

## The Namesake

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### About the Movie

The Namesake movie is directed by Mira Nair; written by Sooni Taraporevala based on the novel The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri.<sup>[1]</sup> Starring: Tabu, Irrfan Khan, Kal Penn and Sahira Nair. Produced by Mira Nair and Lydia Dean Pilcher. released in March 2007 in English and Bengali.<sup>[2]</sup>

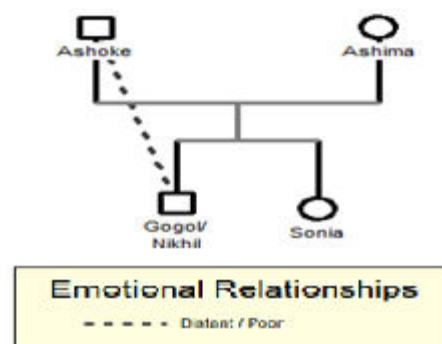
The Namesake movie revolves around the life and experiences of two generations of the Ganguli family. The story starts with an incident with the first generation protagonist Ashoke (Irrfan Khan) who gets inspired to travel and settle beyond his country, India. He meets Ashima (Tabu) his future wife for an arranged marriage meeting and they finally settle in New York, where they go through the process of adapting to a new country and culture, especially Ashima, who has been brought up in a typical Bengali family. The story proceeds with Ashima and Ashoke's journey together to make a home in this distant place, getting acclimatized to the environment, Ashoke and their extended family from fellow immigrant Bengali community guiding and supporting Ashima through the process, keeping alive the Indian traditions and rituals to the best of the circumstances. They give birth to a boy named 'Gogol' namesake of a Russian author Nikolai Gogol (Kal Penn), which is a key factor in the movie for defining the connection and dynamics of the father-son relationship that Ashoke and Gogol have. Later, they have their second child, a girl 'Sonia' (Sahira Nair). Unlike their parents, both Gogol and Sonia are brought up in America while still having some influence of Indian culture. The story progresses with developments in their life, children growing up, leaving the house for further studies resulting in an 'empty nest' for their parents.

The movie is reviewed through the lens of Bowen's family system theory.<sup>[3]</sup>

### The Family Subsystem

The movie revolves around the Indian family and cultural values with the prominent characters being Ashoke and Ashima and their children but there's also their real family back in India and the extended Bengali community in America a reminiscent of the collectivistic culture of India.

The Subsystem we will be focusing on here is the family of Ashoke and Ashima, the first-generation immigrants and their children Gogol and Sonia brought up in America.



### The family Dynamics

**Ashoke:** A professor, a first-generation immigrant from India, settled in America, with his wife Ashima and two children. Although he develops a liking for the new culture but his emotions are deeply rooted in the Homeland culture of India. Later, death is caused by a sudden heart attack

**Ashima:** Earlier a housewife and later a librarian, born and brought up in a typical Bengali family and a first-generation immigrant from India, settled in America after marriage with Ashoke. Faces different challenges due to cultural differences in a new place. Emotions are rooted in the cultural and traditional values of India.

**Gogol:** Firstborn son of Ashoke and Ashima, born in America, struggles to identify with either of the cultures and difficulties in his

relationship with his partners, an American girl and later married to a Bengali girl of Indian origin brought up in the UK. Dislike with his name 'Gogol' due to history behind it leading to changing his name. Dealing with the sudden loss of a father with feelings of remorse and guilt for not maintaining a cordial relationship with him and drifting away from family.

*Sonia:* Secondborn, goes through the same process of cultural transformation as Gogol but the movie does not portray much about her difficulties and challenges. We assume a cordial relationship with mother and distant emotionally distant relation with father based on the events in the movie.

The Key relations of our focus here are between Ashoke-Ashima and Ashoke-Gogol.

*Ashoke-Ashima:* alliance through arrange marriage, they slowly develop an attachment. It is important to understand this relation through patterns of attachment for an Indian couple brought up in the collectivistic culture. They together face the challenges of living in the new culture going through the process of acculturation but it continues till the end due to deeper connections with Homeland culture.

*Ashoke-Gogol:* although Gogol is exposed to the culture of origin in parts of American Individualistic culture has the most influence on him. The father-son duo has conflicts majorly due to these cultural differences and acceptance for each other but is not over till late due to the parenting style. Major conflict arises due to the father naming his son Gogol to which he develops a dislike and changes his name as an adolescent. Later Ashoke shares the personal history behind the name. The sudden death of Ashoke makes Gogol reflect upon the relationship they had and goes through emotions of grief, remorse and guilt for not being with the father and not keeping a cordial relationship with him.

### **Concepts from the family systems theory**

#### *Multigenerational Transmission Process*

- Ashok and Ashima's process of adapting to the new culture
- Gogol and Sonia's process of struggling and trying to understand the Homeland values, culture and beliefs due to being born in the American culture.

*Emotional Triangles:* The story not so evidently depicts a distant relation of the father and the children while they are emotionally more close to the mother. There's a clear "Communication" gap between the two generations mainly with the father leading to an emotional triangle between the father, mother and the children.

*Differentiation of Self:* The namesake highlights Gogol's struggles of identifying with his name which also leads to a conflict and distancing from the family especially with the father. Earlier he starts to identify more with the American culture but later after the failure of a relationship and the development of a new romantic relationship and finally with the death of his father the conflicts with his own identity becomes aggravated.

*Family projection process:* Ashoke and Ashima's struggle to raise the two children and keep them connected to their roots and culture of origin causes distress between the two generations. The children may feel that the values of parents are being projected on them while they are living in a land of a different culture.

*Emotional cutoff:* Gogol faces an emotional cut off from the family as he finds it as a way to manage through the emotional difficulties and concerns of the family subsystem leading to unresolved interpersonal issues but the end result is an increase in the tension and anxiety majorly triggered by the death of his father. It also led to an increase in stress concerning his romantic partners.

### **Intervention**

The intervention proposed here looks at the timeline after the movie ends where only Ashima, Gogol and Sonia are present.

While there's a depiction of emotional disclosure and communication between the mother-son duo at the end there's still a room for improvement here. With Ashima moving back to India the challenges coming with old age and new distance with the children may lead to emotional difficulties that can only be resolved with improvement in communication.

The emotional triangle is naturally ended with the death of Ashoke but its influences might continue to affect the relationship between the mother and the children which need to be

resolved. The technique of Neutralizing triangles can be used here

There's a strong indication of Gogol's struggles to form his self-identity. This might improve with finding closure and resolution of conflicts that he had with his father. This may also lead to an improvement in his personal relationship and struggles with his romantic relationships in future.

Although the ending of the story indicates the distancing of all three family members and finding their own paths to continue life, family therapy to improve the quality of the relationship between them can help them translate that into their future relationship.

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