

Anguish, Adversity and Distress: A Diasporic Study on the Select Novels of Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai

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Abstract

Over the course of the last several years, there has been a substantial amount of written material on the topic of diaspora. The formation of Earth, which occurred after Adam and Eve were sent out of the Garden of Eden, is considered to be the first facade in history. It also signifies the beginning of this crucial journey of exile. It is possible that the experience of exile and the need to reflect on the past would stimulate feelings of ambivalence, which will then result in the formation of a kind of writing that is not limited by geographical or national bounds. An expatriate author is continually engaged in the creative process of constructing and reconstructing their origins. This 'return to the beginning' symbolically signifies desire, memory, myth, exploration, and discovery, cultivating a sense of 'cultural identity' among Diasporic writers. Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai exemplify this pattern; however, their metaphysical linkage to the concept sets them apart from other authors of exile. This study seeks to examine the intricacies of migration, emphasising the suffering, difficulties, and trauma endured by immigrants through a comparative analysis of the themes of diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Keywords: Acculturation, Consciousness, Diaspora, Individuality, Pursuit.

Introduction

Diasporic Conscience is a multifaceted concept that includes notions of exilic life, a feeling of loss, awareness of being an outsider, longing for home, the burden of exile, dispossession, and relocation. The lives of immigrants are not linear. They experience centuries of history during a single lifespan and assume several lives and responsibilities. They feel a feeling of estrangement in the host nations. Despite their efforts at acculturation, they remain marginalised and are seen as outsiders. In *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism*, Salman Rushdie states that migrants "straddle two cultures," "fall between two

stools," and endure "a triple disruption" that includes the loss of roots and linguistic and social dislocation (279). Trishanku, a figure from the Indian epic Ramayana, who ascended to heaven but was compelled to reside in an intermediary realm between earth and paradise, symbolises the contemporary expatriate navigating the contentious global-local landscape. By comparing and contrasting the images of diasporic consciousness in the two books, this study draws attention to the distinctions in place, historical context, migrant kinds and durations, as well as literary strategies. The poem *Boast of Quietness* by Jorge Luis Borges which was translated by Stephen Kessler, serves as the epigraph of *The Inheritance of Loss*, which is chosen because it seems to be appropriate. There are a number of universal human feelings that are addressed throughout the poem, including loss and the challenge of finding pleasure. The emotional landscape of loss is investigated throughout the book.

Analysis

Cho Oyu is a crumbling house in Kalimpong where Jemubhai Patel, a reclusive retired judge, lives with his beloved dog Mutt, his granddaughter Sai, who was left without an adult parent, and his chef Panna Lal. One thing that Jemu lost out on because of the negative impacts of colonisation was the lack of human warmth and family connection. Sai, who longs to see the outside world, lurks in the shadows of the home, devouring old issues of National Geographic. The lariat in the poem represents the ambitious with their endless ambitions, like a lariat in the novel it represents the parents of Gyan and the chef, who want for their children to achieve what they were unable to accomplish because of financial difficulties. In a different area of the globe, Biju is an immigrant trying to fulfil his father's dreams, while Gyan, who has fallen in love with someone else and abandoned Sai, finds his cultural identity through the Gorkhaland Movement. Little does Gyan know that they are all victims of poverty. The members of the G.N.L.F. (Gorkha National Liberation Front) plunder Biju of all his possessions and money the moment he lands in Kalimpong. He walks slowly, as one would expect from someone who has travelled a long way without expecting to achieve their objective, as mentioned in the epigraph.

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri starts in 1968, which makes the reader think about how the past and the present are at odds with each other. The story is about a made-up family called the Gangulis and spans almost thirty years of their lives. Ashima and Ashoke, who were both born in Calcutta, came to the United States when they were young adults. Their children, Gogol and Sonia, are raised in the United States. The story looks at how hard it is to live in two different societies that are very different in terms of religion, society, and ideas. The story centres on Gogol's disagreement with his name and then moves on to bigger ideas of national identity, blending, and acceptance. *The Namesake* only addresses international migration, traversing the events in Calcutta, Boston, and New York City. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* addresses both domestic and international migration. The narrative geographically fluctuates between a New York kitchen, where Biju works as a migrant, and the Gorkha rebellion in Kalimpong in 1986, encapsulating the nativist essence of both locales. *The Namesake* explores a singular aspect of Indian migration to European nations,

namely the professional Indians who emigrated in the early 1960s. In the story, Ashoke Ganguli departs from Calcutta and arrives in America to pursue further studies in fibre optics research. Upon returning to Calcutta after a two-year residence in the U.S.A., he marries Ashima. The diaspora shown in this story demonstrates that voluntary migration engendered a sense of otherness in the home nation, mostly owing to cultural confusion. Jhumpa Lahiri uses cuisine, clothes, language, and traditions to examine the cultural diversity of Ashima and Ashoke.

The Inheritance of Loss explores many stages of Indian migration. The first influx of migrants arrives in European nations seeking further education. In 1939, Jemubhai Patel departs for Cambridge, facing a problem distinct from that of Ashima or Ashoke, when he arrives in England, where Victorian norms persist. His identity dilemma mostly stems from his ethnicity, rendering him a victim of colonisation. Despite living for a lifetime in the host nation, Ashima and Ashok maintain their reverence for their culture and Indian history, however Jemubhai Patel returns with animosity towards Indian culture. Having renounced love, humanity, and all relationships, he resides in a decrepit mansion (Cho Oyu) and perceives himself as more British than Indian. The second wave of immigrants in the book *The Inheritance of Loss* departs their birthplace in pursuit of improved living conditions. They are categorised as Green card holders and undocumented immigrants; tourist visas enable immigrants to access their desired destination more readily. Kiran Desai employs humour and sarcasm in the segment when Biju successfully obtains the tourist visa. He enquired of the watchman, "Is this the Amriken embassy?" Biju asked a watchman outside the formidable exterior. "Amreeka nehi, bephkuph. This is U.S. embassy!" He walked on: "Where is the Amriken embassy?" "It is there." The man pointed back at the same building. "That is U.S." "It is the same thing," said the man impatiently. "Better get it straight before you get on the plane, bhai" (208). However, Biju, the most fortunate youngster globally, was in abject circumstances in America. He is used not just by Americans but also by Harish Harry, an Indian masquerading as a provider of free housing.

Kiran Desai examines the anguish of an immigrant and the inequity of a society where one group journeys to serve while the other goes to be revered. Conversely, Jhumpa Lahiri has entirely overlooked the agony experienced by illegal immigrants, their endeavours to get a Green Card, and the exploitation of Indians in the host nation. While the themes of identity and homelessness are prevalent in these stories, their exploration is characterised by notable disparities. Jhumpa Lahiri effectively depicts the predicament of second-generation immigrants by categorising them as ABCD (American Born Confused Deshi). Gogol, Sonia, and Moushmi never saw India as "Sare Jahan Se Acha Hindustan Hamara." They are captivated by American society and endeavour to assimilate it, prompting a fervent quest for their personal and psychological identity. Sonia reconciles her fragmented identity by adopting American culture. Moushmi engaged deeply with the third culture and language, French. Gogol strives to explore his heritage by establishing a connection with his father

after his unexpected demise away from home. A manifestation of such attraction for the West is also evident in the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Lola and Noni fill their luggage with Marks & Spencer undergarments, consume jam, and peruse Jane Austen. Sai enjoyed cake and English, although they do not conform to the ABCD classification; instead, they are Anglophiles. Food serves as a metaphor for identity in both works. *The Namesake* mostly illustrates cultural confusion. Kiran Desai, conversely, used food to illustrate social distinctions and as a metric for religious identification. For Biju and Gyan, food is a fundamental requirement, yet for the Judge, Lola, Noni, and Sai, it signifies their admiration for England. Verses in the Rig-Veda designate the cow as Devi, equated with Aditi, the mother of the Gods. To slaughter a cow is equivalent to killing a Brahmin. The consumption of beef is a significant concern in the book.

Harish Harry is a devotee of wealth but opposes the consumption of beef. The mocking laughter of Odessa and the statement “nobody eats beef in India and just look at it – it’s the shape of a big T-bone” (159) reveal the contradiction of Indians who venerate the cow in India but consume it in the host nation. Biju resigns from his position at Brigitte’s when faced with the choice of serving meat or compromising his religious beliefs. However, in *The Namesake*, this is not shown as a significant concern, since Ashima prepares sandwiches with bologna or roast meat for Gogol. Kiran Desai’s work clearly illustrates that identity pertains to the many methods by which we situate ourselves. The mere holding of a Green Card elevates an individual to a status akin to that of a deity. If Indians are discriminated against in the host nation based on their skin colour, they, in turn, see Nepalese, who are also part of India, as inferior.

With extraordinary skill, Kiran Desai has reimagined homelessness. While *The Namesake* focusses only on migration and mortality as it pertains to homelessness, *The Inheritance of Loss* delves further into a variety of issues, such as the aftermath of colonisation, the Gorkhaland conflict, deportation, refugees, voluntary homelessness, and mortality. The characters’ resiliency, Ashima’s extreme loneliness, and Gogol’s mental anguish are all vividly brought to life by Jhumpa Lahiri. Having spent over 30 years trying to make the United States her permanent home, Ashima finally decides to divide her time between Calcutta and the States. Despite his desire for a family connection, Gogol can’t shake the ABCD designation. While Ashoke and Ghosh do leave their homes when death takes them to heaven, others will follow in due course.

Consequently, the issue of dislocation becomes more profound and philosophical, highlighting the existential depth that permeates the narrative and shows Lahiri’s intellectual development. Kiran Desai has depicted India as an idea and a realm of aspiration, in contrast to Jhumpa Lahiri’s portrayal of it as a home. The colonialists’ moral degradation of Jemubhai Patel led him to venerate the Whiteman and devalue India, preventing him from experiencing the joys of marriage life with Nimi. Having severed all relationships, he is now homeless of

his own will. Individuals such as Sai, Lola, and Noni envision an India characterised by cheese toast and rum cake; yet, Sai is homeless not due to her own actions, but rather as a consequence of her circumstances at birth. The Bengali sisters transcend their own perceptions of India upon seeing the insurrection and the Gorkhalis encroaching into their land to construct makeshift dwellings. Gyan and Budhoo are Indians; nevertheless, in their own nation, they are regarded as outsiders under the designation of Nepalese. For both Biju and Father Booty, India represents a place of aspiration and longing. "Home is where the heart is" appropriately applies to Father Booty. He dedicates his whole life to India, only to be informed that he no longer belongs and is repatriated to an unrecognisable England. For Biju, India represents the ultimate return home. He formulates a concept of home in an unfamiliar country and returns to discover that his asserted home is a disputed area. Consequently, for all these individuals, home exists in another location.

The authors exhibit notable commonalities in their perspectives and strategies. Lahiri used the stream of consciousness approach to depict the traumatic incident and captivating homecoming of Ashoke, culminating in his engagement to Ashima. Likewise, Jemubhai's grotesque history and the premature demise of Sai's parents are shown in this method. The characters in both works are so authentic that one may encounter them in every aspect of life. We comprehend one another in terms of their achievements and vulnerabilities, emotions and beliefs, as well as their values and biases. However, this does not imply that they are stereotypes. Nalini Iyer thinks that Jhumpa Lahiri's prowess as a storyteller is rooted in her characterisation. The characters she creates are authentic, vibrant, intricate, and distinct. She refrains from resorting to stereotypes and avoids making sweeping generalisations on social and political ties.

Rather, she guides her readers through a spectrum of feelings and experiences, allowing her characters to articulate their own narratives. In Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, the anglicised middle-aged sisters Lola and Noni, together with the inebriated Uncle Potty, inhabit Kalimpong, a locale occupied by a cadre of sophisticated folks, each with intricate histories. Similarly, the persons Biju encounters in New York are nuanced characters rather than just clichés. By analysing the stereotype, she addresses the core paradoxes that permeate contemporary biases. Both authors have shown an alternative perspective of immigrants as individuals who manage to persevere. Sonia's choice to wed Ben, a half-Chinese individual, reflects the passion and optimism characteristic of a successful immigrant.

Both works include open ends and eschew resolution; nonetheless, Jhumpa and Kiran conclude their narratives with an air of optimism. Gogol's aspiration for familial connections and professional advancement signifies his pursuit of a new path, which would emerge after his contemplation of the narratives by his namesake, Nikolai Gogol, bestowed to him by his father. The encounter between the chef Pannalal and Biju evokes a grin from

the reader. Desai communicates to her audience that despite the violence, dishonesty, deceit, animosity, and despair, a persistent thread of love, connection, and compassion endures, a tenderness that no degree of human depravity can eradicate.

Conclusion

Consequently, both writers have depicted a realistic and poignant portrayal of the tangible existence of the Diasporas, who find themselves on a river with one foot in two distinct boats, each vessel attempting to steer them in opposing directions. Every coin has two facets. It is a rewarding experience when approached positively. Immigration provides significant insights on the planet and humanity. It broadens their awareness of concepts they would not have comprehended if raised in a singular environment. It allows them to articulate specifically on a topic of global importance and attraction.

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