RACIAL PREJUDICE AND ASSIMILATION IN JHUMPA LAHARI’S THE NAMESAKE (2003):
A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

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IN JHUMPA LAHIRI’S THE NAMESAKE (2003): A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This study is about racial prejudice and assimilation. The problem of this study is racial prejudice and assimilation is reflected in Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake. The object of the study is The Namesake novel by Jhumpa Lahiri. It used sociological approach. This study belongs to qualitative research. In this method, there are two types of data source, namely primary and secondary data source. The primary data source is The Namesake novel and the secondary data source is other material related to the study. Both data are collected through library research and analyzed by descriptive analysis. The result of the study shows the following conclusion. Based on the analysis it is clear that there is a close relation between structural analysis of this novel and social reality in America in early twenty first century. Jhumpa Lahiri wants to show the racial prejudice and assimilation in America in the early twenty first century through The Namesake novel.

Keyword: racial, prejudice, assimilation, America, The Namesake, Sociological.
A. Introduction

*The Namesake* is a novel by Jhumpa Lahiri. Which was published in 2003 by a mariner book Houghton Mifflin company, Boston, New York. There are 12 chapters and 289 pages in this novel. It is printed in the United States of America..It was originally a novella published in The New Yorker and was later expanded to a full length novel. It explores many of the same emotional and cultural themes as her Pulitzer Prize-winning short story collection Interpreter of Maladies.

The author of this novel is Jhumpa Lahiri. She was born in Nilanjana Sudeshna to Bengali Indian immigrants in London. Jhumpa Lahiri moved with her family to the United States when she was three years old. She grew up in Kingston, Rhode Island and earned a B.A. in English literature from Barnard College in 1989. She went on to earn an M.A. in English, an M.F.A. in Creative Writing, an M.A. in Comparative Literature, and a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies from Boston University. From 1997-1998, she held a fellowship at Provincetown's Fine Arts Work Center. Lahiri married journalist Alberto Vourvoulias-Bush in 2001. They had two children: Octavio in 2002 and Noor in 2005. The family currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.

In 2003, Lahiri followed up with *The Namesake*, a novel that followed the lives, perspectives and changing family ties of the Gangulis, an Indian couple in an arranged marriage who relocate to America. The work was adapted into a 2007 Mira Nair film starring Irfan Khan and Tabu, with Lahiri acknowledging that she felt a connection to the director's sensibilities.


One of the most important theories to make the rounds in 21st century world politics was the ‘racial prejudice theory’ proposed by the American Political theorist Lawrence and Keleher. Prejudice is a *pre-judgment* in favor of or against a person, a group, an event, an idea, or a thing. An action based on prejudgment is *discrimination*. A negative prejudgment is often called a *stereotype*. An action based on a stereotype is called *bigotry*. (What distinguishes this group of terms from all the others on these two pages is that there is no power relationship necessarily implied or expressed by “prejudice,” “discrimination,” “stereotype” or “bigotry.”). The type of racial prejudice are labeled symbolic, racial resentment, color-blind, new, laissez-faire, aversive, ambivalent, and subtle.
The effects of racial prejudice on that they had to overcome the mentality and ideology of a national government and, in fact, an entire society, that was failing to recognize them as citizens worthy of the basic rights and freedoms to which they were entitled as Americans.

B. Research Method

The form of data collected are quantitative method and qualitative method. Qualitative methodologies have not predominated in the social sciences. According to Dabbs (1982, p.32) that qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things. On the other hand, Patton and Cochran (2002) stated that qualitative research is characterised by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods which (in general) generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis.

This study belongs to qualitative method. There are two types of data source, namely primary and secondary data source. The primary data source is the novel The Namesake, meanwhile the secondary data sources are other materials related to the study. In analyzing the novel, the writer analyzes the data based on sociological approach. Focus will be on the racial prejudice and assimilation reflected in Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake and in American society in early twenty first century.
C. Research Finding and Discussion

The writer gets some research finding in analyzing *The Namesake* novel. Each finding has some cases to be discussed. After they have examined, all of components will get back together in a schematic manner in the discussion.

1. Findings

In analyzing *The Namesake* novel, the writer gets some findings. There are type of racial prejudice and assimilation in *The Namesake* novel and racial prejudice and assimilation in reality in America.

a. Racial Prejudice in novel *The Namesake*

In this novel, Gogol as the major character, is the portraits of victim from racial prejudice who does like him. Another person wants to hide the real identity of Gogol and make him be a bad person as thief. Gogol feels he that has different name and culture because he lives in America.

Gogol changed its name from Gogol to Nikhil others called her nick. He feels more confident than the previous name. Gogol doesn’t like the name because the name given by his father is not a common name in America. When he is in elementary school, he liked his name because he did not understand this issue. When he was a teenager, he understood that his name was familiar in America.

Finally, Ashoke to Gogol explained the reason he gave that name. Ashoke just explained that Nikolai Gogol was his favorite
author. He did not tell Gogol about a train accident and he believed that his favorite author had saved his life.

So, the other thing that the reader would think is more a part of Gogol’s rebellion against his name is his natural teenage inclination to assert himself. Changing his name is a big step to establish that separation of child and man, traditions that are not felt are being replaced by determining his identity.

Gogol notices the difference between Gogol and Nikhil. There is more going on here than a name change. This has happened to the reader before, where the reader decide that it’s time to make a statement on something going on in the story and so make up a post, then pick up the book and find my thoughts pretty much confirmed.

Gogol is enamored with a girl named Ruth who he knows his parents aren’t willing to accept with open arms. Then he attends a lecture, one of his cousins being a member of the panel, on the subject of what they call “ABCD” or “American-born confused deshi” which brings the plight of someone like Gogol to light. His problem as an Indian in America is not the same as his parents, as they relate to the old country whereas he relates to the new. His name merely brings what Gogol sees more as confliction rather than confusion to a more constant state.
b. Racial Prejudice in Reality

The culture of the United States is primarily Western, but is influenced by Native American, African, Asian, Polynesian, and Latin American cultures. A strand of what may be described as American culture started its formation over 10,000 years ago with the migration of Paleo-Indians from Asia, as well as from Oceania and Europe, into the region that is today the continental United States. The United States of America has its own unique social and cultural characteristics such as dialect, music, arts, social habits, cuisine, and folklore. The United States of America is an ethnically and racially diverse country as a result of large-scale migration from many ethnically and racially different countries throughout its history as well as differing birth and death rates among natives, settlers, and immigrants (Thompson and Hickey, 2005).

According to Thomson and Hickey (2005), Upper class is individual with considerable power over nation’s economic and political institutions. This group owns a disproportionate share of the nation’s resource. Defined as consisting mostly of white-collar professionals who not only have above-average personal incomes and advanced educational degrees but also a higher degree of autonomy in their work (Douglass, 1989). The main occupational tasks of upper-middle-class individuals tend to center on conceptualizing, consulting, and instruction.
Middle class that an individual who worked their way through college and commonly have a Bachelor’s degree or some college education. School teachers, sales-employees and lower to middle level supervisor rank among those in this particular group (Thomson and Hickey, 2005:65). The concept of a working class remains vaguely defined and is especially contentious. Since many members of the working class, as defined by academic models, are often identified in the vernacular as being middle class, there is considerable ambiguity over the term's meaning. According to Gilbert (1998) defined the working class as the most populous in the United States.

The lower class is loosely defined and its boundaries and definitions subject to debate and ambiguous popular opinions. Service and low-rung manual laborers are commonly identified as being among the working poor. Those who do not participate in the labor force and rely on public assistance as their main source of income are commonly identified as members of the underclass. Overall the term describes those in easily filled employment positions with little prestige or economic compensation who often lack a high school education and are to some extent disenfranchised from mainstream society (Thomson and Hickey, 2005).
c. **Assimilation in novel *The Namesake***

In this novel, Gogol as the major character, is the portraits of victim from racial prejudice who does like him. Another person wants to hide the real identity of Gogol and make him be a bad person as thief. Gogol feels he that has different name and culture because he lives in America. And after that Gogol trying for procures assimilation in his live area.

He appears to be so strongly adverse to the name of Gogol, since it’s really been generally accepted by his friends and never a source of intentional embarrassment or bullying. He is allowed to dress, eat, enjoy more American based living, and there is perhaps a confusion between the worlds. When the family returns to India for visits, Gogol and his sister do not feel the ties that his parents do. For them, their being raised in American ways make them American.

Finally, Gogol is feeling so adamantly against his name, the writer picked up a thought more along the lines of a cultural clash that he is undergoing. In this next section, there is more going on that makes the conflict more evident. For one, Gogol is enamored with a girl named Ruth who he knows his parents aren’t willing to accept with open arms. Then he attends a lecture, one of his cousins being a member of the panel, on the subject of what they call “ABCD” or “American-born confused deshi” which brings the plight of someone like Gogol to light. His problem as an Indian in America is not the
same as his parents, as they relate to the old country whereas he relates to the new. His name merely brings what Gogol sees more as confliction rather than confusion to a more constant state.

d. Assimilation in Reality

The United States is a federal constitutional republic, in which the President of the United States (the head of state and head of government), Congress, and judiciary share powers reserved to the national government, and the federal government shares sovereignty with the state governments.

American culture include both conservative and liberal elements, scientific and religious competitiveness, political structures, risk taking and free expression, materialist and moral elements. Despite certain consistent ideological principles (e.g. individualism, egalitarianism, and faith in freedom and democracy), American culture has a variety of expressions due to its geographical scale and demographic diversity. The flexibility of U.S. culture and its highly symbolic nature lead some researchers to categorize American culture as a mythic identity (McDonald, 2010:120).

It also includes elements that evolved from Indigenous Americans, and other ethnic cultures—most prominently the culture of African Americans, cultures from Latin America, and Asian American cultures. Many American cultural elements, especially from
popular culture, have spread across the globe through modern mass media.

The United States has traditionally been thought of as a melting pot, however beginning in the 1960s and continuing on in the present day, the country trends towards cultural diversity, pluralism and the image of a salad bowl instead. Due to the extent of American culture, there are many integrated but unique social subcultures within the United States. The cultural affiliations an individual in the United States may have commonly depend on social class, political orientation and a multitude of demographic characteristics such as religious background, occupation and ethnic group membership (Thompson and Hickey, 2005).

2. Discussion

Discussing the relation between the society and literature. Wellek and Warren (1989: 109) state that literature is a social institution, which is using the language as its medium. Besides, literature presents life and it almost consists of the social reality, although the literature itself imitates the nature and subjective aspect of human being (Wellek and Warren, 1989: 112). Thus, *The Namesake* novel is reflection of what occured in the early twenty first century. Specifically, *The Namesake* novel is reflected the impact of the culture, economic, and politic, which children are the victims of racial prejudice and assimilation in child labor.
In *The Namesake* novel, Jhumpa Lahiri wants to criticize the social reality in the early twenty first century in United States of America. Through *The Namesake* novel, Jhumpa Lahiri states that children do not deserve to be a victim of the culture, economic, and politic. They should be protected from activities that harm them. They are parties needs to be guaranteed by the family and government. And they are family do not want to racial, but assimilation to life in this country.

**D. Conclusion**

After analyzing *The Namesake* novel, the writer wants to deliver the conclusion. The story of the novel reflects racial prejudice and assimilation.

Based on sociological approach of *The Namesake* novel above, the researcher concludes that Jhumpa Lahiri as the author of this novel wants to tell the readers her intention about the character who was born in India and lives in America and wants to deliver a moral message that children are among other victims of Culture, Economic, and Politic.. She shows the social reality in early twenty first century. He wants to satire about the condition in system of law for paupers and culture, economic, and politic in order to show the true situation and condition through character’s characterization, narration and dialogue.

Jhumpa Lahiri criticizes the social reality in America through the theme, plot and characterization in *The Namesake*. The theme of the story is "racial prejudice and assimilation can lead to confusion of identity". The concept of the novel is, again, the changes that a person goes through when
being transplanted into a different culture, as are Ashima and Ashoke, or being raised between cultures, as is Gogol. It is reflected in the plot of the novel.
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