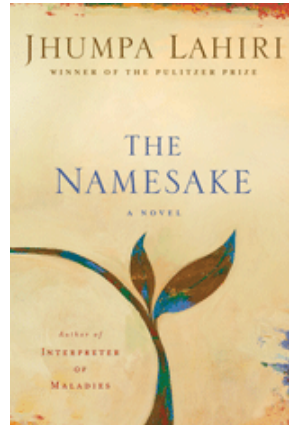


SYNOPSIS OF “THE NAMESAKE” NOVEL



The novel begins in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1968. Ashima Ganguli, expecting a child, makes a snack for herself in the kitchen of her apartment, which she shares with her husband, Ashoke. The two met in Calcutta, where their marriage was arranged by their parents. Ashoke is a graduate student in electrical engineering at MIT. Though Ashima was afraid to move across the world with a man she barely knew, she dutifully did so, satisfying her family’s wishes. She gives birth to a boy in the hospital in Cambridge. Ashoke, nearly killed in a train accident as a young man in India, decides that the boy’s nickname, or pet name, should be Gogol, after Nikolai Gogol, the Russian writer. Ashima and Ashoke agree to register the boy’s legal name as Gogol. Gogol is Ashoke’s favorite author, in part because Ashoke was reading Gogol during the train accident. A dropped page of that book caused the authorities to recognize Ashoke in the wreckage, and they saved his life.

The Gangulis wait for an “official” name for Gogol to come in the mail, from Calcutta. But Ashima’s grandmother, who has the ceremonial honor of naming the boy, suffers a stroke, and her letter with Gogol’s official name is lost in the mail. The family settles into life in Cambridge, with Ashima learning to take Gogol around on her errands. As the family prepares for its first trip back to Calcutta, Ashoke and Ashima learn that Ashima’s father has died suddenly. Their trip is shrouded in mourning. Ashima, especially, misses her parents and her home

in Calcutta, despite the family's growing network of Bengali friends in the Boston area.

The Gangulis move to a Boston suburb, a university town where Ashoke has found a job teaching electrical engineering. Gogol begins preschool, then kindergarten, and Ashima misses spending time with him, and walking around the neighborhood. Gogol begins school, and although his parents have settled on an official name, Nikhil, for him to use there, Gogol insists on being called "Gogol," and so the name sticks. Ashima and Ashoke have another child, a girl named Sonia. Years pass, and the family settles into the modest house in the suburbs, on Pemberton Road. In high school, Gogol grows resentful of his name, which he finds strange, not "really" Indian. He learns about the life of Nikolai Gogol in a literature class, and is horrified by that man's bizarre, unhappy existence. Ashoke gives Gogol a copy of Gogol's stories for his fourteenth birthday, and almost tells him the story of his train accident, but holds back. Gogol hides the book in a closet and forgets about it.

Gogol officially changes his name to Nikhil before going to Yale. He meets a girl there named Ruth, and they fall in love, dating for over a year. After waiting hurriedly for Gogol's delayed Amtrak train, one holiday weekend, Ashoke tells his son about the train-wreck that nearly killed him, and that gave Gogol his name. Gogol was unaware of the story until this point. Nikhil develops a love for architecture, and after graduating from Yale, he attends design school at Columbia, then lives uptown and works for a firm in Manhattan. He meets a young woman in New York named Maxine, who leads a cosmopolitan life with her parents downtown. Nikhil essentially moves into Maxine's home, and the two date seriously. Gogol introduces Maxine to his parents one summer, then spends two weeks in New Hampshire with Maxine's family, the Ratliffs, believing that their life, as opposed to his parents', is paradise.

Ashoke takes a visiting professorship outside Cleveland and moves there for the academic year. He comes home every three weeks to see Ashima and take care of household chores. Ashoke calls Ashima one night and tells her he has been

admitted to the hospital for a minor stomach ailment. When Ashima calls back, she finds out that Ashoke has died of a heart attack. The family is stunned. Gogol flies to Cleveland and cleans out his father's apartment. The family observes traditional Bengali mourning practices, from which Maxine feels excluded. Soon after this period is over, Maxine and Gogol break up.

Gogol continues his life in New York, though he visits his mother and sister in Boston more frequently. Ashima sets Gogol up with Moushumi, a family friend from Pemberton Road, who now studies for a French-literature PhD in New York. Gogol and Moushumi initially resist this blind date, but find that they like and understand one another. They continue dating and soon fall in love. After about a year, they marry in a large Bengali ceremony in New Jersey, near where Moushumi's parents now live. They rent an apartment together downtown.

Time passes. The couple takes a trip to Paris, where Moushumi delivers a paper at a conference. The marriage strains. Moushumi likes spending time with her artistic, Brooklyn friends, whereas Gogol finds them frustrating and selfish. Gogol also resents the specter of Graham, Moushumi's banker ex-fiancé, who was good friends with the artistic crew Moushumi still adores. Moushumi, feeling confined in the marriage, begins an affair with an old friend, an aimless academic named Dimitri Desjardins. She keeps the affair from Gogol for several months, but eventually Nikhil catches her in a lie, and she admits all to him. They divorce.

Gogol returns to Pemberton Road for a final Christmas party. His sister Sonia is marrying a man named Ben and staying in the Boston area. Ashima will spend half her time in Boston and half in Calcutta, close to relatives. Gogol will continue working as an architect in New York, but for a smaller firm where he has more creative input. Nikhil goes up to his room and finds the copy of Gogol's stories his father gave him, realizing how much the author meant to his father. Gogol, feeling close to Ashoke's memory, begins reading the Gogol as the novel ends.

(www.sparknotes.com)

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

JHUMPA LAHIRI



Jhumpa Lahiri, byname of **Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahir** was on born July 11, 1967, London, England, English-born American novelist and short-story writer whose works illuminate the immigrant experience, in particular that of East Indians.

Lahiri was born to Bengali parents from Calcutta (now Kolkata)—her father a university librarian and her mother a schoolteacher—who moved to London and then to the United States, settling in South Kingstown, Rhode Island, when she was young. Her parents nevertheless remained committed to their East Indian culture and determined to rear their children with experience of and pride in their cultural heritage. Lahiri was encouraged by her grade-school teachers to retain her family nickname, Jhumpa, at school. Although she wrote prolifically during her precollege school years, she did not embrace a writer's life until after she graduated (1989) with a B.A. in English literature from Barnard College and obtained three master's degrees (in English, creative writing, and comparative literature and arts) and a doctorate (in Renaissance studies) from Boston University in the 1990s.

While in graduate school and shortly thereafter, Lahiri published a number of short stories in such magazines as *The New Yorker*, *Harvard Review*, and *Story Quarterly*. She collected some of those stories in her debut collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). The nine stories, some set in Calcutta and others on the U.S. East Coast, examine such subjects as the practice of arranged marriage, alienation, dislocation, and loss of culture and provide insight into the experiences of Indian immigrants as well as the lives of Calcuttans. Among the awards garnered by *Interpreter of Maladies* were the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the 2000 PEN/Hemingway Award for Debut Fiction.

Lahiri next tried her hand at a novel, producing *The Namesake* (2003; film 2006), a story that examines themes of personal identity and the conflicts produced by immigration by following the internal dynamics of a Bengali family in the United States. She returned to short fiction in *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), a collection that likewise takes as its subject the experience of immigration as well as that of assimilation into American culture. Her novel *The Lowland* (2013) chronicles the divergent paths of two Bengali brothers. The tale was nominated for both the Man Booker Prize and the National Book Award and earned Lahiri the 2015 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, a prize established in 2010 by infrastructure developers DSC Limited to honor the achievements of South Asian writers and “to raise awareness of South Asian culture around the world.” Lahiri was presented a 2014 National Humanities Medal by U.S. Pres. Barack Obama in 2015. That same year she published her first book written in Italian, *In altre parole* (*In Other Words*), a meditation on her immersion in another culture and language.

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