

# Exploring Gendered Identity Crisis in Diasporic Space In the Works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee

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**Abstract** - Research on diasporic and female studies is a significant and intriguing focus within contemporary literary studies. Diasporic literature has its origins in the migration of less privileged individuals to new and promising lands such as America, Britain, Canada, Trinidad, and others. Migration is often seen in countries with a colonial past. The newly independent individuals moved to foreign countries to escape poverty and seek a brighter future. The new lands were a fertile ground for material success, but they also had a negative impact on the mental well-being of these immigrants. The newcomers found a pre-existing culture, traditions, and rules in the new lands. The recently relocated individuals discovered themselves in a dilemma between their familiar history, the unfamiliar current situation, and the uncertain days ahead. Their minds became permanently ensnared in the complex network of historical and geographical factors.

**Keywords** - Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharti Mukherjee, women identity

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## INTRODUCTION

The literature of the diaspora is essential for understanding global culture and history. Both cultures and individuals migrate, establishing themselves in different locations or being displaced. While the immigrant authors share many similarities, it's important to acknowledge that they each have unique experiences due to the varying circumstances of their migration and establishment. Diasporic literature portrays the experiences of individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures who have moved to various regions of the globe. Indian diaspora literature can be discovered worldwide. It's fascinating how Indian literature reaches every corner of the globe. Studying diasporic literature reveals that the initial and subsequent groups of emigrants experienced a deep yearning for and disconnection from their native countries. The central issue of diasporic literature revolves around rootlessness. Individuals in the diaspora feel displaced and isolated in their new surroundings. Transplanting roots can evoke a range of negative feelings in individuals who are deeply rooted in their culture. Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, writers of the Indo-American diaspora, both depict the pain felt by their protagonists.

The first film, *The Wife* (1975), portrays the sense of detachment and loneliness experienced by a young bride, whereas the second film, *The Namesake* (2003), narrates the challenging voyage of a Bengali couple from India to the United States. The challenges experienced by a first-generation immigrant in a new

country are beautifully portrayed in these two pieces. English has extended its influence in Diasporic literature through the contributions of female authors such as Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Chitra Banerjee Divakuruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, and others. Diaspora communities are formed by individuals who have migrated from their home country to seek opportunities in a different place. Writers from the Indo-American diaspora, like Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, depict the diaspora experience through diverse settings in their stories. Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Wife* delves into themes such as cultural clashes, societal injustice, and the intersection of eastern and western values. The characters in *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, set in the United States, struggle to adapt to their new surroundings. Similar to Bharathi Mukherjee, her work reflects aspects of the author's personal life. Dimple, the main character, is a youthful Indian woman in Mukherjee's novel *Wife*. Amit Basu, Dimple's husband, is a youthful engineer. She was completely under the control of the alien society. Because of feelings of anxiety and insecurity, she struggles to adapt to life in America. She struggles internally and finds it challenging to adapt to New York society. Dimple's stress from adapting to a new culture leads her to commit a tragic act in the novel's climax.

Authors like Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Kavita Dasvani, M. G. Vassanji, and V. S. Naipaul question readers' preconceptions about ideas such as "home," "country," "native," and

"alien" through their narratives of refugee/immigrant experiences. The authors present a case opposing a dualist interpretation of the cultural distinctions between the East and the West. Authors from the diaspora often question established notions of identity and societal norms that dictate life both in their home country and in foreign lands, unlike earlier writers who focused on cross-cultural interactions and portrayed traditional lifestyles and characters to highlight the cultural distinctions. Exploring the postcolonial viewpoint of former colonial populations through diaspora fiction. Several influential works, including Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, as well as more contemporary pieces like Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, have played a significant role in shaping women's studies as a separate academic field. Exploring the postmodern environment and delving into the study of the feminine mind bring fresh perspectives to this area. The experiences of migrating women outside of India are depicted in the works of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri.

The works of diasporic women shed light on their internal struggles arising from cultural displacement, social alienation, and ethnic tensions. Examine their research on women's issues to assess their stance on the feminist movement's objective of dismantling patriarchy. In her book *Delightful Daughters*, Mukherjee offers examples illustrating the challenges that diasporic women encounter. Tara, the protagonist, and her teenage son decide to stay in San Francisco following her divorce. Mukherjee effectively portrays her growth as a woman through her various roles as a daughter, wife, mother, and grandmother. The focus of *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri is on women who are marginalised by gender, caste, and ethnicity. The themes of diaspora and feminine identity are delved into in the writings of Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee. Diasporic Indian authors skillfully utilise the contrast between the Indian past and the foreign present to vividly portray their characters' lives for the reader. Within their imaginative paintings depicting the experiences of immigrants, themes of identity, history, culture, modernism, and westernisation frequently surface. Indian identities constantly shift between truth and appearance as the past remains a constant reflection of their traits. Despite these challenges, both provide valuable information about the female perspective, illustrating how migration has impacted their emotional well-being and hindered their ability to bond. These characters are a result of the circumstances mentioned, including Tara in *(Wife)*, Mrs. Sen, and Boori Ma (*Interpreter of Maladies*). The central issue of diasporic literature revolves around rootlessness. Both Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee employ a range of methods to capture the pain experienced by their main characters. They depict immigrants who uphold their cultural beliefs and traditions while also embracing the customs of the host country. The disruptions detailed by Lahiri and Mukherjee extend beyond the challenges faced by immigrants in foreign lands. Some individuals approach uprooting as an unavoidable aspect of the

human experience, adopting a philosophical perspective. We are all navigating through this vast universe. One can gain insight into the experiences of first-generation immigrants by delving into and comprehending their literary works. Mukherjee and Lahiri delve into subjects like pregnancy trauma, the conflict between Orient and Occident, and the feminine psyche and affection for Calcutta.

## REVIEW OF THE WORK IN THE AREA

Research on diasporic and female studies is a significant and intriguing focus within contemporary literary studies. Diasporic literature has its origins in the migration of less privileged individuals to new and promising lands such as America, Britain, Canada, Trinidad, and others. Migration is often seen in countries with a colonial past. The newly independent individuals moved to foreign countries to escape poverty and seek a brighter future. The new lands were a fertile ground for material success, but they also had a negative impact on the mental well-being of these immigrants. The newcomers found a pre-existing culture, traditions, and rules in the new lands. The recently relocated individuals discovered themselves in a dilemma between their familiar history, the unfamiliar current situation, and the uncertain days ahead. Their minds became permanently ensnared in the complex network of historical and geographical factors.

## THE LITERATURE OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA

Vijay Mishra's work *"Theorising the Diasporic Imaginary"* is a significant analysis of the literary and cultural materials of the Indian diaspora. It is a significant addition to diaspora theory overall. Mishra contends that a comprehensive understanding of the Indian diaspora requires consideration of the specific locations within nation states of both the historical Indian diaspora during early capitalism after the abolition of slavery and the contemporary diaspora associated with late capitalism movements. Mishra used a theoretical framework centred on trauma, grieving/impossible mourning, spectres, identity, travel, translation, and recognition to define the word "imaginary" as any ethnic enclave inside a nation-state that identifies itself as a community experiencing relocation, whether consciously or subconsciously. He analyses the writings of prominent authors such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, M.G. Vassanji, Shani Mootoo, Bharati Mukherjee, David Dabydeen, Rohinton Mistry, and Hanif Kureishi, who are currently residing in various countries including Canada, Australia, America, and the UK. He demonstrates how these authors represent both the diasporic imagination and the historical and contemporary struggles of the Indian diasporas.

"Negotiating Identities: Women in the Indian Diaspora (Gender Studies)" by Aparna Rayaprol and Apama Rayaprol provides a gender-specific view on

how immigrant populations see and carry out the process of rebuilding their lives in a new country. When a community is in a crisis when there are two opposing choices, religion becomes a significant symbolic tool in reconstructing the community. The community in issue is South Asian, and their physical gathering place is the Sri Venkateswara temple in Pittsburgh. The author firmly establishes her work within the realm of women's studies, asserting that the concept of the "immigrant" has often been seen as a uniform entity while overlooking the aspect of gender. She argues in her research that the experiences of immigrant women should not be equated with those of males. The book "Women Writers of Indian Diaspora" by S K Anand contains thirteen critical essays analysing the works of Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherji, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Divakaruni, Meera Syal, Abha Dawesar, Anita Rau Badami, Kiran Desai, Kavita Daswani, Monica Pradhan, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Meena Alexander, Suniti Namjoshi, and Rishma Dunlop, exploring their complexity, richness, and paradoxes. The articles on poetry, fiction, and short fiction by women writers of the Indian diaspora provide various insights into diaspora life, covering themes such as exile, nostalgia, rootlessness, alienation, racial and gender discrimination, marginalisation, assimilation, identity, and cultural hybridization. Contemporary women authors use literary space to emphasise women's difficulties and existential challenges from a gendered perspective. The book will be very beneficial for anybody studying authors of the Indian diaspora.

The book "Naming Jhumpa Lahiri: Canons and Controversies" is a compilation of articles edited by Lavina Dhingra and Floyd Cheung. This work offers innovative perspectives on Jhumpa Lahiri's literature. This analysis of Lahiri's literature explores the varying interpretations and changing meanings of family, nationality, home, ethnic-global migration, and canonicity that arise from her work and literary acclaim. This collection is a crucial source for comprehending the subjectivity concerns in her works and the discourses that shape it. Fakrul Alam's biography of Bharati Mukherjee focuses on her writing prowess. Fakrul Alam's comprehensive analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's published works asserts that despite the author's self-identification as an American writer, her Indian background, upbringing, education, marriage to a North American, and career in America are crucial for interpreting her fiction. Alam believes that Mukherjee effectively uses her own experiences of exile, expatriation, and immigration together with her strong storytelling abilities and vivid imagination to create vivid and unforgettable stories about the challenges and thrills of adapting to a new environment.

India highly values the notion of Diaspora. Despite living in faraway locations, diasporans have maintained their emotional, cultural, and spiritual connections with their country of origin, India. Novelists such as Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and Anurag Mathur have effectively portrayed the

social and cultural aspects of the Indian Diaspora. They all address the issue of Diaspora identity in their works. Female novelists and short-story writers of the Indian Diaspora have shown their efforts to maintain culture and identity in their host countries via their creative works. Indian authors such as Anita Desai, Kamla Markandaya, Bharti Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Kiran Desai have depicted the identity struggles of Indian diaspora men and women in their literary works. These female authors hold the issue of feminism in high regard. Their paintings demonstrate the early struggles of women in a male-dominated environment. The authors eloquently depict the women's anguish, distress, torment, and psychological distress. They claim that global prosperity and peace would ensue when women are universally respected.

## CONCLUSION

Diasporic literature is essential for comprehending global culture and history by depicting the experiences of persons from many origins and cultures who have relocated to other places. Indian writers Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, both belonging to the Indo-American diaspora, examine issues of displacement, social inequality, and cultural conflicts in their writings.

These writers' works challenge established perceptions of identification and cultural conventions by questioning beliefs about "home," "country," "native," and "alien." They examine the postcolonial perspective of past colonial communities via diaspora fiction, including works like Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

Diasporic women's literature explores their internal conflicts resulting from cultural relocation, social isolation, and ethnic conflicts. The authors effectively depict their characters' lives by contrasting the Indian past with the foreign present, emphasising issues such as identity, history, culture, modernism, and westernisation.

Indian identities fluctuate between authenticity and perception, with their history serving as a consistent mirror of their characteristics. Both writers provide excellent insights into the female viewpoint, showing how migration has affected their mental health and impeded their capacity to make connections.

Diasporic writing provides a distinct viewpoint on the lives of first-generation immigrants, revealing the difficulties they encounter in their new surroundings. Readers may acquire insight into the lives of these people and the complicated relationship between identity, culture, and society standards by exploring the works of these writers.

Current literary research emphasises diasporic and gender studies, studying the literary and cultural content of the Indian diaspora. The movement began

with the migration of disadvantaged persons to new territories, often in nations with a history of colonisation. The immigrants had difficulty in their mental well-being as they navigated a conflict between their known past and the unknown present.

Vijay Mishra's study "Theorising the Diasporic Imaginary" examines the literary and cultural elements of the Indian diaspora, with an emphasis on particular locales within nation states of historical and present diasporas. Aparna Rayaprol and Apama Rayaprol provide a gender-specific perspective on how immigrant communities reconstruct their lives in other nations, highlighting the significance of gender in comprehending the challenges faced by immigrant women.

S K Anand's book "Women Writers of Indian Diaspora" provides analytical articles on the literary works of Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherji, Jhumpa Lahiri, and other authors. Fakrul Alam's biography of Bharati Mukherjee emphasises her skill in writing and how she draws from her own experiences of exile, expatriation, and immigration to create memorable tales about the difficulties and excitement of adjusting to a new place.

India greatly appreciates the concept of diaspora, as shown by authors such as Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and Anurag Mathur who expertly explore the social and cultural elements of the Indian diaspora. Indian writers including Anita Desai, Kamla Markandaya, Bharti Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Kiran Desai have portrayed the identity challenges faced by Indian diaspora individuals, emphasising feminism.

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