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**CHAOTIC IDENTITIES AND OTHERNESS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S NOVEL
THE NAMESAKE**

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ÖZET

Jhumpa Lahiri'nin The Namesake Adlı Romanındaki Karmaşık Kimlikler ve Ötekilik
Tezli Yüksek Lisans Projesi
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Jhumpa Lahiri Hintli Amerikalılar'ın yaşamlarını, sorunlarını ve içsel çatışmalarını ayrıntılı bir biçimde işler. Derlenmiş hikayeleri Interpreter of Maladies ile Pulitzer ödülü kazanmış ve yazın otoritelerinin dikkatini çekmiştir. İkinci romanı The Namesake'te bir Hintli Amerikalı ailenin çift kimlikli bireylerinin temel çatışmalarını sergiler. Karakterleri ikili kimliklerini sürdürmeye çabalarken aynı zamanda Kolonyalizm ve Postkolonyalizmin etkilerinden kurtulamaya çalışırlar. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma Asyalı Amerikalılar'ın Amerika'daki durumlarını, arada kalmış kimliklerini, "Öteki" kavramını ve kültür çatışmalarını irdeler. Ben bu çalışma ile ayrıca Jhumpa Lahiri'nin eserlerini Türk okuyucusuna tanıtmayı hedefliyorum.

Bu tezde, bütün bu temalar Postkolonyal kuram bağlamında değerlendirilmiştir. Kolonyalizm ve sonuçlarına bakarak, Batı dünyasının Doğu'ya olan yaklaşımını ve Doğu'nun Batı'daki yeniden yaratılmış kimliklerini sergileyeceğim. Edward Said'in Orientalism adlı kitabı ve Homi Bhabba, Bill Ashcroft, Ania Loomba ve diğerleri gibi Postkolonyal kuramın önemli yazarlarının düşüncelerine dayanarak, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki etnik ilişkilerin geçmişini, Kolonyalizm ve şu andaki etkilerini incelemeyi amaçlıyorum. Böylece, Jhumpa Lahiri'nin The Namesake adlı romanındaki Hintli Amerikalılar'ın karmaşık yaşantılarını ve Amerikan toplumundaki arada kalmışlık durumlarını bu bakış açısıyla yansıtaçağım.

Anahtar Sözcükler: 1) Kolonyalizm, 2) Postkolonyalizm, 3) Hintli Amerikalılar, 4) Ötekilik, 5) Karmaşık kimlikler

ABSTRACT

Master Of Arts

**The Chaotic Identities and Otherness in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novel The Namesake
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Jhumpa Lahiri elaborates on the lives, problems and inner conflicts of Asian (Indian) Americans. She won the Pulitzer Prize with her collected short stories Interpreter of Maladies and gained attention from literary authorities. In her second novel, The Namesake, she portrays the main contradictions of the members of an Indian American family with dual identities. Her characters, while struggling to maintain their dual identities, contemplate over the effects of Colonialism and Postcolonialism. Therefore this work depicts the portrayal of Asian Americans in American society: their inbetween identities, the concept of "Other," and the clash of cultures. With this study I also aim to introduce the works of Jhumpa Lahiri to Turkish readers.

In this thesis, all these themes are evaluated within the context of Postcolonial theory. Tracing back to colonialism and its results, I am going to portray the approach of the Western world to the East, and the East's reinvented and recreated identities in the West. Focusing on Edward Said's Orientalism and the ideas of other prominent writers in Postcolonial theory such as Homi Bhabha, Bill Ashcroft Ania Loomba and many others, I intend to examine the historical background of ethnic relations in the U.S.A., colonialism and its effects in the present. This will put into perspective the chaotic lives of Asian (Indian) Americans, and their inbetween condition within American society, in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel The Namesake.

Key Words: 1) Colonialism, 2) Postcolonialism 3) Asian (Indian) Americans
4) Otherness 5) Chaotic identities

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INTRODUCTION

World history is full of wars which has resulted from economic, political, military or cultural reasons. Once a nation has developed domestically, it begins to search for new ways to widen its sphere of influence all over the world. The reason behind this expansion is the will for hegemony. To maintain world dominance, powerful nations exploited weaker ones. This process is called colonialism which is a significant factor in the shaping of Western thought about the East. Edward Said, in his famous book, Orientalism (1978), underlines the interaction between the West and the East. Because of the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized, Western man constructed Eastern identity by himself. In the eyes of the West, the East was labeled as inferior, uncivilized, barbaric, and irrational. The knowledge about the East was constructed by a single point of view. Thus, the colonized did not have any chance to define or introduce themselves. As they were misrepresented by the West, they experienced an identity crisis. They are portrayed completely different from themselves and this contradiction between real and invented identities cause them to live in identity crisis.

After 1945, many nations gained independence and the decolonization period began. Realizing the devastating effects of colonialism on the colonized people, more humanistic approaches brought about new ways of thinking. As a superpower of the world, in America, Postcolonial studies gained momentum after 1945. With the guiding light of Orientalism by Edward Said, many people could see the terrible effects of colonialism. After the decolonization period which began in 1945, countries are categorized as first and third world nations. The control over weaker nations still went on but there was no direct control over them “however, it does allow the economic, cultural, and (to varying degrees) political penetration of some countries by others”¹. Although it seems that colonial period ended literally, the effects of it still went on and postcolonial theory dealt with the legacies of colonialism

Otherness is the basic issue of postcolonial theory and literature and difference is the basic standpoint for otherness. Difference draws the line between the “Self” and the “Other”. Mimicry is another characteristic of postcolonial theory. Mimicry brings about resemblance so the difference between the “Self” and the “Other” can be minimized by miming the dominant power. In addition, Homi Bhabba suggested hybridity. Hybridity is another way to shake the authority of the colonizer. The difference between the “Self” and the “Other” vanish through hybridity, thus the colonized can escape from misrepresentation which thread their identities. Moreover, place and displacement experience is another feature in postcolonial studies. Migrants or the people in exile come to strange lands where they come across with stereotyping, labels, misrepresentations. Discrimination and prejudices make them alien and foreign so they experience inbetweeness.

Powerful nations always labeled weaker ones as the “Other” and the United States of America is no exception to this rule. Although the United States of America consists of many different ethnic groups, the multinational structure of the country was always a problem to define the national character. As for America’s colonial actions, we can say that Spanish-American War had a significant role for the appearance of America in the world scene. Also, the spread of frontier idea and the missionary spirit of the manifest destiny resulted in American expansionism. The emergence of social and political Darwinism also accelerated America’s imperialistic activities. The idea of the conquest of other people’s land intensified by these reasons and America like England and France labeled the weaker and different nation as its “Other”. The existence of stereotypes which were created and shaped by European ideologies were accepted in the American mind and strengthened through the years.

Orient was an important concern for Americans. The petrol reserves and richness of the Orient attracted Americans. They described Eastern people as the “Other” and

¹ Loomba, Ania, Colonialism-Postcolonialism, Routledge, London & New York, 1998, p.7.

saw them as barbaric and uncivilized. However, after the Second World War, Americans tried to have more friendly relations with Third World Nations in order to make the world safe for democracy.

While suggesting democracy for the world, American government made laws to defend the rights of the minorities. However, it was not easy to destroy the stereotypical images and prejudices from the minds of American citizens. Asian-Indians are one of these minorities who faced with discriminations and prejudices. Many of the Asian-Indians came to America after 1965 with the pass of an Immigration Act. However, they brought in their reconstructed identities with them to America and due to colonial misrepresentations, they experienced identity crisis. Their identities were ignored in the United States of America so they faced with both personal and institutional discriminations. Asian-Indians are described as “model minorities” among other ethnic nations. They are hardworking and take part in professional degrees but it is not enough for them to erase the “Self” and the “Other” contradiction. While trying to assimilate in American way of life, Asian-Indians did not forget about their descent. Religious, traditional and cultural gatherings become necessary ways for them to maintain their ethnic structure.

There is no doubt that different nations were really important in forming national American character. Some Americans believed in the importance of multiculturalism yet some insisted on a single Anglo-Saxon identity. Every pattern of American life was shaped according to the multicultural structure of the nation. Ethnic writing was also an important additive to American life as Werner Sollors said ethnic writing is “expressions of mediation between cultures but also as handbooks of socialization into the codes of Americanness”. Contrary to Sollor’s idea, ethnic literature was neglected by the Americans. Ethnic writing which began with letters and diaries later turned to be fictional. However, ethnic writers were seen as the “Other” and they had problems about where to stand. Either they will maintain their ethnic identities or they will write for the mainstream culture. This duality brought about a split for them, however; there were

advantages of this troublesome position. Ethnic writers were both inside and outside the American life style. Because of this, their difference brought about an authentic side to them who took place in literary innovations or success.

Jhumpa Lahiri is one these ethnic writers who has an international fame with her collected stories, Interpreter of Maladies. She is a South Asian writer who won Pulitzer Prize with Interpreter of Maladies. In her book, Lahiri shows the chaotic lives of Indians living in America. Major themes of the book are inbetweenness, identity crisis, belonging and otherness.

The Namesake is Jhumpa Lahiri's second work. Unlike Interpreter of Maladies which has nine short stories, The Namesake is a novel about assimilation, inbetweenness, chaotic identities of an Indian family. The mother Ashima and the son Gogol are the most problematic identities in the novel. Ashima cannot get accustomed to American life and she has contradictions about living in the United States of America. The novel opens with Ashima's pregnancy to Gogol. Her pregnancy and life in America are too hard to bear for them that she always longs for Calcutta. She is alone and homesick. At the end of the book, Ashima seems to get used to live in the United States of America as she thinks it is difficult to return to Calcutta. As for Gogol, as second generation Indian boy, his problems begin with his birth. The difference between the naming process in Indian and American cultures pushes Gogol in a chaos. Ganguli family give him the name "Gogol". It is the first name of a Russian author whose book is said to save Ashoke's, father's, life. From the very beginning of his life, he always struggles to carry the heavy burden of his name. He is asocial, unhappy, shy and full of hatred. When he gets older, he goes to court and changes his name to "Nikhil". Nikhil is the name which his parents wanted for Gogol's official name. As a child, Gogol refuses Nikhil and says to be Gogol. However, as he gets older, Nikhil seems more suitable to Gogol. Nikhil resembles American names and thus, Gogol has a new name and a new life. Yet, the name Gogol and his past follow him everywhere. His dual identity puts him in a bad situation that he does not know who he is. Through the end of the book, after his

father's death, Gogol begins to understand the realities. He learns that he cannot escape from his name, past and roots. His hatred for his namesake and his book vanish and at the end, he opens the pages of The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol. Accepting his identity, name, and descent, Gogol enters a new period in his life. Whether Gogol will be happy or not after that time was left to the readers.

PART I. COLONIALISM

Since ancient times, different empires and countries colonized the weaker ones in order to maintain their economic, military, political and cultural hegemony. Colonizers gained huge benefits from weaker nations via colonialism. However; as for the colonized people, they were misrepresented by the dominant powers. Their physical appearances, life styles, cultural practices made them the “Other”, the inferior in the eyes of the colonizers. Ania Loomba, in her book Colonialism-Postcolonialism, gives a definition of colonialism from The Oxford English Dictionary:

A settlement in a new country... a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state; the community so formed, consisting of the original settlers and their descendants and successors, as long as the parent state is kept up¹.

This definition does not provide any reference to people who live in colonized lands. Therefore it falls short of identifying the interactions between the colonizer and the colonized. Looking at colonialism and its legacies, Ania Loomba states that:

Everywhere colonialism locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history. The process of ‘forming a community’ in the new land necessarily meant unforming or re-forming the communities that existed there already, and involved a wide range of practices including trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement and rebellions. So colonialism can be defined as the conquest and control of other people’s lands and goods¹.

The conquest of the other lands, that is to say colonialism, became one of the most effective factors in shaping Western thought and knowledge. The interaction between the colonizer and the colonized helped constructing knowledge about the “Other.” The “Self” and the “Other” can be seen as an extension of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic. The West not only created the “Other,” at the same time shaped her own identity. Long before European expansionism and colonialism, many empires

¹ Loomba, Ania, Colonialism-Postcolonialism, . Routledge, London &New York,1998, p.1.

¹ ibid, p.2.

like the Roman, Aztec, Ottoman, and Chinese Empires conquered and colonized many territories. They used fixed stereotypes to describe different and colonized people. “Barbarians” and “Outsiders” were some of the labels given to the “Other.” In medieval times, European countries were the most powerful colonizer countries. They also used the ancient stereotypes and labeled the “Other” as monsters. These stereotypes and created identities of the “Other” helped the Europeans to describe the “Self”. However; the religious ideas brought about contradictions between the “Self” and the “Other”. The Bible which regards all people to be brothers brought about new approaches and explanations to the existence of different races. “One response was to locate them as creatures who had incurred God’s wrath – hence the Biblical association of blackness with descendants of Ham, Noah’s bad son, and with the forces of evil”². For the medieval idea, the “Other” was the ones who were not Christians. Due to this reason, non Christian people were the Other. Thus the identity construction of the “Self” and the “Other”, was shaped according to religion. All these negative ideas about the “Other” and fake religious ideas were strengthened with the beginning of European expansion. Similar stereotypes were used by Europeans and thus colonial stereotyping went on with negative images of the “Other.”

In addition, science was another complementary factor for the racial difference. Physical features and differences were the basic issues for science to define the biologically different races as inferior. Skin color, skull size, and facial angles were biological factors to shape racial differentiation. In this respect, Africans were the most distinctive representatives of this idea. Their dark skin color and other physical features made them the “Other” in the eyes of the West and their biological differences became the root of racial discriminations. “There was a color symbolism by which the whiteness was positively evaluated and blackness negatively evaluated. Blackness was associated with death and a conception of an underworld.”³. The idea of the “Other” and the Christian principles created a contrast like white/black, self/other, Christ/Satan and the West regarded the skin color as a determinant factor to differentiate the “Self” and the “Other”.

² Loomba, Ania, Colonialism-Postcolonialism. Routledge, London & New York, 1998, p. 105.

As for the colonial interaction between the West and the East, it was long before the colonization of Americas that North Africa, Middle East and India were the main interest of European nations. Thus, the ideas and evaluations about the East, which are known as the “Orient”, have a very long and old process. As Edward Said says:

The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences ... The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience⁴.

The “Self” and “Other,” “Normal” and “Foreigner” dichotomy became the very basic tenets of colonial discourse. Focusing on Manichean allegory, the West is regarded as civilized, rational, ethical, good and masculine while Orient is seen as uncivilized, chaotic, irrational, evil and feminine. As a discourse, colonialism represented and named the “Other” as “inferior” or “alien.” For Homi Bhabha;

Colonialism seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges about the colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of the colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction⁵.

Looking at the interaction between the West and the East, we can say that the East has had never a word to define or describe itself; on the contrary, it was defined and represented by Western knowledge and ideologies. The knowledge about the East in the West grew rapidly with the stories and descriptions of colonial

³ Miles, Robert, *Racism*, Routledge, New York, 1989, p. 15.

⁴ Said, Edward W., *Orientalism*. Penguin Books, London, 2003, p.1.

⁵ Bhabha, Homi, *Location of Culture*, Routledge, New York, 1997, p.70.

authorities, missionaries, travelers and traders. The more the West knew about the East, the less opportunity got the Oriental Other to define itself. The huge opposition between the East and the West was once created and it was being reproduced and transformed by Western knowledge and domination.

Although colonized nations were exploited economically and politically, the most important conquest was the cultural conquest. Colonialism is not just an economic, a political or a military action, but it is also a cultural domination of powerful nations over weaker ones. According to Said, the construction of the “Self” and the “Other” between the East and the West is the result of power relationships between powerful and the weaker nations. Said states that “The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony”⁶. The Oriental Other is constructed and represented as weaker as the opposite mirror image of the powerful and civilized West.

. . . Since the middle of the eighteenth century there had been two principal elements in the relation between East and West. One was a growing systematic knowledge in Europe about the Orient, knowledge reinforced by the colonial encounter as well as by the widespread interest in the alien and unusual, exploited by the developing sciences of ethnology, comparative anatomy, philology and history...The other feature of Oriental-European relations was that Europe was always in a position of strength, not to say domination. There is no way of putting this euphemistically. True, the relationship of strong to weak could be disguised or mitigated as when Balfour acknowledged the “greatness” of Oriental civilizations. But the essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, to be one between a strong and a weak partner. Many terms were used to express the relation...The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, “different”; the European is rational, virtuous, mature, “normal”⁷.

The representations and images of the “Other” were always completed with negative adjectives like irrational, immoral and inferior. Colonized people did not have a word to define themselves. Instead, they faced with the descriptions made by Western people who did not know their culture, traditions and lives. Thus, we can say that colonialism had drastic effects on colonized people as they felt alienated

⁶ Said, Edward W. Orientalism. Penguin Books, London, 2003, p.5.

⁷ *ibid*, p. 40.

from themselves, their cultures and lives by representations created by the West. Colonized people were subject to an identity crisis. This resulted in the split of colonial identity; for example “the fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master’s place while keeping his place in the slave’s *avenging* anger”⁸. Thus, colonized people both wanted to be in the colonizers’ place to be powerful and they also wanted to live their own identities and lives. This contradiction was one of the most important effects of colonialism which rendered the experience of the colonized chaotic.

⁸ Bhabba, Homi, Location of Culture, Routledge, New York, 1997, p.44.

PART II. POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND STUDIES IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The discussion of colonialism and its effects brought about new ways of thinking. One of the most distinctive factors for this was “decolonization”. “By the 1930s, colonialism had exercised its sway over 84.6 per cent of the land surface of the globe”¹ but between 1945 and 1960, many nations achieved their independence through decolonization which brought about great changes.

Firstly, reactions against colonialism and fixed definitions of race, culture and class emerged. Destructive effects of colonialism on colonized people’s psychology and their social lives were advocated by some intellectuals and activists. Also, the New Deal programs proposed by Roosevelt after the Great Depression brought about some changes for minorities. The New Deal prohibited racial discrimination however the problem was not solved completely. Unemployment and economic hardships of the country pushed minorities, especially blacks, to a worse situation.

Secondly, new approaches of Western intellectual traditions and more humanistic ideas in human relations gained momentum. These two revolutionary factors which interrogated the legacies of colonialism and its strict ideologies had influential connections with Postcolonial studies. “It is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism”² . Postcolonialism which emerged with Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978) has become an important intellectual field. Most scholars and academicians regarded Orientalism as the foundational text of Postcolonial Theory. Said, in his book, states that the Western world has constructed an inferior East and a negatively stereotyped Orient. Said calls Western knowledge and ideologies about the East as “Orientalism”. He argues that Western epistemologies created the representations of the Oriental Other. For him, “European culture gained in strength and identity by

¹ Loomba, Ania, Colonialism-Postcolonialism, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p.15.

setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self”³. As the definitions and representations of the Orient are shaped by the Western world, it becomes really problematic and traumatic for the Orient to manage its self-authenticity.

Focusing on Said’s Orientalism, Postcolonial Studies is recognized as an important field of study. Many postcolonial novelists and poets focused on race, ethnicity, immigration and the effects of colonialism under the influence of Said’s ideas. Another distinctive addition to the rise of Postcolonial Studies and criticism was the appearance of The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (1989) which defines "postcolonial" as "to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day"⁴. This description widens the scope of Postcolonial Studies. Even though the colonial period seems to end in 1960s, according to Ashcroft et.al. “newly superpowers of the world , the United States of America, has an important role in the world scene. The U.S. controls the global market, international corporations, educational institutions and cultural practices”⁵. Thus, Postcolonial Studies not only deal with once-colonized countries or nations but also it deals with the results of colonialism.

The concept of otherness is one of the most important characteristics of Postcolonial theory and literature. In postcolonial theory, colonized people experience otherness in the concept of identity and difference. As we have stated before, the identity of the “Other” is shaped and intensified by Western knowledge and ideologies with emphasis on their difference from the Western man. Colonized people have their own identity, but Western ideologies reshape and rework these identities focusing on their difference. The Oriental Other is “depended upon what Abdul JanMohamed calls the ‘Manichean allegory’ in which a binary and implacable

² *ibid*, p.12.

³ Said, Edward W, Orientalism, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p.3.

⁴ Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, Tiffin, Helen, The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures, Routledge, London, 1989, p. 2.

⁵ Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, Tiffin, Helen, Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies, Routledge, London, 1998, p.162.

discursive opposition between races is produced”⁶. These binary oppositions are really necessary as they both construct the identity of the ‘Other’ and at the same time they describe the ‘Self.’

Both physical and cultural characteristics, if sufficiently distinctive, may promote identity construction, offering material for the drawing of a group boundary by either insiders or outsiders. Common physical distinctions such as skin color or common cultural distinctions such as shared language, religious practice, or even behavior, facilitate social categorization, offering readily available hooks on which to hang the claim that “they” are not us or that “we” are superior to “them”⁷.

In addition to the concept of otherness, postcolonial theory deals with “mimicry”. For Homi Bhabba, “mimicry is a new term for the construction of the colonial other in certain forms of stereotyping- a colonial subject who will be recognizably the same as the colonizer but still different: ‘not quite/not white’⁸. With mimicry, colonized people create a partial representation of the colonizer thus mimicry brings about resemblance. This resemblance becomes a problematic issue for the colonizer. The difference, which is the basic concept to describe the self, begins to turn into similarities. Colonized people become the mirror-like image of the colonizer thus it brings about a threat to the colonizer. Similarity becomes a threat for the power and the authority of the colonizer. Thus, mimicry seems to be a silent resistance against the colonizer and their culture. By miming the colonizer, the colonized people construct a familiar image with the colonizer who has to maintain the difference by fixing the zones between the “Self” and the “Other.”

If control slips away from the colonizer, the requirement of mimicry means that the colonized, while complicit in the process, remains the unwitting and unconscious agent of menace-with a resulting paranoia on the part of the colonizer as he tries to guess the native’s sinister intentions⁹.

⁶ Loomba, Ania, Colonialism-Postcolonialism, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p. 104.

⁷ Cornell, Stephen-Hartmann, Douglas, Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World, Pine Forge Press, California, 1998, p. 196.

⁸ Young, Robert, White Mythologies: Writing History and the West, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, p. 147.

⁹ *ibid*, p.147.

Mimicry which is a kind of resistance to the dominant culture gives shape to “hybridity” which is also an important issue for Postcolonial Studies. According to Ashcroft et al., “[h]ybridity, is ‘the creation of new transcultural forms from within the contact zone produced by colonization’”¹⁰. Looking at the colonial policy, it becomes clear that colonial power justifies its practices and policies by undertaking the mission of civilizing the other, but at the same time it strengthens the colonized one’s difference by maintaining their otherness. For colonizer, biological, cultural and intellectual hybridities mean a threat to the colonial rule and authority. Thus “colonial hybridity is a strategy premised on cultural purity, and aimed at stabilizing the *status quo*”¹¹.

In colonial discourses of the other, each national, racial or ethnic group is viewed as pure and homogenous, representing an authentic and unified culture. In this knowledge paradigm, any deviation from the norm-assertions or display of strong individual experience or multiple identities- would be seen as impure, even betrayal¹².

As for Homi Bhabba, “cultural purity is untenable because cultural identity emerges in the Third space which is both ambivalent and contradictory”¹³. For Bhabba, the third space is the space between the colonized and the colonizer where both the colonized as “subject” and colonizer are affected. Thus, the mixing of dominant and subaltern cultures, hybridity, is a kind of challenge to colonial discourse. Homi Bhabba describes hybridity as “a problematic of colonial representation . . . that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority”¹⁴. Thus, the integration of cultures and assimilation is helpful for the colonized to shake the position and authority of the dominant power.

¹⁰ Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, Tiffin, Helen, Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies, Routledge, London, 1998, p.118.

¹¹ Loomba, Ania, Colonialism-Postcolonialism, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p.174.

¹² Singh, Amritjit-Schmidt Peter, Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity and Literature University Press of Mississippi, USA, 2000, p.23.

¹³ *ibid*, p.23.

¹⁴ Young, Robert, White Mythologies: Writing History and the West, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, p.148.

Another major concern which Postcolonial Theory deals with is place and displacement. The ones who experience migration or exile have difficulties in finding their places in the new environment. As Loomba states “It is true that the migration of peoples is perhaps the definitive characteristics of the twentieth century, and in crucial ways diasporic identities have come to represent much of the experience of postcoloniality”¹⁵. Migrants who have arrived strange lands become outsiders, aliens and the “Other”. They face with a dominant culture which subjugates the new comers to its ideologies, traditions, social and cultural practices. Their identities which are constructed, transformed and reshaped by the dominant culture become a traumatic issue for them. As they are labeled as the “Other,” they experience in-betweenness. It is a kind of double identity they experience. The real identity and the constructed identity clash and they face many troubles to maintain their existence and identity.

Also, immigrants move between their past and present and this becomes the very common problem of diasporic identities. Loomba argues that “themes of alienation, national longing and transnationalism mark the experience of Diaspora”¹⁶. All of these are the results of colonial dislocation. While trying to manage a life in the strange land, they also struggle with discriminations or prejudices. These discriminations and prejudices which vary according to biological and regional differences, ethnic roots, religion, language and many issues that mark the difference between the “Self” and the “Other” constitute the prejudices against the outsiders. As outsiders in the new land, their identities are constructed, reproduced or transformed according to the concepts of similarity and difference as stated in Cornell et al.

The process of categorization which is at the hearth of the identity construction involves the organization of similarities and differences. In categorizing other people—identifying them as an ethnic or racial group- we emphasize what we see as the similarities among them and their differences from us¹⁷.

¹⁵ Loomba, Ania, Colonialism-Postcolonialism, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p.180.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 180.

¹⁷ Cornell, Stephen-Hartmann, Douglas, Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World, Pine Forge Press, California, 1998, p. 203.

Thus, the migrants live a double alienation. They not only estrange themselves from the new culture due to prejudices, but also they alienate themselves from their past, culture and identities. The migrants experience a deep contradiction and their identities in the new world are based on the ideologies and evaluations of the dominant culture.

PART III. POSTCOLONIALISM AND ETHNICITY IN THE U.S.A.

There is no doubt that massive human migrations and cultural diversity is one of the most important and distinctive characteristics of the United States which was regarded as the “melting pot” of the world. As a multinational state, America had numerous ethnic groups from the very beginnings of its foundation. There is no certain official data but it is estimated that about 250.000 newcomers arrived between 1783 and 1815¹. Although reports and history clearly showed that America was the combination of different ethnic groups, it was one of the most complicated issues for Americans to define themselves. There occurred two competing ideas; one of which described America as the mixture of nations and the other supported the idea that America was the land of Anglo-Saxons. The melting pot idea was stated by Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur in his famous essay “Letters from an American Farmer, Letter III, What is an American?”

What then is the American, this new man? He is either a European or the descendent of a European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country...He is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced...Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men . . .²

Walt Whitman was another prominent figure in The United States history who supported the idea of universal brotherhood, and the idea of an emerging American identity from different ethnic additives. In his prose and verse, Whitman celebrated cultural diversity believing that “America is the race of races”³ and he defined America as “teeming nation of nations”⁴.

While some of the Americans like Crevecoeur and Whitman believed that America was the combination of different ethnic roots, some insisted on the idea of

¹ Dinnerstein, Leonard, Nichols, Roger L., Reimers, David M, Natives and Strangers. Blacks, Indians and Immigrants in America, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990, p. 70.

² Lemay, J.A Leo, An Early American Reader, United States Information Agency, Washington D.C, 1988, p.120.

³ McMichael, George, Concise Anthology of American Literature, McMillan Publishing Company, New York:, 1974, p. 901.

“one nation.” They wanted to create a white Anglo-Saxon society and they denied and forgot the ethnic additives while shaping their national character. “Americans repressed their nineteenth-century ethnic past, which was shaped by arrivals from Ireland, France and Germany in the 1840s, China in the 1850s and 1860s, and Sweden and Norway in the 1880s and 1890s”⁵.

The hot debate between cultural diversity and single identity pushed the Americans to be interested in their own domestic issues. A new nation has been formed and her origins were being interrogated. However, changes and needs seemed more crucial for Americans. Thereupon people began to get involved in other ideas like moving to the West. The desire for prosperity, unspoiled lands, new lives, trade, adventure and overpopulated cities were some of the main reasons for the expansion. In 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner presented the “frontier thesis” which is very significant for the development of the national American character. The period of expansionism had accelerated with the frontier idea, and the American nation was on the move. Unexploited and endless lands brought about many opportunities to the growing nation to develop her economic activities and character as Turner stated in The Significance of the Frontier in American History:

That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn on mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are traits of frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier...America has been another name for opportunity and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion . . .⁶

As Turner states, with the frontier idea, Americans got a lot of opportunities and the spirit of expansionism became more important. As the more lands became

⁴ *ibid*, p. 900.

⁵ Singh, Amritjit, and Robert E. Hogan, eds, Memory, Narrative and Identity: New Essays on Ethnic American Literatures, Northeastern University Press Boston, 1994, p.5.

⁶ Inge, M. Thomas, ed, A Nineteenth Century American Reader, United States Information Agency, Washington D.C., 1988, p.84.

accessible to the Americans, the need for a necessary complementary factor occurred. Means of transportation were not enough to reach the newly founded American settlements. Americans found a solution to this problem, and built the Erie Canal in 1825, and later the Pennsylvania Canal. However, canal building was not enough for the developing nation that railroads became another source to solve the transportation problem. Both the lands settled by Americans, and the access to these places were the reflections of a developing nation. Every field of economy mushroomed and especially steel, lumber, textile and machinery industries increased. Americans needed new markets to further their rapid economic growth, and the idea of expansion gained more momentum.

Not only the Frontier Thesis and the booming economy, but also the Manifest Destiny fitted well into the formation of America. Manifest Destiny made people to expand and manage their obvious mission regarding their religious and democratic principles. America was a “new world” and Americans were God’s chosen people to spread Christianity and democracy. As the originator of the phrase of “Manifest Destiny”, John L. O’Sullivan stated in his essay The Great Nation of Futurity:

. . . Our national birth was the beginning of a new history, the formation and progress of an untried political system, which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only; and so far as regards the entire development of natural rights of man, in moral, political and national life, we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be *the great nation of futurity*.⁷

Both the Frontier Thesis and Manifest Destiny were distinctive factors in shaping the later imperialistic activities of the country. With the thought of an expansion and an inspired mission, American people were ready to move anywhere if necessary for a better life and economic welfare. Moreover Charles Darwin’s thoughts added further into the process. Darwin’s evolutionary theories, the doctrine of Natural selection and the Survival of the Fittest created debates about the

⁷ Inge, M. Thomas, ed, A Nineteenth Century American Reader, United States Information Agency, Washington D.C., 1988, p.7.

existence of superior and inferior races. These ideas gave way to the rise of social and political Darwinism which supported the idea of the control of stronger nations over weaker ones. As Karl Marx said for undeveloped and poor countries “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented”⁸. Christian principles and the Darwinian idea of exploiting or controlling weaker nations strengthened the notion of white supremacy and Anglo-Saxon superiority as the Senator Albert J. Beveridge spoke in 1900:

. . . He made us master organizer of the world to establish system where chaos reigned. He has given us the spirit of progress to overwhelm the forces of reaction throughout the earth... And of all our race he has marked the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the regeneration of the world.⁹

All these needs and ideas accelerated America’s imperialistic visions, and America began to expand to the world like other world powers. However, economic reasons seemed more crucial than the idea and mission of civilizing other nations. Americans believed that foreign markets would promote the economy of the country. The triumph of industrial economy fostered the imperialistic visions. Reaching the overseas became the main target of America. The publication of Alfred T. Mahan’s The Influence of Sea Power upon History in 1890 stated the importance of sea power:

The interesting and significant feature of this changing attitude is the turning of the eyes outward, instead of inward only, to seek the welfare of the country. To affirm the importance of distant markets, and the relation to them of our own immense powers of production, implies logically the recognition of the link that joins the products and markets, - that is, the carrying trade; the three together constituting that chain of maritime power ...¹⁰

⁸ Said, Edward W. Orientalism. Penguin Books, London, 2003 p.1.

⁹ Horton, Rod W., and Herbert W. Edwards, Backgrounds of American Literary Thought. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1974, p.273.

¹⁰ Current, Richard N., and John A. Garraty, eds, Words That Made American History Since The Civil War, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1965, p.141.

In addition to the expansion and development of the American sea power, annexations were also distinctive features of America's growing interest in possessing lands. Especially, after the Civil war, the acquisition of lands abroad gained importance. In 1867 Americans purchased Alaska, in 1900 Hawaii became an American territory. In 1898, with the end of the Spanish-American War, Americans possessed the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam and Cuba. America's first active imperialistic actions ended successfully and the managements in domestic and international stages made Americans think themselves as one of the super powers of the world.

Asia was another prominent beneficial concern for America. In 1800s, America saw the importance of Asia for economic and political developments. However, China was divided into "the spheres of influence" by other nations like Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy and Japan. America had gained independence in 1776 and had struggled for her domestic affairs for a long time; so America was late for taking her place in Asia among the strong nations of the world. Getting the possession of Philippines, Americans had recently been a power in Asia and wanted to take benefit from China. While the foreign powers were getting monetary benefits from China, the Boxer rebellion occurred. They were the members of an anti-Christian organization who strongly opposed to foreign exploitation. After the suppression of the rebellion, John Hay, the Secretary of State, suggested "Open Door Policy" to European powers to guarantee equal trading rights for every nation. Moreover, he recommended preserving the territorial and governmental unity of China. Thus, gaining the friendly feelings of the Chinese to save the unity of the country, Americans were able to enter Asian markets to further their economic activities in the East.

As for America's ideological approach to the East, it can be said that after World War II, the United States of America transformed into the position of England and France and became the superpower of the world. As Edward Said stated, the relationship between America and the Orient was restricted before:

The American experience of the Orient prior to that exceptional moment was limited. Cultural isolatos like Melville were interested in it; cynics like Mark Twain visited and wrote about it; the American Transcendentalists saw affinities between Indian thought and their own; a few theologians and Biblical students studied the Biblical Oriental languages; there were occasional diplomatic and military encounters with the Barbary pirates and the like, the odd naval expedition to the Far Orient, and of course the ubiquitous missionary to the Orient. But there was no deeply invested tradition of Orientalism, and consequently in the United States knowledge of the Orient never passed through the refining and reticulating and reconstructing processes, whose beginning was in philological study, that it went through in Europe. Furthermore, the imaginative investment was never made either, perhaps because the American frontier, the one that counted, was the westward one. Immediately after World War Two, then the Orient became, not a broad catholic issue as it had been for centuries in Europe, but an administrative one, a matter for policy. Enter the social scientist and the new expert, on whose somewhat narrower shoulders was to fall the mantle of Orientalism. In their turn, as we shall see, they made such changes in it that it became scarcely recognizable. In any event, the new Orientalist took over the attitudes of cultural hostility and kept them.¹¹

It is clear that until America has become the superpower of the world and acquired the roles of England and France, the knowledge about the East was restricted with the authors' and travelers' writings and ideas. In his book Innocents Abroad which became one of the most popular travel books in time, Mark Twain wrote his travels and experiences in Europe, Africa and Asia:

We returned to Constantinople, and after a day or two spent in exhausting marches about the city and voyages up the Golden Horn in caiques we steamed away again. We passed through the Sea of Marmora and the Dardanelles, and steered for a new land--a new one to us, at least—Asia. . . ¹²

This seaport of Smyrna, our first notable acquaintance in Asia, is a closely packed city of one hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants, and, like Constantinople, it has no outskirts. It is as closely packed at its outer edges as it is in the centre, and then the habitations leave suddenly off and the plain beyond seems houseless. It is just like any other Oriental city. That is to say, its Moslem houses are heavy and dark, and as comfortless as so many tombs; its streets are crooked, rudely and roughly paved, and as narrow as an ordinary staircase; . . . ¹³

¹¹ Said, Edward W. Orientalism. Penguin Books, London, 2003, p.290.

¹²Twain, Mark, The Innocents Abroad-Roughing It, Literary Classics of the United States of America, New York, 1984, p.320.

¹³ *ibid*, p.322.

America's growing power and interest in the global markets were important steps for Americans to regard the East as an important concern. The rich petrol reserves and the huge markets pushed America to have a growing interest in the East and all these resulted in the cultural domination of America on the East. Edward Said argued that America inherited Orientalism from European powers. Like England and France, America labeled the East as her "Other" and the existence of stereotypes which were created and shaped by European ideologies were accepted in the American mind and strengthened through the years. Thus, the opposition between the "Self" and the "Other" included the "Christianity" and "Islam" dichotomy to draw borders between the West and the East. One of the most dangerous nations for Americans was the Arabs who possessed the rich petrol reserves. Arabs who practiced Islam are viewed as the enemy of Christianity. So generally the Orient was associated with the Arabs and Muslims who were defined as lazy, aggressive, dirty, sexually perverted and uncivilized. But according to Said, behind all these created stereotypes and representations, there was "a fear that the Muslims will take over the world"¹⁴.

Not only the Arab world and Islam, but also Asia was prone to the Orientalist doctrine. After WWII, international policy changed radically, because European countries, which were central to the traditional balance of power, were destroyed. The new superpowers of the world were the United States of America and Russia. The world had been contained by American capitalism and democracy, and communist Russia. These debates were the problem for the entire Western world, and Asia was in the sphere of influence of both America and Russia. The decolonization period which accelerated after the Second World War brought about many changes for the imperial and independent countries. In 1947 India and in 1949 Indonesia were no longer dependent nations. "From 1943 to 1989, ninety-six countries cast off their colonial bonds"¹⁵. They were the Third World nations and many of these new-born nations declared their neutrality in the war between America

¹⁴ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Penguin Books, London, 2003, p.298.

¹⁵ Norton, Mary Beth et al, *A People and A Nation: A History of The United States*, vol B, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1991, p. 515.

and Russia, but neutrality was a threat for the American mind that after that time began to strengthen friendship ties with Third World nations and tried to control these nations. Especially in Asia, America worked to stabilize the region for her democratic ideals. American activities in foreign lands have some differences from the previous superpowers of the world. For example, America did not directly control India as the British did. Even though there were some differences in the American approach to Asia, it was the American Orientalism which labeled the Eastern nations as the “Other”

PART IV. ASIAN-INDIANS IN THE USA

Third world nations were the main target of both the United States of America and Russia. While Americans tried to convince the new nations for democracy, Russians suggested communism. The conflict between two countries brought about a criticism for Americans as they wanted to be a model for the new nations. They had had prejudices about racial affairs. They believed that they were the members of a superior nation, but it was clear that America had to do some radical changes in domestic affairs especially about the minorities to convince third world nations. “Civil Rights Acts of 1964 outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin not only in public accomodation but also in employment”¹. Civil Rights Acts and the new Immigrations Acts were performed since 1965. However, these laws did not work in daily life, and they could not erase the prejudices of the American citizens.

Asian Indians began their America adventure in 1900s. Early Indian immigrants can be divided into two groups according to their social and economic positions. In the first groups, there were workers and farmers, the latter consisted of students, merchants and political refugees and all of them were labelled as “Hindoos” by the Americans. Some of the early immigrants returned to India while some struggled to survive in the new land.

Immigration Acts of 1965 were like an invitation for the Indians that most of them came to America after that period. India was a colony of Britain for over 200 years and the human and natural resources of India had been exploited. So the exploitations and conflicts at home were the reasons for many Indians to seek their lives abroad especially in the USA. “The 1990 census reported 815,447 Asian Indians in the United States, making it the fourth largest of all South Asian immigrants groups”².

¹ Norton, Mary Beth et al, *A People and A Nation: A History of The United States*, vol B, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1991, p.557.

² Khara, Brij B, ed., *Asian Indian Immigrants; Motifs on Ethnicity and Gender*, Kendall, Hunt Publication Company, Iowa, 1997, p.25.

The Colonial oppression of Britain over India seemed to vanish with India's independence. However with Americans' replacing the roles of Britain and France, a new period has been opened. The colonial period has been replaced by decolonization and during this period, there occurred huge waves of immigration to other lands. The United States of America was one of the most attractive country for Asian-Indians. However, there occurred a problem about the position of new-comers in America. They carried along their pre-existing identities and representations to the new land as Jorge de Alva thinks "many people living in both once-colonised and once colonising countries are still subject to the oppressions put into place by colonialism"³.

Prejudice and discrimination against the Asian Indian were not new. They were the "Other" in both their land and America according to the Western ideology. Although immigration law in 1965 outlawed any racial discrimination against Third World nations, "they were treated by the American authorities as unequal, socially and for reasons of citizenship"⁴. They were aliens in the dominant culture and the misrepresentations and stereotypes became a heavy burden for them. As Susan Koppelman stated in her article:

They leave behind many of their possessions and many of their traditions, some already eroded and some just being challenged, but they take with them what they can. Off they go, to be strangers, in strange new lands. Off they go to learn who, without their traditions, they will be. And in these strange new lands, many of them will come to be known by strange new names. Whether the old life was lived in another country, another culture or a marginalized identity, all emigrants must make hard choices about what to keep from the old life and what to take with them, what to adopt or attempt to incorporate into one's "self" in the New World. Once the journey has been negotiated and the New World engaged, what, if any, of the original self must be sacrificed (and why) to ensure survival in the New World?⁵

³ Loomba, Ania, *Colonialism-Postcolonialism*, . Routledge, London & New York, 1998, p.13.

⁴ Khara, Brij B, ed., *Asian Indian Immigrants: Motifs on Ethnicity and Gender*, Kendall, Hunt Publication Company, Iowa, 1997, p.31.

⁵ Brown, Julie, *Ethnicity and the American Short Story*, Garland Publishing Inc., New York & London, 1997, p.229.

It is clear that the immigrants experience a double hardship. They are far from their homelands, culture and traditions and they struggle to survive in a society which contains many racial prejudices. They have their own identity but the most significant problem occurs here. Their identities and ethnic roots have been neglected and ignored in the United States of America who defines herself as the country of freedom. They can not forget their past but they have to live at the present status so they have dual identities. Robert E. Hogan states “Instead of embracing ethnic denial and forgetting, most of them struggle quite openly to maintain a “double citizenship” or a kind of “double consciousness” through contact with homelands, home cultures and, families overseas”⁶. Even though they do their best to adopt the dominant culture and to be the members of it, it is not easy for them to be accepted. Both in personal and social level, they are rejected and they encounter personal and institutional discrimination.

Asian Indians are labelled as a “Model Minority” among the other ethnic groups in America. Most of the Asian Indians are interested in a good career, university education and professional degree. “Indian Americans are more highly represented in professional occupations than any other immigrant/minority group”⁷ but they are neglected by many universities and important work fields due to the racial bias.

In addition, Indians’ appearance, cultural practices, clothes, names and life styles are used by many Americans to draw borders between the “Self” and the “Other.” They are treated as “aliens” and regarded as the opposite mirror image of Americans.

...adaptation to the New World turn on two public manifestations of the self: one’s name and one’s appearance. Individual choices on these matters were complicated by differences among family members about which were right

⁶ Singh, Amritjit, and Robert E. Hogan, eds, Memory, Narrative and Identity: New Essays on Ethnic American Literatures, Northeastern University Press Boston, 1994, p.7.

⁷ Min, Pyong Gap, ed, Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues, Sage Pub, USA, 1942, p.179.

or wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, possible and impossible choices for them as individuals.⁸

Apart from the difficulties of Asian Indians in personal level, the immigrant family has many troubles. They have to keep the family together and the cultural and ethnic practices of the home land should be taught to the new-comers. It is problematic for an Indian women to shape a child who has Indian and American identity. The children of the immigrants are in the worst part of the problem. They are American born Indians who have been living in America since their birth but at the same time they are raised to be good Indians who know and practice many traditional activities as “for the American-born children, the past context has never existed: they came into a world of remnants”⁹

Despite all these matters, Indians save their ethnic roots with religious practices, cultural organizations, native language, Indian values and contact with their homeland. Religion is one of the most important ways to save their ethnic roots that “Post-1965 Indian immigrants as a group are more religious here than they were back in India because it is one effective way of maintaining ethnic identity for themselves and their children”¹⁰. Also, in different times and places, they gather and organize meetings to keep the social and cultural ties with the native land. These Indian organizations were also founded for the social needs of the Indian immigrants. They both strenghten the ties among the immigrants and seek for their rights in the United States of America. Another important way to save ethnic identity is the maintenance of the mother tongue. The first generation has both Indian and English languages but the new members of the family are supposed to speak just

⁸ Brown, Julie, Ethnicity and the American Short Story, Garland Publishing Inc., New York&London, 1997, p.232.

⁹ *ibid*, p.230

¹⁰ Min, Pyong Gap, ed, Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues, Sage Pub, USA, 1942, p. 185.

English. In order to make them know their native language, the parents send their children to Indian language courses.

PART V. AMERICAN ETHNIC RELATIONS AND ETHNIC WRITING

Since the very beginning of the foundation of it, Americans have always dealt with the question of “what is an American?” Americans’ curiosity about their origin clearly indicates the multinational structure of the country. As a colony of Great Britain, America attracted numerous ethnic groups who came for religious, economic or social reasons. The reports of free land and free opportunity penetrated into the minds of many people who had been repressed by religious and ideological rules, political dominance, or poor economies. That is why they came to America, to the “New Found Land” to live as human beings as Crèvecoeur says “here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of man, whose labors and prosperity will one day cause great changes in the world”¹.

Trying to create an ideal and new nation as John Winthrop says “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us”², a lot of races like British, French, Indians, Italians, Africans, Dutch, Asians and many more melted and the American national character came into being. It is clear that the mixture of different nations played a significant role to shape the national American character. However, Americans had always dealt with the origins of the American nation. As mentioned before some argued on the Anglo-Saxon effect shaping the American character, others insisted on the emergence of the American character as a result of national diversity. So there was always a problem about descent and consent in America:

The tension between the rejection of hereditary old-worlds hierarchies (embodied by the European nobility) and the vision of a new people diverse nativities united in the fair pursuit of happiness marks the course that American ideology has steered between descent and consent. It is this

¹ Baym, Nina, ed, The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Third Edition Volume 1, W.W. Norton&Company Inc., New York, 1989, p.561.

² *ibid*, p.41.

conflict which is at the root of the ambiguity surrounding the very terminology of American ethnic interaction.³

Penetration of many different ethnic groups brought about many changes and diversities to the American way of life and politics, social and cultural life, and economics were all shaped and evaluated according to this paradigm and literature is no exception to this rule. Werner Sollors stated “Works of ethnic literature – written by, about, or for persons who perceived themselves, or were perceived by others, as members of ethnic groups-may thus be read not only as expressions of mediation between cultures but also as handbooks of socialization into the codes of Americanness,”⁴ so, ethnic literature shows the very basic tenets of how Americanness and national character had been achieved.

Looking at the historical progress of ethnic writing, there was not a certain literature which was written by authors or intellectuals. Ethnic groups were the “Other, inferior” for the American mind so was ethnic literature. The diaries and letters written by the migrants and immigrants were the first signals of ethnic writing indicating that “the literature then ‘grows’ from nonfictional to fictional forms; from folk and popular forms to high forms; from lower to higher degrees of complexity; and from ‘parochial’ marginality to ‘universal’ significance in the literary mainstream”⁵. However; ethnic writing was regarded as a different and “Other” category in the dominant literature and unfortunately, ethnic writers had also been neglected and ignored due to their difference and “otherness” from the Americans:

The need for ethnic writers in the early twentieth century to free themselves from mainstream impositions, stereotypical self-images, and other such limitations placed upon their field of creativity continues to be reflected in the ways new immigrants are learning to handle their cultural baggage. While all writers are subject to commercial agendas of agents, editors, and publishers, ethnic writers have often also felt obliged to engage or battle stereotypical and exoticized versions of personality and ethnic life.⁶

³ Sollors, Werner, Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, p.5.

⁴ *ibid*, p.7.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 241.

⁶ Singh, Amritjit, and Robert E. Hogan, eds, Memory, Narrative and Identity: New Essays on Ethnic American Literatures, Northeastern University Press Boston, 1994, p.8.

Another problem of the ethnic writers was the standpoint they had to have. They were described with a hyphen which draws the borders between them and the Americans. Italian-American, Indian-American, Jewish-American, Asian-American and many more can be the examples of the situation they had. They became both the “insider” and the “outsider” at the same time and their audiences had also been categorized as Werner Sollors defines their positions:

Ethnic writers in general confront an actual or imagined double audience, composed of ‘insiders’ and of readers, listeners, or spectators who are not familiar with the writers’s ethnic group⁷.

One problem with artists between cultures is where they ought to be fit in the developmental line of progress: in the old world from which they may come, in America, or in a specific line of ethnic descent.⁸

These hyphenate writers may have some advantages regarding their double visions. Their perspectives can be different because they are both inside and outside the American life. In this position, difference brings an authentic and unusual way of looking to ethnic writers:

Because of their close connections to other cultures or to international reading matter, American ethnic writers sometimes participated in literary innovations of other national literatures before such innovations became more widespread in America”⁹.

⁷Sollors, Werner, Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, p. 249.

⁸ *ibid*, 247.

⁹ *ibid*, 247.

PART VI. JHUMPA LAHIRI: LIFE AND WORK

In 2000, a woman writer of South Asian origin was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her collection of short stories, Interpreter of Maladies, published in 1999. Her name is Jhumpa Lahiri and she is the first writer from South Asia who won an international fame for her success.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in 1967 in London. Born in Bengali, her father was a librarian and her mother worked as a school teacher. The family moved to Rhode Island where Lahiri grew up. She attended Barnard College and later Boston University where she obtained her Master's Degrees in English, Creative Writing, and Comparative Studies in Literature and the Arts, and her Phd. in Renaissance Studies.

In her interviews, Lahiri states that she started writing in her childhood and her interest in writing shaped her education and life as a writer. As a writer with Bengali parents, Lahiri visited Calcutta many times. For her parents Calcutta was the homeland. However for Lahiri, neither Calcutta nor America is her home as she is an American born Indian woman.

I never know how to answer the question ‘Where are you from?’ If I say I'm from Rhode Island, people are seldom satisfied. They want to know more, based on things such as my name, my appearance, etc. Alternatively, if I say I'm from India, a place where I was not born and have never lived, this is also inaccurate. It bothers me less now. But it bothered me growing up, the feeling that there was no single place to which I fully belonged.¹

No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile in whichever country I travel to, that's why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile².

¹ “Jhumpa Lahiri on her Debut Novel: An Interview with the Author.” A Houghton Mifflin Release. 26 Feb. 2006, <<http://hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/extra/bljhumpainterview.htm>>

² Rifat Jawaid, (2001) “A Home-Coming for Jhumpa Lahiri.” Date of Access 26 Feb. 2006, <<http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/jan/11jhum.htm>>

It is of no surprise that Lahiri's life and work go hand in hand. Belonging, exile experiences, identity crisis, and in-betweenness constitute the main themes of Lahiri's work. Her first work Interpreter of Maladies was published in 1999 and it includes nine different short stories. In this book, Lahiri expresses the experiences of Indian families living in the United States. The characters in Interpreter of Maladies experience problems of alienation, in-betweenness and loneliness as foreign people living on American soil. Lahiri shows her reader the troubles of existing in two cultures and the difficulty of belonging.

The Namesake published in 2003 is the second and latest book of Jhumpa Lahiri. In The Namesake, Lahiri tells the story of an Indian immigrant family. Family members are Ashima Ganguli, the mother; Ashoke Ganguli, the father; Sonia, the daughter; and their eldest son Gogol, who is the main character of the novel.

PART VII. THE NAMESAKE

A. Ashima, Alienation, Acculturation

Ashima, wedded in Indian tradition to Ashoke in an arranged marriage, moves to Boston with her husband in support during his doctoral studies. The novel opens with pregnant Ashima's appearance in her kitchen while cooking Indian food: "combining Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chili pepper, wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix"¹. She tries to imitate the usual and familiar tastes they have had in India. By cooking Indian snacks, Ashima seems to relieve the burden of her removal from Calcutta, and her homesickness. While trying to adopt the American way of life, Ashima encounters certain problems: she feels isolated and culturally confused. In addition during her pregnancy she thinks that "Motherhood in a foreign land" is hard to bear and "she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare"². Here it is clear that Ashima cannot find a suitable place for herself. She is displaced both in Calcutta and in America. The only place she feels confident is her house and especially her kitchen. Thus, Ashima isolates herself from the outer world, and she tries to construct a home in Indian style. She wants to go back to her native land so her early days in America seem painful to her.

From the very beginning of the novel, Ashima clearly understands the differences between Indian and American cultures, traditions and life styles. In this respect, the writer expresses Ashima's dilemma by comparing and contrasting the two cultures. Differences in American and Indian cultures push Ashima in a position where she cannot forget her memories and life in Calcutta. Despite the fact that she lives in America, she still "calculates the Indian time on her hands"³. Thus, she cannot adapt herself in the American way of life and she goes between her past and present which is one of the major problems of diasporic identities.

¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.1.

² *ibid*, p.6.

As a foreigner in America, Ashima feels desperate and sad. Trying to survive in a strange land and giving birth to a baby are similar experiences, both being first time, and simultaneous occurrences. She is inexperienced in both the American way of life, and in child rearing. These dual hardships put more burdens on Ashima's shoulders. In the hospital, she wants to talk to other American women in order to learn from their birth giving experiences. However; Americans' obsession for their privacy makes Ashima feel lonely and fearful of not knowing anything. Regarding Ashima as a typical Indian woman, we can say that she is warm and ready to communicate. Yet, American women are distant and cold. In the novel this appears to be Americans' distinguishing features. Lahiri here shows us the binary oppositions by stereotyping Indian and American women.

It is the first time in her life she has slept alone; surrounded by strangers . . . she wishes the curtains were open, so that she could talk to American women. Perhaps one of them has given birth before, can tell her what to expect. But she has gathered that Americans, in spite of their public declarations of affection, in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, in spite of their hand-holding in the street and lying on top of each other on Cambridge Common, prefer their privacy.⁴

When Ashima observes American culture closer, she longs for her native land much more. Even more, giving birth and living in a new country is painful for her. Therefore, she cannot keep herself from comparing her position in an American hospital with that of her traditional life in Calcutta. "In India, she thinks to herself, women go home to their parents to give birth away from husbands and in-laws and household cares, retreating briefly to childhood when the baby arrives"⁵. Here Lahiri employs birth giving tradition in India in order to draw to the clashes between the two cultures. Birth is the beginning or the main point of life. However by stating cross cultural differences during pregnancy and the birth process, the writer shows that Indian and American cultures are different to the bone.

³ *ibid*, p.6.

⁴ Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.3.

⁵ *ibid*, p.4.

Although the doctor in the hospital informs the Ganguli family about the birth and says that he is “expecting perfectly normal delivery ... nothing feels normal to Ashima. For the past eighteen months, ever since she’s arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all”⁶. She is homesick and desperately feels alone because of the new and strange life that surrounds her. As Ashima gives birth to a boy, she feels happy but the baby cannot help Ashima to forget about her loneliness. This time she feels sad for her newly-born boy:

Without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at her side, the baby’s birth, like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true. As she strokes and suckles and studies her son, she can’t help but pity him. She has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived.⁷

With this quotation, the writer criticizes the ways things happen in America. In India, birth is a kind of celebration and it is planned during pregnancy. On the contrary, in America it happens haphazardly. This binary opposition between Indian and American perspectives is another indication to display the serious clashes.

Even the arrival of a new comer cannot make Ashima to feel pleased with her life. There is no one to help her and she has to do all houseworks alone. Raising the baby and the household cares tires her. “Ashima has accepted that there is no one to sweep the floor, or do the dishes, [. . .] or prepare a meal on the days she is tired or homesick or cross. She has accepted that the very lack of such amenities is the American way”⁸. Here again the Indian and American stereotypes come into being. In India, people have a collective consciousness and they help each other. Whereas in America, individualism, which is the distinguishing characteristic, leads Americans to just to take care of their own private lives. Even Ashoke cannot help Ashima as he works outside. Because of this, Ashima’s loneliness is doubled with the hardships of raising a baby alone. She is so much irritated that, even running out of rice may cause her to cry. As Ashoke works outside, he manages the socialization process

⁶ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.5.

⁷ *ibid*, p.25.

⁸ *ibid*, p.32.

much better. He adapts himself more easily to American life. When it comes to Ashima, as she is a housewife, she cannot find her place in America. She says “I’m saying I don’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It’s not right. I want to go back”⁹. To Ashima Americans are “perfect strangers”¹⁰ and she cannot adjust to the American way of life, and feels homesick.

Many times Ashima writes letters to her family in India about raising Gogol, however; not only good news, but also bad ones arrive from India. Ashima learns that her grandmother has had a stroke, and she is paralyzed. She wants to see her grandmother and but she knows that she cannot go to India because of “the pediatrician’s concern about tropical diseases. A trip to India will require a whole new set of immunizations, he has warned”¹¹. We see that the pediatrician warns Ashima about the diseases in India. In this respect, Lahiri has a critical look at colonialism and its effects. Representations made by the Western world constituted the most important feature of Colonial discourse. Here, the doctor labels India as the land of diseases, and symbolically sees India as inferior. Moreover, as we stated before, science also was another distinctive factor to define uncivilized nations as inferior. Here the pediatrician’s ideas about the diseases in India also refer to false scientific datas which label the East as inferior. Because of this, Lahiri criticizes the misrepresentations and the science which was a tool in the hands of Western powers.

⁹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 200, p.33.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.34.

¹¹ *ibid*, p.36.

B. Naming

Naming their newborn son is an important event for the Ganguli family making them feel the clashes between the two cultures. According to Indian traditions, an older person in the family decides about the name, so they wait for a letter from Ashima's grandmother impatiently. But the letter does not arrive. It is really problematic for them that they are not allowed to leave the hospital without naming their son because "they learn that in America, a baby cannot be released from the hospital without a birth certificate. And that a birth certificate needs a name"¹. On the contrary to the American way of naming, in India "Names can wait"² but they cannot persuade the compiler of hospital birth certificates, Mr. Wilcox, about their traditional practices about naming a baby. Mr. Wilcox suggests them to give the baby the name of the father or any ancestor:

But this isn't possible, Ashima and Ashoke think to themselves. This tradition doesn't exist for Bengalis, naming a son after father or grandfather, a daughter after mother or grandmother. This sign of respect in America and Europe, this symbol of heritage and lineage would be ridiculed in India. Within Bengali families, individual names are sacred, inviolable. They are not meant to be inherited or shared³.

The practice of naming a baby after the father or ancestor in America is strange to the Ganguli family. In Indian tradition, the name of the child had to be given by older members of the family. Since the Gangulis live in the United States, they realize they have to live by the rules of this country. They see that they have to name their son by themselves, thus the boy "Gogol enters the world"⁴. Ashoke gives the name "Gogol" to the baby and, it is the last name of a Russian writer whom Ashoke admires. Ashoke's grandfather has given that book to him and for Ashoke it was that book that saved his life in a train accident. In 1961, while Ashoke was a student at B.E. college in India, he travelled by train to visit his grandparents. When the accident happened, he was reading The Overcoat by Nikolai Gogol. He heard the

¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.27.

² *ibid*, p.25.

³ *ibid*, p.28.

⁴ *ibid*, 29.

crash and later “he remembers the sound of people half-dead around him, moaning and... whispering hoarsely for help... he had been thrust partway out the window...he remembers believing that he was dying”⁵. After the crash, inspectors, doctors and people looked for the passengers. Ashoke, still alive, could not see anything however he heard the voice of people searching for the train. He raised his hand, but nobody saw it. The book slipped away from his fingers and the people realized that someone was still alive there. The book had saved Ashoke’s life so Nikolai Gogol had a vital importance for him.

Apart from the differences in the naming process, the names in two cultures are also different. In Bengali tradition, there are pet names and good names:

. . . there are always pet names to tide one over: a practice of Bengali nomenclature grants to every single person, two names. In Bengali the word for pet name is *daknam*, meaning, literally, the name by which one is called, by friends, family, and other intimates, at home and in other private, unguarded moments. Pet names are a persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not always so serious, so formal, so complicated. [. . .] Every pet name is paired with a good name, a *bhalonam*, for identification in the outside world. Consequently, good names appear on envelopes, on diplomas, in telephone directories, and in all other public places. . . ⁶

As for Americans, they name their children after themselves, their ancestors or anyone they admire. There are not good or bad names but nick names in the United States. Abbreviations are so common that Americans do not believe in the secrecy of names. Whereas names are very significant for Indians for the relationship between the self, family and the society, the secrecy and the intimacy of the names in Indian culture occurs clearly when Ashima thinks of Ashoke’s name:

Ashima never thinks of her husband’s name when she thinks of her husband, even though she knows perfectly well what it is... It’ not the type of thing Bengali wives do. Like a kiss or caress in a Hindi movie, a husband’s name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over. And so instead of saying Ashoke’s name, she utters the interrogative that has come to replace it, which translates roughly as ‘Are you listening to me?’⁷

⁵ Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.18.

⁶ *ibid*, p.26.

⁷ Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.2.

The birth of the second child of the Ganguli family shows that Ashima and Ashoke are experienced in naming a child. Contrary to Gogol's name, they choose their daughter's name carefully.

They've learned their lesson after Gogol. They've learned that schools in America will ignore parents' instructions and register a child under his pet name. The only way to avoid such confusion, they have concluded, is to do away with the pet name altogether... For their daughter, good name and pet name are one and the same: Sonali, meaning 'she who is golden'.⁸

The naming of the daughter indicates that the Ganguli family has given up with their naming tradition. They begin to melt into American culture. However, the reason for changing their mind about the traditional practice is the problems about Gogol's name. They give two names to Gogol which puts him into disadvantageous position. Due to this fact, the new member of the family is called with just one name. As the novel develops, Gogol's sister does not experience any of the identity problems her brother encountered throughout his life. She is social and adaptable. Unlike Sonali, Gogol experiences identity crisis. It seems intentional that the writer portrays Gogol's chaotic identity and Sonali's happy life. Unlike Sonali, Gogol is unhappy all his life due to his dual names representing his two different identities. It seems to me that Lahiri tries to underline Americans' false prejudices towards foreign people. Because of his different name, Gogol has to face misrepresentation and he stands as the "Other." As for Sonali, having a name more similar to American names, she is not different from the dominant culture. The name of the daughter, changes at home, with time. They call her as Sonu, Sona and finally Sonia. Unlike Gogol's name which seems unusual and different from American names, Sonia is an ordinary one and that name makes the little daughter "a citizen of the world"⁹

⁸ *ibid*, p.61.

⁹ *ibid*, p.62.

C. Indian-American Community in America

After a while, the Gangulis learn that new couples from Calcutta moved in where they live: “every weekend, it seems, there is a new home to go, a new couple or young family to meet. They all come from Calcutta, and for this reason alone they are friends... The husbands are teachers, researchers, doctors, engineers. The wives, homesick and bewildered, turn to Ashima for recipes and advice . . .”¹. These new neighbors are really helpful for the Ganguli family since they meet with people from their own land and they find someone to share their lives, ideas and traditions. They try to practice their lives along in Indian rituals in America and form a small Indian community in America. When Gogol is six months old, Ashima and Ashoke organize a meeting to celebrate Gogol’s rice ceremony which means that the baby can eat solid food from then on. This ceremony is another example to the Ganguli family and the others’ practice of their Indian customs in America. However, they experience the American way of life, too. Living in that country brings about the necessities they have to do. They are both insiders and outsiders in America so they go between the two cultures. Some days they sit and sing Indian songs and or they “argue riotously over the films of Ritwik Ghatak versus those of Satyajit Ray. The CPIM versus the Congress party. North Calcutta versus South”². However, sometimes “for hours they argue about the politics of America, a country in which none of them is eligible to vote”³

¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.38.

² *ibid*, p.38.

D. From City to Suburb

These new comers from Calcutta are so helpful to Ashima as she is trying to get used to live near Cambridge. She somehow feels herself as a part of city. Unfortunately, the Ganguli family has to move to a town outside of Boston due to Ashoke's new position at the university. He becomes assistant professor at electrical engineering department. Unlike Ashoke, Ashima feels that “. . . migrating to the suburbs feels more drastic, more distressing than the move from Calcutta to Cambridge had been”⁴. It possible to understand from this quotation that Ashima has already become acquainted with the city life. The gradual shift from city to suburb looks alike to her move from India to the United States. Yet she feels more stressful than her move from India to the United States. This move from city to suburb is the beginning of a new period in which she again begins to feel as foreigner:

For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect.⁵

The experience of moving from India to the United States and from city to suburb can be seen as the indications of the process of place and displacement. Since the Gangulis cannot have a stable place Ashima has an identity problem. It is here that “the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place”⁶. Ashima feels as a foreigner both in America and also in the town they start to live. The town seems totally different from the city. In the city, she could have long walks with Gogol and she used to learn how and where to go shopping, on the

³ *ibid*, p.38.

⁴ Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.49.

⁵ *ibid*, p.49.

contrary, in the town there were “. . . no sidewalks to speak of, no streetlights, no public transportation, no stores . . .”⁷.

⁶ Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, Tiffin, Helen, Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies, Routledge\ London, 1998, p.9.

⁷ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p. 49.

E. Adaptation to American Way of Life

Ashima had spent two years in that town when she had realized that she was pregnant to her second child. Due to health conditions, she had to spend most of her time in bed during her pregnancy. Writing letters and watching TV programs constituted her pass time activity. In the meanwhile, Gogol attended the nursery school and Ashima used to tell him to watch T.V. to improve his English. Contradiction lies in Ashima who wants Gogol to keep up with the American way of life while reminding him about their relatives and roots in India. However, the distance between the Ganguli family and their relatives in India increases as the phone calls or letters appear not to suffice to keep them in touch. They are in different countries and experiencing different life styles. Visits to Calcutta are strange to them since they know that the ones in India “will never see this life... they will never breathe the air of damp New England morning”¹. Briefly, the Ganguli family is getting accustomed to the life in America. Although the Gangulis are Indian, they feel that they do not belong to India anymore.

The process of adaptation to the American way of life is clearly visible in the slight differences between the Gangulis and their American neighbours. From the outside of their home, nothing seems different from their American neighbours. Just their mail box where some Indian magazines or newspapers are placed displays that they are Indian. In my opinion, the resemblance of their homes from the outside refers to the concept of Postcolonial mimicry. As we stated before in the second chapter, oppressed people can shake the authority of the dominant power by imitating them. Thus, the “Self” and “Other” dichotomy may disappear. The similarities between the Gangulis and their American neighbours’ houses are erase the authority and power of the dominant culture by looking alike. Not only the Ganguli house, but also their attitudes show their assimilation and integration. The Ganguli family begins to learn

¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.64.

[w]hich was preferable, a live Christmas tree or an artificial one? They learn to roast turkeys, albeit rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne, at Thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woolen scarves around snowmen, to color boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter and hide them around the house”.²

They learn to assimilate themselves to American culture as they begin to celebrate Christmas, Thanksgiving or Easter. Although they seem to fit in the American way of life, Ashima still goes on wearing saris and sandals. Since her children want and love to eat American food, Ashima cooks hamburger once a week. All these changes and differences do not mean that they get used to the American way of life totally, and forget about their descent. The Gangulis struggle to build a bridge between American and Indian cultures. This is the signal of the inbetweenness they are experiencing. Ashima and Ashoke, in order to preserve their culture, send Gogol to a Bengali language school where he learns to read and write in Bengali alphabet. They also take their children to Indian plays or dance performances in Cambridge. Especially Ashima, who has not fully adapted to the American life style, persists in raising her children knowing and practicing Indian culture and customs.

² Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.64.

F. Gogol's Chaotic Identity

When Gogol begins the kindergarden at the public elementary school, he experiences problems about coping with both American and Indian cultures. He does not want to go to kindergarden because he learns that he will be called with another name at school. For this reason, Gogol feels uneasy while going to kindergarden. His parents have told him that at school, instead of being called Gogol, he will be called by a new name, a good name, which his parents have finally decided on, just in time for him to begin his formal education. The name, Nikhil, is artfully connected to the old. Not only is it a perfectly respectable Bengali good name, meaning “he who is entire, encompassing all,”¹ but it also bears a satisfying resemblance to Nikolai, the first name of the Russian Gogol.

When Gogol learns that he will have a second name, he is afraid. The name “Nikhil” seems so strange to Gogol as he has always been called Gogol. “He was afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn’t know.”² His parents tell Gogol that it is the tradition of Bengali families to give two names to their child: one of them is the pet name, and the other the good name. Having a Bengali descent but living in America and having a name used by parents and another name used by Americans are another indication to the contradictions of the Ganguli family. Not only giving a second name to Gogol but also choosing the name is also troublesome. Ashoke thinks that the name should somehow resemble to American names for a better pronunciation because “. . . there was a danger that Americans, obsessed with abbreviation, would truncate it to Nick.”³ Here the writer states the fact about the names in America and she clearly underlines their obsession with nick names. Thus, Ashoke chooses Nikhil for Gogol’s good name and he tries to construct a bridge between Gogol and American culture. However as Gogol is accustomed to be Gogol, the new name sounds strange to him. Gogol refuses to use his good name and instead he says that he wants to be called Gogol. In his childhood, Gogol seems to construct his identity

¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.56.

² *ibid*, p.57.

in America. However, as a child, he cannot predict the chaotic identity which will result from his name.

When Gogol is a young boy, his name is ridiculed by the classmates however it does not bother him. He is told that Gogol is the name of an important Russian author thus his name will live forever. Although, he is called as Giggle or Gargle, he does not mind at the beginning. It is a morning when Gogol burst into tears realizing that his surname is shortened to Gang. Also, Gogol realizes the oddness and difference of his name during a school trip to historical places and cemeteries. Gogol finds out a resemblance with his name and Puritan names which are odd and really unusual. “He likes these names, likes their oddness, their flamboyance”⁴. He writes strange names on the paper and “until now it has not occurred to Gogol that names die over time, that they perish just as people do”⁵. Even Ashima is terrified and criticizes the trip to the cemetery, Gogol feels relaxed and happy. He finds someone who shares the same fate with him. They are dead now but once they were alive. “. . . these ancient Puritan spirits, these very first immigrants to America, these bearers of unthinkable, obsolete names, have spoken to him”⁶. At this point, Jhumpa Lahiri underlines the historical facts in her fiction. She refers to the founding fathers and compares their names with Gogol’s name. Regarding the oddity of their names, she puts Gogol in their position. The resemblance between the names can indicate that these dead people were the fathers of the Americans. So Gogol can be seen as the founding father of the new Indian-American generation. The founding fathers were immigrants, so is Gogol. Because of this, not only their names but also their lives seem similar. Therefore Gogol can be seen as the representative of immigrants living in the United States.

Gogol Ganguli’s name is not the only signal to show his inbetweenness. Gogol’s fourteenth birthday parties also present the main contradiction of the family.

³ *ibid*, p.56.

⁴ Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.70.

⁵ *ibid*, p.70.

⁶ *ibid*, p.71.

They live as half Indian and half American. The family organizes two different birthday parties for Gogol. In the first one, Gogol's school friends are invited:

with pizzas that his father picked up on his way home from work, a basketball game watched together on television, some Ping-Pong in the den. For the first time in his life... The other celebration, the Bengali one, is held on the closest Saturday to the actual date of his birth. As usual his mother cooks for days beforehand, cramming the refrigerator with stacks of foil-covered trays... All this is less stressful to her than the task of feeding a handful of American children, half of whom always claim they are allergic to milk, all of whom refuse to eat the crusts of their bread.⁷

Gogol has two different birthday parties organized according to American and Indian cultures. Beginning with the duality of his name, Gogol's birthdays also represent the duality of his daily life. These parties show the different cultural attitudes of Americans and Indians. Ashima cooks for days for the Bengali birthday however the long preparations seem easier than the American style birthday. In a foreign and different culture, Ashima has difficulties in organizing a party which is totally different from Indian parties. At that point, Lahiri takes our attention to American and Indian approach to celebrations. In American birthday, Gogol's friends are served pizza which is easy and ready. On the contrary, cooking for days is the traditional attitude of Indians to birthday parties. By presenting two birthday parties, Lahiri clearly states the traditional differences between American and Indian cultures once more.

It is important that Ashoke gives to Gogol The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol as a birthday present. However, Gogol is not interested in that book and prefers reading other ones. He is not informed about the train accident his father lived through and he is not told the real reason for having the name Gogol. Looking at the pages of the book, he sees the photo of Nikolai Gogol and he is relaxed as "he

⁷ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.72.

concludes confidently, there is no resemblance at all”⁸. Realizing that there is not any single resemblance, Gogol thinks:

[he] has to come to hate questions pertaining to his name, hates having constantly to explain. He hates having to tell people that it doesn't mean anything 'in Indian.'... He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but all things Russian. He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second.⁹

We see that Gogol's name does not give signals to his life, descent or identity. To me, this situation is a critique of the names and their representations. Gogol's identity crisis comes into being because of his different name. During the novel, it is the name which determines the life of Gogol. His life and character is shaped by his odd name. Because of this, we can say that the society evaluates people according to the validity or similarity of their names. If one has an odd and different name, he becomes the “Other” in the dominant culture. Thus, American society's wrongful representations result in Gogol's chaotic identity. When it comes to the reason for Lahiri's choice of an absurd and obscure Russian name for an American Indian boy, I think it indicates the idea of displacement. She presents us a mix of Russian, Bengali, and American cultures, and this multicultural side underlines the typical experience of displacement.

It is seen that as Gogol grows up, his problems also get bigger. Although he was born and raised in America, he cannot mix into the life in America since he himself even does not know who he is. He is an American born Indian but his name is Russian. This triple confusion pushes Gogol to a dilemma and he feels himself so lonely. For him he is the unique person in the world as “no one he knows in the

⁸ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.75.

⁹ *ibid*, p.75.

world, in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake”¹⁰

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.78.

G. The Overcoat

Gogol Ganguli's hatred towards his name brings about the hatred for the writer Gogol and his short story The Overcoat. The Overcoat tells the life and after life of Akaky Akakievich who works as a clerk in a department. As a poor man, Akaky never thinks anything but copying in the department. The people in the office make fun of him, especially his very old coat. One day, he realizes that his coat is too old to wear and he goes to a tailor named Petrovich. Akaky's intention is to make his coat repaired but Petrovich says that he could do nothing for the coat and he should sew a new one for Akaky. Unfortunately, Akaky knows that he cannot afford to have a new coat even though he has some extra money. He feels so happy when he learns that he will get an extra addition from the department. He becomes excited for his new coat. Petrovich and Akaky buy the materials for the new coat. Akaky's new coat becomes so elegant and attractive that his friends in the office congratulate him and one of his superior clerks organizes a party for the new coat. Akaky wears his new coat and goes to the party but he knows that he does not belong there as "he simply did not know where he stood or where to put his hands, his feet, and his whole body"¹. Thinking that it is late, he leaves the party. While walking happily on the street his coat in his back, two robbers beat Akaky and take his new coat. He cannot find help from the authorities and one of his friends suggests him to go to the "very important person," a general. The "very important person" is rude, and treats Akaky badly. Instead of helping Akaky, he despises him. After that interview, Akaky develops high fever and dies. After his death the very important person feels himself guilty of treating him badly. Later, it is said that Akaky's ghost wanders around St. Petersburg taking the coats of people from their backs. Many people declare that it is the rotten corpse of Akaky but no one can arrest him live or dead. Finally Akaky's ghost catches the very important person. The ghost scares him and takes his coat from his back. No one sees Akaky's ghost anymore but the story ends indicating the existence of another but bigger ghost with a moustache.

¹Thomas, S., "The Cloak by Nikolai Gogol," <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/g/gogol/nikolai/g61cl/index.html>, 2003.

Firstly, both Akaky's and Gogol's parents have problems with naming their children. Akaky's mother does not like any of the names suggested for the boy. Thinking that it is the fate of the baby, she names him after his father. Gogol's parents are not allowed to name the child according to their customs so his father gave him the name of a Russian writer. So both names are given at random. Akaky's name "was a case of necessity, and that it was utterly impossible to give him any other name"² as for Gogol, his name is given quickly in order to be able to leave the hospital with a birth certificate.

Secondly, both Akaky and Gogol have troubles in adapting themselves to society and due to their differences they alienate themselves. Akaky's appearance, clothes, and oddity makes him as a ghost while living. He lives for his duties and cannot find a place among others. Like Akaky, Gogol's cultural background and Otherness within the host culture makes him different from other people. Akaky and Gogol are prone to the abuses of others. In The Overcoat, "The very important person" can be seen as an authority figure of society which holds the power and hegemony. Since the society is oppressive, Akaky becomes oppressed. The final twist at the end of the story reverses the roles. Akaky's ghost scares others and becomes the oppressor, whereas "The very important person" turns into the oppressed. In Gogol Ganguli's story, from the very beginning to the end, the American society's approach to Gogol is oppressive.. Because of the misrepresentations and prejudices of American culture, Gogol denies his name, he feels lonely, isolated and "Othered" in American society. Consequently, both Akaky and Gogol are scorned by the people and were oppressed by the power of the dominant culture.

Ashoke feels grateful to Nikolai Gogol and his book for saving his life but his son does not have any slight interest with the book. Instead, he prefers reading American books or novels, listening to American music. One day Ashoke enters Gogol's room and he sees "the Lennon obituary pinned to the bulletin board, and

² Thomas, S., "The Cloak by Nikolai Gogol", <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/g/gogol/nikolai/g61cl/index.html>, 2003.

then a cassette of classical Indian music he'd bought for Gogol months ago, after a concert at Kresge, still sealed in its wrapper"³. Unlike his parents who are devoted to their roots and customs, Gogol cannot attach himself to his Indian descent. He feels neither Indian nor American. He was born in America, attended American schools and experienced the American way of life however raised to be like an Indian. His condition is rather chaotic: he is devoid of a certain identity and place. Because of this, he isolates himself from Indian and American cultures. Among these two cultures, he cannot find a suitable place for himself.

When Gogol begins high school, one of his teachers, Mr. Lawson, informs the students that they are going to read The Overcoat by Nikolai Gogol. The day they begin to study The Overcoat, Gogol feels anxious and furious as he learns that

during his life he was understood by no one, least of all himself. Gogol's life, in a nutshell, was a steady decline into madness...He was reputed to be a hypochondriac and a deeply paranoid, frustrated man. He was, in addition, by all accounts, morbidly melancholic, given to fits of severe depression. He had trouble making friends. He never married, fathered no children. It's commonly believed he died a virgin⁴.

He was not informed by his parents about Gogol's life so he gets angry and feels betrayed. "Warmth spreads from the back of Gogol's neck to his cheeks and ears. Each time the name is uttered, he quietly winces . . . He looks at his classmates, but they seem indifferent, obediently copying down the information . . . ⁵. The teacher gives The Overcoat to be read at home but Gogol refuses to bring to copy to home. He does not want to read it since he thinks that "To read the story, he believes, would mean paying tribute to his namesake, accepting it somehow"⁶. Gogol denies reading the story and his frustration for his name and namesake gets bigger.

³ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.78.

⁴ *ibid*, p.91.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 91.

⁶ *ibid*, p.92.

H. A Visit to Native Land

Gogol's inbetween condition is even more visibly portrayed during Ashoke's sabbatical leave. For the occasion the Gangulis decide to go to Calcutta for eight months. Gogol does not want to go to India as "he dreads the thought of eight months without a room of his own, without his records and stereo, without friends"¹. On the plane, Gogol is so much anxious that he begins to be curious about what to do, where to go and even what to eat in Calcutta. Before landing, he eats a lot of American food thinking that "for the next eight months nothing will taste quite the same"². Although, he is not fully pleased in America, he is afraid of going to Calcutta where he knows nothing about.

On the airport, Sonia and Gogol feel like aliens as they are in a land where they do not know anything about and do not feel they belong. They still speak in English but they are scared by the unknown environment. Instead of renting a house for themselves, the Gangulis spend their days staying with their relatives. In summer, they go to Delhi to visit the uncle. When they return to Calcutta, there occur problems with Sonia and Gogol. They "get terribly ill. It is the air, the rice, the wind, their relatives casually remark; they were not made to survive in a poor country, they say"³. Their illness can be seen as a symbol for Sonia's and Gogol's position. They are the second generation of an Indian immigrant family and this shows the trouble of belonging of the children. Neither in America nor in India, are they not satisfied with their lives due to the hardship of living between two different cultures.

¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.79.

² *ibid*, p.81.

³ *ibid*, p.86.

I. Gogol Vs. Nikhil

As Gogol grows up, he isolates himself from the girls. He has no girl friends at school, he never dates with anyone and he does not go to parties. Instead, he listens to music with his friends at home. One day, Gogol's parents go to Connecticut leaving him alone and Gogol and his friends, Colin, Jason and Marc, go to a party. At the party, first time in his life Gogol meets a girl called Kim. However Gogol does not want to tell his name to Kim.

He wishes there were another name he could use, just this once, to get him through the evening . . . He could introduce himself as Colin or Jason or Marc, as anybody at all, and their conversation could continue. . . But then he realizes there's no need to lie. Not technically. He remembers the other name that had been chosen for him, the one that should have been"¹

Gogol introduces himself as "Nikhil". Having the name "Gogol" disturbs him so much that for the first time in his life, he uses the name "Nikhil". When he changes his name, his report to Kim also changes. He feels confident enough to kiss Kim from her mouth. Gogol has "an alternative identity, a B-side to the self"² by introducing him as Nikhil to Kim. Thus, when the name Gogol which isolates him from social life turns into Nikhil, Gogol becomes a socially accepted man. When his friends learn this, they cannot believe as it seems impossible for Gogol to have such a close relationship with a girl. However, he feels that it was Nikhil who kissed her "but he doesn't tell them that it hadn't been Gogol who'd kissed Kim. That Gogol had had nothing to do with it"³. It is clear that when Gogol changes his name, he also gets a different identity and character. Unlike Gogol, which isolates him from others, Nikhil seems to be more self-confident.

Gogol goes between the two names and characters, and at the end, he decides to change his name to Nikhil legally.

¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.95.

² *ibid*, p.76.

³ *ibid*, p.96.

Plenty of people changed their names: actors, writers, revolutionaries, transvestites. In history class, Gogol has learned that European immigrants had their names changed at Ellis Island, that slaves renamed themselves once they were emancipated. Though Gogol doesn't know it, even Nikolai Gogol renamed himself⁴.

Gogol's decision of changing his name indicates the main problem of diasporic identities. By changing his name Gogol thinks that he can free himself from the boundaries and burdens of being Gogol in America. Susan Koppelman states that

[s]ome immigrants whose names mark them as outside of the dominant culture change all or part of their names . . . [They] may 'just' want to 'fit in,' to accommodate themselves to their new environment. They may be embarrassed . . . They may good-naturedly wish to disassemble any barriers that separate them . . . ⁵

A few months ago, waiting for a dentist appointment, he saw an article on the wall. It was about famous people who have changed their names. This article was the reason for Gogol to change his name. However, his decision about changing his name brings about a disagreement between Gogol and his parents. Gogol interrogates the reason of giving a pet name to him and Ashima says "It's our way Gogol . . . It's what Bengalis do"⁶. Since this explanation is not enough for Gogol to accept his name, he tells his parents about the personal life of his namesake. "He told his parents what he'd learned in Mr. Lawson's class, about Gogol's lifelong unhappiness, his mental instability, about how he'd starved himself to death"⁷. Both the author Gogol, his name, and his unstable life are so strange to Gogol that he hates his name As for Ashoke,

. . . the only person who didn't take Gogol seriously, the only person who tormented him, the only person chronically aware of and afflicted by the embarrassment of his name, the only person who constantly questioned it and wished it were otherwise, was Gogol⁸.

⁴ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.97.

⁵ Brown, Julie, Ethnicity and the American Short Story, Garland Publishing Inc., New York&London, 1997, p.233.

⁶ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.99.

⁷ *ibid*, p.99.

⁸ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.100.

It is seen that Gogol and his father approach the name from different perspectives. Ashoke thinks that Nikolai Gogol is a genius and it is Gogol's book that saved his life. On the contrary to his father, Gogol feels that it is an odd name that nobody takes it seriously. Carrying the burden of his different name, Gogol goes to court to change his name. The judge asks the reason for this change and Gogol says "I hate the name Gogol... I've always hated it"⁹. In ten minutes, his name is changed legally to Nikhil and Gogol feels so happy and light. "He wonders if this is how it feels for an obese person to become thin, for a prisoner to walk free. 'I'm Nikhil,' he wants to tell the people . . ." ¹⁰. He feels free as if he leaves a very heavy burden behind him. Although he changes his name, his old name seems not to give him up as everybody he knows keeps calling him Gogol. He knows that they will call him Gogol so it can be said that Gogol cannot totally be free from his past and old name despite his new name.

Gogol obtains a new name, so a new life begins for him. He goes to college where he introduces himself as Nikhil. He does not feel embarrassed anymore. "Since everything else is suddenly so new, going by a new name doesn't feel so terribly strange to Gogol"¹¹. A new life brings in changes to Gogol's life. He starts smoking, he drinks liquor, he loses his virginity, he feels independent but still there is a snag about his identity. His two names bring about dual identities and life styles to Gogol and he cannot decide who he is.

. . . he doesn't feel like Nikhil. Not yet. Part of the problem is that the people who now know him as Nikhil have no idea that he used to be Gogol. They know him only in the present, not at all in the past... At times he feels as if he's cast himself in a play, acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different. At times he still feels his old name, painfully and without warning... He fears being discovered, having the whole charade somehow unravel, and in the nightmares his files are exposed, his original name printed on the front page of the *Yale Daily News*.¹²

⁹ *ibid*, p.102.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 102.

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 104.

¹² Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p. 106.

Having two different names bring about two different identities to Gogol. This duality underlines the experience of inbetweenness of Gogol. He has thought that everything will be easier and he will be happy with the name Nikhil. But he has forgotten his past and experiences as his life has been associated with Gogol. His identity crisis brings about fear and anxiety to Gogol. Gogol cannot get accustomed to his new name and really worries about this chaos. His parents call him Nikhil in front of his friends or in phone calls but sometimes their tongues slip and “Gogol” come from their mouth. One day, Ashima calls him Gogol in front of one of Gogol’s friends so “Gogol feels helpless, annoyed yet unable to blame his mother, caught in the mess he’s made”¹³. Thus it is clear that the name Gogol will never vanish and he will experience this dual identity in his life.

It is interesting that the name Nikhil sounds somewhat like Nihilism. Nihilism is a philosophical stand which requires the rejection of the meaning, values, morality, ethics, life, truth and existence. As for social life, Nihilism means the rejection of all imposed values and beliefs, traditions, authority, and morality. By choosing the name Nikhil, for me, Gogol rejects his existence, roots, prejudices and imposed values. After changing his name to Nikhil, literally, Gogol does not exist. With his new name, he is always sceptic about his identity. I think Lahiri in this respect tries to show that denying one’s self and past brings about nothingness. However, it is contradictory that when Gogol becomes Nikhil, he becomes social and does not alienate himself any more. In my opinion, by portraying Nikhil as a socially accepted boy, Lahiri criticizes Americans’ treatments of “Other” people. This idea takes us back to colonial discourse which misrepresents “Other” people as different and inferior. In the novel, Americans’s false knowledge and misrepresentations push Gogol into nonexistence, nothingness.

¹³ *ibid*, p.106.

J. New Name, New Life

In a few months after starting college, Gogol defines his room in the college as “home”. Gogol adapts himself to his new life as rapidly as he feels disturbed when he visits his parents. Ashima worries about this situation as “...she cannot bring herself to refer to Pemberton Road as home”¹. But unlike his mother, Gogol feels himself so comfortable at Yale.

Gogol’s new life also results in being able to have relationships with girls. In the train while going to visit his parents, he meets with Ruth who attends the same college with him. Learning that her parents are divorced and her father lives with a stepmother, Gogol compares his life with Ruth’s. He talks about his parents’ descent, India and their visits to Calcutta. Ruth’s interest in India and life style makes him feel confident and comfortable. It is the first time he has been talking with anyone else about his roots and “...it occurs to him that he has never spoken of his experiences in India to any American friend”². Gogol feels so happy as Ruth is interested in every single detail of his life and India. This friendship goes on after returning to college. They begin to meet after classes. They study together, spend time and make love when Ruth’s roommates are out. Gogol likes Ruth so much that he always wants to be with her. When each of them travels separately to spend Christmas at home, Gogol cannot take himself from thinking of Ruth. He wants to be together with Ruth and realizes that he cannot invite Ruth to his parents’ house in Pemberton “...where he is still Gogol”³. He cannot tell his parents that he has a girlfriend. He is worried about the questions they are supposed to ask. The following year, Gangulis learn Gogol’s relationship with Ruth. They do not approve it and think that it is false. Ashima and Ashoke talk about the Bengali-American marriages resulting in divorce in a short time. Since his parents have been married according to Indian customs, Gogol thinks they have no idea about youth and love. Generation gaps and differences in life styles bring about serious conflicts between Gogol and his parents. Ashima and Ashoke who were born and raised in India have their own

¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.108.

² *ibid*, p. 112.

³ *Ibid*, p. 115.

worlds views. As for Gogol, he is an American born Indian who has experienced what American way of life serves him. Neither Ashima nor Ashoke have realized what Gogol has seen in America as a child and a teenage. However, when Ruth goes away to Oxford to study, Gogol empathises with his parents' longings for their families in India. "He longs for her as his parents have longed, all these years, for the people they love in India- for the first time in his life, he knows this feeling"⁴. However, the long distance relationship between Gogol and Ruth results in their separation. They realize that they cannot tolerate each other any more.

One day, there is a panel in Yale and a distant cousin of Gogol, Amit, from Calcutta is a panelist. Gogol, who attends the panel upon Ashima's insistence, hears about the term "ABCD" for the first time in his life. As the panel goes on, he learns that it means "American-born confused deshi"⁵. Gogol thinks of India, other American-born confused deshis and himself but he realizes that he has not got any ABCD friends. "He avoids them, for they remind him too much of the way his parents choose to live, befriending people not so much because they like them, but because of a past they happen to share"⁶. It seems that Gogol clearly struggles to free himself from his roots and past. He was born in America however there is nothing to share with his likes. He does not have any Indian friends and he denies meeting with people from Calcutta or any American-born confused deshi.

In the following days, Gogol learns from his parents the real reason of naming him as Gogol. Ashoke tells about the train accident he had in India. Gogol's namesake's book had saved his life during that accident. This explanation makes Gogol both sad and angry. He feels angry since they had not told him about the accident before. All his life, Gogol had hated his name and when he learns about the accident, "...suddenly the sound of his pet name, uttered by his father as he has been accustomed to hearing it all his life, means something completely new, bound up with a catastrophe he has unwittingly embodied for years"⁷.

⁴ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.117.

⁵ *ibid*, p.118.

⁶ *ibid*, p.119.

⁷ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.124.

Gogol, upon graduating from college, finds a job in New York and starts living there. Unlike his parents, he chooses to live in a different city where he can be away from his parents's home, Bengali parties or meetings. He does not want to take part in his parents' lives instead he likes to be alone “. . . in a place which his parents do not know well, whose beauty they are blind to, which they fear”⁸. He remembers when his parents used to take Gogol and Sonia to Indian restaurants, groceries or shopping centers in Manhattan but Gogol wished that “. . . is parents would walk through the park, take him to the Museum of Natural History to see the dinosaurs, ride the subway even. But they had no interest in such things”⁹. Gogol is free now and he does not want his parents's intrusion to his life. He is an independent individual in New York and he is free of the constraints of Indian traditions.

⁸ *ibid*, p.126.

⁹ *ibid*, p.127.

1. Maxine, An American Girl

Gogol begins a new life in New York befriending many people. One of them is Maxine whom he met at a party. He goes to Maxine's house for dinner. Maxine lives with her parents. During the dinner, Gogol meets with Lydia and Gerald. The same night, for the first time in his life he has been asked about the beauty of Calcutta instead of its poverty and he feels relaxed. Gogol likes Maxine's family and the way they live. He likes the hospitality and the friendly manner they have. Quickly, he falls in love with Maxine. Unlike Gogol, Maxine is at peace with her past. She is happy and comfortable while talking about her childhood and teenage years. One of the most important differences between Gogol and Maxine is that Gogol is secretive and does not talk about his past. He compares his parents with Maxine's parents and finds out that they are totally different. For Maxine "there is none of the exasperation he feels with his own parents. No sense of obligation. Unlike his parents, they pressure her to do nothing, and yet she lives faithfully, happily, at her side"¹. Gogol realizes the huge gap between the two families, their lives, traditions and approach. As time passes, Maxine and her parents see Gogol's poor home and they ask Gogol to live with them. At first, Gogol feels a contradiction but later he has the keys to Ratliffs' house. He is pleased to live with them. In this period, Gogol compares and contrasts what he sees in Ratliffs' house with that of his own parents. The two families seem certainly different from each other. He admires Lydia and Gerald's manners, their way of looking at events and their characteristic features which make him feel comfortable and important.

He cannot imagine his parents sitting at Lydia and Gerald's table, enjoying Lydia's cooking, appreciating Gerald's selection of wine. He cannot imagine them contributing to one of their dinner party conversations. And yet, here he is, night after night, a welcome addition to Ratliffs' universe, doing just that².

When the summer comes, Lydia and Gerald leave home to go to New Hampshire to visit their parents. Gogol and Maxine are alone at home and they live however they want. Day by day, Gogol gets accustomed to live in Ratliffs house and

¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.138.

² *ibid*, p.141.

he does not go to Massachusetts to see his parents. Unanswered phones make Ashima so anxious that she asks Gogol why he is not answering the phone but Gogol lies. He does not tell her that he lives with his girlfriend. At the end of the phone call, Gogol tells about Maxine to her mother and their plan to go to New Hampshire.

On the way to New Hampshire, they agree to visit Gogol's parents. Knowing the differences, he informs Maxine about his parents. He says that "they will not be able to touch or kiss each other in front of his parents, that there will be no wine with lunch"³. Arriving home, Gogol introduces Maxine with his mother and later with his father. At first sight, Gangulis try to keep the distance but later they seem happy. Maxine tastes Indian food and likes it, they talk about their lives. When the time comes, Maxine and Gogol prepare to leave for the way. Gogol gets alarmed each minute in order to cover any unconscious behaviour but Ashoke's tongue slips and calls him Gogol. When Maxine asks about this slippage, Gogol lies and tells her nothing. As it happened before, Gogol's past has been recalled again but he is experienced in how to hide it from Maxine.

They leave Ashima and Ashoke and drive the way to Maxine's grandparents' house. Arriving home, Gogol meets Maxine's grandparents. Unlike Ratliffs', the house seems simple, dark and primitive. Gogol and the Ratliff family spend good time in New Hampshire and he celebrates his twenty-seventh birthday there. It is the first birthday without his parents. During his birthday party, there comes a neighbour named Pamela and she asks questions about India to Gogol. Pamela gets surprised when she learns that Gogol and his sister get terribly ill when they go to India. Pamela says "but you're Indian. I'd think the climate wouldn't affect you, given your heritage"⁴. Maxine says "Pamela, Nick's American"⁵. Maxine thinks that Gogol is American. It is true that he was born in America but his roots were Indian. This conversation displays the main and usual dilemma of Gogol who has a dual identity.

³ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.145.

⁴ *ibid*, p.157.

⁵ *ibid*, p.157.

Gogol has a place among Ratliff family and he seems pleased with spending time with them. However, thinking about his parents, he still tries to find the differences between Gangulis and Ratliffs. He thinks as the time passes that it is impossible for his parents to keep up with Maxine's family. He is pleased with his own life now but he has some contradictions. He thinks of his mother and her curiosity about their arriving to New Hampshire. He knows that "he should call to make sure his father has arrived safely"⁶ but he does not care his parents. In the arms of Maxine he has a good holiday without any responsibilities briefly "... in this cloistered wilderness, he is free.

While Gogol is spending his holiday with Maxine, Ashima stays at home waiting for the weekends to see Ashoke. Ashima lives alone and she tries to find something to entertain herself. Not wholly but at the age of forty-eight, she practices the necessities of American life. She prepares Christmas cards for her husband and children. It takes a long time to finish the cards that she is interested in every single detail. Also, she begins to work in an American library which is her first work in America. She entertains herself and spends time. Now, she has some American friends from the library. "They are the first American friends she has made in her life"⁷. Unlike the very beginnings of her life in America, now Ashima seems to get used to America. She can live alone; she can make friends, work, prepare for Christmas and buy a turkey for the first time.

Everything goes on its way but a sudden and bad news from Ashoke has a destroying effect. Ashoke dies suddenly of hearth attack in Cleveland. He has talked about the problem with his stomach and has gone to the hospital but unfortunately, he has expired. Sonia comes to Pemberton Road and Gogol goes to Cleveland to identify his father. He is upset now seeing the dead body of his father, the room he was seen alive the last time. He goes to Ashoke's apartment to empty the house. Ashoke has lived in that simple apartment alone for three months. He feels helpless and sad losing his father but

⁶ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.158.

[h]e is terrified to see his mother, more than he had been to see his father's body in the morgue. He knows now the guilt that his parents carried inside, at being able to do nothing when their parents had died in India, of arriving weeks, sometimes months later, when there was nothing left to do.⁸

At Pemberton Road, Ashima, Sonia and Gogol enter a mourning period which is a Bengali tradition. They have a mourner's diet just eating rice and vegetables. This diet lasts for eleven day and "they invite their friends to mark the end of mourning period. There is a religious ceremony conducted on the floor . . ." ⁹ Maxine also comes to join the ceremony.

This time, he doesn't care how the house, how the pile of guests' shoes heaped by the door way, might appear to her eyes. He can tell that she feels useless, a bit excluded in this house full of Bengalis. And yet he doesn't bother to translate what people are saying, to introduce her to everyone, to stay close by her side. 'I'm so sorry,' he hears her say to his mother, aware that his father's death does not affect Maxine in the least. 'You guys can't stay with your mother forever,' Maxine says when they are alone for a moment after the ceremony .¹⁰

After his father's death, Maxine becomes less important for Gogol as he realizes that she is selfish. In January, Gogol returns to New York and his relationship with Maxine deteriorates. Instead of helping Gogol to recover, Maxine always complains about Gogol's interest in Ashima and Sonia, his indifference and frequent visits to his mother. They cannot tolerate each other anymore and they get separated. It is clear that Ashoke's death changes Gogol too much. He visits his mother and sister more frequently, he tries to fill the absence of his father and he is really interested in his family. He feels happy when he goes to Massachusetts however he feels and prefers staying alone in New York. He always refuses the offer of his friends to go out and concentrates in his work. Yet one day he cannot refuse the offer of his friends and goes for a drink. There he meets with a woman named Bridget who is married. Twice a week, they meet and make love in his apartment. He does not know her house, phone number or anything about her life. As the time

⁷ *ibid*, p.162.

⁸ Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.179.

⁹ *ibid*, p.181.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.182.

passes, Gogol feels guilty thinking about Bridget's husband waiting to see his wife and they separate.

2. Moushumi and Gogol; An Indian Couple

After Ashoke's death, Ashima asks Gogol about his relationships with girls. Now Gogol feels more comfortable when his mother wants to learn whether he has a girlfriend or not. Ashoke's death changes her that now she is more understanding and friendly to her children. As she does not want Gogol to live alone, she has the intention of finding a girl for Gogol to marry.

He is aware, without having to be told, that his father's death has accelerated certain expectations, that by now his mother wants him settled. The fact that he is single doesn't worry him, and yet he is conscious of the degree to which it troubles his mother. She makes a point of mentioning the engagements and weddings of Bengali children he's grown up with in Massachusetts, and his cousins in India. She mentions grandchildren being born¹.

One day, Ashima talks about a girl who has a Bengali descent. She wants him to call the girl named Moushumi and know each other. At first, Gogol does not care about his mother's struggles and insistence but later he has to call Moushumi to please his mother. As Ashima tells Moushumi is the daughter of their Bengali friends from Massachusetts and she tells that many times Gogol and Moushimu come together in parties or visits. Gogol cannot remember her but in order to do his duty; he calls Moushumi to meet with her. Unlike his previous ideas about the obligation of this meeting, he likes speaking and spending time with Moushumi. "He had not expected to enjoy himself, to be attracted to her in the least"². During his childhood, they came together many times but both of them took place in their parents' arrangements.

Their parents were friends, not they. She is a family acquaintance but she is not family. Their contact until tonight has been artificial, imposed, something like his relationship with his cousins in India but lacking even the justification of blood ties. Until they'd met tonight, he has never seen her outside the context of her family, or she is.³

Like before, Ashima has organized this meeting but this time for Gogol it seems different. They have no parents, no Bengali traditions and necessities. They feel free to do everything they want now. Not any other person but they themselves

¹Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.191.

² ibid, p.199.

decide what to eat, where to eat, how to spend time. Moushumi is the first Bengali friend of Gogol and the familiarity between them attracts Gogol. When they meet for lunch in an Italian restaurant, the waiter thinks that they are sister and brother. It seems funny to Moushumi that she says “Well, it’s just funny to think that all our lives our parents raised us according to the illusion that we were cousins, that we were part of some makeshift extended Bengali family, now here we are, ten years later, and someone actually thinks we’re related”⁴. It is clear that Bengali families in America try to form a unity which covers the immigrant Bengali families. They are far from their countries and in order to recover from the homesickness, alienation and identity chaos, they form a community which focuses on the brotherhood of Bengali people. However, on the contrary, Moushumi and Gogol are not cousins or relatives moreover they meet to know each other. Even they have come together many times since their childhood; they do not know each other. Probably, they did not pay attention to each other as especially Gogol struggled to be far away from anything which reminded him of his roots. But this time, the familiarity between them does not disturb Gogol moreover he feels comfortable and relaxed. In a few weeks, they realize that they love each other. Moushumi tells and recalls everything about her past to Gogol. She talks about her family and her childhood. She talks about the Indian customs which make her rebellious especially about arranged marriages. She is a rebel as she did not do anything her parents asked for. She promised to herself not to marry a Bengali man, she refused to study chemistry, attended to french language courses secretly. Briefly, she did not do anything that her parents wanted or Bengali culture imposed. She went out with many men some of whom were married or older than her. She allowed men to seduce her. All these things go contrary to Bengali customs and her parents’ ideas but she protested everything in her own way. She even engaged with an American man named Graham. At first, her parents were dreadfully anxious about her decision but later

. . . it didn’t matter to them that he was an American. Enough of their friends’ children had married Americans, had produced pale, dark-haired, half-American grandchildren....And so her parents did their best to accept him.

³ *ibid*, p.199.

⁴ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.204.

They told their Bengali friends that Graham was well behaved, Ivy educated, earned an impressive salary. They learned to overlook the fact that his parents were divorced, that his second wife was only ten years older than Moushumi⁵.

All these things seem enough to display Moushumi's protests or her own decisions about her life but the main difference between Moushumi and Gogol is the way of looking at their backgrounds. Unlike Gogol who tries to escape from his past and hide it, Moushumi is more related with her roots. As she leaves Graham when he complains about the visits to Calcutta and despises Indian culture. She feels horrified and angry "For it was one thing for her to reject her background, to be critical of her family's heritage, another to hear it from him. She had realized that he had fooled everyone, including her"⁶.

As time passes, Moushumi breaks her promise about not marrying a Bengali man and they marry within a year. Their parents plan the wedding ceremony and even though it is not the wedding type they want, they do not argue with their parents. Everything is done according to Bengali traditions and they accept everything to fulfill their parents's expectations. The ceremony finishes without any problem except for the tiresome hours. From now on, they are wife and husband and have a good time. "They entertain together on occasion, throwing the sorts of parties their parents never had, mixing martinis in a stainless-steel shaker . . ."⁷ In the beginning, their marriage goes on its way full of entertainment. The very first signals of the troubles occur when they go to Paris for Moushumi's paper at a conference. As she had lived in Paris for many years, there is nothing to share together with Gogol. It is the first trip of Gogol to Europe and he feels excited and attracted especially by the architectural structure of the city. As for his wife, Paris is the city where she has spent very good times. She knows where to go, what to do, where and what to eat. More than a tourist, Moushumi is like a resident of the city. Moushumi knows both the city and the language yet Gogol is a stranger in Paris.

From the beginning, he feels useless. Moushumi makes all the decisions, does all the talking. He is mute in the brasseries where they eat their lunches, mute

⁵Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.216.

⁶ ibid, p.217.

⁷ ibid..228.

in the shops where he gazes at beautiful belts, ties, paper, pens; mute in the rainy afternoon they spend together at the d'Orsay. He is particularly mute when he and Moushumi get together for dinners with groups of her French friends, drinking periods . . .⁸

Sometimes Gogol thinks that it is good to go around the city with a person who knows the city very well but generally he feels jealous and angry as there is nothing new to Moushumi there. She knows many people, French culture, language and everybody Gogol meets adores her. "Here Moushumi had reinvented herself, without misgivings, without guilt. He admires her, even resents her a little, for having moved to another country and made a separate life. He realizes that this is what their parents had done in America. What he, in all likelihood, will never do"⁹ Gogol envies what Moushumi has managed alone in a foreign country and sees clearly what his parents has struggled to do for years. Both his parents and Moushumi were able to live in an unknown country and learnt to survive. He knows that he cannot be so brave to manage this himself so as Moushumi was able to do that, he feels jealous of her.

After returning from Paris, they visit Moushumi's friends, Astrid's and Donald's house. At that dinner party, Gogol feels himself alone and useless. Moushumi and her friends generally have an academic talk and Gogol does not understand what they are talking about. He cannot participate in the conversations so he feels isolated and bored.

Gogol has nothing to say to these people. He doesn't care about their dissertation topics, or their dietary restrictions, or the color of their walls. In the beginning these occasions hadn't been quite so excruciating. When moushumi had first introduced him to her crowd and he and she would sit with their arms around each other, their fellow guests a footnote to their own ongoing conversation.¹⁰

This is the second time Gogol feels useless and bored among Moushumi's friends. He has nothing to share with them and he stays out of the circle. Moushumi

⁸Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p. 231.

⁹ *ibid*, p. 233.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.237.

is interested in her friends and Gogol, knowing no one, spends time alone. The boring hours for Gogol are doubled when he thinks that Astrid and Donald had known Moushumi's fiancé, Graham. He feels angry and jealous thinking about the times they shared together. Astrid and Donald are people who witness Moushumi's life closely. Because of this Gogol, who is far away from their conversations and shared lives, feels alone once more.

Another event which makes Gogol very angry against Moushumi occurs when Astrid and Donald begin to talk about the names. Astrid is pregnant and they talk about the name they are going to choose for their unborn member. Moushumi talks about her own name and she "argues that a name like hers is a curse, complains that no one can say it properly, that the kids at school pronounced it Moosoomi and shortened it to Moose"¹¹. Here Gogol and Moushumi resemble each other in regard to their names. Both of them suffered from their names, wrong pronunciations and abbreviations. So they do not have even a look at the books about the names Astrid and Donald have bought. "Both Gogol and Moushumi are absent from these books, and for the first time all evening he feels a hint of that odd bond that had first drawn them together"¹². While Gogol has a strange satisfaction about their shared sufferings, Moushumi expresses that Gogol has changed his name from Gogol to Nikhil. Gogol is astonished and surprised hearing what Moushumi has said a few minutes ago. Their friends begin to ask questions to Gogol about his former name and "For a few seconds he says nothing. 'Gogol,' he says finally. It has been years since he's been Gogol to anyone other than his family, their friends. It sounds as it always does, simple, impossible, absurd." Mentioning his name in front of other people makes Gogol angry with Moushumi. As it had happened before, he again has to face with his past, the past which he always escapes from. Also, Gogol tells his ideas about names to Astrid and Donald who think that they are going to find the perfect name for their baby. Gogol says "There is no such thing as a perfect name. I think that human beings should be allowed to name themselves when they turn eighteen"¹³. Gogol has suffered from his name since his childhood and this event

¹¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p. 239.

¹² *ibid*, p.240.

¹³ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.245.

once more reminds him who really he is. For his parents, Gogol was the perfect name for him but as for Gogol, his whole life has been built upon hiding his name. When they arrive home after the dinner party, he holds one of Moushumi's books. The characters names are not revealed and they are called simply He and She in the novel. Gogol wishes to be like these characters and thinks about the easy lives these people have lead. He dreams of having a simple life without having a specific name which puts a heavy burden on his shoulders.

a. Breaking Up

As time passes, Moushumi begins to tell lies to Gogol about where she is or what she is doing. She wants to feel free and to be independent from her husband. During these days, she receives a letter from a man named Dimitri who is one of her old friends. He is older than Moushumi and thinking about the old days, Moushumi feels excited about him. The following week, Moushumi calls Dimitri and their love affair begins. They come together on certain days at Dimitri's apartment. Moushumi feels and remembers her old free days in Paris while she is with Dimitri. She feels as if she has gained her lost freedom but at the same time she feels guilty. "She wonders if she is the only woman in her family ever to have betrayed her husband, to have been unfaithful. This is what upsets her most to admit: that the affair causes her to feel strangely at peace, the complication of it calming her, structuring her day"¹. Gogol frequently stays alone due to Moushumi's "unreal" conferences. On one of those Sundays he gets up alone again, he recalls the last weekend which they were together with their families at Thanksgiving. Moushumi seems unhappy and Gogol begins to wonder if he can still make her happy. Moushumi "accused him of nothing, but more and more he sensed her distance, her dissatisfaction, her distraction"². The distance between Gogol and Moushumi is clear enough to understand but Gogol thinks that she is busy and tired. According to Gogol this is why she looks unhappy and he thinks there is no need to worry about it. Unfortunately, Gogol learns Moushumi's love affair with Dimitri in a train journey. They go to Ashima's house to spend Christmas and in the train Moushumi lets her secret out. She tells everything to Gogol. "And for the first time in his life, another man's name upset Gogol more than his own"³ Although Gogol learns the unbearable secret of Moushumi, they go to Ashima's house on Pemberton road. It is Gogol's mother's and sister's expectance of their visit which keeps Gogol and Moushumi reveal their broken relationship. After returning to New York they get divorced. Moushumi goes back to Paris and Gogol lives alone in the same apartment finding another job. At the age of thirty-two, Gogol has married and divorced.

K. Ashima: Half Indian, half American

¹ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.266.

² *ibid*, p. 271.

³ *ibid*, p. 283.

At the same time, Sonia announces an engagement with an American man named Ben and Ashima decides to spend half of the year in America and the other half in Calcutta. In the Christmas of 2000, Ashima organizes a party for her children and friends. Also, this party is the last party she organizes before she leaves for Calcutta. “True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere”⁴. Ashima’s decision about living in America and India shows the permanent half lives. At the beginning of her journey to America, Ashima felt as an alien yet the years in America prepared two different lives but dependent ones. She lives as half American and half Indian. Her journey to Calcutta will be the first one she will do alone, however;

The prospect no longer terrifies her. She has learned to do things on her own, and though she still wears saris, still puts her long hair in a bun, she is not the same Ashima who had once lived in Calcutta. She will return to India with an American passport. In her wallet will remain her Massachusetts driver’s license, her social security card. She will return to a world where she will not single-handedly throw parties for dozens of people⁵.

Ashima has learned to live in American way also keeping her original culture. She is divided into two separate identities and this duality has its reflections on every step of her life. She has once said “I want to go back”⁶ to India yet now she cannot leave her American life behind. While she is preparing for the Christmas party, she “feels lonely suddenly, horribly, permanently alone . . . She feels overwhelmed by the thought of the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and now in its own way foreign”⁷. Everything seems to be opposite now to Ashima. The roles of Calcutta and America in Ashima’s life have changed their roles. “For thirty-

⁴ Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.276.

⁵ *ibid*, p.276.

⁶ *ibid*, p.33.

⁷ *ibid*, p.278.

three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she's worked. She will miss throwing parties"⁸

⁸ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.279.

L. The Resolution of Gogol's Chaotic Life

Gogol who has divorced joins the party alone. He feels sad thinking of her mother's leave for India. When her mother moves, there will be nothing to show that once upon a time the Ganguli family has lived in that house. He cannot believe that his mother is going to leave her house and he begins to share his parents's thoughts and experiences:

He wonders how his parents had done it, leaving their respective families behind, seeing them so seldom, dwelling unconnected, in a perpetual state of expectation, of longing...Gogol knows now that his parents had lived their lives in America in spite of what was missing, with a stamina he fears he does not possess himself. He has spent years maintaining distance from his origins; his parents, in bridging that distance as best they could.¹

Ashima's decision make Gogol understand the hardships his parents have experienced. He appreciates them and thinks of their efforts and success to adopt themselves in an unknown environment leaving the loved ones behind. It is clear that Gogol feels empathy for his parents and gradually begins to accept his past and origins. Being able to see the events without prejudice, there occur changes in his personality. He evaluates their lives as a chain of accidents. Beginning with the train accident Ashoke has lived; his name, his father's death and his marriage are all the events that shaped Gogol's life. At the end, he decides that "these events have formed Gogol, shaped him, and determined who he is"². Here we see that Gogol has a fatalist point of view and instead of blaming his parents and his origins, he accepts his life as a result of series of events. He begins to reconcile with the things he has turned his back on since his childhood. In the Christmas party, while he is looking for the camera, he comes across with the book by Nikolai Gogol which his father has given him as a present. He opens the book and remembers his old days. His hatred of his name and his namesake turns out to be a self examination now. During his entire life, Gogol struggled to hide and escape from his name and past. However, he is not happy for this. His father is dead, his mother is preparing for an unknown journey, and he does not need to come together with people from Bengali. Briefly, anyone

¹Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.281.

who calls him Gogol is vanishing from his life but this “provides no sense of victory”³. Although he always wanted his name to disappear, now he has no satisfaction. He turns his inner self and begins to comprehend his life. In the Christmas party Ashima organizes, Gogol reconciles with his name and past and he begins to read the book of Nikolai Gogol. All these are the signals of how Gogol begins to interpret his life, name and past. Before this time, that book was the thing which he escaped, hid and hated but now it turns out to be a peaceful step to accept his past and fate.

As a conclusion, Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel The Namesake reflects the life of the first and second generation Ganguli family. Throughout the story, we see the struggles of the family members to keep up with their lives in America. Thinking of Ashima and Ashoke, we can say that as they are the first generation immigrants, they try to build a bridge between Indian and American culture. Ashoke has a better adaptation period compared to Ashima. As he works outside, he comes closer to American culture easily. Unlike him, Ashima cannot accommodate the life in America. We can say that as she is a housewife, she cannot see the daily life of Americans and she is always interested in cooking Indian foods at home, wearing saris, practicing cultural rituals, raising her children to be good Indians. Due to these reasons, she feels alone and she is homesick. She has no chance and opportunity for her to make friends, to be interested in anything or to know and comprehend American way of life. When she begins to work and is able to do anything alone, Ashima is self confident. At the end, she does not feel homesick for Calcutta anymore as she has learned to lead two identities and two lives together. As for Sonia and Gogol, they are the second generation immigrants born in the United States of America. Contrary to their parents, they can adopt themselves to the environment easily. They know America since their births, attend to American schools, have fluent English, and have American friends. However, especially Gogol has troubles to manage his life. His name makes him feel isolated and sad as he refuses and denies his name and past. He is neither American nor Indian; he is an “ABCD”, American born confused deshi. He lives the experience of inbetweenness sharply and because of this he cannot have a

² *ibid*, p.287.

real identity. Hiding his real name and refusing his past make him feel like a fugitive and he cannot build a peaceful life. Until the end of the book, we always come across with Gogol's inner thoughts about himself and his fake ideas about erasing his name and past from his mind. The reason for his inconsistency with life is that he wants to live as if he has no roots. Whenever he denies the things which form his identity and character, he faces with his past. At the end, his name seems to vanish yet he is not happy and satisfied. During his life, he has tried to keep it as a secret, however; "...this eventual demise provides no sense of victory, no solace. It provides no solace at all"⁴. The book ends with hope for Gogol. Realizing the events in his life, he has a better understanding and learns to evaluate his life from a different angle. Looking at the pages of the abandoned, hidden book, The Overcoat, Gogol opens a new page in his life. His life after that moment seems to be full of hope as he makes peace with everything he has escaped since his childhood.

³Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p. 289.

⁴ Lahiri, Jhumpa, The Namesake, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 2003, p.289.

CONCLUSION

Colonialism is as old as human history that the beginning of it dates back to the Second Century AD¹. However; European colonialism changed the global order and constructed the knowledge about Colonialism. “Colonialism expanded the contact between Europeans and non-Europeans, generating a flood of images and ideas on an unprecedented scale”². These images and ideas were always about the inferiority of the “Other” people. In this context, power is an important tool to describe the “Other” as inferior, barbaric or weak. As European countries were rich and powerful, they conquered the lands of weaker nations and constructed the knowledge about them. The most crucial point here for me is that colonized people were described how the colonizers evaluate them. The difference between the colonizer and the colonized became the basic tenets of colonialism. Therefore the different people were scorned and seen as the opposite of the “Self.”

Edward Said believes that the construction of the “Self” and the “Other” between the Western and Eastern nations were shaped according to Oriental discourse. Orientalism is an ideological construct which justifies Colonialism. Instead of evaluating the Eastern people in their own society, culture or way of life, colonizers, by focusing on their differences, saw them as the “Other”. Because of this single point of view, then knowledge about the East has not an objective side. The West had his own knowledge about the “Other” and the East was misrepresented by the West. Stereotyping and categorization of the people on conquered lands resulted in identity crisis of the colonized people.

Looking at the interaction between the Orient and The United States of America, we see that

[t]here was no deeply invested tradition of Orientalism, and consequently in the United States knowledge of the Orient never passed through the refining

¹ Loomba, Ania, Colonialism-Postcolonialism, . Routledge, London &New York,1998, p.2.

² *ibid*, p.58.

and reticulating and reconstructing processes, whose beginning was in philological study, that it went through in Europe.³

European knowledge and images about the Orient was also valid in the U.S.A. However; unlike England and France, the U.S.A. did not directly control the Orient.

The Arabs were the main threat for Americans. Because of the rich petrol reserves they possessed and the Islamic religion, especially the Arabs were the “Oriental Other” for the American mind. Asia was also an important concern for Americans’ economic activities and especially after the Second World War, the ones which gained independence, became important to maintain American hegemony.

After 1960s, terms like “ethnicity” and “ethnic group” were widely used in America. Changes in the global and social order and the anthropology brought about a new field of study. Postcolonialism became an important field as the end of the colonial period resulted in many problematic identities. Unlike other colonialist countries which conquered the land of the “Other”, Americans dealt with immigrants or people in exile in general. In my opinion in that respect Americans had great contradictions. They always announced their democratic principles and the equality of the people, yet they still categorized different people and made them the “Other”. Especially after 1965, huge immigration waves shaped the American policy and life. Many people from different lands came to America for social, economic or educational reasons. Even though the American government tried to stop racial discriminations toward minorities; American citizens still used identity construction of the “Self” and the “Other”.

Jhumpa Lahiri in her novel The Namesake depicts the chaotic identities of an Indian-American family in the United States of America. She is conscious of the effects of colonialism and she expresses the otherness of Ganguli family in America. The main character of the book, Gogol Ganguli has chaotic life. In the book, the writer does not focus on his roots or descent as the cause of his troublesome life.

³ Said, Edward W. Orientalism. Penguin Books, London, 2003, .290.

However, Lahiri elaborates on Gogol's name. With a name neither Indian nor American, Gogol grows as an asocial, escapist and alienated boy. I think the main aim of Lahiri to name Gogol after a Russian author is to take attention to the universal problems of minorities in the Western world. Gogol is an outsider in American society and he goes between his Indian and American identities.

In The Namesake, dualities are symbolically used in every aspect of Gangulis' lives. Gogol has two names, one is Gogol and other is Nikhil. Due to these two names, Gogol develops two different personalities and lives which are main concerns of Postcolonial identities. He has two different birthday parties, one is for Indians and the other for Americans. Not only Gogol but also his mother, Ashima, experienced these dualities deeply. She lives in America but longs for Calcutta. She struggles to assimilate in American culture yet; she does not want to forget her past. Through the end of the book, she decides to spend one half of the year in America and the other half in Calcutta. All these experiences display the duality and the identity crisis of Ashima and Gogol.

As for Ashoke and the daughter, Sonia, Lahiri does not show them as problematic identities. Ashoke enters American life easier as he works in a university and Sonia does not have problems like his brother. As Ashoke and Ashima learnt about the problems of naming process in America, they name the daughter with a name resembling to American names. For me, by portraying Ashima and Gogol as chaotic identities, Lahiri takes attention to two topics. Firstly, Ashima is a woman and mother. As Gayatri Spivak states she is a subaltern character. Both being Indian and woman in American society cause in her an identity crisis. She is a weak and fragile character as she cannot do anything by herself. However, at the end of the book, she begins to develop as a powerful and a confident woman. As for Gogol, his identity crisis stems from his name so in that respect he experiences otherness. His name is ridiculed by his friends and he hates his name and namesake. He becomes the "Other" in American society because of his name. I believe that a question should be asked here: what determines the construction of identity? In the book, Gogol's name determines his identity. When he is Gogol, he is asocial and isolated; however,

when he becomes Nikhil legally, he is accepted socially in the American society. At that point, Lahiri displays one of the major concerns of Postcolonial theory, mimicry. When Gogol becomes Nikhil, he mimes American characters. The difference and otherness vanishes and he lives like an American. Resemblance brings about a threat to dominant culture so he is able to destroy the lines between the “Self” and the “Other.” The names are etiquettes which help to define people in social lives and I believe that identities cannot be shaped according to the names. This contradiction shows us the false approach of Americans to meanings in surface. Americans are highly related with appearances and labels that the inner self or identity of people is neglected. These are all the effects of colonial discourse which labeled people with fixed definitions or images.

Although, the colonial period ended, the position of immigrants in the United States of America is the same with colonized people. The pre-existing labels make them the “Other” in American society. In The Namesake, Lahiri interrogates the position of Ganguli family. Assimilation, acculturation and the sense of otherness are all shown in the lives of Ashima and Gogol. However, at the end of the novel, Ashima learns to construct bridges between her Indian and American identities and Gogol, by accepting the realities in his life, begins a new life. Jhumpa Lahiri leaves the decision about Gogol to her readers, however, as a reader; I am full of hope about Gogol’s life.

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