

# ALIENATION'S PERFECT EXAMPLE "THE NAMESAKE," NOVEL BY JHUMPA LAHIRI

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**Abstract:**

*Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Namesake" tells the story of the Ganguli family including Ashima, Ashoke, Gogol and Sonia. Most of the novel revolves around Gogol and his life, as he tries to come to terms with his identity. During most of his childhood and adolescence, he had trouble accepting his name. In his novel "The Namesake," Lahiri talks about the alienation, fear and disillusionment his characters face after moving abroad. In "The Namesake," Ashima and Ashoke emigrate to the United States. Two characters emigrate to the United States due to socioeconomic factors.*

**Keywords:** *Alienation, Fear, Disillusionment, Emigrate, Identity.*

## INTRODUCTION

Jhumpa Lahiri, effectively conveys the theme of the alienation experienced by immigrants assimilating into a replacement place and therefore the exposure of two cultures, relative to how one's 'home' reflects on their identity within the novel, "The Namesake". This bildungsroman novel, set in both India and America and which follows a Bengali family's attempts at assimilating within American culture, portrays this theme throughout. Lahiri conveys this theme through her effective use of the characterisation of all of the characters, Ashima, Ashoke, then the youngsters Gogol and Sonia, helping to develop each of their individual identities. because the story continues, this symbol of homes also helps to develop their identities and divulges each of their own experiences in assimilating into American culture. a method Lahiri conveys the way during which a house is a mirrored image of one's identity, also because the theme of the alienating experience of immigrants assimilating into America and therefore the exposure of two cultures, is thru the utilization of the characterisation of Ashima and therefore the development of her identity. The experience of the Ganguli's attempts at assimilating into American culture is portrayed within Ashima's difficulty at understanding the customs round her as she clings to her correspondence together with her family in India and tries to take care of the Bengali traditions she grew up with. Specifically, she chose to continue traditional Bengali cooking for the rest of her life in America, saving the quarter of her remaining life. "Ashima consumed this concoction during her pregnancy. It is a conservative approximation of a snack sold for pennies on the sidewalks of Kolkata, India." No matter what, she sticks to traditional Bengali cooking methods.

### "The Namesake"

Jhumpa Lahiri has established herself among Indian diaspora writers with her literary work. Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second generation of immigrants. Her work depicts immigration issues such as alienation, expulsion and uprooting, as well as acculturation issues in her host countries. Writers who have emigrated to foreign countries talk about the harsh realities of foreign countries. Immigration seems to hold a great deal of potential for those expected to move to another country. In reality, they are comfortably assimilated into the culture, psychology and geography of their host country. But for those who do not reach the method of assimilation, it is still painful. They always have the feeling of being uprooted and alienated. Alienation has been explained in different ways by different scholars. Mentioned by Arnold Kaufmann,

*"To claim that a person is alienated is to claim that his relation to something else has certain features which result in avoidable discontent or loss of satisfaction."*

Encyclopaedia Britannica describes alienation as,

*"The state of feeling estranged or separated from one's milieu, work, products of work or self."*

A dictionary of literary terms defines alienation within the following words, *"Alienation is the state of being alienated from something or somebody; it is condition of the mind."*

The English word alienation comes from the Latin "alienato". The verb form "alienare" means to grasp, avoid, remove, or shape things for another person. The French "alienate" and "alienation" follow the English "alienate" and "alienation". The Greek words anomia and anomie, meaning alienation from oneself and alienation from society respectively, are considered modern in their use. Anomia marks the disintegration of an individual from society. On anomia, or self-alienation, G.H. Nettler wrote:

*"Anomia is personal disorganization, alienation is a psychological state of an individual .....And alienated is the person who has been estranged, made unfriendly towards his society and the culture it carries."*

In fact, anomie, anomia, and alienation are often used interchangeably. In English, isolation, estrangement, and separation are a series of antonyms meaning alienation, and alienation is a recurring theme in Jhumpa Lahiri's work. Her first novel, "The Namesake", could be an account of her two generations of Ganguli life in America. After Ashima marries Ashoke, she immigrates to America. She doesn't feel comfortable here. She found the social environment and geographical country very different from India. Her sense of being a stranger leads her to alienation. Ashima's sense of alienation is evident throughout the novel: at every opportunity she misses her hometown of Kolkata. At her birth, she is lonely here and she laments that she has no one to take care of her new-born child. She would have been surrounded by her relatives in India. In India, the birth of an infant is a celebration. The birth of an infant doesn't make much sense here, so its importance is half-justified.

*"Without a single grandparent and an uncle and aunt at her side, the baby's birth like most everything in America, feels haphazard, only half true .....She never knows of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived". (Lahiri :25)*

The U.S. health care system requires married couples to list their children's names on certificates. If the child's name is on the medical certificate, both mother and child can be discharged. The child's name is to be raised by her grandmother, which shocks even Ashima. A letter with her name arrives for a month. So, by mutual consent, Ashoke gave the boy the name Gogol. This is a reputation that supports the famous Russian writer Nicholas Gogol, whom he adores. After being discharged from the hospital, Ashima comes home and reveals her resentment,

*"I don't want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It is not right. I want to go back."*

This complete affair heightens the estrangement of the couple, especially Ashima, whose American principles and culture make them lonely. They are twice estranged. First, they are alienated because they are far from home. Second, they are marginalized because of their different cultures. When she next moved to the suburbs, she felt alienated again, likening her alienation to "a kind of lifelong pregnancy." Later, her son named Gogol suffers from estrangement because of his name. There is no clear basis or clarification for his name, at least for the origin of the name. He is a second generation immigrant. His attachment to the home plot is not as strong as his parents'. As Nigamananda says,

*"Jhumpa Lahiri's first generation Indian-Americans cherish their past and its memories and an indispensable and integral part of their roots and their beings, her second generation Indian-Americans reflect both proximities and distancing from it; they seem to perceive and adopt new angles at which to enter this reality. More particularly.....they took forward to the concerns and modes of their hybridization and cross-cultural fertilization in the increasingly multicultural space of USA and not more absorption in the dominant culture."*

This becomes the main reason for his estrangement. His sense of isolation deepens as he tries to avoid his parents and keep his friends away from his parents. In order to adapt to American culture, he tries to adopt the American lifestyle. He is perplexed because his parents are not Native Americans. He tries to avoid his parents and keeps his friends away from his parents. He's trying to immerse himself in American culture. During this tryst, he changes his name from Gogol to Nikhil and befriends and enjoys Kim. He then tries to bond with Maxine's family. He drinks expensive wine in his parents' country house. His conscience haunts him.

*"At times.....another bottle of wine is opened and Gogol raises his glass to be filled, yet again, he is conscious of the fact that his immersion in Maxine's family is betrayal of his own." (Lahiri 141)*

At now he's torn with a psychological conflict, resulting in alienation. Sidney Finkelstein defines alienation as,

*"a psychological phenomenon, an internal conflict, a hostility felt towards something seemingly outside oneself, a barrier erected which is actually no defence but an impoverishment of oneself". (75)*

Living alone in her Pemberton Road home since the death of her husband, she hates the darkness that permeates her home and soul. Her obsession with measurements in her lonely home suggests her loneliness and estrangement. Gogol also experiences Moshmi, whom Ashima wants to marry her son with a kind of existential alienation. Sartre writes about this kind of alienation in his book 'Being and Nothingness':

*"In the shock that seizes me when apprehend the other's look, I experience a subtle alienation of all my possibilities which are associated with the object of the world far for me, in the midst of world." (18)*

Moushumi shares a past with Gogol. She turned down all her potential grooms her parents had picked. After breaking up with her fiancée, she decided not to let anyone into her life. Moushumi's emphasis on her freedom and references to France are often seen as her existentialist alienation. After her party in Calcutta, Ashima finds herself in her eternal loneliness.

*"She turns away from the mirror and sobs for her husband.....both impatient and indifference for all the days she still must sleep."*

Even as a child in America, she lost interest in her family in Calcutta. She feels the pain of separation for her husband. This increases their sense of alienation. "The Namesake" is mainly diaspora fiction, and it is also a story about family ties, conflicting values, and intercultural relationships,

*"Guilt and liberation; in this sense it speaks to the universal struggle to extricate ourselves from the past -from family and obligation and the curse of history." (Hallgren, as Qtd in Batra 46).*

As a narrative of the immigrant experience, first-generation Indian immigrants are contrasted with their children born and referred to abroad. Even the choice of the protagonist's name leads to cultural clashes between the two generations. Settling in another place far away from home for the long term ends in a sense of loss and nostalgia. Remembering the culture, religion, literature, and language of one's hometown conveys ethnic identity, and this sense of self also alienates a person from the host culture. This imperfect assimilation leads to alienation.

"The Namesake", Lahiri's debut novel has an autobiographical element as she presents not only her own experiences, but those of her parents, friends, acquaintances, and others. Throughout the novel, most of her characters experience pain and happiness in their new country. The characters Ashoke and his wife Ashima are first-generation immigrants who have not fully absorbed American culture. For example, when Ashima is in the wards of Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, she feels alienated because she has no one around to offer her help or relief. She fears raising a child in a country where

she knows no one and that her life will look very unpredictable. When Gogol was born, she told Ashoke that she wanted to go back to India with her son Gogol.

Language causes problems for Gogol and Sonia as they grow older. Ashima and Ashoke send their children Gogol and Sonia to classes learning Bengali language and Bengali culture, but the influence of Western culture and language causes them to ignore their own culture and language. Gogol is infatuated with an aggressive American girl named Maxine, but after her father's death, Gogol appreciates Indian culture, and as a result, the relationship between Gogol and Maxine goes into recession. Immigrants are wealthy, but they feel uncomfortable and alienated when they visit their home countries. Ashoke, Gogol, and Sonia make good money in the USA. Ashoke enhances his educational qualification by pursuing Ph.D. doctorate in engineering at MIT, in US and as a result he gets employment during a university and buys a house on Pemberton Road which helps his family lead a complicated life. Thanks to this once they visit their country of origin, in spite of all the comforts provided there, they're not comfortable and feel alienated from their own culture.

Ashima, who cooks Indian food at the beginning of the novel, prepares a Christmas cake at the beginning of the novel and adapts to the host culture due to her youth. Lahiri's portrayal of the immigrant characters in the novel vividly depicts the pain of their estrangement and expulsion despite leading a noble life. In this novel, the name Gogol itself is problematic, the hero cannot relate to a single cultural milieu: American, Russian, Indian. The question of belongingness loomed large before him. Even at the traffic junctions he found the remnants of his name GO LEFT, GO RIGHT, GO SLOW etc” but an effort to seek out the entire name proved futile thus denying him the chance of finding consolation. When he visits the cemetery with his classmates and cries out with joy when other children come across gravestones with American names, he realizes that his bed is not in America, that his body is not gangly here, and that his posthumous I know that will be cremated too. He may disappear from this country.

The companions who accompany the young people also think that the name Gogol is strange. His friends called him Goggle or Guruguru, and some renamed Ganguri to the nasty disease 'Ganggreen'. Gogol's father, like his grandfather, loved the works of Nikolai Gogol and felt a kind of Gogol. As an immigrant to America, Ashoke lived in exile with Nikolai, who felt an affinity with Gogol. Ashoke's favorite story in Nikolai Gogol's short stories is Court. This is about Akaki Akakievich, who spent his life copying documents written by others and being abused by others. Ashoke manages to find a photo of his father who was also Gogol's employee. But Gogol Ganguly found no reference to such a great writer as his father. Akay doesn't do any creative work, just copying documents written by others. It seems that Gogol lives someone else's life, that is, Nikolai's life, which is not real life.

After becoming a full-fledged person, Gogol applied for admission to Yale University, took due legal proceedings to adopt another name, Nikhil, and erased the problematic identity associated with that name. Everyone was talking to him, Nikhil. His friends, his parents, used this name, but not using pet names, causing a certain level of anxiety, indicating a major change in their relationship. A more formal note crept in. Gogol liked his name and felt that his name linked him to his family in an Indian way, as he described the circumstances and events that caused his father to give him this strange name. I was. For the planet however it couldn't be possible for him *“to reinvent himself fully, to interrupt from the mismatched name”* thus he shared the Indian distinctiveness and legacy through the name and located implicit refuge in it.

Despite his American environment, he had absorbed the nuances of Indian culture that became apparent when he abandoned Maxine for his mother. Gogol became upset again when he was planning to split the First-generation immigrants, Ashima's pain and fear of preserving an ancient culture in a new land come alive in the novel. She always compares the host country with her home country. For example, when Ashima was hospitalized for her delivery, she said that Ashima was isolated, even though there were three other American pregnant women in the same room, separated by curtains. She feels she recognizes that US citizens prefer privacy.

She was shocked to learn that Americans do not remove their shoes before entering a home. The language presents another hurdle, and when Ashima says "fingers and toes" as "fingers and toes" because in her native Bengali the plural and singular forms are the same, nurse Patty says she I noticed the flawed English in for her, her time abroad may be a kind of banishment, but her bond with the place where her husband died, and her attachment to her spouse, led her to spend half a year in the United States. In India, it is difficult to leave her hometown. Gogol is a second-generation immigrant, but seeks to assimilate into the host culture by settling permanently in New York City by founding his own company and producing his own designs. “The Namesake” effectively deals with the traumas of the first-generation new immigrants and therefore the dilemmas of the second-generation immigrants who fail to become hundred percent Americans in their attitude towards life. First-generation immigrants have a strong sense of home, and second-generation immigrants feel alienated, unable to form emotional bonds with their host culture despite being far from their home country. They are better able to adapt to the new way of life than their parents by adapting to the customs and customs of their parents who lack the necessary knowledge.

#### **Aim of study**

The key objectives of this paper are as follows-

1. To Study the alienation in the novel (“The Namesake”) of Jhumpa Lahiri.
2. To Study the alienation after effects like depression, stress, isolation, rootlessness, internal conflict and loss of identity.

### Review of Literature

“The Namesake”: A Book Review by Mona Verma 2020(Richland Library.)- This novel is not just a relatable read for immigrants, it is also an elegantly told family saga with universal themes; of love, of the profound relationship between a father and a son, of teenage angst, of feeling pulled by different worlds yet not completely belonging to either, of the unpredictability of life and relationships and of endings which are real and not always happily ever after.

Book Review: “The Namesake” By Jhumpa Lahiri- by Prasannakumary Raghavan 2020 (Feminism India)- The way Lahiri crafts the story in “The Namesake”, makes it a compelling read from the start to end. Her narrative is informal, conversational and relaxing. Its cumulative effect knocks you out. Her talent for observations and the prowess to detail the situations with witty expressions, smooth the path into each character’s world. The novel was made into a major motion picture in the same name by Monsoon Wedding fame Mira Nair.

The Poignant Allure of “The Namesake” by Jhumpa Lahiri: Book Review by Ria Chakraborty 2021(Bookish Santa)- Lahiri has flawlessly patched the storyline with ardent notes of cultural identity and fleshed out the skeleton of the plot with tangible details that enlivened the novel. The book sews the tale of an expatriate family without succumbing to the banal clichés associated with the genre. Its narrative of identity, rootlessness, love, loss and self-discovery, produces an embellished arc of human emotions that takes the reader on a tumultuous and bittersweet journey of both tears and laughter. The poignant page-turner stays with the reader, indelibly, long after it's been placed back on the bookshelf.

### Conclusion:

In today’s world so many people are becoming victims of mental issues such as tension, stress, anxiety, overthinking, phobias and depression etc., and with the help of Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel “The Namesake” we can understand how alienation is the lethal threat to every individual nowadays. Because when in lust for extra money, a big job, ego, pride etc., we left our house and family at that particular time, we didn’t release that loneliness is waiting for us and the world knows that loneliness never comes alone, it is a full package of tension, stress, anxiety, overthinking, phobias and depression etc. And the worst become situation for those who not only left their home but also their country for the sake of money in dollars or super power’s stamp on their back. Because they become alone in a new land but they still in contact with their Indian or homeland friends or family but the next generations who don’t know them, never or one’s or twice meet them become victims of alienation because they are neither Indian nor American either Russian, Chinese or anyone else. Their whole life becomes full of confusion about their existence. And because of that they will have very few or no one to talk and these situations bring alienation in their life just like we saw, Gogol, Sonia, Ashima and Ashoke in “The Namesake”. So according to my research paper, people have to stay with their family and friends, specially with their parents if they want to live a peaceful stress-free life. Otherwise, tension, stress, anxiety, overthinking, phobias and depression etc. always become barrier of your life.

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