

# The namesake discussion essay

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## **Introduction**

" This is a story of an upper class Indian family (Ashima and Ashoke ) who moves as relatively new immigrants into Cambridge, Massachusetts with an aspiration for better and perhaps encouraging opportunities, and the focus mainly on their only son, Gogol. The whole family though struggles to have themselves conformed to the way of life of the average American. The major theme of focus on the story portrayed as a struggle for identity goes about Gogol life. Born to immigrants in Boston, Gogol is brought-up in the suburbs of Boston though with a name he hates- Gogol. To this young man, what frustrates most is that it is neither Indian nor even an American name. He moves to Yale for college from Boston and graduates to be an architect and later to live in New York City where he encounters a rich and attractive non-Indian girl. He feels the wailing difference in their family backgrounds and ultimately breaks up when his father passes on. He later meets a lady his mother later recommends, though equally American just like Gogol, she turns out as a very interesting one. They get married but she is not like him. Her needs lead to conflict in their lives.

Gogol struggles with the identity crisis can be seen in the book in several episodes and encounters, first Gogol's internal struggle to negotiate between the private and public spheres is a central theme of the novel. It is the major reason why Gogol legally changes his name to Nikhil. Gogol, however, realizes that changing his name alone does not mean complete transformation of identity. He in fact questions his dad on why he was given the unique name. The foundation on which the story is laid is the unusual

naming of the protagonist, Gogol; an accidental naming thrust on his parents by the need to feign some identity. When his father comes up with the name Gogol in the hospital, it emerges to him as a blow from a crisis from his own past -- a past he does not share with the son and The Namesake until Gogol, who has come of age abandon the name, is a senior in college. The story told by the father seems to increase the young boy's confusion. She writes: " Gogol listens, stunned, his eyes fixed on his father's profile. Though there are only inches between them, for an instant his father is a stranger, a man who has kept a secret, has survived a tragedy, a man whose past he does not fully know. A man who is vulnerable, who has suffered in an inconceivable way. When the young Gogol forcefully enquires why he was not told the story before, we encounter the following dialogue:

" It happened so long ago. I did not want to upset you."

" It does not matter. You should have told me."

" Perhaps, his father concedes, glancing briefly in Gogol's direction. He removes the keys from the ignition. " Come, you must be hungry. The car is getting cold."

However, Gogol doesn't move. He sits there, still struggling to absorb the information, feeling awkward, oddly ashamed, at fault. " I'm sorry, Baba."

The scene comes to a conclusion: " And suddenly the sound of his pet name, uttered by his father as he has been accustomed to hearing it all his life, means something completely new, bound up with a catastrophe he has unwittingly embodied for years. " Is that what you think of when you think of me?" Gogol asks him. " Not at all," his father says eventually, one hand going

to his ribs, a habitual gesture that has baffled Gogol until now. " You remind me of everything that followed."

Gogol also tries to overcome this identity crisis in other instances, although little is told about his adolescence, we only visit him on his fourteenth birthday and on a brief foray we join him into a party among his college associates who are students at MIT where for the first time a lady kisses him. I think Gogol felt “ trapped” in South Asian culture and it is for that reason that he dated Maxine; because her family was different from his own. Why would Gogol eventually marry Moushumi? Since Gogol always had an interest in white women, how could he suddenly change and marry a Bengali woman? I fail to make any sense of this sudden turn. More of these identity crises is portrayed when Gogol’s mother Ashima forcefully asks him to marry Moushumi yet she (Moushumi) didn’t love Gogol and in fact had an affair with another white man. I also think there is a struggle that every young South Asian must deal with. Should every young South Asian person go after his or her heart feelings and upset their parents and community? I just imagine though, that there are some South Asian families that are open to new ideas in connection to relationships?

However, after the death of Gogol’s father, he changes his personality to please his mother. He also tries to show how dynamic the young man was and how he would get to greater heights to please especially because of the sympathy he had for his mother after the death of the father. Gogol first loses his public name, (bhalonam), and later his private pet name, (daknam) how does he endeavor to remake his identity, after choosing to change his

name? This brings the dynamism and confusion in the young man who is in a constant struggle to become a “ modern” American. In his endeavor to engage in relationships with white ladies, Gogol's encounter with romance is quite different from what the parents had as an experience and their expectations for him. What draws him to his numerous lovers, especially to Maxine, Ruth and eventually Moushumi are different from what influenced the marriage in the case of his parents. What draws these ladies to him is perhaps his new and interesting way of life. All these struggles in the life of Gogol is to ensure that he conforms to the new way of life he sees in American people and to shade off what he perceives of the Indian culture, he lacks identity and personality to defend his own cultural belief systems and the way of life and therefore prone to manipulation by the dominant cultures.

## **References**

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