

Fragmentation of the Home and Reconstructing Identity: In Jhumpa Lahiri's *Namesake* Sakshi Ningappa Madihalli

MA Final Year, Department of English, KLE's G.I. Bagevadi
college, Nipani.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17259402>

ABSTRACT:

Diaspora women writers have emerged as significant voices in contemporary literature, highlighting themes of memory, migration, and modernity to express the difficulties of identity, displacement, and cultural discussions. Since the mid-1960s, these writers have presented the experiences of women who discussed the tensions between their homelands and host countries, addressing issues of displacement, belonging, gender roles, and cultural survival. Their narratives reveal the multidimensional challenges of migration such as loneliness, cultural shock, and challenges to patriarchal and colonial dominance while exploring the reformative dominance of transcultural experience in shaping modern identities. By weaving together personal and collective memories, diaspora women writers critically engage with modernity as a space of hybridity and cultural adaptation, thereby inspiring the discourse on global migration and gendered experiences in cross-boundary settings.

Prominent figures like Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Meena Alexander reflect this vibrant literary tradition that redefines notions of home, identity, and womanhood in the diaspora. This tradition explores memory, migration, and modernity through the lens of prominent diaspora writers. The experiences of migration and displacement are interconnectedly interlinked with the use of memory and nostalgia as literary tools for identity formation and cultural continuity. This paper explores mentioned themes in *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri.

KEYWORDS:

Diaspora, memory, migration, homeland and host land, identity, home.

.....

Introduction:

“A diaspora refers to the migration or spread of a group of people from their original homeland to different parts of the world, often maintaining cultural, religious, or emotional ties with their place of origin.”

The idea of home occupies a central place in diasporic consciousness, yet for those who live away from their native land, home is often less a physical space than a disconnected and remembered idea. Diasporic subjects, separated from their place of origin by migration, displacement, exile, or voluntary movement, continuously struggle with questions of belonging and identity. In this context, memory becomes a vital resource through which individuals and communities reconstruct their sense of self. Memory does not simply preserve the past but reimagines it, transforming fragments of lived experience, cultural practices, and inherited traditions into new forms of identity within the host land.

Diasporic memory functions as a bridge between past and present, homeland and host land, tradition and modernity. It allows individuals to negotiate hybrid identities, creating spaces where nostalgia, cultural continuity, and adaptation coexist. Writers of the diaspora often draw upon personal and collective memory to articulate the tensions of displacement, expressing longing for a lost home while simultaneously constructing new attachments in new environments. This interplay of memory and identity indicates the survival of diasporic communities and highlights the ways in which fragmented recollections are interlinked into articulated narratives of

identity.

Fragments of Home:

For diasporic people, home is rarely a whole or permanent place. It exists in fragments: pieces of memory, traditions, languages, food, rituals, or stories carried from the homeland. These fragments are often incomplete, abstracted around, and reshaped over time in new cultural contexts.

Because migration challenges continuity, diasporic individuals must rebuild who they are in relation to both homeland and host land. Identity is not fixed; it is reconstructed by bringing together cultural memory, personal experiences, and hybrid influences. This reconstruction often creates hybrid identities, a mix of old and new cultural associations. Memory plays a key role: it connects individuals to their roots while helping them survive migration.

Major Indian Diasporic Memory Writers

Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children*, *Imaginary Homelands*) – Memory as both collective and fragmented, connecting personal stories with national histories.

V.S. Naipaul (*A House for Mr Biswas*, *The Enigma of Arrival*) – Deals with memory of colonial displacement and search for belonging in the Caribbean and England.

Bharati Mukherjee (*Jasmine*, *The Middleman and Other Stories*) – Memory as a site of conflict between assimilation and cultural roots.

Jhumpa Lahiri (*The Namesake*, *Interpreter of Maladies*) – Explores nostalgia, family memory, and the negotiation of Indian traditions in America.

The novel: *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri Nostalgia work.

Ashok and Ashima leave Kolkata and settle in New York City. Through a series of miscues, their son's nickname, Gogol: named after Russian author Nikolai Gogol, becomes his official birth name, an event which will shape many aspects of his life.

Cultural clash between Western and Indian naming ceremony:

The story recollects Gogol's cross-cultural experiences and his exploration of his Bengali heritage, as the story primarily shifts between the United States (US) and Kolkata.

Gogol's life is marked by a dualism: his American nurture and his Bengali roots. The Bengali naming ceremony, known as "Namkaran" or "Naamkaran Sanskar," is a culturally significant rite of passage that officially bestows identity upon a newborn. It is typically held on the 11th or 12th day after birth, though the date may be adjusted based on family custom or astrological advice. Gogol's name, a tribute to a Russian author tied to his father's survival story, becomes a source of both alienation and identity crisis, reflecting his challenge to reconcile Indian heritage and American identity. His decision to change his name to Nikhil symbolizes his wish to assert a modern, independent identity distinct from his cultural burden. In western society, when the baby is born suddenly, a name is given. He struggles with his unique name, a symbol of his parents' nostalgia and their desire to preserve heritage through naming.

Throughout his growing-up years and adulthood, Gogol wrestles with his hyphenated identity, initially rejecting and later revisiting his Bengali ancestry. His exposure to cultural rituals and family stories becomes a source of both embarrassment and comfort, making his identity formation a journey through the echoes of his parents' nostalgia.

Gogol legally changes his name to "Nikhil," the name he had

supposedly refused to be addressed by when he was in kindergarten. In college, Gogol uses his “good name” Nikhil, later shortened to Nick. He works as an architect and dates Maxine, a white American woman from a wealthy background, who is clueless about their cultural differences. Gogol introduces her to his parents, who struggle to understand his modern, American perspectives on dating, marriage, and love. They are hesitant and guarded when meeting her. Gogol gets along with Maxine’s family and feels closer to them than he does his own family.

The cultural conflict of the name Gogol in the Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Namesake*

The cultural conflict around the name “Gogol” in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* symbolizes the protagonist’s struggle with his dual identity as a first-generation American born to Bengali immigrant parents. The name “Gogol,” given by his father after the Russian author Nikolai Gogol, carries deep cultural and personal significance tied to the Bengali heritage and family history. However, for Gogol, the name represents the weight of his parents’ traditions and an alienation from mainstream American culture where names may hold less cultural importance. This conflict reflects his broader internal struggle to reconcile his inherited Bengali identity with his desire to assimilate and fit into American society. Throughout the novel, his relationship with his name evolves from rejection to eventual acceptance as a symbol bridging his cultural roots and personal identity. Thus, the name “Gogol” is a powerful metaphor for the immigrant experience of cultural displacement, generational conflict, and the quest for self-identity in a multicultural environment.

Compared to other immigrant fiction, *The Namesake* presents a nuanced generational contrast: first-generation migrants like

Ashoke and Ashima maintain strong ties to Indian traditions, while their children experience hybrid identities shaped by both cultures. In contrast, some migrant narratives depict more radical rejections or reinventions of identity, such as Jasmine's active self-reinvention or Americanah's focus on racial identity and exclusion in the American context. Unlike the sharp conflicts seen in some works, Lahiri's novel portrays identity as fluid, highlighting the togetherness of cultures and gradual shifts rather than outright rejection.

Themes of hybridity, culture adaptation, and the evolving notion of home emerge as central to their works. By engaging deeply with tradition, modernity, and gender, these authors document the struggles of migrants. The global diasporic identity, adapting fresh insights into how memory and migration influence identities and self-expression. Their works intertwine personal and collective memories to address dislocation, nostalgia, and the reimagination of home, enabling a bridge between the past and present.

CONCLUSION:

The present study, "Fragmentation of The Home And Reconstructing Identity Thought In Indian Diasporic Writer Jhumpa Lahiri's Work" explores how diasporic writers use memory as a tool to reimagine identity. It examines the ways in which cultural memory, inherited traditions, and individual recollections are mobilized to reconstruct belonging in contexts of dislocation. By highlighting memory as both a personal and collective phenomenon, this study highlights the complex processes of identity formation in diasporic literature.

Reference:

1. “Cultural Identity in Diasporic Literature with Reference to Rohinton Mistry’s Fiction” By Umar Farooque (2023).
2. Jhumpa Lahiri, The Namesake (2003)
3. “Diasporic Discourse in Agha Shahid Ali’s A Nostalgist’s Map of America” By Makwana Ajay (2024)
4. Identity and cultural conflicts in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel, <https://www.allstudyjournal.com/article/1417/7-4-11-148.pdf>
5. Exploring Diasporic Identity and Cross-Cultural Conflict in <https://www.researchinspiration.com/index.php/ri/article/view/171>

Funding:

This study was not funded by any grant.

Conflict of interest:

The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

About the License:

© The Authors 2024. The text of this article is open access and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.