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〈論文〉

## Crossing Borders and Transcultural Negotiations: Exiled Bodies and Diasporic Identities in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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This study accounts for Jhumpa Lahiri's representations of the Indian American identity by examining the male and female characters, particularly focusing on body and memory, in *The Namesake* (2004). The novel chronicles the lives of an Indian immigrant family and the ways in which identities are explored and (re)constructed by both the first-generations (Ashoke & Ashima Ganguli) and second-generations (Gogol "Nikhil" Ganguli & Moushumi Mazoomdar). Looking at these exiled characters' experiences of border-crossing and transcultural negotiations, this study demonstrates that the strategic use of body and the significance of memory in this contemporary diasporic cultural fiction.

Unlike many other immigrant narratives, the first generation characters are illustrated as more dynamic and are yet more stable and settled than the second generation characters in this novel. Though the first generation characters tend to be overlooked in previous studies, the male protagonist's mother, Ashima, can be interpreted as the most dynamic character among all the characters. As her name indicates, "without borders," it is she who crosses both the physical and psychological borders. While the first generation characters face cultural and racial differences in the U.S. and find ways to enrich their lives in America through actively engaging in remembering and memory-making, the second generation characters feel even more exilic, and their constructions of identity are constantly being challenged by both Indian and mainstream American cultural standards. It seems that the male protagonist, Gogol, is threatened of his gender identity by all the female characters. In the work, both male and female characters of the second-generation seem to construct their identities mostly based on their relationships and try to overcome the crises, an endeavor in which they struggle to succeed. The study takes the stand that the novel circles around the theme of memory, which is emphasized in different manner among people of two generations.

Whereas the first-generations place value on preserving memories, the second-generations' processes of construction of relational identity involves more forgetting and overwriting, rather than remembering the past. The examination of self/communal representations in this work of a second generation Indian American writer unveils contemporary issues of American identity as well as the diasporic experiences of the post-1965 "New Americans" of Indian descent.<sup>1)</sup>

As Lahiri indicates, India is significant for her creation as it occupies a major part of her fictional landscape even though she has never lived there, making it appear not only as setting, but also as literal and figurative memory of the characters without intentions.<sup>2)</sup> Not merely the appearance of the country of origin, but also traveling itself has different meanings for Asian Americans, which often uniquely characterizes their works. Su-ching Huan observes a certain disparity between the purposes of traveling for European Americans and Asian Americans in that the former seeks liberation and expansion whereas the latter to escape from oppression and exploitation: "While Jack Kerouac breezily hits the road for spiritual liberation, many early Asian migrants wandered the road to pursue job opportunities or simply to dodge racially motivated attacks. In [Sau-ling] Wong's words, Asian Americans travel out of 'Necessity,' whereas European Americans travel for 'Extravagance'" (Huan 121). Cross-border traveling can also be read as an important theme in the novel. Huan finds a different purpose and meaning of traveling for European Americans and Asian Americans and discusses that traveling by "necessity" significantly affects their construction of identity in America. However, the meaning of traveling differs in the case of European Americans. The ways in which they perceive travel also differs among the first generation (necessity) and second generation characters (in-between necessity and extravagance). There appear various conditions in Asian American literature post 1965, such differences as nation, race/ethnicity, gender, and class, which influencing both the writers as well as the characters.

The first generation immigrant, Ashima, after years of cultural negotiation and maintenance of memories, acquires a transcultural identity. The work seems to thematize her accomplishments as well as the journey of the second generation characters. Transcultural negotiations are required regarding time, space, body, and memory. The act surrounding memory and remembering/forgetting has different characteristics for the first and second generations. Further, with regard to memory, the first generation characters keep a record of their experiences by taking photographs and writing in address books to resist oblivion and also jog their memories. On the other hand, the second generation characters' act of memory involves the process of rejecting and forgetting, rather than remembering. They often selectively accept and/or overwrite the past. This is particularly seen in

the case of the protagonist, Gogol, who attempts to own as well as disown certain memory.

Ashima Ganguli, the protagonist's mother, originally lived in Calcutta and moved to Cambridge Massachusetts on the occasion of her marriage. From there, due to her husband Ashoke's work at the university, they moved to a suburb of Boston. The novel opens with a pregnant Ashima, who accompanied Ashoke, a researcher who is pursuing his Ph.D. degree at MIT. Her physical experience of pregnancy is referred to as an immigrant experience and following transcultural negotiations. In the course of the novel, Ashima, who is nearing full-term, is in the kitchen making a Indian snack that sells on the streets in India reminding her of home, from American cereal: "Even now that there is barely space inside her, it is the one thing she craves" (1). Food helps ease the transition to a different culture and assimilation, comforting the distress that is a result of displacement by immigration. Food plays a significant role in Asian American literature, as Tobias Döring explains the literary representation of diasporic identity in relation to Indian food: "People in exile are trying to define themselves and their differential identity through privileged forms of cultural practice. Food, clearly, is one such practice, and its paramount importance for the Indian diaspora in the United States is reflected not least in the literary self-representations of that diaspora" (173). Laura Anh Williams further says that "[i]n Asian American literature, food as a metaphor frequently constructs and reflects relationships to racialize subjectivity and also addresses issues of authenticity, assimilation, and desire" (70).

Concerning bodily representations, Ashima's experience of pregnancy parallels her American experience and transcultural negotiations in the work. In the hospital bed, waiting to deliver, Ashima fights painful contractions alone in the hospital bed feeling the chills, gripping the rails of her bed. While counting the intervals between her contractions, she checks the time and thinks about her home in India. Her watch reminds her of the parents who had given it to her at the airport as a "bon voyage gift" (4). The watch signifies that she will need to cross the time in her life between India and the US. She defines the time at the hospital as "American" time: "American seconds tick on top of her pulse point" (4). During her pregnancy and stay at the American hospital, "[n]ot nothing feels normal to Ashima" (5), her physical conditions make her anxious and insecure about raising a child in a life that feels temporary like she feels about living in the United States: "[...] she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare" (6).

When she tries to describe her physical condition to the nurse when she is in pain, the miscommunication resulting from the language gap makes her feel even more insecure and

uncomfortable with shame: “This error pains her almost as much as her last contraction. But in Bengali, a finger can also mean fingers, a toe, toes” (7). She finally gives birth to a child alone at the hospital in a foreign country. After going through the pain of a long labor, she becomes physically exhausted “For half an hour she trembles, in a daze, covered by a blanket, her insides empty, her outside still misshapen. She is unable to speak, to allow the nurses to help exchange her blood-soaked gown for a fresh one” (22). Left with a baby, she feels sorry for her seemingly deprived and disadvantaged son who has been given birth to in America, the place that she has never felt was real for living: “Without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at her side, the baby’s birth, like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true. As she strokes and suckles and studies her son, she can’t help but pity him. She has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived” (24-25). She pities her son for his seemingly isolated condition, which later in life, actually influences his personality and construction of identity when growing up.

Ashima wishes to go back home to India with her husband and pleads with him to finish his degree quickly so that they can go back to India. She is particularly worried about raising her child in the United States, a life which she feels so foreign. Ashima wants to go back to India and cries when she rereads the letters she has received from her parents. Looking at her weeping, Ashoke feels sorry that he married her because she had come to the United States on the occasion of their marriage as he had sought to live in the United States to work and complete his education. Experiencing pregnancy, Ashima compares an Indian woman’s experience of living in America to a physical experience of pregnancy. Ashima feels that being a foreigner is to be in a state of loss and exile, pitied as well as respected by others.

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 that 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. (49-50)

Regardless of insecurity she feels about her life in America, it seems to fill Ashima with happiness that the baby’s face reminds her of her Indian family. The body embodies a memory of Indian family to her in America: “At times, staring at the baby, she sees pieces of her family in his face—her mother’s glossy eyes, her father’s slim lips, her brother’s lopsided smile” (35). It can be

read that Ashima creates, an embodied memory in a foreign country, by giving birth to Gogol.

Ashima writes in her address book to confirm her relationship with her world both in India and the U.S. Although she is dislocated from her home country and is in a very small world, she is positive toward accepting her environment with her feet on the ground. Ashoke and Ashima both seek for Indian community and make efforts in maintaining what they have acquired and built in their new lives in the United States: “She had come back to the apartment and written into the book’s blank blue pages, her parents’ address in Calcutta, on Amherst Street, and then her in-laws’ in Alipore, and finally her own, the apartment in Central Square, so that she would remember it” (160). She also ensures that she keeps a record of the places she visits and the people she meets in her life by writing down her memories. These actions make her appear stronger and more determined than the second-generations. Observing Gogol as he grows up, she wonders about the distance he maintains from her. Ashima begins to believe that her family is where her home is in this foreign land and would prefer to stay close to her family as well as the community she has built with her husband.

Ashoke is also a maker and keeper of cultural memories; Ashoke constantly encourages and reminds him to remember. He carries his camera to record moments to be remembered. Naming his son Gogol is also one of his attempts to keep the past to present. He is characterized by the nature of immigrant lives, in which people hold on to their past memories so as not to lose their identity in diasporic conditions. In contrast to Gogol, as a young man, Ashoke harbored the desire to travel far to see the world outside his country, India.

When Ashoke was young in India, he had survived a deadly train crash that occurred while he was reading short stories by the Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol. The old man who had been sitting near him in the train strongly suggested that Ashoke travel as much as he can. Although, he was not very convinced at that time, he began to want to travel after the train crash in which he was seriously injured and the old man died. While having to be hospitalized for a long time, he develops a longing for traveling around the world: “Yet he refused to read the Russians his grandfather had brought to his bedside, or any novels, for that matter. Those books, set in countries he had never seen, reminded him only of his confinement” (20). As he acknowledged his confinement in the hospital bed while reading novels by foreign writers, Ashoke developed the aspiration for discovery. He shows the will to cross borders and break the boundaries in his life. As he names his son afterward, on the occasion of the accident, the Russian novel starts to bear special meaning for Ashoke, and he decides to keep the memory by naming his son after the author of the book he had

been reading: “Instead of thanking God he thanks Gogol, the Russian writer who had saved his life [...]” (21).

Ashoke feels that he has been given multiple lives through surviving the accident as well as by being able to go to the U.S and he appreciates it: “None of this was supposed to happen. But no, he had survived it. He was born twice in India, and then a third time, in America. Three lives by thirty. For this, he thanks his parents, and their parents, and the parents of their parents” (21). After, pursuing his studies and his career, he also ends his life in America. Even after Ashoke’s death, he lives on in his wife Ashima’s mind even though the ashes of his bones are in the Ganges: “She [Ashima] will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband. Though his ashes have been scattered into the Ganges, it is here, in this house and in this town that he will continue to dwell in her mind” (278). In fact, even though Ashoke is physically in India, he lives on in the memory of his wife, which indicates that he is characterized by realizing border-crossing and becoming transcultural existence. Ashima’s life is also characterized by transcultural experiences and transition, dividing her life by living a half year each in India and the U.S. after her husband’s death. Thus, both Ashoke and Ashima symbolize border-crossing and transcultural experience. Ashoke and Ashima travel and negotiate transcultural conditions, which seem more difficult to overcome for the second-generations in the work.

After Ashoke’s death, the house in which they have lived more than 20 years has to be sold. Making memories and remembering are significant, since the lives in the foreign land is described as “tentative and spare” (6) because the space is no solid ground for them as basis, not to be considered as their “home.” Since the place they live in America is temporary, they seem to hold on to memory and regard it as most significant as a source of sustenance. The sense of emptiness and loneliness is elaborately and sympathetically explored for the lives of the first generation by the second generation writer Lahiri.

After Ashoke’s death, Ashima decides to live both in India and the U.S., something that Ashima and Ashoke had planned as future for both of them. She realizes it by herself and proves her independence and maturity, compared to her younger self. Her adaptability and flexibility make her seem dynamic compared to her original portrayal of a traditional and passive woman. She is the figure that symbolizes the crossing of borders just as her name indicates: “True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere” (276). Ashima comments on her son’s decision to divorce, referring to generational difference: “But fortunately they have not considered it their duty to stay married, as the Bengalis

of Ashoke and Ashima's generation do. They are not willing to accept, to adjust, to settle for something less than their ideal of happiness. That pressure has given way, in the case of the subsequent generation, to American common sense" (276).

Yet she feels that their cultural values are as foreign as is "American common sense" (276), Ashima appears understanding toward Gogol and Moushumi's divorce, which show her ability to accept cultural values apart from her own. She recognizes that she has grown up and acquired new identity through years of transcultural experiences in the U.S.

For the first time since her flight to meet her husband in Cambridge, in the winter of 1967, she will make the journey entirely on her own. The prospect no longer terrifies her. She has learned to do things on her own, and though she still wears saris, still puts her long hair in a bun, she is not the same Ashima who had once lived in Calcutta. She will return to India with an American passport. (276)

She seems to be determined and feel secure about having American identification as well as keeping her cultural practices. Although she has to change in order to adapt to the foreign country, she holds on to the cultural practices that are significant to her. She has matured with her husband through their negotiations of transcultural experiences. Being exiled from both countries, she crosses borders bearing new identity. At the same time, she is proud of maintaining the same fashion, which symbolize the identity of her origin, by dressing in traditional saris and wearing her hair in a bun in the Indian style. On the other hand, after losing her husband, the person she mutually depended on in a foreign land, she faces another challenge alone. Though she feels lonely and insecure after her husband's death, she is attached to the place as a result of having built a life of her own in America, which also remained foreign all her life: "For thirty-three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she's worked. She will miss throwing parties" (281).

Upon leaving America, not only Ashoke, Ashima also has urge to keep the memories of their lives in America alive. She lets her son take pictures of her farewell party for a record: "'Gogol, the camera,' his mother calls out over the crowd. 'Take some pictures tonight, please? I want to remember this Christmas. Next year at this time I'll be so far away.' He goes upstairs to get his father's Nikon, still sitting on the top shelf of Ashoke's closet" (286). Ashima asks her son to take photographs of the people who come to her farewell party before she leaves for India. Asking him to take pictures using Ashoke's camera, shows her desire to keep these memories alive compared to the children, who do not see the value of these memories. Annette Kuhn suggests that the

photograph is significant in its “ghostly quality” and “reminding us of our mortality” (1). It brings past moments to the present, as a symbol of memory. She states that using photographs functions “to challenge, critically and creatively, silences and collective myths and create new stories and relations to the past” (6). Thus, taking photographs to preserve ones memory can be read as a creative act against silence and erasure. Ashoke also emphasized the significance of making memories to his son. Ashoke tells Gogol, as a boy, when they go to the farthest point at the cape: “‘Try to remember it always,’ He tells this to Gogol as he reaches him and leads him back slowly across the breakwater, to where his mother anxiously stood waiting holding her daughter Sonia as a baby. ‘Remember that you and I made this journey, that we went together to a place where there was nowhere left to go’” (187). Ashoke seems to tell his son to have the courage to make a journey, which only he can be in a position to convince and educate Gogol. Ashoke seems to hope for his son to become courageous and brave enough to explore the world as Ashoke has done when he was young. He emphasizes the significance of remembering this experience to Gogol.

With regard to the attitude toward making memories and remembering one’s own past, Joel Kurotti also notices this point and interprets hybrid and border-crossing identity constructed as possession of the past in Lahiri’s work:

[...]Lahiri’s story provides an interpretation of the meaning of hybridity in a post-colonial context. It underlines the centrality of cultural translation in the process of possessing and re-possessing the past and the present, both chronological and spatial, in a meaningful way. It also outlines a strategy of diasporic as well as gendered resistance towards existing colonial and patriarchal hierarchies in the post-colony. (17)

Thus, the characters’ act regarding the possession of memory can be read as a strategy for resistance in diasporic as well as gendered life. As for memory and literary presentation, Nicole King explains the characteristic of the texts of memory: “Reading the texts of memory shows that ‘remembering the self’ is not a case of restoring an original identity, but a continuous process of ‘re-membering,’ of putting together moment by moment, of provisional and partial reconstruction” (175). It can be seen that Ashoke and Ashima engage in the “continuing process of ‘re-membering’” (175). They take photographs to record places and carefully write down the names of people with whom they are acquainted in the community in their address book, thus passing on the memory to the next generation. These actions of the characters’ make the work a text of memory, as King defines.

On the other hand, the second generation protagonist, Gogol, socially constructs his identity

depending on the relationships he seeks out. Gogol seems to try to fill in personal traits that he does not possess by interactions with his girlfriends and wife. These relationships are characterized by negotiations of his identity and (mis)communication. Concerning his body, Ashoke and Gogol both observe physical features and compare them to one another. Gogol examines to find physical traits that differentiate his father's body from his: "Gogol Ganguli is relieved to see no resemblance. True, his nose is long but not so long, his hair dark but surely not so dark, his skin pale but certainly not so pale. For by now, he's come to hate questions pertaining to his name, hates having constantly to explain" (75-76).

Since Gogol's father is a foreigner in his son's eyes, he examines his facial features first and then comparing each part of his face. Gogol feels relieved that he has no resemblance to his father. He dislikes the name his parents have given him as well. Though as the description of the comparison is vague, it is not convincing that he bears no resemblance to his father. Gogol may just want to believe that there is physical in addition to psychological distances he constantly feels with his exotic father. It can be read that he attempts to ignore the fact that he takes after his father by ignoring the physical similarities without consciousness as his father is so foreign to him that he resists his father as his role model.

Ashoke also observes his son Gogol who seems like a stranger, growing up in America to have characteristics that Ashoke does not have. Ashoke examines Gogol's physical growth by looking at the Adam's apple on his son's neck. He finds that his hands take after Ashima's. Although he examines his son's body to ensure a physical connection, he does not own the materials that show a visual memory of Ashoke's past so that all he can do is to wonder: "An Adam's apple is prominent on his neck. The pale hands, like Ashima's, are long and thin. Ashoke wonders how closely Gogol resembles himself at this age. But there are no photographs to document Ashoke's childhood; not until his passport, not until his life in America [...]" (77).

Another time, Ashoke again examines Gogol's face and finds that his face resembles Ashima. From the description, his appearance is characterized by health, cleanliness, and strength, which portrays him as a promising young man who his father can be proud of:

By now Gogol is just shy of six feet tall, his body slender, his thick brown-black hair slightly in need of a cut. His face is lean, intelligent, suddenly handsome, the bones more prominent, the pale gold skin clean-shaven and clear. He has inherited Ashima's eyes, large, penetrating, with bold, elegant brows, and shares with Ashoke the slight bump at the very top of his nose. (98)

These examinations of bodily features to one another between father and son indicate the physical as well as emotional distance they feel between them. In addition, it seems that particularly for exiles, the body is a major source of identification and is also used to represent memory. The body, as an embodied memory, is significant as immigrants depend on it to reassure themselves of their past.

For Gogol, who is unwilling to be associated with his father, on hearing about the deadly accident his father experienced, he suddenly looks at his father like a stranger. This takes place particularly because Gogol has been lacking imagination toward his past just as he rejects his Indianness:

Though there are only inches between them, for an instant his father is a stranger, a man who has kept a secret, has survived a tragedy, a man whose past he does not fully know. A man who is vulnerable, who has suffered in an inconceivable way. He imagines his father, in his twenties as Gogol is now, sitting on a train as Gogol had just been, reading a story, and then suddenly nearly killed. (123)

While looking at his father as he does a stranger, on the occasion of listening to his story about his “embodied name,” he contradictorily feels that his father is now closer to him. On Ashoke’s story-telling, Gogol, almost for the first time imagines about and sympathizes with his exotic father:

And suddenly the sound of his pet name, uttered by his father as he has been accustomed to hearing it all his life, means something completely new, bound up with a catastrophe he has unwittingly embodied for years. “Is that what you think of when you think of me?” Gogol asks him. “Do I remind you of that night?” “Not at all,” his father says eventually, one hand going to his ribs, a habitual gesture that has baffled Gogol until now. “You remind me of everything that followed.” (124)

Gogol discovers a new dimension of his father’s life as well as his name, which he had not seen. The name that has been received as familiar suddenly feels strange and new after Gogol learns of his father’s past deadly accident, which made him eager to discover the past. The body remembers the event and touching the ribs that had broken seems to remind him of the accident. Gogol becomes able to communicate with his father through learning of his namesake. By listening to Ashoke’s story, he becomes more real to Gogol than ever before. This sharing of the experience becomes another memory from which to base the identity that he constructs through his relationships.

As a college student, Gogol purposely keeps away from people of Indian descent as he rejects building relationships based on being Indian. Gogol avoids his “ABCD” (American-born confused

Deshi) friends and the people of the Indian community. This is one of his ways of trying to reject his past and avoid things that are associated with India: “He has no ABCD friends at college. He avoids them, for they remind him too much of the way his parents choose to live, befriending people not so much because they like them, but because of a past they happen to share” (119). He dislikes going back home on the weekends since he has to go to Bengali parties with his parents. In the beginning of his college life, he would try to skip social gatherings as he was not able to positively accept his or his family’s Indianness. Ashoke and Ashima, as parents, are determined toward Gogol and hope that he succeeds in America as Ashoke has done, expecting him to pursue studies to become an engineer, doctor, or lawyer. His parents repeatedly remind him and try to control him, which ends up being in vain.

In this period, Gogol turns to and bases his identity construction according to relationships. As Judith Caesar notices, Gogol assumes the identity his American girlfriend Maxine offers him. He then chooses an Indian American female, Moushumi, as his wife, which can be interpreted as “an unconscious attempt to concretize another identity, an adult identity that would connect him to his childhood world and to his family” (Caesar 114). While avoiding certain people and memories, he does not create an identity for himself and relies on other women to identify himself, like a mirror, basing his identity on relationships. Caesar problematizes the attitude toward his construction of identity both for Gogol that “he [Gogol] never actively tries to create another identity for himself, as his parents have done, or to make sense of the one he has by trying to understand more about the permanent relationships in his life, those with his family” (111). First, he seeks a light relationship with Ruth and then a serious one with Maxine and celebrates her ability to accept her life, which Gogol find hard to do. Maxine does not want to change anything about herself. There is an opposite attraction between Maxine and Gogol from their differences.

American Jewish girl Ruth is Gogol's first serious girlfriend whom he meets on a train to Boston. As college students, they go to the same school and start a long term relationship as a couple after discovering many more things in common. However, Ruth studies abroad in Europe for a semester and their relationship faces a crisis when she returns. Ruth seems to have grown up and changed from the experience, and Gogol finds it difficult to accept her as he used to. Finally, Gogol feels almost relieved when he breaks up with Ruth. In the beginning of their relationship, Gogol starts to like her as he finds things in common with her. After she returns from abroad, he seems to feel uncomfortable and intimidated by her just as he feels with his well-traveled father, Ashoke. It seems that Gogol rejects her as she has achieved something that he is not capable of, which possibly

make him feel insecure.

Then, Gogol meets his second girlfriend Maxine Ratliff, when he starts to work in New York at an architecture firm. He is strongly attracted by Maxine who seems to be liberated and strong—different from any woman he has known before. Gogol starts to stay at Maxine's home with her family whose American style of living fascinates him. As if he were to become a family member, Gogol learns about their lifestyle from Maxine and her family and spends most of his time with them. On the other hand, while Gogol is with Maxine and her family, he keeps away from his own family. He hesitates to introduce his family and the Indian community in which he grew up to her. The relationship with Maxine lasts for more than a year until his father's death, which makes him regret his attitude toward his family and turns back to them—the family he once rejected.

When in a relationship, he is impressed by the differences, particularly in that Maxine feels as she is very satisfied with her family and the way she was raised that she would not hope for anything else in her life, something that Gogol had never experienced before: "This, in his opinion, is the biggest difference between them, a thing far more foreign to him than the beautiful house she'd grown up in, her education at private schools" (138). Gogol enjoys the sense of freedom and affluent living that the Ratliff family offers him, while avoiding his own. On Gogol's birthday, he wakes up at the Ratliffs house to the sound of the phone ringing and thinks that it might be his parents. Later, he is relieved as he remembers that he has not given his parents the phone number. He relaxes while he thinks that he is resting at a place where his parents cannot reach him: "That here at Maxine's side, in this cloistered wilderness, he is free" (158). Gogol envies and appreciates Maxine for the differences and the life with her, which helps him escape from his Indian identity. In a way, she offers him freedom and relief, although later he discovers ironically that these very differences pull them apart.

Gogol regrets neglecting his family while immersing himself in his life with Maxine before his father's death: "'It might do you good,' she says, tilting her head to one side. he glances around the room. 'To get away from all this.' 'I don't want to get away'" (182). He rejects Maxine's offer for the first time and decides to confront the past he has turned away. Gogol regrets his attitude of keeping his family away by staying with the Ratliffs on the occasion of his father's death.

Gogol has been keeping himself away from his parents for so long assuming they would not understand him. After his father's death, he, for the first time, ponders upon the past and remembers his extraordinary visits to Calcutta as a child; it was an exciting trip, the first that introduced him to foreignness and exoticism: "He feels nostalgia for the vacations he's spent with his family, and

he realizes now that they were never really true vacations at all. Instead they were overwhelming, disorienting expeditions, either going to Calcutta, or sightseeing in places they did not belong to and intended never to see again” (155).

After experiencing death of his father, Gogol becomes attracted to an Indian American woman his mother arranges Gogol to meet after a long time when they were children. His father’s death makes him rethink his identity with reference to his Indian origin. This is the one of the reasons the reader can assume to be behind his seemingly sudden attraction to Moushumi Mazoomdar, considering that he has kept away from Indian American people all his life. Moushumi is an independent woman of Indian descent who teaches French literature at college. She quickly becomes Gogol’s girlfriend and then his wife; she is the daughter of a Bengali family in the same Indian community as the Gangulis. Moushumi spent the first thirteen years of her life in London and moved to America with her family. In addition to holding on to the English accent, the fact that she pursued her degree and career in French literature set her apart from the Indian community.

Given that she held on to her English accent as a girl, she was unable to be satisfied with her life in the Indian community in the U.S. just like Gogol. She rejected her Indian identity and preferred to be looked upon as half-French, something that did happen occasionally. Gogol barely remembers her when she was a little girl. However, he soon begins to remember Moushumi after the reunion, and they are surprised to discover that they become attracted to each other. After that, they naturally consider marriage and get married about a year later with their families’ support. In their married life, Moushumi starts to feel unsatisfied and finds it hard to settle down; she spends most of her free time with her friends leaving Gogol feeling gradually isolated and finally, emasculated. Moushumi goes on to find herself outside her marriage and starts an affair with her ex-boyfriend who is French. Their marriage ends when Gogol finds out about the affair, and Moushumi leaves for Paris.

As the title indicates, meaning of names and the act of naming are seems to be positioned as significant in the work. Gogol wishes in vain that Moushumi would change her surname after marriage. Moushumi resists from conforming to traditional values and keeps her maiden name to protect her identity. In the U.S., as a young girl, she becomes acutely aware of the cultural differences and finds Bengali to be traditional and oppressive to women: “By the time she was twelve she had made a pact, with two other Bengali girls she knew, never to marry a Bengali man” (213). As a college student, in her efforts to escape from the reality of her background, she majors in French, the pursuit of which becomes her refuge:

Without telling them, she’d pursued a double major in French. Immersing herself in

a third language, a third culture, had been her refuge—she approached French, unlike things American or Indian, without guilt, or misgiving, or expectation of any kind. It was easier to turn her back on the two countries that could claim her in favor of one that had no claim whatsoever. (214)

She speaks to Gogol with nostalgia of the years her family spent in England. She speaks to him about life there and her unwillingness to move to America, a feeling shared by her parents as well: “For some reason, her [Moushumi’s] parents feared America much more than England, perhaps because of its vastness, or perhaps because in their minds it had less of a link to India” (212). Moushumi loved being looked at differently: “She [Moushumi] is always flattered when they assume she herself is French, or half-French. She enjoys their looks of disbelief when she tells them she is from New Jersey, born to Bengali parents” (253). She harbors the desire to look non-Indian and deludes her identity from others by her appearance and speech.

After marrying Gogol, as a result of her own choice, she gradually finds herself feeling unsatisfied and unfulfilled. Eventually, she finds a place for both excitement and escape in extramarital affairs:

Suddenly, it was easy, and after years of being convinced she would never have a lover she began to fall effortlessly into affairs [...]. She was exactly the same person, looked and behaved the same way, and yet suddenly, in that new city, she was transformed into the kind of girl she had once envied, had believed she would never become. (215)

She feels as though she has become new person experiencing things that any female in her family has done before. She becomes conscious that she once envied those women who broke boundaries, as she had done by having an affair with her old boyfriend. She also constantly and compulsively seeks transformation in resistance to the identity given by her Indian family. She has mixed feelings about her affair and feels both scared and peaceful; she tries to compare herself to other women in her traditional family, but in vain. It shows that she has no role model as Indian American of second generation:

She wonders if she is the only woman in her family ever to have betrayed her husband, to have been unfaithful. This is what upsets her most to admit: that the affair causes her to feel strangely at peace, the complication of it calming her, structuring her day. After the first time, washing up in the bathroom, she’d been horrified by what she’d done, at the sight of her clothes scattered throughout the two rooms. (266)

Moushumi is afraid to recognize the immorality of having affair. She also considers her affair

to be a challenge, a physical resistance of the traditional female role. She secretly wishes to be away and not to settle in married life. Although she may not consciously realize it, she regrets her marriage and feels as if she has given up her freedom.

In her marriage, though she feels guilty for leaving Gogol alone, she goes on to spend time on her own. Moushumi fears turning out to be a woman like her mother, who is vulnerable as well as dependent—a woman who conformed to traditional Indian values. Thus, she needs to confirm to herself that she is always independent and is able to make her decisions for herself: “Sometimes she would sit at a restaurant alone, simply to remind herself that she was still capable of being on her own. This assurance is important to her; along with the Sanskrit vows she’d repeated at her wedding, she’d privately vowed that she’d never grow fully dependent on her husband, as her mother has” (247). Her mother is unable to lead a life of her own in the U.S. even though she has received a higher education in India before her marriage. Thus, Moushumi, as well as Gogol, share similar experiences as second generation individuals without a role model.

In the work, the representation of remembering/forgetting seems to be a significant clue in reading into the relationship between Gogol and Moushumi. For Gogol, meeting Moushumi after his father’s death at a time in his life when he started to rethink his Indianness, remembering the past becomes a pleasant experience. It is comfortable for Gogol to think of Moushumi who symbolizes his Indian identity and past. After reuniting with Moushumi after a long time, the images of her pop up and come into his life daily without consciousness. He becomes better able to appreciate his memory of the past, which is associated with the Indianness that he had been trying to avoid before: “In the days that follow, he begins to remember things about Moushumi, images that come to him without warning while he is sitting at his desk at work, or during a meeting, or drifting off to sleep, or standing in the mornings under the shower” (200).

At other time, a waiter at an Italian restaurant mistakes Gogol and Moushumi for brother and sister. He validates his remark by pointing out certain physical similarities between them: “In a way, he realizes, it’s true — they share the same coloring, the straight eyebrows, the long, slender bodies, the high cheekbones and dark hair” (203). Gogol feels rather pleased to hear that they share physical features. Moushumi points out that their parents had hoped that their children would consider themselves as part of the family, and now that they are actually seen that way: “Well, it’s just funny to think that all our parents raised us according to the illusion that we were cousins, that we were all part of some makeshift extended Bengali family, and now here we are, years later, and someone actually thinks we’re related” (204). It makes the two feel even closer with their physical

features, pasts, and the intentions of their families in common.

Gogol enjoys and appreciates the discovery of his past through Moushumi. He positively accepts his family because whichever past events he remembers about Moushumi, his family is always there, since they would mostly meet at family gatherings. Gogol recalls a memory of her when they were children and gradually changes it to the present image: “He [Gogol] is grateful that his mind has retained these images of her, pleased with himself, as if he has just discovered an innate talent for a sport or a game he’s never played. He remembers her mainly at the pujos he had attended every year, twice a year, with his family [...]” (200).

Although Moushumi talks about her insecurities in her teenage years, Gogol does not clearly remember her in the past. He retains the present image of her as if he has overwritten his past: “He feels tenderness toward her when she disparages herself this way. And though he had witnessed that stage of her himself, he can no longer picture it; those vague recollections of her he’s carried with him all his life have been wiped clean, replaced by the woman he knows now” (214). The memory of Moushumi also turns familial history from difficult to pleasant and comfortable.

Moushumi experiences a physical reaction by being emotionally moved to see him at the reunion, something which she does not expect to feel. He has changed, and she instantly becomes attracted as she sees him:

She still remembers her bewilderment, looking up from her book and seeing him, her heart skipping, feeling the attraction instantly, powerfully, in her chest. For she had been expecting an older version of the boy she remembered, distant, quiet, in corduroy jeans and a sweatshirt, a few pimples dotting his chin. (247)

Her physical response toward Gogol is so impressive that she remembers the strong emotions surging through her as she sees a changed Gogol—an attractive young man. Moushumi who has first pictured him as a young boy, also updates and rewrites her memory.

She favorably accepts the fact that Gogol has changed his name, which makes himself new and respectable to her: “She’d liked that he’d changed his name from Gogol to Nikhil; though she’d known him all those years, it was a thing that made him somehow new, not the person her mother had mentioned” (248). His wish to obtain a new identity by changing his name also interested Moushumi. She found it intriguing to think that she can associate with him as an American of Indian origin who also sought for a different identity just as she did. Gogol and Moushumi share the same experiences in overwriting and renewing the past. They both have struggled with their identities and have felt lost in their lives.

Before Moushumi meets Gogol, Moushumi separated from her fiancé, Graham, partly because of his incapability to embrace the Indian culture and her family. After he leaves her, she begins to feel isolated and insecure yet again in her struggle of her racial and gender identity, as she had in her teenage years: “By the time she’d met him she’d begun to fear that she was retreating into her former self, before Paris—untouched, bookish, alone. She recalled the panic she’d felt, all her friends married” (249). She is unable to positively accept the past as she wanders in a dilemma between conformity and resistance. At the same time, the fact that she panics to discover her friends getting married indicates her state of loss and confinement in traditional values.

Gogol starts to forget things about Moushumi, which is in contrast to their remembering when they first met. His oblivion, on the contrary to remembering experiences that they had pleasantly shared early in their relationship, indicates that they are unable to build a relationship in present. The lack of sharing past memories finally results in their wrecked marriage: “She’s at another conference this weekend, in Palm Beach. By tonight she’ll be home. She claimed she’d told him about the conference months ago, but he doesn’t remember” (268). Being unable to share memories, they seem to become gradually disconnected.

While Gogol respects her courage and independence, she makes him feel somewhat inferior to her, and therefore he feels uncomfortable at times. Gogol observes that she had reinvented her life in Paris, which Gogol would not be able to do. Gogol looks at her with respect and a sense of defeat:

He understands why she lived here for as long as she did, away from her family, away from anyone she knew. Her French friends adore her. Waiters and shopkeepers adore her. She both fits in perfectly yet remains slightly novel. Here, Moushumi had reinvented herself, without misgivings, without guilt. He admires her, even resents her a little, for having moved to another country and made a separate life. He realizes that this is what their parents had done in America. That he, in all likelihood, will never do. (233)

Growing up in similar cultural backgrounds, Gogol understands Moushumi’s need to escape from old acquaintances and family. He is amazed at the fact that she reinvented herself. He has mixed feelings of respect and frustration toward her because she has the courage that he does not have. His masculinity is unintentionally threatened by her as he feels inferior to her in that respect. Moushumi has the courage that makes her able to achieve and move toward change in a foreign land, whereas Gogol does not.

She regrets not staying in Paris and mentions it to Gogol, who is not sure of what to say or do:

“A little. Guess a little part of me wishes I’d never left Paris, you know?” He leans over, takes both her hands in his. ‘But then we would never have met,’ he says, with more confidence than he feels” (234). Gogol faces a crisis of his gender identity, in which his vulnerability and weakness gradually suffocates him. Moushumi is still a wanderer of life after marriage and is unsatisfied, unable to be confident about her own decisions. As Gogol bases his identity on his relationships with women, he lacks subjectivity and is vulnerable.

Facing the crisis of his gender identity, he feels insecure about himself so that by confirming the life that he has built with his wife to relieve himself. This indicates his anxiety as growing up in an immigrant family, he cannot find himself something that he can rely on for his existence. Being threatened with regard to his masculinity, he is constantly characterized by sense of loss and alienation:

He doesn’t feel jealous of her past per se. It’s only that sometimes Gogol wonders whether he represents some sort of capitulation or defeat. He doesn’t feel this always, just enough to nag at him, settling over his thoughts like a web. But then he looks around the apartment for reassurance, reminding himself of the life they’ve set up together and share. (230)

As Gogol senses, while the symbols of their married life comforts him, Moushumi struggles between the idea of traditional gendered expectations and reality. Being second generation individuals, they have many things in common. Moushumi also has the same dissatisfaction and cannot help associating him “with a sense of resignation” (250). Even she has chosen it for herself, she continues to struggle after marriage, with the acquired identity as a wife.

He senses Moushumi’s dissatisfaction and is concerned about their marriage life. He pays attention to the place they have built up for themselves together to feel relief. They didn’t argue, they still had sex, and yet he wondered. Did he still make her happy? She accused him of nothing, but more and more he sensed her distance, her dissatisfaction, her distraction. (271)

Moushumi also senses this weakness and feels unsatisfied with her married life: “Though she knows it’s not his fault, she can’t help but associate him, at times, with a sense of resignation, with the very life she had resisted, had struggled so mightily to leave behind. He was not who she saw herself ending up with, he had never been that person” (250).

Her disillusion toward marriage results in her escaping from Gogol and then turning to an extramarital affair with French ex-boyfriend, which Gogol finally finds out about. It is clear from

these illustrations that Gogol's sense of masculinity becomes threatened by Moushumi. She, knowing that Gogol is not to blame, partly regrets the decision to marry him. As Moushumi wishes to be perceived differently, she is as insecure a person as Gogol and has difficulty in accepting her identity. They both are insecure and struggle with their ethnic and gender identity. Finally, the marriage ends when Gogol finds out that Moushumi is having an affair and reacts both physically as well as emotionally: "His first impulse had been to get out at the next station, to be as physically far from her as possible" (282). He has chills and feels physical response of disgust and aversion soon as he discovers that Moushumi has been having affair and wants to keep physical distance from her immediately.

After divorcing Moushumi, he turns to his family and offers them more sympathy than in any other moment in his life. Widowed Ashima decides to sell the house and decides to separate her life by being in India for half the year and in America for the rest. Ashima's growth is notable among other characters, achieving survival skills, as she has grown up by negotiating transcultural experiences. Although she feels insecure when left alone as a widow, she constantly remains strong and chooses to live her life. Gogol feels nostalgic while leaving the house as it means that the presence of a family would disappear in America: "And then the house will be occupied by strangers, and there will be no trace that they were ever there, no house to enter, no name in the telephone directory. Nothing to signify the years his family has lived here, no evidence of the effort, the achievement it had been" (281).

The narration focuses Gogol analyzing his parents' diasporic lives and history and feeling sympathy toward them while imagining their lives, which makes him reflect upon his own:

Within a decade abroad, they are both orphaned; Ashoke's parents both dead from cancer, Ashima's mother from kidney disease. They stumble into their parents' room, uncomprehending, embarrassed at the sight of their parents' tears, feeling only slightly sad. In some senses Ashoke and Ashima live the lives of the extremely aged, those for whom everyone they once knew and loved is lost, those who survive and are consoled by memory alone. Even those family members who continue to live seem dead somehow, always invisible, impossible to touch. Voices on the phone, occasionally bearing news of births and weddings, send chills down their spines. How could it be, still alive, still talking? The sight of them when they visit Calcutta every few years feels stranger still, six or eight weeks passing like a dream. (63-64)

The grievous events happening in their home country gives them physical shocks to the displaced

couple. He sees that memory is the only thing that they can hold on to and be consoled about for Ashoke and Ashima. It shows the significance of memory, especially for immigrant lives. Gogol objectively sees the physical and emotional distance between Calcutta and New England, observing lives in both countries: "Once back on Pemberton Road [from Calcutta], in the modest house that is suddenly mammoth, there is nothing to remind them;...apart from the name on their mailbox, apart from the issues of *India Abroad* and *Sangbad Bichitra* that are delivered there, appear no different from their neighbors" (64). The name has been the only sign that differentiates the family from the other families in the neighborhood. There will be no evidence of their temporary lives in America, without a trace of the Gangulis. It indicates the tentative and illusory nature of immigrant lives. Especially, toward the end, Gogol matures and begins to truly sympathize with his father and then mother by re-imagining their lives: "It's hard to believe that his mother is really going, that for months she will be so far. He wonders how his parents had done it, leaving their respective families behind, seeing them so seldom, dwelling unconnected, in a perpetual state of expectation, of longing" (281).

Gogol's respect and debts toward his parents and tries to understand the state of mind of an immigrant, which Ashima calls a "lifelong pregnancy" (49). He has long rejected his parents because of the dissociation and feeling of distress that he feels while interacting with them. His parents have been a threat to Gogol as they seem energetic while remaining strange and foreign to his eyes. As he states, he both fears and respects his parents' courage and brevity that he does not possess. Gogol objectively sees his parents and their exiled lives as immigrants: "Though they are home, they are disconcerted by the space, by the uncompromising silence that surrounds them. They still feel somehow in transit, still disconnected from their lives, bound up in an alternate schedule, an intimacy only the four of them share" (87). Ashoke and Ashima's lives are in an "in-between space" and are characterized by the life of exile that Edward Said discusses.<sup>3)</sup>

As to sense of loss as exiles in relation to identity, Gogol seems to deal with it by his attempts to own memories. His sense of disowning memories seems to be reflected in his search and attraction toward old building and materials for substitution. As a child, in his elementary school trip, they visit graveyards and look for their surnames on the grave. Some children find their name inscribed on the grave stone: "The children begin to scamper between rows of the dead, over leathery leaves, looking for their own names, a handful triumphant when they are able to claim a grave they are related to" (69). Unable to find his own, he traces on the paper and brings back one name from there, which surprises his mother. His mother dislikes the idea of tracing names on the graveyard

out of respect for the dead, but Gogol is strangely attracted to it as it symbolizes the memory of the past of early immigrants of Puritans:

But Gogol is attached to them. For reasons he cannot explain or necessarily understand, these ancient Puritan spirits, these very first immigrants to America, these bearers of unthinkable, obsolete names, have spoken to him, so much so that in spite of his mother's disgust refuses to throw the rubbings away. He rolls them up, takes them upstairs, and puts them in his room, behind his chest of drawers, where he knows his mother will never bother to look, and where they will remain, ignored but protected, gathering dust for years to come. (71)

Since childhood, he has hidden thoughts that his parents would not easily understand. He is attracted to historical buildings such as old dormitory at Yale and later decides to major in architecture: 'Gogol makes the mistake of referring to New Haven as home, which angers his mother: "Only three months, and listen to you,' she says, telling him that after twenty years in America, she still cannot bring herself to refer to Pemberton Road as home. But now it is his room at Yale where Gogol feels most comfortable" (108). He has different notions of home compared to his parents, and Gogol feels at home outside of his familial space which they actually reside. It reveals him that the home is a restless place for Gogol, compared to his parents who thought their family to be their only refuge as well as home in America. For his parents, home is embodied by family members, rather than a physical space for living.

He is finally determined to become an architect after visiting the Taj Mahal and is impressed by it in opposition to their parents' wishes for him to become an engineer or doctor. Their seemingly tentative family lives in a foreign country might have drawn him to things that he can recognize its historical and physical presence for substitution. Judith Caesar notices Lahiri's strategic use of old American architectural houses as "an emblem of the emotional spaces between the people who live in those houses, of the interior walls within the mind, of the stairs that connect the levels of experience, of the doors that shut others in or out, of the exterior walls that would normally delineate public from private space but which, again and again, do not" (52). Lahiri uses these "American inner spaces" (52) in particular ways compared to other writers in which "the distances, physical and emotional, connect her characters" (52). In this work, Lahiri also seems to use old American physical spaces as an emotional place, especially for Gogol.

Similarly, his attraction to old names on the grave stones indicates his adoration for things that are grounded in history. His search of identity is reflected in his thought and decision surrounding

his name. Just as his identity, he is unable to find his name in the historical graveyards and the letter supposedly sent by his grandmother in India, which is lost somewhere in between India and America. His attachment to old things indicates his wish to own memories. Moreover, when Gogol is living with Moushumi, he keeps an old picture of Moushumi, an act that can be read into as his unconscious wish to possess memories:

And next to this, a picture of Moushumi, an old passport photo he'd found and asked to keep. She is in her early twenties, her hair loose, her heavy-lidded eyes slightly lowered, looking to one side. It was taken before he'd begun to date her, when she was living in Paris. A time in her life in which he was still Gogol to her, a remnant from her past with little likelihood of appearing in her future. And yet they had met; after all her adventures, it was he whom she had married. He with whom she shared her life. (270)

By keeping a picture of her at a time when he did not know her well, he wants to own her past from her passport with the courage to travel to change herself, which Gogol has never been able to do. He seeks for a relational identity as an adult, in which he realizes that he finds characteristics in his women that he respects but does not own.

Relating to bodily representation, Gogol's younger sister, Sonia Ganguli represents a more adapted and assimilated Indian American of the second generation than do Gogol and Moushumi. This is particularly symbolized by Gogol referring to her as having an "American smile" with braces on her teeth: "Her braces have come off her teeth, revealing a confident, frequent, American smile [...]"(107). The description also reveals Gogol's envy toward his sister for the confidence and security she expresses in American life. Though they have commonalities in that they both show a physical response of aversion to India as they become ill during their vacation there. In addition to their idea of India as a foreign and strange country, the causes of the illness are pointed out as being "the air, the rice, the wind" (86). They need to admit that they cannot adapt to the country. Their westernized bodies are treated according to eastern medicine practice, which gives them pain. No sooner had they recovered than they needed to leave India:

Upon returning to Calcutta, Gogol and Sonia both get terribly ill. It is the air, the rice, the wind, their relatives casually remark; they were not made to survive in a poor country, they say. They have constipation followed by the opposite. Doctors come to the house in the evening with stethoscopes in black leather bags. They are given courses of Entroquinol, ajowan water that burn their throats. And once they've recovered it's time to go back. (86)

Gogol is so relieved to go back to the U.S. while boarding the airplane. He appreciates the American cultural commodity of food and drinks served as well as TV programs and music played on the plane: “With relief he peels back the foil covering his breakfast, extracts the silverware from its sealed plastic packaging, asks the British Airways stewardess for a glass of orange juice. With relief he puts on his headset to watch *The Big Chill* and listen to top-forty songs all the way home” (87).

As significance of the name is suggested in the title, Gogol’s name has constant influences regard to his identity. In Bengali tradition, every person has two names. One is a pet name called *daknam*, which is used in the private domain by friends and family. The other one is a good name called *bhalanam*, which is used publicly for identification: “Good names tend to represent dignified and enlightened qualities. Ashima means ‘she who is limitless, without borders.’ Ashoke, the name of an emperor, means ‘he who transcends grief.’” Pet names have no such aspirations. Pet names are never recorded officially, only uttered and remembered” (26). The protagonist has been given the name Gogol for a temporary period, while they wait for his official Indian name to arrive from Ashima’s grandmother in India, as is the customary practice. However, the letter with his name never arrives indicating a physical and psychological distance between the two countries. This results in the protagonist’s keeping his informal pet name, Gogol, when growing up: “There was the disappearance of the name Gogol’s great-grandmother had chosen for him, lost in the mail somewhere between Calcutta and Cambridge. This had led, in turn, to the accident of his being named Gogol, defining and distressing him for so many years” (287). Gogol is torn between Calcutta and Cambridge just as his name that was chosen by his great-grandmother. He maintains Gogol as his public name until he gradually feels distressed and decides to change it to Nikhil. The disappearance of his name indicates the loss of his identity between India and the United States, a distance that is hard for him to overcome.

Toward the end after Ashoke’s death and Ashima’s leaving for India, Gogol reconsiders the name originally given by his father: “The name he had so detested, here hidden and preserved—that was the first thing his father had given him” (289). Ashoke and Ashima are referred to as “[t]he givers and keepers of Gogol’s name” (289), and they will be physically more distant than ever before to Gogol. As he has changed his official name to Nikhil, the hidden name Gogol symbolizes a past, which will also become distant with her mother. Thus, the name Gogol itself can be read as a symbolizing memory. His official name, Nikhil, represents him as an adult and later, as the name of his company: “There is a possibility, eventually, of becoming an associate, of the firm incorporating

his name. And in that case Nikhil will live on, publicly celebrated, unlike Gogol, purposely hidden, legally diminished, now all but lost” (290). While Gogol, that part of himself, which represents past is hidden in private, Nikhil will live on by the name he has subjectively chosen. At Ashima’s farewell party, when she is leaving for India, he discovers the forgotten book Ashoke had given to him at the house to be sold. There, he finds his name in the end written by his father after opening the book for the first time. He begins reading the book that reminds of his father and his namesake:

As the hours of the evening pass he will grow distracted, anxious to return to his room, to be alone, to read the book he had once forsaken, has abandoned until now. Until moments ago it was destined to disappear from his life altogether, but he has salvaged it by chance, as his father was pulled from a crushed train forty years ago. (290-91)

Gogol struggles with his identity the most compared to other characters in the work. Finally, he seems to be able to overcome this by discovering and reading the book by Russian Writer Nikolai Gogol that his father had given to him. By reading this book in the end, he crosses the borders of time and reconnects with his father by understanding and imagining his thoughts and intentions. Gogol experiences feeling insecure and sometimes even threatened, by both the first generation characters of his parents, his girlfriends, and then his Indian American wife, Moushumi, which seems to have endangered his racial as well as gender identities. However, through experiencing (mis)communication in constructing a relational identity and after reading the book for the first time in the end, he seems to be able to truly accept himself, his family, and his cultural background at his best, thus discovering the significance of memory.

Lahiri’s work is a text of memory, which explores remembering, forgetting as well as overwriting, thus they go through destruction and creation of the self, recognized as a characteristic of this work. Nicole King discusses the characteristics of the text of memory: “The work of ‘memory’ also involves a complex process of negotiation between remembering and forgetting, between the destruction and creation of the self. Individual memories of personal histories are constantly reworked and retranslated in the present [...]” (King 180). Thus, the memory work deals with remembering/forgetting in representing (re)construction of the self, which constantly comes into the present transforming it into personal history. In the work, the perception of memory is a significant theme in (re)constructing the identity of Indian Americans. Lahiri’s work offers the characters’ lives in a new contemporary environment dealing with ongoing issues surrounding migration and identity after the reform of Immigration Act in 1965, from which the people who were called “New Americans” entered the United States. Being exiled, they face continuous challenges of

transcultural experiences and negotiations. As Roger Bromley suggests the significance of noticing particular conditions from which the diasporic cultural fiction is produced concerning issues of identity, Lahiri's work can be read both in local and global contexts, in which the author's own experiences and explorations of what it means to live in America and to belong to America are presented. By looking at diasporic experiences and constructions of identity among first-generation and second-generation characters in this contemporary diasporic cultural fiction, this study demonstrates particular use as well as focus on the body in relation to construction of identity and the significance of memory for Indian Americans. Examining self/communal representations in the work unveils contemporary issues of American identity, regard to differences of race, ethnicity and gender, as well as the experiences of the post-1965 "New Americans" of Indian descent and other people of diasporic communities.

#### Notes

- 1) Due to reform of the Immigration Act in 1965, which resulted in accepting more immigrants of diverse cultural backgrounds called "New Americans" (Waters and Ueda 1-13). The law also had effect in restricting immigrants from the western countries for the first time. The concept of American identity is becoming even more diverse and complex in the twenty-first century.
- 2) See the interview by Lahiri at [http://www.bookbrowse.com/author\\_interviews/full/index.cfm?author\\_number=929](http://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm?author_number=929) (September, 2010)
- 3) Edward Said's describes the characteristics on life of exile, which is relevant to the nature of Ashoke and Ashima's diasporic lives:

Perhaps this is another way of saying that a life of exile moves according to a different calendar, and is less seasonal and settled than life at home. Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew. (55)

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