The word *diaspora* has gained universal currency. According to *Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary*, *diaspora* means “the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country” (423). This word stemmed from Jewish history, referred to in the Bible in the book of Leviticus chapter 19 verses 33 and 34, where the Lord commanded Moses to proclaim to the people of Israel as follows: “Do not take advantage of foreigners (immigrants) in your land; do not wrong them. They must be treated like any other citizen; love them as yourself, for remember that you too were foreigners (immigrants) in the land of Egypt” (The Living Bible 89).

The diasporas or the immigrants all over the world enjoy their temporary or permanent stay as well as suffer in their life in the host countries which are sometimes hostile. The migration of Indians to the USA increased after the promulgation of Immigration Act in 1965. The twentieth century has witnessed many an Indian migrating across the geographical boundaries for various reasons. Among these immigrants, especially the ones who moved into the USA over a period of time, there are some distinguished diasporic writers such as Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, V.S. Naipaul, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri, and their critiques have thrown light on
issues like displacement, hybridity, quest for identity, cultural conflicts, alienation, and gender inequality.

Introduced to the literary world, through her first novel in English, *The Namesake*, in 2003, which was even converted into a film retaining the title, the Indian diasporic writer, Jhumpa Lahiri, has penned two novels and two short story collections. The dictum “Life touches upon a person sometimes with a bouquet of flowers and sometimes with a thorn bush” points out the fact that everyone in the world enjoys the bliss of good things and suffer from the agony of misfortunes. And Lahiri is no exception to this universal truth and so she portrays in this novel the simple joys and happy moments as well as struggles, sacrifices, and sufferings of the immigrants. And as to their experiences, Lahiri’s subjects of focus are material prosperity and academic pursuits, dislocation and displacement, cultural conflicts, loneliness, language barrier, loss of identity, sense of belonging, gender issues, marital conflicts, and the generation gap between the first and the second-generation immigrants.

Firstly, this paper examines Lahiri’s delineation of the brighter side of the life—many an advantage or a benefit—of the immigrants in their hostland in the novel, *The Namesake*. Although the immigrants in this novel find it initially a little difficult to adapt to the way of life of the host country, they lead a sophisticated life which makes their stay in the alien land more comfortable. They earn as much as possible and are contented with their income. Lahiri has explicated in *The Namesake* the exuberant life, some of her characters lead. They get slowly adapted to the alien culture. For instance, in the beginning of the novel Ashima prepares her favorite Indian food and at the end of the novel she has learnt to prepare Christmas cake. As an immigrant in the USA, Ashoke enhances his educational qualification by pursuing Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering at MIT, and as a result he gets employment in a University, and in course of time even he purchases a house on Pemberton road which helps his family lead a comfortable and sophisticated life. His
immigrant status has helped him promote his academic and professional pursuits, resulting in intellectual and economic gain.

Secondly, Lahiri’s depiction of the darker side of the immigrant experiences in *The Namesake* is analyzed in this paper from various perspectives and at different depths of meaning. In this novel, the important characters such as Ashima, Ashoke, Gogle, and Moushumi experience loneliness and alienation. As the host society does not fully accommodate their wishes, they feel alienated. The term *alienation* is inextricably tied to loneliness as to Ashima. While Ashoke is pursuing his studies at MIT, most of the days, Ashima is alone in her apartment feeling terribly lonely. And then again she feels the pangs of loneliness when she is admitted at the maternity ward, with no known persons around her either to comfort or to console. She is exceedingly afraid of raising a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so burdensome and worrisome that she fumes with indignation: “I’m saying I don’t want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It’s not right. I want to go back” (33).

Gogol is another character who is trying to escape from the clutches of alienation. Gogol feels alienated, especially when he realizes that no one in India or America or elsewhere in the world bears his name. When Gogol is fourteen he starts hating his name and he responds rudely when he is asked about his name. At the college party, Gogol is reluctant to introduce himself to Kim as Gogol, so he asserts that his name is Nikhil. The agony felt by Gogol is the agony of Jhumpa Lahiri. Jumpa Lahiri was born as Nilanjana Sudeshna, but she had a pet name, Jumpha, which was found easy to pronounce by her class teacher and so she became Jhumpa Lahiri. The same feeling she puts into her character Gogol who never likes to be called by this name. Gogol considers himself an America whereas American society considers him an Indian.
Language barrier, presented in this novel, is also an issue which needs critical attention. Ashima and Ashoke arrive at a hospital for confinement. After she is allotted a bed in the maternity ward, Ashima looks for her husband, but he has stepped behind the curtain around her bed and utters in Bengali as follows: “I'll be back”—a language, neither the nurses nor the doctors speak. The curtain is a physical barrier and at the same time it also stands for language barrier, because of Asoke’s utterance in Bengali in the United States. Ashima and Ashoke send their children, Gogol and Sonia, to learn the Bengali language and also to attend culture classes every Saturday, but this initiative by their parents “fails to unsettle them that their children sound just like Americans, expertly conversing in a language that still at times confounds them in accents they are accustomed not to trust”.

Lahiri poignantly presents marital disharmony that has raised its ugly head in the lives of Indian immigrants owing to the differences between the host and the native countries’ culture. The marital conflict arises because “in India a strict set of guidelines dictates how husbands and wives act both publicly and privately, in America, such guidelines are not as clear-cut and often, are thrown out guidelines altogether” (Pradhan, 137). The difference between the first-generation and the second-generation immigrants with regard to their notion of marriage is easily perceptible in this novel. The second-generation immigrants have not realized or understood that it is their duty to remain as couple till the end of their life, as the first-generation Indian immigrants like Ashima and Ashoke do believe. The second-generation immigrants, Gogol and Moushumi, lead a happy married life for a year. But after a few months, Moushumi does not like to continue her wedded life with him. She wants to live with her lover, Dimitri, with whom she had had a relationship even before she married Gogol. She spells out to Gogol about her love affair with Dimitri, and applies for a divorce, and then flies back to New York. The American culture has wrought changes in the second-generation immigrants’ attitude towards marriage and married life.
Lahiri presents cross-cultural issue succinctly in *The Namesake*. This issue is analyzed from two perspectives in this novel: one is the first-generation immigrants’ difficulty in assimilating into the host culture and the second-generation immigrants’ ease in adapting to the cultural practices of the host society. The immigrants make attempts fill the cultural gap, and in the process they move gradually towards assimilation into and adaptation to the host culture. And accordingly, “The immigrant experience is complicated as a sensitive immigrant finds himself or herself perpetually at a transit station fraught with memories of the original home which are struggling with the realities of the new world” (Dubey, 22). Initially, Ashoke does not like the celebration of Christmas and Thanks Giving, but he accepts these Christian practices for the sake of his children, and Gogol, after his father’s demise, recalls his father’s change of attitude: “it was for him (Gogol), for Sonia, and that his parents had gone to the trouble of learning these customs” (286).

Lahiri portrays the sufferings of the second-generation immigrants in *The Namesake* as a consequence of cross-cultural conflict. For instance, Gogol, sandwiched between the cultures of the country of their parents and the country of their birth, struggles to carry the burden of two cultures and two names. Gogol’s name Nikhil resembles an American name, and yet Gogol and his past life follow him everywhere as a shadow. He makes all efforts to erase his native identity and as a result he even does not introduce his parents to his American girlfriends, Ruth and Maxine. The death of Gogol’s father brings about a great change in him. He is convinced that he cannot abandon or diminish the importance of both cultures. He realizes “identity as a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall, 10). He learns to strike a balance between the two cultures. The realization that he is made up of two cultures strengthens his pride, instead of weakening his morale. He has assimilated American culture and values without losing Indian identity altogether. He feels no shame for his name, and also he feels proud to be called Nikhil Gogol Ganguli.
While delineating the immigrant experiences of her characters in her novel, *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri employs some fictional techniques such as stream of consciousness, inconclusive end that gives freedom to her readers for drawing their own conclusions, and coining a terse title which provides clue to the content. The sweet and bitter experiences of the immigrants presented by Lahiri in *The Namesake* have been examined from various perspectives and at different levels in this paper.

**Works Cited**


