

# A Study Related to Diaspora in Lahiri's Novels

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## Abstract

*Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second category of Asian American authors who generally write about India, see India as an intriguing destination to make a living under any circumstances, and deal with the problems experienced by Indian immigrants attempting to exist in a new country. In this article, the author uses a few of Jhumpa Lahiri's novels to explore the Diaspora. Her stories are not only fictional works that we read; they are actual accounts of the expatriate community in which they live. Lahiri's writing is praised or well-known for its beauty and poignancy as well as for its ability to gently and mesmerizingly evoke an emotional connection or link between the reader and the characters. Both her protagonists, who are typically immigrants from India to America who must negotiate between the cultural ideals of their origin or country and their chosen home, and her "simple" English, which is easily understood by others, set Lahiri's writing apart. Lahiri is familiar and well-known, in her autobiographical literature, which is immensely absorbing for readers. Lahiri examines her characters' problems, worries, and prejudices in order to document the complexities and specifics of immigrant psychology and behaviour.*

**Keywords:** Home, Diasporas, Culture, Jhumpa Lahiri, Novel, Fiction

## Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri, byname of Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri is an American author. She has known for her short stories, novels, postcolonial and essays in English, and, more recently, in Italian. Lahiri was born on 11 July, 1967 in London, England. From Boston University, Lahiri earned a double M.A. in English (second M.A. in Comparative Literature), an M.F.A. in Creative Writing, and a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies. Her dissertation, "Accursed Palace: The Italian Palazzo on the Jacobean Stage," was completed in 1997.

Lahiri initially encountered the writing inspiration in elementary school, and at the ripe old age of seven, she started co-authoring "books" with a classmate during recess. Interpreter of Maladies,

her debut collection of nine short stories, was published in June. She has produced two major collections of short stories, each with 17 stories. As many readers are aware, Lahiri's short tales are mostly on the lives and difficulties (including many sorts of internal and external strife) of Indians in the United States. She began her career with the short story collection Interpreter of Maladies, published in 1999, featuring 9 short stories and largely indicating the sensation of otherness that Indians, strongly zoomed in on Bengalis (including Bangladeshis) in the United States. In 2003, Lahiri released her first novel, The Namesake. The topic and premise of this story were motivated by a family story she heard as a child. She subsequently went on to win the Man Booker Prize and the National Book Award

for Fiction for her second novel, *The Lowland*, which was released in 2013.

### **Diaspora**

Lahiri not only illustrates how the later generations will inevitably become estranged from their cultural heritage as a result of their physical and psychological separation from South Asia, but she also highlights another crucial aspect that may complicate identity formation: the likelihood that the South Asian immigrant families' subsequent generations will wed both white and other ethnic Americans. The latter scenario is how Lahiri depicts Gogol's sister Sonia as she makes plans for her future with her half-Chinese, half-Jewish fiancé Ben. When more cultural prerogatives are added to the already complex process of creating identity for future generations, the significance of any one cultural bond must obviously be diminished. Lahiri also highlights the fleeting nature of these cultural borderlands because only the second generation has experienced a world so strongly influenced by both their parents' native cultures and the American way of life. Lahiri predicts that, in the end, the third generation and beyond will forge a global identity that is not based on nationality or ethnicity but rather on personal prerogative.

A diaspora is a group of individuals who are spread geographically and share a common heritage. It also refers to ethnic group members who have voluntarily or involuntarily fled their motherland. The word "influential migration" refers to the forcible removal of people from their home nation for social, political, or economic reasons, such as the indentured labour system, India-Pakistan partition, and so on. Intentional migration from one country to another encompasses movement for a variety of reasons, including education, work, marriage, and social reasons. Diaspora immigrants confront a range of issues, including a sense of displacement, cultural conflict, and identity confusion. Diaspora literature, also known as diasporic literature, is a type of writing written by immigrants that chronicles the lives of immigrants living in other countries. The creative contributions of writers of Indian

descent such as V. S. Naipul, Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukharjee, Amitav Ghosh, Meena Alexander, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and others to diaspora literature have resulted in the development of Indian Diasporic Literature.

The plot of the novel revolves round Ganguli family and shows how much nostalgic the family is from the beginning of their landing in America. By reading this book one comes to know how much they wish and aspire for home and for creating their own domestic and social space around them. Lahiri shows in this novel the importance of home, and what it is to be in America and still can't become an American. The concept of space is an important one throughout the novel. It is not difficult for Gangulis to keep their domestic space by adhering to their own Indian culture. They keep their Indian manners, language, culture, and rituals inside their home: "When Ashima thinks of her husband, she never considers his name." Ashima's situation is a true representation of the plight of women in diaspora. When she is alone at home, she cries, her isolation and loneliness haunting her: "she wonders if she is the only Indian in the hospital," but a gentle yank of baby from the body tells her that she is not alone. In the hospital, she is more painful because of motherhood in a distant land, not because of labour: "that it was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved, had made it more miraculous still."

The novel portrays the cultural dilemma faced by immigrants in foreign land; Lahiri also shows that the immigrants in their passion of being attached to their own cultural beliefs and customs gradually imbibe and assimilate the cultural ways of the host country people. Their own children became bilingual and bicultural, and face cultural dilemmas and displacement more. They became culturally hybrid and there was cultural transformation. Gogol speaks words in two languages, at home he speaks Bengali with his parents and outside he speaks English. After the legal formalities, when Ashima flies alone to be with her husband with a heavy heart and lots of instructions from

her family members and relatives. The instructions of what to do and what not to do in America shows how much concerned the Ashima's family is about that she should not lose her identity and Indian culture; same kind of concern was shown by Ashima and Ashoke towards the preservation of their children's identity in America. They also advised them in the same way what to wear, what to eat and in which language they should talk.

### **Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Namesake'**

The subject of this article, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), focuses on how first- and second-generation immigrants adhere to their original and new countries. Lahiri investigates the psychological states of second-generation immigrants Gogol, Sonia, and Moushumi, as well as first-generation immigrants Ashima and Ashoke, in this book. The novel shows how the concept of homeland creates a setting in which to construct a sense of belonging and affinity to identity. In this age of transmigration, the term "home" connotes impermanence, displacement, and dispossession. Many critics feel that the concept of home, rather than being anchored, is better aptly described as being in between two places. The book mentions Ashima's sense of connection to her birth nation, India. Furthermore, Gogol, Sonia, and Moushumi's identities are considered to be tied to the United States, where they were born. The question of whether they appear to be dismissing Indian philosophical concepts and principles for this region arises. And how far along are they with the actual house?

The Ganguli family is a microcosm of Indian immigration in the United States and beyond. Their situation is similar to that of today's Indian diasporas. The novel's intriguing subject is to what extent and in what shapes first and second generation diasporas preserve boundaries. According to John A. Armstrong's book "Mobilised and Proletarian Diasporas," the third fundamental condition for diaspora is boundary maintenance. He defines boundary-maintenance as the retention of a separate identity in relation to a host society. Boundaries can be kept by consciously resisting assimilation through self-forced endogamy or

other forms of self-segregation (394-395). So we can see in the story how the Ganguli family and other Indian characters maintain a balance of 'Boundary Maintenance' and 'Boundary Erosion,' as they adapt and oppose American society at different times.

Spanning a period of over three decades, *The Namesake* presents the graphic penportrait of the Gangulis, torn between the pull of the age-old traditions of their native place and the American way of life. The story begins in 1968 when the newly wed Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli immigrate to Cambridge, Massachusetts and await the arrival of their first child. Gogol, who was born with a name that is neither Indian nor American, nor even a first name at all. Soon after his birth he is named Gogol after the world renowned Russian short story writer of the nineteenth century, Nikolai Gogol. Ashoke is grateful to this Russian author since he feels the copy of Nikolai Gogol's anthology of short stories prevented him from dying in a train crash in India before coming to America to study at MIT and before marrying Ashima. As a tribute to the author, Ashoke, while waiting for a prospective Bengali name for their new-born kid to arrive from her grandmother, decides to call him Gogol. The parents are aware that Gogol is a 'awkward' name for their American-born kid, but the letter containing the respectable Bengali name has been misplaced.

*The Namesake* is a narrative about an Indian immigrant family, Ashima and Ashoka Ganguli, and their two children, Gogol and Sonia, who are resettled in America, and their struggle to maintain their Indianness on American land. The novel covers a period of about thirty years of its characters' life, starting in 1968 and ending in 2000. In the beginning, readers are introduced to Ashima Ganguli who is cooking food in her kitchen in America. Then after some months in Massachusetts she is admitted to hospital for delivery. Ashima gives birth to a child named Gogol. "He has never been motivated to read a word of Gogol, or any Russian writer, for that matter," says Ashoka. Gogol has never been taught the true significance of his name, and he is ignorant of the

event that nearly killed his father. He's only been told half the truth about Gogol, and his father is a devotee." (Lahiri, 2003:75)

Two of Lahiri's first-generation protagonists, Ashoke and Ashima, are profoundly engrained in Bengali culture. Ashima, a Bengali woman, stands out as she never addresses her husband by name. She makes an attempt to practise all Bengali rites in order to instill Indian values in her children, Gogol and Sonia. They take their children to Bengali social gatherings so that they can learn about the culture. Lahiri shows how Ashima retains her Indian culture while adapting into modern American life. Cultural conflict arises in the novel because Gogol's parents wish to nurture their children in Indian culture, while their children choose to adopt American culture. Throughout the book, Gogol is unhappy with his name. His identification makes him uncomfortable. When he changes his name to Nikhil, he abandons his Bengali heritage and embraces the life he admires. Gogol's culture is always evading him. Although he enjoys Maxine's parents' company and falls in love with her, he is embarrassed by his own parents because they do not fit into American culture. Gogol has spent his entire life being disobedient. His decision to alter his name from Gogol to Nikhil is an act of defiance. He defies authority by losing his virginity at a party and having a brief affair with Ruth, a white female. When he becomes "aware of the fact that his engagement in Maxine's family is betraying of his own," he is drawn back to his origins and begins a long-term relationship with Maxine, another wealthy white girl. His life abruptly changes when he learns of his father's death. His father's abrupt death has a great influence on him as he learns to connect with him and his upbringing. He stops his connection with Maxine in order to spend more time with his mother and sister.

Gogol marries Moushumi, a Bengali girl, in accordance with Indian tradition, with all of her rites, as he progressively realises the importance of his family and culture. However, as a timid and reclusive young woman in her twenties, Moushumi finds liberation from her parents and their

rigorous Bengali traditions: "Without a second thought, she had allowed men to lure her in cafés, parks, and as she admired artworks in museums. She let the males pay for her meals and drinks. She'd have one man sleep with her after lunch and another after dinner. By the end of the book, Gogol has accepted the title that embodies his family's heritage. He pulls out a volume of Nikolai Gogol's short stories that his father had given him as a birthday present many years ago. He begins to see his father's railway tragedy and his doomed marriage as accidents that have occurred throughout his family's history. As the book comes to a close, Gogol believes he is now free to do anything he wants. He is unable to accept American society while also returning to India. As a representative postcolonial diasporic literature, *The Namesake* exemplifies the persistent dilemma that South Asian Diasporas in the First World face. As a result of encountering competing cultures in Diasporas, they become psychological refugees, torn between two homes to which neither of them belongs.

Jhumpa Lahiri's work combines the eastern and western worlds. Themes like as assimilation, failed relationships, home, exile, dual identities, rootlessness, and hybridity help us understand Lahiri as a Diaspora writer. Her transatlantic journey, during which she gained acquainted with both Indian and American culture, is more clearly recounted in her anecdotes. Her books are jam-packed with descriptions of traditional Indian dishes, clothing styles, ceremonies, and names. In this context, Lahiri is the Indian diaspora's spokesperson.

Lahiri has a completely distinct perspective on immigrant fiction. She genuinely challenges the system and wonders why someone would be excluded for writing on a particular subject. Lahiri believes that authors have always tended to write about the worlds from which they originate, and it just so happens that many authors are originally from different parts of the world than they ultimately end up living in another, either out of choice or due to necessity, and write about their experiences as a result. In the realm of diaspora



writers, terms like “diaspora,” “exile,” “alienation,” “belongingness,” and “expatriation” have meanings that are largely similar to one another and contain some degree of ambiguity. They describe being both a refugee and an ambassador in a distant country. Here, diaspora took on the shape of a social formation where it talks about blending into a different culture to produce hybrid identities. For her readers, Lahiri aimed to create several depictions of diasporic life. These differences are represented by the fictions explored in the study. The “inbetweenness” of the immigrant population forces us, the readers, to reexamine our assumptions. The diasporic space is unique in its own right. Lahiri’s characters reflect both positive and negative aspects of their diasporic journey. She demonstrates how adaptability and a changing lifestyle can benefit immigrants. The characters in *Unaccustomed Earth* suffer as a result of their hazardous situation at the crossroads of two different cultures. They continue to follow cultural poles, two traditions, and two ideologies, resulting in disputes, rootlessness, and identity crises. Their fate is decided by how they perceive their own history and culture. Lahiri highlighted Kaushik’s mother’s breast cancer once more in the short story “Going Ashore.” She received no help or inspiration from her family or friends in India to deal with the problem. The family decided to return to America to escape the disturbing behaviours of the locals and achieve mental tranquilly.

Lahiri illustrates issues that demonstrate how the diasporic world has altered the traditional idea of home as a haven of safety and harmony. The experiences of immigrants are varied. Some of the emigrants are able to free themselves from the shackles of outdated beliefs and customs and experience the benefits of integration. People, who recall the past too much, like Kaushik, become mired in the past and lose the ability to move forward. Forgetting one’s native culture can be tragic for the Diaspora population and be damaging in several ways. Only by mediating between these two areas can immigrants maintain positive in their life.

To summarise, the diaspora did more than only stimulate border crossing. It signifies a journey through less evident limits such as time, place, race, traditional ideas, and language. The diasporic beings adapt to their new surroundings and create something new. They cannot simply abandon their previous ways of life and traditions and gradually adjust to the host country; also, the relationship between good and bad in the diasporic world must be underlined.

### Conclusion

To conclude, the present chapter presents migration and the sense of exile as a universal experience and the imbalance between the east and the west that changes a person’s thinking and feeling. These changes, Lahiri points out, manifest themselves in the loss in personal sphere and social sphere over times. The novel highlights the loss that is inevitable when one lives life torn between the east and the west. As a result, this story is about modern immigrant life and the continued parallel universe that has been left behind. Jhumpa Lahiri attempts to manage diasporic space, narrative space, and cultural space. Lahiri depicts a society lost in nostalgia and how recollections of home enhance their longing. The novel is a brilliant family drama that spans centuries and civilizations. Lahiri’s story provides crucial insight into the characters’ inability to relate as a result of their diasporic identity and diasporic consciousness caused by dislocation. Continents, generations, civilizations, beliefs, and races are all represented in the novel.

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