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## The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri - A Thematic study of a Diasporic novel

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### Introduction:

The Namesake (2003) known as a famous diasporic novel belongs with Indian and western culture. Diaspora is a word of Greek origin meaning 'to sow over or scatter'. Diaspora has become a term of self-identification among many varied groups who migrated or whose forbearer migrated from one place to another or several other places. The Namesake is a novel, deals with multiple themes like search for identity, cross cultural conflict in migrated world etc. The central character Gogol have multiple identities as the novel progresses. Ashok Ganguli the father of Gogol came United States like many professional Indians who went to the United States. Ashok Ganguli too leaves his homeland, and comes to American pursuit. After settling in America for two years, Ashok married the nineteen year old Ashima, a girl of his parents' choice and the two immigrated to America. Ashima misses her homeland and find it difficult to call Boston her home. As Jhumpa Lahiri was born as Nilanjana Sudeshna, but had one pet name, Jhumpa which was found easy to pronounce by her teacher and she became Jhumpa Lahiri. She felt embarrassed whenever she was called as Jhumpa. She struggled a lot to make herself feel an American but she found just a half-way feeling. The same feeling she puts into Gogol who never likes to be called by this name. The agony felt by Gogol is the agony of Jhumpa Lahiri.

Lahiri's parents, like the whole first generation of Diaspora, were always isolated from mainstream American Culture. Despite the fact that they spoke English, they were betrayed by their accent. They feel alone and aloof there. Lahiri has shown all this through various conflicts presented in The Namesake.

**Key Words:** Cross Cultural Conflict, diaspora, dislocation, loss of identity, eagerness to return to their native land.

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### Search for identity:

This is the main theme of the Namesake because the whole novel revolves around it. The problem of Gogol's name symbolizes the problem of his identity. Gogol was given the pet name because when he was born his parents were not aware that the American system needs a particular name of the child just after the birth to register the birth certificate and that's why by having lesser knowledge of foreign culture they were forced to give their newborn child a name and that's why Ashok named his son "Gogol". He names him Gogol after the name of his beloved Russian author, Nikolai Gogol, thinking of it as a pet name only, which is a common practice in India. The book of this author helps him save his life. So Ashok has great reverence for this author and his name. For him, Gogol signifies a beginning and a survival. The name fills him with joy and indicates a new life. But Gogol feels uncomfortable in this name so he wants to be connected to the strange names in the graveyard. He wants to relate himself with American milieu but his name hinders his way to be recognized as an American. Nikhil replaces Gogol when he enters Yale as a freshman. Here nobody knows his earlier name. He feels relief and

confident. Here starts his transformation. He starts doing many activities which he could not dare to do as Gogol. But a new dilemma encircles him. He changes his name but "he does not feel like Nikhil" (105). He fears to be discovered. With the rejection of Gogol's name, Lahiri rejects the immigrant identity nurtured by his parents. But this outward change fails to give him inner satisfaction. "After eighteen years of Gogol, two months of Nikhil feels scant, inconsequential." (105)

He hates everything that reminds him of his past and heritage. The loss of the old name was not so easy to forget and when alternate weekends, he visits his home "Nikhil evaporates and Gogol claims him again." (106). He tries to put a wall between his past and his present, but it is not easy at all.

### Cross Cultural Conflict:

This is also a vital theme throughout the novel progresses. Gogol the protagonist desires to blend in the American society. He wants to live unnoticed, but he is not viewed as an American by other Americans, even though he is a native born citizen. The adaptation of "Nikhil" is a part to live only in the present, but the ghost of Gogol clings to him that he signs his old name unconsciously. He does not respond immediately when he is addressed

as Nikhil. He tries to become entirely different person from what really he is. Gogol struggles to carry the burden of two names. Nikhil resembles American names, though “Nikhil” is an Indian name! Yet Gogol and his past follow him everywhere. He experiences a feeling like sandwich i.e. being-in-between.

**Conclusion:**

In this way the dominant themes like Search for identity and Cross Cultural Conflicts can be discuss. As discussed above Gogol is the protagonist and the whole novel revolves around him and his family. At the end of the novel Gogol appears to be in-between situation where Gogol and Nikhil culminate into one. He made a peace with his present and past.

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