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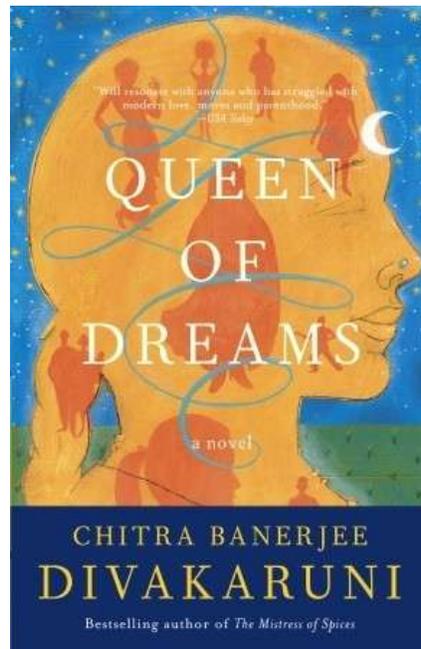
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## Quest for Identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name Sake*

R. Malathi, M.A., M.Phil.



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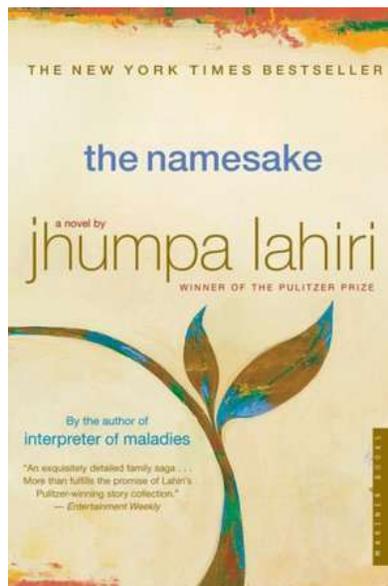
Quest for Identity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name Sake*

## Focus of This Paper

This paper is based on my M.Phil. dissertation entitled *Quest for Identity: In the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Queen of Dreams and Jhumpa Lahiri's The Name Sake*. The initial part of this paper (as presented below) maps out the stream of Indian Diaspora fiction in English and the biographical details about Chitra Banerjee and Jhumpa Lahiri and their literary works. The later sections deal with the theme of *Identity Crisis* as depicted in *Queen of Dreams* and *The Name Sake*. Finally, the paper also discusses Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri's innovative use of narrative techniques employed in these novels. A summing up of the research findings is presented at the end.

## Introduction

Indian English Literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian Diaspora, such as V.S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and Salman Rushdie, who are of Indian descent. Diasporic literature comes under the broader realm of Post-Colonial Literature - the production from previously colonised countries such as India.



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## **The Concepts of *Exile*, etc.**

In Post-Colonial literatures, the concept of ‘exile’ involves the idea of a separation or distancing from literal homeland or a cultural and ethnic origin. Migrant literature is a topic which has commanded growing interest within literary studies since the 1980s. ‘Migrants’ are defined as people who have left their homes to settle in countries or cultural communities which are initially strange to them.

The terms ‘migrant’, ‘expatriate’, ‘exile’ and ‘refugee’ have been replaced by the term “Diaspora” in recent days. The term ‘Diaspora’ literally refers to a scattering, carrying within it the ambiguous status of being both an ambassador and a refugee; one anticipates the projection of one’s culture and the other seeks refuge and protection and relates more positively to the host culture.

## **The South Asian Diaspora**

The South Asian Diaspora, shaped by dispersions of people, goods, ideas and beliefs that flowed from and through the Indian subcontinent, is currently one of the world’s largest Diasporas. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives all anchor a sense of home for people who have moved outside the region through the centuries. These territories evoke emotional, Social, political, economic, cultural and literary affiliations as well, which find expression in multiple ways.

## **Part of the American and English Literary Traditions**

The Indian Diaspora has become a part of the American and English literary traditions. Some of the Indian English writers, notably, Raja Rao, became an expatriate even before the independence of the country; Indian-English writers like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Viram Seth, Sunetra Gupta, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Hari Kunzru have all made their names while residing abroad. Their concerns are global concerns as today’s world is afflicted with the problems of immigrants, refugees and all other exiles.

## **Diaspora – A Past Indian Tradition**

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It is interesting to note that the history of diasporic India writing is as old as the Diaspora itself. The first Indian writing in English is credited to Dean Mahomed, who was born in Patna, India, and after working for fifteen years in the Bengal Army of the British East India Company, migrated to “eighteenth century Ireland, and then to England” in 1784. His book *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* was published in 1794. It shows that the contribution of the Indian Diaspora to Indian writing in English is not new.

V.S. Naipaul’s characters, like Mohun Biswas ‘from *A House for Mr. Biswas* or Ganesh Ramsumair from *The Mystic Masseur*, are examples of individuals who are generations away from their original homeland, India, but their heritage gives them a consciousness of their past.

### **Modern Diasporic Indian Writers**

The Modern diasporic Indian writers can be grouped into two distinct classes. One class comprises those who have spent a part of their life in India and have carried the baggage of their native land offshore. The other class comprises those who have been bred since Childhood from outside India. They have had a view of their country only from the outside as an exotic place of their origin. The writers of the former group have a literal displacement where as those belonging to the latter group find themselves rootless. Both the groups of writers have produced an enviable corpus of English literature.

### **Focus of Diasporic Indian Writers**

The diasporic Indian writers have generally dealt with characters from their own displaced community but some of them have also taken a liking for western characters and they have been convincing in dealing with them. Two of Vikram Seth’s novels *The Golden Gate* and *An Equal Music* have as their subjects exclusively the lives of Americans and Europeans respectively.

Two of the earliest novels that have successfully depicted diasporic Indian Characters are Anita Desai’s *Bye –Bye Blackbird* and Kamala Markandaya’s *The Nowhere Man*. These novels depict how racial prejudice against Indians in the UK of the 1960s alienates the characters and

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aggravate their sense of displacement. Bharati Mukherjee's novels like *Wife* and *Jasmine* depict Indians in the US- the land of immigrants, both legal and illegal-before globalization got its impetus.

Salman Rushdie in the novel *The Satanic Verses* approaches the allegory of migration by adopting the technique of magic realism. Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* has the character Lla whose father is a roaming diplomat and whose upbringing has been totally on foreign soils.

### **Prize-Winning Recognition**

The diasporic Indian writers of the first generation have already established their credentials by winning numerous literary awards and honours. But recently the ranks of the second generation of Indian writes in the West have swelled enormously and many among them have won international recognition.

### **Identity Crisis**

Identity crisis or search of identity has received an impetus in the Post-Colonial literature. Indian English fiction deals at length with the problems, rising due to multi-culturalism and intercultural interactions. Man is known as a social animal who needs some home, love of parents and friends and relatives. But when he is unhoused, he loses the sense of belongingness and thus suffers from a sense of insecurity or identity crisis.

Identity crisis is the central theme of this comparative study between Chitra Banerjee's *Queen of Dreams* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name Sake*. Both Chitra Banerjee and Jhumpa Lahiri belong to Indian Bengali descent.

## Divakaruni's Works



**Chitra Benerjee Divakaruni**

From <http://www.chitradivakaruni.com/>

Divakaruni's work has been published in over fifty magazines including *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker* and her writing has been included in over fifty anthologies including the *Best American Short Stories* the *O. Henry Prize Stories* and the Pushcart Prize anthology. Her fiction has been translated into twenty languages, including Dutch, Hebrew, Indonesian and Japanese. Her works include: **Arranged Marriage** (1995), **The Mistress of Spices** (1997), **Sister of My Heart** (1998), **Vine of Desire** (2002), **The Unknown Errors of Our Lives** (2001), **Neela: Victory Song** (2002), **The Brotherhood of the Conch** (2003), and **The Queen of Dreams** (2004), **The Palace of Illusion** (2008), **One Amazing Thing** (2010).

Divakaruni's novel **The Mistress of Spices** was released as a film of the same in 2005. In addition, her novel **Sister of my Heart** was made into a television series in Tamil and aired in India, as **Anbulla Snegithiye** (Loving Friend).

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## Jhumpa Lahiri's Works



**Jhumpa Lahiri**

[www.bookforum.com](http://www.bookforum.com)

Jhumpa Lahiri is the daughter of parents who emigrated from India. Her debut work, **Interpreter of Maladies**, won several awards, including the Pulitzer for fiction in 2000. Her second Publication, *The Namesake* was her first novel and spent several weeks on the **New York Times** best seller list. Lahiri's second collection of short stories, **Unaccustomed Earth** was released on April 1, 2008.

### **Identity Crisis in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams***

Divakaruni's literary output treats all shades of *Identity Crisis* such as alienation, marginalisation, despair, nostalgia, readjustment, assimilation, adaption or adoption. As a woman writer her writings are autobiographical. She portrays a kind of cultural in-betweeness. Such 'marginal' people are found in ever communal group, where a cross fertilization of cultures takes place. The United States of America, a land of opportunities and a culturally pluralistic society, is no exception to it. She also contrasts the lives and perceptions of first-generation immigrants with that of their children born and raised in a foreign land. And, inevitably, it includes the Indian-American experience of grappling with two identities.

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## **Synthesis of Indian and American Experience**

While depicting the common experiences of the Indian diasporic community, *Queen of Dreams* synthesizes an Indian – American experience with magic realism. The major problems faced by the immigrants are those of their search for identity and a sense of emotional fulfillment.

## **Wakefulness and Subconscious**

The narrative of *Queen of Dreams* explores the connection between wakefulness and subconscious. The author has spun an enchanting story of a second generation immigrant trying to divine her identity, with her dream-interpreting mother contributing to the mystery and magic. The picture of ancient India and contemporary America is simultaneously projected through the mother, who migrated from India with her husband and her daughter Rakhi. Rakhi, a young artist and divorced mother living in Berkeley, California, trying to find her footing in a world which is alarmingly in the process of transition, torn by Violence and horror.

## **The Queen of Dreams**

Mrs. Gupta, the ‘queen’ of dreams, retains much of her Indianness. It is imperative she does so, in order to retain the powers she had acquired in India-the power of interpreting dreams- which otherwise would desert her. To let the dream-spirit invade her, she is forbidden to squander her body in search of physical pleasures. Nevertheless she falls in love, marries and moves across the oceans to America with her husband. Meantime, Rakhi is born and the tinsel sheen of her marriage no longer holds her attention. Her beautiful dreams are contrasted with her husband’s bloody ones which end their nuptial life. She mourns for the price she had to pay, lonely nights without her husband’s physical touch. Thus, from then on she leads the life of a wife without being a wife. The dreams- the other people’s lives-descend on her, warned her to warn them and help them because to her, “a dream is a telegraph from the hidden world”

**(Divakaruni, QD 34).**

## **The Strategy of Segregating and Integrating**

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Mrs. Gupta maintains her culture by mostly cooking Indian foods. Raki Says,

At home we rarely ate anything but Indian, that was the one way in which my mother kept her culture (**Divakarui, QD 7**).

Mrs. Gupta Clad herself as Indians do either a Saree or Salwarkameez. She usually restricts herself within the confinement of her house and only ventures out to pass the message of her dreams to her clients.

Mrs. Gupta follows both the strategy of segregating and integrating in order to enforce an existentialist sense of identity. To her, her identity is no great an issue as she maintains most of her Indian culture and tradition. She adjusts and accommodates expediently though her sense of up rootedness disturbs her peripherally. Mrs. Gupta remains tender accepting most of the changes revolutionizing America and adapting to it, not so much affected by it. She creates an identity for herself which revolves around her dream world which none dares enter, not even her husband or daughter.

### **Malfunctioning Family**

The dream-teller's distance from her husband and daughter creates a malfunctioning family in which the daughter vainly strives for her mother's attention and the father periodically sinks into the oblivion of drinking. Rakhi's relationship with her father is largely dysfunctional throughout her childhood. Moreover, Rakhi experiences herself as an abandoned child when she cannot follow her mother to the realm of dreams. She is unable to trust her and is haunted by the feeling that her mother's priorities lie in the realm of mystery rather than with her own family.

### **Unfathomable Past and Clandestine Working of the Present**

Mrs. Gupta's unfathomable past and her clandestine working of the present is brought to light through her dream journals posthumously. Her dream journals are only her nostalgic reminiscences of her past life in the caves with the elders which actually establishes her cultural identify. In her journal, the mother describes herself as an integral part of a group; she uses the

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first person plural pronoun to describe her own and other dream-teller/students' reaction to their teacher's speech. She Says,

She looked at us as though she saw things we did not know about ourselves. We realized then that living here, in these caves that were in the world but not quite of it, would change us beyond recognition. And some of us-including myself-were frightened and focused all our attention on holding back tears (**Divakaruni, QD 232**).

### **The Interpretation of the Dream**

The pivotal of the whole novel rests on the words of Mrs. Gupta as she elucidates the dream and interprets the meaning of it.

The journal appears to be the mother's last chance to reach her family by telling them the truth about her. As the father translates the journals to Rakhi, the daughter comes to terms with her mother's death and slowly rediscovers her father's unique characters and talents. Although at first, Rakhi blames her father for her mother's death, when the father and daughter start cooperating to save Rakhi's Coffee shop, the daughter learns to trust her father and gradually relinquishes her anger. Sitting late into the night and sharing ideas, the father and daughter realize that it is the first time they have spoken to each other directly, without the mother's mediation.

Story-telling, which Rakhi craves, remains out of her reach. When as a child, Rakhi asks her mother to tell her a bed time story; the mother encourages the daughter to tell a story herself. Although these stories develop the daughter's imagination, they do not provide her with the sense of belonging or identification with her mother or her ethnicity, Rakhi, says,

Would have preferred the stores to have come from my mother, and to have been set in India, where I grew up, a land that seemed to me to be shaded with unending mystery (**Divakarui, QD 4**).

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While the mother's journals reveal her secrets to understand herself for her daughter. The Father's stories contribute to Rakhi's basic need for ethnic belonging, mutuality and continuity thus helping her to reconstruct her sense of ethnic identity.

### **Devastating Experience**

Sonny, a DJ in a famous night club, invites Rakhi to come and hear him play. The evening ends in a disaster. Rakhi is drugged and raped; the loud music and the commotion prevent Sonny from hearing his wife's cries for help. When a week later, Rakhi tells her husband about the rape, Sonny refuses to believe her. Sonny's dismissal infuriates his wife; they have a fight and she decides to divorce him.

Characterized by secrecy and isolation from society, Mrs. Gupta's lifestyle cannot serve as a constructive example for her daughter. Thus, when Sonny attempts to contact his wife to prevent their divorce, Rakhi does not answer his phone calls and endless messages until, one day he simply stops calling. The gap of silence Rakhi intentionally creates between herself and her husband parallels her detachment from her mother that Rakhi has experienced throughout her life. This dysfunctional pattern of communication replicates itself with Rakhi's daughter, Jonaki, who inherits her grandmother's dream-telling talent.

While with her mother, Rakhi romanticized her mother's talent and aspired to become a dream-teller, with her daughter, she realizes that the gift Jonaki possesses is also "a terrible weight she'll have to carry... by herself" (**Divakarui, QD 283**). The process Rakhi undergoes as a daughter coming to terms with her mother's peculiar life style enables her to accept her daughter's separateness. By helping her daughter recognize and exercise her talent, Rakhi facilitates the construction of Jonaki's identify as a dream-teller, thus amending the mistakes of her relationship with her own mother and creating harmonious balance between the past and present.

### **Trapeze between Two Cultures**

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Having imbibed the American culture by birth and Indian culture through blood Rakhi trapezes between the two cultures. Rakhi does not know who she actually is or where she actually belongs to. Born and educated in America Rakhi perceives America as her home, and she wants to be accepted on her own terms. She “faces a sense of alienation in the sense of ‘insider’, ‘outsider’ (Divakaruni, QD32). Though ignorant she constantly bickers after her non-existent past, and contemplates a visit to the mysterious land-India-which she would never make. Devoid of any knowledge about her ancestral home, she possesses only a warped sense of what is Indian.

After the death of her mother in the mysterious car accident, her father volunteers to help resuscitate the Chai House into “an Indian Snack Shop, a ‘chaer dokan’, as it would be called in Calcutta” (Divakarui, QDS185). The intermingling of two cultures is strongly felt in the new emergence of the resplendent coffee shop under the banner ‘Kurma Shop’. By sharing the culinary secrets with his daughter, the father not only strengthens their connection, but also transmits cultural knowledge and customs.

### **Living in a Perpetual State of Tension**

Rakhi desperately wants to succeed as a painter or as a lucrative shop owner. Rakhi as a diasporic Subject is compelled to live in a perpetual state of tension and irresolution because she is unable to sever her ties with the imaginary homeland though she has accommodated into the host culture.

After the catastrophe of fire in the ‘Kurma Shop’ she realizes her mother’s words that, “calamity happens so we can understand caring” (Divakarui, QD 237). The bond of affinity develops after the calamity. Disaster makes the customers more informal in their relationship to Rakhi. The fact that they all belong to one country makes them relate and they form a distinct ethnic group and community.

The customers begin to flock around the ‘Kurma Shop’ to hear Gupta who sing their cherished old, loved Hindi songs. The father’s affirmative response also brings a crowd of ethnic

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musicians to the store. Rakhi notices that, “while some wear western clothes, and some are in kurta-pajames” (QD 217). Although these people are her countrymen and they “share the same skin colour, the word foreign comes to her again, though she knows it’s ironic” (Divakaruni, QD 194). They rediscover the joy like an “unexpected oasis tucked into an arid stretch of dunes” (Divakaruni, QD 196) a pleasure they thought they would never find in America.

### **The Aftermath of 9/11**

In the US, the devastation caused by the terrorists on September 11, 2001 shattered all complacency and Chitra Banerjee had felt a need to narrate about it. The violence unleashed in the American Society on account of the bombing of the World Trade Center takes a great toll on the lives of the immigrant. In *Queen of Dreams* Rakhi and her customers were attacked by the native people called ‘patriots’ in the Kurma shop.

Branded as terrorists for keeping the shop open they are thrown into a nightmare where they start to question their identity. Obscene words are hurled at them,

Looked in the mirror lately? One of them spits. You ain’t no American! Its fuckers like you who planned this attack on the innocent people of this country. Time someone taught you faggots a lesson (Divakarui, QD 267).

### **“But if I wasn’t American then what was I?”**

Ruminating over these words Rakhi reflects “But if I wasn’t American then what was I?” (271). All the built in feeling of being American is lost on that day of great loss to many people as they realize that,

And people like us seeing ourselves darkly through the eyes of stranger who lost a sense of belonging (Divakaruni, QD 272).

Rakhi, thus suffers from multiple stresses and is forced to construct a gender identity where she has to locate herself.

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Though born in America, America does not offer her the passport of being an American. By adopting American ways, Rakhi moves towards success and stability in life, although temporarily she suffers a setback due to doubts about her sense of belonging and identity.

Her mother's writing and her father's stories, as well as the band's cosmopolitan music and the Indian-American paintings provide Rakhi with alternative ways of self-definition. It is therefore through these meaningful exchanges with others that she realizes that there is more than one legitimate way to be ethnic or Indian American.

### **A Tale of Self-discovery**

Thus, Chitra Banerjee's sixth novel *Queen of Dreams* depicts a pleasant typical tale of self-discovery which is spiked with elements of mystery, suspense and supernatural elements.

### **Identity Crisis in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name Sake***

Jhumpa Lahiri's debut novel *The Name Sake* explores the themes of expatriate painful experiences and cultural dilemmas of the first and second generation Indian immigrants. Loneliness is one of the burning problems of the expatriate community in the nation of their choice. In this novel *The Name Sake*, the Bengali Indian couple Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli experience this issue in plenty on landing in Cambridge or Massachusetts; of the two, it's the wife who undergoes this trauma more than the husband.

In America, Ashima cannot imagine giving birth to a child in the hospital without being surrounded and cared by her mother, grandmother or aunt. Lying in the hospital, she wonders, "If she is the only Indian person in the hospital..." (3). She feels lonely. Most of the time, she remains lost in the memories of Calcutta, her home town, thinking of the activities going there by just to get rid of American culture.

Having obtained a Ph.D. in Boston, Ashoke has been researching in the field of fiber optics. Lahiri portrays the emotions of Ashima and Gogol Ganguly. Gogol is the first born in Ashoke's family. After the birth of her son Gogol, she longs to go back to Calcutta and raise her child there in the company of the caring and loving family members but decides to stay back for

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Ashoke's Sake. It takes at least two years for Ashima to cope up with the American culture. Though Ashoke had been there for years, he is totally ignorant about American norms and rules applied for a newly born child. Unlike in India, a newly born child needs a name to be given in the hospital. This compels Ashoke to name his son, Gogol, the name of the famous Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. Ashoke's miraculous escape in an Indian train crash is credited to a bulky copy of a Nikolai Gogol novel so that the parents decide that Gogol is the perfect name for their first born boy; not knowing the consequences that their son is going to face later in life and eventually leading up to his identity crisis.

### **Training in Bengali Language and Culture – Preserving the Home Culture**

Ashima, first generation immigrant, trains Gogol in Bengali language, literature and exposes him to Bengali customs, rites, beliefs, food tastes, habits and mannerisms. Like immigrants of other communities Ashima and Ashoke too make their circle of Bengali acquaintances, get known through one another. These Bengali families gather together on different occasions like the rice and name ceremonies of their children, their birthdays, marriages, deaths and Bengali festivals like Navratras and Poojas. They celebrate these as per Bengali customs, wearing their best traditional attires, trying to preserve their culture in a new land.

While making efforts to preserve their “home culture” in their new homes, the first generation immigrants train their children in the Bengali language they also groom them to cope with the way of life in America. Ashima teaches Gogol,

to memorize a four-line children's poem by Tagore, and the names of the deities adorning the ten-headed Durga during puja (**Lahiri, TNS 54**).

At the same time, being a progressive mother she also makes Gogol,

“watch Sesame street and The Electric Company, the English programs on TV in order to keep up with the English, he uses at nursery School” (54).

### **Observing Contrasting Cultural Practices**

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Lahiri shows the very contrasting cultural practices of the two different countries through the problems faced by Ashoke and Ashima. Initially Ashoke does not like the celebration of Christmas and Thanks giving, but as Gogol recalls, “it was for him, for Sonia, and that his parents had gone to the trouble of learning these customs” (Lahiri TNS 286).

### **A Second Generation Attitude**

Gogol, like a typical second generation Indian-American makes a conscious effort to be different from his parents. He wants to live in a world free from the Bengali culture, from the traditions that tie him down to a country and culture that he does not know. He experiences a cultural dilemma on numerous occasions during his life. He experiences the feeling of in-betweenness and belonging to no one nation quite intensely throughout his life. As Gogol grows up, his identity crisis begins soon when the school principal finds his name very awkward and strange to pronounce. Exploring what goes on in Gogol’s mind Lahiri says,

He hates that his name is both obscured that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but all things Russian. He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second (Lahiri TNS 176).

Gogol has strong need to assimilate, amalgamate and be one of them in America. He does not want to be known as an outsider. He feels that he is an American and he wants to distance himself from everything which is Indian or Bengali. He has seen throughout his life how the natives treat his parents with distrust and disdain. The parents are humiliated and segregated by the hosts. Gogol wants to avoid such circumstances in his own life and to achieve a sense of belongingness. He is ready to disown what is his own and assimilate into a culture that he wants to make his own.

### **Solving the Identity Problem**

Gogol tries to solve his identity problem by becoming Nikhil once he is going to join the University. The new identity gives him a sense of freedom and he is able to shed his earlier

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inhibitions. Changing his name is like a rite of passage to adulthood for Gogol. Gogol like a typical American dates with one girl after the other and Sonia Ganguli dates with an American. When he becomes friendly with Ruth and Maxine he starts dating with them and Gogol enjoys premarital sex with Ruth. The freedom of premarital sex seems quite acceptable to American parents, who would come as blasphemy to his own parents. Sonia and Gogol can understand each other and share their confidence of having a girl friend or a boy friend with each other but cannot share it with their parents. This is not due to a generational gap alone but partly due to a cultural gap as well. Ashima is terribly upset at seeing her children becoming cultural orphans in the US. She has never imagined that this would happen to her children.

### **Dating**

Dating has been a way of life to the children in America until their marriage and for many it continues even after the marriage. Americanized Indian children and their American counterparts are not at all in a hurry to marry and settle down. As premarital sex is a socially permitted necessary evil, there is no urgency in children to settle down. In the novel *The Name Sake* Gogol, even though he is approaching thirty, there is in him no symptom of settling down in marriage.

### **Heart-to-Heart Chat between Father and Son - Revelation**

In India, parents, especially the fathers share some important secrets of their life with their children especially the first born male children just before their impending death. This especially happens whenever parents have a premonition of their impending end. It happens in the life of Ashoke and Gogol too. The heart – to – heart chat that ensues throws more light why Gogol was christened Nikolai Gogol, after the Russian short story writer. Ashoke's grandfather had presented a hard bound collection of short stories by Nickolai Gogol to Ashoke.

Ashoke recalls the train accident that took place 209 kilometers from Howrah in October 1961. He tells Gogol about the night that had nearly taken his life, and the book that had saved him. Gogol listens and stunned by his father's profile. Lahiri narrates the mood of Gogol,

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Though there are only inches between them, for an instant his father is a stranger, a man who has kept a secret, has survived a tragedy; a man whose past he does not fully know. A man who is vulnerable, who has suffered in an inconceivable way. He imagines his father, in his twenties as Gogol is now, sitting on a train as Gogol had just been reading a story, and then suddenly nearly killed. He struggles to picture the west Bengal countryside he has seen on only a few occasions, his father's mangled body, among hundreds of dead ones, being carried on a stretcher, past a twisted length of maroon compartments. Against instinct he tries to imagine life without his father, a world in which his father does not exist (Lahiri, TNS 123).

When the train accident had occurred it was two-thirty in the morning and everybody was deep asleep except Ashoke who was still reading, rather re-reading the last story of the book, "The overcoat". If he had not been reading Nikolai Gogol at that time, he would have been killed. Ashoke had been waiting for the right moment to reveal this secret to his son. Gogol now knows why his father is limping and asks his father why he had not told him all those years. Ashoke simply says, "I didn't want to upset you" (Lahiri, TNS 123).

### **Marriage within Ethnic Group – Separation**

After the death of Gogol's father, Gogol ends the relationship between him and Maxine and accepts his mother's words that his marriage with Moushumi another Bengali immigrant girl. Gogol and Moushumi live for a year as husband and wife and as they move into the second year of their married life, they lose interest in each other. Their marriage does not work for their degrees of assimilation vary and their expectations of each other vary. When Moushumi is back with her friend Astrid and Donald, Nikhil begins to notice a change. She starts drifting from him using her studies as an excuse.

The final straw comes when she goes to Paris for a Paper presentation; she meets her former friend and goes to bed with him. Gogol comes to know the relationship between Moushumi and Dimitri, he feels chill of her secrecy numbing him. Lahiri describes it,

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like a poison spreading quickly through his veins. He cannot blame her much, for they had both acted on the same impulse (Lahiri, TNS284).

Without much argument they both agree to divorce. After the formal divorce, she moves to Paris. Gogol is thus labeled as a divorcee.

### **Dejection Caused by Bi-cultural Identity –Another ABCD**

Ashima on seeing her son, feels may be Gogol would have been better off with someone other than Moushumi. Gogol, Ashima's Son, having experienced many emotional setbacks because of his 'bicultural' identity is towards the end dejected, distressed, displaced and lonely. He does not know what to do after his father's death, his wife's desertion and his mother's impending departure to India. His identity as Indian is questionable. But his desires to settle a home, have a family, and a son and rise professionally in other countries hint his quest for the new 'route' which will dawn on him after his reflections in the company of the stories by his namesake, Nikolai Gogol-gifted to him by his father. For the time being there is just emptiness in him and this emptiness upsets him. No doubt, he is yet another ABCD. (American-born Confused Deshis).

### **Perplexing and Difficult Journey**

Thus, Lahiri brings out the perplexing and difficult journey an emigrant family makes in order to have a better life in a land, which offers numerous opportunities to anyone willing to try. The novel, *The Name Sake* offers a glimpse into the harsh realities that immigrants have to face while they try to incorporate into the culture of a foreign country, as well as not forgetting their own values and traditions.

### **Narrative Techniques**

This section is an attempt to analyze the techniques employed by diasporic writers Chitrabanerjee and Jhumpa Lahiri in their novels *Queen of Dreams* and *The Name Sake*.

### **Enigmatic and the Magical**

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*Queen of Dreams*, following the success of *The Mistress of spices*, unfolds its plot through the inexplicable, the enigmatic and the magical. *Queen of Dreams* travels along two story lines; the one of Mrs. Gupta, told through her dream journals and the other of her daughter Rakhi. The first is a more powerful story than the second. While the story of Mrs. Gupta centers on her relationship to herself, the story of Rakhi deals primarily with relationships with others- ex-husband, father and diseased mother.

*Queen of Dreams* opens with Mrs. Gupta's premonition of her own impending death, facilitated by a vision of a snake. Mrs. Gupta's story literally gives credence to the magical, the mysterious and the supernatural. It argues that in portraying this dream reader, Divakaruni offers two valuable things. First, she offers a glance at a prehistoric time and a space where women's transforming powers of healing, oracles, fertility, mediation, and destruction were exercised daily without question. Secondly, she offers her reader a critical energy to read the story against the long history of masculine delegitimation of such feminine powers and knowledge that have now been labeled witchcraft, superstition and primitivism.

### **Hindu Symbolism**

Divakaruni's choice of snake as a messenger evokes the snake symbol in Hindu tradition. In *Queen of Dreams* the snake is the symbol of the feminine divine. For example, the novel's very first line is, "Last night the snake came to me" (**Divakaruni, QD 1**) and the snake is immediately associated with the caves where women dream-readers live. Another instance of the Snake's symbolic connection with female deities is achieved through Rakhi. After 9/11, when her life has become ashes, Rakhi receives four paintings from an unknown sender that finally inspire her to resume her life as an artist. One of these paintings depicts

A many-armed purple being with a moonlike face floats above a nest of serpents. Is he (she? it?) a god or a human? (**Divakaruni, QD 244**).

This image is undoubtedly that of Mother Durga, who is often portrayed with ten arms, a quarter-moon on her forehead and a meditative smile. Divakaruni portrays Goddess Durga with a

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nest of Snakes which floats above her instead of riding a tiger or a lion. Here Divakaruni evokes the living tradition of India and its relationship to the diasporic Hindu community in the U.S.

### **Man in White - No name, No history and No Voice**

The biggest puzzle in this novel is the man in white who has no name, no history and no voice. His first appearance signals mystery. Rakhi notices two surprising things on the morning when she finds this man in the eucalyptus grove practicing Taichi.

The second time, Rakhi sees the man in the grove, it is raining again and the man seems to have appeared and disappeared like magic. Inspired by this experience, Rakhi does her best work in painting the presence/absence of the man practicing Tai chi in the eucalyptus grove. The mysterious man purchases this painting from the gallery where Rakhi has a show, and the gallery manager takes down his name as Emmett Mayerd. Only much later does Rakhi realize that his identity is “Dream Time”, “Emit Maerd” spelled backward. **(Divakaruni QD 156-157).**

This is the being who, as a Snake, prophecies Mrs.Gupta’s death; who, as a Tai chi master, instructs Rakhi to surrender herself to forces of nature; who as policeman, protects Rakhi and her friends from the skinheads after 9/11; and who, as a driver of a black sedan, leads Mrs. Gupta to her death.

Chitra Banerjee uses the words like, Ice-Cream sellers’ song “pista kulfi chahiye, pista kulfi” **(QD 150)** “Cha”**(QD 159)**, “pakoras” **(QD 160)** “Chaer dokhan” **(QD 165)**, “gawjas”, “rasogolla syrup” **(Q.D.185)**, “Brihat Swapna Sarita” **(QD 52)**, “beta”,**(QD 188)** “beti”**(QD 188)**, “Chhaiya Chhaiya” **(QD 304)**, etc.

### **Crisscrossing the Boundaries of Prose, Prose and Lyricism**

Crisscrossing the boundaries of prose and poetry Divakaruni adds lyricism to the prose which enhances the style of the narrative.

### **Narrative Techniques Employed by Jhumpa Lahiri**

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In this section I discuss the narrative techniques employed by Jhumpa Lahiri in her select novel. Lahiri used her own craft, technique, style, format and structure. Her narrative voice is elegant, bitter sweet and gentle. Her novel talks of Indian culture, traditions, including food and festival, clothes and customs. In *The Name Sake*, Ashima, Gogol's mother practices Indian cultural values at her new home in Boston.

### **Food as Metaphor**

Lahiri emphatically utilizes "food" as a metaphor for differentiating the experiences of first and second generation immigrants having divided identities and loyalties. On the very onset of the novel, the pregnant and lonely Ashima is shown making a spicy Indian Snack- 'Jhalmuri' using American ingredients . Lahiri in her own words,

Rice crispies and planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chili pepper, wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix (**Lahiri, TNS 1**).

The absence of "mustard oil" reminds Ashima of her Calcutta where it was easy to find it.

### **Garments**

Ashima also wears Indian dress, the sari which is a key example of the maintenance of cultural identity. She clings to her six-meter dress until the end, challenging even the coldest temperature of Massachusetts. The bindi, that usually adorns the forehead of an Indian married woman, is another cultural possession that Ashima adheres to daily.

### **Contrasting Indian and American Traditions**

Lahiri shows the cultural tradition of India in a contrasted style to the American tradition. For example, the readers can find out in the opening chapter that Ashima doesn't call her husband, Ashoke by his name. This cultural tradition is contrasted to the American tradition where they publicly show affection to one another.

### **Arranged Marriage**

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Ashima and Ashoke's marriage was an arranged marriage and it shows how in the Bengali custom they marry first and then learn to belong to each other. The technique of contrast and comparison has been used again here to show the differences between the Bengali custom and the American custom. It is an American tradition to belong to one another first, and then marry after time. This cultural tradition of arranged marriages is a barrier preventing Ashima from belonging and therefore is causing her to feel as if she doesn't belong in society?

### **Indian Names**

In Lahiri's novel, Indian names, the Indian identity of her characters, become potent symbols and tools to highlight the immigrant identity. Names are closely linked to identity and can help or hinder a sense of belonging. But in Gogol's circumstance he struggles to fit both in the American society and his Bengali home as he feels his name does not belong to either culture.

Gogol's name is also another symbol that speaks of Ashoke's saved life and the life that he himself could give. The book **The Overcoat** written by Nikolai Gogol symbolized Ashoke's saved life. If it wasn't for the book page in Ashoke's hand acting like a flag, his crumpled body would have been left behind. Lahiri's words,

Warmth spreads from the back of Gogol's neck to his cheeks and ears. Each time the name is uttered, he quietly winces (**Lahiri, TNS 91**).

Thus, the skilled employments of narrative techniques by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri in their novels guide the readers through the lives of immigrant Bengali families in U.S.

The next section will sum up the research findings.

### **To Conclude**

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This paper presented a study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Queen of Dreams* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name Sake* and investigated the theme of Identity Crisis in both the novels.

The basic problems of diasporic writings are the feeling of dislocation without roots. The diaspora feels homelessness alienated in the foreign land. Dispersal of roots involved pain, alienation, identity crisis and other feelings towards the acculturated ones.

When a person visits the unknown land, he is an outsider in a no man's land and there he has to struggle a lot for his survival, conquering these new feelings of nostalgia. He craves out a new territory and threads himself totally with the lure of the west. He recreates himself into a new personality and forms emotional ties with the place he lives in. The living 'in-between' condition is very painful and marginalizing for the diaspora people. They face cultural dilemma and stand bewildered and confused. In the following generations these confusions, problems and yearnings become less intense as they get influenced by the culture of their host country and also adapt themselves to it.

This is true in the case of both Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name Sake*. Both the novels explore the ideas of isolation and identity, not only personal but also cultural. The characters in both the works frequently encounter crisis of identity, which is tied to inability to reconcile the American identity with their Indian identity.

In the novel *Queen of Dreams*, Rakhi, the off spring of immigrants, is born to the hyphenated existence - Asian American. Before Rakhi discovers the dream journals of her mother, she has been creating a sense of 'homeland' through photos of India and other images available through globalized networks of communication. The daughter has never been to India but is determined to identify her "roots" so that she understands her identity as an Asian American.

Rakhi has forgotten her hyphenated identity and thinks of herself as American - an inevitable lot of the second generation "diasporics". Rakhi does not understand why Java café

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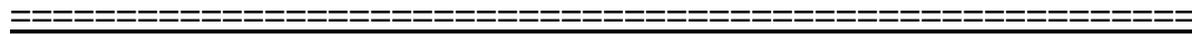
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would put up the American flag or she would be advised to close shop early. On the one side, the people who have formed an imagined community in her Kurma House seek a sense of belonging in her café but at the same time, they come outfitted in western gear and feel insecure. At the end of the novel Rakhi and her friends and their families go through the harrowing experience with the racial riots in the aftermath of 9/11. Rakhi observes how she has suddenly become an outsider in a land that she was born and brought up in.

Like Rakhi in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*, Gogol, the central character in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name Sake* struggles hard to find his roots with his immigrant parents while adapting to American society in different contexts.

Gogol despises his name and grows up as American as he can while his parents cling to their Bengali past while living what appears to be a typical American suburban life style. For Gogol reconciling his ethnic background with American culture presents a crisis of identity. The issue of naming is a pervasive theme throughout the novel. Gogol struggles first with his unusual name and later with the traditions that which his parents insist on upholding that embarrass Gogol in front of his American friends. Gogol towards the end accepts his identity as it is two names, two cultures, half-Indian and half-American. He realizes that he cannot escape from his name and from his hyphenated identity. Towards the end he recognizes that being an immigrant, his fractured self is his only reality. He accepts that he neither changes his destiny nor his name.

Thus, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name Sake* confess the problems of people who have migrated to America and their quest for their identification in their migrated land.



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