


Split-up Identity: Reading Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* Geo-critically

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Abstract

*Jhumpa Lahiri's writings are often marked by the constant tension between domesticity and foreignness, and she has explored this theme through her own multicultural self, which emerges from the crossroads of three different continents. She was born in London to Bengali parents, brought up in New England, USA, and is currently living in Italy, where she writes in the Italian language to forge a deeper connection with it. Her multicultural perspective influences the characters in her fiction and short stories, constantly challenging cultural monopolies and the constraints of identity politics. Her debut fiction, titled *The Namesake*, explores the problem of ambivalence in multicultural situations, which leads its protagonists into a space of identity crisis. Despite being originally Indian diaspora, Gogol, the male protagonist, looks upon himself as an American. At the same time, his mother Ashima Ganguli remains in the cleavage of anxiety and ambivalence. This predicament can be interpreted as a consequence of the conflict between dominance and disavowal. They work in parallel, leading them to a situation where they are thrown into the site located between becoming and non-becoming. This qualitative paper, which appears to inspire subsequent researchers to explore this field further, seeks to demonstrate geocritically how split identities are constructed in the current context of glocalization and transnationalism. The research will draw on the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial diaspora theories and geocriticism.*

Keywords: *Diaspora, anxiety, duality, domesticity, foreignness*

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Introduction

Geocriticism, comparatively a recent framework of interpretation for literary texts, has garnered significant attention from literary critics worldwide as literature assumes a multidisciplinary disposition due to its capacity to encompass diverse issues related to human life. It correlates the philosophical concept of derangement, dislocation, and deterritorialization. Nowadays, diaspora literature is starting to borrow theoretical frameworks from geocriticism for its interpretation, as the space is transgressive and the geographical cartography is ever-changing due to geopolitical crises, natural calamities associated with rising global temperatures, and the frequent shifting of human locations. All

these processes remarkably affect and effect the cultural amalgamation and orientation. Even Homi Bhabha's conception of 'mimicry', Edward Soja's 'third space', gets intertextualized with the theoretical framework of geo-criticism. Due to its delicate connection with issues such as diaspora, derangement, cultural anxiety, and in-betweenness, as underlying themes, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* deserves to be explored from a geocritical perspective.

The Namesake deserves an in-depth geo-critical analysis for its spatial and temporal significance. Like her other novels, this fiction, too, bears such a disposition because of the author's own geographical location. Her debut fiction, titled *The Namesake*, explores the issue of ambivalence in a multicultural context closely tied to the geopolitical landscape of the period, characterized by an uncertain shift in geopolitical realities, the pervasive influence of globalization, the corporatization of the economy, cultural imperialism, and the ongoing paradigm shift in ecology. In the face of all these immensely influential power dynamics, all the major characters of *The Namesake* proceed towards the pit of split identity. Despite being originally Indian diaspora, Gogol, one of the protagonists, looks upon himself as an American. At the same time, his mother Ashima Ganguli remains in the cleavage of anxiety and ambivalence. This situation can be interpreted as a consequence of the conflict between dominance and disavowal. They work in parallel, which leads them to a situation where they are thrown into a site located between becoming and unbecoming.

At this point, it may not sound irrelevant if the delineation accommodates Shakespeare's Hamlet's reflection on the multi-dimensionality of humans while tactfully criticizing his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are, after being appointed by Claudius, dubiously spying upon him, though superficially they continue pretending to be his friends. In his words:

What piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals— and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? (Shakespeare, 1982)

The immensity of man's capacity for adaptability impresses Hamlet, and at the same time, he does not forget to mention the stern reality that, despite all the excellences, man is the quintessence of dust; that is, crudeness and liminality define the 'self' of an individual, however special he claims to be. To Hamlet, man's multifaceted capacity makes him the crown of the creation, and at the same time, it leads him to perennial anxiety. In the same vein, the present era vehemently experiences the undercurrents of the ambience where regionality is being constantly challenged by globality, and collective consciousness is contested by the alienation and the compartmentalization of the self, and consequently, the paradigm of identity with all its characteristic liquidity keeps transforming, deranging, and dislocating in terms of power relations. That is why Salman Rushdie claims, "*Our identity is at once plural and partial*" (Rushdie, 1992). Identity is not monolithic, and it is highly contextual. Different contexts bring about different experiences, which construct identity—essentially polyphonic — and create the disposition of the contrapuntal and multilayered self, being both homogeneous and heterogeneous. It is tentative, and simultaneously ambivalent, marked by pluralism loosely analogous with multiculturalism, and thus it formulates a condition "*which is used to describe societies in which no single system, based on religion, class or creed, predominates*" (Thiem, 2003). Such an environment accommodates tolerance and cultural diversity. But the multi-voicedness inherent in this environment tends to create anxiety among those who try to maintain connectivity between what they have left behind and what they are presently exposed to. In such an environment, apprehension of losing one's self-identity works powerfully. The apprehension of the fragmented self persuades diaspora

in the present world, which is characterized by “*the rise of new power centers within or in proximity to a region, altered political interactions with countries outside the region, and regional social forces that compete with state-sponsored national and regional identities*” (Acharya, 2015). Falling into such cultural cross-currents, humans now feel that they straddle two cultures and fall between two stools. Jhumpa Lahiri, in terms of her own status as a British-born Indian diaspora, presently dividing her time between Italy and New York, depicts the issue of dual identity through the characters in her debut novel, *The Namesake*.

In the context of postcolonial realities, identity has become a profoundly complex condition, given the nuances and gravity inherent in it. Even the natives encounter ambivalence and anxiety as they constantly face the waves of globalization, neo-colonial situations, and a cosmopolitan environment that consistently negotiates the cross-currents of culture. But the problem of ambivalence and anxiety is acute with the immigrants who live in a foreign country as a diaspora. The feeling of division and displacement causes alienation, which leads the diaspora to a problematic space, and Homi Bhabha defines it as a ‘third space’. A desire to be like the natives, that is, mimicry, and at the same time, a rooted sense of inferiority challenge the issue of authority and frustrate true representation. Homi Bhabha, in this connection, asserts, “*The desire to emerge as ‘authentic’ through mimicry— through a process of writing and repetition- is the final irony of partial representation*” (Bhabha, 1994). However, according to Amitav Ghosh, the modern Indian diaspora, which began in the mid-nineteenth century, is not only “*the most important demographic dislocations of modern times; it now interprets an important force in world culture*” (Ghosh, 2008). Jhumpa Lahiri specifically depicts the problem of representation, mostly caused by dual identities, in her debut novel, *The Namesake*. Her portrayal of the complexities of diaspora identity in the USA is largely autobiographical, as she herself is an Indian diaspora living in Europe and America.

The novel revolves around an Indian couple, Ashoke and Ashima, who are first-generation immigrants, and their second-generation children, Gogol and Sonia. The couple came to the USA in search of better career opportunities, and Ashoke felt proud to find his name on the list of faculty at an American university. On the other hand, Ashima wrestles restlessly to adapt to the new cultural realities. She gives birth to her son in a hospital alone, but her mind, at that crucial moment, is crossed by the recollections of Calcutta, where, during childbirth, a woman is usually surrounded by her kith and kin. Not only that, but the couple also encounters another cultural shock as they prepare to leave the hospital. They must name their newborn before leaving the hospital for the record. Ashoke Ganguli names the child Gogol, after the name of the prominent Russian author Nikolai Gogol, his favorite author, whose collection of short stories he was reading during a train accident, and was able to draw the attention of the rescuers with a page from the book that he discovered in his hand, even while lying helpless on the rubble. In Indian culture, it is usually an elderly person in the family who names the newborn. Ashima waits for a letter from her grandmother living in Calcutta, with a name for her newborn, but the letter never comes. Gogol is unhappy with his pet name at school, and if his fellow students call him Gogol, he gets angry. He succeeds in changing his name at college and introduces himself to his classmates as Nikhil Ganguli, his true name. During his college and university days, he did not visit his parents frequently; he rather dated American girls and lost his virginity with an American girl whom he cannot recollect today. Once, while coming to visit his parents during the summer vacation, Gogol’s train suddenly stopped as a man jumped out of the train. At the station, Ashoke shares with Gogol the story behind naming him after his favorite Russian author, Nikolai Gogol. This revelation creates more depression and restlessness in Gogol. After graduating from Columbia University, he starts living in a very small apartment in New York, where he dates

Maxine, an American girl from a well-to-do family. He even visits his parents with Maxine, whom his mother does not like. Anyway, Gogol breaks up with Maxine and his father's sudden demise by heart attack, Gogol returns to his mother and sister Sonia. Due to her adherence to her heritage, Ashima Ganguli wants her son to marry his childhood acquaintance, Moushumi. However, only after one year does the marriage break up due to the lack of a shared cultural context that both partners fail to address properly. Moushumi chooses to live with her fiancé, Dimitri. Gogol is left alone. Sonia chooses her American-Chinese fiancé, Ben. Thus, despite cultural similarities, the differences in the cultural context lead to a failed relationship. Gogol's mother, Ashima, decides to return to her native land, Calcutta, in apprehension of losing her own self in the cross-currents of cultures. In the final scene, it is revealed that Gogol picks up the storybook by Nikolai Gogol, which was previously gifted to him by his father.

Thus, the long and short of the narrative of *The Namesake* revolves conspicuously around the tension between past heritage and new cultures. All the major characters in the novel are haunted by the anxieties and angst emanating from the dynamics of identity, specifically, dual identities experienced mostly by immigrants who are recklessly trying to reconcile two heterogeneous cultural realities. All the characters encounter the pressures of assimilation in a new situation characterized by new modes of festivals, rituals, and traditions. In fact, "*The clash between cultural traditions and the pressures of assimilation is one of the themes of the novel*" (Parameswari & Raj, 2023). All the major characters desperately wrestle with the cleavage marked by ambivalence, emerging from their desire to assimilate, while simultaneously alienating themselves from the crosscurrents of cultures and heritage. This confusion creates dual identities, characterized by an associative and dissociative disposition.

Literature Review

To explore the issue of dual identities, it is relevant at this point to determine the cultural location of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. The novel belongs to a new category of Indian fiction that emerged in the 1980s. In relation to its form, content, and politics, it may be termed the "transnational Indian novel" in English, a concept that can be traced back to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, published in 1981. Prominent postcolonial critic Pramod K. Nayar encapsulates them into a genre named "*global Indian novel in English*" and prefers to use the term 'transnational' to diasporic because the former suggests many homes, not two, as it is found in the concept of diaspora, which is mostly marked for its linearity (Nayar, 2014). Nayar refers to Cohen's definition of diaspora in which the individual finds linkage to both the former home and the present one, "*to a culture left behind and a culture now adopted*" (Nayar, 2014).

On the other hand, transnational suggests many homes, floating conditions of borderlessness, and in this connection, the narrative of *The Namesake* depicts the protagonists, such as, Gogol, Ashima, Moushumi and Sonia who are consistently shifting to many different places, e. g. Massachusetts, Boston, New York and some other locations in search of an objective, that is, peace and stability of mind which they never avail. Gogol grows angry, irritated, and restless, and all these mental proclivities are rooted in profound feelings of displacement, loss of identity, and a fragile 'self'. He always feels de-territorialized and hence restlessly searches for re-territorialization, though in reality, he fails to bring things together. To Ashoke, home constantly shifts; to him, home is more than a site—it is merely a concept, and so he adapts well to his new place in a new country. He enjoys his career as a university faculty member. On the other hand, to Ashima, the USA is a contrast, a binary opposition to her home left behind in Calcutta. She never feels at home in

the USA, and hence she endlessly struggles to remain in touch with her heritage that she left many years ago with her husband. She, as a consequence, wants Gogol should marry Moushumi, not the American girl Maxine, and it is merely a frail attempt to connect her present place with the heritage she has left behind. However, she is frustrated after the breakup of her marriage to Gogol, which occurred within just one year. At last, she intends to return to Calcutta, and thus, she continually finds herself in 'in-betweenness' and encounters the problem of recreating her own self topologically. On the other hand, both Gogol and his sister Sonia represent themselves as transnational individuals, always shifting the paradigm of their adaptability. Gogol's relationship with Maxine fails. His marriage to Moushumi breaks up, but he remains in the USA, with a view to preparing for a new emerging situation that will bring about a coalescence of history, culture, and heritage. Sonia's marriage to an American-Chinese man suggests her capacity to embrace multiple cultural adaptations, an unavoidable reality in the emerging situation of globality and transnationality.

Again, the naming of the protagonist, that is, 'Gogol', contributes to the formation of his complicated identity. Naming, as Kenyan postcolonial theorist and writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1993) suggests, is a political act, a strategy of Othering, alienation, and transformation into a new self. Ashoke Ganguli's choice of pet name for his son, from the Russian language, interprets his complicated unconscious, which, according to Jacques Lacan, is structured like language. The sound 'Gogol' is neither Bengali nor American. It is from a third language, that is, the Russian language, which interprets the location of his own self, that is, the 'Third space', a site of ambivalence, anxiety, interruptions, and innovations. True, "*Language is one of the 'medias' through which thoughts, ideas, and feelings are represented in a culture*" (Hall, 2003b). Homi Bhabha interprets the role of this spatiality in the following words:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as a social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. (Bhabha, 1994)

Innovation and interruption form a dialectical unity, and cognitive dialogism usually constructs a new identity. But the construction process is interfered with by the absence or fragility of language, which, according to Ngũgĩ, is "*a carrier of history and culture built into the process of communication over time*" (Thiong'o, 1993). But language, a potent means of representation, is lost with Ashoke Ganguli. In relation to the social and economic status, Ashoke represents the predominant class of the society, and languages, as Ngũgĩ believes, are lost when "*the predominant class in society has no use for them*" (Thiong'o, 1993). As colonialism functions deliberately with a view to fossilizing the victims' cultures, in the same way, the neo-colonial situation with colonial legacy patronized by the First World capitalist countries works for transforming the immigrants or diaspora into a cultural 'Other'. This process is vividly illustrated in the case of Gogol, who is not satisfied with his name, nor can he adhere to his good name, 'Nikhil Ganguli,' which is close to his cultural heritage. He rather sways between these two, just like a see-saw, a typical condition of those living in the 'Third space', in between becoming and unbecoming.

The character of Ashima Ganguli may aptly interpret the concept of 'third space'. She, throughout her stay in the USA, struggles fruitlessly to bring the two different cultures closer to each other. On different occasions, she organizes gatherings of the local people, mostly Indians living in the neighborhood. She prepares Indian recipes with American ingredients. She speaks Bengali at home, performs puja, and calls Brahmins for rituals. She

tells her children Indian mythological tales. But at the same time, she feels compelled to live in the USA. Metaphorically interpreted, it is akin to an attempt to achieve cultural synthesis. However, she fails, and her realization is horrifying. To her, living in a foreign country is like being in a state of perpetual pregnancy. In the narrator's words:

For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that the previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect. (Lahiri, 2004)

The duality that readers find in her character is that she spends almost her whole life in the USA, yet experiences a sense of pity and respect, which creates a hyphenated identity. Actually, like Jhumpa Lahiri herself, “[H]er experience arguably possesses elements of the immigrant and the emigrant, oriented in two different directions” (Pireddu, 2021). One is towards the US, and the other is towards India. Her name ironically means ‘limitlessness’, but she cannot cross the border of her own Indian culture. She thoroughly puts on a sari, and when in the hospital, she is asked to put on a knee-length skirt; she feels embarrassed. She does not call her husband by his name, as is typical of a typical Indian wife, and reads the Bengali magazine *Desh*. “*The printed pages of Bengali type, slightly rough to the touch, are perpetual comfort to her*” (Lahiri, 2004). She sticks to her Bengali heritage even though she comes to America only to perform her duty to her husband as a submissive, typical Indian wife, shaped and controlled by the patriarchal social dynamics. Actually, “*She was torn apart between her duty and her unconscious will to retain her Indianness*” (Ghosh, 2020). In fact, cultural identity encompasses both similarities and dissimilarities, and thus, it can be understood in two ways. In this connection, Stuart Hall sounds appropriate when he asserts that cultural identity can be comprehended in two ways:

... firstly, identity understood as a collective, shared history among individuals affiliated by race or ethnicity that is considered to be fixed or stable; and second, identity understood as unstable, metamorphic, and even contradictory- an identity marked by multiple points of similarities as well as differences. (Hall, 2003a)

In the same vein, Ashima's identity is predominantly saturated with elements of nostalgia and struggles with adapting to the host culture. She seeks to discover herself in the ambiance of new cultures, even as she looks back to her homeland with a desire to return there. Even after living in the USA for about thirty-five years and following her husband's death while working at a library, she decides to spend six months of the year in Calcutta and six months in the USA. This desire, to a great extent, is a potent manifestation of her dual identity. Such a disposition is an inherent reality in the era of globalization and transnationalism, which leads to cultural dislocation, a crisis of identity, and psychological ambivalence. True, the nostalgia that is found in Ashima is not available in Gogol and Sonia with the same intensity. It is mostly found in the first generation of immigrants. The second generation tries to adapt to the host culture through the assimilation process. However, the discourses about first-generation immigrants and second-generation immigrants are predominantly fluid, constantly changing their mode. For example, Ashoke Ganguli does not exhibit the same intensity of nostalgia as Ashima Ganguli, despite being a first-generation immigrant himself. This difference is a result of variations in exposure and negotiations. The cultural negotiations that Ashoke can make with the host culture are not possible for Ashima, as, just like a traditional Indian woman, she does not belong to the employed section of

people; that is, she lacks social and economic empowerment. This segregation from the mainstream of economic and social dynamics contributes to the intensification of her nostalgia for her homeland, namely, Calcutta.

On the other hand, Gogol's upbringing tempts him to skip Indian culture and hence, he is "*seen to be in conflict with parents' ideals. While he grows up more open to American ways of living and emulates their culture and approach to life, his mother seems to be trying to "protect" or "preserve" the Indianness of her son*" (Sonowal et al., 2022). But he, too, cannot avoid the duality of identity, and it is conspicuously depicted in the scene when he introduces his American girlfriend, Maxine, to his parents and asks her to conform to the Indian standard of living. Even after his father's death, he attends the funeral rites as per Hindu culture and gets his head shaved. Eventually, to make his mother happy, he marries the Indian girl, Moushumi, following traditional Indian rites. When his marriage breaks up, he appears to be more stable and considerate, a typical Indian living in the midst of American cultural realities. Also, Moushumi, like other second-generation diasporic characters in *The Namesake*, stands for tentativeness and liquidity. She stays in Britain, America, and France, but settles nowhere permanently. She, unlike Ashima, hardly finds any interest in Bengali culture. She is a freewill agent and loves to enjoy a life free from the patriarchal dominance on the part of the husband, usually found among the first-generation diasporic women. She is always on move because of her shifting nationalism or transnational disposition, a very common phenomenon in the present globalized world. Even the character of Sonia marks the experiences of the crossroads of cultural hybridity. She lives with her mother, adapting many Indian ways of living, though she prefers American food to traditional Indian food items. She even feels uneasy in Calcutta and strongly feels that America is her homeland. Ultimately, she marries an American-Chinese man named Ben, which reflects the expansion of the multidisciplinary of cultural dynamics.

As such, both Gogol and Sonia reside in the third space of culture, a platform where heterogeneous cultural ingredients intersect and negotiate power relations, according to Edward Soja. In his words, 'third space' is the location where:

... everything comes together... subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (Soja, 1996)

Power and hierarchy, which operate within the process of globalization, result in an uneven integration of human life and contribute to the emergence of diaspora. Due to cultural ambivalence, it occupies a hybrid identity space, or the third space. The strangers constituting a diaspora are simultaneously members of the local community and, at the same time, not members of the same. They are a new identity "*that might emerge by combining two identities that were previously discrete and now overlap. They are not seen as individuals, but as a particular type that is a combination of the stranger's identity and local identity*" (Smith, 2008). In line with this theoretical framework, the characters of Gogol, Sonia, and even their mother Ashima go through the process of continuous interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the simultaneous particularization of universalism, and thus, an incessant interaction between the local and global creates their hybrid identity marked by anxiety, ambivalence, and doubleness. As hybridity encompasses multiple roles, a plurality of selves, and double consciousness, it perpetuates a non-negotiable restlessness that chronically frustrates every attempt to bridge between two different cultures meaningfully. And that is why, Gogol, Moushumi, and even Gogol's mother Ashima Ganguli fail to interact

effectively with the new situations they are exposed to due to the displacement of the location of their ‘self’. They experience a kind of “two-ness”, that is, two identities exist in a single entity, and this “two-ness” works potentially as a hindrance to the singularity of consciousness. As such, all the diasporic characters in *The Namesake* find themselves at the site of both challenge and privilege—the challenge of negotiating local cultural dynamics and the privilege of enjoying globalized realities and transnational synthesis.

Challenge and privilege are conceptualized by the notion of ideology, which is not “*a static set of ideas*” (Rivkin & Ryan, 2000). It is a dynamic social practice that constantly impacts and reconstructs the individual's ‘self’. That is why the attempt on the part of the diasporic characters to become like the hosts never ends, and the hosts also keep chronically chasing the diaspora. The multiplicity of geographic locations contributes to the formation of anxiety, which persuades both the diaspora and the hosts, ultimately leading to the erosion of identity. The qualitative research paper, utilizing textual data, will explore this research gap—the space of anxiety and angst, which appears to the researcher as less explored.

Methodology

This research is primarily qualitative, based on textual data derived from both primary and secondary sources. For its theoretical framework, it borrows lenses and perspectives from contemporary postcolonial theories by seminal theorists in the relevant field, such as Homi Bhabha and Edward W. Said, among others, who contribute to the research objective of this paper. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* draws the attention of its readers to the identity crisis of the Indian diaspora in Europe. Ambivalence pursues the diaspora because the homeland they have already left behind takes hold of their memories, leading to the emergence of shadowy imagination. On the other hand, the host country does not accommodate them wholeheartedly because of the apprehension on its part to be culturally manipulated and thus losing originality, which tells upon its identity. In such a juncture, inevitably, a cultural ambivalence is created, and it leads them to create a space in between these two spaces, theoretically known as ‘third space’. This qualitative research focuses on the crisis of the diaspora in the ‘third space,’ which is marked by angst and anxiety, which, after all, define their identity.

Result and Discussion

To infer, however, it is phenomenal that the problem of identity, which has fermented through geographical shifting encompassing both spatial and temporal landscapes, conspicuously seems to be common among all immigrants, not only in the USA but also in other developed countries, in terms of contemporary global realities. For instance, it is, as it appears to be relevant here, that many immigrants from the Middle Eastern countries to the USA assume different names to prove that they do not belong to extremist Islamic ideology. In the twenty-first century, under the pressure of enormous social, political, economic, and ethical changes, the consensus of the previous century is constantly being proven fragile. Even the concept of home goes through a deconstruction and reconstruction process, and under such circumstances, homeland turns into an imaginary, shadowy entity, not ready to welcome with the warmth and affection the immigrants expect to cherish in their imagination, as these impulses are constantly being challenged by the rampant hegemony of capitalism and its inherent consumerism. In the same vein, the host culture usually does not refer to immigrants as their brothers; at best, they are called half-brothers, not equals. The consciousness of the immigrants about this truth, which is constructed on the discursive and polemical argumentations, leads them to the necessity of rebuilding a new language from the ground up, and it can aptly redefine, relocate, and reunite the immigrants with the situation they intend to embrace in association with the warmth of heart and stability of mind. This

new language will encode justice and equity, ensuring negotiation between the host culture and the immigrants' culture, and bring about a synthesis despite their heterogeneity and differences. It is a mammoth task to overcome these differences, though; on the whole, it is a crying need to build the concept of nationhood or nationality. Actually, nationality is an act of imagining and integrating a large number of people, and "*Nationalism cements individual identity with collective identity, making them inseparable*" (Tharoor, 2020). It involves self-determination with immense power to appeal to humans' tribal instincts, prejudices, and chauvinism, and it stimulates the desire to be relieved from the "*strain of individual responsibility which it attempts to replace by collective or group responsibility*" (Tharoor, 2020). Hence, a sense of nationhood involves the annihilation of binaries or discrimination.

It is true that capitalism does not intend to bring these two parties to the same deck in terms of equal status and equal distribution of amenities. It vehemently tends to create binaries and places these two parties on two opposite poles. Due to geographical dislocation, cultures inherently tend to view themselves as omnipotent, much like gods, who often resent it when humans rival their powers or attempt to steal their magic. Gods always want humans to know their place. But "*liberty is precisely the idea that one need not know one's place but rather for oneself a place that feels right*" (Rushdie, 2021). To an immigrant like Ashima or Gogol, liberty explicates the capacity to experience the same realities that they have left behind in their home country, that is, India. On the other hand, the 'god-like'ⁱ host country, that is, the First World country, reminds them of their 'place', which is, in Salman Rushdie's term, 'imaginary homeland'ⁱⁱ now lying in their memories, not in reality. Thus, a center/margin binaryⁱⁱⁱ is constructed. This crucial and conflicting situation creates a kind of relationship between the center and the margin that "*is intricate and interanimating*" (Spivak, 1996). In such an inter-animating relationship, the immigrants are tolerated by the host culture as long as they behave like them. That is, a deliberate desire and enterprise on the part of the host culture remains active to transform the immigrants into mimetic individuals. However, on the part of the immigrants, the determination to sustain themselves remains intact. These two antagonistic forces create a kind of identity through negotiation and interaction, which can be characterized as a dual identity, and in its construction, mediate the whole fabric of society to varying degrees. It is constructed through coercion and content. If interpreted psychoanalytically, all the major characters of *The Namesake* hold dual identity. Gogol, Ashima Ganguli, Sonia, and all other immigrants can overcome it if they can build a new language, a system of reinterpreting and reconstructing their own selves. They need this language because it "*is the privileged medium in which we 'make sense' of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged... So, language is central to meaning and culture and has always been regarded as the key repository of cultural values and meanings*" (Hall, 2003b). However, constructing a language alone cannot ensure the juxtaposition of heterogeneity unless it is reciprocated by the host cultures.

Actually, the construction of such connecting language is not possible for all these Indian diasporic characters in fiction because of their ambiguous relationship, in terms of spatial and temporal parameters, with their motherland, even if they also belong to the host countries. The impetus of such a relationship appears to be inherent in the fact that India, due to its omnivorous and generous accommodating nature, has failed to develop a singular national culture. However, Amitav Ghosh, a prominent eco-fiction author, does not call this trait a failure. He rather calls it India's greatness for its omnivorous and generous disposition of synthesizing heterogeneity. In his words:

... it is in itself the form of Indian culture. If there is one pattern in Indian culture, in the broadest sense, it is simply this: that the culture seems to be constructed around the proliferation of differences (albeit within certain parameters). To be different in a world

of differences is irrevocably to belong. Thus, anybody, anywhere who has even the most tenuous links with India is Indian, potentially a player within the culture. The mother country simply does not have the cultural means to cut them off. (Ghosh, 2008)

Such an inevitable and inseparable attachment to the mother country and mother culture leads Jhumpa Lahiri's characters to dual identities, and this is not a problem; rather, it is a site of cultural negotiations and intersections that contribute to the breadth of India's cosmopolitan nature and its generous attitude towards heterogeneity.

Historically, India has enjoyed a shared heritage of colonialism and imperialism, and its consequential social, political, and economic repercussions, thus defying "*the diktat of national boundaries*" (Dasgupta 2007). Due to cultural, linguistic, theological, and social diversity, as well as its significant geographical location, Indian nationalism is characterized by both the notion of nationalism as empowerment and that of homogenization and hegemonization. It is so because of India's past memories of the struggle against colonialism, and even after its independence, consistent riots and political and racial turmoil contribute to the development of patriotism among its people, irrespective of caste and creed. There is a common belief that "*flag independence*", that is, merely political independence, apparently does not guarantee the withdrawal of imperial processes or the end of historical processes. Rather, the process of identity construction continues through the anticolonial enterprises, as decolonization is, of course, not a panacea for political and social instability. And when some people migrate to a foreign country to settle, they face a more critical situation as the host land treats them^{iv} as a segregated community, devoid of their own land. In the face of such behavior, the diaspora hesitates to embrace the host land wholeheartedly and at the same time apprehends returning to their homeland, lest they should fail to experience the warmth of cultural affinity and interaction. In this connection, while depicting the mental condition of the diaspora, Michel S. Laguerre asserts:

They have one foot in as incorporated individuals through citizenship and the other foot out because their ethnic institutions may lag behind, either because these can be ignored without injuring the group (thereby maintaining the privatization of such institutions) or simply because their institutions may not be seen by the mainstream to be compatible with existing institutional structures. (Laguerre, 2006)

Besides, globalization poses a significant challenge to diasporic people due to its immense heterogeneity and the constraints imposed by history, society, and culture. Furthermore, the diaspora's desire to assimilate into the host land is significantly hindered by its constant exposure to global realities characterized by globalization and transnationalism. Thus, the tentacles of diasporic politics of adaptation spread among heterogeneity, marked by the consistent shift in the paradigm of identity. In fact, Jhumpa Lahiri finds her characters in this very shifting space of liquidity and tentativeness.

Conclusion

In fine, due to its involvement with spatio-temporality, transgressivity, and referentiality, deterritorialization emphasizes the re-conceptualization and de-essentialization of the nation-state, as the latter lies on the foundation of integration of the community with the same linguistic and cultural dynamics, while the immigrant diaspora carries with it its own culture and language, though it gradually tends to transform itself through mimicry. If examined through a geocritical lens, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* poignantly draws readers' attention to the nuances that contribute to the identity-formation process, which is essentially tentative, fluid, and ambiguous in relation to space and cultural belonging across diasporic and transnational landscapes. Assimilation, integration and incorporation constitute

a process which does not go continuously, and thus, the paradigm of identity always shifts, and keeping the above discussion in mind if the readers give an in-depth perusal of *The Namesake*, they will conspicuously feel that the novel is an essence of the firsthand experience of Jhumpa Lahiri, and she delineates the spatial dimension of identity in its canvass.

ⁱ The term refers to the dominance and hegemony practiced by the host country upon the diaspora.

ⁱⁱ Salman Rushdie's essay "Imaginary Homeland". He has anthologized this essay in his book with the same title.

ⁱⁱⁱ It refers to the dichotomous relationship between the host land and the Diaspora.

^{iv} 'Host land' refers to the country where the immigrants live as a diaspora.

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