

Diasporic Consciousness: A Conceptual Framework in The Namesake and Jasmine

Smriti rani^{1*}, Shiv Kumar Yadav²

^{1*}Researcher, Patliputra university. Email- smritirani488@gmail.com

²Professor, College of commerce, arts and science, Patliputra University.

Citation: Smriti rani, et.al (2025). Diasporic Consciousness: A Conceptual Framework in The Namesake and Jasmine, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 31(1) 810-814
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v31i1.10504

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Diaspora studies is one of the most ancient and also newest form of studies. It is also the central term in postcolonial literary studies, especially in understanding the work of south Asian writers. In postcolonial literature, the shift in "diaspora" from a narrowly religious category to an expansive sociocultural paradigm is particularly relevant. Mukherjee's fiction—most significantly <i>Jasmine</i>—demonstrates a more radical, transformatory vision of diaspora. Her protagonists are in transit, escaping repressive pasts and finding new beginnings in unfamiliar cultural landscapes. The protagonist <i>Jasmine</i> assumes multiple personas as she crosses continents and states, reflecting the transformatory transformation of diaspora from fixed to fluid, performative existence. Lahiri's prose, on the other hand, in <i>The Namesake</i>, addresses the quieter, more reflective aftermath of displacement. Her protagonists grapple with inherited traditions, intergenerational conflict, and a strong need for cultural anchorages. KEYWORDS: Diaspora consciousness, Post colonial literature, Kaleidoscopic reinvention, Voluntary transnationalism.

Main Body

Diasporic consciousness is a central term in postcolonial literary studies, especially in understanding the work of South Asian writers who write about transnational migration, identity, and cultural displacement. "Diaspora" is derived from the Greek *diaspeirein*, which means "to scatter," and originally was used to describe the dispersal of Jews from their homeland. Nowadays, in contemporary contexts, it has become an umbrella term for various types of migration—forced, voluntary, economic, and educational—that yield complex emotional and cultural experiences (Ambrose and Lourdasamy 356). Diaspora, in literary theory, is not physical displacement; it is a psychological state characterized by fragmentation of identity, homesickness for the homelands, and negotiation of belonging in foreign contexts. The state is not transitory but sustained, as migrants and their descendants move back and forth repeatedly between cultural poles. Indian English writing, and particularly post-1965, offers rich soil for such narratives due to massive migration in response to global labour demands and political turmoil. For diasporic individuals, "home" is a symbolic and mobile site—real and imagined. Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri are the most vocal in this respect. Their fiction engages the emotional and sociocultural disjuncture of migration at a deep level.

Bera argues diasporic writing is marked by "the aesthetic and emotional processing of estrangement, survival, and hybridity," a particular postcolonial sensibility (Diasporic Sublime 20). In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee tells the story of a protagonist who explores repeated reinvention along geographic and affective topographies, a dynamic and often agonized negotiation of identity. Lahiri, on the other hand, charts the more muted melancholy of the immigrant condition in *The Namesake*, with characters who occupy cultural in-betweenness and struggle with generational dissonance. Diasporic consciousness thus works not as a theme but as a narrative strategy in their work. It allows the negotiation of identity as fluid and contested, decided by memory and accommodation. Their characters are not just dislocated—remade, in constant flux across new cultural and affective topographies. Through their respective literary lenses, Mukherjee and Lahiri offer complex understandings of the psychological realities of diaspora, rendering diasporic consciousness a rich framework in the analysis of global Indian fiction.

Etymology and Evolution of the Term "Diaspora"

The term "diaspora" comes from the ancient Greek verb *diaspeirein*, literally "to scatter or disperse." Originally, the term was almost solely associated with the dispersal of the Jewish people following the Babylonian exile, where it had a theological significance—conveying a shared sense of loss, divine punishment, and yearning for a promised land (Ambrose and Lourdasamy 356). Over the centuries, this religiously originated term gradually acquired historical and political richness. The Jewish diaspora was its referent for centuries, but with world events like slavery, colonialism, and partition, the term started to broaden, encasing a wider range of experiences of displacement. The twentieth century, particularly after World War II and the decolonization of Asia and Africa, saw an exponential growth in human migration on geopolitical and economic grounds. This demographic phenomenon led scholars to rethink and widen the meaning of diaspora. Cultural theorists like William Safran and Robin Cohen were central to this widening, arguing that diaspora cannot be restricted to a single ethnic or religious group but thought through a set of identifying features common to displaced groups. These are a shared memory of the homeland, a collective identity maintained across generations, a sense of marginalization in the host country, and a persistent desire for eventual return, symbolic or real (Mishra 4). From the 1990s, diaspora was no longer thought of as an event of physical displacement but as a complex condition with emotional, psychological, and cultural undertones. Scholars began to study the diasporic condition as one of hybridity, liminality, and transnational affiliations. Diaspora, therefore, was a way of seeing how people and groups hold onto cultural identities in the face of new geographies and sociopolitical conditions. As Alfonso-Forero explains, the term evolved into "a framework for negotiating multiplicity, memory, and affiliation" in cultural studies and literary criticism (68). It is here in this interdisciplinarity that the term gained currency in postcolonial theory and identity politics.

In postcolonial literature, the shift in "diaspora" from a narrowly religious category to an expansive sociocultural paradigm is particularly relevant. It allows writers to negotiate concerns of alienation, hybridity, loss, nostalgia, and cultural reinvention. Diaspora literature is predisposed to foreground the affective concerns of memory and oblivion, tradition and modernity, and host and home lands. As Das explains, the diasporic writer becomes "a cultural translator who must bridge geographic distance and emotional detachment through narrative strategies" (29). Such a mobilization allows for an affluent cartography of displacement—not just exile, but the fertile soil for cultural synthesis and identity formation. For Indian English writers, particularly women such as Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, the diasporic paradigm is a useful lens through which they deconstruct migration as a lived, emotional, and gendered process. Both writers have thought the idea a lot in their works, marking not only the physical displacement, but also the interior geographies of the characters—the psychological and affective changes accompanying the act of displacement. As Bera writes, "diaspora is not only a plot device in their narratives; it is the underlying condition shaping their characters' identity crises and self-fashioning" (Diasporic Sublime 22).

Mukherjee's fiction—most significantly *Jasmine*—demonstrates a more radical, transformatory vision of diaspora. Her protagonists are in transit, escaping repressive pasts and finding new beginnings in unfamiliar cultural landscapes. The protagonist Jasmine assumes multiple personas as she crosses continents and states, reflecting the transformatory transformation of diaspora from fixed to fluid, performative existence. Lahiri's prose, on the other hand, in *The Namesake*, addresses the quieter, more reflective aftermath of displacement. Her protagonists grapple with inherited traditions, intergenerational conflict, and a strong need for cultural anchorages. Alfonso-Forero claims that Lahiri's diasporic fiction captures "the internal dissonance of second-generation immigrants, whose diasporic identities are shaped by both proximity and estrangement" (71). Both authors demonstrate how diaspora in the contemporary period is more than geographical displacement—it is a lived experience involving emotional, intellectual, and psychological readjustments. The home ideal is no longer fixed or single. It is constantly negotiated and reassembled through memory, language, ritual, and relation. According to Chatterjee, the diasporic subject inhabits a "third space," where identity is in continuous transformation, determined by conflicting cultural allegiances (44). This postcolonial redefinition of diaspora as process rather than event enables richer, more nuanced readings in literary studies. Thus, the transformatory movement of the term "diaspora" represents an epistemological sea change. From its narrow roots in exile and divine retribution, it has come to represent a complex cultural and theoretical tool. For Mukherjee and Lahiri, it is both context and catalyst—driving narratives that disrupt fixed notions of identity and nation. The contemporary literary concept of diaspora is not one of remembering home any longer; it is one of navigating multiplicity, exerting agency, and fashioning new modes of belonging in a globalizing world.

Diaspora as Experience, Location, and Condition

In cultural studies and postcolonial literature, the diaspora is commonly understood through an intertwined triad: experience, location, and condition. These are not exclusive categories but rather mutually supporting ones that collectively give a clear picture of migratory identities and their complexities. As experience, diaspora describes the lived condition of movement, adaptation, and survival; as location, it refers both to the material geography occupied by diasporic groups and the cultural symbolism within and attached to these places; and as condition, it defines the emotional, psychological, and ideological state of in-betweenness, fragmentation, and hybridity (Chatterjee 48). The experiential meaning of diaspora consists of both the material and non-material processes of transition through which migrants go. It encompasses border crossings, bureaucratic processes, racial and linguistic marginalization, and the affective cost of separation from homeland and kin.

These are not necessarily linear or solvable. Instead, they tend to become part of the person's ongoing identity. As Ambrose and Lourdusamy note, "the migrant's journey does not end with physical relocation; it continues through ongoing negotiations of selfhood in the new land" (361). In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, this ongoing negotiation is clearly seen in the lives of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli. Their experiences in Boston represent more than geographical shift; they embody the internal processes of acclimation and emotional endurance.

Ashima's distressfulness is seen in her attempts to recreate Indian traditions within a foreign cultural setting. Her everyday practices—such as sprinkling mustard seeds on her food, dressing in saris despite the snow, and lamenting the absence of support during childbirth from the extended family—testify to her underlying refusal of complete cultural assimilation (Akhter 3). These practices are more than simple nostalgic gestures; they are claims of identity in a space that constantly otherizes her. In so doing, diaspora as experience is a war zone for cultural memory and individual resilience. The second aspect, location, is also vital. Diasporic writing is also very much interested in the geography of identity politics. Cities such as New York, London, Toronto, and San Francisco are not merely multicultural settings; they are geographies imbued with tension where syncretism and cultural conflicts happen. As Bera contends, such city spaces "function as both crucibles and crucifiers of identity—where cosmopolitan promise is mixed with structural exclusion" (*Diasporic Sublime* 38). Boston and New York in *The Namesake* are representational sites where Gogol's American upbringing continually confronts him with his Bengali background. His alienation from Indian traditions and resultant unease with white American mores are manifestations of diasporic location's ambivalence.

For Ashima and Ashoke, their apartment becomes a cultural capsule—a place where Indian rituals exist intact in the midst of American consumerism. Ashima's effort to replicate her new surroundings in what she remembers Calcutta to be reflects the malleability of space in diasporic consciousness. As Das points out, "location in diaspora is not just a place to live; it is a terrain to contest, redefine, and personalize" (31). Therefore, the idea of space is then psychologically nuanced, supporting both the pain of displacement and the aspiration of cultural continuity.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* presents a radically alternative, but no less powerful, examination of diaspora's spatial and experiential dimensions. Jasmine's travels through America—from Florida to Iowa to New York—are the mirror reflection of her developing identities. In each place, there is required a new identity: Jyoti turns into Jasmine, then becomes Jase, then Jane. These are not circumstantial changes but intricately linked to her reaction to trauma, race, and gender violence. Her travels from the countryside of Punjab to the city of the United States are not represented as linear forward motion but rather as kaleidoscopic reinvention, fuelled by breakdown and redrafting. According to Deshmukh, "Jasmine does not passively suffer her displacement; she redefines it as a series of thresholds through which she reclaims agency" (56). Notably, Jasmine also complicates the concept of place by illustrating how American spaces—beyond their bill of freedom—can be infested with risk, racism, and misogyny. Her transformation is not brought about by acceptance but by exigency. Every city she travels through compels her to learn new cultural codes, survival strategies, and affective landscapes. Unlike Ashima, who builds familiarity through continuity, Jasmine endures through transformation. As Bera points out, this "survivalist elasticity defines the postcolonial diasporic subject—not as a stable category but as a mutable figure adapting to shifting geographies" (*Diasporic Sublime* 45).

The third and most intangible dimension of diaspora is condition—the psychological and emotional states brought about by the migrant experience. These are feelings of alienation, cultural schizophrenia, generational conflict, and identity fragmentation. The diasporic condition is one of perpetual negotiation between belonging and estrangement. Chatterjee describes this as "a paradoxical state where the subject is simultaneously rooted in memory and suspended in cultural liminality" (50). For Gogol, this diasporic condition is realized in his rejection and subsequent reclamation of his name. His final acceptance of his Bengali heritage after his father's death is more of a recognition of the complexity of his bicultural identity than a resolution. For Jasmine, the diasporic condition is realized through her name changes and romantic involvements. Every version of herself—partner, every place—discloses not just her resilience but also her broken sense of self. As Alfonso-Forero points out, "Jasmine embodies the psychological cost of forced resilience in a society that demands reinvention at the expense of continuity" (70). Finally, diaspora as experience, place, and status offers a three-dimensional model for comprehending the immigrant psyche. It is a lived reality, a spatial phenomenon, and an internal state—woven together through memory, narrative, and adaptation. In the works of Lahiri and Mukherjee, these dimensions are intricately interlaced, offering readers a rich and layered depiction of what it means to live in-between.

From Forced Displacement to Voluntary Transnationalism

Historically, "diaspora" has been strongly linked with forced migration. The Indian diaspora experience, in specific, dates back to colonial-era practices involving indentured servitude, large-scale labour migrations under the British Empire, Partition of India in 1947, and repeated political turmoil in post-Independence South Asia. Such historical ruptures made migration a survival strategy—driven by violence, poverty, or political disenfranchisement. In those situations, displacement was not an option but an imperative, usually leading to a desire for return or an unrequited yearning for home (Das 30). The story of diaspora has, however, changed much in the age of globalization. As economies have liberalized, the world has become more connected, and education and labour markets have internationalized, migration has become more of an elective and strategic

option. Individuals now migrate across frontiers in search of a better job, more education, professional growth, or even marriage. This shift from forced to voluntary transnationalism does not water down the emotional and psychological nuances of migration. As Das rightly points out, even in voluntary migration, the migrant tends to feel "cultural schizophrenia, homesickness, and the burden of a split identity" (30). The act of deciding to emigrate does not release one from the perpetual dilemma of assimilation and cultural loyalty. This transformation is deeply embodied in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine*. Although *Jasmine*'s first migration to the United States is driven by the horrific death of her husband, her later journey from one American state to another—Florida, New York, Iowa—is more characterized by individual agency and a transformative selfhood. Contrary to the classic immigrant story based in nostalgia or victimhood, *Jasmine*'s account details a migrant not simply adapting to new culture but redefining herself in the process. *Jasmine* makes herself over repeatedly—Jyoti, *Jasmine*, Jase, Jane—and each remake signifies a refusal to be pinned down in one cultural script.

In the view of Alfonso-Forero, *Jasmine*'s migrations "articulate a form of feminist cosmopolitanism, one that resists fixed identities and embraces fluid affiliations" (71). Instead of returning to her homelands or finding asylum in cultural purity, *Jasmine* defines her identity as a multiplicity. She becomes translatable not just linguistically and behaviourally but emotionally and ideologically, a citizen of transnational space. Her narrative is representative of a new diasporic condition wherein mobility is a route towards self-definition and not a break to be lamented. *Jasmine*'s own agency is her refusal of both patriarchal Indian tradition and the racialized deployments of American society. The *Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, on the other hand, offers a generationally developed iteration of the diasporic condition—one figured not by bodily displacement but by cultural transmission. Gogol Ganguli, the child of Bengali immigrants, is born and brought up in America. He does not experience the same linguistic or institutional barriers his parents do; he goes to fancy schools, dates American girls, and moves about with ease within white-dominated public spaces. Far from having a settled identity, however, His unease with his birth name—a nod to the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol—is a defining emblem of his fragmented sense of identity. Gogol's existence is defined by the weight of inherited displacement. Though he did not emigrate himself, he inherits his parents' dislocation and the affective silences that accompany it. His efforts to create an entirely American identity—through changing his name, dating non-Bengali women, and separating from his parents' customs—are all in vain. As Mohammadi points out, "*Gogol*'s voluntary choices are ultimately attempts to overwrite a history he cannot escape" (21). His experience shows how the diasporic state can be perpetuated across generations, generating inner strife even if physical migration does not occur.

The tension between *Jasmine* and *Gogol*'s stories captures the development of diaspora writing in the twenty-first century. While *Jasmine*'s tale mirrors the instability and fluidity of voluntary transnationalism, *Gogol*'s mirrors the leftover and inherited wounds of displacement. *Jasmine* travels through geographies and identities with kinetic force; *Gogol*, with geographical fixity, remains emotionally adrift. Such disparities highlight how the character of migration—voluntary or involuntary—can differ but its impact on identity is lasting. Moreover, both accounts unsettle the simplified dichotomies of victim and agent, exile and arrival, or home and away. *Jasmine* is not fully assimilated nor fully displaced; she maps her own destiny through resistance and reinvention. *Gogol*, although ostensibly assimilated, struggles with the affective afterlives of diasporic disconnection. As Bera observes, "the modern diasporic subject is not characterized by a unitary path of loss or arrival but by a constant negotiation of affiliations through changing contexts" (*Diasporic Sublime* 40). Recent diaspora fiction transcends the narrative of exile to include elective mobility, affective ambiguity, and multiple belongings. It recognizes the agency, particularly in feminist reimagining's of migration, but also serves to place in the foreground the residue of cultural displacement. Lahiri and Mukherjee's writing is enlightening on this transition with both simplicity and complexity—showing how diaspora, whether involuntary or voluntary, is always such a profoundly human endeavour, being eternally recast through memory, longing, and reinvention.

Psychological Markers: Alienation, Nostalgia, Dislocation

At the centre of diasporic consciousness are three profoundly intertwined psychological signifiers: alienation, nostalgia, and dislocation. These states within inform the subjective existence of diaspora and frequently determine the way characters fashion, challenge, or redefine their identities. In diasporic writing, especially that of South Asian heritage, these affective and psychical aspects are not just on the periphery—these are at the centre of the narrative itself and the formation of character. They express the lived experience of cultural liminality and expose tensions between past and present, home and host, and self and society. Alienation is often the initial psychological response one is met with in diasporic narratives. For most first-generation migrants, the new world is alien not just in geography but in language, social codes, and systems of belonging. The sense of being "othered" is augmented by linguistic difference and racial marginalization. Nostalgia follows, serving as a psychic link to the homeland. It appears in the form of rituals, food, familial recollection, and language. But with second-generation migrants, dislocation and alienation appear differently—not through recollection of home, but through a disjointed sense of self, one formed through cultural heritage and social estrangement from home and host cultures alike.

In *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri dramatizes these generational differences through the figure of Ashima and her son Gogol Ganguli. Ashima has a ritualistic dislocation of nostalgia. She misses Calcutta in her daily life in

Boston: she dresses in traditional attire even during snowy winters, prepares Bengali food, and writes to her relatives in the script of her homeland. Her cultural preservation acts are not merely nostalgic but necessary to her psychological survival in a foreign world. As Chatterjee points out, "Ashima's diasporic consciousness is shaped not only by geographical distance but by emotional insulation from the American cultural milieu" (53). Her rituals are forms of resistance against cultural erasure and a self-created sanctuary in a foreign country. Her husband, Ashoke, is a stark contrast. He displays a type of detached pragmatism concerned with professional development and academic success. Though culturally rooted in India, he is a utilitarian, forward-looking migrant. His alienation is intellectualized, and he seldom complains about the type of emotional yearning expressed by Ashima. The contrast between Ashima's emotional yearning and Ashoke's intellectual integration represents the diverse psychological strategies of the first-generation immigrants. But it is Gogol who most fully illustrates the second-generation experience of displacement. In contrast to his parents, Gogol is born in the United States, grows up speaking English, and receives an education at American schools. He moves about in elite social circles with complete ease but also experiences a deep, existential discomfort that he is unable to verbalize. His name becomes an emblem of the fractured self that he is: neither quite Bengali nor entirely American. He tries to escape this dislocation by legally changing his name and by dating American women, but his efforts prove futile. The psychological burden he carries is not tied to memory or nostalgia, but to a sense of cultural homelessness. Laddha and Bhatt explain that Lahiri's fiction "captures the quiet ache of second-generation dislocation, where the homeland is not remembered but imagined, and the hostland remains emotionally inaccessible" (407). Gogol's internal crisis is not due to trauma but to a lack of cultural grounding.

Unlike Lahiri's introspective portrayal of dislocation, Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* dramatizes psychological fragmentation through action and transformation. Jasmine's emotional landscape is not defined by nostalgia but by the necessity of survival. Her alienation is not a passive emotional state but an active psychological strategy. From Jyoti in Punjab to Jasmine in Florida and finally Jane in Iowa, each identity she assumes is a response to her surroundings and past traumas. Her history of rape, illegal immigration, and widowhood forces her to reinvent herself again and again, not to become assimilated but to escape destruction. Deshmukh provides a reading of Jasmine's dislocation: "Jasmine does not lament her dislocation; she arms it, turning it into a vehicle for agency and self-recuperation" (61). Unlike Gogol, who remains immobilized by his in-betweenness, Jasmine flourishes in her fractured selfhood. Each of her personas is a shield against an unfriendly world. Her alienation is radical, kinetic, and freeing—implying that dislocation, though psychologically burdensome, can also be a place of redefinition. Lahiri and Mukherjee both illustrate how dislocation and alienation are internalized differently based on generation, gender, and trauma. Dislocation is lamented for Ashima, inherited by Gogol, and manipulated by Jasmine. These divergences lay bare the malleability of diasporic awareness. For Bera puts it that "diasporic literature is not merely a testimony of dislocation but a chart of psychological reinvention" (*Diasporic Sublime* 50). So, alienation, homesickness, and dislocation are dynamic conditions rather than fixities responding to dynamic environments imbued with memory, intention, and imagination.

Citation

1. Ambrose, M. C., and A. Lourdasamy. "Review of Displacement, Space, and Identity in the Postcolonial Novels of Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry and Manju Kapur." *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2022, pp. 354–372.
2. Akhter, A. M. "'My Children... Shall Strike their Roots into Unaccustomed Earth': Representation of Diasporic Bengalis in Jhumpa Lahiri's Latest Collection of Stories." *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 37, no. 1–2, 2014.
3. Alfonso-Forero, A. M. *Translating Postcolonial Pasts: Immigration and Identity in the Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee, Elizabeth Nunez, and Jhumpa Lahiri*. PhD diss., University of Miami, 2011.
4. Bera, S. *The Diasporic Sublime in the Works of Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni*. PhD diss., Szegedi Tudományegyetem (Hungary), 2022.
5. Chatterjee, N. *Reading Jhumpa Lahiri: Women, Domesticity and the Indian American Diaspora*. Routledge, 2022.
6. Deshmukh, S. A. *The Theme of Dislocation in the Novels of Bharati Mukherjee*. PhD diss., 2020.
7. Das, S. K. "Diasporic Literary Worlds of Three Authors: Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri." *Journal of Literary Aesthetics*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2016, pp. 22–34.
8. Mishra, V. *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary*. Routledge, 2007.
9. Mohammadi, A. "Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* Through the Lens of Diaspora Literature."