

# Semiotic Analysis of Train in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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## Abstract

This paper makes a semiotic analysis of train in *The Namesake*, a novel by Jhumpa Lahiri who has been marked as a crafty painter of the sensibilities of Indian diaspora. The paper objectifies the thoughtful and vivid use of train by the novelist to match the emotional aspects involved with the plot. Lahiri has just not used trains as a means of transport but as a symbol to the sensibilities of diaspora. The paper commences with a small discussion on general purposes for which writers use trains in their works to project different concerns and later projects the vivid usage of train in the novel. There appears a variety of references to train in *The Namesake*, each pointing to the writer's different motives behind its induction. While at a point train shapes a person's career, at other instance it ruins life. At some point it emerges as a symbol of faith, at another point it leads to deception. Through train, Lahiri projects kaleidoscopic images of the sensibilities of Indian diaspora in addition to gradual change and maturity. She is successful in associating train with emotional contours of her characters.

**Keywords:** Jhumpa Lahiri, Indian-American, Indian diaspora, rail, semiotic analysis, train

## 1. Introduction

Travels have always been inspirational for mankind as they open gates to opportunities and different socio-cultural aspects. Technical advancements gifted human society with various means of transports, which accelerated travels and further fuelled the imagination and creativity. Since these means of transports inspired mankind to cross borders and peep into different cultures, their impact on literature has been very intense (Kumar, 2020; Kumar et al., 2021). Writers have been using different means of transport in their works for various purposes. They have been used to showcase: (i) development of the society and its impacts, (ii) response to the oppressive supremacy that aimed to marginalize local sentiments (iii) agony of any societal affairs, and (iv) mobility and connectivity. In addition, they are used as mobile plot setting device that can help in plot-progression. The use of means of transport has also been symbolic to human attitudes in different genres. All such varied incorporations gave rise to 'Mobility Studies,' which holds that travel descriptions and the use of means of transport should be analyzed from the perspective of "cultural analysis" which can surely prove to be a "fertile ground for interdisciplinary field of mobility studies" (Spalding & Fraser, 2012; IX). Further Spalding and Fraser emphasize that as an intellectual tradition Mobility Studies see "modernity itself in terms of movement" (Spalding and Fraser, 2012; IX). When the term 'diaspora' itself is deeply associated with movement, connectivity, culture and construction of nation; it is utmost important to reflect critically on the journey-related perspectives of the literature of any diaspora. As the rise Indian diaspora literature is viewed as a tag of globalization, it is necessary to critically investigate as to how the writers of Indian diaspora use (or make their characters use) different means of transportations to establish individuality and connectivity to their roots vis-à-vis the novel trends of communication. It is equally important to analyze the literature of Indian diaspora to see as to how and what incidences are projected by the writers during the travels of their characters because public transports also reflect society and culture. *The Namesake*, being a reflection of a second-generation Indian-diaspora writer on the life of an emigrant Indian family negotiating a hyphenated cultural identity in the times when communication facilities were not easy, serves an ideal for such analysis as it involves trains at different meanders of the plot reflecting over the usual themes of diaspora literature.

### 1.2 Objective of the Research

The following are the objectives of the research:

- To study the significance and features of symbols in literature.
- To make a semiotic analysis of train in *The Namesake*, a novel by Jhumpa Lahiri

## 2. Literature Reviews

Post-Symbolists “have shed an enchanting new light on subjects that might seem outdated or stressful on completely familiar events” (Bowra, 1943) through their imaginative art. A symbol is a sign that refers to something abstract in general. It is both a sign and a symbol, and signifies multiple concepts as well (Kumar, 2021). In addition to this, there is obvious correlation between the signifier and the signified. The word tree may signify many concepts: on primary level, it signify tree, then at another level it may refer life growth and may have many more meanings. Simultaneously, a symbol is made up of several instances and signifiers, which serve as signifiers in addition to their instances (Jindal & Pushpinder, 1998). As per etymology, “symbolism means a 'bringing together, and this derivation is the logical antecedent of current conceptions, for symbolism is an apposition of ideas and objects, one of which expresses the other” (Critchley, 1975; p. 53).

Symbol is arbitrary as “Saussure has phrased it, in a now famous passage the term [arbitrary] should not imply that the choice of the signifier [that is, symbol] is left entirely to the speaker ... I mean that it is unmotivated, that is, arbitrary, in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified” (Devito, 1970; p. 7).

Regarding the use of symbols on literature, Barber (1964) and Robins (1964) assert that a symbol is one of the inventions that writers use to transform language into a powerful technique. The symbolical expression has a twofold phenomenon: it may allude to things those are not visible, the past or future; as well as things those are the imaginary and possible. The transition from emblazoning to vocal notation marks a significant leap of comprehension.

Handa (2003) states that symbols are concepts with connotative, evocative and emotional significances. They enable the language to be evocative and alluring. They must be used to represent concepts that cannot be conveyed in words. This allows a symbol to transmit sensations realistically.

Regarding the connection between images and symbols Welleck and Warren (1963) said that “an image may be evoked once as a metaphor, but if it persistently recurs both as presentation and representation, it becomes a symbol” (p. 163). This statement well illustrates the concept of symbols its appropriateness in literature.

### 2.1 Language and Symbolism

According to Hayakawa (1974), language is the most sophisticated, complicated, and complex symbol. “Various noises that human beings can produce with their lungs, throats, tongues, teeth and lips stand for specified happenings in their nervous systems. We call that system language” (p. 24). It is “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates” as viewed by Bloch and Trager (Cited in Householder, 1971; p.28).

Languages and symbols are interconnected. Symbols are actually the building blocks of languages. Language may be made up of both traditional and sophisticated symbols, and is thus referred to as incorporating symbol systems (Critchley, 1975; Ajmal et al., 2020; Abdelrady et al., 2022). Lehmann (1972) states that “the functions of symbols are determined by their relationship to other entities in the system. The meaning of station is circumscribed by other words possible in the same context: airport, school, super market and so on. The meaning of ‘Could you tell me?’ is circumscribed by other possible arrangements, such as ‘You could tell me’, and so on. Throughout language the functions of symbols are determined by their relationship to other entities in that language” (p. 18).

Language is understood as a system of signifiers that have a variety of implied and explicit meanings. Depending on the communication context the nature and use of the symbol varies. It conveys ideas through symbols. (Hall Jr., 1969). Levinson (1997; p. 65) has the similar view that “there is a specific symbol in each language. There are usually a few words in a language that can only be used as a symbol”.

### 2.2 Symbolism as an Art

Symbolism offers an artistic or aesthetic touch to literary works. Writers and critics use stylistic or metafictional symbolism in their writing for unusual effect. The use of symbols and imagery in literature elevates it to the level of art. It excites the reader when they are employed in literature. Symbolism satisfies a basic biological need. It promotes mental wellness while maintaining consistency (Hayakawa, 1974; Çakmak et al., 2021).

In literature, symbolism is used to achieve universality and long-term effect. In literature, symbols could be used as metaphors, similes, and images, among other things. Every notion is different, so every symbol has a different meaning and significance. “The symbols in art have no any strict structure, since they are conceptual in nature. Symbols in art

are suggestive. The function of symbol is to suggest anything. Language uses these arbitrary symbols to sketch non-arbitrary pictures” (Dhongde, 1987; p. 95).

### 3. Method

In this research study, the researcher will look at both conceptual and theoretical aspects of the subject matter. 'Introduction' is the first section, which describes the investigation's location and purpose. The other four sections are separated into two groups of three. The second chapter provides an overview of previous study on the usage of symbols in the literature. The third chapter contains a discussion of the research methodologies that were used in this study. It is in the fourth chapter that we delve into the issues of semiotic analysis of train in *The Namesake* in detail. A summary of the information offered in the preceding chapters is provided in the final section of the article.

### 4. Discussion and Findings

Trains, initially, emerged as tools to feed the growing industrial revolution utilizing the colonized resources-whether human or natural. In British Colonies train/railway was a mode to establish the colonial grip on resources, leaving behind the traditional ways of transport so as to mar the indigenous ways of economic sustainability. Keeping in view such role of trains Leo Marx calls them as a capitalist symbol of “power to create power” (Zabel, 2000; 1). Writers and critics have been capitalizing more and more on trains as they are directly connected to a large section of society and gives them an opportunity to use them as a “cultural and literary symbol” (Zabel, 2000; 1). Trains are also a significant pointer to man’s civilisational progress. Writers use trains as a positive symbol or negative symbol- “one applauds progress, the other retrogradation. One celebrates the stern, the other the whimsical” (Carter, 2000; 241). Marx(2004) also divides writers using train as a symbol into two categories- one who believe train to be a threat to some cherished ideal of high civilization or art or craftsmanship (p.347) and another who consider train as man’s contribution to the progress of nature (p.241). Thus in some works the train appears as a positive symbol hailing development and progress, in other works train appears as a negative symbol criticizing the loss incurred as the cost of development.

Zabel (2000) observes that the train has been used in a very different sense by African-American writers projecting the rebellions of the Blacks against American apartheid; a rebellion against “greed and hate of whites supremacy that demonized all of those of African descent” (p. 2). Zabel(2000) strongly avers that in African-American literature “train itself is not.....symbol of progress, manmade or otherwise,” (3) rather it is a symbol of rebel and conflicted nature of America (4). Spalding and Fraser(2012) generalizes Zabel’s observation and writes,

...train travel has provided a mobile experience of modern realities that were themselves subject to constant change and even rupture. Through literary and visual representations, artists have imagined train as contradictory symbol of both modern anxiety and potential freedom (X).

Michael J Freeman in his book *Railways and Victorian Imagination* differs from Spalding and Fraser as for him trains in literature represent technological, social and creative development. His thoughts echo loudly when train is further hailed as “an unproblematic symbol of technological and social progress” (Beaumont and Freeman, 2007; 7).

Studies centered on the use trains/ railways in the literatures of different nation and societies can be found with ease but scholastic studies on the use of trains in the literature of Indian diaspora are rare. The shortage may be because the critical studies on literature of Indian diaspora focus keenly to examine postcolonial issues or the usual themes concerning nation, home, marginalization, acculturation, cultural shock, displacement and rootlessness. Jhumpa Lahiri has successfully experimented with the use of trains to project these diaspora sensibilities.

#### 4.1 Trains in “*The Namesake*”

Lahiri has referred to trains very suggestively in *The Namesake* to relate to the diasporic themes of displacement, home, assimilation, marginalization, cultural shock, connectivity, identity and roots. In fact the train evolves as a carrier of different themes. The skillful exhaustive use of train in *The Namesake* points that the references to trains are just not incidental but are well planned so as to result in important and very critical situations, which should help the author in plot progression and in projecting the concerns of connectivity. Almost every reference to train results in an important situation or a turning point. A thoughtful study on these references to train proves that Lahiri cautiously uses train as a symbol. But ironically, almost none of the researchers have listened to the use of train in *The Namesake* from analytical point of view. Out of Sixty research papers obtained for this research, only one research paper titled as “Train Wreck in *The Namesake*” was found to be focusing on the train as a considerable element in *The Namesake*. The introductory of this paper informs its word-count to be just 750 with seven citations. But priced at \$ 13.95, this paper too does not evaluate the exhaustive use train in the novel rather “focuses on the train wreck in Chapter One” (Train Wreck in *The Namesake*, 2008). Though the first reference to train in the novel is important but the other references to train cannot be ignored as the repetitive and thoughtful use of trains bespeaks of its symbolic employment.

It must be stated that a close reading of *Anna Karenina* and *The Namesake* reveals strong similarity in context to the usage of train. Both the novels commence with a train accident that lays the foundation to the plot. While the introductory reference to train in *Anna Karenina* introduces the hero and the heroine to each other, the first reference to train in *The Namesake* develops acquaintance between Ashoke Ganguli and Ghosh- a fellow traveler, who in a brief friendly talk onboard persuades Ashoke to move abroad to make fortune before getting tangled in familial affairs. He inspires, "Do yourself a favor....pack a pillow and a blanket and see as much of the world as you can. You will not regret it. One day it will be too late" (Lahiri , 2006;16).

After a few hours of this tempting advice of Ghosh the train meets a fatal derailment that kills Ghosh and leaves Ashoke in the dark fields to bleed speechless till death. Fortunately, the rescue team identifies life in gravely injured Ashoke who while recuperating on bed for a month, decides to follow Ghosh's advice to move abroad despite all resistances from the parents. The train here proves to be foundation element of the plot. Had Lahiri given no thought to train at this juncture, Ashoke wouldn't have met Ghosh. And had there been no train-wreck Ashoke wouldn't have thought so deeply about making destiny abroad, " as far as he could from the place in which he was born and in which he had nearly died" (Lahiri , 2006; p. 20).

This very first reference to train carries a five page long description; delineating Lahiri's observation on the situation of trains in India. Train has been used in this case for three purposes:(i) lay strong foundation for the plot and establish connectivity, (ii) make two strangers meet so that the protagonist gets persuaded to move abroad, (iii) to re-emphasize the uncertainty of human-life, and from authorial point of view project the Indian milieu to which trains are inevitably associated with.

The second reference to train in the novel features Boston with a prominent reference to the society and administrative honesty, which furthers the plot. Train has been used here to incorporate the seeds of adaptation in Ashima's mind, which has been reluctant to view West as 'home' under the continuous episodes of nostalgia that resist her to think positively about west. In preparation for her visit to India, she shops gifts for her relatives and boards a train back to her residence. Unfortunately, in a rush to alight she loses her bag full of the gifts on the train. Ashima is devastatingly "furious with herself, humiliated at the prospect of arriving in Calcutta empty-handed" (Lahiri , 2006; p. 42) but the following day when she receives her lost articles through MBTA Lost and Found Department; she develops faith and a sense of respect for Cambridge. Her outlook towards West changes with this incident of honesty and, "this small miracle causes Ashima to feel connected to Cambridge in a way she has not previously thought possible" (Lahiri , 2006; pp.42-43). This incident appears to have been indicted very deliberately as it was essential for the author to make Ashima feel home, though partially; otherwise the plot would have moved in other direction with Ashima's utter dejection with USA. While the gifts convey her sensitivity towards her kinship and her emotional connectivity to 'home'; the train here becomes a very positive symbol of trust and faith. To be brief, the train emerges as a device that inculcates sense of connectivity in a critical character at a critical point in the plot.

The next reference to train pictures younger Gangulis-Gogol and Sonia, who have a strained relationship and utter disconnection with India as they, having born-and-brought up in America, have different outlook towards Indian food, society and culture. Indian is never a home for them and thus they see India through disinterested eyes and heart. Lahiri projects the disconnection of Gogol and Sonia, in contrast to their born-in-India-settled-in-Cambridge parents by revealing "Four in the family.....two US Passports and two Indian" (Lahiri , 2006; 80). Lahiri subtly uses train as a tool to point the young Gangulis' disinterested outlook toward India. This miniscule reference to Howrah station may lead to misinterpretation about India but it successfully portrays what the two US-born-and-bred detached adolescents may perceive. This reference to train brings the entire family together more closely than the airplane that fares them to Calcutta from US. To recall, though they all board the same plane yet they sit apart and enjoy separately signifying differences in their tastes, attitudes and inclination but on the train they are bound to be together due the reserved seats. The plane signifies individuality and the train hints at the highly social culture of India. Lahiri's comments very indicatively when she comments on the scenery the young Gangulis notice: "In the morning they look at the scenery through the tinted window of their air-conditioned car. As a result, the view, no matter how bright the day, is gloomy and gray" (Lahiri , 2006; 84).

'They' here just not refers to Gogol and Sonia but to all arm-chair travelers from West, or anyone who wishes to see India by setting himself far in luxuries. The compartment becomes a medium for Lahiri to sharply criticize the obnoxious views on India. She is sharp and bitter in her tone while using 'tinted window' as a suggestive pun for prejudiced mind. She steps further in extracting sharp satire by saying, "....the view, no matter how bright the day, is gloomy and gray." She means that howsoever pleasant or good is something, to a prejudiced mind it shall be always gloomy, untrustworthy and absurd. This reference to train may appear short but not less in its sharpness or thoughtful

use. The train here has been used for two purposes- one, for presenting the feelings of an NRI family boarded on an Indian train, and second- for projecting Lahiri's sharp critique on gloomy ideas on India.

The details of the journey back to Calcutta are disgusting (Lahiri, 2006; 85-86) as Sonia falls sick of allergy, a businessman onboard gets murdered, the inconsiderable delay of the train and Gogol falling seriously ill. The train, in this reference has been represented as a queer victim of fate, ill luck or misfortune, mishaps and the uncertainty of human life. And that's why Lahiri makes it clear in the first line of this description, "bad luck trails them on the trip back to Calcutta" (Lahiri, 2006; 85).

The fifth chapter of the novel describes more train journeys than all other chapters. A small and casual reference to a commuter rail that takes Gogol from Boston to Lechmere to change his name as 'Nikhil' (Lahiri, 2006; 97) signifies his yearn to break the walls of culture and traditions. Lahiri would have used any other means of transport but has again chosen train to suggest it to be a carrier of thoughts, emotions and revolts for it gives her wider space to describe. In the latter part of the chapter Gogol (Now Nikhil) boards a train 'unwillingly' (Lahiri, 2006; 108) from Boston to go to Cambridge to meet parents. His hateful journey implies to his dejection toward his parents, home, roots and cultural values. The train stands neutral for there is no mentioning of any good or bad incidence yet it powerfully conveys Gogol's feelings. In the same chapter there is a long description of a brief train journey that Gogol takes to join his parents on Thanksgiving (Lahiri, 2006; 108). Gogol boards a crowded train and by chance meets Ruth whom he falls in love with later. The crowded train is a symbolic to today's global situation where spaces are crowded with identities and every human being has no solution but to "keep walking from one compartment to the next, looking for an uncrowded vestibule" (109) in which one might get some space to establish oneself. The jam-packed train having only 'standing room' implies to the inevitable lack of comfort coupled with the necessity of travel. Gogol moves from one compartment to other in search of seat implying his life-long quest for identity. The expression 'finding a seat' bears a metaphorical significance to his personal struggles in establishing his identity. Lahiri induces luck in this reference and helps Gogol find not only a vacant seat but also Ruth who coincidentally happens to be from the same university Gogol studies in. The intense intimacy between the two as projected by the author makes the reader feel that all will be well in the latter pages but luck has in it something else. Contrary to the first reference to train where Ashoke found an advice that shaped his career, his son Gogol finds Ruth with whom he falls in love and expects to shape his life. The affair ends abruptly with both developing critical differences over Ruth's going to Oxford for a semester. Later the relationship is severed and leaves teenaged Gogol torn apart with the haunting memories of Ruth and the first train journey he had enjoyed with her. The same chapter ends with another train journey of "distracted, gloomy and impatient" Gogol who is travelling to join his father on Thanksgiving, while Ashima and Sonia have gone to India. Lahiri describes Gogol's sadness hinting at some serious turning point:

But he feels distracted for some reason, gloomy, impatient to be off the train... He angles his head against the window and watches the autumnal landscape pass: the spewing pink and purple of waters of a dye mill. Electrical power stations, a big ball-shaped water tank covered with rust. Abandoned factories, with rows of small square windows partly bashed in, ravaged as if by moths. On the trees the topmost branches are bare, the remaining leaves yellow, paper-thin (Lahiri, 2006; 120-21).

Suddenly the train stops and there spews a variety of rumours about halt disturbing Gogol. The train gets irritatingly late and Gogol misses the connecting train in Boston. The delay of the train coupled with the sorrows of the loss of girlfriend makes Gogol much poignant. Under the shadows of loneliness and gloom he, for the first time, feels sympathetic to his father for being alone and waiting in chill at the station. Such emotional juncture has been knowingly created so that the decade long secret regarding the reason behind the name 'Gogol' and Ashoke's life can be revealed in much powerful emotional light. Emotions, climatic condition and silence are tactfully induced by Lahiri to make the revelation sentimentally powerful and appealing. Ashoke remains silent throughout the drive and on reaching home he discloses the first train-accident and narrates how a book by Nikolai Gogol saved his life- a truth that Gogol expects to have known long back. The suicide that delayed Gogol's train now makes a sensitizing imprint of loss of Ashoke on Gogol's mind. Being intensely emotional, Gogol feels a special sense of connectivity to his father which he has never felt before. Thus, the train in this context imbibes emotional connectivity in a character who had been denying his every connection to his roots whether in the form of parents, values or culture.

Lahiri induces another nostalgic reference to train sixty-one pages after this referral. The journey is very sad for Gogol as Ashoke is survived only in the memories of Ganguli family. Gogol boards a train to New York sadly and is seen off by Ashima and Sonia. Describing an emotional start off, Lahiri has again chosen train as a medium and calls the Gangulis as "diminished family straining but failing to see Gogol" (Lahiri, 2006; 184). The word 'diminished' is a result of author's conscious effort to tell that with the death of Ashoke, the Ganguli family has reduced in its gravity.

On the other hand “straining but failing to see” implies to the void between Gogol and his family. To connect the reader to Gogol’s poignancy over love-sick memories of Maxine-Gogol’s new girlfriend, Lahiri gives description of the scene visible outside the window: “Snow covers the straw-colored ground. Trees stand like spears, dried copper leaves from the previous season still clinging to a few of the branches” (Lahiri , 2006; 184).

And amidst this description Lahiri introduces a very brief telephonic conversation between a young woman and her boyfriend distracting Gogol from his familial nostalgia and reconnecting him to Maxine. After a while Gogol sees through the window sea-shore and reconnects to his father remembering latter’s fondness to sea-side beauty. The train reconnects Gogol to his familial roots. Maxine later breaks with Gogol complaining him of his obsession in looking after Ashima and Sonia. Trying to come to circumstances, Gogol leans much on his mother. Every weekend he goes to Massachusetts by train to see his mother and sister (Lahiri , 2006; 188) to establish emotional connectivity. Train here again becomes a symbol of connectivity with the familial roots. It is on one such train bound journey to his family that he feels guilty for having an affair with Bridget whose husband is very faithful to her. He feels that in having an affair with Bridget he has been cheating an astute man. Gogol onboard train realizes his act as sin and emerges as an emotionally matured young man establishing his connectivity to cultural roots. Particularly, in this reference for the first time train emerges as an eye-opener to Gogol and stands as a symbol of morality.

The way a train journey can be so detestable for second generation of Indian immigrants has been projected in the eight chapter of *The Namesake*. Lahiri infuses this reference again to portray the disapproval the NRI Children have towards India and Indian culture. Moushumi, Gogol’s wife, recalls an anecdote about a train journey in India (Lahiri , 2006; 213). Moushumi observes the environment of the train to be too suffocating for her and burdened upon her more when the Bengali couple sharing the same compartment had been bold enough to seek her hand for their son who had been studying surgery at Michigan. While the parent’s open enquiry, in Indian context, implies to parent’s yearn to seek suitable Indian match for their son studying abroad; for teenaged Moushumi who had been growing in west, it was an unusual mutilating attempt of disrespecting her individuality and encroaching her will in choosing a partner. Moushumi’s cruel critique for the enquiry is a flagrant rejection of roots and culture. In this small but crucial recollection the train becomes a showcase of generation gap and differences in the perception of individuality.

The last reference to the train come towards the end of the novel (Lahiri , 2006; 280-284) where the reader essentially empathies with Gogol. Gogol’s forthcoming misfortune and aftermath is clearly hinted with the details of the activities at the platform. The initial description itself makes reader feel that Gogol is sad and is content to sit lonely perhaps because his mother Ashima is leaving America forever. The description emerges as a metaphor to Gogol’s misfortunate pendulum-like life oscillating confusedly between haves and have-nots, home and foreign, my and ours, and me and they. It is at this sentimental note that Lahiri diverts the reader masterfully to another pathetic train-bound journey of Gogol, exactly a year ago. Lahiri shockingly reveals the break off between Gogol and Moushumi on a train. Instead using a restaurant, an office or any other place Lahiri uses train to narrate the pathetic incidence of split and painstaking disclosure of extramarital affair of Moushumi which shakes Gogol to the extent of utter dejection. Lahiri reveals gradually that it had been on a train to Boston exactly a year ago, when Gogol and Moushumi were travelling to spend Christmas, Moushumi accidentally referred to Dimitri. Upon instigation of Gogol she disclosed about her love-affair with Dimitri leaving him so devastated that he “felt none of the tenderness... only the anger, the humiliation of being deceived. And yet, at the same time, he was strangely calm- in the moment that his marriage was effectively severed” (Lahiri , 2006; 282).

Lahiri expresses the contrast of separation and union in the pretext of constraints. Gogol severs marital relationship with Moushumi immediately and finds solace in his familial roots. This last reference to train in the novel is as artistically and emotionally powerful as the very first one. While the very first reference to train ends in ravaging accident at night, this reference to train ends up with wreckage in Gogol’s life. While the first reference shapes Ashoke’s life, the last one devastates his son’s life. Amidst the description of Gogol’s pathetic mental condition Lahiri narrates the feelings of reconnection and perception that seeps in Gogol. She narrates: “He’d felt this way on only one other occasion, the night he had sat in the car with his father and learned the reason for his name” (Lahiri , 2006; 282). Such a realization is reconnection to parents. But due to their train-bound journey Gogol is forced to stay with Moushumi even after knowing the cheat. Lahiri expresses this in very strong words:

His first impulse had been to get out at the next, to be as physically far from her as possible. *But they were bound together, by train, by the fact that his mother and Sonia were expecting them, and so somehow they suffered the rest of journey, and then through the weekend, telling no one, pretending that nothing was wrong* (Lahiri , 2006; 282-83, emphasis mine.)

Lahiri has emphatically used train in this context to suggest the subjugation and irony that becomes inevitable in certain circumstances. In addition, she also hints that severing ties is not just easy because human beings are many times ruled by cultural and external environmental forces. The train is here suggestive of connectivity at the cost of disconnectivity (disconnection, to be linguistically correct). For example, Gogol's disconnection with Moushumi on train connects him to his mother and roots. Lahiri attempts to suggest that connection to roots and culture demands some sacrifices of choices, and every connection is a result of some disconnection. A train connects characters to their destinations, to their aims but at the same time it keeps on disconnecting them too.

## 5. Conclusion

*The Namesake* commences with reference to a train that builds foundation of a career and it ends with a reference to another train that ruins familial life of a young character. Lahiri suggests different moods, expresses different notion, and criticizes falsifying views with the help of train. However, this must be emphasized that she does not refer to train as a negative symbol, as it is in *Anna Karenina*. Train evolves as a symbol of connectivity in *The Namesake*; and in due course it connects the readers to the diasporic sensibilities of individuality and connectivity with the roots. To her, train is a carrier of culture, society and individual emotions. At times it signifies change- change in life. Gogol's father's life changes in a train accident, Ashima's attitude towards West changes due to train, Moushumi asserts her individuality on trains, Gogol's own attitude towards father and family changes due to delay in train and at last, critically, Gogol's life is devastatingly torn due to a disclosure on a train. While trains keep on facilitating characters' mobility, they significantly point to their emotional contours.

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