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QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN THE GLOBAL CULTURE: A STUDY

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Abstract:

Jhumpa Lahiri is the most celebrated young diasporic Indian-American English novelists and her best novel is The Namesake. She received Pulitzer Prize Award for her Fiction. She portrays Indian-American middle class life in her diasporic Indian English novel. The novel The Namesake depicts the life of protagonist, Gogol Ganguli from birth until middle age. It also depicts recording of his struggle to discover who he is as a second-generation immigrants. He struggles first with his unusual name and later with the traditions his parents insist on upholding that embarrass Gogol in front of his American friends. The name Gogol is symbolic after the Russian author Nikolai Gogol. His father is impressed by Nikolai Gogol. Actually Gogol is his nickname and Nikhil is his real name but he is familiar with Gogol in his schools and among his friends. He is not satisfied with his name and his parent's culture. He is always searching his self identity and his own culture. He is very fond of American cultures and relations. He forces to accept his parent's identity and culture but he rejects both. After the death of his father and ending his marriage with Moushimi within two years, he learns his identity and culture.

Keywords: *Self-discovery, Relations, Marriage, Culture and Death, etc.*

The novel *The Namesake* is written by Jhumpa Lahiri. It is a major contemporary diasporic novel. She is a contemporary diasporic Indian-American writer, whose real name is Nilanjana Sudeshna. She was born in London. She is the daughter of Bengali Indian immigrants. Her family moved to the United States when she was three. She was called by teacher in school Jhumpa a nickname because it was easy to pronounce as usual real name. She also completed her higher education in The United States. Lahiri married with Alberto Vourvoulias-Bush who was American. She has two children named Octavio and Noor. Though Lahiri's mother wanted her children to grow up knowing their Bengali heritage and her family often visited relatives in Calcutta, Lahiri considers herself an American. She has written collection of short stories named *The Interpreter of Maladies* released in 1999 got O. Henry Award and PEN/Hemingway Award. Lahiri published her debut novel, *The Namesake* in 2003. She has also written *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) received Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award in 2008 and Asian American Literary Award in 2009, *The Long Way Home* and *Cooking Lessons*.

The novel *The Namesake* is written by Pulitzer Prize winning author Jhumpa Lahiri. It depicts the life of Ganguli family who migrated to America from Bengal. The novel depicts the life of the protagonist of the novel Gogol Ganguli from birth until middle age, recording his struggle to discover who he is as a second generation immigrant. Gogol is the son of Ashima and Ashoke who lived in America. Gogol struggle, first with his unusual name and later with the traditions his parents insist on upholding that embarrass Gogol in front of his American friends. However, as Gogol grows older, he comes to appreciate what his parents went through when moving to this country and how hard it was for them to adapt to their adopted country. Gogol eventually finds some solid ground between his



parents and the world they live in, bringing him some peace. *The Namesake* is a novel of self-discovery, and emotional journey.

The novel *The Namesake* depicts the whole life of Gogol Ganguli. He struggle to discover who he is as second-generation immigrant. He also struggles, first with his unusual name later with traditions his parents insist on upholding. He belongs to traditional Bengali family who migrates to America. His mother Ashima is traditional woman who marries with Ashoke. Ashoke decides to live in America for profession. The novel *The Namesake* is a self-discovery that it is an emotional journey. His father Ashoke was fascinated by Russian author Nikolai Gogol. He read a short story of Nikolai Gogol while travelling to America by train in the middle of the night, while Ashoke was still reading, the train derailed and crushed, Ashoke was saved when rescuers caught sight of pages of his book flying from his slowly released first. During his long recovery from his injuries, Ashoke swore he would one day travel the world and he could not let any one stop him.

The baby boy is born early the next morning. A name must be chosen for the child, Ashoke and Ashima have decided to give this honour to Ashima's grandmother who has named all the children in her family. They have not received the letter the grandmother had mailed a month ago, because in the tradition of Calcutta, they believe they have several months to wait. However, they soon learn that the child must have a name for his birth certificate before he leaves the hospital. Accordingly they decide to give the child a nickname that will work for the birth certificate and then change his legal name when the letter arrives from the grandmother. Ashoke decides the nickname should be Gogol, after the author of the story he was reading the night of the train wreck. So Ashima also agrees with nickname Gogol.

Gogol's search for personal identity in the globe is major theme of the novel; *The Namesake* Gogol grows up with an unusual name. He is the only Indian in a group of children, of standing out in a crowd. However, Gogol feels as though his name only makes this worse. No one else in the world has a name like Gogol. Even the Russian writer, his namesake, does not have Gogol as his first name; it is his last. Gogol is not teased over his name and the only trouble he gets from other people is mispronunciations and the occasional questions. However Gogol feels that the strange name makes him stick out like sore thumb. Gogol decides to change his name when he turns eighteen years, picking a name his father has once picked for him in the tradition society, Nikhil. His father enrolls his name as Nikhil but the Principal objects the name because he does not sense the name so Principal calls him Gogol. His father decides to change his name so he becomes happy to that. Finally Gogol learns that why his father names him Gogol.

Gogol's name is not the only part of his family's identity that he objects to. He feels that his parents' strict adherence to the traditions of Bengali ways in an embracement. He dislikes the effort his mother goes to when cooking meals for guests, her insistence that the guests eat heartily, and her refusal to sit down to her own meal before her guests are done. He also dislikes that his parents only socialize with other Bengalis and refuse to adapt to the traditions of America. As Gogol grows, he rejects many of the Bengali traditions, resents his family's frequent trips to Calcutta, and cuts himself off from his parents as quickly as he can. He embraces the affection of other families, American families that are drastically different from his own, searching for himself in their ways rather than those of his mother and father. Gogol impresses Maxine's family because he praises standard of living, cooking and tradition of American culture. At first, he meets Ruth a young and beautiful girl but his father does not allow him to be friend because of American citizen. However, after his father dies, Gogol feels differently, turning to his family's traditions with more gusto than he ever embraced them before. As a result, Gogol ends up in a bad marriage that ends before it's even two years old. He marries with Moushumi Mazoomdar, is the daughter of a family friend of the Gangulis. It seems their marriage was ordained by their family. Gogol and Moushumi start their marriage on rocky feet.



Moushumi takes him to Paris only to leave him feeling left out while she spends time with her friends as he tours the landmarks of the historic city. When Moushumi and Gogol return home, they spend time with some of Moushumi's friends and again Gogol feels left out. She is too feeling the difficulties of marriage and begins to search outside her marriage for happiness. She has an affair with an old boyfriend. When Gogol learns the truth, so, the marriage ends, and Moushumi returns to Paris.

Gogol's search for his personal identity among his parents' traditional style of living is a major theme of this novel. The first sign of Gogol's unhappiness is his dissatisfaction with his name. However, it soon becomes clear to the reader that this is just a symptom of Gogol's difficulties with living in a Western civilization with parents who still practice the traditions of the Eastern world. He is an American, second-generation immigrants, who has no guidance as to how he should behave in his adopted country. At first, Gogol rejects his parents and embraces the culture of the American people around him. However, Gogol feels guilty for this after his father's death and goes the other direction, embracing the Indian world by marrying an Indian woman. This does not work out for him, either, as the woman he marries but does not love him, but marries him out of a sense of obligation to her own parents.

Finally, however, Gogol discovers himself, a man who is both Indian and American, and in this way solves the struggle of his search for an identity.

Cultural situation is another theme of the novel *The Namesake*. Gogol is confused to know his personal identity and his cultural but his parents very well know their identity and culture. Ashoke and Ashima move to America so that Ashoke will have the opportunities of education and the experience of seeing a world his parents only read about. Ashima is not happy from the start, afraid of being a new place without anyone she knows nearby. Ashima does not even know her husband well since the first time they looked each other in the face. When Ashima has a boy, the homesickness becomes even more intense, as it is a tradition in her country to have family around during the birth and the first year of the child's life. Ashima confesses to her husband that she cannot do this and wants to go home. However, Ashoke refuses.

Soon, Ashima becomes involved in the day-to-day activities of her child's life and finds enjoyment in this routine. Shortly after, through her husband's work, they begin to meet other Indians also living in Cambridge. As a way to comfort herself and to bring home to her, Ashima surrounds herself with other immigrants from India. Ashima brings India to her, throwing parties where she only invites other Indians and following the traditions of home with these new friends. This habit continues through her children's childhoods, causing them frustration with their mother's refusal to accept the traditions of American culture. Slowly, Ashima begins to accept small pieces of American culture, celebrating Christmas and Thanksgiving, as well as making her children traditional American meals such as Hamburger Helper. However, it is not until her children have grown up and left home that Ashima begins to make friends with people of all races when she takes a part-time job at the local library.

In order to safeguard Ashima's culture in the alien land, she as the first generation immigrants educate her children in the native language, literature and history and guide them about their religious customs, traditions, beliefs, food habits, and social etiquettes. Ashima teaches Gogol to memorize poems by 'Tagore' and the names of gods who embellish the ten-handed Durga in the novel. Ashima also drives to Cambridge with her husband and children when Apu Trilogy plays at the Orson Welles, or when there is a Kathakali dance performance or a sitar recital at Memorial Hall. When Gogol is in the third grade, they send him to Bengali language and culture lesson every other Saturday, held in the home of one of their friends. It is a difficult task for the first generation immigrants, how to raise their children? Either by Indian way or American way, Ashima is well aware about their problem and brings up Gogol according to Indian and American cultures.



Jhumpa Lahiri introduces American girl Maxine, who is culturally different from Indian Woman. First time Gogol meets her in a party, she is very attractive and outgoing girl. Gogol begins a relationship with her. Maxine's parents are financially well off and live in a four-storey house in major metropolitan city New York, with one floor occupied entirely by Maxine. Gogol moves with her, and becomes an accepted family member. When Maxine's parents visit her grandparents in the mountains of New Hampshire for the summer vacation, they invite Maxine and Gogol to join them for a couple of weeks. Gogol accompanies with them without prior permission of his parents. He breaks his cultural boundaries and accepted American culture living in relationship. Maxine's parents Gerald and Lydia allow Gogol to share Maxine's bedroom. It is contrastive things with Gogol's family and his parents Ashima and Ashoke. In the global cultural sea his parents keep their own identity and unique of their culture. Her mother wears normal Indian saree and sandals from Bata. Ashoke uses pant which made by tailor even he teaches in university avoiding jackets, coats and tie.

Jhumpa Lahiri highlights cultural difference between two women Ashima and Maxine. In American culture they feel nothing wrong in kissing before parents to a beloved, drinking wine with lunch or sleeping with a boy friend before marriage. But it is taken seriously in the Indian family. It is an act of sin for a virgin girl. Difference in the life styles and culture bring disaster to every character in the novel. Ashima is mostly faithful to her culture throughout her life even after her husband died. But her son Gogol is not serious about his own Indian Culture. He is confused his culture and identity still he marries with Moushimi. After his marriage ended within two years, he learns and accepted his own culture and his parent's advice.

Thus, to conclude, the novel, *The Namesake* is written by Jhumpa Lahiri, is highlighted the self-discovery or quest for personal identity and cultural identity. Novel depicts the life of Gogol who was born in America in Ganguli's family. Ashima Ganguli and Ashoke Ganguli are the parents of Gogol who migrates to America from India (Bengal) for higher education and job. Jhumpa Lahiri portrays life of Ganguli family who has followed Indian culture but Gogol is a son of Ashima and Ashoke does not accept religion, customs, traditions and cultures of his parents. He confuses whether he is Indian or American. So he attracts American life style, culture and relations which his parents do not allow. He is always searching his personal identity in the global culture but fails. He fails in his personal life marriage life, cultural life and relations. After his father's death he learns a lot of things and gets his identity as Indian-American. It is mentioned in the research paper.

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