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# A Lacanian Gaze into Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

Jhumpa Lahiri'nin *The Namesake* Adlı Romanına Lacancı Bir Bakış Açısı

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**ABSTRACT**

*The Namesake*, published by Jhumpa Lahiri in 2003, illustrates the cultural and social identity issues of two generations of an Indian-American family, who struggle to adjust between two different cultures. As a second-generation son, Gogol, the protagonist of the novel, is trapped between these two cultures and experiences an identity crisis. In the journey of discovering his true self, Gogol has conflicts with his Indian roots along with the American society he has been raised in. He was named after his father's favourite Russian author. His biggest conflict, however, starts with the dilemma he experiences with his own name. To deal with his identity crisis, he tries to leave his roots behind and embraces his American side. However, this attempt will not be a solution to the crisis he feels deep down inside of him. In this respect, this study aims to explore the journey of the protagonist's identity construction in the context of Lacanian Psychoanalysis. In order to portray the identity development process of the protagonist, Gogol is analysed in relation to the three Orders of Lacan: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. Regarding the protagonist's experience of these three Orders, Gogol is seen to be a Lacanian infant, who is in pursuit of his lost object of desire called *object petit a* to sustain the intimate connection with his true self.

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## Introduction

This study examines Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* to illustrate the protagonist Gogol's challenges and conflicts in his journey of identity construction. Struggling between his Indian roots and American side, the two different cultures, Gogol feels trapped and questions his identity. To seek his true self, Gogol, like a Lacanian infant, pursues his lost object of desire. In this respect, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory has been used in this study in order to show the protagonist's identity development process. In the novel, Gogol's portrayal from birth to adulthood, including his romantic affairs and a marriage he passes through, renders it possible to analyse him in relation to Lacan's three Orders. On his path to obtain his lost object of desire, *object petit a*, Gogol confronts the laws of the Symbolic Order embodied in Indian and American cultural norms and experiences the moments when he questions his existence, which is only accessed through the Real.

Psychoanalytic criticism, primarily associated with Freudian thoughts, has gained a new dimension with the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-81), who reformulated

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psychoanalysis in terms of language and structuralist views. Lacan places language as the basis of his theory to interpret the human psyche and behaviours. His thesis '…the unconscious… is structured like a language' (Lacan, 2006, p. 737) has become a motto for Lacanian psychoanalysis. According to Terry Eagleton (1996), Lacan's work is a notably innovative attempt to reinterpret Freudianism, regarding the human subject, its role in society, and, more importantly, its relationship to language (p. 142). As a non-traditional psychoanalyst, Lacan, however, is a controversial figure ''among his interpreters concerning what he intended by many of his statements'' (Tyson, 2006, p. 26). That's why his work is regarded as abstract and ambiguous and might cause difficulties in comprehending and applying the theory. On the other hand, he had no concern about being understood correctly, and he says that he writes to be read not to be understood (Lacan, 2013, p. 69). Despite this contradiction, Lacan ''is arguably the most important psychoanalyst since Sigmund Freud'' (Homer, 2005, p. 1) and provides an innovative perspective to classical psychoanalytic studies. Lacan, as a main follower of Freud, initiated the movement 'Return to Freud' in the 1950s, opposing the discipline of ego-psychology of post-Freud thinkers, and devoted most of his twenty-eight-year seminars to close reading and understanding of Freud's ideas and concepts. Holding annual seminars in Paris from 1953 to 1981, Lacan, thus, introduced radical ideas to psychoanalysis through the reconsideration of Freudianism. Even if he fully supports and makes valuable contributions to Freudianism, in time Lacan has formulated his own theory. Homer (2005) remarks that ''[i]n seminar XI, for the first time, Lacan moved away from an exposition of Freud's ideas to the development of his own conception of psychoanalysis'' (p. 11). Today, along with his seminars, Lacan's seminal book, *Ecrits: A Selection* (1966), which consists of his collected articles and lectures, presents ground resources for Lacanian studies.

Lacan divides the psyche that controls human beings into three groups: His three Orders called *the Imaginary*, *the Symbolic*, and *the Real*, constitute the base of this study. Lacan describes these three Orders to specify his theory of the psychological development of the infant. To better understand Lacan's Imaginary Order, the idea of the mirror stage, in which the child identifies himself with his image in the mirror and realizes his own entity, needs to be clarified first. Lacan first mentions the concept of the mirror stage, accepted as his first innovation in psychoanalysis, in the Congress of International Pyscho-Analytical Association (IPA) in 1936 with his paper called 'Le state du miroir'. He later conceptualizes the idea of the mirror stage in detail with his study entitled 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' at the 16th of Zurich IPA Congress in 1949. Today although the idea of the mirror stage is mostly associated with Lacan, he is not the one who first introduced the term to psychoanalytic studies. Lacan's concept of the mirror stage is considered to be based on the experiment of the mirror test conducted by the French Marxist Psychologist, Henri Wallon in 1931. In his mirror test conducted on six-month-old human babies and similar-aged chimpanzees, Wallon reveals that they differ in their reactions to the images in the mirror. While the chimpanzees show limited interest in their reflections, the human babies are completely fascinated by their reflections (Buchanan, 2010, p. 322). Thus, borrowing and modifying the Wallonian concept of the mirror test (Bailly, 2012, p. 22), Lacan created his theory of the mirror stage and placed it as an initiation in the psychological development of the infant, who experiences his three Orders.

The mirror stage, which includes the periods of 6 and 18 months, initiates the Imaginary Order, where the infant possesses a delightful complete union with its mother. The mirror stage is, therefore, viewed as a primary condition for the infant to enter the Imaginary Order. With its identification with the image reflected in the mirror, the infant experiences itself as a whole rather than a fragmented mass and develops a sense of self. For Lacan, the mirror stage is ''the age indicated to the jubilant identification of the individual who is still an infant with the total form [of itself]'' (2006, p. 428). In the same way, Lionel Bailly (2012) describes the mirror stage as the first time when the baby realizes itself beyond its perception of being immature, helpless, and

fragmented and discovers itself as a unitary being with an intense feeling of joy and excitement (p. 28). Thus, the infant, with its sense of feeling as a whole, steps into the realm of the Imaginary, where it perceives the world through images rather than words. For this reason, the Imaginary Order, as a preverbal stage, is a world constructed around the child's perceptions. "… [I]t is a world of fullness, completeness, and delight…'' (Tyson, 2006, p. 27) because the child builds a unified and satisfying relationship with its mother. The child regards itself as an inseparable part of its mother and thinks that ''my mother is all I need and I am all my mother needs'' (p. 27). Due to this strong dyadic connection with its mother, the child feels complete and gratified and tastes an illusionary world. This is an intense sense of satisfaction and fulfilment that the child wishes to keep during its entire life. Lacan calls this delightful feeling 'the Desire of Mother', which the child continues to experience until it acquires language.

With its acquisition of language, the child leaves the Imaginary Order and enters the realm of the Symbolic. Lacan emphasizes the child's acquisition of language as its initiation into the Symbolic Order (Tyson, 2006, p. 28). Affected by the idea of 'structuralism' of Ferdinand de Saussure, Lacan creates a relation between the function of the Symbolic Order and language. Saussure claims that language is a system that governs what people say while they are unconsciously unaware of its rules (Homer, 2005, p. 37). That is to say, children are exposed to a specific language, and thus they are subject to that language's rules and system. Likewise, when the Lacanian infant enters the Symbolic Order, he is structured by the laws of the Symbolic Order. The first law the child confronts is the father's prohibition, through which the child experiences the biggest separation of his life and loses the intimate union with its mother, experienced during the Imaginary Order. Lacan states that this biggest separation constitutes our most important experience of loss that will haunt us all our lives (Tyson, 2006, p. 28). In this way, the child feels incomplete and seeks substitutes for that loss, unconsciously desiring it throughout its life, even if it will never sustain the satisfying bond with the mother. Bertens (2024) indicates that we do not have access to the preverbal self we live [in the Imaginary] with a lack, and thus the loss of our original state causes 'desire', a deep-felt longing, which we could never achieve but rather temporarily satisfy with symbolic substitutes (p. 117). Lacan calls this lost object of desire 'object petit a', which refers to the child's fantasy union with its mother.

With the child's entry into the Symbolic Order, the Desire of Mother is replaced with the Name-of-the-Father, a symbolic signifier, which represents all sorts of rules and prohibitions that the child abides by. That's why, the Name-of-the-Father symbolizes ''the restrictive dimension of the Symbolic Order'' (Tyson, 2006, p. 31). As an authority signifier of the Symbolic Order, the Name-of-the-Father breaks the closed circuit of mutual desire between the mother and child (Homer, 2005, p. 53) and determines the child's roles and relations in society. Surrounded by ideological systems like laws, values, and cultural norms, the Symbolic Order possesses an important function in the formation of the child's self. Namely, experiencing the Symbolic Order, the child enters the world of ideologies, which shapes its identity. Tyson (2006) says that ''we are not the unique, independent individuals [because], [o]ur desires, beliefs, biases… are constructed for us…'' when we immerse into the Symbolic Order. [For this reason], the way we respond to our society's ideologies makes who we are (p. 31).

Lacan's Real, on the other hand, is a difficult concept to explain. For Lacan, ''the Real ex-sists because the Symbolic and Imaginary exist'' (Bailly, 2012, p. 97). The tension between these two Orders might be the reason for the existence of the Real. Selden et al. (2005) claim that the Real is incomprehensible because it is "beyond reach because beyond the subject and beyond representation'' (p. 158). The Real is not social realities experienced in the Symbolic or is not the idealized union desired in the Imaginary. It is ''the void or abyss at the core of our being that we constantly try to fill out'' (Homer, 2005, pp. 87-8). Whatever exists in that void, beyond reach and

existence, represents Lacan's Real. In the same way, Tyson (2006) presents interesting views on Lacan's Real, which are placed at the centre of this study. She indicates that ''the Real is the uninterpretable dimension of existence'' because it stays outside of all ideologies of society to explain existence. Behind the world of ideologies exists the Real even if we cannot realize it. The Real is the experience during the times ''when we feel there is no purpose or meaning to life." For Lacan, the individual's experience of such anxious feelings results in trauma. *The trauma of the Real* is our realization that the buried reality behind the ideologies of society is beyond our capacity to understand and explain (p. 32).

## Jhumpa Lahiri and the Analysis of *The Namesake*

Jhumpa Lahiri, born 1967 in England to immigrant parents from Indian descent and raised in America, has come to the international spotlight with her debut collection, *Interpreter of Maladies,* which won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. With the publication of her collection in 1999, *The New Yorker*, a renowned magazine for its reviews of literature and arts, praised her talent in writing and named Lahiri as ''one of the 20 best writers under the age of 40'' (Nelson, 2015, p. 295). As the first Indian-American female author to receive a Pulitzer in literature, Lahiri has taken her place among prominent diasporic writers like Salman Rushdie and Kiran Desai in immigrant literature.

As a second-generation immigrant raised with both Indian traditions and American culture, Lahiri experiences a sense of cultural displacement and identity conflict. In one of the interviews held with Lahiri, she expresses, ''When I was growing up … I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offspring, I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, …'' (Newsweek Staff, 2010). Based on her personal poignant experiences as a diasporic individual, Lahiri mostly deals with such issues as immigration, identity crisis, alienation, cultural conflicts, and a sense of belonging in her literary works. Tabur (2017) asserts that ''like her fictional characters, Lahiri often points toward her own diasporic experience as being puzzled with the questions of home, identity, and belonging'' (p. 145). Accordingly, in *The Namesake*, claimed as her autobiographical novel, Lahiri is concerned with similar issues so as to depict the protagonist Gogol's struggles and conflicts with his dual identity.

*The Namesake*, published in 2003, is a novel that narrates the life of two generations of an Indian-American family, the Gangulis, who struggle to adjust between two different cultures. The main characters are the first-generation immigrants, Ashoke and his wife, Ashima, and their American-born children Gogol and Sonia. The story centres around the life of the couple's son Gogol, who is named after his father's favourite Russian author, Nikolai Gogol. Being an American-born Indian with a Russian name, Gogol feels confused and has conflicts with his identity. He clashes with his Indian and American culture. His biggest conflict, however, starts with the dilemma he experiences with his own name. Burdened with these psychological conflicts, Gogol sets on a journey, where he desires to discover his lost identity. In his identity construction process, Gogol is now a Lacanian infant, who seeks his lost object of desire in order to maintain the idealised union with his true self.

## Gogol's Conflict with His Name

Gogol's identity crisis starts from the moment he was born. The letter sent from India by their great-grandmother including Gogol's 'good' name never reaches his parents. It gets lost somewhere between India and America. In Indian culture, people are given two names: a *pet name* for the intimate circle of family and friends, and a *good name* for formal and professional occasions. This tradition of naming, however, causes a problem for Gogol, who was born in a country which has no such customs. Since the letter has not arrived yet, his parents decide to postpone the naming of their son. However, they learn that ''in America, a baby cannot be released from the hospital

without a birth certificate. And that a birth certificate needs a name'' (Lahiri, 2006, p. 27). That is why his father Ashoke has named his son after his favourite author, Gogol, which is given as a pet name to be used among family members. Unexpectedly, the pet name Gogol, registered in the hospital's files, turns into a good name.

When Gogol begins his formal education, the time he starts kindergarten, his parents have finally decided on a good name for him to use at school. Now he will be called by a new name, 'Nikhil'. Gogol is, however, deeply concerned with this current situation and feels distressed. ''He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know'' (Lahiri, 2006, p. 57). Even more, as his father takes him to school, Gogol remains quiet and does not respond to any questions addressed to him. He just keeps looking down at his sneakers despite Mrs. Lapidus's insistence to communicate with him (p. 57).

In his childhood, Gogol embraces his name, which creates a sense of belonging for him. Despite being a Russian name, which has no relation with his Indian or American sides, from his childhood perception, Gogol is who he is. He associates his name with his real identity. Gogol's desire to keep his name reflects ''a self-imposed defence against an inevitable upheaval in his life'' (Munos, 2008, p. 109). Therefore, he refuses to have a new name his parents have chosen for him. This corresponds to the Lacanian concept of Imaginary Order, where the Lacanian infant inhabits the world of completeness and fulfilment with his mother. In Lacanian sense, Gogol is still clinging to his Imaginary Order, where he is satisfied with his connection with the Desire of Mother, which signifies his true self, identified with his name. In order not to lose the idealized union with his name, in another saying, to remain in the fantasy world of the Imaginary Order, Gogol insists on keeping his name. "At the end of his first day he is sent home with a letter to his parents from Mrs. Lapidus… explaining that due to their son's preference, he will be known as Gogol at school" (Lahiri, 2006, p. 60).

However, with his step into puberty, Gogol faces the confusion that his name causes. Thus, his Desire of Mother turns into the-Name-of-the-Father, which refers to ''a symbolic function that intrudes into the illusionary world of the child and breaks the imaginary dyad of the mother and the child'' (Homer, 2005, pp. 55-6). His name, Gogol is now a Lacanian father who restricts him from obtaining his lost object of desire 'object petit a', and results in a lack in his life. Thus, Gogol's idealized connection with his Desire of Mother disappears through the existence of the Lacanian father. In other words, he leaves the Imaginary Order and enters the realm of the Symbolic, where Gogol, as a Lacanian infant, unconsciously pursues his lost object of desire, associated with his true self: "He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American, but of all things Russian" (Lahiri, 2006, p. 76). He feels the need to satisfy his desire, which is unattainable now.

Especially during the time when he learns about the life of the author Nikolai Gogol in his literature class at high school, Gogol wants to escape from his Lacanian father, which breaks his satisfying bond with his Desire of Mother. That is to say, the name Gogol has become an obstacle that prevents him from being a normal American boy he wishes to be. As Mr. Lawson, his literature teacher, asks the students to read 'The Overcoat by Nikolai Gogol', Gogol never touches the book. ''To read the story, he believes, would mean paying tribute to his namesake, accepting it somehow'' (Lahiri, 2006, p. 92). In a way, he is afraid of facing his Lacanian father. In the course of analysing Nikolai Gogol in class, Mr. Lawson mentions that: ''Gogol's life, in a nutshell, was a steady decline into madness … He was reputed to be hypochondriac, and a deeply paranoid, frustrated man… He never married, fathered no children. It's commonly believed he died a virgin'' (Lahiri, 2006, p. 91). This moment, however, is a sort of torture for Gogol to endure. He is panicked to death and worried about his classmates' thoughts about him. "Each time the name is uttered, he quietly winces" (p. 91). He, like a Lacanian infant, is forced to leave the idealized world of the Imaginary Order to confront his Lacanian father.

On a Saturday night, when his parents go out of town for the weekend, Gogol, with his American friends, sneaks out to a college party held at a university dorm. This is the first time he gets closer to a girl in his life. So far, he has never dared to date a girl due to his strange name. To avoid the reaction of the girl at the party, Gogol, despite his own shock, introduces himself as "Nikhil." As their conversation develops, Gogol kisses the girl at the end of the night. On the way back home, when his friends express their surprise, Gogol is completely in a daze. Astonished by what happened with the name Nikhil, Gogol has come to a new realization that: "'It wasn't me,' he nearly says. But he doesn't tell them that it hadn't been Gogol who'd kissed Kim. That Gogol had had nothing to do with it'' (Lahiri, 2006, p. 96). Therefore, the name Nikhil, which has become a new signifier to help Gogol to avoid his Lacanian father, has replaced the name Gogol, associated as a barrier to reach the fantasy world of the Imaginary Order in his childhood.

As Gogol turns eighteen, just before his freshman year at university in New Haven, he officially changes his name into Nikhil. The moment he leaves the Court, feeling totally unburdened, Gogol ''wonders if this is how it feels for an obese person to become thin, for a prisoner to walk free. 'I'm Nikhil,' he wants to tell [all] people…'' (Lahiri, 2006, p. 102) in the street. In a sense, Gogol escapes from his Lacanian father, and thus Nikhil becomes a substitute for his lost object of desire in the Symbolic Order. Namely, Gogol tries to compensate for the lack, his lost identity, with his new name Nikhil. By changing his name, Gogol thinks that he frees himself from the law of his Lacanian father: "But now that he's Nikhil it's easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas. … It's as Nikhil, that first semester, that he grows a goatee, starts smoking Camel Lights at parties and …" (Lahiri, 2006, p. 105). He feels satisfied with his renewed identity formed by his new name that replaces the identity created by the name Gogol.

For this reason, the name Nikhil represents the American culture that Gogol identifies himself with. That is to say, "Gogol becomes the identity of a foreign madman who never experienced sex or any of the other initiations that lead to an adult identity for modern Americans'' (Ceaser, 2007, p. 109). Therefore, Gogol holds on to his new name Nikhil as a substitute in the Symbolic Order to seek his lost object of desire.

More importantly, Ashoke's sudden death has become a turning point in Gogol's life. After his father's death, his mother Ashima also leaves them to live in India. Hence, Gogol comes to such a point that he begins to question the meaning of life. While doing so, he especially focuses on his crisis with his name. His name Gogol means "future" to his father to help him survive a train crash whereas, for him, it represents the Indian roots he has always wanted to leave behind. But now, all his efforts to get rid of his name seem in vain to Gogol. Somehow, he senses something hidden in life even if he cannot fully comprehend what it is. This might be the moment Gogol experiences the Lacanian Real, where the infant finds no sense of meaning and everything is beyond its understanding in its life. Now, Gogol feels an endless void in the Real, neither filled with the substitutes in the Symbolic Order nor accessed through the fantasy union experienced in the Imaginary Order. His sense of true self gets a new form that he cannot fully understand.

## Gogol's Conflict with His Family

Gogol's bicultural upbringing, shaped by his Indian and American culture, paves the way to question his identity. In his journey of self-discovery, Gogol has conflicts with his Indian roots along with the American society he has been raised in. Trapped between these two cultures, Gogol, therefore, experiences an identity crisis. At home, he is raised by a family, who deeply feels nostalgia for their heritage and tries to pass it to their children. However, outside his home, in the public sphere, he is surrounded by American traditions and customs. Focusing on the construction of identity and relation with ourselves, Rose states that relations are built in the name of certain objectives such as manliness, modesty, propriety, distinction, harmony, fulfilment, virtue, and

pleasure (p. 130).

For this reason, Gogol, feeling in-between, cannot deal with his dual identity. To resolve his confusion, he turns his back to his Indian roots and embraces his American side. For Gogol, his Indian roots mean a handicap to maintain his American identity. Deep down, Gogol perceives himself to be an American and feels alienated from his heritage. Particularly on their visits to Calcutta, his parents' hometown in India, Gogol's detachment from his roots becomes much clearer: ''[These people] are related on their mother's or father's side, by marriage or by blood… but [Gogol and Sonia] do not feel close to them as their parents do'' (Lahiri, 2006, p. 81). In this respect, in Gogol's Lacanian development of journey, his Indian heritage is regarded as the-Name-of-the-Father that restrains him from obtaining his lost object of desire. For Lacan, the father signifies the Law (Eagleton, 1996, p. 143). With his entrance into the Symbolic Order by the law of the Lacanian father, Gogol experiences a lack in his life and feels no sense of completeness. Likewise, Gogol is forced by his Lacanian father to accept the Indian norms of his heritage to which he has no sense of belonging. For this reason, to escape from his Lacanian father, Gogol strives to distance himself from his family and any circle of Indian community in America. For instance, when he attends a panel discussion about Indian novels written in English, where his distant cousin from India gives a speech, Gogol's thoughts clearly exemplify his escape from his roots: "Gogol has never heard the term *ABCD*. He eventually gathers that it stands for 'American-born confused deshi' In other words, him… But Gogol never thinks of India as *desh*. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India'' (Lahiri, 2006, p. 118). The Symbolic Order, with its ideological word, has an important function even in the perceptive world of the subject. Thus Gogol, growing up in America, which is culturally different from India, is influenced by American system.

Even more, to escape from his family, Gogol settles in New York to work just after he graduates from university: ''[A]fter four years in New Haven, he didn't want to move back to Massachusetts, to the one city in America his parents know. … He didn't want to go home … to go with them pujos or Bengali parties…'' (Lahiri, 2006, p. 126). Unquestionably, Gogol does not want to remain with his family. Ceaser expresses that although he is now a grown man, he still seems to be going through the adolescent struggle to form an identity for himself separate from the world of his parents (2007, p. 111). For Gogol, his family is associated with his Lacanian father and forces him to stay in the Symbolic Order, where he experiences a lack and unconsciously desires to complete it in his entire life. However, to avoid his Lacanian father, Gogol identifies himself with his American side. He holds on to American culture as a substitute to compensate for his lost object of desire in the Symbolic Order. For Gogol, American culture represents the identity he desires to obtain. That's why, he is more inclined to his American culture than the unknown and distant culture of [his] parent's origin (Bhandari, 2018, p. 93). In his American culture, he feels free of the law of his Lacanian father, and thus he struggles to fill the emptiness in his Symbolic Order to reach his lost object of desire.

On the other hand, with his father's death, Gogol's attitudes toward his heritage seem to change. During those painful times, he never leaves his family alone, and as a dutiful son, he practices the 'ten-day mourning diet' ritual to pay his blessings to his father. Even more, when his American girlfriend comes to take him to his previous American life from his mournful environment, he rejects her by saying ''I don't want to get away'' (Lahiri, 2006, p. 182). In the years following his father's death, Gogol visits and supports his mother whenever she needs him. ''His return to his parents' house in Massachusetts, argues Friedman (2008), is a physical and metaphoric return to his Indian roots'' (p. 121). In Lacanian sense, Gogol's return to his roots shows that he accepts the law of his Lacanian father, who prevents him from reaching his object of desire. For that matter, the American culture he embraces as a substitute for his lost object of desire cannot recover the lack Gogol has experienced in the Symbolic Order.

## Gogol's Conflict with Women

Gogol's romantic affairs with women provide no sense of reconciliation with his true self as well. *Maxine* as an American woman and *Moushumi* as an Indian woman play an important role in his identity crisis. His adulthood life in New York is mostly shaped around these two relationships. For Gogol, Maxine represents his American culture to which he feels closely tied: ''Maxine is an affluent white American, a New Yorker by birth and privileged in every sense. She functions as a representative of Western high culture and international sophistication'' (Bhalla, 2012, p. 113). Highly fascinated by Maxine's way of living with her parents, Lydia and Gerald, Gogol finds himself in her life without any hesitation and falls in love with her (Lahiri, 2006, p. 137). This way, Gogol separates himself from his family and immerses into the American culture he wishes to be a part of. Unsurprisingly, he easily fits into his new life with Maxine and feels free of the burden of his Indian descent: "From the very beginning he feels effortlessly incorporated into their lives… Gogol and Maxine come and go as they please, from movies and dinners out… At night he sleeps with her in the room she grew up in…" (p. 136). To adopt the American way of life and live like them is not a big challenge for him.

In Lacanian sense, Maxine is regarded as a substitute to compensate for Gogol's lost object of desire, which he has missed through the existence of the-Name-of-the-Father in the Symbolic Order. In his relationship with Maxine, Gogol hides himself in his American culture, which allows him a safe zone away from his Lacanian father: ''He feels free of expectation, of responsibility, in willing exile from his own life. He is responsible for nothing in [this] house'' (Lahiri, 2006, p. 142). In some way, Gogol keeps away from the law of his Lacanian father, which signifies the Indian cultural norms he is expected to follow. However, with his father's death, Gogol's intimate connection with Maxine is broken as in the case of the Lacanian infant's broken union with its mother through the presence of the-Name-of-the-Father. Thus, Gogol becomes dissatisfied with his substitute, Maxine, and begins to search for other substitutes to reach his lost object of desire in the Symbolic Order.

After his break-up with Maxine, following his father's death, Gogol is now closer to his family. Upon his mother's constant insistence, Gogol, not to upset her, agrees to meet Moushumi, the daughter of his parents' friends. Moushumi, like Gogol, is a second-generation immigrant, who shares similar troubles in America due to her origin. Likewise, she has ended a relationship with her American boyfriend. Somehow, these similar experiences bring them together in New York. Although Gogol remembers Moushumi from the parties and festivals of their parents in his childhood, this is the first time they meet outside the circle of their Indian communities. On their meeting, Gogol, despite his surprise, is highly impressed by Moushumi's beauty and attitude during their conversation. "He had not expected to enjoy himself, to be attracted to her in the least" (Lahiri, 2006, p. 199). Gogol has always refused to communicate with anyone from his family's origin. He has struggled to get rid of his heritage, which provides no sense of relief to him. But this time, their shared experiences and likeness comfort Gogol. He knows that he does not need to make any disturbing explanations related to who he is.

Within a year, they get married. They are united due to their common culture, shared experiences, and dilemmas that their roots lead to (Bhalla, 2012, p. 116). For Gogol, his relationship with Moushumi becomes a solution to his confusion with his self. It seems that he embraces the Indian side of his identity, and thus he makes peace with the crisis he feels deep inside of him. Gogol's ''choice of Moushumi as a lover and then a wife seems to have been part of an unconscious attempt to concretize another identity, an adult identity that would connect him to his childhood world and to his family'' (Ceaser, 2007, p. 114). In this respect, in Gogol's Lacanian developmental journey, Moushumi represents the Desire of Mother he wishes to connect. With his marriage to Moushumi, Gogol might enter the Imaginary Order, where he sustains an intimate union with his Lacanian

mother. Therefore, Gogol has a chance to experience a sense of fulfilment that he is always looking for in the Symbolic Order. However, upon Moushumi's betrayal, Gogol's intimate connection with his Lacanian mother is broken, and thus he leaves the fantasy world of the Imaginary Order, where he feels complete and delighted.

Like his father's death, Gogol's divorce from Moushumi becomes a turning point in his life. After his exit from the Imaginary Order, Gogol, as a Lacanian infant, finds himself in a void, where he has lost his way to reach his object petit a. He seems in a sort of limbo between his Imaginary and Symbolic Orders. Now, a year later, after his divorce, he waits at a train station for his sister Sonia to go home before his mother Ashima leaves for India "… but a sense of failure and shame persists, deep and abiding… It's as if a building he'd been responsible for designing has collapsed for all to see (Lahiri, 2006, pp. 283-4). As he waits at the train station, Gogol is seen to question the meaning of life. He questions what he gets from life and where to go in the future. He seems to be at a crossroads in his life. This might be the moment Gogol experiences the Lacanian Real, which is beyond the existence and the reach of the Imaginary and Symbolic Orders.

## Conclusion

In the quest for his true self, Gogol sets on a Lacanian journey to retain his intimate union with his Desire of Mother. As a Lacanian infant, in his journey of identity construction, Gogol confronts his own name and Indian roots as the-Name-of-the-Father, and this situation causes him to experience an identity crisis. To deal with his identity crisis, Gogol begins to pursue his lost object desire, *object petit a*, which helps to maintain his satisfying union with his Lacanian mother. In a feeling of lost and no sense of complete as a result of his lost identity through the existence of the-Name-of-the-Father, Gogol is trapped in the Symbolic Order. To avoid his Lacanian father, Gogol adopts his American culture as a substitute for his lost object of desire. In a way, it is through his substitutes in the Symbolic Order that Gogol struggles to reach his Lacanian mother, which signifies his ultimate gratification with his true self. In this sense, Gogol's relationship with his American girlfriend Maxine represents his major substitute to compensate for his lost object of desire.

Even if Gogol mostly remains in the Symbolic Order in the course of his identity construction, from time to time, he has a chance to enter the Imaginary Order where he feels complete and delighted thanks to the connection he builds with his Desire of Mother. When he preserves his name Gogol in his childhood, he is satisfied with his true self and enjoys the blissful union with his Lacanian mother. In the same way, his return to his Indian roots with his marriage to Moushumi shows that Gogol might enter the Imaginary Order and recover his union with his Lacanian mother, which he has lost in the Symbolic Order through the law of the Father.

Gogol's father's sudden death and his divorce from Moushumi are accepted as crucial turning points in his identity construction process. After these two poignant events, Gogol is thought to have experienced the Lacanian Real, where he feels locked somewhere beyond the reach of his Imaginary and Symbolic Orders. He questions the purpose of his life. All these troubles he has experienced are beyond his comprehension. Neither his substitutes for his lost object of desire in the Symbolic Order nor his intimate union with his Desire of Mother in the Imaginary Order offers a sense of existence to Gogol.

With the application of Lacanian psychoanalysis to *The Namesake*, this study shows that the protagonist Gogol, experiencing Lacan's three Orders, strives to find a solution to his identity crisis and undergoes a transformation in the journey of discovering his true self. This study also, through its Lacanian analysis, provides an illuminative insight into *The Namesake* compared to the previous studies mostly carried out within the fields of diaspora and postcolonialism.

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