

Borders and Multiculturalism: A Reading of *The Namesake* and *Brick Lane*

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Abstract

Hyphenated identities are crucial elements of a multicultural setup. And cultural conflicts are perhaps inherent in individuals who strive to exist with two identities imposed on them. What we know today as Diaspora Literature, is perhaps an attempt to put forth the complexities behind hyphenated identities. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* trace the identity crisis that underlies an immigrant's life. Both works also depict the conflicts between the first-generation and second-generation immigrant's. In my paper I have analysed *The Namesake* and *Brick Lane* closely to show how the novelists have portrayed immigrant lifestyle in their works. My paper also deals with the vision the novelists have of an ideal multi-cultural setup. For instance, how assimilation of another culture can make an immigrant's life better if not perfect.

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories . . . Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of being and not, that makes me rootless and easily bored. (*The Buddha of Suburbia*, p. 3)

The Alis, the Lahiris, the Chadhas¹, the Raghavs², the Kalpana Chawlas³ or for that matter the curry restaurants in East London could be objects of pride. But these multi-cultural specimens who are "neither just this / nor just that" (Dayal, 1996, p. 47) have a complex history beneath their glitter – a history of struggle

for existence in a foreign land and then a race to give this existence a name.

Fulfillment of cherished dreams seduces throngs of 'Third World' citizens to migrate to the First World. No doubt, the dreams are realized amidst the 'desh'⁴ nostalgia for the first generation. But even in the next generation there remains an identity crisis that is the cause of great anxiety. A multicultural society is a site of hyphenated identities (e.g. American-Indian, American-Bangladeshi) with its own set of power structures, strikingly different from a homogeneous monocultural setup. But does a multicultural world, where "emigrants and others preserve their cultures with the different cultures within one nation" (Wikipedia), really exist? Or has it created 'boundaries' within nations and are we yet to discover a multicultural utopia? This essay tries precisely to answer these questions by analyzing the diasporic existence depicted in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*.

In his essay "Diaspora and Double Consciousness", Samir Dayal (1996) observes that "The discourse of multiculturalism has often proved inadequate in accommodating the complexity of race or migrancy..." (p. 46). Indeed, multiculturalism brings with it several 'borders' - borders not only imposed in the alien world but also in one's own 'desh' where the immigrant is not at ease because she has "moved to another country and made a separate life" (Lahiri, 2003, p. 233). While writing about migration, James Clifford (1992) has pointed out that "we are seeing the emergence of new maps" and in this essay I will focus on these maps, which are not geographical but more related to 'borders' which surround the existence of a diasporic⁵ persona. Being a product of these "borderland culture areas" (Clifford), Diaspora Literature has given us various stock characters whose lives are ruled by 'borders' or 'boundaries'. The characters feel "the strangeness of the familiar" and not only place themselves in the borderline but also build borders around them. The boundaries could be imposed by the four walls of their apartments or by their physical appearance. The formation of these boundaries is actually a two-way process. At one level it is developed by the immigrants themselves and at another level imposed by the hosts⁶. In an interview, Jhumpa Lahiri confessed that she looked different and felt like an outsider. The gaps in a multicultural setup are broadened owing to a constant pursuit, both by the hosts and the immigrants, to identify themselves with only one homogeneous cultural identity position having failed to realize that a multicultural framework does not acknowledge such positioning.

In Diaspora Literature, the apparently caste-free Western world proves to be a fragmented "hidden world" with a darker reality where characters are forced to

build 'boundaries', as they are cornered primarily on the basis of religion and colour. I will now try to locate the various borders which Jhumpa Lahiri and Monica Ali have subtly highlighted in their works. My reading of *The Namesake* and *Brick Lane* reveals that so-called multicultural society has enhanced the formation of three major borders. The first border is the border between immigrants (first and second generation collectively) and the original inhabitants of a country. The immigrants "believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it" (Safran, 1991, ix-x). In contrast, the hosts fear a destruction of their Anglo-American-Christian heritage and also find it difficult to accept the fact that some less fortunate whites are often employed by economically prosperous immigrants. In this context, Zadie Smith (2001) writes in her novel *White Teeth*, "There are still young white men who are angry about [successful immigrant stories]; who will roll out at closing time into poorly lit streets with a kitchen knife wrapped in a tight fist." (p. 327). It is this first border between the hosts and the immigrants which is responsible for the formation of extremist groups like The Lion Hearts and the Bengal Tigers depicted in *Brick Lane* and also the cause of riots described at the end of the novel.

The second border I will underscore is the border that culturally separates the second generation from the first generation. This gap is a heightened version of the generation gap. Instances like an angry Shahana exclaiming, "I didn't ask to be born here" (Ali, 2004, p.181) abound in the two books. I take up this issue more elaborately later in this essay. The third border is that created by immigrants amidst the diasporic framework itself because "racial and ethnic divisions exist... among the Hindus and Muslims and the Indo- and Afro-West Indians" (Ramraj, 1996, p. 223). This boundary is one which arises because of diverse experiences of geography, history, beliefs, and language / dialect differences, and is often overlooked by readers. We find that Lahiri surrounds the Ganguli family with Hindu Bengalis, whereas in *Brick Lane* we come across only Muslim Bengalis. Insecurity is the main reason for such associations. Also, the clashes between Bangladeshis and Somalians in Britain tell us that an immigrant's life could be ruled by the fear of being overtaken by some other group of immigrants. Thus, although the immigrants are responsible for the heterogeneity of a multicultural setup, they live constantly under the fear of the same.

Brick Lane and *The Namesake* have given us two memorable characters, Nazneen and Ashima respectively. Both women leave their homelands to realize the dreams of their new husbands. *The Namesake* begins with Ashima trying to

revive the taste of Kolkata *jhal muri*⁷ by "combining Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts" (Lahiri, p. 1). Ali brings us to Tower Hamlets where Nazneen, "the unspoilt girl [from] the village" (Ali p. 22), who in her eighteen years of unmarried life had scarcely spent a solitary moment, now fights loneliness by listening to a lavatory flushing in the next-door apartment. Ashima, unlike Nazneen who can only say "sorry and thank you" (Ali, p. 19), is a woman acquainted with the poetry of Wordsworth and Tennyson. Yet both lead enclosed lives, doing "regular prayer, regular housework" (Ali, p. 51), and performing remarkably similar chores like cooking lamb curry with potatoes to suit their husband's palate. More than the similarities experienced in their routine life, both women endure the foreign land initially with the same homesickness, as "nothing feels normal" (Lahiri, p. 5) to both Ashima and Nazneen and something always appears to be missing from their lives. We can conclude from this that many diasporic individuals, irrespective of their nationalities, educational backgrounds, and religion tend to have the same sense of incompleteness. Nazneen feels suffocated in her box-like apartment when she recalls the vast expanses of open fields in her village, and, in the last few days of her first pregnancy Ashima recounts, "In India, ... women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares, retreating briefly to childhood when the baby arrives." (Lahiri, p. 3) Incidentally, both women give birth to their children in a "foreign land", "far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those [they] love" (Lahiri, p. 4).

When Ashima cannot let go her tattered copy of *Desh*⁸ it immediately becomes more than a literary magazine and is one that carries layers of meanings associated with 'desh' sensibilities. Similar sensibilities are attached to the letters Nazneen and Ashima receive from their 'desh'. 'Desh', though the centre of the cultural identity of many immigrants, is the cause of much anxiety. The exaggerated 'desh' nostalgia makes many immigrants outcasts in their new homes and also distances them from their children. Some first generation immigrants, it may be noted, have tried to construct their "imaginary homelands" by residing in places like Bangla Town in East London or Edison in New Jersey⁹ to resist assimilation into the host country's culture. Thus very often we find that a microcosm has been created in Diaspora Literature, which prevents their characters from trespassing into 'whiter'¹⁰ grounds – diasporic characters tend to keep company of people from their community only – "... the baby has visitors, all Bengali" (Lahiri, p. 24). Such confinements have given rise to the phenomenon of the 'traditionalists', a term used by Victor Ramraj in his essay "Diasporas and Multiculturalism". Traditionalists are people who vehemently

resist any sort of assimilation and protest against anything accultural. *Brick Lane* also leaves little space outside the Bangladeshi community of Tower Hamlets (Karim could very well have been a Kirk)¹¹. This very-Bangladeshi world, though appearing superficial at times, has been delineated vividly by Monica Ali. There is barely any mention of any noteworthy white British figure. Though Chanu in *Brick Lane* severely criticizes the Sylhetis who build villages around themselves, his own home is a perfect example of a villager's household - he does not let Nazneen go to English classes or allows his daughters to speak English at home. His constant bickerings with his elder daughter Shahana reveal that Chanu with all his certificates has remained a traditionalist at heart who plans to return 'home' before his children get spoilt. These traditionalists still see their new world in shades of "gray"¹² as they have consciously kept themselves in the periphery.

The trope of 'desh' ultimately fails to keep up the hopes of the immigrants and is ultimately reduced to a mere metaphor because although immigrants prefer being traditionalists, they seldom avail themselves of the opportunity to return to their 'desh', primarily because of the material comforts of the new land. And even if immigrants return to their real homes, in most cases the real 'desh' appears to be starkly different from their nostalgic construct of 'desh'. For Nazneen, it is not Karim (Nazneen's lover) but her sister Hasina's letters, which make her turn away from Bangladesh. Because it is through these letters that Nazneen comes to know about Hasina's constant struggle for existence (we come to know that Hasina is raped and that she also works as a domestic help). Thereby the letters inform Nazneen of her shattered 'desh'. Chanu, it is true, returns to Dhaka but readers cannot, but be very skeptical about the success of his soap business.

In spite of the hard-earned security which makes many settle in a foreign land the diaspora community is constantly tormented by two harsh realities. The first reality is the cultural uprootedness epitomized by the children of these settlers and the second is the discrimination encountered by them and their next generation because in a multicultural setup, the dominant "Power uses difference as a way of marking off who does and who does not belong" (Hall, 1997). In fact, the derogatory word 'Paki'¹⁴ had been coined to denote an uncultured, brutish immigrant. Incidents like the police raids in East London and the arrest of innocent immigrants show the kind of oppression a section of immigrants go through. *Brick Lane* offers us riots and other traumas experienced by the Bangladeshi community in London. In the novel Nazneen laments, "My husband says they are racists [his promotion would take longer than a white man] ... if he painted his skin pink and white then there would be no problem." (Ali, p. 72). So

while at one level many immigrants fear competition from other immigrants, at another level, they are wary of discrimination from the larger 'host' community. Thus we can see how fear and insecurity have entwined to form borders within a single nation. More importantly, such traumas lead to the formation of layers of borders in the diasporic individual's psyche whose doubled insecurity forces him to struggle twice as much for survival.

According to Victor Ramraj, 'assimilationists' are those immigrants who try to incorporate the culture of their new homes in their lives. Ashoke, who was born a "third time in America" (Lahiri, p. 21), rebuilt himself to fit into a particular system. Lahiri devotes two pages (pp. 64 -65) of her novel elaborating the assimilating acts practiced by the Gangulis: celebrating Christmas, Thanksgiving, and preparing American dinners form a crucial part of their lives. Talking about the transformations the successful immigrant goes through, Fredrick Buell (1994) observes, "Model immigrant success stories ... [are] models because they remind us on every page that the author [of the success story is] an 'other', while simultaneously celebrating the supposedly complete transformation of that identity" (p.148) Diasporic authors in some way or the other tend to take the side of the 'assimilationists'. "The Gangulis have moved to a university town outside Boston. . . [where] they are the only Bengali residents." (Lahiri, p. 48) Then "Ashima and Ashoke are ready to purchase a home" where "all the houses belong to Americans" (Lahiri, p. 51) Lahiri distances the family from the Bengali community and makes them climb the stairs of progress but Chanu in Tower Hamlets remains confined to Bangla Town. "The job is everything Ashoke has ever dreamed of" (Lahiri, p. 49) whereas, Chanu's state (afflicted by the "Going Home Syndrome") steadily declines and he ends up as a cab driver in London. In contrast Nazneen ventures outside the borders of her apartment in an act of assimilation which boosts her confidence and ultimately makes her financially independent. "Nazneen had never seen this England but now ...the idea formed that she would visit it" (Ali, p.438). Thus, on one hand the traditionalist Chanu is shown as limited, whereas, the assimilationist Nazneen is depicted as capable of growth. With the traditionalist-assimilationist framework, yet another border has been formed within the diasporic community. The liberal Nazneens will always tend to be in conflict (concealed or exposed) with the more conservative Chanus.

Rosemary Marangoly George (1996) has noted, "The literature produced out of diasporic experiences has always been in the business of constructing fictions that fit realities and don't fit realities." (p.180). Following her, I point out

that a homogeneous national identity is something that is usually detested in a multicultural setup but the closeness of an individual to the dominant national identity makes her an ideal immigrant. And this is the greatest irony of Diaspora Literature. The constant shifting of point-of-views from one generation to another, as in *The Namesake*, reveals not only the double consciousness i.e. the diasporic's ambivalent allegiance to 'desh' on one hand and to the host country, on the other, but also the shifting point-of-views are used as a means to highlight the differences in perceiving the world by two frames of thought.

"Our names contain our fate."¹⁵ (*Midnight's Children*, p. 304)

The name Gogol is crucial to Lahiri's novel. Its significance is highlighted through a series of co-incidences. But the name also assumes a greater significance because of the discourse of diaspora. The name, not Indian or American (as opposed to Nikhil's firm Indianness), is oddly enough a Russian last name, which acts as a signifier of the complicated dual identity of second-generation immigrants. Instances like the Indian classical music cassette his father Ashoke gifted Gogol months ago still lying sealed in its wrapper highlights Gogol's rejection of his parent's culture. In diaspora literature, growing up, a strange case of duality and rejection, at times can culminate in hatred of one's dual identity. Gogol and Sonia are more attached to Christmas than Durga pujo (a Hindu religious festival). Gogol ends up denying his own childhood, which is unquestionably more entwined with his Indian roots. Gogol "remembered wishing that his parents would walk through the park, take him to the Museum of Natural History ... but they had had no interest in such things." (Lahiri, p. 127). Thus the 'past', so nostalgic for one generation, becomes an object of hatred for another. By comparing Ruth's family with Gogol's, Lahiri clearly posits the difference experienced by second-generation immigrants. Gogol "wishes his parents could simply accept her, as her family accepts him." (Lahiri, p. 117) and Maxine's "Why on earth would they mind?" (Lahiri, p.129) almost leaves him baffled. Gogol's life with the Ratliffs (Maxine's family) opens an unknown America to him. Words like 'vacation' have a new meaning for him now, for "he realizes now that they were never really true vacations at all. Instead they were overwhelming, disorienting, expeditions" (Lahiri, p.155). Yet he cannot situate his parents in a setup where he feels free. But ultimately the fact that he changes his name to the very-Indian Nikhil tells us that it was his 'hyphenated borderline'¹⁶ identity he resented.

Moushumi, Gogol, and Sonia – all feel they are confined within boundaries. Their professions, their marriage, everything about them seems to be

determined by an overpowering alien culture. Thus Moushumi rebels by vowing never to marry a Bengali man and then secretly double majors in French, again not anything American or Indian. Moushumi suffocates and as an outlet for her sufferings "she began to fall effortlessly into affairs. With no hesitation, she had allowed men to seduce her...She gave herself openly, completely, not caring about the consequences." (Lahiri, p.215). Bibi and Shahana in *Brick Lane* fear their return to Bangladesh. Shahana's arrogance disturbs Chanu, who shouts, "Tell the little memsahib that I am going to break every bone in her body" (Ali, p.180), again, "I'll dip her head in boiling fat and throw her out of the window" (Ali, p.180). Ali informs her readers:

Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them. If she could choose between baked beans and dal it was no contest. When Bangladesh was mentioned she pulled a face. She did not know and would not learn that Tagore was more than poet and Nobel laureate, and no less than the true father of her nation. She did not care. (Ali, p. 180)

Shahana's voice could be the voice of a teenage second-generation immigrant. Eventually to escape the family's return 'home', Shahana runs away.

At one level in her novel Lahiri makes an attempt to bridge the gaps by letting East mix with the West. Thus Gogol in *The Namesake* falls for two very American women, Ruth and Maxine. But we seldom find first generation immigrant families readily accepting such associations. Ashima and Ashoke point out that Bengali men marrying Americans have usually ended in experiencing divorce. When it comes to marriage or love affair, diaspora authors strangely play the role of traditionalists. Lahiri breaks Gogol's relationship with both Ruth and Maxine and Sonia is married off to the not - so - American Ben. Similarly in Krutin Patel's film *ABCD*¹⁷ (American Born / Bred Confused Desi), Nina ends up marrying a white American and Raj breaks his Indian engagement to flare up an affair with a white colleague. But the ending of the film exemplifies the 'confused' in the acronym posing serious doubts about the choices made by the siblings. Readers, thus are relieved when Gogol ties the knot with the Bengali Moushumi. Both shared strikingly similar childhoods – "the same parties to attend", "the same frequent trips to Calcutta", "both routinely assumed to be Greek, Egyptian, Mexican" (Lahiri, p. 212). Gogol and Moushumi's marriage is assumed by all traditionalists to be perfect. But the marriage collapses. Why? The

rebellious Moushumi's cultural identity is constructed of some immoral experiences, which ultimately make her unfaithful. "There were days she slept with one man after lunch, another after dinner." She keeps company with people who sleep with one another and we can't see her "with some Indian guy." (Lahiri, p. 215) Similarly for Nazneen, Dr. Azad appears to be eternally suffering because of his accultural wife who smokes and wears short skirts. The borders appear to indicate a world where one's roots are to be respected, and where the *lakshmanrekha*¹⁸ cannot be crossed.

Diaspora literature often attempts to give a holistic picture of immigrant existence. The initial struggle reflected in the beginning usually leads us to a stronger and mature version of the immigrant as we approach the ending. We are amazed at the changes that Ashima and Nazneen go through (as we saw, Ashima and Nazneen as assimilationists and here I am pointing out the transformation the assimilationists go through)—both grow stronger to be *ashim*, that is to say, without borders. Nazneen is confident enough to raise her two daughters in London without Chanu. And Ashima too "has learned to do things on her own" and "is not the same Ashima who had once lived in Calcutta." (Lahiri, p. 276). And strangely Ashima muses, "For thirty-three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library...She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband" (Lahiri, p. 279). This confession reveals the bond first-generation immigrants develop with their host nations.

The last line of *Brick Lane*, "This is England ... You can do whatever you like" (Ali, p. 492) which symbolizes an attachment to the host nation, shared by both Nazneen and Ashima, is a stark contrast to Ashok's sarcastic, "In America anything is possible. Do as you wish."¹⁹ (Lahiri, p. 100). Assimilation for these women signifies freedom and strength that at once places them on a higher pedestal compared to their counterparts, back 'home'. It is undeniable that a second-class citizen's existence is preferable to Ashima's mundane middle-class North Kolkata existence. On the other hand, Nazneen shudders at the thought of Hasina's struggle for existence in Bangladesh. Some works also take us beyond the 'happy assimilation' in *Brick Lane*. For instance, Lahiri gives us a picture of the last years of one's life in a 'foreign land'. "Ashima feels lonely suddenly, horribly, permanently alone..." (Lahiri, p. 278) A rawer picture is depicted in *ABCD* where Nina's mother Anju, a widow, dies lonely in a kitchen, talking to her dead husband with no dear ones by her. We also cannot help wondering what will happen to Nazneen in the autumn of her life.

The isolated life depicted in the initial chapters of *Brick Lane* is not desirable

and is almost an impossibility in a multicultural world. There has to be some sort of assimilation, some sort of negotiation with the dominant culture to situate oneself in a multicultural setup. In the beginning of the novel ice-skating is something strange for Nazneen but at the end of the novel we find she is attempting to ice-skate. "To get on the ice physically – it hardly seems to matter. In her mind she was already there." (Ali, 492). This is symbolic of Nazneen's breaking the boundaries to carve a space for herself in a world which no longer seemed alien. Thus "she was already there" to face the future which is "a conceptual space for identification and misidentification; and an arena of struggle" (Hua).

Diaspora authors have a vision of a 'Happy Multicultural Land' (no doubt very ironic at times) and so *The Namesake* ends with, "For now, he starts to read." (Lahiri, p. 291) Gogol's reading of Nikolai Gogol's short stories signifies his acceptance of his dual or plural identity. Thus both novels recognize "the endless transformation and translation...of the migrant self" (Dayal, p. 54). Borders are inevitable in a multicultural setup but if one does not "move away from the anachronistic, sentimentalized notion of home as a safe haven, to explore how home can become" (Hua) or if one fails to acknowledge one's dual identity, the borders are simply going to multiply. The straightforward words of 'assimilationist' Mrs. Azad are aptly indicative of the model immigrant in a multicultural framework :

Listen, when I'm in Bangladesh I put on a sari and cover my head and all that. But here I go out to work. I work with white girls and I'm just one of them. If I want to come home and eat curry that's my business. Some women spend ten, twenty years here and they sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn two words of English... The society is all wrong. Everything should change for them. They don't have to change one thing. That ... is the tragedy. (Ali, p.114)

In both novels we come across perplexed characters in strikingly different setups – in *The Namesake* the setting is largely an upper middle class society, whereas in *Brick Lane* it is a lower middle class setting. Although their homes, professions and tastes are not alike, the characters of both novels experience the same anxieties because of their bordered existence. But the greatest similarity between the two works is the optimistic vision of both writers. The happy ending of the two works is a vision of a multicultural land not only the characters, but also the writers themselves have embraced. Thus both *The Namesake* and *Brick Lane* explore the politics behind hyphenated identities. In both the novels the novelists have identified the difficulties that arise from hyphenated identities. Yet

at the end of both works the reader can identify a process to overcome the difficulties a multicultural society imposes on its citizens. In this process an individual is bound to assimilate new cultures to survive, yet he cannot set himself free from the awareness of another culture which moulds him.

Notes

- 1 Gurinder Chadha was born in Kenya, and grew up in Southall, London, England. She began her career as a news reporter with BBC Radio, directed several award winning documentaries for the BBC, and began an alliance with the British Film Institute (BFI) and Channel Four. In 1990, Chadha set up her own production company: Umbi Films. She is the director of popular films like *Bend it like Beckham* (2002) and *Bride and Prejudice* (2004).
- 2 Raghav is a Canadian-Indian (his family originated in Uttar Pradesh in India), who was brought up in a trilingual community speaks English, French and Hindi fluently. He is a talented singer whose music is a fusion of R&B, Asian, a little Bollywood and a little rap...English and Hindi lyrics blending into a magnificent multicultural jamboree. *Storyteller* (2004) has been his most popular release.
- 3 Kalpana Chawla was an astronaut with NASA. She hailed from Haryana, India and perished in the Columbia space shuttle disaster.
- 4 *Desh* in Bengali means homeland.
- 5 In this essay I have looked at a particular section of immigrants from South Asia as depicted in *The Namesake* and *Brick Lane*. Thus the term diaspora here is linked only with this group of people.
- 6 The hosts here are the original inhabitants of a particular country.
- 7 A snack sold on the pavements of Kolkata. It is a spicy mixture of puffed rice, peanuts, mustard oil, etc.
- 8 A literary magazine published from Kolkata.
- 9 Bangla Town in Britain is inhabited by a large number of Bangladeshis and hence the place is called Bangla Town. Edison in the United States is the home of many Indian (Gujrati) immigrants.

- 10 I have used 'whiter' here to signify the dominant culture of First World host nations as this culture is quite different from the culture shared by the non-whites.
- 11 Ali could have replaced Nazneen's lover Karim with a white British figure. But she refrains from doing so to portray a more vivid picture of the Bangladeshi world in Britain.
- 12 Jhumpa Lahiri uses gray to denote the America where Ashok had not yet landed. I have used the same word for the traditionalists as even after staying in the host nation for decades, they barely try to associate themselves with the host culture.
- 13 Ashima and Ashoke feel distanced from their children who sound all – American. So they enroll disinterested Gogol and Sonia in "bor-ing" Bengali classes and Chanu teaches Shahana and Bibi *Amar Shonar Bangla* (the national anthem of Bangladesh written and composed by Rabindranath Tagore) to impose the lost culture on them. Sonia prefers hair colour and "argues violently" with her mother. Similarly Shahana wants to wear tight-fitting jeans which Chanu vehemently opposes) Ashima and Ashoke too feel distanced from their children who sound all too American. So they enroll disinterested Gogol and Sonia in "bor-ing" Bengali classes and Chanu teaches Shahana and Bibi *Amar Shonar Bangla*¹² to impose the lost culture on them. Sonia prefers hair colour and "argues violently" with her mother. Similarly Shahana wants to wear tight-fitted jeans which Chanu vehemently opposes.
- 14 'Paki' does not anymore refer to an emigrant from Pakistan. It was perhaps initially used to derogatorily refer to the conservative Pakistanis who first came to Britain, but now the word is used as a hate word to designate emigrants in general.
- 15 I have used this quote as in the next section I am going to focus on Gogol who represents the voice of second generation emigrants. Gogol's name is symbolic of the dual identity which torments him for the larger part of the novel.
- 16 Here I am referring to hyphenated identities like "American-Indian" or "British-Bangladeshi" as borderline identities. Generally such identity is attributes to the second generation.
- 17 The film *ABCD* also traces the conflicts between first-generation and second-

generation immigrants in America.

18 According to the *Ramayana* it is only after crossing the sacred border that Lakshman drew that Sita was kidnapped by Ravana

19 An angry Ashok used the words when Gogol decided to change his name.

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