

Hyphenated Identity: Indian -American Selfhood in Gogol Ganguli

Dr. Neha

Extension Lecturer, Dept of English, Pt. NRS Govt College, Rohtak, Haryana

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Abstract

Individuals who have experienced diaspora face a difficult negotiation between their cultural legacy and their own unique self-definition. The term of hyphenated identity encapsulates this complex interaction. Gogol Ganguli, the protagonist of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, is a striking embodiment of the Indian-American identity that the author explores in her work. The life of Gogol is a reflection of the contradictions that come with living between two different cultural worlds: the traditional Indian ideals maintained by his parents and the contemporary, individualistic attitude of American culture. His peculiar name, which is borrowed from the Russian author Nikolai Gogol, becomes a prominent emblem of his shattered identity and the internal battle that he is experiencing. Through this research, the author investigates how Gogol's evolving connection with his name reflects his battle to accept himself and to feel like he belongs. His decision to forego his given name and subsequent adoption of the name "Nikhil" is indicative of his efforts to integrate into the culture of the United States of America while simultaneously cutting himself off from his ancestry. Despite this, the shift does not help him overcome his identity issue; rather, it heightens his awareness of the cultural dislocation he is experiencing. Throughout his life, Gogol progressively comes to grips with the meaning of his dual personality. This is accomplished via significant life experiences including as familial ties, love interactions, and personal losses. It is the contention of this dissertation that Gogol's trip exemplifies the fluid and dynamic nature of hyphenated identity, which is characterised by the fact that selfhood is not fixed but rather is continually contested. It is important to note that Lahiri emphasises that the process of reconciling cultures does not include the erasing of one identity in favour of another, but rather requires the acceptance of many identities. In the end, Gogol's acceptance of his name represents a more comprehensive sense of identity as being multifaceted, hybrid, and shifting over time. This understanding is reflective of the lived reality of the Indian-American diaspora.

Keywords: *Hyphenated; Indian -American; Selfhood; Gogol*

1. Introduction

There has been a substantial increase in the amount of scholarly attention paid to the notion of hyphenated identity within the setting of diaspora studies, particularly in the context of investigating the lived experiences of immigrant populations who are navigating between cultures. In this context, hyphenation is a sign that represents both connection and separation, representing the dual awareness of persons who belong to two different cultural realms at the same time. One school of thought contends that identities of this kind are not static but rather are continually moulded by the interplay of social, cultural, and historical forces (Hall, 1990; Bhabha, 1994). In the case of Indian-Americans, this dualism frequently takes the form of a conflict between the traditional demands of the family and the principles of an individualistic Western culture.

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A captivating tale that portrays the difficulties of diasporic identity via the life of Gogol Ganguli is presented by Jhumpa Lahiri in her novel *The Namesake*, which was published in 2003. Gogol is a representation of the problems that second-generation immigrants have when they are forced to reconcile their inherited cultural identity with the constraints of assimilation. Gogol was born in the United States to parents who became immigrants from Bengal. Lahiri (2003) provides an illustration of how Gogol's childhood is characterised by a continuous conflict between the Indian traditions that are perpetuated inside his family and the American culture that influences his outward environment.

The relationship that Gogol has with his name, which is taken from the name of the Russian author Nikolai Gogol, is one of the most important aspects of his identity issue. As Gogol gets older, the name, which first had a profoundly personal importance for his father, turns out to be a cause of humiliation and isolation for Gogol. According to Lahiri (2003), the choice that Gogol made to change his name to "Nikhil" was an attempt to disassociate himself from the various ways in which he was seen to be different from other people and to integrate himself into the mainstream American culture. This transition, on the other hand, does not address the internal struggle that he is experiencing; rather, it shows the fractured character of his identity and the difficulties of abandoning one's cultural roots.

To add insult to injury, the novel highlights wider theoretical difficulties relating to the creation of identities and cultural hybridity. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) places a strong emphasis on the notion of the "third space," which is a milieu in which hybrid identities are formed as a result of the interaction of many cultures. In a similar vein, Stuart Hall (1990) is of the opinion that identity is more of a process of becoming than it is of being, and that it is formed by continuing experiences and representations. The journey that Gogol takes is illustrative of many various ideas, as he goes through stages of rejection, uncertainty, and ultimately acceptance of his dual personality.

In light of this, the purpose of this research is to investigate the concept of Indian-American selfhood as it is depicted in Lahiri's works, with a particular emphasis on the fluid and ever-changing character of hyphenated identity. It claims that the experiences of Gogol Ganguli demonstrate that identification is not a matter of selecting between two cultures but rather of navigating a place where both cultures may live. Taking this perspective into consideration, *The Namesake* emerges as a major literary piece that contributes to an understanding of the psychological and cultural aspects of diasporic living in the contemporary world.

2. Literature Review

There has been a significant amount of research conducted in the fields of postcolonial and cultural studies on the topic of hyphenated identity and diasporic selfhood, which provides a solid theoretical platform for the analysis of *The Namesake*. When seen through the perspective of identity, which is a fluid and ever-evolving construct that is formed by relocation, memory, and cultural contact, the experiences of immigrants and their descendants have frequently been understood.

One of the most significant additions to identity theory was made by Stuart Hall (1990), who conceptualises identity not as a fixed essence but rather as a continual process of "becoming." This is one of the most notable contributions to identity theory. In his argument, Hall contends that cultural identity is produced via representation, history, and diversity, which makes it essentially dynamic. This viewpoint is especially pertinent to the character of Gogol Ganguli, whose identity develops as a result of his involvement with the cultural frameworks of both India and the United States. His struggle is a reflection of Hall's idea that identity is continually changing, and that it is influenced by both the experiences of the present and the inheritances of the past.

In a similar vein, Homi K. Bhabha (1994) establishes the idea of hybridity and the "third space," which turns out to be an essential framework for comprehending diasporic identities. According to Bhabha, the interplay between cultures results in the formation of a new hybrid identity that goes beyond binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized or native/foreign. It is possible to see Gogol's life as happening inside this third space within the framework of Lahiri's narrative. It is within this space that he negotiates the conflicts that arise from his Bengali origin and his upbringing in the United States. His identity is not entirely Indian nor entirely American; rather, it is a developing synthesis of both of these identities.

In addition, the psychological aspects of diasporic identity have been investigated by academics such as Erik Erikson (1968), whose theory of identity crisis offers a glimpse into the inner struggles that individuals experience when going through the process of self-definition. Gogol's uneasiness with his name and his subsequent desire to remake himself as "Nikhil" are both explained by Erikson's framework, which helps to explain the situation. Despite the fact that it finally demonstrates the limitations of outward modifications in terms of addressing inner identity problems, this gesture is symbolic of a yearning for wholeness and acceptance.

In addition, Jhumpa Lahiri's (2003) portrayal of immigrant experiences has garnered critical acclaim for her nuanced depiction of these experiences, notably the generational gaps that exist between first-generation immigrants and their children. A number of critics, like Mishra (2007) and Brah (1996), note the significance of diaspora in the formation of cultural consciousness. They also highlight the fact that persons of the second generation frequently experience a sense of "in-betweenness." The manifestation of this situation may be seen in Gogol's relationships, as he attempts to find a balance between the expectations of his parents and his own wants, which are developed by American culture.

Within the realm of diasporic literature, scholars have also concentrated their attention on the symbolic value of name. There is a common perception that names serve as indicators of identity, lineage, and affiliation. The name Gogol, which is associated with the Russian author Nikolai Gogol, becomes a source of tension in the novel *The Namesake*. It is a representation of both personal history and cultural displacement during the novel. It has been pointed out by critics such as Ganguly (2010) that the process of renaming a person symbolises an attempt to exert control over one's identity, yet at the same time it highlights the fact that it is impossible to totally discard one's history.

Furthermore, diaspora theorists such as Avtar Brah (1996) suggest that identity is influenced by the junction of many sites, including home, migration, and memory. This interconnectedness is vividly mirrored in Gogol's journey, as his idea of self is shaped by both his familial roots and his lived experiences in America. This intersectionality is demonstrated in a clear and vivid manner. The fact that he eventually came to terms with his background and name is illustrative of the process of reconciling various identities that cross.

Generally speaking, the corpus of material that is now available emphasises that hyphenated identity is not only a condition of conflict but also a place that is conducive to innovation and development. This study draws upon past research in order to investigate how the experiences that Gogol Ganguli depicts in *The Namesake* are representative of the intricacies of Indian-American selfhood. This is accomplished via the merging of theoretical viewpoints and literary analysis.

3. Research Methodology

This study delves into Jhumpa Lahiri's (2003) *The Namesake* and its concept of hyphenated identity using a qualitative and interpretive research technique. The literary analysis forms the backbone of the research, with Gogol Ganguli serving as a stand-in for Indian-American identity. Primary data comes from the book, and secondary data comes from books, academic papers, and critical essays on diaspora studies, cultural identity, and postcolonial theory. Stuart Hall's (1990) and Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) proposals on cultural identity and hybridity provide the theoretical groundwork for the analytical framework. To understand Gogol's complex and ever-changing sense of self, we might look to Hall's idea of identity as a process of becoming and Bhabha's "third space" as a lens through which to examine the interplay between his many identities. To further comprehend the psychological aspects of Gogol's inner struggles, especially his fight for cultural belonging and his name, we might go to Erik Erikson's (1968) theories on identity crisis. Names, cultural tensions, assimilation, generational gaps, and self-acceptance are some of the recurrent themes that may be found via a careful study of certain chapters of the book. These topics are examined through the lens of the larger cultural and social milieu of the Indian diaspora in America. The research ensures a critical and contextual reading by using a comparative viewpoint and tying Gogol's experiences to existing theoretical ideas in diaspora and identity studies. Additionally, the study is analytical and descriptive in nature, with a focus on methodically examining and interpreting textual material to bolster the main point. Theoretical and critical sources are acknowledged using the author-year citation format. Emphasising the dynamic and ever-changing character of Indian-American selfhood in Lahiri's writings, the overarching technique seeks to offer a unified comprehension of the narrative's construction and negotiation of hyphenated identity.

4. Results and Discussion

An examination of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, which was published in 2003, demonstrates that Gogol Ganguli's sense of hyphenated identity has numerous aspects. The findings are displayed in the form of theme tables, which are then followed by interpretations in further depth.

Table 1: Identity Conflict and Name Crisis

Aspect	Observation	Textual Evidence
Name Identity	Discomfort with given name	Gogol feels embarrassed by his unusual name
Cultural Alienation	Feels different from peers	Struggles in school and social settings
Identity Shift	Changes name to Nikhil	Attempts assimilation into American culture

The findings suggest that Gogol's name serves as a major emblem of the conflict that arises between two identities. The fact that he chose not to use the name "Gogol," which is associated with Nikolai Gogol, is a manifestation of his wish to disassociate himself from his cultural and family heritage. However, choosing the name "Nikhil" does not completely address his issue, which lends credence to Erik Erikson's (1968) notion that the construction of an identity requires more profound psychological processes than only exterior transformation.

Table 2: Cultural Duality and Hybridity

Aspect	Indian Influence	American Influence
Family Life	Traditional Bengali customs	Limited outside influence
Social Life	Minimal engagement	Dominant cultural interaction
Values	Collectivism	Individualism

According to the findings, there is a distinct distinction between Gogol's home environment and his social surroundings. This simultaneous exposure results in the formation of a hybrid identity, which is consistent with the idea of the "third space" proposed by Homi K. Bhabha (1994). Gogol's identity is not formed by preferring one culture over another; rather, it is formed by negotiating the junction of both cultures, which results in a selfhood that is fluid and ever-changing.

Table 3: Generational Differences

Aspect	First Generation (Parents)	Second Generation (Gogol)
Cultural Attachment	Strong connection to India	Weak/ambivalent connection
Adaptation	Limited assimilation	High assimilation
Identity Perception	Stable	Conflicted

The comparison demonstrates a generational divide in the way people see different cultures. Gogol's parents are able to preserve a consistent and deeply entrenched personality, but Gogol himself is prone to disorientation and fragmentation. According to Stuart Hall (1990), identity is not something that is fixed but rather something that is continually produced. Attempting to strike a balance between inherited traditions and current impulses is the source of Gogol's struggle.

Table 4: Journey Toward Self-Acceptance

Stage	Key Experience	Outcome
Rejection	Denial of name and heritage	Identity confusion
Exploration	Relationships and independence	Partial understanding
Acceptance	Realization of name's significance	Integration of identity

The last stage of Gogol's trip illustrates a steady progression toward self-acceptance along the course of the voyage. The emotional and cultural value of his name and background is something that he comes to comprehend after going through the process of feeling loss and reflecting on it. This trend demonstrates that hyphenated identity is not static but rather develops over time as a result of events that occur in one's life. In the end, Lahiri (2003) says that the journey to authentic selfhood involves accepting both of one's cultural identities rather than rejecting any of them. When taken as a whole, the findings indicate that hyphenated identity in *The Namesake* is characterised by conflict, negotiation, and ultimately reconciliation. Gogol Ganguli's path is representative of the larger experience of Indian-American people who are navigating between two different cultural frameworks when they are immigrants. According to the findings of the study, identity is not a static or solitary construct; rather, it is a dynamic concept that is formed by personal experiences, cultural exchanges, and emotional ties.

5. Discussion

The results of this research provide credence to the notion that hyphenated identity is not a static condition but rather a process that is always changing and developing. In her critique of *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri (2003) does an excellent job of depicting the complications of Indian-American selfhood as they are experienced by Gogol Ganguli. In accordance with larger theoretical approaches in the fields of diaspora and cultural studies, the results that were described previously shed light on the fact that Gogol's identity is formed via the ongoing confrontation between cultural inheritance and personal choice.

One of the most important things that has emerged from the findings is the significance of naming in the process of identity building. Rejecting his name, which is commonly linked with Nikolai Gogol, is a hint that Gogol is making an effort to escape the cultural otherness and social discomfort that he experiences. On the other hand, the data indicate that the act of renaming does not erase the internal struggle that he is experiencing. Instead, it heightens his sense of displacement, drawing attention to the fact that identity cannot be recreated only via alterations to one's exterior environment. It is important to note that this discovery lends credence to Erik Erikson's (1968) psychological paradigm, which places an emphasis on the fact that identity crises are addressed via internal reconciliation rather than by surface change.

In addition, the debate sheds insight on the part that cultural hybridity had in the developmental process of Gogol's sense of self. The theoretical idea of the "third space" that was presented by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) is reflected in the duality that is noticed between his social world and his household environment. The experiences that Gogol has demonstrate that identification is not a question of selecting between Indian and American cultures; rather, it is a matter of being inside a place that is in between the two as a result of the interaction of both influences. In spite of the fact that it initially causes uncertainty, this hybridity later turns out to be a place where one may realise themselves and grow emotionally.

In addition, the generational disparities that were discovered in the findings provide a substantial contribution to the comprehension of hyphenated identity. Because they are immigrants of the first generation, Gogol's parents have a strong and deeply entrenched sense of cultural identity. On the other hand, Gogol, who is a member of the second generation, suffers fragmentation and ambiguity in his cultural identification. The concept that identity is continually formed via experience and representation is supported by this comparison, which was presented by Stuart Hall in 1990. It is not only a personal fight for Gogol; rather, it is a reflection of a more widespread diasporic reality in which inherited traditions and present realities frequently come into conflict with one another.

Furthermore, the debate demonstrates that the construction of one's identity is significantly influenced by both human interactions and the events that occur in one's life. Gogol's progressive comprehension of his cultural roots is greatly aided by the contacts, sexual relationships, and experiences of loss that he encountered throughout his life. As a result of these experiences, he goes from being rejected to being accepted, which suggests that the formation of an individual's identity is intricately tied to the emotional and social circumstances in which they are experienced.

In general, the findings of the study indicate that hyphenated identities are characterised by conflict, negotiation, and ultimately reconciliation. The concept of a unique or unified self is called into question by Jhumpa Lahiri's (2003)

presentation of identity, which is layered and complex. The path that Gogol Ganguli took finally demonstrates that there is a correlation between accepting one's dual background and developing a more genuine and comprehensive understanding of who one is. As a result, the debate demonstrates that the Indian-American identity, as shown in *The Namesake*, is not characterised by division but rather by the capacity to incorporate many cultural characteristics into a unified whole.

6. Conclusion

This research delves into Jhumpa Lahiri's (2003) *The Namesake*, specifically examining the character Gogol Ganguli as a symbol of Indian-American identity, to examine the notion of hyphenated identity. The results show that diasporic identities are neither fixed or distinct but rather formed via ongoing struggle between cultural legacy and personal experience. Second-generation immigrants have internal problems similar to Gogol's, as he goes from rejecting his name and origin to finally accepting them. His plight is emblematic of the greater difficulty, in a multicultural setting, of satisfying both one's family and one's own needs and desires. His decision to change his name to "Nikhil" seems like a solution at first, but it shows how difficult it is to completely distance oneself from one's indigenous heritage. The emotional and historical weight of Gogol's identity must be acknowledged before he can attain genuine self-awareness. Cultural hybridity is a key factor in the formation of diasporic identities, according to the study. It is clear from Gogol's story that his life fits the theoretical description of a "in-between" region where many cultures coexist when it comes to the construction of an individual's identity. Although this hybridity might be perplexing at times, it also presents a chance for individuals to develop and discover themselves. The fact that Gogol and his parents are from different generations further emphasises how identity is fluid and how factors like migration and one's immediate surroundings may shape one's sense of belonging. Instead than viewing identity as a static concept, it portrays it as a multi-faceted and ever-changing construction. The narrative of Gogol Ganguli shows that embracing both traditions is not necessary for cultural reconciliation. Rather, it entails fully embracing both sides in order to create a whole and significant identity. The book affirms that having more than one identity is not a constraint but rather a room for complexity, resilience, and development, offering a deep reflection on the reality of diasporic living.

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