

Exploring Identity and Diaspora: A Postmodern Study of Selected Works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee

Sawant A. A.¹, Sawant U. A.²

Submitted: 06-May-2026 Revised: 11-May-2026 Accepted: 13-June 2026 Published: 30-June-2026

Manuscript ID:

IJEWLPSIR-2026-030308



Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0):

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work no commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.22079134

DOI Link:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22079134>

Volume: 3

Issue: 3

Month: June 2026

E-ISSN: 3065-7873

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, Tuljaram Chaturchand College, Baramati

²Associate Professor and Head Department of English, Sahakar Maharshi Shankarrao Mohite-Patil Mahavidyalaya, Natepute
Email: uttamsawant909@gmail.com

Abstract

The phenomenon of diaspora has become a powerful theme in contemporary Indian English literature, reflecting the lived experiences of migration, cultural dislocation, and identity negotiation. This paper explores the diasporic consciousness and postmodern narrative techniques in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*, two seminal works that offer insightful portrayals of Indian immigrants navigating life in foreign cultural landscapes. Both Lahiri and Mukherjee, themselves diasporic writers, delve deep into the emotional and psychological dimensions of displacement, hybridity, and the search for belonging. Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, a collection of short stories, presents characters who inhabit a liminal space between their inherited Indian traditions and the adopted Western culture. Through minimalist prose and nuanced storytelling, Lahiri brings out the silent struggles of alienation, nostalgia, and fragmented identities. Stories such as "Mrs. Sen's" and "The Third and Final Continent" subtly depict the cultural gap between generations and the internal conflict between memory and assimilation. On the other hand, Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* presents a more assertive and complex engagement with diasporic identity. Through the protagonist Tara, Mukherjee challenges traditional notions of Indian womanhood, family honor, and cultural purity. The narrative reflects a postmodern sensibility, incorporating fragmented structure, shifting time frames, and multiple layers of storytelling to question essentialist ideas of identity. Tara's journey from a traditional Indian upbringing to an independent life in America illustrates the process of cultural negotiation and self-redefinition that is central to the diasporic experience. The paper also investigates how both authors employ postmodern literary devices—such as fragmentation, intertextuality, and narrative multiplicity—to reflect the fragmented realities of diasporic individuals. While Lahiri's tone is subtle and introspective, Mukherjee's is bold and transformative, yet both contribute to a broader understanding of the postcolonial and diasporic condition. Ultimately, this study reveals how *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Desirable Daughters* portray the tension between tradition and modernity, home and abroad, and self and society. The analysis underscores how postmodernism enhances the portrayal of diaspora, allowing for complex, non-linear, and hybrid identities to emerge. In doing so, Lahiri and Mukherjee not only narrate the story of migration but also redefine what it means to belong "between worlds."

Keywords: Immigration, Loneliness, Cultural Conflict, Adaptation, Migration, Adjustment, Cultural Assimilation, Belonging, Identity, Transformation, Family, Gender Roles, Cultural Conflict

Introduction

The concept of diaspora, marked by the movement of people across borders and the negotiation of multiple identities, has emerged as a central theme in contemporary Indian English literature. This phenomenon, deeply rooted in the historical, political, and cultural landscapes of postcolonial societies, has inspired numerous literary explorations of displacement, hybridity, and belonging. Among the writers who have significantly contributed to this discourse are Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee. Through their respective works *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Desirable Daughters*, both authors portray the nuanced realities of Indian immigrants living in the West. Their narratives not only present personal and collective struggles of diasporic individuals but also employ postmodern literary techniques to reflect the fragmented, non-linear, and hybrid nature of diasporic identity. This paper critically examines the diasporic consciousness and postmodern narrative devices in these two seminal texts, analyzing how they contribute to a deeper understanding of the postcolonial condition.

Diaspora and Hybridity in Lahiri and Mukherjee's Works:

The diasporic condition, often characterized by the tension between home and host culture, manifests in unique ways in Lahiri and Mukherjee's works.

How to cite this article:

Sawant, A. A., & Sawant, U. A. (2026).

Exploring Identity and Diaspora: A

Postmodern Study of Selected Works of

Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee.

International Journal of English and

World Languages & Literature

Paradigm Shift in International

Research, 3(3), 34–36.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22079134>

Address for correspondence:

Sawant U. A.

Prof., Head, Department of English,

Sahakar Maharshi Shankarrao Mohite-

Patil Mahavidyalaya, Natepute

Email: uttamsawant909@gmail.com

Jhumpa Lahiri, in her short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*, captures the quiet, internalized conflicts of Indian immigrants attempting to navigate their lives in a foreign land. Her stories, especially “Mrs. Sen’s” and “The Third and Final Continent,” exemplify the sense of alienation and nostalgia experienced by first-generation immigrants.

In her story “Mrs. Sen’s”, a young American boy, Eliot, observes the life of Mrs. Sen, an Indian woman struggling to adapt to her new life in the U.S. while babysitting him. Through her routine of chopping vegetables and longing for Indian fish markets, the story reflects her deep sense of cultural displacement and isolation.

In “The Third and Final Continent”, a reflective narrative of an Indian immigrant’s journey from India to London and finally to the United States, the protagonist gradually adjusts to American life while forming a bond with his elderly landlady. The story ends on a note of acceptance and belonging as he settles with his wife in the U.S. In these stories, Lahiri illustrates the notion of hybridity, where characters exist in a liminal space—neither fully Indian nor completely American.

On the other hand, Bharati Mukherjee’s *Desirable Daughters* offers a more overt and complex exploration of diasporic identity. Through the protagonist Tara, Mukherjee challenges rigid cultural norms and embraces the fluidity of identity. Tara’s journey from a traditional upbringing in India to an independent life in San Francisco encapsulates the transformative possibilities of diasporic life. Unlike Lahiri’s characters, who often internalize their struggles, Tara actively questions and redefines her cultural and personal identity.

In *Desirable Daughters*, Tara, once a traditional Indian woman from a wealthy Calcutta family, now lives independently in San Francisco. Through her story, Mukherjee delves into themes of family honor, gender roles, and cultural identity. Tara navigates a mystery involving a man claiming to be her sister’s son, leading her to reassess her past and present.

Postmodern Narrative Techniques:

Both Lahiri and Mukherjee utilize postmodern narrative strategies to represent the fragmented and multifaceted experiences of their characters. Postmodernism, with its emphasis on ambiguity, multiplicity, and narrative disruption, proves particularly effective in conveying the disjointed realities of diaspora.

Lahiri’s minimalist prose and understated storytelling mirror the quiet struggles of her characters. Her use of third-person limited narration allows readers to intimately access the characters’ internal worlds, fostering empathy and introspection. The absence of overt plot climaxes or resolutions in many stories reflects the ongoing and unresolved nature of diasporic identity. Additionally, Lahiri employs subtle symbolism and intertextual references to Indian culture, enriching the narrative with layers of meaning.

Mukherjee, in contrast, adopts a more experimental and dynamic narrative style. *Desirable Daughters* features a fragmented structure, nonlinear timelines, and multiple narrative voices. These techniques reflect the disorientation and complexity of Tara’s identity journey. For instance, the blending of past and present, as well as the interweaving of family history with personal experiences, creates a tapestry of interconnected narratives. Mukherjee’s bold narrative choices underscore the instability of identity and the influence of memory, culture, and personal choice in shaping one’s sense of self.

Thematic Exploration: Identity, Memory, and Belonging:

A key theme in both *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Desirable Daughters* is the quest for identity and belonging. In Lahiri’s stories, characters often grapple with feelings of rootlessness and cultural dissonance. The notion of home becomes both a physical and emotional space that is constantly redefined. For instance, in “The Third and Final Continent,” the narrator’s gradual acclimatization to American life, culminating in the purchase of a home and the birth of a child, signifies a tentative acceptance of a new identity, while still honoring his cultural roots.

In *Desirable Daughters*, Tara’s identity is in a constant state of flux. Her divorce, single motherhood, and romantic relationships challenge the traditional expectations of Indian womanhood. Mukherjee uses Tara’s character to explore the intersections of gender, culture, and diaspora. The narrative does not offer a singular or stable identity but instead embraces multiplicity and change. Memory plays a significant role in this process, as Tara revisits her childhood, family history, and ancestral roots to make sense of her present self.

Generational and Cultural Conflict:

Both texts highlight the generational divide that often accompanies diasporic experiences. In *Interpreter of Maladies*, this is seen in the differing attitudes of immigrant parents and their American-born children. The children often assimilate more easily, leading to tensions and misunderstandings within families. This generational gap reflects broader cultural conflicts between tradition and modernity.

In *Desirable Daughters*, the conflict is not only generational but also ideological. Tara’s rejection of traditional norms creates friction with her conservative family in India. Mukherjee presents this tension as a necessary part of personal growth and cultural negotiation. The novel suggests that diaspora offers a space for challenging and reimagining inherited identities, even at the cost of familial and cultural discord.

Language and Storytelling:

Language serves as a crucial tool for negotiating identity in both works. Lahiri’s precise and restrained use of English mirrors the emotional restraint of her characters. The simplicity of her language allows for deep emotional resonance, revealing the undercurrents of longing and loss beneath the surface. Her storytelling is marked by subtlety and suggestion, requiring readers to engage actively with the text.

Mukherjee's language, by contrast, is vibrant, layered, and reflective of her characters' complex inner lives. She incorporates elements of Indian English, cultural references, and shifting narrative perspectives to create a rich, textured narrative. The act of storytelling itself becomes a means of identity formation, as Tara reconstructs her life story to understand herself.

Conclusion

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* offer profound insights into the diasporic experience through their distinctive narrative styles and thematic concerns. While Lahiri presents the quiet, internal struggles of assimilation and nostalgia, Mukherjee explores the bold, transformative possibilities of diasporic identity. Both authors employ postmodern literary techniques—such as fragmentation, intertextuality, and narrative multiplicity—to reflect the complex realities of their characters. Through their works, they illuminate the emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions of migration, offering nuanced portrayals of life "between worlds."

In a globalized world where questions of identity, belonging, and cultural hybridity are increasingly relevant, the contributions of diasporic writers like Lahiri and Mukherjee become all the more significant. Their narratives not only articulate the personal dimensions of diaspora but also challenge and expand the literary representation of postcolonial subjects. By merging diasporic consciousness with postmodern narrative forms, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Desirable Daughters* redefine the contours of Indian English literature and offer enduring reflections on what it means to live, remember, and belong in a constantly shifting world.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have supported and encouraged me in the completion of this research paper, "Exploring Identity and Diaspora: A Postmodern Study of Selected Works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee."

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

1. Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999.
2. Mukherjee, Bharati. *Desirable Daughters*. Theia, 2002.
3. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
4. Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books, 1978.
5. Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. Granta Books, 1991.
6. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Harvard University Press, 1988.