

## Diasporic Consciousness in the Writing of Chitra Banerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai - A Glimpse

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### Abstract

Since inception, man has always tried for a better life. Stone-age has resulted in advanced technology world-age in exploration of a better life. This quest has always enforced man to move from one place to another, often leaving his homeland. Such movements have turned into kinds of exile as dislocation from the homeland was severe and painful. Language, identity, place, home: these are all of a piece – just different elements of belonging and not-belonging” - Jhumpa Lahiri. Inspired by the vast spread of migration, immigration or emigration, Diasporic literature gained prominence in the universal literature in the backdrop of post-colonial context, simultaneously developing with post-colonial literature. The process of transplantation makes the immigrant a victim of 'rootlessness'. Today, we can say that the most important Indian writing is produced in the Diaspora by writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, etc. Especially, Indian women diasporic writers have made their voice heard around the world, managed to excel in all areas of literature and achieved global recognition. These female diasporic writers exhibit their own physical and emotional conflicts in their works. Diasporic literature focuses mainly on themes like discrimination, cultural shock, identity crisis, alienation, displacement, dilemma, depression, hybridity and nostalgia.

This article explores the conflicts of cross-cultural identities and transplantation into a new culture in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*. The paper undertakes a comparative analysis, from the cultural and feministic points of view of the predicament of women protagonists in immigration as presented in the selected novels.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, diasporic literature, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni cultural displacement, identity crisis, exile, nostalgia, alienation.

### Introduction

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Diasporic Literature is a very vast concept and an umbrella term that includes in it all those literary works written by the authors outside their native country, but these works are associated with native culture and background. In this wide context, all those writers can be regarded as diasporic writers, who write outside their country but remained related to their homeland through their works.

Diaspora Literature involves an idea of a homeland, a place from where the displacement occurs, and narratives of harsh journeys undertaken on account of economic compulsions. Diasporic literature has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of migration and expatriation. Generally, diasporic literature deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. It reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of the immigrant settlement.

A major theme of in diasporic writing is their occupation of liminal space. In fact, diasporic writing is doubly liminal space. This writing remains an outsider looking in at the new culture, but it is also an outsider to the homeland, looking in at a past of space that has altered in their absence. The word “exile” has negative connotations but if it is a self- exile, then the very word becomes ambivalent. There are multiple flavours of an exile. An immigrant belongs to a class lower than that of an émigré. He is higher than ‘refugee’ and less than ‘expatriate’. An immigrant is someone who voluntarily leaves his native country to settle permanently in another country. Émigré is an emigrant, the one forced to leave his native country for political reasons. A refugee is a person who has fled from some danger or political persecution. Expatriate is someone who has left his native country to a new country with conscious resistance to total inclusion in the new host society.

The immigrants, whatever their reason for migration be, financial, social, political, no matter whether they migrated for trade and commerce, as religious preachers, as labourers, convicts, soldiers, as expatriates or refugees, exiles (forced or voluntary), or as guest workers in search of better life and opportunities have shared some common things as well as differences which are based on their conditions of migration and period of stay in the adopted land. Mostly the migrants suffer from the pain of being far off from their homes, the memories of their motherland, the anguish of leaving behind everything familiar agonizes the minds of migrants.

The diasporic Indians too, do not break their relationship with the ancestral land. There is a search for continuity and “ancestral impulse”, an effort to look for their roots. Settlement in an alien land makes them experience dislocation. Dislocation can be considered as a break with the old identity. They experience the sense of loneliness in an alien land feel as they face non-acceptance by the host society and also experience ethnic discrimination. The immigrants attempt to assimilate, adapt and amalgamate with the society of their host country. Their attempts of adaptation and adjustment are not without their concern to maintain their original

culture and identity. The marginal groups try to guard themselves against the dominant host group. The most important means used for insulation is the continuation of the cultural practices and social traditions. The first-generation immigrants are always concerned with keeping the social, cultural baggage which consists of among other things their religion, language, music, art, dress and cuisine. Conscious attempts are made by the diasporic communities to pass their traditions to the future generation.

As the expatriate writer experiences cultural, geographical and emotional displacement, there emerges a diasporic sensibility that mirrors the plural identity of the writer. Their writing is characterized by a pluralistic vision. There is a constant shifting between two worlds, voyaging back and forth between two locales. The writer few times visualizes his or her home country as a place of violence, poverty, corruption and sometimes it is romanticized. We also see that in the floating world, aggressive forces pushing him or her from all sides longing to hang on to old tradition, customs and ways but caught in the world he ultimately calls his own way not be the one he desired for, nor the one he left behind, but an uncertain land which he must merge now. This pendulum movement is found in most expatriate writing with the writer caught between the past and the present.

Basically, diaspora is a minority community living in exile. Diaspora refers to a population that shares a common heritage who is scattered in different parts of the world. On the other hand, migration refers to people moving to different areas in search of a settlement. Some migrants leave their country because they want to work, study or join family, for example. Others feel they must leave because of poverty, political unrest, gang violence, natural disasters or other serious circumstances that exist there. Diasporas can play an important role in the economic development of their countries of origin. Beyond their well-known role as senders of remittances, diasporas can also promote trade and foreign direct investment, create businesses and spur entrepreneurship, and transfer new knowledge and skills.

Diaspora, (Greek: “Dispersion”) Hebrew “Galut” (Exile), the dispersion of Jews among the Gentiles after the Babylonian Exile or the aggregate of Jews or Jewish communities scattered “in exile” outside Palestine or present-day Israel. There are many diaspora populations in the world: the African diaspora, with populations in the Caribbean, North and South America, and Europe; the Chinese diaspora, from Indonesia and Malaysia to Cuba and the United States and Canada; the Jewish diaspora, from eastern Europe and Spain across all of Europe, to South. Diaspora describes people who have left their home country, usually involuntarily to foreign countries around the world. Examples of these communities include the removal of Jewish people from Judea, the removal of Africans through slavery, and most recently the migration, exile, and refugees of Syrians.

Portrayal of the various issues generated by the experience of migrancy and Diaspora, such as displacement, alienation, rootlessness, fragmentation, racial discrimination,

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marginalization, crisis in identity, cultural confrontation and many others are largely portrayed in contemporary Indian Writing in English. The late twentieth century has witnessed the emergence of transnational community better known as Diaspora. The word 'Diaspora' has been taken from the Greek word 'dia' and 'sperio' which literally means "to disperse". The word 'Diaspora' usually refers to Jews living in different parts of the world after their displacement from their own land, more recently after their mass killing.

Diaspora is synonymous with new literature of immigration. Such literature springs from a thorough-going engagement with the host country on the part of the immigrant. Immigrant literature captures the wrenching experience of relocation in an alien country for the immigrant. The important obsessions for the new literature of immigrant include nostalgia as well as guilt for the home country and intergenerational conflicts between immigrant parents and American-born children. The present paper concentrates on the difficulties and the problems faced by the immigrants as presented by the immigrant writer. The experience of migration and living in diaspora have produced plethora of studies on the recent post-colonial literature, criticism and theory. The continued existence of diaspora cultures, the cultures of communities living outside of their "home" lands (real or perceived), is a key element of cultural diversity today across the globe and certainly in Europe.

In the study of diaspora literature, "Displacement" or "Dislocation" is an important notion that is used not only to express the physical movement of an individual from one place to the other but it also shows how with the movement of a person the aggregate of a whole nation, to which he or she belonged, carried with them. Dislocation leads to cross-cultural encounters that have always affected the lives of immigrants and there is constantly the possibility of rejection, confusion and tension when people from different cultures intermingle. This interaction portrays the immigrants caught in flight between boundaries, an astonishingly complicated web of memories, relationship and images. The migrants in the foreign culture lie in soft bond memory of the motherland. The chief characteristic features of the diasporic writings are the quest for identity, uprooting and re-rooting, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia, nagging sense of guilt etc. The diasporic writers turn to their homeland for various reasons. Generally, diasporic literature deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. It reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of the immigrant settlement.

Diasporic Literature involves an idea of a homeland, a place from where the displacement occurs and narratives of harsh journeys undertaken on account of economic compulsions. Basically Diaspora is a minority community living in exile. Diasporic literature encompasses stories about those who disperse or scatter away from their homeland. These novels follow characters who try to assimilate life in a new country, who for several reasons leave home and create a new one, sometimes thousands of kilometres from what was known

to them. Diasporic media are a platform for self-expression, the representation of cultural artefacts and the contestation of negative stereotypes by migrant people in the public sphere.

The expatriate novelist's works investigate the cultural displacement and its impact. The uprooted immigrants face varied situations, problems of rejection and acceptance. If accepted, the problem would be an adjustment, coping with the anxiety, monotony, disappointment, isolation and finally they face failure and rejection. The works of expatriate writers depict the effect of cultural uprootedness and the never-ending experiences of which social rejection is central. Social rejection is when a group of people decides, to reject one or more persons from participation in their group. Social rejection can be of many different ways. Sometimes people out rightly reject someone by telling them they are not wanted. Sometimes, there is a potentially crueller rejection that is not easy to accept in human beings, and there is always a natural sentiment of the need for acceptance in groups

In loneliness, a psychological state, an immigrant experiences a strong sense of emptiness and loneliness. Loneliness is more than a sense of having company of another person. It is a feeling of being detached, disconnected, and/or cut off from other people so that it feels difficult or even often feel empty or depressed inside. Feelings of estrangement or isolation from the world are common amongst those are lonely.

There has been a great change in the concept of diaspora because of demographic changes and progress in communication technology during the last two decades. Fastest mode of communication, social networking sites have their impact on the experience of exile. A post-1965 migrating generation thinks India very differently than a post-1980s and posts 2000s generation. Class and gender also play an important role in the shaping of not just the diaspora but also diaspora's interface with cultures.

It is interesting to note that the history of Indian diasporic writing is very old. The first Indian writing in English is attributed to Dean Mohamed, who was born in Patna, India. His book *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* was published in 1794. It predates by about forty years. The first English text was written by an Indian residing in India. Kylas Chunder Dutt's *Imaginary History A Journal of Forty-Eight hour of the year 1945* was published in 1835. The first Indian English novel, Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*, was published much later in 1864. It proves that the contribution of the Indian Diaspora to Indian English writing is not new.

The immigrant issues have been explored by diasporic writers like Anita Desai, Meena Alexander, Bharathi Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shani Muthoo, Kiran Desai and others in their works. In recent years, much critical interest has grown in the writings of Indian immigrant writers who have settled in the U.S. They raise their voice against the mental trauma, cultural alienation and identity crisis of the dislocated people from their homeland India. The immigrant issues have been explored by the above-mentioned diasporic writers and

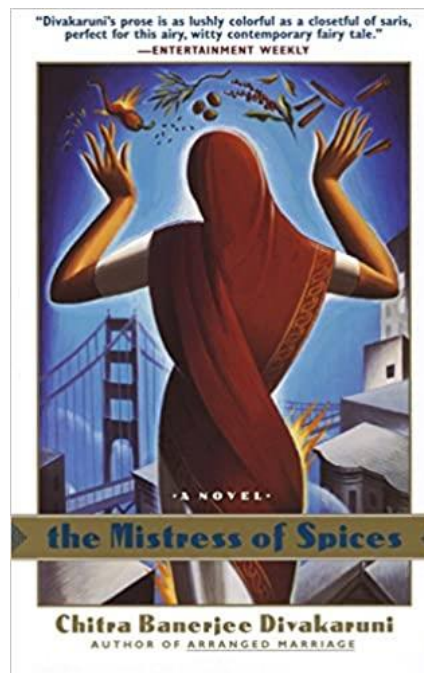
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others in their works. In recent years much critical interest has grown in the writings of Indian immigrant writers settled in the U.S. They raise their voice against the mental trauma, cultural alienation and identity crisis of the dislocated people from their homeland, India.



Courtesy: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, the Bengal- born writer who immigrated to the U.S, is one of the foremost writers of the Diasporic literature. Chitra Banerjee is an Asian American with her ancestral roots in India. A fan of Tagore classics, US-based author, poetess and activist, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, grew up reading strong women writers like Mahasweta Devi and Ismat Chughtai. And that left an indelible mark on her psyche and definitely inspired her own writing. Through the characters of her stories in *Arranged Marriage*, Divakaruni explores the problems of identity crisis, emotional isolation and non-communication, the experience of migration, etc. Her books have been translated into 29 languages, and her works have appeared in over a hundred magazines and anthologies. Several of her novels and stories have been made into films and plays. Before she began her career in fiction writing, Divakaruni had established herself as an acclaimed poet and wrote poems encompassing a wide variety of themes. Her main area of focus is immigrant experience.

Living in the U.S, she is more aware of the differences in culture which urges her to explore in all its essentials. Divakaruni believes that the immigrant Indian women feel the impact of the cultural schism caused by dislocation more immediately than men and that, because of this, she tends to look back even as she evolves on to a new being in the diasporic setting. In her American Book Award winning first collection of short stories, “*Arranged Marriage*”, she beautifully presents inter alia the matrix of diasporic consciousness like alienation, loneliness, rootlessness, nostalgia and questioning.

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She often focusses on the character balancing two worlds, particularly Indian immigrants struggling for peaceful life in America. The United States of America, a land of opportunities and culturally pluralistic society, is no exception to it. It is a kind that opens up avenues for all those immigrants who initially seek their economic condition. The aspiring and ambitious individual uproot themselves from their cultural moorings and migrate to countries which promise them better living condition and comforts. The immigrants who carry dreams of aspiration also carries with him his natural identity. His reluctance to shed his identity makes it difficult for him to get assimilated in his hero home. The natives too are not ready to accept him without any reservation. This harsh reality, besides causing innumerable problems to the co-migrant, leads to various tensions in the society.

Divakaruni's works are devoted to women of all races and faith who share a common female experience. All her heroines must find themselves within the contrasting boundaries of their culture and religion. She states: "My characters struggle in the balance between family responsibilities and individual happiness, which is in away, at the centre of conflict between our Hindu culture, which always shows the mother as the giver, nurture and sacrificing herself for the good of the family and the western concept of self-happiness."

Chitra Banerjee, an Indian American award winning author and poet who migrated to America in 1976 at the age of 19, witnessed the troubles faced by the so-called "black" in a country of the so-called "white". As an expatriate, she is conscious about her own identity and hence her works reflect the sense of rootlessness and alienation, which are mostly relevant to the Indian diaspora. Disparity in a new land persuaded her to establish Maitri, a hotline for South Asian women who were the sufferers of discrimination, cruelty and abuses. The initiative taken to improve the condition of such women motivated her to write *Arranged Marriage*, a work of art to narrate the tale of abuses and bravery of immigrant women.

Chitra Banerjee possesses a high rank in the contemporary circle of Indian Diaspora for being a very keen observer of life of the Indians, especially Bengali women, in the United States of America. Through the characters of her stories in *Arranged Marriage*, Divakaruni explores the problems of identity crisis, emotional isolation and non-communication and the experience of migration. Her books have been translated into 29 languages, and her works have appeared in over a hundred magazines and anthologies. Several of her novels and stories have been made into films and plays. Before she began her career in fiction writing, Divakaruni had established herself as an acclaimed poet and wrote poems encompassing a wide variety of themes. Her main area of focus is once again immigrant experience as Divakaruni says,

"Expatriates have powerful and poignant experiences when they live away from their original culture – and this becomes home, and never quite, and then you can't really go back and be quite at home there either." (Divakaruni Profile by Arthur J. Pais)

Chitra Banerjee, the author of several award-winning volumes of poetry and novels, in her debut collection of short stories, *Arranged Marriage* (1995) which has also won a PEN Josephine Miles Award and a Bay Area Book Reviewers Award, deals with the immigrant experiences, especially of women in general. Divakaruni, with her remarkable workmanships portrays diasporic women protagonists, living in two cultures, struggling the insecurities of exile, and questioning their identities. In this brilliant collection, which contains eleven short stories.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni belongs to the first generation of Indian immigrants in the United States who has spent a part of her life in India and has carried the baggage of her native land offshore. She has keenly observed the postcolonial society of India as well the challenges of diaspora abroad. With this observation, she has portrayed the fear of adjustment, struggles and sufferings of her characters, both from India and abroad, authentically. The focal point in almost all stories in *Arranged Marriage* is the problem of adjustment arising from cultural variation experienced by an Indian woman when she moves toward the west, which is an important theme in the mosaic of American Indian culture. The first story of the collection, “Bats” talks about the physical and emotional sufferings and the courage of an Indian woman who leaves her torturer husband and returns home with her child in India. The second story of the collection, *Clothes*, which is about the unfulfilled promise of a marriage, also talks of unknown fear of migration and adjustment of Sumita, the central character, who has to accompany her husband to California.

Chitra depicts the struggles of women in foreign land. She affirms that diaspora is not merely scattering or dispersion but a matrix of consciousness. Being an immigrant lady she through her stories depicts all the experiences of Indian immigrants in all its colours. Thus, all her works, *Mistress of spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *The Vine of Desire*, *Queen of Dreams* clearly shows the immigrant feminine experience. Her novels discuss the themes of cultural conflict, racism, identity, women, alienation and integration. Here we analyse the experience of Indian women migrants in America as depicted in Divakaruni’s novel.

Divakaruni’s main focus is on portraying the condition of women immigrants from India. Women who face greater problems in their homeland also deals with the loneliness of their new country. Even the second-generation immigrants are embroiled between the lifestyle of their birth country i.e. America and the life style of the birth country of their parents. The immigrant characters after struggling with the problems of immigration, find a foot hold in America through integration. They learn to adapt to the new lifestyle by adopting the positive aspects of the American culture. All the same time, they retain positive aspects of their native culture while letting go of the more orthodox traditions and beliefs.

She seems to follow two divergent tracks personal and impersonal, but it moves in the direction of uniformity. In the novel *Queen of Dreams* which came out in the year 2004

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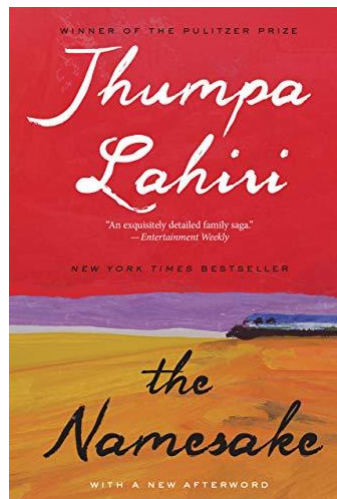
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marks a growth in Divakaruni vision of immigration. In this novel the mother, who comes from the native slum area of Calcutta is endowed with the exceptional power of interpreting the hidden messages of the dreams of her customers like that of mistress of spices, she wants to spare Rakhi from the tales of her strange and painful past. Rakhi in spite of her birth and nurturing in American life unconsciously retains her innate bonding with Indian life, Indian scenery and Indian Culture.

Divakaruni' s focus is mainly on women caught between two worlds, their dejection, and disillusionment and adaption to such conditions. Besides, it evaluates their attitude and approach toward life, abandonment or preservation of their cultural values. Each tale has a freshness and uniqueness of diasporic consciousness. In most of the stories, the author skilfully narrates the stories of Indian women immigrants living in the perpetual socio-psychological conflict. Divakaruni, with her remarkable workmanships portrays diasporic women protagonists, living in two cultures, struggling the insecurities of exile, and questioning their identities. In this brilliant collection, which contains eleven short stories.



Courtesy: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Jhumpa Lahiri is a significant writer of Indian diaspora who has enriched the corpus of international writing in English Nilanjana Sudeshna, better known as Jhumpa Lahiri, is known for her short stories, novels and essays in English and Italian. Lahiri was born in London in 1967 to Indian immigrant parents from West Bengal. She was born in London in 1967 and raised in Rhode Island. Her Bengali parents, a teacher and a librarian, took their family on regular trips to Calcutta, India to visit extended family. Lahiri completed her B.A. at Barnard College, and from Boston University she earned M.A. She is currently a professor of creative writing at Princeton University in the United States. Her debut collection of short-stories *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Her first novel, *The Namesake* (2003) was adapted into the popular film of the same name. In these works, Lahiri explored the Indian-immigrant experience in America. In 2011, Lahiri moved to Rome, Italy and has since then published two books of essays. In 2019, published her first novel in Italian

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called *Dove mi trovo* and also compiled, edited and translated the *Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories* which consists of 40 Italian short stories written by 40 different Italian writers.

Prize-winning author Jhumpa Lahiri is celebrated for her depiction of immigrant and Indian American life, yet her poignant stories also capture universal themes of longing, loneliness and barriers of communication. She is known for works of fiction like *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, *Unaccustomed Earth* and *The Lowland*. *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri presents her with The 2000 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction. When it comes to *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri's writing style can be described as both simplistic and journalistic. Her writing is simplistic because she avoids complex words, complicated sentence structure, and figurative language. Lahiri's work highlights Indian diasporic womanism as a composite of feminism, womanhood and motherhood of the immigrant Indian women. It highlights the shades of each aspect such as double marginalisation, patriarchal dominance, ideological pressures, gender inequality, gender discrimination, power relations, sexism, stereotyping, emancipation and sexuality.

Her novel *The Namesake* deals with the tribulations of the immigrants in an alien land, the yearnings of exile and the emotional bafflement of cross cultural dilemmas. The novel continues to develop further the themes of cultural alienation and loss of identity. She tries to incarcerate the experiences and cultural dilemmas of 30-year struggle for the Ganguli family, for their integration and assimilation into alien. Lahiri's protagonists are the continental immigrants but they endure cultural introspection. They have their conflict of consciousness between two selves- the native and the foreign. They have their journey towards home and identity, being recognized as unsettling race through alienation, cultural conflict and hybrid culture. By carefully delineating the selves of her tormented characters she has imparted universality to their themes. Thus, her narratives are the real social documents on tormented souls not with the usual sound and fury but rather through imaginative reconstructions.

*The Namesake* is an example of a diasporic novel since it follows the lives of an immigrant Indian American family. Jhumpa Lahiri, had received critical acclamation for her warm and intricate portrayal of family life and Indian immigrants trying to be on both sides of the two cultures- their Indian heritage and the American dream. Lahiri from her childhood had experienced the conflicts experienced by an immigrant who has to continuously struggle with her environment and herself in order to find her true identity in the world. In her novel *The Namesake* she portrays the themes of Diaspora, cultural alienation and loss of identity that the immigrant faces in making a new home in foreign country. *The Namesake* revolves around the life of an Indian immigrant couple Ashima & Ashok Ganguli who have come to create a new life for opportunities for themselves in the University of Suburbs in Boston. In *The Namesake*, she reflects on the Indian Diaspora and creates a narrative that reveals the inconsistency of the concept of identity and cultural difference in the space of Diaspora.

In an interview Lahiri has admitted: “I’m lucky that I’m between two worlds... I don’t really know what a distinct south Asian identity means. I don’t think about that when I write, I just try to bring a person to life”. And that is exactly what she does through her characters. Names are symbols of identity in life. Names help people to communicate with each other, they play an important role for people to identify themselves. As identity becomes the core issue, the names become quite significant. Indian tradition follows various kinds of rituals and ceremonies of naming a born baby. Names play a very important role in life. In literature, dealing with the clash of cultures, countries, and races, names emerge as identity symbols. In Indian perception good names represent dignified and enlightened qualities. Pet names are sometimes meaningless and silly. The title *The Namesake* reflects the struggle Gogol Ganguli goes through to identify with his unusual name. The novel represents the experience of a very specific community which has no name.

As Wieviorka states, when a Diaspora community is “constantly rejected or interiorized while only wanting to be included, either socially or culturally, or when this group or this individual is racially discriminated and demonized under the argument of a supposed cultural different” then the individual or the group is embarrassed and this eventually “leads to a self-definition and behaviours based on this culture and, eventually, racial distinction.” An atmosphere of home is tried to be built up for children and themselves far from their real home. This sense of alienation from the western culture and the land where they live creates a feeling of rootlessness among the children who can neither co-relate with the place where they are born and bred nor to the place to which their parents belong to and about which they are always being told about. Parents do their utmost to create Bengali ambience for Gogol and Sonia by arranging all Bengali get together, but the two as they grew in hybrid culture, part Bengali, part American, gingerly respond to their parents’ efforts to create a homeland in America, an oasis of Bengali culture. Ashima tells Gogol about Durga Puja, she also makes him memorize four line children’s poem by Tagore. But at the same time, she is conscious of her child being American student and makes him watch Sesame Street and the Electric Company in order to match with English he uses at school. So, Gogol is always sailing in two boats simultaneously, one with his parents at home speaking Bengali and living in Bengali style and the other of American Indian.

Multiculturalism suggests the co-existence of different cultures. It does not prescribe homogenization and conformity directly. It also does not encourage openly different ethnic religious, lingual or racial constituents of a particular society to degrade and alienate each other so that such a society is damaged or destroyed permanently. *The Namesake* is a perfect reference for Lahiri’s story about the strangeness of the Indian immigrant experience in the United States and that is somewhat true also because the child of immigrants begins in a kind of nowhere place. Gogol or even Lahiri is firmly of America but is not quite an American in part because they are not recognized as such by others. Gogol desires to blend in the American society. He wants to live unnoticed. But he is not viewed as an American by other Americans,

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even though he is a native-born citizen. He tries to put a wall between his past and his present but it is not easy. The adoption of Nikhil is a part to live only in the present, but the ghost of Gogol clings to him that he signs his old name unconsciously, he does not respond immediately when he is addressed as Nikhil. He tries to become an entirely different person from what really, he is. Gogol struggles to carry the burden of two names. Nikhil resembles American names, yet Gogol and his past follow him everywhere. He experiences a feeling of being in-between. Jhumpa Lahiri tries to focus on the issue of identity what she had faced in her childhood. The problem of Gogol's name symbolizes the problem of his identity. He wants to be connected to the strange names in the graveyard when the students were taken to the graveyard for the project. He wants to relate himself with American locale, but his name hinders his way to be recognized as an American. Nikhil replaces Gogol when he enters Yale as a freshman. Here nobody knows his earlier name. He feels relief and confident. No one knows him as Gogol but Nikhil. His life with new name also gets changed. Gogol is an outsider in American society whereas he does not feel intimacy with Indianness. So, who he is becomes a great problem. It is the name which determines identity. Gogol is trying to get identity. Even after making all efforts to erase his past, his failure to assert his identity is seen in his relationship with women. He does not want Ruth or Maxine to meet his parents. Such efforts are made to escape his past identity and heritage. Gogol engages in a constant struggle to remain loyal to both worlds. Hence, the major theme portrayed in the novel is one of identity. This theme is illustrated vividly by examining the importance of one's culture and background, gender, and name as the definition of patriarchal lineage and destiny in life.

*The Namesake* convincingly illustrates the lives of both first generation and second generation Indian migrants in the USA. Alienation is a part of the experience of the Indian Diaspora and even if people are at home in any part of the world it does not mean that they will not become victims of the sense of alienation. The novel also shows how the immigrants face cultural dilemmas in the foreign system. She has tried to answer all these questions in her own poise through the quest of identity of her characters. The second-generation Diaspora finds their roots only after undergoing cultural imbalance. Diaspora is all about the creation of new identities, spaces for growth, resolution of conflicts and a new culture. Lahiri shows that the immigrants in their enthusiasm to stick to their own cultural belief and customs gradually imbibe the cultural ways of the host country too. Their own children groomed to be bilingual and bicultural face cultural dilemmas and displacement more. But at last Lahiri also shows that all immigrants carve their own routes in the course of time and it's not necessary that they should settle in the country of their own origin.

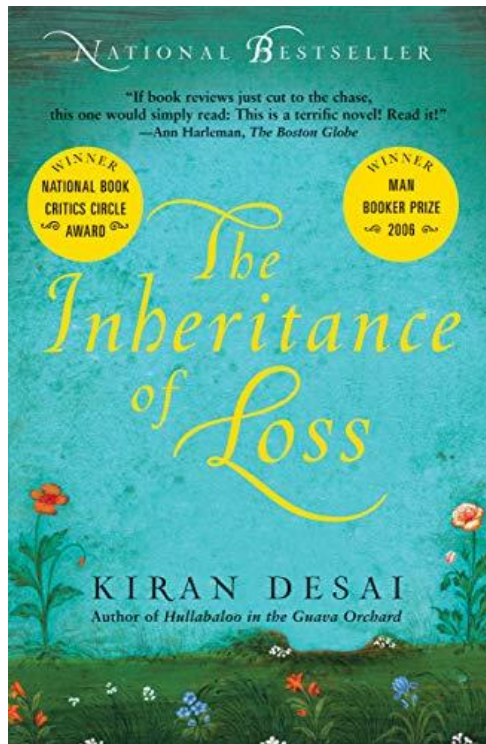
The coveted novelist Kiran Desai is an established diasporic writer of Indian origin who presents Indians as protagonists in her fiction. Her novels generally narrate about Indian immigrants who struggle to settle in an alien country usually America. Kiran Desai is an Indian-born American author whose second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), became an international best seller and won the 2006 Booker Prize.

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Dr. V. Malar

Diasporic Consciousness in the Writing of Chitra Banerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai -  
A Glimpse



Courtesy: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Kiran Desai, in her novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) sets Indian society in its backdrop and writes the novel based on her experiences when she has travelled between diasporic identities and displacement. She has written the novel in English language rather than in Indian English. She expresses the new voice of modern Indian fiction in her novels and depicts something of absolutely her own. A famous Indian English writer, Salman Rushdie has said that she is a terrific writer in expounding the sufferings of exiles. She has a place among the great contemporary Indian authors who study life and society in India. He also expresses the human breadth and political shrewdness that have been incorporated in the novel. Kiran Desai, in *The Inheritance of loss*, addresses variety of identity crises issues such as cultural hybridity, nationalism, identity and the connection between place and culture. Most characters of the novel experience great influence of the non-native culture. The author shows various aspects of the split identity on a different life story faced by people who are trying to face a strong foreign influences and the characters of the novel are representatives of various issues regarding confused identities.

Chapter Two of the novel describes the formation of Indian Diasporas. It presents the diasporic formation of the characters, judge and Sai. The diasporic thought of the judge exists in alienated form by focussing on three key aspects; mentally paralytic, emotionally blocked and spiritually dead. However, the formation of diaspora of Sai is because of her British education. The colonial education makes her lose her native identity. Hence, they are keeping a hybrid identity in the formation of the Indian diaspora. Chapter Three describes the formation

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of diasporas in New York. This chapter is composed in three parts. The first part describes the formation of the Diasporic character, Biju, an illegal immigrant in New York. The second part portrays the formation of the diasporic person, Saeed. The third part delineates the formation of the diaspora Harish-Harry, a lawful permanent immigrant. Through the analysis the three types of immigrants, the researcher discusses that they should keep in-between space, hybrid identity in the globalized world. Biju is the son of the cook who leaves India in hope of better life in America finds out that he is not able to understand the foreign culture and in the end he is relieved back to India, where he despites his imperfections, finds security in well-known habits and customs. The story is set in a small Indian town Kalimpong in North-East Himalayas where the author grown up. The novel shows not only the lives of the main characters but also the development of the region with growing social unrests of Nepali nationalists who are a large diaspora living in the region, and also the impact of such changes on the inhabitants of the region.

The beginning of the novel introduces a retired judge who lives with his granddaughter and his cook. The judge is an old man who was as a young bright man sent to Britain to become a judge to serve the British government. However, the British society of 1940's was not prepared to encounter foreign culture and young Jemubhai Patel had to face racist behaviour which had devastating effect on his self-esteem. For entire days nobody spoke to him at all, his throat jammed with words unuttered, his heart and mind turned into blunt aching things, and elderly ladies, even the hapless blue-haired, spotted, faces like collapsing pumpkins moved over when he sat next to them in the bus, so he knew that whatever they had, they were secure in their conviction that it was not even remotely as bad as what he had. The young and beautiful were no kinder; girls held their noses and giggled, "Phew, he stinks of curry! Eventually he felt barely human at al..." (Desai, 2006, pp. 39-40).

In the novel, Gyan points out Sai's belonging, as she does not belong to Indian culture, but at the same time is not part of the British culture either as Gyan believes she will not be accepted by it. The cook, who is actually called by his name only once at the end of the novel, on the other hand represents a person from a lower class that follows Indian traditions but sees the Western world as something of a higher standard and is proud of his son Biju, who lives in New York: the cook had thought of ham roll ejected from a can and fried in thick ruddy slices, of tuna fish soufflé, khari biscuit pie, and was sure that since his son was cooking English food, he had a higher position than if he were cooking Indian (Desai, 2006, p. 17). The sense of displacement is caused by loss of cultural connections with the place which further causes the loss of one's identity.

This novel demonstrates this problem in the character of judge who does experience of dislocation twice and both times he has a great influence on his behaviour. The first time, the judge's experiences of dislocation happens when his parents decide to send him to England, so he is able to work for the British government in India, this happens during the Raj period in early the 1940's. During his journey and his stay in Cambridge, he experiences a variety of

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events which shapes his diasporic self and identity. From the beginning, he experiences many racial prejudices, and he gradually starts to believe in them and these beliefs turn into his self-hatred: He grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him found his own skin odd-coloured, his own accent peculiar. He forgot how to laugh, could barely managed to lift his lips in a smile, and if he ever did, he held his hand over his mouth, because he couldn't bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth. They seemed too private. In fact, he could barely let himself peep out of his clothes for fear of giving offence. ... To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight may reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly (Desai, 2006, p. 40).

The displacement and lack of cultural understanding caused the judge to live a very lonely life. He had no cultural connections with Britain and since he was not accepted for his otherness, his loss of self-esteem caused him also to lose his self-respect. He turned all his hopes to his studies but when he came to the ICS entrance exam he was only ridiculed by the examiners. Later on, he found out that his performance was not sufficient to qualify for the ICS. However, since there were "attempts to Indianize the service" (Desai, 2006, p. 117) and he was admitted at the end. Even though this event was very important for him, it did not improve his self-esteem as he still referred to himself as "one" when he was saying to his landlord "One is done. One is finally through" (Desai, 2006, p, 117).

After being accepted for the program, he moved to a new boarding house with other students where he met his only friend in England: Bose. They had similarly inadequate clothes, similarly for lonely empty rooms, and similarly poor native's trunks; "...a look of recognition had passed between them at first sight, but also the assurance that they would not reveal one another's secrets, not even to each other" (Desai, 2006, p. 118). As the judge met someone of the same cultural background, he immediately found a bond with him on the ground of the same cultural understanding. The judge, together with Bose, tried to become as English as possible and they avoided Indian students at work to establish his new identity. He found he began to be mistaken for something he wasn't – a man of dignity.

This accidental poise became more imbalanced when Veeraswamy ate shepherd's pie instead and agreed on the train home that Trafalgar Square was not quite up to British standards of hygiene (Desai, 2006, p. 119). Consciously, the judge began to adopt the new British culture and by doing so he began to consider himself more important than any other thing. He envied the English. He loathed Indians, worked as an Englishman with the passion of hatred and for what he would become; he would be despised by absolutely everyone--English and Indians, both (Desai, 2006, p. 119). This illustrates his belonging to somewhere else; to find his place in the society but at the same time he does not identify himself with the society which does not accept him. He hates Indians because being Indian caused him great suffering in Britain so his working "at being English with the passion of hatred" (Desai, 2006, p. 119) is really his attempt to belong somewhere, to merge into the society, to suppress his exoticism. Unfortunately, this effort only causes him to be hated by Indians as they sense his attempt to be superior to them

and also by the British who do not fully accept him as he is still Indian. On his journey home “He sat alone because he still felt ill at ease in the company of the English” (Desai, 2006, p. 119). This line is just evidence that even though he tries to become British he does not feel to be one. However, upon his arrival home he finds out that he does not belong to his culture anymore either. As “He was a foreigner – a foreigner – every bit of him screamed” (Desai, 2006, pp. 166-167). This feeling causes a great confusion to him. When his wife, is out of curiosity, steals his powder puff, which exhilarated his family, his confusion turns into hatred, as “any cruelty to her became irresistible, he would teach her the same lesson of loneliness and shame he had learned himself”. (Desai, 2006, p. 170). His cruelty is not restricted only to his wife but also to his family whom he refuses when they ask him for help.

### **Conclusion**

Memories always remain a significant factor in expatriate writing. The memories evoked are of by past times, place and people as they were when the writer experienced them, as they are now, at this point of time they may immensely altered. Besides, these memories are now coloured by imagination and nostalgia. In the fictional world of these writers, different worlds are negotiating each other, real world and the imaginary. Expatriate experience is problematic for the second-generation immigrants of the third world for specific reasons. Born and brought up on foreign soil expatriation for this neo- class of immigrants hangs the background as an imaginary reality, free from the stigma of nostalgia and the popular symptoms of angst, loneliness existential rootlessness or homelessness, their predicament is in many ways worse than that of their predecessors. Despite their assimilation and acculturation, they cannot escape from being victimized and ostracized. In today’s literary field, it is accepted by all that diasporic or expatriate writers are those writers who have preferred to settle in countries other than home country, distinguishing them from “Desi” or “rooted” counterparts.

It should be noted that while early expatriate writing was generally those of a tourist on a short period away from home. Many of the present days expatriate have chosen to settle abroad. However, the present days writing by expatriate writers, the backdrop and inspiration is always derived from the homeland.

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