

GENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND ALIENATION IN LAHIRI 'S NOVELS

Smriti Rani^{1*}, Dr. Shiv Kumar Yadav²

¹*Research scholar, Patliputra University, Email - smritirani488@gmail.com*

²*Professor, Patliputra University, college of commerce, arts and science, Email: drsky1965@gmail.com*

***Corresponding Author:**

**smritirani488@gmail.com*

Jhumpa Lahiri's works, particularly *The Namesake* and *The Lowland*, explore the profound psychological and emotional impacts of immigration on identity, specifically focusing on second-generation immigrants. Her novels examine the intergenerational struggles and psychological residue that shape the identities of immigrants, navigating between their inherited cultural values and the pressures to assimilate into their host country. Lahiri's portrayal of second-generation immigrants reveals a complex dynamic where nostalgia, cultural dislocation, and the sense of rootlessness play crucial roles in shaping identity. Through her characters, Lahiri provides insight into the fluidity of immigrant identity and the emotional alienation that comes with the search for belonging. At the core of Lahiri's exploration lies the question of identity construction, as her characters struggle with a fractured sense of self, a product of their parents' migration and their own experiences in a new land. Lahiri's narratives delve into themes of nostalgia and trauma, not just as personal experiences but as generational forces that affect the second generation. Such characters as Gogol Ganguli in *The Namesake* represent the profound feeling of alienation and inner conflict that is inherent in the second-generation immigrant condition. The dislocation arising from the gap between two worlds—Bengali and American—is a constant preoccupation that affects the character's inner life, sense of self, and relationships. As a result, Lahiri's novels serve as a deep exploration of the emotional and psychological landscapes of those who must navigate dual identities, balancing between their parents' past and their own present. Through these narratives, Lahiri asks critical questions about the formation of identity in a diasporic context. Can one ever fully reconcile multiple identities? How do you come to terms with the trauma inherited from what you have seen through your parents' experiences, more so if what they have been through is displacement, loss, and violence? The condition of second-generation migrants underlies all of Lahiri's work and provides an optic through which to better view the protracted emotion and cultural unease of beings suspended between worlds.

Overview of Lahiri's Approach to Second-Generation Immigrant Identity

Rather than presenting identity as a static construct, Lahiri uses characters like Subhash and Bela to explore how identity is inherited, interrupted, and self-authored in silence. Bela's gradual alienation from both her mother, Gauri, and the family's hidden political past underscores the emotional residue of unspoken trauma. Subhash's inability to fully disclose the truth to Bela is not negligence, but a reflection of the diasporic dilemma: protecting a child from the very history that defines them. Lahiri's narrative thereby illustrates that second-generation identity is shaped not only by visible cultural practices, but by concealed truths and narrative absences (Lahiri, *The Lowland*, 67). In *The Namesake*, the main character, Gogol Ganguli, grapples with the supremacy of his Bengali heritage and being American. The conflict in his life is also mirrored in his name, which he had been given by his father and later becomes a symbol of individual alienation. Disowning his name and therefore his heritage by Gogol is a poignant metaphor for second-generation immigrants, who are caught between the desire to integrate into the host culture and the allure of their family and cultural heritage (Akhter 4). As he grows older, Gogol's journey reflects the struggles faced by second-generation immigrants to reconcile these identities while grappling with societal expectations. His emotional alienation, internal conflict, and search for identity are central to Lahiri's portrayal of the immigrant condition, where the younger generation must redefine themselves in the face of inherited traditions and personal desires. In *The Lowland*, Jhumpa Lahiri unravels the generational legacy of political trauma through the bond between two brothers, Udayan and Subhash. Udayan's radical engagement with the Naxalite movement in Bengal and his subsequent death form a pivotal rupture in the narrative. Subhash, the elder brother, emigrates to the United States, where he chooses to raise Udayan's daughter as his own. This act reflects not just familial responsibility, but the quiet emotional burdens that migrate along with the body. Lahiri's treatment of this relationship challenges binary notions of fatherhood and generational inheritance by showing how ideological commitment and grief ripple across kinship structures, even among members of the same generation (Lahiri, *The Lowland*, 45). The second-generation immigrant's struggle with identity is not only predestined by the past, but also by the reception by the host society. Lahiri explores this issue in *The Namesake* through Gogol's constant struggle with his name and the resulting stereotypes. Gogol's discomfort with his name, ethnicity, and his parents' traditions is a personal as well as a social issue. At large, he is always reconciling between identities imposed upon him and his own emerging self-concept (Brah, 1996). The immigrant identity, for Lahiri's characters, becomes a space of continual reinvention, where one's sense of self is in constant flux, shifting between cultures and generations. In *The Lowland*, Lahiri also explores how second-generation immigrants are often seen as "hyphenated" individuals—caught between two worlds, often expected to embrace both while also being unable to fully access either. Lahiri's characters embody this fluidity, particularly as they try to navigate conflicting expectations from their parents' generation and from the dominant culture.

Lahiri's construction of second-generation immigrant identity is both political and deeply personal, portraying how characters like Gogol in *The Namesake* and Bela in *The Lowland* are shaped not merely by inherited traditions, but by

emotional landscapes marked by silence, longing, and fragmented memory. These are not characters working within a straightforward binary of cultures but instead are trapped in a perpetual negotiation between the unspoken expectations of parents and their own nascent desires. Their identities are not bequeathed intact but constructed from cultural remnants, affective withholding, and half-told pasts. In *The Namesake*, Gogol's unease with his name—bestowed upon him hastily by his father after a traumatic event—emerges as a potent metaphor for cultural dislocation. For years, he views it as an unnecessary burden, a marker of difference that distances him from his American peers. The name "Gogol" embodies his hybrid existence: neither fully Indian nor fully American, and never able to feel entirely at home in either space. Yet, following the death of his father, Ashoke, Gogol begins to reassess the meaning behind the name. It ceases to be a symbol of shame and becomes instead a bridge to memory and legacy—a subtle reconciliation with his roots, achieved not through ritual, but through quiet reflection and personal growth (Lahiri, *The Namesake*, 102). Similarly, in *The Lowland*, Bela represents a more visceral embodiment of inherited trauma. The absence of her biological father, Udayan, and the emotional withdrawal of her mother, Gauri, leave her suspended in a liminal emotional space. Raised by Subhash, who shields her from the truth about her origins, Bela's sense of identity is shaped not by overt instruction but by the absence of narrative. She is left to navigate a familial legacy constructed from silence and omission. Her eventual estrangement from her adoptive father and rejection of traditional structures reflect a conscious effort to author her own identity—one informed by, but not enslaved to, the emotional and political voids passed down to her (Lahiri, *The Lowland*, 138). Lahiri's exploration of second-generation identity thus transcends cultural binaries. It focuses on the emotional inheritance of memory, secrecy, and unspoken trauma. Her characters' development reflects how second-generation immigrants must decode not only external cultural expectations, but also internal familial silences that shape how they come to see themselves in the world.

Themes of Nostalgia, Rootlessness, and Belonging

In Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction, nostalgia, rootlessness, and the pursuit of belonging emerge as interwoven themes that shape the emotional landscapes of both first- and second-generation immigrants. These are not simply abstract conditions—they are embedded in everyday choices, silences, and identities negotiated through cultural ambivalence. Lahiri's characters do not mourn only the geographical loss of homeland. They mourn the untranslatable parts of their lives that cannot be carried forward—rituals, relationships, languages, and emotional codes. In *The Namesake*, Gogol's resistance to his name symbolizes more than embarrassment. It reflects his internal dislocation—caught between the heritage of his Bengali parents and his desire to assimilate into American modernity. His name is an artifact of the old world he does not fully understand, yet it becomes a tether to memory and grief when his father dies. This evolution marks Gogol's reluctant reconciliation with his fragmented cultural identity (Lahiri, *The Namesake*, 102). Lahiri does not frame this nostalgia as regressive. Rather, it is layered: a longing for emotional coherence, not simply for a place. It is an ache for narrative continuity in a life interrupted by migration and silence. In *The Lowland*, Lahiri expands this inquiry into intergenerational memory. Subhash's migration to the United States after his brother Udayan's politically motivated death is not just an escape—it becomes a burdened act of preservation. His decision to raise Bela as his own daughter creates a hidden lineage shaped by sacrifice and omission. Bela grows up estranged from her history, experiencing a sense of rootlessness without knowing its full origin. Her alienation from both her adoptive father and her absentee mother, Gauri, illustrates how emotional detachment and unresolved grief compound over generations (Lahiri, *The Lowland*, 138). Rootlessness, in Lahiri's world, is not just spatial—it is psychological. Her characters are not simply exiles from countries, but from intimacy, clarity, and belonging. The sense of being "in between" persists even when they are physically settled. Lahiri offers no facile resolutions. Instead, she portrays belonging as a negotiation—something constructed moment by moment, often in private acts of remembrance, solitude, or silent resistance. Ultimately, her fiction critiques the myth that identity can be inherited cleanly. Instead, it reveals that what is inherited are fractured memories, unresolved traumas, and the continual labor of making one's place in a world that sees the diasporic subject as perpetually peripheral.

Lahiri lays out belonging, rather than as an attained status, but as a changing, frequently deceptive, emotional negotiation that traverses generations and geographies. Her diasporic characters do not have a secure understanding of home, identity, or cultural grounding. Rather, they reside in tension between what is inherited and what is imagined, what is recalled and what is never named. Belonging, in Lahiri's fictional world, is not tied to land or community, but to moments of self-recognition, quiet acceptance, and sometimes painful detachment. In *The Namesake*, Gogol's relationship with his name serves as a microcosm of his larger identity crisis. Assigned in a moment of emergency, the name becomes a source of shame and alienation during his adolescence. For Gogol, the name is an unwanted relic of his parents' world—a barrier to fitting into American society. Yet, after the death of his father, the very name he resented transforms into a fragile link to memory, grief, and love. He begins to read Nikolai Gogol, the Russian author, as a means of understanding the man his father once was, and in doing so, begins a journey toward reconciling the disparate parts of himself. His eventual acceptance of his name does not signal a return to tradition but a more nuanced embrace of complexity—a reluctant acknowledgment that identity can be grounded in contradiction (Lahiri, *The Namesake*, 102, 107). In *The Lowland*, Lahiri expands this narrative of fractured belonging through Subhash and Bela. Subhash migrates to the United States seeking intellectual freedom and physical distance from the violence that claimed his brother's life. However, the trauma does not fade with migration. Instead, it reconfigures itself in his role as Bela's father. Subhash is not her biological parent, yet he raises her with deep ethical commitment, choosing silence over confrontation about her origins. This silence, though protective, also becomes a barrier to intimacy. Bela, unaware of her true parentage and alienated from her emotionally distant mother, grows up navigating a void—a place where history should have been. Her sense of belonging is built not from tradition, but from gaps, omissions, and emotional instincts that she must piece together herself (Lahiri, *The Lowland*, 138, 144). Lahiri's characters do not "arrive" at belonging in a conventional sense. Rather, they circle around it, step into

it tentatively, and at times reject it altogether. Their lives reflect the emotional labor required to craft an identity from inherited silence, fragmented memory, and diasporic complexity. The search for belonging is, in Lahiri's vision, not a destination but a slow act of construction—done in solitude, grief, and small acts of narrative reclamation. Her fiction offers a powerful critique of the myth of wholeness, replacing it with a vision of identity as an evolving mosaic, shaped by both presence and absence.

Analysis of Generational Trauma and Its Impacts on Identity Construction

Lahiri's exploration of generational trauma reveals how emotional histories—especially those left unspoken—shape the identities of second-generation immigrants. Rather than presenting trauma as a single event, she portrays it as a lingering psychological atmosphere that influences familial roles, cultural affiliations, and emotional availability. In *The Namesake*, Gogol Ganguli's discomfort with his name represents a symbolic refusal of his parents' past—a past rooted in displacement, loss, and cultural rigidity. Ashoke and Ashima carry with them the emotional residue of migration: the pain of leaving India, the struggle to belong in a foreign land, and the quiet grief of cultural disconnect. These emotions, though rarely verbalized, create an environment that profoundly impacts Gogol's sense of self. His rejection of his name, and later, his reluctant embrace of it, reflects a deeper oscillation between distancing himself from trauma and eventually confronting it (Lahiri, *The Namesake*, 104). However, this confrontation does not come in the form of grand reconciliation. It is slow, fragmented, and emotional. Following Ashoke's death, Gogol begins to reflect on the symbolic meaning of the name and the history it carries. He realizes that while he cannot fully embody his parents' past, he cannot discard it either. Lahiri uses this evolution to show how second-generation immigrants must make sense of a legacy they did not choose, yet cannot escape. The trauma is not in the memory of violence but in the emotional silences—the rituals without meaning, the languages unspoken, the expectations never explained. In *The Lowland*, Lahiri presents generational trauma through more overt political stakes. Udayan's involvement in the Naxalite movement and his subsequent death leave a vacuum that shapes the lives of Gauri, Subhash, and Bela. Subhash, though not ideologically involved, inherits the emotional responsibility for both Gauri and Bela. His grief over his brother's death is compounded by guilt and obligation. Though he migrates to the United States, he cannot escape the trauma. It manifests not in ideology but in emotional restraint. He becomes a caregiver shaped by loss, unable to fully express affection, caught in the quiet repetition of sacrifice (Lahiri, *The Lowland*, 122). Bela, growing up in this atmosphere of veiled grief and concealed lineage, embodies the second generation's estrangement from history. The truth of her parentage and the silence surrounding it create a rupture in her identity. Lahiri does not offer resolution. Instead, she reveals that trauma continues not through storytelling but through the absence of it. Identity, for the second generation, is not only shaped by the past but also by what has been left unsaid. The trauma of migration and its intergenerational effects also surface in Lahiri's exploration of gender roles within the immigrant family. The women in *Desirable Daughters* are particularly affected by the emotional legacies of their mothers' and grandmothers' lives. The generational trauma experienced by these women is rooted in the limitations placed on them by tradition and their ancestors' sacrifices. For instance, Tara, who is one of the female protagonists, needs to tread her own path while also complying with the expectations placed on her by her family's past. Tara's struggles to reconcile modernity and tradition uncover the psychological influence of generational trauma, as she seeks to find her independence while struggling with her cultural heritage (Chatterjee 65). The trauma of gender roles is not only individual but collective, as it is passed down through the generations, creating a cycle of conflict between personal desire and familial obligation. In all of Lahiri's works, the characters' struggle with generational trauma is closely linked to their search for belonging and identity. This trauma affects their emotional worlds, typically preventing them from ever completely integrating into the surrounding society. The children of immigrants, even though born in the new country, are stuck within a liminal identity in which they do not quite belong to either the parents' culture or the culture in which they are brought up. Their inherited trauma from their parents' displacement, alienation, and homeland loss inform their understanding of who they are and where they belong in the world. Their identity formation is a continuous negotiation of these competing forces, struggling to reconcile their ambivalent cultural heritage amidst the emotional wounds left by their parents' histories. Lahiri's nuanced portrayal of generational trauma reveals its profound influence on identity construction, showing that the trauma of one generation does not end but is passed on, shaping the psychological and emotional lives of subsequent generations. By exploring the effects of generational trauma in her characters' lives, Lahiri highlights the challenges faced by second-generation immigrants, who must navigate not only their own sense of identity but also the emotional legacies of their parents and ancestors (Gómez 34). The theme of generational trauma, therefore, is central to Lahiri's exploration of the complexities of identity formation within the diasporic experience.

Nostalgia and Rootlessness in The Namesake (The Immigrant Experience)

In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, themes of nostalgia, rootlessness, and belonging intertwine to explore the complex immigrant experience, particularly the challenges of second-generation identity. Through the character of Gogol Ganguli, Lahiri delves into the psychological and emotional landscape of an individual caught between two cultures. The conflict among these identities informs the characters' life stories, as they navigate the interstitial spaces of tradition, modernity, and memory. The chapter will address the second-generation immigrant experience as influenced by the first-generation immigrant experience, second-generation identity formation, emotional alienation, and the power of nostalgia shaping the immigrant narrative.

The Impact of First-Generation Immigrant Experiences on Second-Generation Identity

The immigrant experience is marked by deeply complex struggles with identity, and first-generation as well as second-generation immigrants both undergo these struggles forcefully. The clash between first-generation immigrant experience

and second-generation identity formation is at the heart of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. The first-generation immigrants like Ashoke and Ashima carry the psychological burden of having left their nation behind, while their second-generation children like Gogol grapple with their parents' values as well as those of the world they are born into. This is a struggle that creates a dissonance of identity in the sense that the immigrant children are exposed to the challenge of bringing together the values of their homelands and the cultural norms of their host countries. It is always the experience of the immigrants of the first generation as an experience of loss—loss of home, family, and cultural identity. For Ashoke and Ashima, it is not a physical journey of migration to America but also an emotional one, leaving behind their comfort world for pastures new. Ashoke's harrowing experience of an horrific train crash in India does make his immigration process more complex. His survival is symbolic of the ordeals of most immigrants who have to rebuild their lives in a foreign country carrying with them the weight of their past. Ashoke's homesickness for Calcutta and his cultural affinity with Bengali traditions serve as an anchor, holding him down to earth even amidst the intrigues of immigrant life in America. His emotional predisposition in favor of his culture is seen in his wishes to pass on these beliefs to his children, especially his son, Gogol (Lahiri, *The Namesake*). Second-generation children like Gogol, on the other hand, are generally caught in a crossfire of intersecting identities. While their parents are clinging on to the past and are eager to safeguard their cultural heritage, the kids born and brought up in a foreign country cannot construct their identities based on a system that is both conditioned by their parents' origin and determined by the environment of America. Gogol's identity is split, as he cannot connect with either his Bengali culture or his American schoolmates. He renounces the cultural heritage that his parents so desperately want to retain, e.g., his name, a constant reminder of his parents' history. This renunciation is evidence of Gogol's defiance of forces of conformity to his parents' will and his struggle to form a distinct identity from the Bengali as well as American story. The rivalry between both generations is also seen in the way Bengali and American cultures affect the life of Ashoke and Gogol. Ashoke, despite being settled in America, still maintains his Bengali culture. His memories of Calcutta and his motivation to preserve the Bengali culture, like celebrating Bengali festivities, are all his efforts to retain some relationship with his past. Ashoke's identification with his past is not merely an act of nostalgia but an act of wanting to hold onto his sense of self in a strange land. He sees his culture as a source of strength, and he attempts in his efforts to impart this strength to his children (Lahiri, *The Namesake*).

Gogol, however, is unable to comprehend the significance of his heritage. The name that his parents give him, a token that symbolizes their Bengali heritage, is a source of contention for Gogol. For him, the name is a reminder of his parents' immigrant past and is a source of alienation from the cultural baggage associated with it. The insistence of his name by Gogol and his desire to become more "American" are expressions of his attempt to set himself on his own terms and chart his own destiny. But the refusal does cause an alienation, for he is poised between two worlds, not belonging to either of them fully. His journey of self-discovery in the novel is to learn to accept both his heritage and his uniqueness, to realize that he can't be reduced to either his Bengali roots or his American environment (Akhter 4). The tension between first-generation immigrants' allegiance to their homeland and second-generation children's necessity to belong in the adopted society reflects the greater tension of identity formation in the immigrant condition. For second-generation immigrants, their compulsion to belong to their generation constantly conflicts with the cultural and emotional ties their parents hold dear. Identity search is thus an ongoing balance between the old world and its cultural expectations and the new world of freedom. This conflict is not limited to Gogol but the general theme of generation conflict throughout immigrant families, wherein history is at once a support and tension point (Lahiri, *The Namesake*).

Emotional Alienation: The Conflict Between Tradition and Modernity

In *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri dramatizes the psychological and emotional disconnection felt by second-generation immigrants torn between the cultural heritage of their parents and the modernity of their host culture. This tension is most vividly presented through Gogol Ganguli, whose quest for self is characterized by his refusal to accept the Bengali culture his parents love, combined with his inability to join fully American society. Lahiri's nuanced portrayal of emotional alienation highlights the complexities of belonging and identity for immigrants in a foreign land, where the clash between tradition and modernity becomes a battleground for the self. Gogol's sense of alienation is evident from the beginning of the novel. His given name, which his father Ashoke had selected to commemorate their Bengali heritage, serves as a potent reminder of his disconnection from the culture of his parents and also from the dominant American culture. The name Gogol, named after the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, is one that is imbued with a cultural weight that Gogol is unable to connect with, and it becomes something that he resents. His refusal of his name is not so much a wish for a Westernized identity as an attempt to break free from the cultural heritage assigned to him by his parents. Gogol's discomfort at his name initially is symptomatic of his wider alienation, as he does not feel he belongs to either the Bengali or American world completely (Chatterjee 2022). This emotional estrangement is added to by Gogol's refusal to accept the values of his parents. Ashoke and Ashima, being first-generation immigrants, have their Bengali roots, which they bring along to America. For them, holding on to cultural rituals like celebrating Bengali festivals, eating Bengali food, and speaking Bengali in the home are means of holding on to their identity and making sure that their child does not forget its roots. Yet, to Gogol, such practices represent a way of life he does not wish to live. The reminder all the time of his parents' traditional ways, added to the pressure of meeting the expectations of his heritage, brings an emotional division between him and his parents. He is bound by the cultural constraints that they force on him, making his identity development all the more complicated. The struggle between Gogol's need to create an identity in America and his parents' push to continue Bengali customs mirrors the broader conflict between tradition and modernity that pervades the immigrant experience. As a member of American society, Gogol is surrounded by modern values such as individualism, freedom of expression, and the pursuit of individual happiness. These values conflict with the communal identity and communal ties that underlie Bengali culture. Gogol's peers, for instance, live lives that appear to be quite different from

his own, with a focus on individual achievement and the abandonment of conventional responsibilities. This contrast compounds Gogol's feelings of alienation because, in his opinion, neither the conventional Bengali life nor the American culture can best fit his identity (Gómez 2024).

Gogol's emotional estrangement also expresses itself in his relationships with people. His romantic relations with Maxine specifically symbolize his endeavor to adopt American values, yet they are characterized by a profound sense of inner conflict. Maxine, being an heiress from a rich American family, personifies the life Gogol wants yet rejects. His affair with her is ultimately unfulfilling, in that he cannot shake the cultural baggage that still defines him. His sense of responsibility to his family and his heritage keeps him bound to his past, so he cannot ever quite seize the liberty represented by Maxine. Gogol's failure to come to terms with these two opposing sides of his existence—his Bengali origin and his wish to integrate into American society—is what ultimately causes emotional detachment in his relationships (Mukherjee 1989). This emotional disconnection hits rock bottom when Gogol, after his father Ashoke's passing, is finally able to come to terms with how he feels towards his name and his heritage. In a poignant moment of introspection, Gogol realizes the importance of his name and the relevance it holds to his father's history. This epiphany is a turning point in Gogol's identity formation, as he starts embracing the intricacies of his bicultural identity. His quest for acceptance is representative of the larger immigrant experience, wherein second-generation immigrants are forced to find a balance between their parents' traditions and the expectations of the contemporary world (Chatterjee 2022). The Namesake effectively depicts the emotional dislocation that second-generation immigrants undergo as they grapple with balancing the traditions of their parents and the modern, individualistic values of the world they live in. Gogol's journey reflects the universal experience of those who live between two worlds, neither of which fully accommodates their complex identities. Lahiri's exploration of emotional alienation in the context of immigration serves as a poignant commentary on the challenges of belonging, identity, and the negotiation between tradition and modernity.

Nostalgia as a Driving Force in the Novel

In *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri employs nostalgia as a common thread that underlies the immigrant experience, in particular the emotional journey of second-generation immigrants like Gogol Ganguli. Nostalgia, often blended with the immigrant's homesickness for the past and for home, is more than a bittersweet homeland nostalgia for something lost, but also a force with many facets affecting the individuation, identity construction, and reunions of the characters with their double cultural heritage. In *Ashoke, Ashima, and Gogol*, Lahiri presents nostalgia as a survival strategy and way of dealing with the psychological tension of displacement. The first- and second-generation characters of the novel are caught between remembrances of their native land and the harshness of the current reality in America, and the comingling of past and present is central to an appreciation of their inner conflict. For the first-generation immigrants, particularly Ashoke and Ashima, nostalgia is a process of accommodation for the alienation they suffer in their new home. Ashoke's memories of Kolkata are closely associated with the traumatic event of his family being lost in a killing accident in India. They are painful memories but also a way of holding onto his grip over his origins. His homesickness, however, is not based on nostalgic recollections alone but is intricately associated with him wanting to preserve the quintessential about his existence. Ashoke's recollections of Kolkata are frequent and are linked with rituals such as preparing traditional Bengali cuisine, celebrating festivals, and communicating in Bengali with his wife. For Ashoke and Ashima, these nostalgic rituals are an attempt at balancing the emotional displacement that they experience in America (Gómez 2024). Ashima, particularly, has such a strong experience of nostalgia because her remembrances of Calcutta are not simply about cultural practice but about family, neighborhood, and the security of the life she had known. Lahiri effectively captures this tug of the heart in Ashima's failure to adapt to American ways. She yearns to listen to the sounds of her home, savor the taste of food, and feel the familiarity of streets she had walked. For Ashima, nostalgia is the connective thread to the past for her, and it is the emotional energy that ties her to her heritage as she slowly becomes accustomed to residing in America. Nostalgia is not one-way emotional experience in *The Namesake*, however; it is also an evoking force for Gogol, the second-generation son, but of a more nuanced kind. Nostalgia for Gogol is not necessarily an easy desire to go back to India; rather, it becomes a tool of self-discovery as he struggles with his identity. Initially, Gogol feels nothing but contempt for his parents' culture, lifestyle, and language. An urge to belong to the American society makes him attempt to disassociate himself from his Bengali heritage. However, with age and also with personal loss, i.e., his father's death, Gogol's vision of nostalgia is not the same anymore. He understands that his own heritage is part and parcel of his being, and that the previously mentioned burdensome nostalgia turns into an anchor to hold onto. The moments that he returns to his family's origins, either by visiting India or learning about his father's past, allow him to see not alienation but a tool towards self-knowing (Mukherjee 2002).

The role of nostalgia within the novel is not simply yearning for the past but grappling with the emotional complexity of being an immigrant. For Gogol, nostalgia is an integral part of his rediscovery of identity. His emotional journey is about embracing the significance of his name, his heritage, and the immigrant's life that shaped him. This transformation in his perception of nostalgia is his coming of age, because he no longer sees it as a vulnerability but as a wellspring of strength that binds him to his roots and yet allows him to engage the future. In addition, Lahiri uses the theme of nostalgia to probe the broader immigrant experience, that is, the psychological dislocation of those suspended between two worlds. The first-generation characters are rooted in homesickness for their native land, while the second-generation characters like Gogol struggle with belonging to a strange world. Nostalgia therefore acts as a mediating factor between the two generations, where each character's attachment to the past dictates their sense of belonging and identity in the present (Gómez 2024). Nostalgia in *The Namesake* is an omnipotent feeling that determines the emotional existence of the characters, particularly those experiencing the ambiguities of immigration and identity. For Ashoke and Ashima, nostalgia is a life-giving lifeline which anchors them in spite of the dislocation of being foreign, while for Gogol, nostalgia is a malleable concept which

transforms from an emblem of alienation to a journey towards self-discovery. Lahiri's portrayal of nostalgia is not merely sentimental but serves as a critical tool for examining the dynamics of cultural belonging, generational trauma, and the immigrant experience.

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