



## The Analysis of the Main Character Through Three-Dimensional Aspect and Characterization in the Novel “The Namesake” by Jhumpa Lahiri

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**Abstract.** *This study is conducted to examine the three-dimensional aspects and characterization methods in The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri. The primary focus is placed on identifying how the main character, Gogol, is portrayed through these dimensions and what methods of characterization are applied to reflect his development. A qualitative descriptive method is used in this research, applying Lajos's theory of three-dimensional aspects along with Burroway's concepts of direct and indirect characterization to analyze the narrative data from the novel. Through the analysis, it is revealed that Gogol is portrayed as a character who undergoes a significant transformation throughout the story. In the early stage, he is shown as a 14-year-old who struggles with his identity and feels detached from himself. As the narrative progresses, a rebellious attitude is displayed by Gogol as he distances himself from his Bengali background. In the final stage of his life, after experiencing personal loss and emotional challenges, he undergoes a more profound reflection, leading to a greater appreciation for his cultural heritage. This transformation is portrayed through the use of both direct and indirect characterization methods, by which the emotional and cultural journey of an immigrant character is effectively conveyed.*

**Keywords:** *characterization, main character, three-dimensional aspect*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A novel, as a form of long prose fiction, explores various aspects of human experiences through its characters, events, and conflicts. Among its intrinsic elements, character plays a crucial role in shaping the plot and conveying the novel's more profound meaning. According to Abrams and Harpham (2009), characters are fictional constructs created by authors to serve narrative purposes. As Nurgiyantoro (2002) also stated, characters in novels are more complex than those in short stories because the more extended narrative allows for deeper development of their physical traits, social background, and personality.

To understand a character in depth, Lajos (2004) proposed the concept of a character's "bone structure," which comprises three-dimensional aspects, including physiological, sociological, and psychological elements. These dimensions help readers perceive characters as real and relatable individuals. In literary analysis, these dimensions provide a structured framework for examining how characters are constructed and developed throughout a narrative. The portrayal of these aspects is made possible through characterization, a technique an author uses to reveal a character's traits and the inner world. Through characterization, an author gradually presents a character's physical appearance and condition (physiology), social

identity and background (sociology), and inner thoughts, emotions, and motivations (psychology).

In this study, the analysis of characterization is grounded in these three-dimensional aspects as they offer a comprehensive lens to explore how the main character is shaped, evolves, and reflects broader human experiences. Thus, the three-dimensional aspect not only defines what is being revealed about the character but also guides how that revelation is analyzed through the author's characterization techniques.

The study of three-dimensional aspects and characterization is not a new approach in literary analysis. Previous research, such as Khotimah et al. (2023) in "Three-Dimensional Aspect of the Main Character in Delia Owens' *Where the Crawdad Sing*" and Maharani (2020) in "The Three-Dimensional Aspect of the Main Character in *The Great Gatsby*", has applied Lajos' theory to explore how characters are constructed in fiction. While these studies successfully examine the physiological, sociological, and psychological dimensions of character, they tend to focus solely on these aspects without closely connecting them to the characterization methods used by the authors.

To build on and expand this area of research, the present study analyzes the main character in *The Namesake*, a novel by Jhumpa Lahiri, by combining Lajos's three-dimensional theory with Burroway's theory of characterization. This combination enables a more in-depth examination of how the main character is constructed, not only through his traits but also through the narrative techniques used to portray him. Moreover, this study contributes a fresh perspective by applying these frameworks to a novel centered on cross-cultural identity and immigrant experience, which differs from the cultural and thematic context of previous studies.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Three-Dimensional Aspect of Character**

In literature, characters are crafted to resemble real human beings, allowing them to appear believable and multi-faceted. According to Lajos (2004), this sense of realism is effectively achieved through the exploration of three-dimensional aspects, comprising physiological, sociological, and psychological elements, which serve as the foundation for understanding human behavior. By examining these dimensions, it becomes easier to portray a character in depth and trace the motivations behind their actions. These three-dimensional aspects include:

### **1. Physiological Aspect**

The physiological dimension of a character refers to their physical attributes, which play a key role in shaping their identity and influencing how others perceive them. This includes basic features such as gender, age, height, weight and distinctive traits like hair, skin, and eye color. A character's overall appearance, whether neat, attractive, or disheveled, also contributes to this dimension analysis.

### **2. Sociological Aspect**

The sociological dimension, as proposed by Lajos (2004), involves the social environment and background that influence a character's behavior and development. This includes elements such as family structure, education, occupation, social class, and cultural influences. These sociological traits provide context for a character's motivations and help explain their actions and transformations within the story.

### **3. Psychological Aspect**

The psychological dimension of a character emerges from the interaction between their physical attributes and social background. It represents the internal aspects of a character, such as their thoughts, feelings, and emotional responses to their surroundings. Psychological traits include a character's emotional tendencies, belief systems, ambitions, and personal motivations.

## **Characterization Method**

Characterization is the method used by authors to present and develop characters in a story (Minderop, 2005). It includes both the direct portrayal of a character's actions, thoughts, and interactions, as well as indirect cues that reveal deeper traits, motivations, and roles within the narrative. According to Burroway et al. (2019), the characterization method is divided as follows:

### **1. Direct Characterization**

This is a method of presenting character explicitly through observable traits and behaviors. This method enables readers to understand a character through direct presentation rather than inference. Four primary methods contribute to this approach. First is dialogue, which serves as an effective tool for characterization because it not only communicates information but also reflects a character's emotions, motives, and personality. Second is appearance, which extends beyond visual appearance to include elements such as movement, gestures, posture, and overall physical demeanor, all of which influence how one is perceived. Third is action, which represents a response to realization, shaping both the plot and the character's development. Fourth is thought, which reveals characters through their feelings and

reflections, enabling readers to grasp the character's personality directly from these observable traits and reflections.

## **2. Indirect Characterization**

This method involves portraying a character through narrative summary, generalizations, or evaluative language rather than direct presentation. This approach shapes how readers view characters without revealing them through their own actions, dialogue, or inner thoughts. Indirect characterization can take two forms: first, authorial interpretation, where the narrator explicitly conveys the character's traits or emotions, and second, interpretation by another character, where the character is described from another character's viewpoint, often colored by personal opinions or biases.

## **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative method to analyze the main character, Gogol Ganguli, in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, focusing on his three-dimensional aspects and characterization. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative research focuses on the meaning and interpretation of the phenomenon within the context of the study. Additionally, this study utilizes narrative data derived from *The Namesake*, a novel first published in 2003. Structured chronologically, the story serves as the primary narrative source. This approach is consistent with Bleakley's perspective (as cited in Butina, 2015), which views the narrative itself as a valid source of data.

In this study, content analysis was employed as the primary method to examine the narrative elements within the narrative. According to Kothari (2004), this method involved examining written material, and data were collected through a close reading of the text, with detailed notes taken on passages that revealed the main character's three-dimensional aspects. The data were then analyzed using the three-dimensional character framework proposed by Lajos (2004) with Burroway et al.'s (2019) theory of characterization. The analysis was presented in a structured and descriptive manner, divided into three different stages of Gogol's life: his teenage years, his transition into Nikhil Ganguli, and the period following his father's death, to highlight the changes and development of his character. At each stage, the collected data were analyzed by combining both approaches to demonstrate the complexity of Gogol's character development and the literary techniques used to portray it.

#### **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings and discussion sections are intended to address the two main research questions by identifying the three-dimensional aspects, physiological, sociological, and psychological of the main character, Gogol Gangului, and by analyzing the characterization methods used by the author, specifically the use of the direct and indirect method, to portray his complexity throughout the narrative of *The Namesake*.

##### **Gogol's early adolescence**

This phase begins when Gogol is fourteen years old, as depicted in Chapter 4 of the novel, marking a period of self-questioning and cultural tension. This stage shows the early signs of his internal identity conflict.

##### **1. Physiological Aspect**

The physiological dimension of Gogol in this stage is reflected through his age and the physical development typical of early adolescence. The first piece of data highlights that Gogol is 14 years old:

Gogol's fourteenth birthday—like most events in his life—is another excuse for his parents to throw a party for their Bengali friends. (Lahiri, 2019, p. 72)

The data above confirms that Gogol is portrayed as a 14-year-old boy, a time of significant growth and change both physically and emotionally. The narrator's phrase "*like most events in his life*" indirectly reveals Gogol's recurring experience of having his milestones shaped by his parents' cultural expectations. This is an example of authorial interpretation as a characterization method, where the narrator gives insight into Gogol's feelings of detachment and the tension he experiences between his individual growth and his family's expectations.

##### **2. Sociological Aspect**

Gogol Ganguli's early sociological development is shaped by his upbringing in a Bengali household while being immersed in American society. As can be seen in this data

"Thanks, Baba," Gogol says, eager to return to his lyrics. Lately, he has been lazy, addressing his parents in English, despite their continued use of Bengali with him. Occasionally, he wanders through the house with his running sneakers on. At dinner, he sometimes uses a fork. (Lahiri, 2019, p. 75)

From the passage, it is known that at home, his parents continue to speak to him in Bengali, trying to preserve their cultural heritage, while Gogol often replies in English as a sign of his growing detachment from his roots. The narrator's description of Gogol as "lazy" for not speaking Bengali reflects an example of indirect characterization through authorial interpretation. This commentary suggests that while his parents work to instill traditional

values, Gogol is increasingly influenced by the American environment surrounding him, including at school and in everyday interactions. This dual exposure creates a tension between his home culture and the broader society, shaping his social identity.

However, Gogol's sociological experience during this stage is not limited to his family environment and the cultural values his parents maintain; it also includes the kinds of entertainment and leisure he chooses to adopt to embrace the lifestyle and identity of an American teenager.

His parents don't suspect Gogol of being, in his own fumbling way, an American teenager. They don't suspect him, for instance, of smoking pot, which he does from time to time when he and his friends get together to listen to records at one another's homes. They don't suspect him when he goes to spend the night at a friend's house, or drives to a neighboring town to see *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, or into Boston to see bands in Kenmore Square. (Lahiri, 2019, p. 93)

The above passage further evidence of this American influence appears in Gogol's teenage lifestyle, where he participates in activities typical of American adolescents, such as experimenting with marijuana, attending concerts, and watching cult films with friends, without his parents' knowledge. These behaviors highlight his assimilation into American youth culture and his distance from Bengali norms. Additionally, the narrator's phrase "in his own fumbling way, an American teenager" exemplifies indirect characterization through authorial interpretation, implying that Gogol is awkwardly navigating his American identity.

### **3. Psychological Aspect**

This section analyzes the psychological aspect of Gogol Ganguli by focusing on his response to his name, which represents his central internal conflict. His discomfort with the name reflects a deeper struggle with his sense of identity and a feeling of not belonging. The data below will be used to explore his emotional reactions and shifting attitude toward his identity.

For now, he's come to hate questions pertaining to his name, and hates having to constantly explain. He hates having to tell people that it doesn't mean anything "in Indian." He hates having to wear a nametag on his sweater at Model United Nations Day at school. He even hates signing his name at the bottom of his drawings in art class. He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but, of all things, Russian. He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second. (Lahiri, 2019, p. 75)

In terms of psychological dimension, Gogol Ganguli's internal conflict centers on his discomfort with his name, which he feels does not reflect either his Indian heritage or American identity. This emotional struggle is a significant part of understanding Gogol's psychological aspect and reveals his identity crisis. The conflict is presented through thought-based characterization, as the narrator shares Gogol's inner feelings and frustration, particularly his repeated expression of hatred for his name. This method allows readers to understand his psychological turmoil and the cultural confusion he experiences.

In conclusion of Gogol's early adolescence, physiologically, Gogol is portrayed as a 14 years-old and starting to feel disconnected from his parents' cultural traditions; sociologically, he adopts American habits and lifestyle, moving away from his Bengali roots; and psychologically, he intensely dislikes his name, which triggers confusion about his identity. These aspects are revealed through characterization methods, such as authorial interpretation for the indirect method and the direct method through thought-based characterization, allowing readers to understand Gogol's internal struggle and emotional growth.

### **Adopting the name Nikhil**

At the age of 18, just before starting college at Yale in 1986, Gogol decided to legally change his name. This moment signifies a significant shift in his life, as it represents his attempt to break free from the discomfort and embarrassment he had long felt about his name. This transitional period is explored in Chapters 5 and 6 of the novel, where Chapter 5 depicts Gogol at 18 as he begins college, embracing his new name. In contrast, Chapter 6 jumps to 1994, when he is 26 years old and dealing with more mature experiences.

#### **1. Physiological Aspect**

By now, Gogol is just shy of six feet tall, his body slender, his thick brown-black hair slightly in need of a cut. His face is lean, intelligent, suddenly handsome, the bones more prominent, the pale gold skin clean-shaven and clear. He has inherited Ashima's eyes, large, penetrating, with bold, elegant brows, and shares with Ashoke the slight bump at the very top of his nose. (Lahiri, 2019, p. 98)

At this stage, Gogol is physically portrayed as having reached maturity, marking his transition into adulthood. The data shows that he is nearly six feet tall, with a slim build and defined facial features, including a lean face that is now considered handsome and intelligent-looking. These details highlight the shift from adolescence to physical adulthood. Additionally, both direct and indirect methods are employed in terms of characterization. Direct characterization is demonstrated through explicit descriptions of his physical traits, including his height, skin tone, and hair. At the same time, indirect characterization appears through the

narrator's interpretation, especially in phrases like "intelligent" and "suddenly handsome," which reflect an evaluative perspective. These interpretations help convey not just Gogol's outward change but also a sense of his growing maturity and presence as a young man.

## **2. Sociological Aspect**

In the second stage of Gogol's development, the sociological aspect is examined through his social life as a university student at Yale. This period marks his exposure to a broader and more diverse social environment, where he interacts with people from different cultural backgrounds and begins to shape his identity independently from his family.

It is as Nikhil the first semester that he grows a goatee, starts smoking Camel Lights at parties, and, while writing papers and before exams, discovers Brian Eno, Elvis Costello, and Charlie Parker. It is as Nikhil that he takes Metro-North into Manhattan one weekend with Jonathan and gets himself a fake ID that allows him to be served liquor in New Haven bars. It is as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party at Ezra Stiles, with a girl wearing a plaid woolen skirt, combat boots, and mustard tights. By the time he wakes up, hungover, at three in the morning, she has vanished from the room, and he is unable to recall her name. (Lahiri, 2019, p. 105)

This section shows how Gogol, now going by the name Nikhil, is adjusting to and influenced by the social environment of American college life. His behaviors, such as growing a goatee, smoking, attending parties, using a fake ID to drink, and engaging in casual relationships, are typical of college students in the U.S. and reflect his efforts to fit in and explore a new identity. These actions signal his departure from the traditional values of his Bengali upbringing and his growing connection to American culture. This shift represents more than just social adaptation; it marks a personal transformation as Nikhil takes control of who he wants to be. The characterization of this passage is conveyed through his actions rather than narration. Readers learn about his changing identity through the choices he makes, showing that Nikhil is becoming more independent and eager to define himself on his terms.

## **3. Psychological Aspect**

After Gogol legally adopts the name Nikhil, he begins facing a psychological conflict, showing that identity change is not as simple as switching names. Although the change was meant to help him fit into American society, he still feels emotionally attached to his former self.

But after eighteen years of Gogol, two months of Nikhil feel scant, inconsequential. At times, he feels as if he's cast himself in a play, acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different...He fears being discovered, having the whole charade

somehow unravel, and in nightmares, his files are exposed, his original name printed on the front page of the *Yale Daily News*. Once, he signed his old name by mistake on a credit card slip at the college bookstore. Occasionally, he has to hear Nikhil three times before he answers. (Lahiri, 2019, p. 105)

The data above emphasizes that two months as Nikhil cannot undo the eighteen years he lived as Gogol. The phrase “acting the part of twins” captures how he feels divided, as if he is performing a role that does not fully belong to him. Even though people see him as Nikhil, he continues to think like Gogol internally, which creates anxiety and fear of exposure, as reflected in his nightmare about his real name being made public. These details underscore Gogol’s struggle to embrace his new identity and relinquish his past fully. Psychologically, this passage reveals Gogol’s deep internal fear and confusion, showing that identity involves more than legal documents. It is also about personal acceptance. From a characterization perspective, this moment is an example of Burroway’s method of revealing character through thought. The narrative invites readers into Gogol’s mind, allowing us to understand his emotional state without the author explicitly explaining or judging it. Through his thoughts and reactions, the passage exposes Gogol’s inner turmoil and difficulty in adjusting to a new version of himself.

In conclusion, the second stage of Gogol’s character, after he legally changed his name to Nikhil, reveals a complex transformation through the three-dimensional aspect. Physically, he matures into adulthood, as evidenced by both direct and indirect observations of his appearance. Socially, Gogol immerses himself in American college culture by changing his behavior and lifestyle, distancing himself from his Bengali background as shown through action-based characterization. Psychologically, he experiences inner conflict and confusion, struggling to fully embrace his new identity. This is portrayed through his thoughts, illustrating his emotional disconnection from the name “Nikhil”. Overall, this stage highlights that identity is not easily changed on the surface; it also requires deep internal acceptance and emotional growth.

### **The passed of Ashoke Ganguli**

The death of Ashoke Ganguli marks a significant turning point in Gogol’s life. It brings deep sadness and prompts him to think more seriously about who he is and his relationship with his family. Without his father, Gogol enters a phase of reflection and rediscovery of his identity and heritage.

#### **1. Physiological Aspect**

The physiological dimension of Gogol in the final stage of his life can be understood through his age, which shows that he is approaching 30 years old. This age reflects a stage of

full adulthood, indicating that Gogol has entered a more mature stage of his life, both physically and mentally. His age in this phase also supports the idea that he is beginning to settle into a more reflective and grounded version of himself, shaped by personal experiences and loss. The below is data to analyze:

When he tells her that he isn't even thirty, she tells him that by that age, she had already celebrated her tenth wedding anniversary. (Lahiri, 2019, p. 191)

In this stage of the novel, which occurs about a year after Ashoke's death, Gogol is revealed to be around 29 years old. This is shown through a conversation with his mother, Ashima, who mentions that by his age, she had already been married for ten years. From a physiological perspective, this moment marks Gogol's transition into full adulthood, reflecting not only physical maturity but also the emotional and psychological growth that accompanies age. While he once embraced a carefree youth, Gogol is now at a point where he begins to consider serious life decisions, such as marriage.

The characterization in this passage is conveyed through dialogue, specifically indirect speech. Gogol's mention of his age reveals his current stage in life, and Ashima's response highlights the difference in life experiences and expectations between generations.

## **2. Sociological Aspect**

The sociological aspect of Gogol in the final stage of his life is reflected in his changing social status, particularly in his marital relationship. The sociological aspect can be analyzed from the two data points below.

Starting tomorrow, he realizes with a shock, he and Moushumi will be regarded as a family of their own. (Lahiri, 2019, p. 219)

This passage marks a pivotal moment in Gogol's life, when he comes to realize that his relationship with Moushumi, an Indian-American woman, has altered his social standing. By getting married, he is no longer just someone's son; he and Moushumi are now seen as their independent family unit. This realization surprises him, indicating that he is starting to grasp the responsibilities and identity that come with marriage. This marriage signifies his attempt to fulfill familial and cultural expectations by forming a union with someone who shares the same cultural background. Additionally, this passage uses characterization through thought as Gogol's internal reflection reveals his awareness of how his role in society is changing, rather than relying on external description or other characters' views.

Unfortunately, Gogol's status as a married man lasts only two years before it comes to an end. Although he initially gains a socially recognized role through his marriage to Moushumi, this status is short-lived. This can be seen from the data below:

But really, the job was a ruse; she and Gogol had decided that it was best for her to return to New York alone. By the time he arrived at the apartment, her clothes were gone, and makeup and bathroom things were gone. It was as if she were away on another trip. But this time, she didn't come back. She wanted nothing of the brief life they'd had together; when she appeared one last time at his office a few months later, so that he could sign the divorce papers, she told him she was moving back to Paris. (Lahiri, 2019, p. 283)

In 2000, two years after marrying Moushumi, Gogol faces a significant shift in his social identity when their marriage ends in divorce. Moushumi quietly leaves their apartment while Gogol is away, taking all her belongings and later returning only to finalize the separation before moving back to Paris. This moment marks Gogol's transition from a husband to a divorced man, reflecting a significant change in his social role. The passage uses action-based characterization, where Moushumi's decisions, such as leaving, removing her things, and signing the divorce papers, indirectly highlight the changes in Gogol's life and his new status as a divorcee.

### **3. Psychological Aspect**

From the psychological aspect, the analysis focuses on Gogol Ganguli's attitude toward life. This can be observed through his thoughts, as shown in the following data.

People talk of how much they've come to love Ashima's Christmas Eve parties, that they've missed them these past few years, and that it won't be the same without her. They have come to rely on her, Gogol realizes, to collect them together, to organize the holiday, to convert it, to introduce the tradition to those who are new. It has always felt adopted to him, an accident of circumstance, a celebration not really meant to be. And yet it was for him, for Sonia, that his parents had gone to the trouble of learning these customs. It was for their sake that it had come to all this. (Lahiri, 2019, p. 286)

Initially, Gogol's attitude toward his life and culture is rebellious; he resists engaging with his Bengali heritage and feels a sense of distance from it. However, after his father's death, Gogol begins to develop a greater appreciation for his Bengali background. The passage shows that he starts to realize his parents' efforts to learn American customs, such as celebrating Christmas, specifically only for him and his sister, Sonia. This newfound understanding brings feelings of regret and emotional awareness. It marks a psychological shift from indifference to appreciation, reflecting Gogol's growing maturity and evolving attitude toward his cultural roots. Rather than being described through external narration, this change is revealed through Gogol's internal reflections, employing thought-based characterization to illustrate how he

increasingly values his family's efforts and traditions, demonstrating his personal and cultural growth.

In conclusion of Gogol's final stage of life, physiologically, he has reached full maturity, approaching the age of 30, marking a clear transition into adulthood. Sociologically, Gogol has experienced significant changes in his life, having become fatherless after Ashoke's death and having gone through the rise and fall of a marriage, which ended in divorce with Moushumi. Psychologically, he undergoes a significant shift in attitude, moving from resistance to appreciation of his Bengali heritage. At this stage, the three-dimensional aspect of Gogol's character is primarily revealed through direct characterization methods, including his inner thoughts, actions, and dialogue, which offer a deep insight into his emotional growth.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

The analysis of Gogol Ganguli's character across three life stages in *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri reveals how the three-dimensional aspects —physiological, sociological, and psychological —interact to shape his identity. Through changing stages of age, social roles, and emotional development, Gogol's journey illustrates the complexities of cultural duality and personal transformation. His characterization is effectively conveyed through both direct and indirect methods. These techniques allow readers to trace his evolving self-perception and cultural awareness, highlighting how identity is not static but shaped by time, experience, and reflection.

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