

EXPLORING THE LITERARY WORLDS OF THREE AUTHORS: BHARATI MUKHERJEE, CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI, AND JHUMPA LAHIRI

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Abstract:

Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are three Indian writers who have explored the lives of both men and women in their works. Their works often focus on the struggle for identity in the United States, with themes of marginality, alienation, and nostalgia. They portray the younger female characters as strong, educated individuals who embody progressive women in a rapidly changing society. This article explores analyse their works, and showcase their diverse experiences of Indian women in diasporic circumstances, focusing on the pursuit of self-discovery. Lahiri's *The Namesake* explores themes of nostalgia, the challenges faced by expatriates, and the experience of living between two cultures and countries.

However, Lahiri falls short in accurately portraying the challenges faced by women characters, similar to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has achieved considerable success in this area, although her approach may not be as groundbreaking as Bharati Mukherjee's in advancing women's rights.

These three writers skillfully capture the essence of Bengali diasporic culture, with Mukherjee's writings featuring a diverse cast of characters hailing from various corners of the world. This article delves into the diasporic worlds depicted in the works of these three authors, examining their portrayal of expatriate and immigrant experiences.

Key words: diasporic worlds, self-discovery, Indian women, immigrant experiences

Introduction:

The psychological idea of identity may be partially attributed to Erik Erikson's theory. According to this theory, the concept of "identity" is defined as the capacity to sustain continuity and internal coherence. 1 The era of Modernity indeed ushered in a sense of consistency and assurance. However, the principles of unity, continuity, coherence, and a sense of progress have been substituted with notions like as discontinuity, fragmentation, dispersion, reflexivity, and transition in response to the emergence of postmodern society. Therefore, the concept of identity no longer pertains to the creation of a fixed inner essence, but rather involves an ongoing process of adaptation between the internal and external aspects, similar to several projects that often clash throughout the span of a lifetime. This article focuses on the two main types of identity: the narrative, sometimes referred to as personal identity, and the community identity. The encounter with one's natural environment has a role in shaping a part of one's personal identity. Therefore, it is crucial that an individual's perception of the events occurring in their life be precise. Kaufmann argues that identity is a narrative that individuals construct about themselves. Ricoeur uses the terms "narrative identity" or "personal identity" to describe a notion that is not limited to a single sense of self, but rather focuses on the meaningful interpretation of the many events that occur during one's life. The novel uses several cultural systems as references, which provide a backdrop and a temporary nature to the concept of identity. These cultural systems gain importance at different life stages. 7 Furthermore, with the concept of "the narrative identity," the notion of "the collective identity" is also presented as a fundamental aspect of socialisation. The reason for this is because "the collective identity" is the factor that effectively integrates an individual into a group. Firstly, there are essential similarities among individuals, such their country, language, or skin. Furthermore, the process of socialisation facilitates the transfer of a shared collection of experiences, attitudes, norms, and social conventions. In this topic, we may explore ethnicity as a means of identification, which serves as the basis for the organisation of ethnic groupings. Jenkins argues that the primary difference between individual narrative identification and collective story identity is in their emphasis. Individual narrative identity focuses on highlighting the differences, whilst collective narrative identity highlights the commonalities. The reason for this is because the first one highlights the distinctions, whilst the second one highlights the resemblances. The definition of a successful life and a successful identity has changed in tandem with modern society. Bauman discusses the loss of connection to a certain time or place, leading to the emergence of identities that are adaptable and changeable, which he refers to as "chameleon" identities. He also coins the term "fixeophobia" to describe the postmodern dread of being attached or linked to anything or anybody. Some postmodern thinkers suggest that self-identity may disintegrate into several masks. However, it is an intrinsic

aspect of human nature to want a certain level of consistency in the universe. The choices and ambitions in life are shaped by the experiences received via recognition and classification. The formation of a stable and enduring sense of self is crucial for the healthy development of an individual's personality. This occurs when one navigates and conquers many obstacles in the domain of social growth. Individuals with a higher capacity for decision-making and action are more likely to hold the ability to effectively tackle societal concerns. Enhanced social integration and recognition may facilitate the process of identity formation for individuals. Although the obligations of social development in postmodern cultures have unique characteristics and operate in a different manner with a separate framework, they have not been eradicated. Resolving these issues may instill a feeling of autonomy, which is the motivating factor behind a self-image that is based on introspection, and this in turn can influence one's identity. How would you define the process of attaining one's identity in the contemporary world? The metaphor "Patchwork" suggests that individuals are driven to assemble different elements of their life and organise them in a way that is meaningful to them. Obtaining one's identity in the modern world is both the objective and the essential need for achieving coherence. Consequently, it is essential to have the ability to organise oneself, to reconcile positive expectations with available resources, and ultimately, to explore the deeper meaning of one's life. Internally, the success of this activity is evaluated based on its authenticity, and externally, it is evaluated based on its social recognition or appreciation. What is the impact of this on an individual's adult identity, particularly in the context of migration? Migration involves more than just physical relocation; it also has a profound impact on human identity, frequently resulting in a crisis of identity. Migration is an essential activity that is inherently connected to the establishment of interpersonal ties within social networks. Various factors, such as personal, political, and economic concerns, might contribute to migration. 20 Vordermeyer categorises the causes for migration into three fundamental models: "refugees," "the carriers of hope," and "the global players." These models are classified according to the differing levels of personal choice they entail. Twenty-one These categories inherently include distinct characteristics that contribute to the process of restoring one's identity. The emigrant's attachment to their home country is a determining factor in addition to their aim and motivation for the move. The migrant will search for what was absent in their home country and long for what they left behind in the host country. Individuals who are in search of asylum and are officially recognised as refugees are compelled to migrate due to a multitude of factors. Their decision to migrate is not voluntary, but rather imposed upon them. The causes that trigger stress, sometimes referred to as "Push" factors, are the ones that necessitate migration. These include political or religious endeavours, armed conflicts, natural disasters, and economic downturns. This particular cohort of immigrants will have more difficulties in adapting to their new country compared to those migrants who have chosen to relocate. Flusser argues that "the refugee" carries remnants of their own country,

making it difficult for them to assimilate into their new community. Aside from the "Push" factors that contribute to migration, there are also "Pull" factors that might be seen as catalysts for migration. These factors, such as political stability, freedom of conscience, a thriving economy, a democratic system, and increased chances of success, have a positive significance for individuals and enhance their attractiveness.

Reviews of Literary Worlds:

Three Indian Bengali diasporic female writers now reside in the United States: Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, who belong to the first generation of the Indian diaspora, and Jhumpa Lahiri, who belongs to the following generation. This article seeks to analyse and contrast the viewpoints of these three writers on the foreign country and their depiction of Bengali diasporic culture in their literary works. There is a distinct difference in attitudes and experiences between the first and second generations of the diaspora, which is known as a generational gap. The selected writers do not belong to the same diasporic generation. Consequently, there are specific deficiencies in their feeling of inclusion as a diaspora, as well as in their diasporic viewpoints and literary creations. The first phase of diaspora is characterised by emotions of alienation, nostalgia, and rootlessness resulting from the act of migrating. Despite their relocation, they persist in retaining the cultural concepts, customs, and traditions of their area of origin. Makarand Paranjape thinks that these events are deeply intertwined with one's prior identity and engender a resistance to undergoing a metamorphosis. In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha discusses the sense of displacement experienced by first-generation expats, who find themselves living in transitional or intermediate spaces. The condition of being displaced, dislocated, and rootless also gives rise to the notion of "double consciousness" (coined by W.E.B. Du Bois) and "unhomeliness" (coined by Heidegger), which are the main features of a diasporic position. Lois Tyson thoroughly analyses these two concepts: Postcolonial diasporas are characterised by the presence of double consciousness and a sense of unhomeliness. The concept of "double consciousness" or an unstable sense of self often arises as a consequence of forced migration and colonialism. In the diaspora, there is a sense of being caught between cultures, of not fully belonging to either one. It's like finding oneself in a psychological limbo, not just due to personal issues, but because of the cultural displacement one experiences. Homi Bhabha and other scholars refer to this as "unhomeliness." Being "unhomed" is a distinct experience from being without a home. Feeling unanchored and disconnected, not finding solace even within oneself, can be a profound experience. The struggle with cultural identity can leave one feeling like a psychological wanderer, searching for a sense of belonging. (421)

However, for those who belong to the second-generation diaspora or are the children of the first generation, the country they were born in differs significantly from their ancestral homeland. This fact plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of these children. These children navigate between different cultures and societies, one being the culture of the place they reside in and the other being the culture of their parents' homeland. As a result of belonging to two different cultures and societies, individuals often develop a sense of "in betweenness." This can lead to either a loss of identity and alienation or a hybridity, where they adopt elements from both their home and host culture in a foreign land. Diversity and the emergence of new cultural identities are prevalent among young people (Hall, 1991). According to Vertovec in his work "Three Meanings of Diaspora," he suggests that the diasporas of the "second generation" are often more influenced by the diverse cultural influences of various fields (290). This identity is akin to a multifaceted identity. Somdutta Mandal explains that this situation brings about a conflict between the younger generation's desire for assimilation and their need to maintain their ethnic identity. It also creates tension between parents who want to preserve their cultural ethnicity and their children who seek the freedom to embrace a more American lifestyle

(12). These children inhabit a unique space that is characterised by conflict, constant tension, and unpredictable disorder (Bhabha, 1994: 218). Therefore, there is a clear differentiation between the "first generation" diasporic individuals and the second generation. Although there is a strong inclination towards assimilation or transculturation among the younger diasporic individuals, the same cannot be said for their older counterparts. The first generation fondly and wistfully longs for their mythical "homeland". So, it could be argued that the "first generation" diasporic individuals could be seen as expatriates, while the second generation could be seen as immigrants. In the following section, we will delve into the nuances that distinguish expatriation from immigration.

Bharati Mukherjee::

I arrived at a deep realisation. I no longer identified with Indian culture or values. I could no longer bear the burden of tradition, or the various oppressions imposed by a caring family... I had a realisation, as if a new opportunity had presented itself, that I belonged to a lineage of immigrant writers, much like those who came before me from Europe. (Emphasis added)

Mukherjee in —On Being an American Writer: 2008

Bharati Mukherjee resides in the United States and is a writer of Indian descent, representing the first generation of the Indian diaspora. She is a talented author, skilled in crafting novels, short stories, and non-fiction works. She was born in 1940 in Calcutta and

later married a Canadian fellow student, Clark Blaise, at the University of Iowa in 1963. Following that, she resided in Canada from 1966 to 1980. She acquired Canadian citizenship and resided in both Toronto and Montreal, where she held teaching positions at McGill University and Concordia University. She moved to the US in 1980 with her family and obtained US citizenship in 1988.

The overall motifs in Bharati Mukherjee's writings include the sense of change from living abroad to settling in a new country, the presence of violence, the process of assimilation for new pioneers, awareness of social hierarchy and gender roles, the portrayal of upper-class brahmanism, the shift from adapting to a new culture to finding one's own identity within it, the recurring themes of displacement and finding a new home (as described by Clark Blaise in *Resident Alien*), the representation of multinational characters, occasionally drawing from mythology, and finally, the exploration of Bengali sensibilities in the diasporic world. The topic of her migration to the United States in 1980 from Canada is also evident in her writings, particularly in her collection of essays *Darkness* (1985), which conveys a palpable sense of transitioning from expatriation to immigration. There is a subtle distinction between expatriation and immigration. The concept of assimilation sets expatriation apart from immigration. A person living abroad will always carry their homeland with them. There is indeed a sense of detachment present in the expatriate mindset. George Steiner views the expatriate writer as a representation of the modern individual. 10-11.

Within the realm of Commonwealth literature The phrase "the expatriate sensibility" is widely recognised as a legitimate literary term. Uma Parameswram and Alastair Niven discuss the concept to describe the literary works of Commonwealth writers living abroad. Christine Gomez's essay, titled "The On Going Quest of Bharati Mukherjee from Expatriation to Immigration," delves into the concept of expatriate sensibility.

Expatriation is a multifaceted experience that encompasses a nostalgic yearning for the past, often represented by one's ancestral home. It involves the anguish of being exiled and feeling like a stranger in unfamiliar surroundings. It also entails striving to preserve one's individuality amidst an unwelcoming environment, while maintaining a sense of moral and cultural superiority over the host country. Additionally, it involves resisting the identity imposed by the new surroundings. The expatriate creates a protective shield to shield themselves from cultural challenges and the unwelcoming atmosphere in their new surroundings. (emphasis added).

There is a distinction between expatriates and immigrants based on their level of integration into their country of residence. Immigrants fully embrace their new home, while expatriates view themselves and are viewed by others as residing in a foreign land. A newcomer strives to adapt to unfamiliar territories. A piece of writing by an expatriate centres around the home country that has been left behind, while immigration writing

highlights the country that one has entered as a migrant. A person living abroad reflects on their past relationship, while someone who has moved to a new country embraces their current life.

During Bharati Mukherjee's time in Canada, she encountered a troubling anti-Indian sentiment and perceived racial bias from the government towards Indians, along with other forms of discrimination faced by the "invisible minority" residing in Canada. She believed that her writings were not receiving the recognition she had anticipated, especially in comparison to her Canadian husband, Clark Blaise. She felt like a psychological expatriate during her time in Canada. The main characters Tara and Dimple in her novels "The Tiger's Daughter (1971)" and "Wife (1975)" are expatriates, both physically and emotionally, as they navigate their lives in Canada. A person living abroad often feels a sense of discomfort in both their home culture and the foreign one. M. Shivaramakrishna explores the complex dynamics of identity for Tara and Dimple, highlighting the ongoing struggle between maintaining their Indian heritage and embracing a new immigrant identity (74). According to Jasbir Jain, Mukherjee's novels capture the essence of the expatriate experience. She regards V.S. Naipaul as a writer who lived abroad. After publishing her first two novels, Bharati Mukherjee admired him as her role model. Even in her *Days and Nights in Calcutta (1977)*, she expresses:

I see a faint and inexperienced resemblance to Naipaul within me; he has expressed the emotional and nonsensical aspects of art and being displaced, of being an artist from the "third world" living among the former colonisers; the perplexing tolerance of the hosts, the utter impossibility of ever finding a true home, a desh. (287)

Therefore, during that period, Bharati Mukherjee, like V.S. Naipaul, viewed herself as a writer living abroad, as reflected in her initial two novels. Upon arriving in the United States, Bharati Mukherjee eagerly anticipated what lay ahead. She reconsidered her previous position as an expatriate and began to view herself as an immigrant. In *Darkness (1985)*, the author reflects on the idea that constantly searching for signs and questioning one's place in the world can prevent a sense of belonging. Her shift from being an expatriate to an immigrant can be likened to a transition from a sense of detachment in expatriation to a sense of excitement and enthusiasm in immigration. In the conclusion of her book *Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction: A Perspective (2004)*, Sushma Tandon presents an argument:

“[S]he (Mukherjee) saw in immigration an opportunity to redefine herself as an artist in an immigrant tradition, and not as an aloof and alienated expatriate writer, concerned only with the subversive potential of life on the margin. “(167)

Therefore, it presents a chance for her to express her experiences and simultaneously advocate for her belief that it symbolised a liberation from societal and cultural limitations

in her native country. So, she is a writer who immersed herself in the American culture.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni:

Similar to Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a first generation diasporic writer residing in the United States. She is a highly accomplished author, poet, and teacher of creative writing. Additionally, she is known for her work in writing fiction for children and young adults, as well as her contributions as a book reviewer, columnist, and social activist. Her work has been featured in more than 50 prestigious magazines, such as the Atlantic Monthly and The New Yorker, and her writing has been selected for inclusion in over 50 anthologies. Her books have been translated into 29 languages, spanning Dutch, Hebrew, and Japanese. Her works explore various themes such as the experiences of South Asian immigrants, particularly women, historical events, mythology, and the blending of reality and fantasy. Divakaruni's works primarily take place in India and the United States, with a particular emphasis on the lives of South Asian immigrants. She is a versatile writer who caters to a wide range of readers, from children to adults. Her published works span across various genres, such as realistic fiction, historic fiction, magic realism, and fantasy.

A significant focus of Divakaruni's writing revolves around the experiences of immigrant women. During the interview, she expresses:

My work resonates with women, as I delve into their experiences - love, challenges, and relationships. I aim for readers to connect with my characters, to empathise with their emotions, and ultimately, to break down any preconceived notions when encountering similar individuals in reality. Divakaruni's fascination with women blossomed after she departed from India, prompting her to reassess the treatment of women in her home country. During her time at Berkeley, she dedicated herself to volunteering at a women's centre, where she developed a strong passion for assisting battered women. She later founded or became a part of "Maitri," a non-profit organisation that provides free and confidential assistance to families from South Asia who are dealing with domestic violence, emotional abuse, cultural alienation, and human trafficking. She is one of its founders and still serves on the advisory board alongside a group of friends. This eventually inspired her to write *Arranged Marriage* (1995), a powerful work that delves into the experiences of immigrant women, highlighting both their struggles and their resilience. In *Arranged Marriage*, Divakaruni explores the experiences of immigrant brides as they navigate the complexities of cultural shifts and grapple with the quest for personal identity. Divakaruni explores a wide range of thought-provoking topics in the book, such as racism, interracial relationships, economic disparity, abortion, and divorce. She is also a strong advocate for gender equality. She draws inspiration from Mahasweta Devi. During an interview with the Atlantic Monthly online, she shares:

Mahasweta Devi -- an Indian feminist writer -- has been a wonderful role model for me. She wrote about women's issues long before it became fashionable or political to do so -- when it was really dangerous -- and she suffered a lot for it. I look up to her enormously. "She's in her seventies and still writing"

Her female characters embody various facets of diasporic life, including those who are marginalised, rebellious, docile and traditional, modern, and even supernatural. The young characters in novels such as *Silver Pavements and Golden Roof*, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), and *One Amazing Thing* (2010) portray the second generation who discover their true identity in the United States through assimilation and their progressive mindset in a foreign country. Her female characters embody a blend of tradition and modernity. While the characters in her works draw inspiration from Indian Hindu mythology and traditional Bengali society, they are depicted with a modern twist in foreign lands. Her novel, *The Palace of Illusions: A Novel* (2008), offers a unique perspective on the Mahabharata, presenting the story through the eyes of a woman navigating a patriarchal society. When discussing Divakaruni's gender portrayals, K.S. Dhanam presents an argument:

Divakaruni's books are aimed at a diverse audience of women, encompassing various races and faiths, who can relate to shared female experiences. All of her heroines navigate the complex interplay of their respective cultures and religious beliefs...She also compares the lives and perspectives of the first generation immigrants with those of their children who were born and raised in a foreign land. And of course, it encompasses the experience of Indian Americans navigating the complexities of dual identities. She has a deep understanding of the diasporic experience, skillfully blending eastern values with western ideals. Her writing course with her identification is with a bold new world coming to life. Her keen awareness of current perspectives and modern concerns is interwoven with a continuous quest for self-discovery that transcends the realms of anthropology, sociology, and academia. (62)

According to her, the stories are a product of her vivid imagination and the diverse experiences of those around her. *The Mistress of Spices* stands out for its distinctive style, combining elements of both prose and poetry. The book possesses a captivating and enigmatic essence, as Divakaruni eloquently expresses: "I crafted this work with a sense of whimsy, blurring the boundaries between the tangible realm of twentieth century America and the eternal realm of myth and enchantment, all in my endeavour to fashion a contemporary fable."

Realism, fantasy, and Indian myths blend harmoniously in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's captivating writing style. A significant influence on her writings stems from the genre of magic realism and the works of Salman Rushdie. She skillfully combines the power of nature with various objects like spices, conches, and mirrors. Following the release of her

debut novel *The Mistress of Spices*, she reflects in her essay "Dissolving Boundaries" on her endeavour to craft a contemporary fable that unites the realms of American realism and the profound influence of her cultural heritage. Her renowned trilogy, *The Brotherhood of the Conch* (2003-09), beautifully weaves together ethical and ecological themes, entwined with elements of myth and magic. They blend together elements of reality and the supernatural, reminiscent of the captivating narratives found in ancient Hindu myths and legends.

Despite her focus on improving women's lives in today's interconnected world, few critics have acknowledged her as a feminist. Samrat Upadhyay, for instance, discusses in his essay "Arranged Marriage: Between Third World & First" how Divakaruni's portrayal in *Arranged Marriage* caters to the romanticised desires of Westerners and overlooks the intricate emotional experiences of the women as they transition from a 'Third World' to a 'First World'. Having been raised in Bengal and residing there until the age of nineteen, Divakaruni was immersed in Bengali culture, moral principles, and Hindu folklore and customs. Her tales are filled with the vibrant essence of Bengali cultures. Her middle class Bengali upbringing instilled in her a strong sense of moral and ethical values, which she often contrasted with the realities of the New World. She incorporates numerous folktales into her stories, drawing from her childhood memories in Bengal. These tales include the enchanting city hidden beneath the ocean and the captivating serpents that possess the power of speech. However, she skillfully adapts these narratives to suit the context of the New World. During an interview with Soumi Basu from *The Medha Reviews*, she discusses her fascination with the enchanting abilities of natural objects. She believes that her deep connection to these tales stems from her childhood in Bengal. Our folk tales are brimming with enchantment - the objects and animals within these stories possess a captivating blend of natural and mystical qualities. I wanted to incorporate that aspect into my books, which do rely on folk tales as inspiration.

Divakaruni's writings blend traditional and modern elements, creating a rich tapestry of ideas. She finds herself navigating the complex space between being an expatriate and an immigrant in her diasporic American life. While the characters in her writings are often inspired by Hindu mythology and may not fully embody the cultural values of the United States like the characters in Bharati Mukherjee's works, she does incorporate elements from the diverse and globalised American life to give her stories a modern touch. It seems that Divakaruni aims to adapt her stories to fit into different cultures and engage readers from those cultures. This could be a reflection of her transformation from a traditional Bengali woman to someone who embraces modernity, while also embracing the globalised and multicultural values of the US.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Truthfully, I still find it difficult to perceive myself as an American. For migrants, the difficulties of living in a foreign land, the feelings of isolation, the constant sense of being different, and the yearning for a home they left behind, are more pronounced and troubling than for their children. However, the challenge faced by the children of immigrants, who have deep connections to their country of origin, is that they experience a sense of not fully belonging to either culture. I was always troubled by the lack of a specific place where I truly felt like I belonged during my formative years. I find it less bothersome now. (emphasis added) (187-88)

Jhumpa Lahiri explores the complexities of identity formation and the challenges of navigating between two cultures in her work as a second generation Indian diasporic writer. Her characters embody the perspectives of second-generation Indian Americans while remaining keenly aware of the nuanced distinctions that arise from intergenerational differences in the cross-cultural transnational sphere. During a conversation with Mary A. Dempsey, she shares that she has been greatly influenced by various authors, with Virginia Woolf being a particularly significant source of inspiration. It's intriguing that she, as a female writer, frequently opts to write from the perspective of a male protagonist. Her writings often explore the theme of diasporic sensibility, particularly in relation to the experiences of expatriates. Additionally, she frequently delves into the dynamics of man-woman relationships within a familial context. Typically, we observe a progressive mindset and a willingness to adapt to the changing world among the second generation diasporic writers. Despite being a second-generation diasporic writer, Lahiri stands apart from the theoretical perspectives of the diasporic literary tradition. She embodies the spirit of the first generation diasporic writers, who long for their homeland and nostalgically reconnect with their ethnic roots. She refrains from identifying herself as an immigrant writer and instead embraces the label of an expatriate writer. Her characters from the first generation of the diaspora evoke a deep sense of melancholy and yearning, as well as a feeling of being uprooted and a longing for the past. Despite being born in London and raised in Rhode Island, United States, the author embraces Bengali customs in her marriage and explores the cultures of both countries in her writing. Through her work, she delves into the complex emotions experienced by expatriate writers.

The story begins with Ashima Ganguly's endeavour to capture the essence of her beloved Indian snack, symbolising the evocative connections between Bengali culture and Cambridge. This is a fusion of different cultures, blending Rice Krispies, Planters Peanuts, and chopped red onions seasoned with salt, lemon juice, and pepper. This indicates that Ashima is more of an expatriate rather than an immigrant, attempting to rebuild the former state of her past. (30) Ashima Ganguli appears to embody the voice or the counterpart of the novelist Jhumpa Lahiri. Lahiri crafts her texts, particularly *The Namesake*, as a rich tapestry of cultural exploration, delving into Bengali traditions, ideals, and open-

mindfulness towards outside influences. The novel tells the story of the Ganguli family in Calcutta and Boston. The Ganguli family is a highly educated and cultured group of individuals from Calcutta who have a deep appreciation for Russian and English literature. Her most recent novel, *The Lowland* (2013), is set against the backdrop of the Naxalite movement in late 1960s Calcutta. Calcutta holds a prominent place in Lahiri's creative vision. Lahiri responds to Vibhuti Patel's inquiry about the significance of Calcutta in her imagination:

An important yet limited role. I had the privilege of spending a significant amount of time in Calcutta during my childhood. It was a period filled with valuable experiences, often spent at home with my grandmother. I immersed myself in literature, delving into the world of books. This passion led me to explore the art of writing and documenting my thoughts and experiences. It allowed me to embrace solitude in an unexpected way

- despite the bustling crowd, I found a way to create a psychological barrier. It was a space that sparked my creative thinking. Calcutta stimulated my intellect, my perspective as a writer, my curiosity in observing things from diverse angles (emphasis added). There's a rich history and cultural heritage that we lack in this place. We are still in the early stages of our lives here.

Bengali culinary elements are present in nearly all of her stories. Food and clothing choices are deeply rooted in specific cultures. These items have been widely used as powerful metaphors in diasporic literature, symbolising an integral aspect of one's identity. The short stories, *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* and *Mrs. Sen's* in the collection *Interpreters of Maladies* (1999), beautifully incorporate Bengali food items into the fabric of these two narratives. In *Mrs. Sen's*, Bengali fish takes on a recurring theme.

An Analytical Discussion on Mukherjee, Divakaruni and Lahiri:

In contrast to Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee Dibakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri's focus lies elsewhere, not on gender discrimination. She explores the human condition and the struggle for identity in the unfamiliar territory of the United States. Marginality, alienation, and nostalgia are prominent themes in her work. She focuses on the importance of personal choice and staying true to cultural values within family settings. Her gender portrayals typically fall within the realm of the second generation of the

Indian diaspora. The younger female characters in novels such as *The Temporal Matters*, *The Namesake*, *Only Goodness*, and *The Lowland* are portrayed as strong, educated individuals who possess a clear sense of direction and purpose. They embody the progressive women of the modern era in a rapidly changing society. These confident gender portrayals demonstrate a desire to embrace and acknowledge their own presence in unfamiliar territories. Ashima in *The Namesake*, as the first generation diasporic character, displays a strong sense of independence and confidence. In the conclusion of *The Lowland*,

Gauri Mitra fully embraces California's cosmopolitan culture and demonstrates her complete independence. In her paper titled "Portrayal of Femininity in Contemporary English-language Films by South Asian Diasporic Female Filmmakers," Tasneem Farida characterises Ashima as displaying elements of feminism. However, it can be argued that this assessment lacks proper justification. Ashima's character undergoes a significant transformation throughout the novel, starting off as a bundle of emotions, sensibilities, and a somewhat indecisive expatriate in the United States. It is only towards the end that she emerges as assertive and self-reliant. These three writers, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri, have explored the lives of both men and women in their works.

These vibrant depictions of gender, spanning from previous generations to the present, showcase the diverse experiences in the foreign territory of the United States. They depict the challenges, the moments of happiness and sadness, and the difficult circumstances of women's lives. The primary concern is still the pursuit of self-discovery for Indian women in diasporic circumstances. As women writers, they bring a unique perspective to the table, expanding the boundaries of human experience from various angles and dimensions. In Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Gogol may be the central character whose name choices drive the novel's title, but it is Ashima Ganguli who takes on the role of the protagonist. Through her character, the novel explores themes of nostalgia, the challenges faced by expatriates, the predicament of women in familial spaces, and the experience of living between two cultures and countries. I believe there are striking similarities between Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), particularly in the portrayal of the two main female characters. Ashima, the central character of *The Namesake*, experiences a profound sense of questioning and uncertainty, finding herself in challenging situations within her own family. These experiences are similarly explored by Woolf through the female character Mrs. Dalloway in her novel. It is evident from Lahiri's interview that she draws inspiration from Virginia Woolf.

In *The Lowland*, Lahiri does provide some representation for women characters. However, she falls short in accurately portraying the challenges faced by these women, similar to the criticism Elaine Showalter made about Virginia Woolf's inability to capture the distressing realities of women's struggles within the confines of their families. In contrast, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has achieved considerable success in this area, although her approach may not be as groundbreaking as Bharati Mukherjee's when it comes to advancing women's rights. While some may argue that Mukherjee's novels are critiques of a society that privileges the masculine perspective, I believe that Mukherjee's female characters embark on these crusades to carve out their own spaces. They seek to not only challenge the patriarchal world, but also to assimilate into the new First World. The voices of subalterns are skillfully projected through Mukherjee and Divakaruni by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. As previously mentioned, Jhumpa Lahiri can be classified as part of

the expatriate community in the United States, while Bharati Mukherjee falls into the transcultural and transnational immigrant category. When it comes to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, she falls somewhere between the expatriate and immigrant groups.

These three writers skillfully capture the essence of Bengali diasporic culture. Mukherjee's writings showcase a diverse cast of characters hailing from various corners of the world, including Bengal, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Pakistan, China, Italy,

Afghanistan, Philippines, Trinidad, and more.

This article delves into the diasporic worlds depicted in the works of these three authors, examining their portrayal of expatriate and immigrant experiences.

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