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Narratives of Displacement: Analysing the Themes of Identity and Belonging in Contemporary Diasporic Literature with reference to *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract:

The study underscores the theme of the search for identity and belonging in *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. *The Namesake* chronicles the life of Gogol, whose Indian identity oscillates, and he navigates the cultural gulf between Indian heritage and American rearing. The parents, Ashoke and Ashima, grapple with the feeling of displacement while attempting to inculcate cultural continuity in their child. *The Inheritance of Loss* examines characters like Sai's lives caught between the fragments of colonialism and the undercurrents of globalisation. She is an orphaned Indian girl with her Anglophile grandfather, and Biju is an immigrant in the United States. They are both facing estrangement in various ways. Through the cultural dislocation, colonial legacies and the quest for identity, the study reveals the characters' journey towards self-discovery and illuminates the ways in which diasporic literature communicates the complexities of displacement, offering a richer understanding of human standing in a globalised world.

Keywords: Belonging, Displacement, Diasporic Literature, Identity, Immigrant.

Introduction

Diaspora is a Greek lexicon that refers to a group of peoples' dispersion from their native land to some other parts of the world. The thinning out of people can be due to various factors, such as economic upliftment due to developmental activities by governance and political hassles.

While residing in another region, they form communities on the base of culture, which assists in developing a feeling of belongingness and security. It is a wide-ranging term that is something more than migration. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin define in the book *Post Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* defines diaspora as "The voluntarily or forcible movement of people[s] from their homelands into new regions" (Ashcroft et al. 66). According to them the root cause of diasporic movement was colonialism which involved dispersion and settlement of masses of Europeans either temporary or permanent, over the world.

The authors who migrated or emigrated are best at describing diasporic experiences in their works. The state of uncertainty after leaving the ancestral land, adjustment to a new culture, and memories of the root develop a hyphenated experience. On the question of what distinguishes diaspora literature from other literature, the answer lies in the stories that highlight cross-cultural and cross-national themes that are poignant where the feelings of different social status, experience of multiculturalism, hybridity, and the aesthetics of diverse topographical and cultural surroundings are dominant. According to sociologists, diaspora is the act of assimilation of culture, which is analogous to socialisation. The widespread use of 'diaspora' principally refers to Jewish dispersal; however, the meaning of the term has increasingly widened. It is not merely a synonym of migration but has an open-ended meaning. Kevin Kenny gives powerful insight into the concept of diaspora and explains it as an idea that various types of migration create. It produces distortion depending on the purpose and use of the term. Diaspora studies have gained popularity, though the limitation of understanding the cultural contribution persists. The term diaspora envelops a huge range of populations in which the migrants are from various parts of the world. The term has varied meanings, ranging from Jewish classical Diaspora following Babylonian captivity to the modern-day diaspora that comprises Asian Diaspora, African Diaspora, Indian Diaspora and others.

The established fact is that the radical shift has given birth to different kinds of diasporas. Besides, diasporas identify themselves in terms of political and economic equations. Indian diaspora is perceived to be in three phases. The first phase is from India's east and west coasts of Indian monarchs and traders. They tried to establish contacts with the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Eastern and Northern America. Indian diaspora of the mediaeval period was associated with trade, which is documented in history and mentioned in Indian novels by Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh in the book *Moor's Last Sigh* and *Antique Land*, respectively. The nineteenth century was the second phase, during which the emigration

population included traders and white-collar workers from India to British, French, and Dutch colonies.

This phase claims a scholarly depiction of the Indian diaspora, and the implication of colonialism is believed to be through the process of migration. In the third phase of the Indian diaspora, researchers found that emigration from India to oil-rich industrial countries forms an organic connection with the colonial diaspora. Diasporic writing deals with alienation, displacement, the disintegration of cultures, existential rootlessness, cultural identity, and multiculturalism. The two other distinct phases of Indian diaspora writing are the colonial and post-colonial. Additionally, generational distinctions were classified as first-generation and second-generation diaspora writers. The categorisation is based on differential narratives. It appears the difference is in accordance with the approach they feel to their homeland, the avenue in which the characters mature and narrate their diasporic tale with varied experiences.

The travels and the narrative of the Indian diaspora are presented in divided categories based on the movements of people that appear in Indian Diaspora Literature. For example, the Jewish diaspora was formed by the leaving of people, whereas the Indian diaspora was formed by spreading its people. Indentured migration occurred from 1830 to 1917 in places like South Africa, Malaysia, Trinidad and Fiji, Surinam, and many other locations. A migration wave of IT technocrats occurred in big cities such as the UK, US, Australia, and Canada during the 1960s to 1980s. These waves of migrations produced a group of writers who penned down the struggles and successes that witnessed the period. The diaspora beside colonial and post-colonial classification is also divided into two generations of migrant writers. Some were from first-generation migrant writers, whereas some were from second-generation migrant writers. The first generation migrated voluntarily or involuntarily. They depicted the plight of suffering and displacement.

The writers of the second generation either were born and brought up in host countries or migrated for the improvement of social echelons and economic conditions. The later writers were hedged between two cultural constructs and met with the experience of rootlessness and quest for identity that was reflected in some of their fictional and non-fictional writings. The difference between the two generations of diaspora writers implies that the first generation depicted memory and nostalgia, whereas the latter looked to the homeland for inspiration in her ideas and took advantage to use them in their literary works. This study includes the works

of diasporic writers Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri and the novels *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The Namesake*, respectively that mention the migration of the characters for varied reasons, which was either their choice or forced for better living.

Discussion and Findings

Kiran Desai's Booker Prize-winning novel *The Inheritance of Loss* is geographically divided between two countries, India and America, and the foothills of the Himalayas occupy the narration wherein teenage Sai lives with her grandfather, the retired Judge and a cook and his son Biju. The novels talk of divisions -about continent, religion, and nationality. Indian diaspora in the novel is prominent, with Sai receiving a British education. Sai is at a loss of identity and thus hangs between her native land and the land where she is growing up after leaving India at eight years of age. The characters in the novel are migrants from India who live with the identity of second-class citizens. The Judge, Sai's grandfather, left home and studied in Cambridge, but he was treated as an outcast; his skin colour was odd to him, and the tongue he spoke was different and strange. The characters in the novel form a diaspora, and one finds Biju, the cook's son, who is an immigrant and came to America in search of a better life. Biju struggles to comprehend the alien culture. He undergoes trauma for being a migrant.

The separation from their homeland and the dwelling of memories of their homeland are normal behaviours of migrants, and the narration in the novel strengthens the notion of diaspora, wherein the characters remember their native land and search for their identities in the strange land. Desai migrated to London, which raised the shaping of diasporic responsiveness. She arrests diasporic issues of her characters who navigate the national border of a country and form a diaspora. She encloses migration, multiculturalism, identity crisis, terrorism that caused violence, and diasporic issues in her coveted work. The novel describes the formation of the Indian Diaspora and the American diaspora in the subsequent chapters. Desai, through Biju's journey to the first world for a better life, leaves behind the poverty-stricken, unsatisfied life and is just alive in the third world. His dream world was America, where people moved to be rich. Desai describes his dreamland as “a country where people from everywhere journeyed to work” (Desai 22). According to Biju, Indians were welcomed there a lot. His enchanting dream to get a tourist visa was a proud moment, and he considers himself as civilised and deserving. This filled him with hope and aspiration for a better future, and his father advised him to stay long and earn money. Biju has a clear vision of his moving to

America and is aware of the threat to his dual identity in society and cultural barriers. It is a normal practice that to have a better start in life, one has to take risks, make adjustments, and accept whatever offer comes the way just to be familiar with the new place and then research a job of one's choice.

Though Biju was discontented with the kinds of jobs, the goal of becoming rich and having a secure life made him swallow all the dissatisfactions. With the responsibility to heighten his family's status and thereby the dream of money in the bank and fulfilment of other necessities, he had to hide the sufferings in the alien country instead of exaggerating the father's happiness, marvellous life and success. Biju creates a prestigious image among the neighbours in India and instigates a successful life in America. The state of confusion in both the world as Homi K Bhabha adds, "In that displace the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting"(Bhabha 13). The situation Biju faces is suffocating, and shifting from one job to another, sending false letters about his well-being, distressing him. The condition of immigrants made him anxious, and the news of unrest in India was even more worrisome to him, wherein in Darjeeling, the situation raised to this state: "They should kick the bastards back to Nepal" (Desai 228). Feeling alienated in the hostland fills him with gloom, and it incenses when his father's friend Nandu discourages his arrival in America in search of a job.

Biju's dream of a good life seems to be shattered. The story of the Himalayan town of Kalimpong surrounds the characters Jemubhai Patel Biju and Sai Mistry against a backdrop of diaspora. The novel explores the conflict of culture the characters go under. The author focuses on the emotions and characters in search of identity in the unknown land. Desai gives a detailed analysis of the difficulties the characters face in assimilating into the new culture. The diasporic consciousness is prominent in the novel with the loss of cultural conflicts, and it talks of a thrilling journey from a state in the Himalayas to a modern world, the United States. With basic emotions and the fight for survival, the characters try to find meaning in life, and Desai analyses their effort to accept Western habits with the East. The individuals in the novel are in a dream of a better life and earning money, security and good status, jerk in the pit and thus continue to struggle worthlessly. In the novel, Gyan points out Sai's crisis of cultural identity, and the cook admires the Indian culture but finds Western culture superior and proud of Biju, who shifts to New York and cooking Western food "that since his son was cooking English food, he had a

higher position than if he were cooking Indian (Desai 17)". On the contrary, the Judge experiences a change in behaviour with displacements. His stay in Cambridge during the 1940s with various events shapes a diasporic identity, and the racial prejudices develop a self-hatred. He finds everything peculiar in him when he compares his skin colour and accent and eventually develops a sense of inferiority.

The act of imitation is observed in the character and the state of otherness due to multiple displacements caused by a fear of loss of self-esteem. To fit in, the Judge adopts British culture and finds himself in a state of being between the two cultures. He attempted to qualify for the ICS entrance exam and was mocked by the examiners, showing how Indians were made feel low when they aspired to assimilate into colonial society. Another very important aspect Desai mentions is when the Judge meets his friend Bose in England; they share the exact status of the inadequacy of clothes, rooms, and other things. Similarly, they had the same cultural background, which created an assured bond between them, which indicates Desai's emphasis on imitating the behaviour of the dominant group to get social acceptance. The author prominently depicts the challenges Indians face in a foreign land that develops a sense of discomfort and lack of solidarity, which are instrumental in creating the feeling of an outsider. The author also discusses the prominence of shared cultural backgrounds, which are helpful in creating strengthened networks in unfamiliar environments.

The Name Sake by Jhumpa Lahiri is a diasporic novel that talks of authors of experience living abroad and writing about their native country. The story expresses the quest for identity through the complexities of dual cultures, reminiscences for their home country and the differences in their way of life in the host nation. The feeling of alienation, failing to acculturate, is prominent in the novel that categorises the work as diasporic. The feeling of dislocation is prominent in the characters of Ashima and Ashok, where Gogol is not in that state as he was not born in India. In the present globalised, multicultural world, diaspora studies and diasporic literature are emerging fields in literary and socio-cultural studies. The diasporic literature is influenced by the feeling of displacement and dislocation in foreign lands, and they feel alienated and suffer from existential crisis and mental trauma; failing in their attempt to acculturate themselves to the host culture and exile from home leads to complex identity.

The Namesake is a novel published in 2003 that tells the story of the Ganguli family. Immigrants from Kolkata share their experiences while living in the United States. Gogol is the central character, and his pet name is the source of his struggle with his identity as an

immigrant in America. The term diaspora typically refers to people's dispersion or moving from their homeland. In the novel *The Namesake*, the diaspora aspect is perceived through the Ganguli family's aspect as they navigate the challenges of immigrants, at the same time maintaining their Indian roots and also assimilating into American culture. Lahiri talks of Cultural identity, nostalgia and belonging, generational divide, language and identity, cultural traditions and rituals, and the search for authenticity. The characters undergo constant transcultural processes in the form of imitation, assimilation, and adaptation, and transformation is observed in the characters. The struggle for balance between Indian tradition and the American way of life is prominent, and Lahiri laid a common plight on diaspora communities. Somewhere, the Ganguli gradually lost the essence of old traditions to build a new world, a behaviour that was very common among migrants. TS Eliot, in the book *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, states

The colonisation problem arises from migration. When peoples migrated across Asia and Europe in pre-historic and early times, it was a whole tribe, or at least a wholly representative part of it, that moved together. Therefore, it was a total culture that moved. In modern times, emigrants come from countries that are already highly civilised. They came from countries where the development of social organisation was already complex. The people who migrated have never represented the whole of the culture of the country from which they came, or they have represented it in quite different proportions. They have transplanted themselves according to some social, religious, economic or political determination, or some peculiar mixture of these (qtd in Cresswell 33).

The clash of cultural identity is evident when Gogol wishes to change his name and admits daringly in the courtroom before the Judge that he hesitated to tell his parents that " I hate the name Gogol,...I've always hated it"(Lahiri 100). Gogol was confused by his name, and it was an element of embarrassment as he did not even have an Indian name but a Russian, and he lived in America. Gogol's official change of name, he observed, is a huge transformational process that indicates growth. He knew the new name would continue as a separate identity, and in this process, he began dating Ruth. He was confident that, in due course, people would identify him as Gogol. On this note, Moushumi falls in love with Nikhil and befriends Gogol. Ashoke and Ashima are an Indian couple who migrated to the USA, and the husband chooses America as their place of work. Lahiri depicts the generational divide by Gogol's attitude and

outlook towards the meaning of life. The children of the couple Gogol and Sonia were born in America and were drawn towards the culture wherein they do not like their father's Ashoke home town, India, as they found the environment uncomfortable. They find no closeness as their parents do in their homeland: "Gogol and Sonia know these people but they do not feel close to them as their parents do"(Lahiri 81).

The meaning of migration changes for the two generations and, similarly, the process of identity. The former generation forms a group of other immigrants to facilitate group identity, but the latter finds identity by imitating the culture of the new land. The essential strategies of survival by forming a group are mismatched, indicating a generational gulf. The long vacation while coming to India for eight months was a homecoming for the parents, but for the children, it was exile as they lacked adjustment to a new environment and changed surroundings. Living without Gogol's room was unimaginable to him. Lahiri showcases the sense of belonging through Ashima, who is nostalgic in nature and finds it hard to adjust to the American atmosphere. She is a typical Bengali woman who had to migrate, but it disturbs her, and, in due course of time, accepts and welcomes life in an unknown land. Ashima is tremendous in preserving her culture but could not prevent her from getting wet while walking in a haze. The influence of the American lifestyle has its own force, but Ashima was pure Indian at heart and thus took extra care in the upbringing of her children. She balances the two cultures and helps her children remain at their roots as responsible and ideal mothers. Ashima's inner struggle to be in her culture, as Lahiri mentions, in many instances. The most prominent are two names of her son, as Bengalis are, in practice, a pet name (*dak naam*), and the other is the name for official use that is a good name (*bhalo naam*). Ashima though tried to balance the two cultures, but America could never be her home, neither was she in a state to claim India as her home. Lahiri depicts Ashima's predicament after her husband Ashoke's death. While moving to India, Ashima feels

overwhelmed by the thought of the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and is now in its way foreign. For thirty three years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she's worked. She will miss throwing parties, she will miss living with her daughter...she will miss the Opportunity to drive...she will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband (Lahiri 278-279).

The narrative displays insecurity among the characters. Ashima's arranged marriage to Ashoke and immigration to the United States with her husband developed insecurity, and the journey from India to the United States brought difficulties. Ashima had to adjust to the new culture, which the novel chronicles and her unease in adapting to the new social life is illustrated by Lahiri with keen details. The cultural and social dislocation Ashima encountered was the prime cause of unease in the new land, the United States. The couple experiences the emotional challenges of seclusion from home, their longing for home and adapting to the new societal norms and culture in the States. Lahiri effectively portrays the protagonists' challenges to assimilate into the new social conventions, traditions and culture that entirely diverge from that of India. The novel reflects how the experience of immigration impacts the senses and helps grow complexities within familial relationships besides the quest for a sense of belonging. In the gradual process of transformation and adaptation, Ashima finds herself in a new phase of life where the protagonist's initial sentiments and self-doubt play a crucial role in moulding her character's growth, amplifying the profound emotional tone of Lahiri's work.

The author proficiently arrests the sensation of insecurity inside the characters, wherein she often paints the picture of struggle along with the feeling of leaving home, thus bringing out the diasporic experience. The battle with cultural alienation is the most frequent part of her analysis. Insecurity among the characters and the struggle with cultural isolation is adeptly captured and is frequently depicted in the book. Leaving India and relocating to the United States, the characters encounter a different array of traditions, cultural standards, and customs. The reality of the cultural divide prompts a sentiment of incomplete assimilation in both environments, hence engendering a feeling of vulnerability. Gogol Ganguli, a name derived from the renowned Russian writer, stimulates a sense of disconnection from Indianness. As a result, he faces the challenge of blending with the Indian cultural background and the American environment in which he is living now. The internal struggle the characters had to handle is more extensive in comparison to the identity that several immigrants encounter to steer the delicate balance between their inherited heritage and the culture they adopted after exile from their homeland. The elder generation faced linguistic challenges, as Ashima and Ashoke give instances of misinterpretation and feelings of detachment. The language barrier further heightens the sense of fear in the unfamiliar environment. The characters are always looking for a place to call home. Lahiri inspects the desire of individuals to search for a haven and to experience feelings of comfort, whether in a relationship or through cultural integration or social acceptance.

Conclusion

The writers Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri highlight the characters who lived with a hyphenated identity in the host country, and the thought of coming back to their motherland stopped them because they fear to suffer a state of loss of identity. The novels bring out insightful views on the challenges the diasporic individual faces, highlighting the changing aspects of cultural shift and the pursuit of a sense of belonging. The novels examine the means by which an individual's identity is influenced by the characters Biju and Gogol illustrate as a case study. The individuals encountered challenges and successes, aiding a poignant reminder of the human desire for self-discovery and connection to one's heritage. The challenges, experiences and achievements focus on fundamental human aspiration for self-examination and connection to one's roots. The novel puts forth conflict in the assimilation process and the essentiality of preserving cultural heritage, thus shedding light on the intricate balance individuals must maintain between the past and their present. The stories also shed light on the need for understanding and empathy in bridging cultural gaps. Desai and Lahiri depict characters struggling to balance two very different cultural worlds. These authors encourage readers to consider and assess how they define identity and what it means to belong through their creative works.

The fictional works *The Namesake* and *The Inheritance of Loss* emphasise the importance of open and productive discussions to create an inclusive environment and promote a deeper understanding of the intricacies associated with cultural diversity. The novels serve as impactful literary vehicles that examine the human condition in a diasporic environment. These literary works cultivate a deep connection with readers that transcends cultural boundaries by delving into the complexity of self-development and the pursuit of a sense of inclusion. The commonality of these literary works lies in the narration that relates to nostalgia, alienation, discrimination, racism, and different cultural values that are contrasted with homeland. The objective of forming an identity in the alien land is another primary concern of these two works. Through analysing these stories, we can gain insight into how diversity adds value to the fabric of human existence and the importance of recognising our interconnectedness in the larger global context.

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