
HYBRIDITY AND FRAGMENTED IDENTITIES IN DIASPORIC NARRATIVES: A STUDY OF SALMAN RUSHDIE, V.S. NAIPAUL, JHUMPA LAHIRI, AND AMITAV GHOSH

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Article Received: 03/03/2026**Article Accepted:** 06/04/2026**Published Online:** 08/04/2026**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.04.190

Abstract

Diasporic narratives often explore the complexities of identity, belonging, and cultural hybridity, reflecting the fragmented experiences of individuals navigating multiple worlds. The negotiation of identity in diasporic literature is shaped by historical dislocations, transnational movements, and the interplay of personal and collective memory. This paper examines the themes of hybridity and fragmented identities in *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, *A Bend in the River* by V. S. Naipaul, *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, and *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh. These novels provide rich literary representations of characters caught between historical legacies, cultural displacement, and personal reinvention, illustrating the psychological and social struggles of individuals shaped by migration, colonial histories, and shifting national identities. Drawing on postcolonial and diasporic theories, the study investigates how these texts portray identity as a fluid and evolving construct rather than a fixed essence. The hybridity depicted in these novels functions as both a site of resistance and a source of existential struggle, demonstrating how individuals continually negotiate their sense of self in relation to cultural, historical, and political forces. By examining these texts within a broader socio-historical framework, this paper sheds light on the complex intersections of memory, migration, and identity formation in postcolonial and diasporic discourse. Ultimately, the study argues that hybridity in diasporic literature serves as a means of challenging rigid identity constructs while also exposing the challenges of navigating multiple cultural affiliations in an increasingly globalized world.

Keywords: Diaspora, identity, hybridity, migration, existence, discourse

Introduction:

Hybridity is a key concept in the modern and postcolonial literature, originated from Homi Bhabha who defined the term as a “third space” where new identity emerges due to cultural exchanges, it challenges the notion of rigidity of identity. Hybridity is a key element in the diasporic literature. Diaspora refers to the dispersion of people from their ancestral homeland to different parts of the world. Diaspora can cause due to several reasons whether it is migration, exile or displacement due to different reasons such as historical, political, and cultural. Hybridity in the diasporic literature manifest in three different ways; linguistic, cultural and identity hybridity. Hybridity is also seen as a site of resistance where the binary opposition like self/other, colonizer/colonized disrupts also allows a redefinition beyond national identity. Diaspora literature also deals with the concept of fragmented identity. Fragmented identity is a state of fractured and unstable sense of self which emerges when individuals struggle to reconcile with multiple cultural influences such as cultural, personal and historical. In diasporic narratives this fragmentation often results due to loss of homeland, displacement and the clash between tradition and modernity. Hybridity and fragmentation of identity is evident in the novels by Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri and Amitav Ghosh.

Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is a 1981 Booker Prize winning novel which tells an entangled tale of Salim and Shiva, the two main characters of the novel. This novel isn’t a typical diasporic novel rather it tells an internal displacement within India after partition. The political condition of Indian makes the protagonist Saleem Sinai to experience a diasporic consciousness. This novel is significant because in this novel the diasporic identity of Salman Rushdie manifests as Rushdie tries to construct an “imaginary homeland” through memory and fragmented storytelling. In the novel the protagonist Saleem Sinai is a hybrid character who stands as a metaphor for India’s own hybridity like India’s diversity and absorption different culture, Saleem also absorbs different cultural influences. The following lines shows Saleem’s ties to national history, reflecting hybridity:

“I was born in the city of Bombay ... once upon a time. No, that won’t do, there’s no getting away from the fact: I was born at midnight, the precise instant of India’s independence, and I have been mysteriously handcuffed to history.” (3)

The non singularity of Saleem’s identity and his accumulation of diverse experiences, cultures and histories is seen in the following lines:

“Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me.” (525)

The novel also shows linguistic hybridity as Rushdie shows India’s multicultural landscape through his blend of English, Hindi and Urdu. Rushdie also shows narrative

hybridity with the mixing of real history with myth and magical realism. The novel is an example fragmented identity which can be seen in the case of its protagonist Saleem Siani whose identity is shattered due to partition which reflects India's fragmented postcolonial selfhood. The dislocated identity is seen through Saleem whose body metaphorically cracks under the weight of history.

Like Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the protagonist's name of V.S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* is also Salim. Though the spelling of their names is different but they both share hybridity. The novel takes place in a fictional African country at a time of political and social turmoil, reflecting the challenges of navigating a world shaped by colonialism, independence, and global influences. *A Bend in the River* focuses on diaspora in the postcolonial African context through its protagonist Salim. The novel's is also known for its famous lines:

"The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it." (3)

The novel's diasporic element is also evident through Salim's experience of cultural rootlessness, feeling alienated from his Indian heritage as well as from the African society he inhabits. The failure of postcolonial nation to incorporate diasporic communities is critiqued in the novel by V.S. Naipaul. In the novel Salim is neither fully Indian or African due to which he experiences hybrid belonging. Salim is shown as man who is stuck between histories and critiques western colonialism and the failure of postcolonial hybridity. The fragmented identity in the novel stems from Salim whose narrative is filled with existential displacement and uncertainty as he cannot belong to any cultural space. The novel's suggestion of how diaspora leads to isolation rather than integration gives a pessimistic view of fragmented identity.

When there is a discussion about diasporic literature, the name of Jhumpa Lahiri always comes into the discussion. Jhumpa Lahiri's contribution to the discourse of diaspora is undeniable. Her debut novel *The Namesake* is considered as one of the finest novels which portrays the struggle of diasporic communities. The novel tells the story of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, a Bengali young couple who leaves India and settles in Massachusetts, United States. The novel explores Indian-American diaspora through Ashoke and Ashima, the first generation of immigrants and their second-generation children. Through the character of Gogol Ganguly (the son of Ashima and Ashoke), Lahiri explores the diasporic identity conflict. Gogol who is torn between his Bengali heritage and American upbringing is an embodiment of diasporic identity conflict. This diasporic conflict is also seen in the name of Gogol which originated from Nikolai Gogol which makes Gogol self-conscious

about his difference from his American peers. His desire to assimilate into American society culminates when he legally changes his name to Nikhil. The character of Gogol represents the struggles of cultural hybridity. Gogol's adoption of American norms but feeling the pull of Bengali traditions shows the struggle of cultural hybridity. The novel also shows the fragmented identity of diasporic community. The lines encapsulate fragmented identity: "He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know. Who doesn't know him. But he is afraid to be Gogol again, either." (57)

Gogol's attempts to leave his past is seen from his multiple identity shifts and renaming himself. Even after assimilation of American culture he feels alienated which shows diasporic struggle for self-definition.

Like Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh also explores theme of identity, diaspora and hybridity. Ghosh Sahitya Akademi award winning novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) deals with diasporic memory and borderlessness in the context of India, Bangladesh and England. The novel is split into two parts; 'Going away' and 'Coming Home'. The novel describes a young boy who is growing up in Calcutta, educated in Delhi and also follows his experiences in London, England. The novel's protagonist experiences diasporic belonging through his transnational connections. Ghosh also questions rigid notion of nationality and shows how imaginary divisions created by borders rather than real separations. Ghosh also blurs distinction between India, Bangladesh and England in the novel. The novels show how history creates hybrid identity. Ghosh also uses narrative hybridity as the novel shifts between past and present to show how history is created by transnational experiences. Ghosh also explores fragmented identity in the novel through its unnamed narrator. The unnamed narrators fragmented identity is reflects the blurred distinction between nations and memories. The novel also shows how identity is fluid rather than fixed which shaped historical and personal traumas.

In conclusion, through the above discussion it is evident that hybridity and fragmented identity is an inevitable part of diaspora. It can also be concluded that there is an interplay between diaspora, hybridity and fragmented identity. Diaspora creates conditions for hybridity as individual must navigate multiple cultures. A space for cultural negotiation is also offered by hybridity, but it also leads to fragmentation as individuals struggle define themselves. Each novel presents as a process rather than a stable category which reflects the psychological and social challenges of migration and displacement. While hybridity can be empowering but it can also lead to existential dilemmas faced by diasporic individuals.

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