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NATIONALISM THROUGH GENERATIONS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE NAMESAKE*

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Abstract: National identity is a part of one's self constructed by experience, memory, and cultural surroundings. This study aims to examine how expressions of nationalism differ between first- and second-generation Indian immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. The analysis was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method, focusing on close reading scenes, character behavior, and narrative elements to uncover generational differences in expressing nationalism. Using a postcolonial lens, this study applies Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities to examine the first-generation immigrants, Ashoke and Ashima, who maintain strong emotional ties to India by preserving Indian culture through food, clothing, language, habits, rituals, and resisting aspects of American customs. Meanwhile, their children, Gogol and Sonia, represent the second-generation immigrants who grew up in the United States and adopted American lifestyles. Their nationalism appears in more subtle and unconscious ways, more like Americans in terms of food preferences, habits, and holiday celebrations. Upon analysis, it was found that Gogol and Sonia did not wholly abandon their roots, as they persisted in Indian traditions such as wearing traditional attire and following a mourning diet ritual. Michael Billig's concept of banal nationalism is used to analyze how this generation blends American influence with selective participation in Indian customs. The study shows that nationalism can still be expressed abroad and does not have to be shown through overt or political acts.

Keywords: *nationalism, cultural identity, immigrant generations*

INTRODUCTION

Nationalism is a belief that is grounded on an awareness of love and loyalty towards one's country. Nationalism can be interpreted as the union of geographical and political commitment, regardless of competing affiliations such as kinship, occupation, religion, wealth, race, or even language (Haas, 1986). Haas states that nationalism is "modern" since it emphasizes how people must find their identities in a detached surrounding that is not driven by organizational identities. However, nationalism is not a single concept; it takes on various forms depending on political, social, and historical contexts instead (Chaudhary & Pareek, 2024). Nationalism has become a complex issue due to its diverse forms. It is considered an imagined political community that fosters unity among its people while remaining both limited and independent at the same time (Anderson, 1991). Despite the fact that nationalism is often considered a natural feeling, it can also be influenced by external factors and individual

decisions. Suheri et al., (2022) state that nationalism may arise when a person is faced with the need to define their national identity, especially when they have to choose between two or more affiliations relating to citizenship or a sense of belonging to an imagined community. This concept is particularly relevant for individuals who grow up in a multicultural environment, where they must navigate between inherited cultural values and society's norms they live in.

The complexity of nationalism becomes even more evident in the context of immigration, in which individuals must adjust to a new physical environment and adopt the cultural values and practices of the new country while leaving their familiar homeland (Albert, 2021). For instance, Indonesian students who pursue higher education abroad often reconsider their national identity, balancing their connection to their homeland with the cultural expectations of their host country (Fernando et al., 2020). While some attempt to maintain Indonesian traditions, others gradually embrace the culture of their new surroundings, leading to a more fluid and evolving sense of nationalism. This phenomenon demonstrates that nationalism is not only defined by geography but also shaped by identity negotiation in multicultural settings. Another phenomenon is that the government can influence the high level of nationalism. According to Aziz et al., (2017, as cited in Trisofirin et al., 2023), the government's support for the education of migrant worker's children plays an important role in maintaining their sense of nationalism. However, many migrants hesitate to send their children to school due to long working hours. Instead, their children often watch Malaysian television programs, especially cartoons, which may impact their language development and social interactions in the future.

According to Ibáñez and Ramón (2023), many people move to other countries for better education, job opportunities, living standards, or political stability, making them settle permanently in their new home. As they begin to build their new lives abroad, these immigrants often raise families in the host country, causing the second-generation immigrants to grow up in a different cultural environment. First-generation immigrants work hard to adapt to the new country they move to, and they also strive to maintain their connection to their homeland. First-generation immigrants often do this by keeping their native language, traditions, and rituals. It can be seen in Vietnamese migrant families in Australia, where various ways are employed by parents to maintain Vietnamese culture and values, such as teaching the Vietnamese language, staying up to date with contemporary Vietnam through music, or even bringing their children back to Vietnam (Tran, 2018). While the second generation, who grow up in a different culture, develops their identity based on both their family's traditions and the society they live in. Unlike their parents, who see nationalism through cultural conservation, the second generation often connects their national identity to success in school, career achievements, or fitting into society, making them feel less attached to their ancestral roots (Verma & Lhamo, 2020).

The Namesake, a novel by Jhumpa Lahiri, vividly portrays the generational divide in nationalism within an immigrant family. Ashima and Ashoke, as first-generation immigrants who live in the United States to pursue a better life while holding onto their Indian identity by keeping the cultural traditions and maintaining a strong bond with their homeland. Throughout the story, Bengali immigrants like them try to maintain their heritage by cooking traditional food, wearing cultural clothes, and following customs that reflect their Indian roots (Kara, 2021). However, their dedication to keeping culture alive often comes with feelings of alienation and loneliness. Lahiri highlights that first-generation immigrants face more challenges than their children, such as feeling lonely, struggling to adjust, and missing their home country. It is especially clear in Ashima's experience as she spends much time alone

while Ashoke is busy with his studies at MIT. Even during her most important life, such as giving birth to Gogol in a hospital, Ashima has no one around to help her with her first birth (Jaya, 2017). Although the parents have taught Bengali culture, the second-generation immigrants, Gogol and Sonia, who were raised in America, still adopted various aspects of the host country's culture. This was influenced by external factors, such as the lifestyle of their surroundings. Such as Ashoke and Ashima's first child, Gogol, sees nationalism differently through struggles with his cultural identity. Instead of embracing his Indian heritage, he rejects it at first by changing his name and distancing himself from his parents' traditions to fit into American society. This struggle shows how nationalism varies, with the second generation seeing it as a blend of their heritage and the culture they grew up in. *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri is a successful and well-known novel that deals with the lives of immigrants. Many studies have been done on this novel, but some discuss the same issues of hybridity, identity crisis, diaspora, and cultural assimilation. Chelladurai (2023) found that the wide gap between two generations comes from differing levels of attachment to the homeland. While Ashoke and Ashima maintain their Bengali identity through festivals, clothing, and rituals, the second-generation finds it challenging to do so since they are aliens to their homeland who only have the image given by their parents. Similarly, Khrais (2020) explores three main characters, Ashima, Ashoke, and Gogol, who experience cultural struggles by using concepts of hybridity and assimilation. They finally develop a transcultural identity without entirely abandoning their Indian roots, creating a "third space" through cultural hybridity.

Furthermore, Kara (2021) examines the situation of the first immigrant, which is better than the second generation, who lacks a clear cultural home. The second generation grew up absorbing remnants of American society and Indian background culture; this led Gogol to mimicry by acting like an American. Additionally, Paudel (2019) introduces the idea of "unhomeliness," where individuals do not have the feeling of belonging, even when they are in their own homes. Paudel takes the example of Gogol, who feels torn between his Indian heritage and American upbringing, which leads to a sense of "nowhere ness."

From a psychological perspective, Mohammed and Berzenji (2023) explore that the immigrant's children develop double consciousness, in Fanonian terms, which means wearing a white mask when they are among white people and removing it when they are home or in familial surroundings. Gogol also wears a mask when he tries to change his name or when he is concerned about eating and walking with his American friends. Similarly, Yahya and Mani (2022) explain that both Gogol and Ashima struggle with alienation. Ashima feels disconnected and uncomfortable with the unfamiliar culture around her as she is unable to adapt to her life in the U.S. Gogol also faces similar challenges since he is stuck between two cultures; he cannot reject his Indian heritage, but he also does not fully feel part of American society. Gogol's identity crisis is portrayed as an exhausting journey representing a postmodern individual who is always searching for belonging Yahya and Mani called the "age of refugee." Another study by Singh and Kumar (2017) analyzes *The Namesake* using the lens of semiotics and psychoanalysis, arguing that identity in the novel is shaped through language, symbols, and unconscious meaning. They highlight that Gogol's struggle with his name reflects a deeper cultural and psychological conflict and that the meaning of the novel is dynamic, changing with each reader's interpretation.

In *The Namesake*, Ashima's cooking habits are not merely domestic routines but serve as a sensory bridge to her homeland. As Bhat (2023) observes, Ashima finds comfort in the sound and smell of food preparation, which helps her transform her American kitchen into a

cultural space that resembles her Indian background. A more detailed perspective on first-generation immigrants is offered by Bhandari (2020), who studied food plays a key role as a cultural signifier, providing physical nourishment and emotional connections to their ethnic identity. Bhandari further notes that Ashima gradually transforms through her interactions with the host country's culture. In line with this, food and consumption are powerful metaphors for identity and cultural negotiation (Das, 2021). The study argues that food serves not only physical needs but also emotional and symbolic functions within the Indian diaspora. Das states that Ashima maintains their heritage through cooking, while their interactions with Western food signify shifts in identity. In contrast with the first generation, Dash and Sarkhel (2024) found that the second generation expresses their struggle to be bicultural identities through their food choices. Gogol's preference for American fast food, Moushumi's interest in French cuisine, and Sonia's balanced acceptance of both Indian and American food reflect how second-generation immigrants related to their culture not only through inheritance but also through personal reinterpretation.

Although some research above discusses generational dynamics, they do not explicitly compare how nationalism is expressed between first- and second-generation immigrants. While existing studies on *The Namesake* often explore themes of hybridity, identity, or assimilation, they tend to overlook the specific ways in which nationalism is expressed across generations. This study addresses that gap by examining how first- and second-generation Indian immigrants demonstrate national belonging through both deliberate cultural preservation and every day, banal practices. The complexity of nationalism within immigrant identities will be examined through a postcolonial lens, applying Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities to analyze how the first generation maintains cultural ties to their homeland. Meanwhile, Michael Billig's theory of banal nationalism is used to interpret how the second generation expresses nationalism shaped by their American upbringing. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following question: How is nationalism expressed differently by the first-generation and second-generation immigrants in the novel *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study concentrates on how nationalism is experienced and interpreted differently by the first- and second-generation immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. Since the novel explores the complexities of cultural identity, emotional attachment, and national belonging within a diasporic context, this study applies a postcolonial approach using two theoretical frameworks: Benedict Anderson's imagined communities and Michael Billig's banal nationalism. These theories are selected because they reflect the generational contrast explored in the novel: Anderson's concept captures the deliberate nationalism of first-generation immigrants, while Billig's theory explains the implicit, routine expressions found in the second-generation.

Anderson (1991) defines a nation as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign," which helps explain how immigrants imagine their homeland not as a physical place, but as a symbolic community maintained through deliberate cultural practices, particularly in the context of first-generation immigrants in *The* Namesake, namely Ashoke and Ashima. In this study, Anderson's theory is applied to show how such imagined connection is sustained through acts of preserving rituals and ceremonies, resisting

Western customs, maintaining language use, and upholding traditional food as markers of national identity.

While Anderson's framework emphasizes the deliberate and symbolic nationalism of the first generation, (Billig, 1995) shifts the focus to the subtle and unconscious expressions of national identity that characterize the second generation. Billig's concept of banal nationalism is used to analyze how the second-generation Gogol and Sonia unconsciously express their national belonging to America through daily routines, preferences in music and food, language use, and participation in American social life. However, they do not explicitly reject their Indian heritage, as shown through their participation in certain Indian traditions. These theories facilitate distinguishing the explicit nationalism expressed by the first-generation immigrants and the more implicit from routinized expressions shown by the second-generation.

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method because it allows detailed interpretation of literary texts, especially in analyzing character behavior, cultural meaning, and symbolic elements. According to Nassaji (2015), descriptive qualitative research is useful for providing rich, straightforward descriptions of a phenomenon, particularly when exploring language, culture, and social meaning. The method aligns with the research question by allowing close attention to how different generations express nationalism through both observable cultural practices and subtle narrative details in the novel.

The primary data source is the novel *The Namesake*, from which data are taken in the form of narration, dialogues, and character expressions that reflect how Ashima, Ashoke, Gogol, and Sonia express their sense of nationalism, shaped by their generational experiences and the influence of both Indian and American cultural environments. The secondary sources of the research were books, journal articles, and previous studies related to nationalism, diaspora, and identity. The research steps include: (1) close reading of the novel to identify nationalism features expressed through characters' dialogues, actions, emotion and habits; they were selected based on their relevance to expressions of nationalism including explicit cultural practices, symbolic actions, and moments of resistance or adaptation; (2) selecting and classifying textual data based on their relevance to first or second-generation characters; (3) analyzing selected data using the lens of imagined communities for the first-generation and banal nationalism for the second-generation; and (4) drawing conclusions based on the findings to explain how different memory, everyday practices, and generational experience in multicultural setting shape forms of nationalism. The data were thematically categorized according to generational context (e.g. ritual, language use, food, clothing, and resistance). Recurring themes were manually identified and organized based on theoretical relevance to ensure coherence with the research objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cultural Expression of Nationalism in First-Generation Immigrants

The first-generation immigrants in *The Namesake* are Ashoke and Ashima, a Bengali couple who migrated to the United States to pursue a better future. Although they live far from home, they maintain a strong emotional bond with their homeland by continuing to uphold cultural practices from India. Ashoke and Ashima preserve their Indian identity by maintaining traditional practices in their daily lives. This preservation became a way to express their

nationalism even though they no longer lived there. Their efforts reflect Benedict Anderson's (1991), where a nation is formed not only through legal boundaries but also through a shared sense of belonging, memory, and cultural practices. In this context, Ashima's daily rituals, such as preparing traditional food, serve as a way to imagine and maintain their belonging to India.

For example, Ashima prepares a snack by "combining Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bow" while "wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix" (Lahiri, 2004, p. 1). The quotation shows that although the ingredients are not the same as those found in India, the intention behind the dishes symbolizes her emotional connection to her homeland. In this context, food becomes a tool for Ashima to recreate a sense of home and belonging. As Fischler explains, the principle of incorporation makes recognizing and identifying foods a crucial part of shaping our identity (Fischler, 1988, as cited in Partarakis et al., 2021). Ashima also utilizes traditional food to pass on cultural identity to the next generation, as in the quotation below.

Excerpt 1: Ashima's Traditional Cookung for Gogol

> "… prepare his favorite things: lamb curry with lots of potatoes, luchis, thick channa dal with swollen brown raisins, pineapple chutney, sandeshes molded out of saffron-tinted ricotta cheese." (Lahiri, 2004, p. 82)

Ashima also utilizes traditional meals to pass on cultural identity to the next generation. Her efforts to cook Gogol's favorite Indian dishes show how she uses food as a way to nurture cultural memory within her family so that they still have a sense of connection with their home country. This idea is supported by Kara (2021), who states that Ashima's efforts, such as preparing traditional dishes, are strategies to adapt to the society where she lives; it is for the sake of her children and to feel at home in this distant land. These practices are part of a larger imagined connection to the homeland. As Anderson (1991) explains, national identity is sustained through shared rituals and collective memory; practices like preparing and cooking traditional food become acts of imagined communion with one's country and culture.

The act of preserving cultural identity is not limited to food; it is also reflected in clothing choices, which carry symbolic significance and reinforce national belonging. When Ashima is about to give birth to her first child at Mount Auburn Hospital, she is "asked to remove her Murshidabad silk sari in favor of a flowered cotton gown." (Lahiri, 2004, p. 2). The fact that Ashima wears a *sari* in her daily life, even during labor, a moment of physical vulnerability, demonstrates her attachment to traditional Indian attire. For Ashima, the sari is not merely a piece of fabric but a representation of cultural continuity and self-identification. This notion is reinforced by Ramadhani (2019), who explains that wearing a complete sari set brings Ashima comfort, even though it may be less practical compared to casual Western clothes such as T-shirts and trousers. This preference highlights how traditional clothing becomes a quiet yet powerful expression of imagined national identity, particularly in the context of diaspora life.

Excerpt 2: Ashima's Use of Kinship Terms

> "… she is teaching Gogol to say 'Dida' and 'Dadu' and 'Mamu,'" and "There'll be someone to call you Dada." (Lahiri, 2004, pp. 51, 61)

Another subtle but meaningful way for Ashima to express her nationalism is through the preservation of her native language. As reflected in the quotation above, the words she

teaches Gogol in his early years, such as “Dida” (grandmother), “Dadu” (grandfather), “Mamu” (uncle), and “Dada” (brother), may appear minor, yet they carry deep cultural significance. These kinship terms are not only functional but also deeply embedded in the social fabric of Indian identity. Ashima’s efforts are further emphasized by Mangalaeswari and Valliammai (2017), who note that although first-generation immigrants like Ashima appreciate America as their new homeland, they continue to maintain their native culture within domestic spaces. Ashima's dedication to teaching the Bengali language to her children serves as an important part of preserving national identity. However, this process of cross-cultural transmission is often met with confusion and rejection from the second generation.

Excerpt 3: Bengali Language Lessons

> “… they send him to Bengali language and culture lessons.” (Lahiri, 2004, p. 75)

Not only does Ashima teach her children Bengali at home, but she also demonstrates her commitment to passing on her native culture by sending Gogol to Bengali language and culture lessons. However, Gogol dislikes the classes because they interfere with his Saturday morning drawing class. Ashima persists in her efforts. In Anderson's view, these actions contribute to the formation of an imagined community, where language plays a central role in unifying a dispersed population. Beyond language, Ashima desires her children to grow up holding Bengali values even when they are living in the Western environment. Ramadhani (2019) adds that the steps taken by Ashima are part of a broader effort to ensure that Gogol remains to remember his cultural roots and to keep embracing the culture of Bengalis.

Ashoke and Ashima tried various things to transfer their Bengali life to their children in order to maintain their ethnicity (Dey, 2017). "… by the time he is ten, he has been to Calcutta three more times" (Lahiri, 2004, p. 77); the parents took the children to Calcutta since they were so young with the aim of the children could better understand the language, culture, and surroundings of their origin. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) posits that proficiency resembling that of a native speaker can only be achieved within a limited period, from infancy until puberty (Lenneberg, 1967, as cited in Han & Bao, 2023). Beyond the efforts to inherit culture, Ashima's actions are also seen as a form of adaptation. As Sarangi (2004) stated, "feeling at home" can be an indication of the adaptation process. Although living abroad, the Ganguli live among Bengali relatives, who still connect them to India.

Excerpt 4: Gogol’s Rice Ceremony

> “The occasion: Gogol’s annaprasan, his rice ceremony.” (Lahiri, 2004, p. 44)

Ashima and Ashoke held annaprasan rituals that marked the introduction of the first solid food intake of a baby aside from milk for Gogol at six months old and Sonia at seven months old. In this ceremony, the baby is presented with symbolic items: gold, representing future wealth or landowner; a pen, signifying scholarly pursuits; and a dollar bill, indicating a potential path in business. Despite living far from their homeland, they continued to observe these traditional rituals and invited numerous guests, primarily Bengali relatives. They asked Dilip Nandi, a fellow Bengali, to assume the ceremonial role of Ashima's brother, who was responsible for holding and feeding rice to Gogol. Ceremonies like annaprasan extend beyond mere formal cultural practices; they are expressions of imagined nationhood, recreating the cultural atmosphere of India, affirming Anderson's idea that nationalism is shaped through collective symbols and rituals that foster a shared identity.

Ashoke and Ashima demonstrate resistance to American cultural norms, particularly in their resistance to preserving Bengali naming traditions. When the hospital staff requests that they name their newborn right away to complete the birth certificate, they refuse to follow the Western custom of naming a child after a parent or ancestor. As reflected in the narration, "This sign of respect in America and Europe, this symbol of heritage and lineage, would be ridiculed in India." (Lahiri, 2004, p. 32). Instead, they insist on waiting for a letter from Ashima's grandmother in Calcutta, although it never arrives, without preparing a backup name. Eventually, Ashoke decides to name the baby after a Russian writer he admires rather than selecting a heritage name common in the host culture. In American and European contexts, naming a child after a deceased family is seen as a way to honor the family heritage and keep the memory "alive" (Miseo, 2022). However, this contrasts sharply with Bengali culture, which regards personal names as sacred and not to be shared or inherited. Instead of adopting host-country traditions, Ashoke and Ashima's approach to naming reflects their continued attachment to India, both emotionally and symbolically. Interpreted through Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities (1991), Ashoke and Ashima's act becomes more than cultural preference, it represents their imagined connection to a national identity that exists beyond geographic boundaries. This aligns with Ranju (2021), who explains that naming conventions depend on cultural beliefs and origin, as seen in Hindu traditions, where naming structures typically include a given name, a middle name, and a family.

In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, the first-generation immigrants expressed their nationalism through consistent efforts to preserve their Bengali culture in daily practices. In terms of food, Ashima cooks traditional dishes like curry and chutney, which connect her and her family to their roots. In terms of language, she teaches Gogol Bengali kinship terms and sends him to Bengali culture classes. Regarding clothes, Ashima wears a sari every day, even during childbirth, showing her attachment to traditional dress. Ashoke and Ashima frequently bring their children to Calcutta and surround them with Bengali relatives in order to expose them to Indian education and culture. Through rituals and customs, they hold ceremonies like annaprasan and let Ashima's grandmother choose a traditional name for their firstborn. Lastly, they reject American customs, such as the Western naming tradition, to uphold Bengali values. These actions reflect Anderson's theory of imagined communities, where shared cultural practices keep their attachment to Indians alive despite living abroad.

Cultural Expression of Nationalism in Second-Generation Immigrants

The second-generation immigrants in *The Namesake*, represented by Gogol and Sonia, are raised within a cultural environment different from their parents. Unlike Ashoke and Ashima, whose nationalism is tied to preserving Indian customs, these children experienced a more blended identity shaped by both American and Indian influences. Growing up in the United States, Gogol and Sonia internalized American habits, preferences, and holidays, which reflect their everyday engagement with the host country. However, their participation in certain Indian traditions suggests that they do not entirely reject their heritage. Therefore, their expression in nationalism is more subtle and less deliberate. It manifests in small, often unconscious acts that reflect a sense of belonging to the society they were raised in. It aligns with Michael Billig's theory of banal nationalism (1995), which explains how nationalism is maintained through daily, unnoticed practices. By analyzing these small, recurring behaviors, it becomes evident that Gogol and Sonia develop a sense of national identity not through overt political gestures but through habitual and personal expressions rooted in their American upbringing while still negotiating traces of their Indian roots.

Excerpt 5: Unopened Cassette as a Symbol of Disconnection

> "…then a cassette of classical Indian music he'd bought for Gogol months ago, …, still sealed in its wrapper." (Lahiri, 2004, p. 88)

One's identity might be expressed through various aspects, including musical taste. Gogol, who was a teenager at the time, was an avid fan of The Beatles. The fact that he collected nearly all of their albums demonstrates the extent of his interest in the band. Assuming his son had an interest in music, Ashoke purchased a cassette of Indian classical music for Gogol, which ultimately remained unopened and hung on the bulletin board. Gogol's lack of interest in Indian music clearly indicates his shift away from Indian culture toward the American cultural environment in which he was raised. Within the framework of banal nationalism, as proposed by Billig (1995), national identity is conveyed not only through grand celebrations but also through everyday preferences, such as musical taste. His surroundings undoubtedly influenced Gogol's enthusiasm for The Beatles, as his friend gifted him *The White Album*, a popular item among American youth at the time.

The quotation "… cravings, for hamburgers or a slice of pepperoni pizza or a cold glass of milk." (Lahiri, 2004, p. 95) appears during the Ganguli family's eight-month trip to Calcutta. Growing up in the United States shaped Gogol and Sonia's preference for American food; even while visiting their ancestral homeland, known for its richly spiced cuisine, they longed for Western fast food. Unlike their parents, who viewed the preservation of Indian culinary traditions as a means of maintaining national identity, Gogol and Sonia consumed Western food without conscious cultural intention; instead, it was a habitual and unconscious act. According to Billig's concept of banal nationalism (1995), nationalism is not limited to overt political symbols. However, it is embedded in everyday practices that are taken for granted, like food consumption, that silently reinforce national belonging. Although globalization offers a variety of cultural options, the predominance of American food in their preferences underscores their emotional attachment to the host culture. Therefore, Gogol and Sonia's dietary habits represent how second-generation immigrants express their nationalism by unconsciously engaging with the dominant culture of American society.

Excerpt 6: Gogol's Subtle Rejection of Home Culture

> "… addressing his parents in English though they continue to speak to him in Bengali. Occasionally he wanders through the house with his running sneakers on. At dinner he sometimes uses a fork." (Lahiri, 2004, p. 85)

Born in a multicultural setting, Ashima encourages Gogol to learn both the Bengali and English languages. Therefore, he has been bilingual since childhood. However, as part of the second-generation immigrant group, Gogol gradually distances himself from the language and cultural practices of his parents. He realizes that Bengali is not widely spoken in the United States, as evidenced by moments when cashiers smirk at his parents' accents, and salespeople prefer to address Gogol directly, recognizing him as a native English speaker. Consequently, as he matures, he increasingly abandons the use of Bengali. This linguistic shift illustrates how national identity is embedded in everyday behavior. In line with the concept of banal nationalism, Billig (1995) asserts that "an identity is to be found in the embodied habits of social life… include those of thinking and using language." (p. 8). Besides speaking English, Gogol also wanders around the house wearing shoes, an American habit, while Ashima had taught her children to wear flip-flops indoors, as in customary Indian households.

Furthermore, the detail that "he sometimes uses a fork" reflects Gogol's alignment with American culture, which is dissimilar from his parents, who eat using their fingers. Sinha (2023) emphasizes that the Indian practice of eating with hands, even in restaurants, is not merely a tradition but a symbol of cultural pride and identity. Gogol's preference for using a fork represents not only an adaptation to his environment but also a shift from a deeper layer of his inherited cultural heritage.

Excerpt 7: Western Holidays Take Priority

> "… the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati." (Lahiri, 2004, p. 74)

Moving abroad to earn money and eventually build a family there involves a long process in which immigrants encounter various experiences, including cultural celebrations. It is reflected in the Ganguli family, who are introduced to American celebrations such as Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Gogol and Sonia's Christmas celebrations become increasingly elaborate; they enjoy moments such as decorating the Christmas tree, exchanging gifts, reading and sending letters, participating in school events, and hosting parties as commonly done by Americans. Influenced by their surroundings, which celebrate Christmas in such ways, Gogol and Sonia look forward to Christmas more than Durga and Saraswati. This contrast illustrates how second-generation immigrants unconsciously align themselves with the dominant cultural practices of their host country. According to Billig (1995), national identity is formed through practices that feel "natural," which is not maintained through grand gestures alone but through socially patterned routines, even during holidays. Therefore, Gogol and Sonia's excitement for Christmas does not signify a rejection of Indian culture but rather reflects a natural adaptation to the emotional rhythms and banal cues of American life.

While Ashoke and Ashima adhere to Bengali traditions by performing the Durga Puja at their home, Gogol and Sonia are more eager to celebrate Christmas and consider these celebrations incomparable (Sharma, 2024). As mentioned in the narration, "During pujos, …, Gogol and Sonia are dragged off to a high school or a Knights of Columbus hall overtaken by Bengalis" (Lahiri, 2004, p. 74). The setting may feel distant and less emotionally engaging, but Gogol and Sonia's presence at these events reflects a continuing connection to Indian customs. Billig (1995) emphasizes that national belonging is formed through everyday participation and repetitive rituals, even when such participation occurs without deep reflection. Gogol and Sonia's involvement still reflects a form of routine nationalism. The Indian identity remains embedded in their lives through habitual participation, shaped by family and community expectations.

Excerpt 8: Sonia's Comfort in Western Clothing

> "… she would always take off her sari after an hour or two and put on her jeans." (Lahiri, 2004, p. 230)

Second-generation immigrants, like Sonia, generally adopt American norms, including in daily wear. The quotation above exposes Sonia's conscious effort to participate in Indian traditions while simultaneously returning to her comfort zone rooted in the American lifestyle. Her decision to wear a sari during pujos, even if only for a short period, exemplifies how second-generation immigrants balance their heritage with the dominant culture. Despite embracing American clothing norms, such as jeans, Sonia's willingness to wear traditional

Indian attire for ceremonies reflects her maintained attachment to her roots. Sonia's choice shows that she does not entirely abandon her cultural heritage while living abroad but rather navigates both identities, embodying the complexity of belonging to two cultures at once.

Excerpt 9: Gogol and Sonia Join the Mourner's Diet

> "For ten days following his father's death, he and his mother and Sonia eat a mourner's diet, forgoing meat and fish." (Lahiri, 2004, p. 207)

One of the clearest moments where the second generation expresses their connection to Indians is during the mourning period following Ashoke's death. For ten days, Gogol, Sonia, and Ashima followed the traditional Bengali mourning diet, avoiding meat and fish. Previously, when Gogol was younger, he had observed this tradition following his grandfather's death, but he forgot and ate a hamburger at school due to boredom with a ritual that his friends did not observe. This ritual shows that, despite growing up in America and adopting many Western lifestyles, Gogol and Sonia still participate in culturally significant practices from their heritage. Through the lens of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995), it suggests that national identity can emerge in subtle, often unnoticed ways through routine actions. Their observance of this ritual is not a public declaration of identity but rather a quiet and intimate act of remembrance and respect, an expression of belonging that coexists with their American upbringing.

The second-generation immigrants, Gogol and Sonia, exhibit a different form of nationalism compared to their parents. They express their national identity through subtle, often unnoticed, and blended practices shaped by their American upbringing. In terms of preferences, especially music, they favor Western bands such as The Beatles and show little interest in classical Indian music. In terms of food, they experience cravings for Western dishes like hamburgers and pizza during their travel to Calcutta. In terms of language, they frequently respond to their Bengali-speaking parents in English. Their habits, including wearing sneakers indoors or using a fork, reflect subtle assimilation into Western norms.

Regarding festivals, they have greater enthusiasm for Christmas celebrations than for traditional Indian pujos, although they still participate in the latter without deep reflection. In clothing, Sonia is willing to wear a sari during pujos, although she reverts to jeans afterward, suggesting a symbolic yet limited engagement with Indian attire. Lastly, through rituals, both Gogol and Sonia participating in a mourning diet following their father's death, reflecting their respect for Bengali traditions. These small, routine actions exemplify the concept of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995), in which national identity is maintained through everyday behaviors, indicating that while they are more embedded in American life, they continue to preserve selective ties to their Indian heritage.

Aspects	**First-Generation (Ashoke & Ashima)**	**Second-Generation (Gogol & Sonia)**
Food	Cooking traditional Indian dishes	Craving American fast food even while visiting India
Language	Speaking Bengali at home, teaching kinship terms	Responding in English even when parents speak Bengali

Habit	Eating with hands, wearing flip-flops indoors	Using a fork, wearing sneakers indoors
Clothing	Wearing a sari even in discomfort situations	Wearing jeans, a sweatshirt, and Levi's, Sonia wears sari briefly during pujos
Education	Enrolling children in Bengali language and culture lessons	Preferring American activities like drawing session
Celebration	Celebrating Durga Puja and Saraswati worship	Showing greater excitement for Christmas; attending Durga pujos without deep reflection
Rituals	Holding annaprasan ceremonies, participating in Indian pujos	Actively participating in the mourning diet following Ashoke's death
Resistance	Rejecting American naming norms	Exhibit a tendency to favor American cultural norms, yet do not entirely abandon Indian culture

Table 1. Comparison of nationalism expression in the first- and second-generation immigrants in *The Namesake*

This table portrays the differing aspects of nationalism expressed by the first- and second-generation immigrants in *The Namesake*, categorized by cultural practices such as food, language, habits, clothing, education, celebration, rituals, and resistance. Each generation demonstrates distinct patterns shaped by their lived experience and cultural surroundings.

CONCLUSION

The previous section shows that cultural differences, generational gap, and identity struggles appear in the lives of the Ganguli after moving to the United States. Ashoke and Ashima, who grew up in India, bring their strong values and traditions, which often clash with the host country culture. They try to recreate their homeland through daily rituals and raise their children with the same cultural understanding. On the other hand, Gogol and Sonia grow up surrounded by American culture, which shapes their daily habits, preferences, and celebrations. However, they still participate in Indian customs from time to time, proving that they do not fully leave their roots behind. The cultural negotiation carried out by Gogol and Sonia shows that holding on to more than one culture is possible, especially for second-generation immigrants who live between two worlds.

As a concluding remark, this study contributes to the understanding of how the Ganguli family expresses national identity in *The Namesake* as two generations of immigrants in multicultural settings. While this study focuses on generational differences, future research may examine the role of social environments in shaping immigrants' identity. Further

exploration can also consider how family dynamics and everyday interactions influence one's cultural belonging.

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