

**Exploring generational conflicts among diasporic teenagers and their
Parents in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake***

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Abstract

*This paper delves into the portrayal of generational conflicts within diasporic families as depicted in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*. These conflicts arise from the conflicting pressures faced by first-generation parents who strive to preserve their Bengali heritage and their American-born children, who navigate the complexities of assimilation. It focuses on how unfulfilled parental expectations intersect with the second-generation immigrants' pursuit of cultural integration in the United States. Drawing upon literary analysis and the Postcolonial theoretical framework, this paper offers insights into the complexities of intergenerational dynamics, identity formation, and belonging in the context of immigrant experiences. Through a close textual analysis, this study examines the root causes of these conflicts, including differing values, expectations, and the challenges of constructing a bicultural identity and opportunities inherent in navigating cultural hybridity and familial obligations within the diasporic landscape. The study reveals how the immigrant experience uniquely shapes parent-child relationships within diasporic families, emphasizing the struggle to bridge generational divides while seeking a sense of belonging in a new cultural landscape. Ultimately, the study considers whether Lahiri's novel offers potential bridges for intergenerational understanding and reconciliation.*

Keywords: Diaspora, Diasporic teenagers, Immigrant experience, Generational conflict, Cultural hybridity, Assimilation

Introduction

Generational conflict is a common theme in the experiences of diasporic families. Children of immigrants often find themselves caught between the cultural traditions of their parents and the dominant culture of their new home. This clash of values can lead to significant tension within families, as explored through postcolonial theory's lens. Jhumpa Lahiri's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Namesake* serves as a powerful illustration of this conflict. *The Namesake* explores the experience of the Ganguli family, Bengali immigrants navigating life in the United States. It delves into the intricate dynamics of identity, belonging, and familial ties within the context of diaspora literature. Set against



the backdrop of Indian immigrants in the United States, Lahiri's narrative follows the journey of the Ganguli family, particularly focusing on the protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, and his parents, Ashoke and Ashima. The novel grapples with the complexities of cultural integration and the intergenerational tensions that arise as individuals navigate between their heritage and the adopted homeland. Through richly drawn characters and evocative storytelling, Lahiri captures the nuances of diasporic identity formation, shedding light on the challenges and triumphs of forging a sense of belonging in a foreign land.¹

A central theme of the novel concerns the generational conflict between Ashoke and Ashima, the parents, and their children, Gogol and Sonia. Ashoke and Ashima cling to their cultural heritage, while Gogol and Sonia grapple with assimilation into American society, leading to clashes in values, identity, and expectations. While scholarly attention has been devoted to *The Namesake*, existing research often focuses on Gogol's individual struggle with identity (Dasgupta, 2005; Sengupta, 2007; Heer, 2011, George, 2013). Less explored is the broader dynamic between the entire family, particularly the multifaceted conflicts arising from the generational divide.

This study therefore aims to fill this gap by unraveling the layers of generational conflicts depicted in *The Namesake*, with a specific focus on the conflict between parents' expectations and children's desires for autonomy and self-discovery. By examining the characters' experiences through the lens of post-colonial theory, the paper aims to illuminate the broader themes of cultural adaptation and familial bonds within the diasporic framework (Hall, 1990; Zhou et al., 1998; Dasgupta, 2005; Foner, 2005; Kim, 2009). Specifically, this study seeks to analyze the portrayal of generational conflicts between diasporic teenagers and their immigrant parents in *The Namesake*; by exploring how Gogol and Sonia's experiences growing up in America differ from the values and expectations of their parents. In addition, it explores how these conflicts are shaped by the characters' cultural backgrounds and experiences of assimilation in the United States. Furthermore, the study aims to identify the challenges and potential resolutions to these conflicts within the family structure, thereby determining whether the novel offers any possibilities for reconciliation or a sense of belonging for both generations.

Ultimately, the study explores how Lahiri's narrative underscores the significance of understanding the complexities of diaspora literature in reflecting the multifaceted experiences of immigrant communities; and the implications of generational conflicts for individuals' sense of self, familial relationships, and cultural belonging, offering insights into the broader discourse on migration, acculturation, and cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Brah, 1996; Ashcroft et al., 2002; Min, 2010). In doing so, this paper hopes to contribute to a deeper understanding of the profound impact of diaspora literature in shaping the perceptions of the complexities of diasporic experiences and the enduring quest for cultural authenticity amidst the flux of migration and adaptation in an increasingly globalized world.

¹Jhumpa Lahiri. *The Namesake*. (Massachusetts, USA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003).

Theoretical Considerations

In achieving the set objectives of this paper, a suitable theoretical approach to the study of generational conflict among diasporic families is inevitable. In this regard, the Postcolonial theory is relevant for the analysis of generational family conflict in *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri. It is applicable to the Ganguli family's experience as immigrants from India, navigating cultural displacement and the legacy of colonialism in shaping their expectations and identities. Postcolonial theory is a multifaceted body of thought that examines the cultural, political, and social legacies of colonialism in formerly colonized nations and the experiences of diasporic communities.² It emerged in the latter half of the 20th century as scholars began to critique the traditional narratives of colonialism, which often presented the colonizer's perspective as objective and universal.

A core tenet of postcolonial theory is the analysis of power dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized. It examines how colonial structures continue to influence social, political, and cultural formations in formerly colonized nations, even after formal independence.³ Additionally, it explores the various ways in which colonized subjects resist these structures, both overtly and subtly.⁴ Edward Said's seminal work, *Orientalism*, highlights how Western powers constructed stereotypical representations of the East, fostering dominance and control.⁵

Living under colonial rule often led to the development of hybrid identities, where colonized subjects blended elements of their own cultures with those imposed by the colonizer.⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, in *The Empire Writes Back*, argue that colonized subjects create new identities that blend elements of both their own cultures and the colonizer's.⁷ This concept challenges binary notions of colonizer and colonized, highlighting the messy and complex ways cultures interact and evolve. Thus, colonization often disrupts and undermines the cultural identities of colonized peoples. Hence, the aspect of cultural hybridity is applicable and therefore adopted for this study.

On the other hand, postcolonial theory emphasizes the ways in which colonized peoples resist the ongoing influence of colonialism. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, argues for the importance of recognizing the agency of the colonized in shaping their own destinies.⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, a prominent postcolonial theorist, explores the concept of mimicry, where the colonized subject adopts the colonizer's language, customs, or practices, but

²Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2002), p 3

³Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Massachusetts, USA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p 271

⁴Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p 85

⁵Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, USA: Vintage Books, 1978), p 34

⁶Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p 3

⁷Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 2002), p 3

⁸Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p 273

with a subversive twist.⁹ Mimicry can be a form of resistance, exposing the contradictions and instabilities within colonial power structures.

Postcolonial theory has been critiqued for its focus on the binary of colonizer and colonized, neglecting the complexities within both groups. Additionally, some argue that the theory overlooks the continued influence of colonialism on non-colonized nations. Despite these critiques, postcolonial theory remains a valuable tool for analyzing the legacies of colonialism, particularly in exploring issues of power, identity, and resistance in literature, history, and cultural studies. Postcolonial theory offers a valuable lens for analyzing literature, history, film, and other cultural productions from formerly colonized nations or that deal with themes of diaspora and intercultural encounters. Therefore, the Postcolonial theory is relevant for the analysis of generational family conflict in *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri.

Through a postcolonial lens, one can analyze how the characters in *The Namesake* grapple with their cultural heritage and its clash with the dominant culture in the United States and the power dynamics between the Ganguli parents, shaped by their colonial background, and their American-born children, Gogol and Sonia. Essentially, this theory allows for an examination of the tensions between assimilation and cultural preservation, as well as the ways in which colonial legacies shape the experiences of diasporic communities. Additionally, Postcolonial Theory encourages a critical interrogation of language, representation, and agency within Lahiri's narrative, considering how colonial histories influence the characters' perceptions of themselves and their place in the world.¹⁰ Incorporating Postcolonial Theory into the analysis of *The Namesake* provides a nuanced understanding of the novel's themes and characters, illuminating the intersections of culture, migration, and power dynamics within diasporic literature.

Cultural hybridity in postcolonial thought

Homi K. Bhabha's seminal work, *The Location of Culture*, presents cultural hybridity as a central concept in understanding postcolonial experiences. He rejects the notion of cultural purity as a byproduct of colonial thinking. He posits that the encounter between colonizer and colonized inevitably generates new cultural forms and identities, a space he terms "the third space." This hybridity challenges the colonizer's imposition of cultural dominance and allows for new forms of resistance and self-expression.¹¹ This hybrid state defies simple categorization, fostering a sense of fluidity and instability within seemingly dominant cultural identities.

Postcolonial scholars have applied the concept of hybridity to analyze various cultural works, including literature, film, and art. In the context of literature, scholars like; Rushdie (1981); Jan Mohamed (1983) and Dasgupta, (2005) have examined the works of diasporic writers. For instance, writers within colonized

⁹Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*, p 86

¹⁰Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p 273.

¹¹Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*, p 37.

societies have also employed hybrid styles, incorporating elements of both their traditional storytelling techniques and those imposed by the colonizer.¹² Visual artists have similarly challenged traditional cultural boundaries, juxtaposing traditional and Western forms to critique power structures and explore identity construction.¹³

In Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, for instance, the protagonist Saleem Sinai embodies the complex hybridity of post-independence India, with its blend of religious traditions, linguistic influences, and conflicting historical narratives. His fractured, multifaceted identity mirrors the challenges of forging a unified national consciousness in a country shaped by colonialism.¹⁴ In the same vein, Abdul R. Jan Mohamed explores the concept of "syncretic culture," examining how literature from formerly colonized societies reveals a blending of indigenous cultural elements with those imposed by colonizers.¹⁵ This syncretism highlights the resilience of local traditions and the ways in which they merge with and transform dominant cultural forms.

While the concept of cultural hybridity offers a valuable lens for understanding postcolonial dynamics, it has also faced criticism. Some scholars argue that it can romanticize the experience of cultural mixing, overlooking continued power imbalances that shape cultural production.¹⁶ For instance, Young warns against a purely celebratory view of the concept arguing that it often arises from conflict and displacement, underscoring the inherent trauma of colonialism.¹⁷ Hybridity can also be a source of tension and alienation, as individuals navigate the complexities of belonging to multiple cultures.¹⁸ Hybrid spaces might even be co-opted by powerful forces, leading to cultural appropriation or superficial forms of multiculturalism.

The concept of cultural hybridity highlights the complex and fluid nature of cultural identities in the postcolonial world. It draws attention to processes of cultural transformation, resistance, and the creation of new cultural forms in the aftermath of colonialism. Yet, critical engagement with this concept demands acknowledging the ongoing power imbalances and enduring legacies of colonial trauma that continue to shape cultural spaces. Hence, while a tool for resistance and new forms of expression, it also highlights the ongoing struggles of constructing identities in a world marked by the legacy of colonialism.

¹²Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, p 156.

¹³Nikos Papastergiadis, "Hybridity and Ambivalence in the Work of Jean Michel Basquiat." *Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical*, edited by Edward Soja, (Oxford, England Blackwell, 2009), p 115.

¹⁴Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981).

¹⁵Abdul R. JanMohamed, "Syncretic Culture and the Nature of Pre-Colonial Societies." *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (Massachusetts, USA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), p 57.

¹⁶Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London, UK: Verso, 1994), p 234.

¹⁷Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995) p 23-24.

¹⁸Jan NederveenPieterse, "Hybridity, So What? The Anti-hybridity Backlash and the Riddles of

Recognition." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 18, no. 2-3, (2001): p 60.

Treatment of generational conflict in literature

Generational conflict, the clash between the values, beliefs, and expectations of different generations, has long been a central theme in literature. From the ancient Greek play *Antigone* to contemporary novels like Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, authors explore the tensions arising when traditional ways of life collide with changing social norms and the aspirations of the younger generation. Authors explore these conflicts to illustrate the changing social landscape, family dynamics, and the challenges of navigating identity across generations. Several factors contribute to generational conflict like rapid social change, differing values, competition for power, technological advancements and communication gaps.

Generational conflict often reflects broader social and historical transformations. For example, Victorian literature frequently depicts the clash between conservative parents and their children, grappling with issues like industrialization and evolving social roles.¹⁹ Similarly, American literature of the 1920s, known as the *Lost Generation*, explores the disillusionment of young people disillusioned with the values of their parents who fought in World War I.²⁰ Furthermore, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* showcases the clash between Elizabeth Bennet's independent spirit and her mother's focus on social climbing and securing a financially advantageous marriage for her daughters.²¹ Modern literature continues to explore generational conflicts in diverse contexts. For instance, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* portrays the clash between Bengali immigrant parents and their American-born children struggling with assimilation. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* explores the experiences of a young Nigerian immigrant grappling with cultural expectations and her parents' desires for her future.

Scholars have employed various frameworks to analyze generational conflict in literature like Family Systems Theory, which examines family dynamics and how conflict can be a symptom of underlying issues within the family structure;²² Psychoanalytic Theory utilizing Freudian concepts like the Oedipal complex to explore the unconscious motivations behind generational clashes;²³ Social History which considers how broader historical events and social changes shape generational conflict²⁴ and Feminist Theory with feminist scholars like Mary Ellmann examining how patriarchal structures contribute to

¹⁹Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (California, USA: University of California Press, 2001), p 134.

²⁰Richard Lehan, *The Lost Generation*. (Massachusetts, USA: Twayne Publishers, 1997), p 10.

²¹Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Penguin Classics, 1995).

²²Michael C. Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Introduction to the Bowen Family*

Systems Theory. (New York, USA: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), p 82.

²³Shoshana Felman, *The Literary Language and Its Discontents*. (New Haven, Connecticut, USA: Yale University Press, 1993), p 12.

²⁴Williams O. Shanahan, Denise A. Elder, Robert R. Lichter, and John Taylor. *Grandparenthood*

and Social Change. (New York, USA: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992), p 14.

generational conflict between mothers and daughters.²⁵ This study therefore explores the theme of generational conflict through the lens of postcolonial theory, which is relatively rarely employed in previous studies.

Author's background and synopsis of *the Namesake*

Jhumpa Lahiri (born Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri) was born in London, England, in 1967, to Bengali Indian parents.²⁶ Raised in Rhode Island, USA, she experienced a bicultural upbringing that significantly shapes her writing.²⁷ Her work often explores the complexities of the immigrant experience, the search for belonging, and the tensions between cultures.²⁸ Lahiri holds a B.A. in English from Barnard College and multiple advanced degrees from Boston University (M.A. in English, M.F.A. in Creative Writing, M.A. in Comparative Literature, and a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies)²⁹

Lahiri is a highly acclaimed author. Her debut short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2000. Lahiri has published other novels, including *The Lowland*, *Unaccustomed Earth*, and the essay collection *In Other Words*. Currently a creative writing professor at Princeton University, ³⁰Lahiri's writing often delves into the experiences of first- and second-generation immigrants, identity struggles, cultural hybridity, and the complexities of family relationships.³¹

Synopsis of *the namesake*

The novel traces the lives of the Ganguli family, Bengali immigrants who settle in the United States over three decades. It mainly focuses on the experiences of Gogol, the American-born son of Ashoke and Ashima. Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli begin their life in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Ashima struggles with homesickness and isolation while Ashoke pursues his academic career. Ashima gives birth to their son, and faces a dilemma with naming him, as they await a formal, auspicious name from their grandmother in India. Ashoke's near-fatal train accident in India and his obsession with the works of Russian author Nikolai Gogol lead to a unique naming circumstance. The son is given the unusual "pet name" of Gogol, meant to be temporary before an official name arrives from India. The nickname, however, becomes Gogol's formal name, a source of embarrassment and alienation growing up in suburban America.³²

²⁵Mary Ellmann, *Thinking About Women*. (New York, USA: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1968), p 132.

²⁶ Patricia Chiu, *JhumpaLahiri: A Biography*. InfobaseLearning, 2018.

²⁷ Tania Dasgupta, *JhumpaLahiri*. (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007).

²⁸ Carrie McCormick, "Interpreter of Maladies" by JhumpaLahiri. [Gale Literature: Contemporary Literary Criticism], (2010): p, 321-332.

²⁹JhumpaLahiri, [JhumpaLahiri Official Website]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.randomhouse.com/kvpa/jhumpalahiri/> (accessed 23 February 2024)

³⁰Ibid., n.p.

³¹ McCormick, "Interpreter of Maladies" by JhumpaLahiri, p, 321-332.

³²JhumpaLahiri, *The Namesake*(Massachusetts, USA: Mariner Books, 2004.

The novel explores Gogol's struggle with his unusual name, which symbolizes his displacement between two cultures. As a teen, he rejects his Bengali roots, then legally changes his name to the more American, "Nikhil," and distances himself from his family. The novel explores the generational and cultural clashes between Gogol and his parents. He desires to fully assimilate into American life, dating American girls, and rejecting many of his Bengali traditions. Lahiri examines the complex dynamics between the parents' adherence to Bengali traditions and their children's desire to assimilate into American society. Conflicts arise over issues like arranged marriage, career choices, and cultural identity. However, a series of significant life events, including his father's death, lead Gogol on a path of questioning his identity and his relationship with his heritage.³³

While the primary focus of *The Namesake* is on Gogol's generational conflict with his parents, there are subtle examples of other diasporic teenagers experiencing similar struggles. For example, Moushumi Mazoomdar Gogol's eventual wife, also experiences a form of generational conflict. Her parents, like Gogol's, hold onto traditional Bengali customs. Moushumi rebels in her own way, not against the culture itself, but against her parents' expectations for a traditional arranged marriage. Her unconventional relationships and personal choices reflect a desire to break away from those expectations.³⁴

Additionally, while not explicitly explored in significant depth, Gogol's friends at college reveals a glimpse into the varied experiences of second-generation immigrant children. Some seem fully integrated into American culture, while others might hold onto elements of their cultural heritage in different ways. Lastly, Sonia Ganguli, Gogol's younger sister, navigates the same cultural complexities, although her conflict is less pronounced in the novel. Her choices in partners and career reflect a more effortless blending of her Indian heritage with her American upbringing compared to her brother's more tumultuous journey.³⁵

The differences in perspectives between Ashoke and Ashima, who cling to their past, and Gogol and Sonia, who navigate the complexities of the American present, create significant generational tension and misunderstandings. The novel charts Gogol's journey through self-discovery, loss of loved ones, and cross-cultural relationships. Gradually, he gains a deeper appreciation of his heritage and begins to reconcile his conflicting identities. The novel ends with Gogol beginning to read the works of Nikolai Gogol, a gift from his father, suggesting a reconnection to his past and a more complex understanding of his identity.³⁶

Analysis of generational conflict in *The Namesake*

Postcolonial theory examines the cultural, social, and psychological impacts of colonialism and imperialism, particularly focusing on the experiences of

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

colonized peoples and their descendants. Given that *The Namesake* explores the immigrant experience of a Bengali family in America, Postcolonial Theory provides a framework for understanding the complex dynamics of identity, power, and cultural hybridity depicted in the novel. Postcolonial theory argues that the legacies of colonialism continue to shape the experiences of formerly colonized peoples, even after gaining independence.³⁷ In *The Namesake*, this manifests in the contrasting experiences of Ashoke and Ashima, the immigrant parents, and their American-born children, Gogol and Sonia. Ashoke and Ashima cling to their Bengali heritage, a subconscious attempt to reclaim a sense of agency stripped away by British colonialism.³⁸ They view assimilation as a form of cultural erasure, a sentiment echoed by postcolonial scholars who critique the imposition of Western values on formerly colonized societies.³⁹

Gogol and Sonia, however, embody the postcolonial subject caught between cultures.⁴⁰ They are drawn to the freedoms and opportunities of American society, a stark contrast to the limitations they perceive in their parents' Bengali traditions. This creates a tension, as Gogol feels pressure to conform to American norms while simultaneously yearning for a connection to his heritage.⁴¹ This fact is depicted as follows; "He is aware of the Indian part of himself, not ordinary, everyday Indian, but Indian as a hyphenated adjective".⁴² This line highlights the societal pressure Gogol feels to fit in and his awareness of being seen as different. In addition, "He wonders if it would be possible to feel content inside his name, connected as his parents are to theirs".⁴³ This reflects his longing for a sense of connection to his given name, a symbol of his heritage. This internal conflict reflects the broader postcolonial struggle for identity, where the colonized subject grapples with the imposed dominance of the colonizer's culture.⁴⁴

The act of naming, a central motif in the novel, further underscores the postcolonial context. Ashoke's insistence on naming his son Gogol, a figure from Russian literature, represents his desire to forge a new identity beyond the constraints of his colonial past.⁴⁵ Gogol, however, rejects this name, symbolizing his resistance to being defined by his parents' experiences and his yearning to carve his own path in America. On changing his name: "The following September, ...he informs his teachers and classmates that he wishes to be known as Nikhil, and the transformation is complete".⁴⁶ This highlights Gogol's active choice to conform to American naming practices, implying pressure to fit in. This act of renaming aligns with the postcolonial project of decolonization,

³⁷ Ashcroft et al, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, p 3

³⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, p 212

³⁹ Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p 293

⁴⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p 1

⁴¹ Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 187

⁴² Ibid., p 97

⁴³ Ibid., p 77

⁴⁴ Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, p 182.

⁴⁵ Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 31.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p 99.

where formerly colonized peoples reclaim their agency and redefine themselves on their own terms.⁴⁷

Moreover, Gogol and Sonia's resistance to their parents' expectations, such as arranged marriage, represents a challenge to the established power dynamics and a yearning for agency over their own lives.⁴⁸ On this, "He is aware that his parents, and those of his Bengali friends, regard him with a mixture of disappointment and resignation".⁴⁹ This implies a clash with his parents' expectations, creating pressure to be different than he desires. This echoes the postcolonial concept of mimicry, where the colonized subject adopts the colonizer's practices but subverts them from within.⁵⁰

Furthermore, postcolonial theory emphasizes the concept of hybridity, the blending of cultures experienced by colonized peoples. Living between two cultures necessitates a form of cultural hybridity. Gogol and Sonia embody this hybridity, straddling Bengali traditions and American customs. Their experiences highlight the complexities of negotiating identities in a postcolonial world.⁵¹ Ashima's discomfort with Sonia dating an American boy exemplifies the challenges of reconciling cultural norms.⁵² Yet, moments of connection, like the family's Durga Puja celebration, demonstrate the possibility of forging a shared identity that blends both heritages.⁵³ The Ganguli children embody this hybridity. This is revealed in the following lines;

Ashima stood at the doorway, a sari draped over her cotton pajamas, watching her children move through the familiar rituals. Despite the years, despite the miles, it felt for a moment as if they were back in Calcutta, a family observing a puja no different from the countless others they had celebrated before...⁵⁴ For the next few days, the house would be filled with the aroma of incense and spices...Gogol, despite his annoyance, found himself drawn to the activity...He felt a strange sense of belonging...⁵⁵

This passage describes the family's Durga Puja celebration, a traditional Bengali festival while Gogol might initially resist it, he experiences a sense of connection to his heritage during the event. They navigate between Bengali traditions at home and American influences at school and among their peers. This creates a sense of dislocation and disorientation, contributing to the generational conflict. For instance,

He spent his childhood shuttling between two worlds... In his Bengali world, he was Gogol, a name that felt like a

⁴⁷Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p 292.

⁴⁸Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 192

⁴⁹Ibid., p 74

⁵⁰Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p 86

⁵¹Ibid., p 3.

⁵²Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 221.

⁵³Ibid., p 142.

⁵⁴Ibid., 142

⁵⁵Ibid., p 142.

misplaced burden. In his American world, he was Nicky, a name that felt reassuringly ordinary, reassuringly American...⁵⁶ He felt like an impostor, everywhere he went...He envied those who possessed an uncomplicated sense of belonging...⁵⁷

These quotes capture Gogol's sense of dislocation and disorientation as he navigates between his Bengali upbringing and his American surroundings.

On the other hand, Ashima feels a loss of control as her children move away from their Bengali roots;

They're not Bengali anymore,' she said...Her voice trembled. They're American. They've forgotten everything⁵⁸...She felt a growing distance between herself and her children, a distance that had nothing to do with geography or miles. It was a distance of culture, of language, of unspoken expectations...⁵⁹Ashima watched them walk away, her arm stiff at her side. She felt a familiar pang, a sense of loss that had nothing to do with age or Sonia's independence, but with a loosening of the tight knot that had for so long bound their lives together.⁶⁰

This passage expresses Ashima's fear of losing her cultural identity in America and her frustration with her children's assimilation.

While Gogol's conflict is central to the novel, the focus on Moushumi, Sonia, and Gogol's college friends expands our understanding of how generational conflict and cultural navigation can manifest in different ways.⁶¹Moushumi's resistance to the expectation of an arranged marriage can be framed within the context of postcolonial feminist thought. Scholars like Spivak and others critique how colonialism often reinforced patriarchal structures within colonized societies.⁶²Moushumi's insistence on choosing her own partner challenges these long-standing power dynamics, asserting her agency over her own life. Moushumi's behavior exemplifies Bhabha's notion of mimicry with a subversive element. She adopts certain Westernized practices, like independent dating. However, she does so not so much assimilate, but to challenge the traditional expectations and power structures within her family representing a subtle form of hybridity.⁶³

⁵⁶Ibid., p 38.

⁵⁷Ibid., p 192.

⁵⁸Ibid., p 192.

⁵⁹Ibid., p 192.

⁶⁰Ibid., p 221.

⁶¹Ibid., p 145.

⁶²Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p 272.

⁶³Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*, p 86

Furthermore, her unconventional relationships also illustrate the complex power dynamics at play within diasporic families. By defying her parents' expectations, Moushumi challenges the traditional authority her parents hold as first-generation immigrants.⁶⁴ She subverts the role of the dutiful daughter, reflecting the process of mimicry where a colonized subject adopts aspects of the colonizer's culture while also asserting their own individuality. While her actions might be considered rebellious within the Bengali cultural context, they can be viewed as an assertion of individual autonomy, a concept often valued in Western societies. Postcolonial theory problematizes the idea of cultural purity or authenticity. Moushumi's choices might be perceived by her parents as a rejection of her Bengali heritage. However, her actions signify a complex negotiation of identities, rather than a simple abandonment of culture. Her hybridity is evident in her resistance to traditional norms while likely still valuing other aspects of her Bengali upbringing.

It is important to acknowledge that even with Moushumi's defiance; she continues to navigate within existing power structures. Her eventual marriage to Graham, a white American, could be interpreted as a further move towards adopting aspects of the dominant culture. This demonstrates how resistance within a postcolonial framework can be complex and multifaceted. Finally, Moushumi's trajectory in *The Namesake* offers a compelling example of how postcolonial theory helps us understand the nuances of resistance and agency within diasporic experiences. Her defiance of arranged marriage embodies a struggle for autonomy, a negotiation of power dynamics within her family, and a challenge to traditional notions of cultural authenticity. Through her choices, she offers a version of hybridity that is dynamic and assertive, highlighting the complexities faced by women navigating cultural expectations in the postcolonial world.

Sonia's trajectory in *The Namesake* stands in contrast to Gogol's struggle with bicultural identity. This is captured in the following words; "Sonia, unlike Gogol, seemed comfortable straddling both worlds...She learned Bengali with ease...yet spoke English without an accent...She was comfortable navigating both cultures".⁶⁵ This passage highlights Sonia's ability to navigate both Bengali and American customs seamlessly, representing a form of cultural hybridity.⁶⁶ She embodies a more effortless navigation of the "third space" where cultural elements are blended to create a new, unique identity.⁶⁷ Her choices in partners and career reflect a comfort with both her Bengali heritage and American upbringing, which is a more balanced form of cultural hybridity and suggesting a more integrated sense of self.

Sonia's choices can be understood through Bhabha's notion of mimicry. She might strategically adopt certain aspects of American culture, like dating

⁶⁴Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, p 42

⁶⁵Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 178

⁶⁶Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, p 36

⁶⁷Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p 37

American boys, but not necessarily to fully assimilate.⁶⁸ However, her choice of dating American boys is in conflict with her mother's expectation as captured below:

She does not understand why Sonia insists on dating this boy, her mother confided in him...Ashima believed that Sonia, unlike Gogol, had embraced all that America had to offer, and yet she was throwing it all away for a boy who did not even understand the sacrifices they had made.⁶⁹

This quote demonstrates Ashima's struggle to reconcile her traditional Bengali values with Sonia's choice to date an American boy, highlighting the challenges of cultural negotiation within the family.

Sonia's hybridity allows her to maintain a connection to her Bengali heritage without feeling the same level of alienation as her brother. Her experience also highlights how cultural hybridity can be more than just resistance to dominant culture. While Gogol's rebellion represents a rejection of his parents' expectations, Sonia seems to embrace aspects of both cultures without significant conflict. This suggests that hybridity can be a positive force, allowing individuals to create identities that draw strength from multiple cultural sources.⁷⁰ Despite her ease with blending cultures, Sonia might still experience a subtle sense of loss. Postcolonial theory emphasizes the ways in which colonized subjects grapple with the loss of their cultural heritage.⁷¹ Sonia's acceptance of American norms might signify a certain level of detachment from her parents' traditions. However, the novel does not explicitly portray her as experiencing this loss as a source of major conflict. Perhaps she finds ways to maintain some connection to her Bengali roots even without the intense struggles faced by Gogol.

Sonia's ability to navigate both cultures might also be explained by the concept of "dual consciousness", which is described as the experience of Black Americans existing within two distinct cultural spheres.⁷² "Sonia, unlike Gogol seemed to effortlessly navigate both worlds. She spoke Bengali at home, but at school, she slipped seamlessly into American slang, peppering her speech with 'like' and 'you know'".⁷³ Sonia, though not experiencing racial marginalization in the same way, embodies a similar ability to hold onto elements of both Bengali and American culture, selectively appropriating aspects that resonate with her. It is also important to consider the power dynamics at play in Sonia's hybridity. Her chosen partner might be Bengali or American, influencing the specific cultural mix she navigates. Additionally, her career path could reveal a preference for one culture's values over the other. However, compared to

⁶⁸ Ibid., p 86

⁶⁹ Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 221

⁷⁰ Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, p 62.

⁷¹ Said, *Orientalism*, p34.

⁷² Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p 2.

⁷³ Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 112

Gogol's outright defiance, Sonia's approach suggests a more subtle negotiation of these power dynamics within her identity formation. On the whole, Sonia's character in *The Namesake* offers a valuable counterpoint to Gogol's experience. Through her, Jhumpa Lahiri demonstrates that cultural hybridity can be a relatively smooth process for some second-generation immigrants.

Moving on, the brief glimpses into the lives of Gogol's college friends serve as powerful illustrations of the concept of cultural hybridity in postcolonial theory and highlight the diversity of hybrid experiences among second-generation immigrants. This multiplicity mirrors the reality that there is no single way to navigate the complexities of bicultural identities. As Bhabha argues, colonization disrupts traditional cultural identities, creating a "third space" where individuals negotiate new self-understandings that blend elements of both their colonizer's and colonized cultures.⁷⁴ In *The Namesake*, Gogol's friends represent a spectrum of this hybrid experience. Some embody a greater degree of assimilation, adopting primarily American cultural practices. Others might demonstrate different forms of hybridity, holding onto specific aspects of their heritage, forming a unique blend of cultures within their identities.⁷⁵

The friends' varied experiences also resonate with the notion of mimicry explored by Bhabha. He suggests that the colonized subject may adopt the colonizer's practices, but often subverts their meaning.⁷⁶ For instance, a friend who readily adopts American clothing and slang could be seen as mimicking the dominant culture. However, this act could also be a form of resistance, a way of signaling their independence from their parents' traditional expectations. The complexities of bicultural identity can also be understood through the lens of postcolonial theory's focus on the colonized subject's struggle with the loss of identity.⁷⁷ While the friends seem comfortable within their American surroundings, they might still grapple with a sense of dislocation from their parents' heritage. This is particularly evident in Gogol's case, who actively rejects his Bengali name, but later feels a pull towards understanding his cultural roots.

Postcolonial theory also emphasizes the ongoing power dynamics between colonizer and colonized cultures. Even in a second-generation context, like Gogol's friends, these power dynamics might continue to influence their experiences. For example, some friends might feel pressure to excel academically, mirroring the historical emphasis on education as a path to social mobility for immigrants coming from colonized nations.⁷⁸ Others might navigate societal expectations that position them as perpetual outsiders, despite being American-born. Overall, the portrayal of Gogol's college friends in *The Namesake* offers valuable insights into the complexities of bicultural identity formation within the framework of postcolonial theory. Their lives highlight the diverse ways in which second-generation immigrants negotiate cultural hybridity, mimicry, and the search for belonging within the lingering power

⁷⁴Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p 37.

⁷⁵Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p 273.

⁷⁶Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p 86.

⁷⁷Said, *Orientalism*, p 34.

⁷⁸Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p 273.

dynamics of a postcolonial world. While the novel primarily focuses on Gogol's journey, these glimpses serve as powerful reminders of the multifaceted experiences of individuals navigating the "third space" between cultures.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* explores the complexities of family dynamics within the context of post colonialism. However, *The Namesake* also offers glimpses of potential reconciliation. While Gogol initially strives to distance himself from his Bengali heritage, the novel concludes with hints of reconciliation. This shift can be understood through the lens of postcolonial theory, particularly the concept of reclaiming the narrative. For instance, on his father's death: "The realization seeps into him slowly... that his father, who once refused to pronounce his name, loved him unreservedly, in a way he can never fully understand".⁷⁹ This points to Gogol's newfound understanding of the love connected to his heritage, hinting at his yearning for that connection. On Gogol's later realization, he says:

Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he lives, Gogol Ganguli will, once and for all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so cease to exist. Yet the thought of this eventual demise provides no sense of victory, only a profound sadness.⁸⁰

This reflects his later realization that his given name held a connection to his family and identity that he regrets severing. Colonialism often involved the suppression of colonized cultures. Gogol's initial rejection of his Bengali name, a symbol of his heritage, reflects this struggle. His insistence on being called Nikhil represents an attempt to write himself into a new narrative, one free from the constraints imposed by his parents' cultural background. However, as the novel progresses, Gogol experiences a shift. His journey to India can be interpreted as a quest to understand his parents' past and his own cultural roots. Gogol's journey can be seen as a move towards reconciliation with his parents and his heritage. He begins to reclaim the narrative of his identity on his own terms, acknowledging the complex influences that shape him. While in India,

Gogol looked around the room, at the photographs lining the walls, at the bookshelves crammed with Bengali novels his father would never read again. He felt a surprising connection to this place, a sense of belonging he hadn't anticipated.⁸¹

This quote highlights Gogol's newfound appreciation for his heritage. While he might not fully embrace the traditional Bengali identity his parents envisioned, his visit to India allows him to forge a personal connection to his roots. This act suggests a possible bridge between the generations, a recognition of the complex cultural tapestry that shapes their identities. Thus, the ending of *The Namesake* offers a hopeful glimpse of reconciliation for diasporic families

⁷⁹Lahiri, *The Namesake*, p 287.

⁸⁰Ibid., p 288.

⁸¹ Ibid., p 284

navigating cultural tensions. Through a postcolonial lens, his path as a reclamation of the silenced narrative becomes obvious, creating a space where both the colonizer's and colonized cultures can coexist within the complex formation of personal identity.

Thus, postcolonial theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing the generational conflict in *The Namesake*. The novel reveals how the legacies of colonialism continue to shape the lives of immigrants and their children, leading to a complex struggle for identity and belonging within a new cultural landscape. However, the novel also suggests the potential for a bridge to be built, a space where both generations can find a sense of belonging within their cultural hybridity. The novel also explores the consequences of generational conflicts for the characters' emotional well-being, familial relationships, and sense of belonging. It considers how moments of conflict and rupture ultimately contribute to moments of growth, reconciliation, and understanding within the family.

Conclusion

This study has explored the generational conflict within the Ganguli family in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* through the lens of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory offers a rich framework for understanding the generational conflicts in *The Namesake*. The power dynamics between the dominant and marginalized cultures, the act of naming as a form of resistance, and the concept of hybridity all contribute to the tensions within the Ganguli family. By examining the struggles between Ashoke and Ashima, the immigrant parents, and their American-born children, Gogol and Sonia, we gain a deeper understanding of the anxieties and complexities inherent in the diasporic experience.

The analysis reveals how power dynamics, a key concept in postcolonial theory, influence the family dynamic. Ashoke and Ashima, clinging to their Bengali heritage, hold a position of authority based on their cultural capital in their homeland. However, their children navigate American society with greater fluency, challenging established power structures and yearning for agency over their own identities. This mirrors the postcolonial concept of mimicry, where the colonized subject adopts but subverts the colonizer's practices. Furthermore, the experiences of the Ganguli family highlight the concept of cultural hybridity. Gogol and Sonia embody a blend of Bengali traditions and American customs, reflecting the inevitable mixing of cultures in a postcolonial world. However, this hybridity creates tension. Gogol's act of renaming himself "Nikhil" exemplifies his rejection of the imposed Bengali identity and his struggle to forge a new, Americanized self. This resonates with the concept of loss of identity that postcolonial theory explores, as colonized subjects grapple with the effects of cultural displacement.

Ultimately, *The Namesake* portrays the ongoing negotiations of power, identity, and belonging within a diasporic family. By employing a postcolonial framework, one gains a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the Ganguli family as they navigate their lives between two cultures. While tensions and misunderstandings persist, the novel offers glimpses of reconciliation,

suggesting the possibility of forging a shared identity that acknowledges both heritage and the realities of their American lives. Overall, the paper synthesizes key insights gleaned from the analysis of generational conflicts in *The Namesake* and underscores the novel's contribution to our understanding of diaspora experiences. It emphasizes the importance of empathy, cultural understanding, and intergenerational dialogue in fostering harmony and resilience within immigrant families.

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