

Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel, *The Namesake*, published in September 2003 in succession to her debut collection of stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, emerges as a national bestseller and sets its motif on the immigration experience, cultural clash and generation conflict. Lahiri was born in 1967 in London of Bengali parents, and grew up in Rhode Island, USA. *The Namesake* on a major scale reflects Lahiri's own experience of and contemplation on the identity problems of the second-generation South Asian Americans. This novel captures, in its substance, a sense of the troubling of identifications. As is implied by the category "South Asian-American," the very rhetoric of the inclusivity of "hyphenation" veils the fact that whiteness is by implication invested with normativity.¹ According to Samir Dayal, hyphenated citizenship is in effect a sign constructed in opposition to "real and unqualified Americanness." This Americanness presents itself as the "spectral authenticity" that does not bear the mark of hyphenatedness, and thus designates a condition of the othering for many "ethnic" groups ("Minding" 235). For the South Asian immigrants in the U.S. such as is depicted in *The Namesake*, they are situated on the threshold of inclusion and are caught in the perpetual oscillation between assimilation into the mainstream culture and the preservation of a diasporic, liminal sensibility.

Through Lahiri's characters in *The Namesake*, I intend to examine the liminality of South Asian identity by referring to Bhabha. For the diaspora such as Lahiri's protagonists and other Indian immigrants, there is neither nostalgia for a home left behind, nor a sense of crude exclusion in the adopted country. In my paper, I will mainly draw from Homi Bhabha's conception of "liminal space" in *The Location of Culture* at the attempt to explore into the "unhomely" situation of the immigrants. According to Bhabha, the liminal space the immigrants occupy is heterogeneous in its constitution and, with the constant influx of difference of the other—that is, both the "home" and the host country—the Indian immigrants is empowered to negotiate a space and identity in the American society. After

¹ Note that elsewhere in this essay, the hyphen is not used in the term "South Asian American," in accordance with the norm of usage. In order to explicate the notion of "hyphenation," it is retained here in this passage.

reading Bhabha's theory into the novel, I will further point out the shortcomings of Bhabha's notion of "hybridity" in solving the immigrant's identity problems in the contemporary world. In this final part, I will mainly draw from Negri and Hardt's idea of "imperial racism" in their work *Empire*, and through the critique of the postcolonial politics of difference I propose "the will to be against" and "desertion" as the way to liberation from the troubled identification that has been permeated by the imperial power.

The Namesake follows the travails of one oddly named Indian-American young man, Gogol Ganguli, through his identity obfuscation as a second-generation South Asian American. Gogol, son of Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli, is stuck with the pet name after his "good name," which is given by Ashima's grandmother in India, gets lost in the postal void somewhere between India and America. As Gogol is named after the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, which adds more ambiguity to his already confused South Asian identity, the liminality, hybridity, and state of in-between-ness of the South Asian community is brought to the fore. Gogol lives his entire life attempting to negotiate a space in mainstream American society. As a teenager, Gogol changes his name with the intention to sever the Indian culture he inherits from his parents, and, donned with the new name, Nikhil, Gogol starts to lead an American youngster's life. As a young adult, Gogol moves in with his American girlfriend, Maxine, and seeks assimilation to her and her parents' way of life. Despite his effort to become white, to achieve total Americanization, Gogol ends up marrying an Indian woman, Moushumi, and, after his father's death, Gogol starts to read, for the first time, "The Overcoat" by the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. While Gogol refuses to read the book by his namesake for the first thirty years of his life, he returns to his childhood bedroom at the end of the novel and picks up "The Overcoat" to read it. Accordingly, Gogol's liminal identity is reflected in his position between assimilation and segregation, inclusion and exclusion.

Before interrogating the liminal space and interstitial identity of South Asian immigrants in the U.S. as is projected in *The Namesake*, it would be a necessity to examine the history of immigration of this particular group into the continent.

Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva offer meticulous information on this subject in their introduction to *Between the Lines*. According to the two coeditors of this book, there are two phases in South Asian immigration to both the United States and Canada. The first phase began as early as the 1890s and saw small numbers and staggered discontinuous flows of immigrants arriving. The early wave of South Asian immigrants is mostly constituted by the laboring and farming class without the advantage of much education. Following the relaxation of immigration laws in 1965, which eliminated race, religion, and nationality as criteria for immigration and phased out the quota system in the United States, there has been a dramatic increase in South Asian immigration in the 1960s. In contrast to the constituency of the first wave, the typical profile of the second wave of South Asian immigrants illustrates that they were mainly English-speaking, college-educated, middle-class elites and brought with them a high level of skill or education that has often allowed them to become affluent in the adopted country. Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli in *The Namesake* exemplify the second wave group. Ashima has already got a college degree and worked as an English tutor in Calcutta, and her husband, Ashoke, was a doctoral candidate in electrical engineering at MIT in 1968 U.S. (*Namesake*, 2). As the data reads that "post-1965 Indian immigrants have generally come from large cities in all parts of India,"² the "well-educated and cosmopolitan" group of immigrants, in Bahri and Vasudeva's wordings, attains "visibility by virtue of numbers as well as their greater preparation and ability to enter the cultural, social, and political mainstream" (5). All but ignored in the early years of the 20th century, the South Asians in the United States and Canada are now ready to record and write their cultural and historical role in the Anglo-American culture.

For the first-generation immigrants such as Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli, they arrive in the U.S. from India and are directly connected to the nation of origin. "Hometown" is where they are born and from, and their life in America is constantly intertwined with resistance against assimilation and a constant sense of

² The data are conveniently available in Bahri and Vasudeva. See Manju Sheth, "Asian Indian Americans," in *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues*, ed. Pyong Gap Min (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995) 169, qtd. in Bahri and Vasudeva 5.

alienation and exile. Ashoke, though apparently adapted well to the host country, goes back to India to marry Ashima in an arranged ceremony, and reads *India Abroad* and *Sangbad Bichitra*, which are delivered to his house in the American suburb. Ashima keeps wearing Murshidabad silk sari and reiterating letters from India and a copy of *Desh* magazine with a pen-and-ink drawing on page eleven by her father (*Namesake* 2, 6). Both of them still carry Indian passports and eat Hindu meals. Food and clothing in this novel not only represent elements that are tied to one's nation of origin and retained in the rhythms of daily life, but also serve as a trope of cultural clash that one experiences. There are many detailed descriptions of the Indian food Ashima cooks and eats that are distinct from the American food her children favor. Whereas Golgol and Sonia eat French fries and listen to Beatles, Ashima and Ashoke, even in the American milieu, cling onto Indian traditions or religion such as naming their child with a pet name and a good name, annaprasan or the baby's rice ceremony, and the worship of Durga and Saraswati. Their nostalgia for home and their segregation from the American society is reflected in their forming an union with Bengali friends in the U.S. and is best illustrated in their mood after coming back from an annual trip to Calcutta: in spite of the hundred or so relatives they've just seen, they feel as if they are the only Gangulis in the world. The people they have grown up with will never see this life, of this they are certain (*Namesake* 64). Ashima seems precise when she describes her exilic situation in America as:

a sort of lifelong pregnancy— a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts — 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 — is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect. (49-50)

As their former life wanes and their relatives in India slowly dwindle, they could only form with their Bengali friends in America an Indian community, from which they could extract a sense of their shared origin and past.

Following Benedict Anderson's conception of "imagined communities," one might view the unity, which the first-generation of South Asians strives to form in North America, as:

[an] imagined political community [,a kind of nation],¹ both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.
(*Imagined* 6)

This imagined community is a construction that involves deliberation, which is solidified through the first-generation South Asians' shared extraction from their mother land. *The Namesake* demonstrates how hard Ashoke and Ashima endeavor to develop such an unity because their "each step, each acquisition, no matter how small, involves deliberation, consultation with Bengali friends" (*Namesake* 64). For the first-generation South Asian Americans such as Ashoke and Ashima, they are more prone to assume a "sojourner" rather than a settler stance. Rooting identities in a past and in a place they know they have for all practical purposes left for good is the dream not of the diasporic, but of the sojourner. By and large, they would remain isolated and fragmented, "seeking shelter in emotional ghettos made up entirely of food and videos shared with South Asian friends" (Singh 96). Their idea of homeland is frozen in the moment they left their town or village or nation state. Like Ashoke, who always wishes his son would read Nikolai Gogol's book, a book that once saved his life in India, and also like Ashima, who always hopes her son to take only their Indian-ambiance-suffused Pemberton house as his home, the first-generation

immigrants desire to impose their own ideas of pure identity upon their children. The image of "home" and the idea of an "authentic Indian identity" flourish so vigorously in their heart that few of the first-generation immigrants are ready to acknowledge that after two decades or more of their lives in the United States, they are neither purely Indian nor American.

Bhabha refutes Anderson's configuration of social identities and nations as coherent imagined communities. Cultures are always already partial and hybrid formations. Either the ghetto mentality in retaining a pure Indian identity or the radical Americanization fails to solve the predicament that has trapped the South Asian immigrants. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha propounds a liminal space, "in-between the designations of identity," to open up the possibility to negotiate a space for the minority into the mainstream (4). Bhabha refutes any stable, pure, homogeneous or authentic identity. In Bhabha's opinion, Anderson's "imagined community" takes root "in a 'homogeneous empty time' of modernity and progress" (6). For both the host country and the mother nation, Anderson's "imagined community" is doomed to "be altered by mass migration and settlement," as the "migrant communities are representative of a much wider trend towards the minoritization of national societies" (221). While the "imagined community" still hinges on a kind of homogeneous or authentic identity, for the second-generation diaspora, a self-enclosed unity based on a fixed moment in the history is nothing but phantasmatic.

While Ashoke and Ashima are trying their best to simulate the Indian milieu in the new land, Gogol and Sonia, who are neither born nor raised up in Calcutta, do not maintain any reminiscent gaze on India. When Gogol's good name given by Ashima's grandmother gets lost somewhere between India and America, it symbolizes that, for the second-generation diaspora such as Gogol, the Indian mother land is as much disorienting as the host country. Ashima also testifies to the unassimilated diasporic condition her children are in by saying that "she has given birth to vagabonds" (*Namesake* 167). Gogol shares none of his parents' nostalgia for their vacations in India; instead, those vacations, "either going to Calcutta, or sightseeing in places they did not belong to and intended never to see

again, are nothing but disorienting expeditions' (*Namesake* 155). The generation Gogol belongs to intend to sever the Indian origin they inherit from their parents and seek to become white. The deliberate disconnection from the Indian origin is best illustrated by Gogol:

He has no ABCD [American-born confused deshi] 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)

Gogol perfectly portrays the identity dilemma of the second-generation immigrants; he is neither an authentic American nor an authentic Indian. Gogol is not only caught up between two cultures but, at the same time, excluded from both of them. His identity obfuscation is concretized through his reactions to his name— a name from Russia, which only intensifies his confused state of identification. Gogol's distaste for his own name and refusal to read his namesake's book, given as a birthday present by his father, highlight his suffering in constructing and grasping his own identity.

Gogol takes effort to reinvent himself by living another name. Gogol's resentment toward his own name and craving for Americanization testifies somewhat to the postcolonial self-disgust in Franz Fanon's exposition: 'the individual [the Fanonian native] accepts the disintegration ordained by God, bows down before the settler and his lot, and by a kind of interior restabilization acquires a stony calm' (*Wretched* 54-55). Gogol's self-loathing is projected onto his defiance of his parents' value. When Gogol changes his name into Nikhil at his adolescence, he feels he has managed to escape from his parents' haunting expectations. He earns his first kiss, loses his virginity, makes white American girlfriends, and chooses to be an architect despite his father's wish for something else. He seeks to accommodate into the American way of life. However, this

Gogol-becoming-Nikhil phase is transcribed into a schizophreniac state. When Nikhil kisses a girl he acquainted at a party, Gogol thinks to himself, "it wasn't me" – it hadn't been Gogol who'd kissed Kim – Gogol had had nothing to do with it" (96). While Gogol seeks Americanization as Nikhil, he is confronted with an inner struggle between the two names:

There is only one complication: he doesn't feel like Nikhil. Not yet. Part of the problem is that the people who now know him as Nikhil have no idea that he used to be Gogol. They know him only in the present, not at all in the past. But after eighteen years of Gogol, two months of Nikhil feel scant, inconsequential. At times he feels as if he's cast himself in a play, acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different. (105)

As he swings between his old name and American name in the schizophreniac nebulous, Gogol finds only alienation and disorientation in that deterritorialized space, rather than true agency or citizenship.³

In *The Namesake*, Bhabha's notions of liminal space and hybridity are fairly well developed. Its American setting, being highly transnational and multicultural, accentuates Bhabha's allegation of the vulnerability of pedagogical boundaries of nation-state. The so-called "Americanness" is already insinuated by the plurality of ethnicities, as Bhabha explicates in "Dissemination":

³ I invoke Deleuze and Guattari's ideas on the flow of desire here as a frame for the schizophreniac state in the diaspora's identity formation. "Desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows" (Anti-Oedipus, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983), 5.

We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred Nation *It/Self*, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space that is *internally* marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference. (*Location* 148; emphasis original)

If the South Asian Americans recognized as the "hyphenated" Americans are marked as ethnic other, the liminal space they occupy in Bhabha's proposition signifies the emergence of the interstices, where the domains of difference overlap and "the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2, emphasis original). The liminality, which puts one's identity constantly in flux, is attested to by Gogol, who resists the overdetermined identity, history, and origin constituted in a name and asserts that every human being "should be allowed to name themselves" and thus form their own identities "and until then, pronouns" (*Namesake*, 245). Gogol's contention of pronouns parallels with Bhabha's notion of liminality, which initiates innovative sites of collaboration and infiltration of different cultures.

With regard to how a South Asian community can be formed in the United States, Bhabha also offers some clues with his proposition of "the performative" in opposition to "the pedagogical":

[T]he people are the historical "objects" of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*; the people are also the "subjects" of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the

prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity;
as that sign of the *present* through which national life is
redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process. (*Location* 145;
emphasis original)

Bhabha disputes fixed notions such as tradition and historicity as the only factor that defines the idea of a community or society, as he firmly contends that "the very idea of a pure, "ethnically cleansed" national identity can only be achieved through the death of the complex interweavings of the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood" (5). He advocates that we should take living reality or everyday life, that is, "the present," and the performative into consideration when it comes to forming the identity of a community. In other words, the enthusiasm for finding "common ground" should not be permitted to hinder the tolerance of the agential performativity in negotiating for a sense of community. Dayal, in "Splitting Images," presents an incisive reading of Bhabha by invoking Bakhtin's "dialogic model of community," which, Dayal says, "balances centripetal forces of community and centrifugal enunciations of agency" (93). The immigrants are situated in the moment of transit, where past and present, tradition and difference are in interminable contestation. None of the poles, either the native traditions or the acculturation of the adopted country (or countries), would dominate in such a negotiation.

In rehearsing Bhabha's theory of antiessentialism, Lahiri's novel underscores the fact that pure Indian or pure American identity no longer exists. Instead, what emerges is a pluralist community that is related to the imbrication of different cultures, the "overlap and displacement of domains of difference" (Bhabha 2). As is demonstrated by Gogol, who, after his father's death, promises to sustain the Bengali circle at the eve of his mother's leaving for India, keeping Indian friends and form a sort of a community is the way to prevent the immigrants, the second-generation in particular, from eradicating their roots, and to mediate them into the mainstream American society. When their parents or relatives who came directly from India are gone, this community will help provide the

second-generation immigrants with multiple anchorages and serve as the liminal space that prevents identities at either end from settling into "primordial polarities" (Bhabha 4).

While Bhabha's notion of hybridity contributes to breaking down binarism and the hierarchical structure between cultures, his idea seems weak to provide a solution to the new form of rule in the contemporary globalized world. In *Empire*, Negri and Hardt posit that the globalized world, or "Empire," is devoted to abating the modern forms of sovereignty and to "setting differences to play across boundaries" (*Empire*, 142). Thus, the postcolonial politics of difference portrayed by Bhabha, who proposes hybridity and the free play of differences across boundaries as liberation, is outdated because "[it] is liberatory only in a context where power poses hierarchy exclusively through essential identities, binary divisions, and stable oppositions" (*Empire*, 142). Bhabha's conception of the alternative community, a community of the "unhomely," affirms difference and hybridity as the resistance to the binary structuring of social hierarchies. However, this world is no longer divided in two, and hybridity is already a realized politics of difference. The enemy Bhabha strives on attacking is gone, and his proposition of hybridity as liberation is disarmed.

According to Negri and Hardt, the contemporary imperial racism is a differentialist racism, in which the biology determinant is replaced by culture. There are rigid limits to the flexibility of cultures, and differences between cultures and traditions are insurmountable. At the same time, the imperial racism adopts a pluralist theoretical position, which takes as its principle that all cultural identities are equal. This pluralism, according to Negri and Hardt, "accepts all the differences of who we are so long as we agree to act on the basis of these differences of identity, so long as we act our race" (192). The imperial racism employs a strategy of differential inclusion:

No identity is designated as Other, no one is excluded from the domain, there is no outside! White supremacy functions

rather through first engaging alterity and then subordinating differences according to degrees of deviance from whiteness. This has nothing to do with the hatred and fear of the strange, unknown Other. It is a hatred born in proximity and elaborated through the degrees of difference of the neighbor. (194)

Racial differences are posed not as a difference of nature but rather as a difference of degree. Segregation and subordination are enacted to orchestrate cultural differences in a system of control and lead to stable and brutal racial hierarchies. This differentialist racism and its theory of segregation is demonstrated in Gogol's being finally subsumed in the Indian community at the end of the novel. On the surface, the community offers perfect anchorages for hybrid identity, yet deep down it also caters to the Empire's will to rigidly limit the flexibility and compatibility of cultures. No matter how proximate they are on the stratum of whiteness, they are segregated as belonging to different culture, and by forming an Indian community they must act on the basis of these differences of identity. They belong to a different culture, and the differences between cultures and traditions are insurmountable.

Against this inclusive, permeating, and amorphous domination, Negri and Hardt proposes that "the will to be against" is the way to liberation. In the troubled experience of identification of the immigrants, hybridity is merely an empty gesture that reinforces imperial power rather than challenging it. The way to free oneself from the imperial power, from its differentialist and pluralist racism, that includes, differentiates, segregates, and dominates different cultures, "being-against" becomes the essential key to resist the amorphous domination and rigid taxonomy of the Empire. As Negri and Hardt defines:

The will to be against really needs a body that is completely incapable of submitting to command. It needs a body that is

incapable of adapting to family life, to factory discipline, to the regulations of a traditional sex life, and so forth. (*Empire*, 216)

Instead of complacently awaiting normalization and submitting to the imperial order of cultures and identifications, the will to be against is to defy traditions and disciplines and to desert them.

Such a will to be against is best illustrated by Moushumi, who once married Gogol and then decides to become a divorcee. Her background is far more complicated than Gogol's. She is an Indian, who is raised up in England and then moves to America. In America, she envies and emulates the American way of life and then decides to marry Gogol to live up to her Indian family's expectation. Yet, she is discontent to fall into a simple identification with either America or India. She immerses herself in French because the third language and culture offers her a refuge from America and India that could claim her in favor of one that has no claim whatsoever (*Namesake*, 214). A few months after marrying Gogol, she grows relentless again because she cannot help but associate [Gogol] with a sense of resignation, with the very life she had resisted, had struggled so mightily to leave behind (250). She finally runs away with Dimitri, a French. Living with Dimitri, she is content that:

There are no Bengali fruit sellers to greet her on the walk from Dimitri's subway stop, no neighbors to recognize her once she turns onto Dimitri's block. It reminds her of living in Paris—for a few hours at Dimitri's she is *inaccessible, anonymous*. (264; emphasis mine)

This anonymity and inaccessibility both illustrates and accomplishes her will to be against subsumption into the immigrants' hybrid identity. She is not willing to resign to the two cultures that contest to claim her and that simultaneously set

mutually inclusive and differentiative boundaries in between. By deserting the Bengali family and traditions and the interstitial identity the marriage with Gogol seems to offer, Moushumi demonstrates her resolution to rebel against the imperial power.

Despite the shortcomings of Bhabha's conception of hybridity, it does contribute to demystify the idea of 'authentic identity' that has been put to use by Eurocentric-minded people for quite some time. Resonating with Bhabha's antiessentialist stance and resolute demystification of authentic identity, Salman Rushdie proposes the notion of 'imaginary homelands' and further helps to renegotiate traditions into larger national and social collocations. Rushdie talks about the expatriate or emigrant writers in his position and their relation with their home country:

[O]ur physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, *imaginary homelands*, *Indias* of the mind. (Rushdie 10; emphasis mine)

I put emphasis on Rushdie's use of the plural nouns 'homelands' and 'Indias' to highlight his elimination of 'true India' or 'authentic homeland.' Rushdie acknowledges the expatriate and emigrant writers' ability to 'straddle two cultures' because they are 'partly of the West' and their identity is 'at once plural and partial' (Rushdie 15). While some reviewers of *The Namesake* criticize Lahiri as reiterating the 'cartoonishness' of Indians and exotifying them as 'clumsy, awkward, desperately out-of-place,' I would like to defend Lahiri by saying that those critics seem to fall into the Eurocentric fallacy of being obsessed with authentic identity.⁴ Though Lahiri is disconnected from India, her 'long

⁴ See Vennila nr Kain, 'Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri: A Book Critique.' 2005
<<http://www.vennila.net/Lahirireview.html>>.

geographical perspective, to borrow Rushdie's words, enables her to describe it from new angles. Accusing the novel of exotifying or presenting Indians as caricatures does not do justice to Lahiri, who, through her double stance as insiders and outsiders, has in fact offered a 'whole sight' (in Rushdie's words) of the Indian immigrants' situation in a foreign country. By and large, these expatriate or emigrant writers who write in English have triggered an internal transformation in the climate of 'English Literature.' Rushdie testifies to this by stating that 'the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of truth' (Rushdie 14-15). These writers, on Rushdie's perspective, are 'translated men.' These writers' writing not only reflects 'struggles between the cultures within themselves' but also 'other struggles taking place in the real world' (17). In the interview with Bahri and Vasudeva, Gauri Viswanathan also points to this cultural translation by saying that 'English Literature' is increasingly being rewritten as 'Literature in English,' [which] deterritorializes the national implications of English literature. The co-option of the ethnic writing or texts into the mainstream English literature should not be guarded against. It is time now for the field of 'English' or the Eurocentric countries to 'rethink its accepted parameters' (Bahri and Vasudeva 57-58). As Bhabha suggests in his appropriation of Benjamin's idea of translation, cultural translation is praxis of hybridity, without which the existence of the original texts would be meaningless. Authenticity or the primordial 'English' is always already a constructed phantasm, and thus blasphemy is an inevitable necessity and not a dread.

For these South Asian immigrants, who have straddled two cultures or even have polygenesis or multiple births, their immigration experience frustrates a complacent location as simply a South Asian or an American, and refuses a single incarnation that can be domesticated or assimilated. Lahiri's *The Namesake* has faithfully portrayed the inner struggles and identity problems the South Asian Americans are faced with. Their borderline position in the United States has not only enriched the South Asian traditions but also woven plurality or diversity into the skein of American society. The liminality in their negotiation of identity does not allow an unquestioning acquiescence to assimilation into the mainstream or an

easy dissolution into the foreclosure of the native traditions. To sum up, Lahiri's novel has opened a site for readers to understand its transnational context, and the American nation-state has little meaning except when being considered within its collocation with different ethnicities and cultures.