

Paper prepared for the Second Euroacademia International Conference
Identities and Identifications: Politicized Uses of Collective Identities

Florence, 18 – 19 October 2014

This paper is a draft

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The Concept of Identity Through Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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Abstract: *The Namesake* (2003), by the Indian American writer Jhumpa Lahiri discuss the concept of identity as associated with postcolonial concepts such as hybridity, transculturation, and migration. In this regard, Stuart Hall's notion of identity - as the continuous play of history, culture and power- and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "third dimension" - as the common ground for negotiation and transformation, which is neither assimilation nor otherness but represents the history of coalition building and the transnational and cultural diasporic connection- are seems two important sources to understand the novel. The novel focuses on the notion of shifting identities, the portrayal of the characters as torn between respecting their family traditions and an Americanized way of life and exploration of the "Third Space" where they create their identity as transnational. By representing her characters at the crossroad where both local and global spaces meet and constant negation between different aspects of lives appear, Lahiri depicts a transnational space for the Indian immigrants in the United States. Although the immigrants' tenacity in clinging to the past is obvious in such space, a constant negotiation between different identities, recasting the fixed identities is seen as inevitable in *The Namesake*. Lahiri represents her characters struggling to balance the two worlds that involve the issues of immigration, race, class and culture, because she accepts that "identities are never unified, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" [4]. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.

Key Words: identity, negotiation, balance, discourse, transformation.

Identity is a topical issue in the contemporary study of culture with many ramifications for the study of ethnicity, class, gender, race, sexuality and subcultures. It becomes an issue when something assumed to be fixed, coherent, and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty. Identities are not something once and for all; rather they are constantly producing themselves a new. They are associated with desire—desire for recognition, association, and protection over time and space. Identities are constructed under circumstances which are not chosen deliberately. In other words, they are perceived within the domain of cultural circumstances and are not things which exist; they have no essential or universal qualities. They are constructed, made rather than found, by representation. In Stuart Hall's words, "identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always "knowing" that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a lack, across a division from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate -identical- to the subject processes which are invested in them" [4].

The expression of identity is bound up with the notion of culture. Many scholars add that at the basis of ethnic and national identity there exists a common culture. A nation is primarily a cultural community, and the national culture provides the national community with its feel of continuity, which is an important factor in every type of identity. Hence, it is reasonable to discuss every type of identity in relation to cultural affiliation. Stuart Hall argues that there are at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first position defines cultural identity in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective one true self which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, as Hall argues, "our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provides, as one people, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history" [5]. Along with the points of similarity, cultural identity also has the "critical points of deep and significant difference, which constitute what we really are or rather . . . what we have become" [6]. One can't speak for very long, with any exactness, about one experience, one identity, without acknowledging its other side. This is the second notion of cultural identity Hall favors: cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of "becoming" as well as being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.

Hall's argument clarifies that far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, identities are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power. Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. The ways in which these identities were subject and positioned in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization. The dominant or superior culture has the power to influence or dominate the other. Nevertheless, this idea of otherness as an inner essence changes our conception of cultural identity. From this perspective Hall writes,

“cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark” [5]. Thus, identity is neither once-and-for-all nor is it a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return. But identity is not a mere phantasm either. It is something that has histories or a past, which continually speaks to us. For example, let us consider the shifting identities of black people in the United States. Descendants of African ancestors were called Negro, meaning black, when they were migrated to the United States. Later people began to call them Nigger, meaning black slave. After the Emancipation Proclamation, they were called Black American, and then Afro-American. Now they are called African American which shows the connection to their past or histories. Identities of black people in the United States have constantly been reconfigured over time and space. In that point larger point here becomes that identities are always in a process of transformation despite the existence of hierarchy and domination of one culture over another.

If we analyze the example discussed above, we find transcultural engagement between immigrant groups and dominant (host) societies opening up a “Third Space” where hybrid identities are created, making neither this nor that but their own—not African or simply American, but African American. In that point we come to the Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of identity. His concept of identity is related to the cultural transformation. Cultural transformation is a process specifically that takes place among immigrants. The connections between immigrants and their home countries, as well as the political status of both home and host countries, affect the ways in which they adjust to a new location. The interaction and engagement in transcultural conversation between the host or dominant cultural groups and immigrant groups slowly opens up the new site for transformation. As such, cultural transformation characterizes the in-between as a third element, an amalgam of two cultural entities that create a third identity after the original two have been altered. In this context, cultural transformation becomes related to Bhabha’s notion of third space. To address the notion of identity, Bhabha claims that third space “is characterized by discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, and rehistoricized a new” [2]. That is, “Third Space” is a place where we negotiate between different identities. Negotiation becomes a process where people of different cultures accept and blend their cultures in a society without one culture dominating the other. This co-existence of different cultures ultimately produces a hybrid culture which Bhabha posits as “the inter—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” [2]. For Bhabha “the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity is the Third Space” [1], which enables other positions to emerge. Hybridity is a dual culture and also implies a syncretic view of the world in which the notion of fixity or essentiality of identity is continually contested. Hybridity is not just any given mixing of cultural materials, backgrounds or identities. It is the intercultural space of in-betweenness and liminality where identity is formed through the negotiation between different cultures.

In fact Bhabha’s notion of third space comes from his interest in the way in which power and authority functioned in the symbolic and subjectifying discourses of the colonial moment. His interest was particularly focused on the domain of cultural relations, where the structure of signification or the regime of representation becomes at once the medium of social discourse as well as the operative and substantial objective of a political strategy. Although Bhabha targets his idea of Third Space to stress the interdependency of colonizer and colonized, it is pertinent to the situations of immigrants living in the United States. In accepting this argument, we understand why claims to the inherent purity and originality of cultures are untenable. It urges us to open up the notion of a transnational culture “not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” [2]. It is in this space that immigrants can find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves. Today along with the technological development and excessive mobility of people that have intensified and changed the cultural exchange, the Third Space has considerable implications for reinventing of a new United States, for example, that reconcile and overcome the embeddedness of any existing hierarchies, categorization, and discrimination. Therefore, the contemporary immigrant writer I’m analyzing in this paper is attempting to create an alternative space to locate and stabilize their characters in the new (thus, the word “alien” becomes inappropriate) land of settlement.

The Namesake explores the conflicts of Indian immigrants for both the first and second generations, spanning a time period from the late 1960s to the early twenty-first century in the United States. The characters are middle class Bengalis, well versed in both Indian and British education. They bring with them enough cultural associations to recreate their “imagined political community,” with the first generation protagonists constantly recalling their birth country with longing and occasional visits to India. The story starts with Ashoke Ganguli, who, as a young student in India decides to further his education in the United States after a train accident that nearly costs him his life. His trip to India from the United States for an Indian wife, Ashima, follows a second generation that turns into the hyphenated Indian Americans with a dual culture, or the ABCD—“American Born Confused Deshi” [6]. Here “Deshi” means simply Indian and desh is India. Gogol is an exemplary of ABCD who cannot answer the question, “where are you from?” [6]. For him the notion of home is very complicated. He is baffled to answer whether he is from India or the United States. However, Gogol does not think of India as his country or “desh;” he sees himself as purely American—unhyphenated Indian American.

Though Gogol considers himself an American, he is brought up between two diametrically different cultures, similar to Bhabha’s in-between space where people can, to a certain extent, move and negotiate within their worlds. He is both Indian and American. He belongs to Indian parents on a different geographical space than India and is

acculturated as an Indian at home. But outside the home, he is an American. He thinks of India as a “foreign country far away from home, both physically and psychologically” [6]. He struggles to reconcile his dual cultures. On the one hand, he is fascinated with the free and happy lifestyles of his American girlfriend, Maxine; on the other he feels a sense of obligation towards his parents. Like that of every immigrant child, Gogol’s real challenge is to secure an identity in the midst of differences.

Influenced by U.S. lifestyle, Gogol tries to distance himself from his parents and adopt an American identity. He spends “his nights with Maxine, sleeping under the same roof as her parents, a thing Ashima refuses to admit to her Bengali friends” [6]. His identity is strongly identified with cultures that play a crucial role in the formation of modern immigrant identity which is “de-centered” [5]. A culture is, “a living set of social relations,” rather than a “timeless trait”. It is not a fixed site of meaning, or simply “common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provides us, as one people” with stable unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning” [5]. Hall’s idea on culture are important to understand the modern cultural identity of Lahiri’s characters. In fact, her characters attempt to form a multiplicity of identities in a process of cultural formation. Their cultural identity formation includes pieces of cultural inheritance to incorporate into their lives as Americans, which is similar to Hall’s idea of “being” and “becoming” of cultural identity.

Lahiri’s focus on the tension between past and present complicates Hall’s idea of being and becoming. For instance, Gogol lives between the worlds of past and present. Although he attempts to escape from the past by denouncing his cultural roots and changing his name, he is somehow connected to his roots. He is uncomfortable with his name that has so many connections with his past. He likewise cannot understand the significance of the name Gogol that his parents chose for him. Rather it is because of the very name that he is teased by his friends and his name is mispronounced by his teachers. As a result, when he turns eighteen, he goes into a Massachusetts courtroom and asks the judge to change his name, providing as his reason that he “hates the name Gogol” [6]. Although Gogol believes that by switching his name to Nikhil he would get rid of his past, his parents’ obstinate insistence on calling him by his original name symbolizes that a simple name change does not alter the fabric of a person. It is a symbol of something that he learns later through his father that his name Gogol is connected to his father’s past life. Ashoke tells Gogol “the story of the train he had ridden twenty-eight years ago, in October 1961 . . . about the night that had nearly taken his life, and the book that had saved him, and about the year afterward, when he had been unable to move” [6]. Through the story of his father and the train accident, Gogol learns that the significance of his name is so strongly associated with his father’s unforgettable past that he cannot escape so easily. Ashoke survived the accident because he was reading Gogol’s “The Overcoat” when the accident occurred near two hundred and nine kilometers away from Calcutta killing the passengers in their sleep. Gogol realizes how his life has been interwoven between the past and present.

Although Gogol is living in the in-between space and struggling to balance the two different worlds, he still longs to escape from his cultural roots and venture into his U.S. girlfriend’s life. By contrasting the lifestyles between Gogol’s and Maxine’s parents, Lahiri suggests that the immigrant children are fascinated to adopt the American lifestyle. Gogol’s immersion into his girlfriend’s life is an indication of a second generation immigrant child’s realization that an identity far from their own cultural roots is a necessity to live happily in the multicultural United States. It is Gogol’s ability to understand the difference between the lives of his parents and Maxine’s that prompts him to desire Maxine’s lifestyle. He is surprised to find the warm welcome from Maxine’s parents. At the dinner table, he is impressed with their style—an opportunity to compare between his parents’ way of serving dinner with Maxine’s parents:

A bowl of small, round, roasted red potatoes is passed around, and afterward a salad. They eat appreciatively, commenting on the tenderness of the meat, the freshness of the beans. His own mother would never have served so few dishes to a guest. She would have kept her eyes trained on Maxine’s plate, insisting she have seconds and then thirds. The table would have been lined with a row of serving bowls so that people could help themselves; but Lydia pays no attention to Gogol’s plate, she makes no announcement indicating that there is more [6].

Gogol finds a sense of freedom and independence even in the dinner table at Maxine’s house. Insisting someone empty the plate or requesting to eat more, which is a common practice in Indian culture, is something that irritates Gogol. On the contrary, he finds no obligation to eat more at Maxine’s house. Thus, though the passage is simply a description of a dinner table, Lahiri’s use of delicate language reveals a sense of freedom at the American dinner table. It is this freedom and individualism that instigate a desire for U.S. way of life in Gogol.

Although Gogol is unaccustomed to such U.S. table manners, “this sort of talk at mealtimes, to the indulgent ritual of the lingering meal, and the pleasant aftermath of bottle and crumbs and empty glasses that clutter the table, he learns to love the food Maxine and her parents eat, the potato and risotto, the bouillabaisse and osso buco, the meat baked in parchment paper” [6]. Not only Gogol’s affection for Maxine suggests his adoption of interracial dating and love, but also the adoption of most of the American demeanor because for him to know her and love her is to know and love all of these things. In fact, Gogol’s love for her is a result of his strong desire for everything she possesses—the individual lifestyle of Maxine who has “no sense of obligation,” and unlike his parents her parents pressure her to do nothing, and yet she lives faithfully, happily, at their side. In other words, Gogol’s cultural identity formation is highly affected by what Hall calls “identities are constructed through, not outside, but difference. This entails the

radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called it is *constitutive outside* that the positive meaning of any term – and thus it is “identity” – can be constructed” [4]. Gogol’s position emphasizes the necessity of the formation of a transnational identity which requires negotiation of the cultural borderlands between the United States and India.

Bhabha suggests that the in-between space of the cultural borderland is a place of transformation and change where fixed and essential identities are deconstructed. For this reason, he asserts that “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” [2]. Bhabha argues that such borderline culture innovates the performance of present by renewing the past, refiguring it as a contingent in-between space. When we read from the framework of Bhabha’s notion of borderline culture, Lahiri’s characters can be seen dwelling between different cultures and engaging in transcultural conversations. The interaction between her characters and the host groups slowly opens up the space for cultural transformation that characterizes the “in-between as a third element, an amalgam of two cultural entities that create a third after the original two have been altered”.

One of the important techniques that Lahiri uses in the novel to liberate her characters from the narrowed confinement of national boundaries is her contrast between the initial and latter attitudes and behavior of the characters. In the beginning Lahiri’s characters are seen holding strictly to their cultural roots. But later they go through changes in their demeanor. However, cultural transformation does not take place at once in *The Namesake*. It becomes a process that shuttles the characters towards forming their identities as hybrid and transnational. This process, for example, can be seen in Ashima by contrasting her character in different stages of her life in the United States. When she first comes to the United States, she feels completely lonely in the foreign land. She is shocked to find people who live detached from one another. When the time comes to give birth to her first child, 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. This is a common experience of immigrants unaccustomed to new cultures of the new land. Ashima does not have any other choice than to study her son and pity him for she has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived.

In an attempt to get rid of the loneliness, at least temporarily, Ashima practices Indian cultural values at her new home in Boston. She preserves the Indian food recipes, the Indian dress, the sari which is a key example of the maintenance of cultural identity that Indians are so proud of. She clings to her six-meter dress until the end, challenging even the coldest temperature of Massachusetts. The bindi, that usually adorns the forehead of an Indian married woman, is another cultural possession that Ashima adheres to daily. She cooks Indian foods “combining Rice Crispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl; she adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chili pepper, wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix” [6]. She prefers to read “a tattered copy of *Desh* magazine” printed in her mother tongue. She does not even say her husband’s name, a practice in South Asia, particularly in Nepal and India. Usually husbands are called with the name of the first child plus “father”—for example, Gogol’s father. Ashima does not call her husband Gogol’s father, but never utters his first name: “Like a kiss or caress in a Hindi movie, a husband’s name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over. And so, instead of saying Ashoke’s name, she utters the interrogative that has come to replace it, which translates roughly as Are you listening to me?” [6]. Like Ashima, Moushumi’s mother is also a typical example of an Indian wife. A traditional woman in India does not hold a job, but remains a homemaker. She is almost ignorant of the outer world. Similarly, although Moushumi’s mother lived abroad for thirty-two years, in England and now in the United States, she “does not know how to drive a car, does not have a job, and does not know the difference between a checking account and a savings account. And yet she is a perfectly intelligent woman, was an honors student in philology at Presidency College before she was married off at twenty-two” [6].

However, here Lahiri’s concern is not to emphasize the ancestral cultural values that her characters hold in the United States. Rather, by juxtaposing the immigrants’ initial experiences and practices in the United States with their latter adoption and immersion into the U.S. culture, she suggests the transient nature of identity, pushing the characters towards inhabiting transnational space on U.S. soil. As Lahiri’s immigrant characters live in the liminal space by attempting to adhere to the old values and negating U.S. culture, something new begins to emerge. In this regard, their immigrant experience reflects what Bhabha suggests: “The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the beyond that establishes a boundary; a bridge, where presencing begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world” [2]. Bhabha’s concern about cross-cultural initiations is particularly evident in Ashima. Although she resists U.S. culture in the beginning, later she starts to adopt it. A sense of relocation replaces her earlier feelings of homelessness in the United States. Practically, transformation through the intercultural conversation is a necessary condition for immigrants living in the metropolitan cities. To locate themselves in a new space, they need to realize their in-between status, and go through certain changes in their practices and lives.

Lahiri demonstrated the importance of in-between space, but also has, by deconstructing the narrow national and cultural identity for the immigrants, attempted to locate them into the mainstream white society. She suggests that identity based on national culture is a “potent site of control and domination within modern society”. In other words, as long as immigrants are resistant to adopting a multiplicity of identities, they risk being the victims of discrimination. Thus, unlike the stereotypical characters in postcolonial literature who suffer cultural dislocation and alienation due to their inability to negotiate and transform, Lahiri’s characters’ resistance to adopting US culture gradually declines: “As their lives in New England swell with fellow Bengali friends, the members of that other,

former life, those who know Ashima and Ashoke not by their good names, but as Monu and Mithu, slowly dwindle” [6].

Ashima’s immigrant homesickness and resistance to the host culture gradually compels her to emerge from the shelter of the Indian extended family into the American nuclear family. She enters the U.S. culture of individualism by going out and buying her groceries and pushing a stroller like all American mothers. This step towards independence brings some “pride in doing it alone, in devising a routine” [6]. When she retrieves all her shopping items at “the MBTA lost and found . . . [and] not a teaspoon [is] missing” [6], she begins to trust the American system and to feel “connected to Cambridge in a way she has not previously thought possible” [6]. She learns to do a lot of American things. She starts inviting non-Indian friends to her home, American women who also become her shopping companions [6]. She also learns about other women living alone because they are divorced and about “dating in middle age”. This is the same Ashima who always had feared her children turning into Americans, who used to cook Indian foods, and who for the first time had felt a touch of a man by putting her feet into the American made shoes of Ashoke at the age of nineteen. She was against Gogol’s love affair with a white American girl. But now she becomes positive about an intercultural love affair and marriage: “from time to time his mother asks him if he has a new girlfriend. In the past she broached the topic defensively, but now she even asks one day whether it is possible to patch things up with Maxine” [6]. It is her understanding of different cultures and her living in different social relations that make Ashima become more tolerant of her children’s Americanization.

Such changes in attitude, an attempt to be released from the confinement of narrow national identity, can be seen in other characters too. Moushumi’s parents accept an American guy named Graham as their son-in-law. When she brings him home in New Jersey, to her enormous surprise, her parents welcome him. Like American parents, they think that Moushumi is old enough to decide her life so “it didn’t matter to them that he was an American. Enough of their friends’ children had married Americans, had produced pale, dark-skinned, half-American grandchildren, and none of it was as terrible as they had feared” [6].

Similarly, consolidating Indian culture with American seems quite acceptable for Ashoke too. He is an enthusiastic reader not only of Charles Dickens, Graham Greene and Somerset Maugham, but also of eminent Russian writers like Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy [6]. He looks to the West for inspiration or self-liberation, believing that the West is a more fortunate place. A chance encounter by Ashoke on a train with a fellow Bengali, Ghosh, reiterates the rhetoric of the West/United States as the place of prosperity. Given his willingness to depart and to prosper, he begins “to envision another sort of future . . . walking away, as far as he could from the place in which he was born and in which he had nearly died” [6]. Influenced by prosperity, he slides more easily into the process of Americanization when he arrives in the United States. The “fountain pen” which is a marker of high status for Indian intellectuals, a custom most probably borrowed from the English tradition, gives way to the American “ballpoint” [6]. He “stops wearing jackets and ties to the University,” despite being a tenured full professor, because he does not want to appear different from his American colleagues [6]. His purchase of a house for his family in the New English neighborhood “appear[s] no different from their neighbors,” except for “the name on the mailbox, and apart from the issues of *Indian Abroad* and *Sangbad Bichitra* that are delivered there” [6]. Later, this house becomes a place where frequent gatherings of the Bengali community take place and even debate intensely “about the politics of America, a country in which none of them is eligible to vote,” but which indicates their allegiance to their American space (38).

Through these gatherings in the Ganguli household, Lahiri suggests Hall’s delineation of “cultural identity in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” [5]. Like Hall’s argument, what appears to be most suitable for these Bengali families is that they all come from Calcutta and are Bengalis, all of which turns into a common terrain for speaking the Bengali language and other similar practices. For instance, Gogol’s baptism, “the annaprasan, his rice ceremony” , which symbolizes “the Bengali staff for life” [6]. It is the first big event that brings these Bengali families to the Ganguli’s place; the Nandis, the Mitras, the Banerjees. It is a shared culture that prompts them to get together to celebrate each ceremony and festival in the United States. The gatherings of Bengali families at the Ganguli’s house as the basis for shared cultural identities are seen to be more pertinent when Ashoke passes away. At this difficult time all the “friends of the family” come to Ganguli’s house from six different states lining up their cars the whole of Pemberton Road, and take care of them: “for the first week, they are never alone; No longer a family of four, they become a household of ten, sometimes twenty, friends coming by to sit with them quietly in the living room, their heads bent, drinking cups of tea, a cluster of people attempting to make up for his father’s loss” [6].

However, Lahiri illustrates that these Indian immigrants are estranged from their birth country and have adopted some specific characteristics of the new cultures over time. They “learn to roast turkeys . . . at Thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woolen scarves around the snowmen, to color boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter” [6]. Although these are Christian celebrations, these characters practice them the way they prepare for the Hindu celebration of festivities associated with Goddesses Durga and Saraswati [6]. Turkey at Thanksgiving is a U.S. cultural tradition, but they prepare turkey the way they used to roast chicken back in India: “rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne” [6]. Similarly, like the Durga Pooja, one of the greatest festivals in Hinduism, which is celebrated among the people of the same community, they celebrate Christmas at another Bengali house. These characters not only gather to celebrate Indian festivities and customs and maintain their cultural ideologies, but also to observe Christian celebrations, yet in an evolving way. They have made Christian holidays part of their own cultural tradition even though they are not Christian.

In this regard, Lahiri projects her immigrant characters into such an imaginary landscape, where they must negotiate between different identities and re-root themselves between the newly acquired US space and Indian cultural practices. Lahiri's characters are rather comfortable in adopting the hybrid identities. Her characters live -between, straddling two worlds, making their identity transnational. The novel provides a fascinating representation of the ways in which first-and-second generation immigrants negotiate different identities through cultural conversation, and overcome the cultural issues in the United States. Lahiri concentrates on the formation of hybrid identity, which is transnational, for her characters. She positions her characters in-between the different cultures where transformation takes place, deconstructing the fixed notion of identity.

The Namesake is set against the backdrop of the 1970s and 1980s when Indian migration to the West (here particularly the United States) was rampant due to the effect of rising globalization. It explores the conflicts of Indian immigrants for both the first and second generation, spanning a time period of late 1960s to early twenty-first century. In this regard, *The Namesake* fairly deals with the cultural conflicts that resulted from 1970s' globalization. The characters in the novel come from across the ocean. The development of new technologies and transportation play a vital role in mobilizing people from one world to another and in negotiations between different cultures. The connection between different peoples, ideas and ideologies are faster. *The Namesake* demonstrates that identities are becoming more transnational and global due to the development of technologies, transportation, and global connections between people. It talks about the immigrants who live in a land of nowhere, resulting from their attempt to overcome cultural issues and negotiate diverse racial identities. Given that the conflict between rootedness, constituting a tie to their past, and uprootedness, living in the present, disrupts their lives, they attempt to negotiate the differences and form fluid identities.

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