and as she pats him to sleep, he cries between sleeping and feeding. She cries after the mailman’s visit because there are no letters from Calcutta” (34). It shows that Ashima’s memories for her homeland are constantly present. Even though she lived in America for a long time, she feels she

does not belong to the place where she lives. Through letters from India, she connects herself to her homeland.

Similarly, Ashima, in the new world, America, tries to create her past environment by making different varieties of Indian food. She cooks Indian food to make up for her diasporic alienation. The feeling of newness is overcome by Indian food as she prepares different varieties of recipes such as, “lamb curry with lots of potatoes, luchis, thick channa dal with swollen brown raisins, pineapple chutney, sandeshes molded out of saffron –tinted ricotta cheese” (72). Food is a kind of remedy for her, which takes away the newness. Her experience of displacement and feeling of alienation is removed a little through cooking of Indian food. The narrator asserts:

In the evening, she cooks for him hoping to please with unrationed, remarkably unblemished sugar, flour, rice, and salt she had written about her mother in her very first letter home. By now she has learned that her husband likes his food on the salty side that he likes to finish his dinner with a small final helping of rice and dal. (10)

According to the narrator, Ashima wants to please her husband by making different kinds of Indian foods. By the time she comes to realize that her husband likes to have typical Indian food, dal and rice.

Likewise, Ashima and Ashoke are filled with religious love and affection; they have deep attachment to their family. Ashima follows the mainstream patriarchal norms and values of Indian culture in the foreign land. She believes in religion, manner, social norms, values, and ideal family, and also desires these qualities within her family members. The narrator mentions, “She teaches him to memorize a four-line children’s poem by Tagore, and the name of deities adoring the ten-handed goddess

Durga during puja: Saraswati with her swan and Kartik with his peacock to her left, Lakshmi with her owl and Ganesh with his mouse to her right” (54). Ashima, with her desire to make her children familiar with Indian culture, tries to teach them showing the picture of different Hindu deities like Durga, Saraswati and Ganesh. She teaches her children the poems of Tagore.

However, in the middle part of the novel, Ashoke dies unexpectedly due to heart attack. As the Hindu Bengali wife, after the death of husband, women are not allowed to wear red dresses, put *tika* and use *Sindur* on her forehead; the same thing applies to Ashima too. She is forced to remove her *Sindur* from her forehead. As the narrator asserts, “His mother has shampooed the vermilion powder from her part. She has taken off her iron wedding bracelet, forcing it from her hand with cold cream along with all the other bracelets she’s always worn” (180). Likewise, in Hindu culture, during parents’ death, son also has to follow some responsibilities. Gogol obeys the traditional norms and values of Bengali culture. He shaves all his hair with a razor. For ten days, following his father’s death, he, his mother and Sonia eat a mourner’s diet, forgoing meat and fish. They eat only rice, dal and vegetables, plainly prepared.

On the eleventh day of Ashoke’s death there is a ritual task done for the soul to remain in peace in heaven. The eleventh day is the end of the mourning period in Bengali culture. People and relatives come to express their sorrow on the demise of Ashoke. Though Ganguli family is in the foreign land, a Christian land of religion, they perform all the Hindu Bengali ritual what they should do after the demise of a Hindu man. They scatter Ashoke’s ashes in Ganges. It shows that at the time of grief in the foreign land also they have respect and belief in their native cultures.

The wedding ceremony of Moushumi and Gogol is performed according to Bengali culture although they are in America. They wear traditional Hindu costume in their wedding ceremony, Gogol wears “a parchment – coloured Punjabi top, a prepleated dhoti with a drawstrings waist, a pair of nagari slippers with curling toes [...]. On the other hand Moushumi wears sari and blouse .Two enormous paisleys have been painted in red and white on her cheek” (222). Likewise, on the reception programme they make typical Bengali food items. “It is typical north Indian fare, mounds of hot pink tandoori, alloo gobi in thick orange sauce” (223). It makes them feel as they are in their own land. The food items help to add the Indian atmosphere in their wedding ceremony.

Moreover, in the last part of the novel Ashima sells her house, where she has lived for the past twenty-seven years. She decides to spend six months of her life in India and six months in America. She is overcome by a feeling of being dis-housed, not knowing where she really belongs. Her struggles for acculturation and her final decision or solution to it is found at the end. As the narrator exposes:

She feels lonely suddenly, permanently alone ... she feels overwhelmed by the thought of the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and is now in its own way foreign.... For thirty-three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she has worked. She will miss throwing parties ... She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband. (279)

Ashima, comes to realise her affection towards her home in the new land, America. She misses all those memories with her husband, friends, her job and the activities she used to do in America during the thirty-three years of her life in America.

This research tries to show the struggles of immigrants in America. Those who are in a foreign country feel alienated because one has to face of new language, culture and place. Diasporic people are haunted by a sense of loss or dislocation or displacement. In *The Namesake* we can find all these elements or struggles faced by immigrants. Therefore, novel is diasporic.

## Chapter: Four

### Consequences of Cultural Hybridity

*The Namesake* is a story of Indian Ganguli family's migration to America and their struggle and hardship to form a life in the new land. Especially, the writer, who is herself a child of immigrants, includes the experiences of immigrants in her stories. Lahiri is an Indian by origin, but an American by practice and she is categorized as a diaspora writer. In most of the novels written by diaspora writers, it is possible to find elements of hybridity.

Lahiri's *The Namesake* makes a dramatic depiction in which major characters become victims of cultural hybridity. Hybridity refers to the creation of new-transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. Hybridization takes various forms such as cultural, political, social, racial, and even linguistic. It includes many issues like alienation, diaspora, dislocation, migration, globalization, marginality, ethnicity, identity crisis etc. Among them, identity crisis and alienation are powerful expressions of cultural hybridity.

Identity is inevitably bound with culture. Activity of mass media, migration, and globalization affect the hybrid subject, which causes identity crisis. The cultural values and identity, therefore, have been transferred to other cultural groups, and the cultural loss appears to be a major question among the people. They seek their identity. The cultural mixing gives rise to new hybrid identity that distracts modern subjects. Therefore, the hybrid subjects fall in the crisis of identity. In the global context, people do not belong to one culture and identity only. They are defined by multiple and unstable identities. Globalization gives rise to cultural hybridity, which refers to the movement and transference of people. Hybrid subjects create a transcultural issue while practicing new activities and following new profession and

culture. They try to fit into new and uncommon culture. Thus, when the people cannot assimilate perfectly, they lose something of their own culture and adopt something from other culture. They become hybrid as the characters of *The Namesake*.

*The Namesake* explores the issues of Indian immigrants for both the first and second generation. In the novel, the characters Ashima and Ashoke belong to the first generation and their children Gogol, Sonia and daughter-in-law Moushumi belong to second generation. Ashoke and Ashima are highly inspired by the concept of American dream that they will have a better future and life in the US. Even though Ashima and Ashoke are in foreign land they try their best to preserve their Indian cultural heritage and teach their children in America. On the other hand, their children are not interested towards their ancestors' cultural heritage, they are fascinated towards American culture and life style.

In this novel the characters from the second generation Gogol, Sonia, and Moushumi and their activities like smoking cigarettes, visiting night clubs, making boyfriend and girl friend, preferring individual life, celebrating Christmas party etc. are example of Americanization. Gogol wants the life style of Americans, and to be Americanized, he assimilates with the western way of living by making American girlfriends, smoking cigarette, visiting night clubs without letting his parents know about such activities. He wants to go beyond his traditional forms of life and desires to live an individual life beyond any restriction from his parents. He tries to avoid socializing with the people from his own background. Though he whole heartedly follows American lifestyle, he cannot avoid his original culture. With the death of his father, he has to perform all the rituals and the family responsibility willingly in a foreign land. He tries to mimic the life style of American but he becomes neither a pure American nor a pure Indian. He becomes a hybrid subject, which results in his



identity crisis. That is to say he becomes an outside of in the alien land and his own land as well.

Their parents maintain their social life by performing their traditional norms, *puja* and other Hindu ceremonies, but the children do not wish to participate in those traditional performances and ceremonies of their heritage. They prefer to celebrate Christmas and other programs of the Americans. Hence, children's attraction towards Christmas and their rejection to their own Hindu culture are example of their diasporic situation.

In Hindu society, extra marital relationship is taken as sin or thing of immorality and shame. The married women are not allowed to make such kind of sensual relation, whereas in western culture extra marital affair is not considered as abnormal thing. Moushumi though she belongs to Hindu culture, adopts the western culture, and has relationship with other person even after marriage. She ruins herself due to her lustful and mechanical relationship.

Thus, this novel depicts the conflict between the first generation and the second-generation immigrants. The old generation tries to preserve their cultural heritage whereas the second generation rejects it and wants to be assimilated with the new or American culture. But they are caught between two cultures and live culturally hybrid existence.

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