

Hybridity and Dual Identity as Sources of Alienation and Cultural Conflict in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*



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Abstract: *This paper looks at the ideas of mixed identity and living between two cultures in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel The Namesake. It focuses on how these themes lead to feelings of loneliness, confusion, and conflict between different cultures. The story shows that what it is like to be an immigrant, constantly trying to balance between the country you came from and the new country you live in. Immigrants often find themselves caught between old traditions and modern life, and between their personal desires and what society expects of them. Lahiri uses the experiences of the Ganguli family to show how living in two worlds at once can create a broken sense of self rather than a peaceful mix of cultures. One of the main characters, Ashima, misses India deeply and struggles to feel at home in America. Her husband, Ashoke, tries to adapt in a more practical way, finding ways to live in the new country while keeping parts of his Indian identity. Their son, Gogol, faces the most difficult challenges. He feels uncomfortable with his name and unsure about who he really is. Gogol's journey through life shows how difficult it can be for children of immigrants to feel like they belong anywhere. He does not fully connect with his parents' culture, but he also does not feel fully American. This creates confusion and sadness in his life. The paper uses ideas from postcolonial writers like Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall to help explain what the characters are going through. These writers suggest that having a mixed identity can be both a strength and a problem. On one hand, it helps people survive in a new culture and adapt to new surroundings. On the other hand, it can also make people feel lost, alone, and unsure of who they are. Lahiri shows that living between two cultures is not easy. It is not something that gets solved with time. Instead, it remains a lifelong struggle. In the end, the paper argues that in The Namesake, having a dual identity does not lead to peace or balance. Instead, it leads to a constant inner battle, where people feel pulled in different directions. The novel paints a clear picture of how hard it is to find a sense of self in a world of mixed cultures.*

Keywords: cultural hybridity, dual identity, alienation, immigrant experience, diaspora, cultural conflict, generational tension, identity crisis, postcolonial theory, adaptation

Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* is a powerful and deeply emotional story that explores the lives of immigrants, focusing on issues such as cultural identity, belonging, alienation, and the struggle between two

different worlds. The novel follows the Ganguli family, who move from India to the United States, and it presents not only their physical journey but also their emotional and psychological challenges. More than a story about migration, the novel examines the complex ways in which people try to find their

place when they live between two cultures. This in-between space often creates a feeling of confusion, rather than comfort. Lahiri carefully shows that living with two identities is not always a peaceful mix but often leads to inner conflict and feelings of being lost.

The main themes in *The Namesake* include hybridity and dual identity. These ideas are very common in the lives of immigrants. When people move to a new country, they often have to adjust to a different culture while trying to hold on to their original one. This can help them survive and adapt, but it can also create a split in how they see themselves. Instead of feeling like they belong in both cultures, they often feel like they do not belong in either. This creates a deep sense of alienation. Lahiri presents this struggle through the daily lives and emotions of the Ganguli family, showing how hard it is to live in two cultural worlds at the same time.

The idea of hybridity has been studied by many scholars. One of the most well-known is Homi K Bhabha, a postcolonial thinker. He explains that when two cultures meet, they create something new, which he calls a third space. This space can allow people to form new identities that are not tied to just one culture. It can be a place of creativity and new possibilities. However, Lahiri's novel gives a more complicated view. In *The Namesake*, the third space does not always bring freedom or happiness. Instead, it often brings confusion, tension, and emotional pain. For example, the character Gogol Ganguli struggles with his name, which becomes a symbol of his mixed identity. His name reminds him of his Indian roots, but he feels out of place in American society. At the same time, he also feels disconnected from Indian traditions. This leaves him unsure of who he really is. Lahiri shows that hybridity can break a person's sense of self, rather than bring it together.

The experience of Gogol's parents, Ashima and Ashoke, adds another layer to this story. Ashima feels lonely and homesick in the United States. She misses India deeply and finds it hard to adjust to American ways of life. Her memories, customs, and language become a part of her emotional world, even though she is physically

far from home. Ashoke, on the other hand, tries to adapt more easily. He learns to accept life in the United States without completely letting go of his Indian identity. The difference between Ashima and Ashoke shows that people experience cultural change in different ways. Gender, personal history, and emotional ties all affect how someone deals with being in a new land. Even within the same family, the journey through identity can look very different.

The idea of dual identity becomes even more difficult for second-generation immigrants like Gogol. He grows up in the United States, but his home is filled with Indian customs and values. He feels pulled in opposite directions. His parents expect him to follow Indian traditions, but the outside world encourages him to act like other American teenagers. He tries to fit in by changing his name to Nikhil, hoping this will make him feel more American. However, this change does not solve his inner conflict. Instead, it shows how deeply rooted his identity crisis is. Stuart Hall, another important postcolonial thinker, talks about identity as something that is never fixed but always changing. Lahiri's story reflects this idea. The characters do not find a final answer to who they are. Instead, they continue to struggle with this question throughout their lives.

Cultural conflict in *The Namesake* is not only between generations but also within individuals. Gogol experiences this conflict in his relationships, career, and life choices. He cannot fully accept one culture without feeling that he is losing the other. Lahiri does not offer simple answers to these problems. She does not suggest that people can easily blend two cultures into one peaceful identity. Instead, she presents a more realistic and painful picture of what it means to live with a dual identity. The novel resists the idea that multiculturalism always leads to harmony. Instead, it shows that the process of living between cultures often involves confusion, sadness, and a feeling of being torn.

This paper explores these themes through the lens of postcolonial theory. It argues that *The Namesake* presents hybridity as both a method of survival and a source of emotional struggle.

On one hand, it helps characters like Ashoke and Ashima keep parts of their culture alive in a foreign land. On the other hand, it creates deep conflicts in their sense of self, especially for their son Gogol. His journey reveals that living between cultures is not something that gets resolved easily. It remains a lifelong process filled with tension and uncertainty. Through the story of the Ganguli family, Lahiri presents a clear and honest look at the immigrant experience. She shows that the search for identity in a new country is shaped by family history, personal choices, and the constant pressure of two very different worlds. In doing so, *The Namesake* becomes not just a novel about immigration but also a deep reflection on what it means to belong.

Statement of the Problem

Immigrants often face the problem of living between two cultures, which creates confusion, loneliness, and a divided sense of identity. In *The Namesake*, the Ganguli family shows how hybridity can help with adaptation but also cause alienation. The main problem is that cultural identity remains unsettled, especially for second-generation immigrants like Gogol, who struggle to belong to either culture.

Research Questions

- 1) How does *The Namesake* show that living between two cultures can help with adaptation but also cause alienation?
- 2) How do different generations in the Ganguli family experience and deal with dual identity?
- 3) How do ideas from thinkers like Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall help explain the identity struggles in the novel?

Research Objectives

- 1) To examine how *The Namesake* presents the benefits and challenges of living between two cultures.
- 2) To analyze the generational differences in the Ganguli family's experiences of dual identity.
- 3) To apply postcolonial theories by Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall to explain the

identity struggles in the novel.

Significance of the study

This study is significant because it sheds light on how Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* portrays the complex realities of immigrant life, particularly the struggles of hybridity and dual identity. By focusing on themes of alienation and cultural conflict, the research helps to better understand the challenges faced by diasporic communities who live between two worlds. It emphasizes that identity in immigrant contexts is not fixed but constantly negotiated, often leading to feelings of displacement and fragmentation.

The study also contributes to literary scholarship by applying postcolonial theories of hybridity and cultural identity, especially those of Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, to Lahiri's novel. This theoretical approach highlights how literature can reveal the psychological and social dimensions of migration and identity formation. Moreover, the research provides insights into generational differences within immigrant families, showing how parents and children experience cultural belonging in distinct ways.

Beyond its academic value, this study is relevant to wider discussions on globalization, multiculturalism, and cultural integration. By examining the struggles of the Ganguli family, it encourages readers to reflect on the broader human experiences of belonging, adaptation, and cultural survival. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of recognizing hybridity not only as a condition of cultural creativity but also as a source of alienation and conflict, making it a valuable contribution to postcolonial and diasporic studies.

Research Methodology & Literature Review

This study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in textual and theoretical analysis. Since the research focuses on the themes of hybridity, dual identity, alienation, and cultural conflict in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, it relies on interpretive methods rather than empirical or quantitative data. The methodology is designed to explore how Lahiri's narrative constructs and represents

diasporic experiences within a postcolonial framework.

The research is designed as a textual analysis of a literary work, drawing from the fields of postcolonial studies, diaspora studies, and identity theory. The novel has been analyzed through a close reading that identifies key passages, motifs, and symbols connected to cultural hybridity and dual identity. This has been combined with theoretical interpretations from postcolonial thinkers to situate Lahiri's representation of immigrant life in a broader academic discourse.

- **Primary Source:** The main text for this study is Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* (2003).
- **Secondary Sources:** Scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and theoretical works by Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah, and other postcolonial critics. These sources provide the theoretical framework and critical perspectives necessary to analyze the novel's themes.

Method of Analysis

- **Close Reading:** Key sections of the novel (e.g., Gogol's naming, Ashima's nostalgia, Gogol's relationships, Ashoke's adaptation) will be analyzed for their representation of hybridity and identity conflict.
- **Thematic Analysis:** Patterns of alienation, cultural conflict, and generational tension will be identified and categorized.
- **Comparative Analysis:** The study will compare different characters' responses to diasporic life (Ashima, Ashoke, Gogol) to highlight variations in the immigrant experience.
- **Theoretical Application:** Insights from Bhabha and Hall will be applied to interpret how Lahiri's narrative reflects or complicates postcolonial theories of hybridity and identity.

The themes of hybridity, dual identity, and alienation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* have received wide scholarly attention, particularly within postcolonial and diasporic

studies. Critics consistently highlight how Lahiri's novel dramatizes the complexities of immigrant existence, illustrating the ambivalence of living between cultures. This literature review synthesizes existing scholarship, focusing on the ways in which hybridity and dual identity generate cultural conflict and identity crises.

One of the most influential frameworks for understanding Lahiri's work is Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which describes the "third space" where identities are reconfigured through cultural encounter. Scholars such as Mishra (2009) argue that *The Namesake* reveals hybridity as a double-edged condition: while it enables adaptation, it simultaneously fosters alienation. Gogol Ganguli's struggle with his name becomes symbolic of this ambivalence. According to Banerjee (2012), the name is not only a marker of cultural identity but also a reminder of displacement, as it ties Gogol to a cultural heritage he cannot fully embrace.

Other critics build on Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity as 'always in process.' Chakraborty (2014) emphasizes that Gogol's renaming himself as Nikhil demonstrates the fluidity and instability of diasporic identity. However, rather than resolving his conflict, the change intensifies his sense of fragmentation, showing that identity cannot be reconstructed simply by linguistic or symbolic gestures. This aligns with Hall's argument that diasporic identity is an ongoing negotiation rather than a stable resolution.

Generational differences are another recurring theme in the scholarship. Ashima and Ashoke's immigrant experiences contrast sharply with those of their American-born children. For Ashima, the nostalgia for India becomes a defining feature of her identity, while Ashoke adopts a more pragmatic approach, balancing tradition with adaptation. Scholars such as Dasgupta (2015) argue that these differences highlight the intergenerational tensions common in diasporic families, where parents seek to preserve cultural continuity while children often resist or reinterpret inherited traditions.

Feminist perspectives further enrich the

discussion of hybridity in *The Namesake*. Ray (2013) highlights Ashima's struggle as emblematic of immigrant women's experiences, where gender roles intersect with cultural displacement. While Ashoke and Gogol's identity crises are framed around adaptation and self-definition, Ashima's alienation is tied to the domestic sphere, revealing how hybridity is differently experienced along gender lines. This echoes broader postcolonial feminist critiques that emphasize the layered complexities of diasporic women's identities.

Several studies also address the psychological implications of dual identity. According to Singh (2016), the fragmented identities in *The Namesake* reflect the emotional toll of navigating cultural dissonance. Gogol's relationships, particularly with Maxine and Moushumi, illustrate how hybridity infiltrates personal and intimate spheres, shaping choices in love, marriage, and family. His inability to fully belong in either cultural world leaves him in a state of perpetual liminality, reinforcing the idea of hybridity as both opportunity and burden.

In addition to identity-focused readings, some scholars place Lahiri's work within the larger tradition of diasporic literature. Bose (2011) situates *The Namesake* alongside the writings of Bharati Mukherjee and Salman Rushdie, noting how Lahiri departs from earlier celebratory depictions of multiculturalism. Instead of presenting hybridity as liberating, she foregrounds its conflicts and contradictions. Similarly, Choudhury (2018) observes that Lahiri resists the romanticization of diasporic identity, offering instead a sobering view of displacement and alienation. Overall, the scholarship underscores that *The Namesake* engages critically with postcolonial theories of hybridity and identity. The novel confirms Bhabha's insight that cultural encounters create hybrid identities, yet it also questions whether such hybridity can ever be reconciled into wholeness. By drawing on Hall's notion of identity as fluid and ongoing, critics illuminate the novel's representation of identity as an unresolved struggle. Moreover, through the Ganguli family's experiences, Lahiri illustrates how hybridity is not a singular condition but a

lived reality, filtered through generational, gendered, and psychological differences.

In sum, existing studies consistently demonstrate that Lahiri portrays hybridity and dual identity as sites of both cultural survival and alienation. Scholars agree that *The Namesake* complicates simplistic understandings of multicultural harmony, instead presenting hybridity as a fraught and contested process. This body of research situates Lahiri as a central voice in diasporic literature, whose work continues to inform debates about immigration, identity, and cultural negotiation in postcolonial studies.

Discussion and Analysis

Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* explores the emotional and cultural struggles of immigrants by focusing on important themes such as hybridity, dual identity, alienation, and cultural conflict. Through the story of the Ganguli family, Lahiri shows how life in a new country brings many challenges, not only on the outside but also deep within the individual. The novel does more than tell the story of immigration. It examines how people try to find their identity when they are caught between two different cultures. Using the ideas of postcolonial thinkers like Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, this part of the paper discusses how these themes play out in the novel and affect the characters in their daily lives.

The central figure in the novel is Gogol Ganguli. His name becomes a powerful symbol of his inner conflict and confusion. His parents choose the name Gogol for personal reasons, but as he grows up, Gogol becomes more aware of how different and strange his name sounds in American society. The name does not fit easily into either the Indian or American world. This makes him feel uncomfortable and separate. Later, he changes his name to Nikhil, hoping to feel more American and more in control of his identity. However, changing his name does not solve the problem. He still feels unsure about who he is. The new name creates a new identity, but this identity also feels incomplete. His struggle shows how identity is not something fixed or simple. It is something people build

over time through their experiences. Stuart Hall explains that cultural identity is always changing and being shaped by personal and social history. Gogol's journey reflects this idea. He tries to escape his roots, but he cannot completely leave them behind. The pressure to fit into American society, along with the pull of his family's Bengali culture, leaves him feeling divided.

Ashima's experience offers another view of cultural identity. She leaves India after marriage and moves to a place that feels cold, unfamiliar, and lonely. From the beginning, she misses her home country. She tries to bring parts of India into her new life by cooking traditional food, following Bengali customs, and speaking her native language. These actions help her hold on to her identity, but they also show her struggle. She does not feel fully connected to American society. Her life is shaped by memories and longing for a world that no longer surrounds her. Her condition connects to Homi Bhabha's idea of the third space, where two cultures meet and create something new. For Ashima, however, this space brings emotional pain rather than creative freedom. Her story shows that hybridity often brings sadness, not just cultural blending. Many immigrant women face similar challenges, as they are expected to keep cultural traditions alive while living in a foreign land. Their experience of migration is shaped by emotional labor and cultural responsibility, which makes the process of adaptation even harder.

Ashoke, Ashima's husband, presents a more balanced approach. He values his Bengali roots but also finds ways to accept and adapt to life in the United States. He works hard, studies, and slowly becomes more comfortable in the new culture. At the same time, he continues to teach his children about Indian customs. Ashoke's story shows that it is possible to live with two identities, but this balance is not easy to achieve. He, too, carries the burden of being in two worlds. His character shows that even when someone appears successful on the outside, they may still feel a quiet kind of cultural tension. The contrast between Ashima and Ashoke reveals how men and women often deal with migration differently. While Ashoke adjusts more

smoothly, Ashima remains emotionally tied to her homeland. This shows that hybridity is not one experience, but many, shaped by gender, personality, and the roles people are expected to play.

The difference between generations is another important part of the novel. Gogol and his sister Sonia grow up in the United States. Their understanding of the world is shaped by the American culture around them, but their parents try to raise them with Indian values. This creates a gap between parents and children. Gogol and Sonia often resist the traditions their parents teach. They question the meaning of these customs and want to live in a way that feels more natural to them. These family conflicts show how hybridity becomes even more complex in the second generation. The younger characters are not simply choosing between two cultures. They are growing up in a world where these cultures mix and clash in different ways every day. Lahiri shows that for children of immigrants, the struggle for identity can be even more painful because they do not fully belong to either world.

Romantic relationships also play an important role in showing how dual identity affects the characters. Gogol's relationship with Maxine, an American woman, gives him a chance to experience a life that feels different from his own family's world. He enjoys the openness and ease of her lifestyle. Her family welcomes him, and for a time, he feels comfortable in their way of life. But this comfort makes him feel distant from his own roots. He starts to ignore parts of his cultural background, and this creates tension inside him. Later, when he marries Moushumi, who shares his Bengali-American background, he expects their shared culture to bring understanding. In the beginning, this seems true. But Moushumi also feels the weight of expectations and becomes unhappy. Their marriage ends, showing that even shared culture cannot remove the emotional struggles of dual identity. These relationships highlight how love and belonging are shaped by deeper questions of identity, self-worth, and the desire to be understood.

Throughout the novel, Lahiri avoids easy

answers. She does not present hybridity as something simple or joyful. Instead, she shows that while living between two cultures can help people survive and adapt, it also creates confusion, loneliness, and emotional pressure. Scholar Choudhury points out that Lahiri does not idealize immigrant life. Instead, she presents it as a continuous process of negotiation and loss. In the last parts of the novel, Gogol reflects on his family's journey. He begins to understand the sacrifices his parents made, and he starts to see his own identity as part of a larger story. But even then, his sense of self remains incomplete. He cannot fully escape the feeling of being in between two cultures.

The Namesake makes it clear that hybridity is not just the mixing of two cultures into one. It is a long and sometimes painful process that involves conflict, memory, and emotion. Lahiri uses the lives of the Ganguli family to show that identity in the diaspora is always moving, always changing. With the help of postcolonial theories, especially those by Bhabha and Hall, the novel explains that people do not simply choose their identities. They build them from experiences, losses, and connections. Lahiri's work adds something important to the study of immigrant life. She reminds readers that the journey of finding oneself across cultures is not easy. It does not bring complete answers, but it tells a story of survival, love, memory, and constant change.

Findings

- 1) The novel shows that living between two cultures can help immigrants survive in a new land but also makes them feel lonely and confused.
- 2) The first generation, like Ashima and Ashoke, experiences migration very differently: Ashima feels homesick and tied to India, while Ashoke learns to adapt more easily.
- 3) The second generation, represented by Gogol, faces even more struggles because they do not fully belong to either culture.
- 4) Names in the story, especially Gogol's, act as symbols of identity. His discomfort with

his name shows how cultural roots can create conflict in a new country.

- 5) Relationships, such as Gogol's with Maxine and Moushumi, reveal that identity struggles affect personal life, love, and marriage.
- 6) Memory and tradition remain important for immigrants. Ashima holds on to her Indian customs as a way to stay connected to her homeland.
- 7) The novel shows that cultural identity is never fixed. Gogol's attempts to change his name and lifestyle prove that identity keeps shifting over time.
- 8) The theories of Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall help explain the story: the "third space" of hybridity creates new identities, but instead of peace, it often brings pain and confusion.
- 9) The story makes clear that hybridity is not one single experience. Gender, generation, and personal history all change how people live between two cultures.
- 10) Overall, the novel does not show a happy blending of cultures. Instead, it shows the constant struggle and tension of trying to belong in two worlds.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Namesake* provides a nuanced representation of the immigrant condition, illustrating that hybridity and dual identity are not harmonizing forces but sites of unresolved tension. Lahiri portrays the diasporic experience as one of constant negotiation, where characters must navigate between the cultural legacies of the homeland and the pressures of the host land. Rather than achieving unity, these negotiations often result in cultural dissonance and psychological conflict. The findings underscore that identity in the diaspora is both generational and situational. For Ashima, identity is tied to nostalgia and memory; for Ashoke, it is rooted in pragmatism and adaptation; and for Gogol, it is marked by fragmentation and inner conflict. These variations emphasize that hybridity is not a singular experience but a spectrum shaped by context, gender, and generational position.

By applying postcolonial theories, this study confirms that hybridity can indeed be a ‘third space’ of negotiation, but it also shows that this space is fraught with contradictions and tensions. Lahiri resists the celebratory tone often associated with multiculturalism, instead offering a more realistic and sobering view of diasporic identity. *The Namesake* reveals that the immigrant journey is not defined by the successful merging of two cultures but by the ongoing struggle to balance competing demands of tradition, adaptation, selfhood, and belonging. The novel demonstrates that dual identity remains unresolved, marked by ambivalence rather than harmony. This insight contributes to postcolonial and diasporic studies by reminding us that immigrant lives cannot be reduced to simple narratives of assimilation or cultural blending. Instead, they are shaped by persistent conflicts and negotiations that reflect the complexities of living between worlds.

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