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## REPLICATIONS ON INDIAN DIASPORIC THEME: WITH REFERENCE TO JHUMPA LAHIRI AND KIRAN DESAI

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### ABSTRACT

The word, ‘diaspora’ means ‘to disperse’ in its original Greek context. Ashcroft, Griffith’s and Tiffin define it as the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions... Cohen describes diaspora as the communities of peoples living together in one country who acknowledge that the old country – a nation often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore- always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions. (K. Rupinder qtd. in CDL).The literature of diaspora refers to the works written by those who live outside their native land. There are various types and kinds of diaspora literatures-African, Australian, Arab diaspora, and so on. Among these, Indian diasporic literature has caught ‘fancy of writers, literati, historians and sociologists. Since, foreign land offers many fold challenges in terms of adaptation and assimilation of various socio-cultural values, this paper, as such is an attempt to theorize some of the common issues reflected in the Indian diasporic fiction, annexed with a brief review of Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai’s works.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Indian diasporic fiction, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai.

### Introduction

The Indian diasporic fiction which emerged out of several social, psychological and cultural backgrounds has achieved a unique and important place in the present day critical discourse. The fiction written by Indian writers who presently live in India or in other parts of the world have claimed global accolades for the handling of diverse subject matters, characterization, language and multiple thematic issues. The most important feature of this genre is that it is evolving day by day while extending the empire of Indian English fiction. From the very inception to simple experimentation, the Indian diasporic fiction is now globally recognized for the wide use of employed narrative techniques, hybrid language and undercurrents of contemporary issues. The widening gyre of diasporic writing has a phenomenal impact on the fast-changing global world. Understandably so, because by bridging cultural gaps between East-West global poles, it has rendered an immense service in acculturating the uncommon zones of different cultures. The Indian diasporic fiction besides bringing the lure of late capitalism to the forefront has also pictured trauma and tragedies of displaced groups living in the distant lands. As such, when one surveys Indian diasporic Fiction, the human soul awakens to respond the calls of dispersed in the wilderness of postmodern civilization. It is this soul’s awakening that Indian diasporic fiction is mostly remembered for. The new generation Indian diasporic fiction writers have touched all the possible spheres of human enterprise and as a result, the vast numbers of readers across the world, are tempted to experience the universe through the eyes of those who have beautifully observed it. In the recent years, Indian fiction writers have been widely recognized by the west. Writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Aravind Adiga, Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri have either won the prestigious literary prizes or they have been short listed for it. The contemporary India is blessed with legendary diasporic novelists, who cross all the labels of nationality, race or ethnicity and voice their inner most feelings through the immortal pages of fiction. Their firsthand experience and vast scholarship brought a renaissance and second coming to the Indian English fiction. The fiction of Indian diasporic writers celebrates diversity of cultures, races and ethnicities. Their fictional diversity is akin to what India itself represents. The well-known names in the Indian diasporic fiction writers include but are not limited to Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry, Aravind Adiga, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai along with some others. They have refined the Indian English fiction, giving it new dimensions, heights and magnitude. They all belong to the post-colonial era and employ either ‘magic Realism’ or ‘fragmented language’ to reveal their inner self. Discussion Post-colonial literature has developed because of the dramatic shrinking of the world, due to the technology and transportation, and the increasing multicultural cast of our own country. The Post-colonial literature goes under various subheadings like Diasporic writing, Subaltern Studies, Cosmopolitan writing and so on. While assessing Indian diasporic fiction as a sub-genre of postcolonial literature, we observe that this field entitles the huge corpus of well recognized works widely read and rightly appreciated by global readers. The extraordinary representation of local/global, self-society and home-homelessness which form its core, inform us about the present-day futility of making geographical borders for confinement of the circulation of free ideas between civilized human races. The motif of the Indian diasporic fiction is not only to highlight the issues of nostalgia and alienation but also to eliminate manifest as well as latent boundaries, the geographical and well as mental. As the imaginary and well distributed concrete borders of nation, race and ethnicity, render an enormous disservice to the progressive world, the vanity of having them is questioned by diasporic fiction.



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The word ‘diaspora’ as Somdatta Mandal observes, is derived from the Greek, meaning dispersal, distribution or spreading has been applied for many years to the worldwide scattering of the Jews; In more recent times, it has been applied to a number of ethnic and racial groups living distant from their traditional homelands; and it has been used with particular application to people from the former British India- a result of the colonization, though of late, one occasionally hears or reads of the African diaspora. When we speak of the Indian diaspora, writers generally refer to persons of Indian birth or ethnicity living abroad. (In earlier times often as a result of induced emigration or indenture but in more recent decades usually by free choice and often for economic, artistic or social advantages) (M. Somdatta qtd. in CDL). However, in present times, there are African, Australian, Arab diasporas and so on, besides well established, south Asian diasporic writers, making their name and fame in the literary arena. These diasporic voices emerging from margins have established a literary canon in their respective home-host country. They in addition to presenting the perennial issues of loss and longing have also defined new goals for fiction. Sudesh Mishra makes a distinction between the old and new Indian diasporas. This distinction is between, on the one hand, the semi-voluntary flight of indentured peasants to nonmetropolitan plantation colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Surinam, and Guyana, roughly between the years 1830 and 1917; and on the other the late capital or postmodern dispersal of new migrants of all classes to thriving metropolitan centres such as Australia, The United States, Canada and Britain. (M. Sudesh qtd. in IHILE) While tracing the recurrent thematic trends dealt within the Indian English diasporic fiction, we notice a striking divergence between these two old and new groups of writers, especially marked variations are found in the treatment of their experiences on the foreign soil. The writers of the old diaspora are very keen to record the experiences of their initial encounters with the alien culture. While doing so, they generally express anger, frustration and estrangement. The new diasporic writers on the other hand, freely examine the cross-cultural perspectives in more positive and affirmative sense. To specify the points of conversion and diversion between these two, Sudesh Mishra, in the same article, categorizes old and new diasporic writers as: The writers of old diaspora like V.S Naipaul(India- Trinidad) Harold Lado (TrinidadCanada) Subramani(Fiji), K.S. Maniam (Malaysia) tend to express panic, nausea, hysteria estrangement, violence and nostalgia in their works, the writers of new diaspora such as Bharati Mukherjee (India- United States), Farrukh Dhondy (India-Britain), Agha Shahid Ali (IndiaUnited States), Rohinton Mistry (India-Canada), Sujata Bhatt (India-Germany) Kiran Desai (India-United States) and Jhumpa Lahiri (India-United States) are inclined to inhabit the liminal or threshold zone of intercutting subjectivities that defines the experience of migrancy.( M. Sudesh qtd. In IHILE) Hence, when we examine Indian diasporic fiction as whole, it emerges that the themes of panic, nausea, hysteria, violence, nostalgia home, homeless, alienation, estrangement, identity, hybridity, cross-culturalism, local, global and longing belonging frequently recur in these writings.

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most famous Indo-American writers who is one among the Diaspora writers. She belongs to the second wave of Diaspora community or in other words, we can say that the existing stream of Diaspora. The main purpose of Diaspora writing is not specific but it reflects the inner psyche of writers highlighting surroundings and circumstances in which they live and breathe leaving their native place and a sense of comparable scenario between their native land and existing strange land. “Diasporic writing often deals with a shared identity of being dislocated and is an important theme in postcolonial literature especially writings from Caribbean, Asian American and other countries. It means that national, ethnic or communal identities are constituted in the absence of a territory.” (Abraham, 3) The conflict can be come across sometimes found through nostalgic sentiments and memories spent happily with dear ones.

Jhumpa Lahiri writes about the deracination and displacements of the immigrants in an unknown land and outbursts her feeling expressing that Americans cannot connect all levels to a family background. Lahiri always talks about the cultural clashes and the questions of identity. She also describes some proper native characters by means of her portrayal skills with a wonderful message. The characters delineated by Jhumpa Lahiri relate the message properly what she wants to convey her readers. Sometimes these characters are inscribed with individuality and sometimes they come before us as just role player but recalling the memory and feelings for their own native people as well as nostalgic experience is the key factor which is centred round the Diaspora writers.

As a Diaspora writer, Jhumpa Lahiri has also chosen to write about the major issues of Diaspora deliberately considering and depicting the immigrants crisis of identity, cultural and racial divergence, alienation of the mind and the loss of the sense of belongingness and it seems the history of immigration is the history of feeling taken out and astray in a different time and space and its afterward consequences. A close study of her writings enables us to think that there is a trading going on between the expatriates and their sacrifices.

They (immigrant characters in her writings) achieve an economic stability in return of losing own identity and belongingness. Majority of her literary writings is sustained with the theme of loss of self identity and self quest. Through her writings she makes a proper movement character towards the sense of existence and a search in which inner and outer self is implied. The root of her theme lies not only in the feelings self realization but it also comprises the mannerism of the society to which her characters try to assimilate.



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Here it goes through a fix type of transformation where various kinds of language and culture get mingled and become something different losing the ancient features. People try to hold on the streamlines of past adopting them as integral parts and find a path to assess their spent time and elaborate the past better than the present. From psychological point of view it may be said that the gone period controls their psyche and affects their feelings and emotions.

Sometimes this situation causes the state of dilemma and inner conflicts. Lahiri’s writings help to understand the multi-cultural scenario and discuss about breaking the barriers of countries and the globalization which is going on around the world. She gets back to her homeland through her writings and somehow becomes the flag bearers of the society. Lahiri writes about characters who are immigrants like her own parents, the people who were born in England and America as the second generation of the immigrants and the problems and dilemmas of setting down in the new land. William Safran writes that “The writers of Indian Diaspora continue to relate personally or vicariously, to the homeland in one way or another”. When we trace back to the origin of Indian Diaspora we come to the conclusion that mostly people fly to USA and other places from their native lands due to their desire of economic betterment.

It is clear that economic interests of people sometimes set the feeling of leaving the native place. Some people contrived to flee for political reasons and some people want to escape from religious discrimination. In due course, these migrated Indian have occupied a place of considerable privilege in the non-native land which could not have been possible to the native land. The studies of Diaspora consist of the well-known works of renowned South-Asian writers. There are about 25 million Indians living worldwide and it makes the Indian community the second biggest Diaspora after Chinese, and it is reported by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs that India could have been connected with the modern Diaspora and its existence by the arrival and rule of British Empire.

The roots of Indian Diaspora in US could be founded before one hundred years when the people from the different regions of Punjab began to migrate to look for jobs in Washington’s load mills and the California’s large agricultural fields. Although these workers were Sikhs, they were known in the famous media as Hindu and almost from the beginning they were seen as different not comparable and equal as “most undesirable of all the eastern Asiatic races”. Then after a long period the new form of Diaspora came into existence with the advent of the advanced capitalism and emergence of globalization. Similarly Indian students as well as colonists from Punjab also prepared a new framework favourable to Indian people. According to Angelo Monaco, the new Indian Diaspora has begun to set in the country in the form South Asians and Middle East people due to the 1965 Immigrants and Naturalization Act which abolished the quota method and made the process of settling down very feasible and convenient.

The major attention of that migration policy was to allure people with technical skills. Consequently, thousands of people migrated from middle class Indian family for economic interests. There were highly qualified migrants in which doctors, scientists, engineers, doctoral students were included. Jhumpa Lahiri through her writings present the agonies of migrants how they manage themselves in accordance with the existing circumstance having feeling of alienation in a land where they have to leave their own mannerism and culture. Sometimes she also relates a message of getting unacquaintance and feeling of strange emotion.

It is a proven fact that the isolation from one’s own homeland causes an agonizing process that brings about numerous material and emotional traumas in the process of laying foundation in an alien land. In her writing Lahiri tries to make us clear about the actual condition of migrants. Her characters are controlled by the circumstances and after an interval or a period they realize the problems, the problems of being exhausted, miserable and frustrated. Here is an illustration from her well know work *The Namesake* that sheds a light on the agonies of migrants in an alien land: “Being a foreigner is a sort of life-long pregnancy-A perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts.

It is an on-going responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding like pregnancy being a foreigner Ashima believes, is something that elicit some curiosity from strangers, the come combination of pity and respect.” (*The Namesake*, 49-50) “*The Namesake*” is a story of an Indian family who moves to America for best opportunities, concerning chiefly with the only son, Gogol Ganguly. In this novel, the whole family struggles to conform to the American way of life, the first problem arises here when Gogol who experiences the most difficulty, beginning with the problem of his name which is changed in his teens. Jhumpa Lahiri does a great job getting the readers into this chief character head and feeling for him as he develops in a culture and society entirely new to his parents and their attempts to keep the Indian culture true to their children.

The novel of Jhumpa Lahiri’s highlights the confusion, the homesickness and the loneliness of the first generation Indian in a foreign country. Lahiri explains about sensitivity to both the parent generations and children’s towards both Americans and Indians.



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The novel is about the Ganguly and story of assimilation into the foreign land. Ashoke Ganguly came into US like so many professional Indians who are in the waves of the early sixty went to the US, as a part of the brain drain. The novel we get to see the trauma of being torn between two worlds by the role of the protagonist Gogol Gangoli, he is not proud of his origins. He tries so many times to escape his root to the Bengali culture. In the novel we get to see how Lahiri beautifully portrays the changes in the mind of Gogol who eventually develops sensitivity towards his family, culture and mostly with his name and also we get to see how Ashima ganguly evolves from being a homesick housewife to a confident woman comfortable in her circumstances and finally she begun to feel home at Boston. “The bad news is that they are told by Mr. Wilcox, compiler of hospital birth certificates, that they must choose a name for their son. For they learn that in American, a baby cannot be released from the hospital without a birth certificate. And that a birth certificate needs a name.” (Lahiri, 27) Name is a sign of identity in life. It helps to connect and communicate with one another and plays a vital role for people to know themselves.

Apart from this, the self becomes a focal point in all major diasporic works to explore its various connotations with regard to the society. As the self as well as society is always in a continuous flux, the artistic representation as such portrays all these changes in an imaginative and creative manner. Since, woman are more prone and sensitive to subtle changes, happening around the self, and the surroundings, they present a very heart touching and exciting account of all these changes. The two Indian-American women novelists-Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai are the representative writers in the genre of new Indian diasporic fiction. Their works keenly observes the experience of immigrants in multiple ways. Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai belong to the innovative new generation of diasporic writers. They share a variety of common and contrary viewpoints. Both are deeply rooted in the diasporic discourse of duality and dilemma. They experience the plural identity between the home culture and host culture. Their characters are drawn from rural India and placed in the promising cities of America, where they experience both nostalgia as well as the rejection of inherent value system and cultural roots. Apart from this, they have their own way of narrating the events. Jhumpa Lahiri’s language is more touching and natural than her counterpart. She gives a psychological treatment to her characters without philosophizing them too much. Kiran, on the other hand, looks towards every minute detail with great philosophizing nature. The fiction of both of these novelists explores how the earliest modern notions of centre and margin home and exile and familiar and strange are falling apart. The borders defined in terms of geography, culture and ethnicity are being replaced by configuration of power, community space and time. Lahiri with Kiran are represented as new, progressive and innovative South Asian writers. Both are seen as a successful decedent of Rushdie centric, global South Asian literary diaspora or in other words, one of his “midnight’s Grandchildren” (A phrase which denotes write.

### Review of Literature

In addition to personal interviews, there are also various research papers of academic scholars who have made an important contribution in the critical analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai’s fictional world. However, before revising the main research articles, I would first like to introduce few dissertation works written on the field, beginning with: Amartya Sen’s thesis “Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny” (London: Penguin; 2006).The crux of the Sen’s thesis is that “our shared identity gets savagely challenged when the manifold divisions in the world are unified into one allegedly dominant system of classification – in terms of religion, community, culture, nation or civilization”. (S.Amartya: 2006) While as Tamara Ayesha Bhalla in her thesis “Reading the Authentic South Asian Diasporic Literature” examines the Lahiri’s Namesake as portray and representation of second generation of South Asian Subjectivity, whereby exploring the theme of identity crisis. (B. Tamara: 2011) Besides these outstanding works, there are also a number of research papers of wellknown literary scholars who have mainly focused on the diasporic experiences of these two writers. The list goes long, but I have chosen few to analyse the main trends. The Research Paper- “The Treatment of Immigrant Experiences in Jhumpa Lahiri’s the Namesake” by D Ebina Cordelia, examines the novel ‘Namesake’ from Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin’s view point of “diaspora” exploring the theme of alienation, loneliness, homelessness and quest for identity. (C.D Ebina: 2011) Shirley de Souza in her research paper “Memory and Forgetting: An Analysis of ‘Unaccustomed Earth’ takes Nietzsche’s concept that “forgetting is a positive power that enables a kind of relaxation of consciousness and allows the rise of the new”. She analyses the characters of the short story collection from this perspective and demonstrates how the internal relations between recalling and forgetting operating in the text. (S. Shirley: 2010) In the research paper, titled “The Loss of Identity and Cultural Predicaments” Dr. Ramesh Singh M. Chauhan discusses Kiran Desai’s novel, “Inheritance of Loss” as a fiction, depicting the universal problems of class-distinction, cultural difference, loss of identity and superstitions in the Indian society. (S. Ramesh & M. Chauhan: 2013) Meenakshi Goyal and Hemlata in their research paper “The themes of Alienation and Displacement”, discuss the key issues of alienation, displacement, intra-national and international migration with respect to the Anita Desai and Kiran Desai’s fictional world. (Meenakshi & Hemlata: 2013.



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## Conclusion

Thus, in this review paper, an attempt was made to reflect some of the common themes frequently dealt, and recurrently taken by Indian diasporic fiction writers. The paper however, also carried an evolutionary history of Indian diasporic fiction, starting from the term diaspora itself with some appraisal of this genre. In the last section, few dissertations and selected articles were analysed to make a review how Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai's fiction has been dealt or explored through the post-colonial and cultural literary discourse. The conclusion of the paper highlights the fact that Diaspora not only leads to the crossing of borders but it also signifies the journey across the little visible boundaries of time, space, ethnicity, traditional values, language etc. The Diaspora creates something a fresh and new entity. They (migrants) cannot easily renounce their past lifestyle and traditions and slowly get shifted to the past land and also play their roles between the best and worse situations. Here psyche becomes the instrument to turn the decision because our inner state of mind and heart paves the path for our future life.

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