



Cultural Identity and Intergenerational Dynamics in Diaspora: A Comparative Analysis of Divakaruni and Lahiri

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Article Information

Article History:

Received: 23/09 2023

Accepted: 18/01/2024

Published: 20/01/

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Abstract

*The present research is a comparative study of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*. This study highlights how cultural identity shapes, maintains, and evolves within diasporic communities. The struggle of the first-generation diaspora in preserving their cultural traditions and values on foreign soil and the dilemma of the second generation in balancing their cultural background with their upbringing forms the central theme of this research. While the first generation creates an 'imaginary homeland' to cope with their longing for home, the second generation seeks to establish a new identity influenced by their surroundings. The goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by members of diaspora communities while attempting to reconcile their cultural heritage with newly encountered cultures. A methodology involving in-depth analysis, close examination, and interpretation was used to achieve this goal.*

Keywords: cultural identity; generational differences; cultural heritage

The Achievers Journal: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Culture (2023), 9(4), 1-22

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Introduction

Identity is a complex and ever-evolving term that forms the core of our existence. "In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity" (Erikson 130). It is always in flux and is not shaped by just personal experiences, but also by how it is represented, both by the individuals themselves and the outside world (Hall 443). Cultural identity is an individual's sense of belongingness to a particular cultural group or community and plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's self-perception. In the words of Stuart Hall, it "is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past" (445). Cultural identity is closely connected to the diaspora as it shapes the experiences of communities across borders.

Originally employed to represent the exile and dispersion of Jews, the term "Diaspora" now represents various migration activities. It is used as a 'metaphoric designation' to signify various groups of people, such as expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities tout court (Safran 83). Diaspora is an evolving concept that can be applied to various global conditions and experiences. Although it has been

historically associated with certain groups such as Jews and Greeks, it is not limited to these historical models. As Clifford puts it, "We should be able to recognize the strong entailment of Jewish history in the language of the diaspora without making that history a definitive model. Jewish (and Greek and Armenian) diasporas can be taken as non-normative starting points for a discourse that is travelling or hybridizing in new global conditions" (306). In the field of diaspora literature, writers often explore recurring themes, such as the quest for identity, memory, nostalgia, a sense of belongingness, generational gaps, homelessness, and cultural assimilation. This study primarily concentrates on two prevalent themes: cultural identity and intergenerational dynamics. This will be done by conducting a comparative analysis of the works of two eminent authors in the field of diaspora literature: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri.

Generational clashes arise because of the differences in the cultural upbringing of the two generations and their diverse life experiences within the diaspora. The first-generation diaspora often holds onto their cultural practices in foreign lands, while the second generation tends to distance themselves from such practices. The second generation experiences an identity crisis, as they do

not identify themselves with their parents' culture, and the culture in which they grow up does not fully accept them as their own. Jhumpa Lahiri also belongs to the second-generation diaspora and has experienced such uncertainties, as she states in an interview: "I've often felt that I am somehow illegitimate in both cultures. A true Indian doesn't accept me as an Indian and a true American doesn't accept me as an American." (Kantrowitz)

On the other hand, the first generation often desires to return to their homeland and to deal with that longing, they participate in various practices, such as cooking traditional food, wearing traditional clothing, speaking their native language, celebrating cultural festivals, and forming social groups with people from their home country. In doing so, they create their 'imaginary homelands'. They try to maintain their cultural traditions while also blending in with the new culture, thus experiencing a kind of cultural duality. Salman Rushdie asserts: "Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, we fall between two stools, but however ambiguous and shifting the ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy" (Rushdie 15). While Jhumpa Lahiri represents the second-generation Diaspora,

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni comes from the first generation. Both writers in their respective works, *The Namesake* and *Queen of Dreams*, skillfully portrayed the generational conflicts and crises of cultural identity as experienced by their characters. This study aims to investigate the complex web of culture, identity, belongingness, and generational conflicts that shape the lives of people in diaspora communities by conducting a comparative study of the aforementioned works. It intends to explore these themes and present the struggles and challenges faced by individuals living in the diaspora to balance their cultural heritage with the new cultures they encounter.

Aims and Objectives

The present research brings together two distinguished writers of the Indian Diaspora belonging to two different generations. Examining writers from two different generations will help us better understand how cultural identity and generational dynamics have changed in diaspora communities over the time. The key objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the representation of intergenerational dynamics in the diaspora by carrying out a comparative analysis of *The Queen of Dreams* and *The Namesake*.

2. To analyze the role of cultural identity in the characters' lives from the two selected novels.

3. To explore the strategies and difficulties encountered by the characters as they strive to preserve their heritage and assimilate into a new society within the diaspora context.

4. To identify the key similarities and differences in the portrayal of cultural identity and intergenerational dynamics between Divakaruni and Lahiri's selected novels.

5. To explore the role of cultural hybridity in shaping individuals' experiences in a diaspora.

Methodology

The present study aims to explore the novels of Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni using in-depth analysis, close examination, and interpretation. Within the framework of key theoretical concepts from scholars such as Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, a comparative study is conducted to identify similarities and differences in the portrayal of cultural identity and intergenerational dynamics in these two novels. This study incorporates the diaspora, cultural identity, and other related theories proposed by well-known authors in this field. Both

writers have first-hand experiences with the diaspora, which they have beautifully depicted through the characters of their novels. The themes of identity crisis and generational gap are evident in both novels, which serve as the foundation for interpretation and analysis in subsequent sections of this study.

Literature Review

Both the novels selected for the present study are seminal works that have been studied by many researchers from different perspectives. Izabella Kimak, in her work entitled *On Geographical and Metaphorical (Fault) Lines: Immigration, Acculturation and Generation Gap in South Asian American Women's Fiction* (2015), discusses that in most of the works written by South Asian American women writers, the process of immigration is shown as crossing various lines—geographical, spatial, and metaphorical. Before crossing the physical borders of the nation, one must cross the metaphorical boundaries of native and adopted cultures. Furthermore, she stressed that the first and second generations have entirely different immigration experiences. She selected four writers from two different generations, including Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, to examine different perspectives on the issue of migration and use the idea of "fault lines" (Meena

Alexander) to show the challenges and disruptions that come with immigration. She emphasizes that individuals develop hybrid identities by actively moving between different cultures, often referred to as 'borderlands.' In these borderlands, individuals do not fully belong to one culture or the other; rather, they exist in an in-between space where different cultures come into contact. Thus, their identities are shaped by their diverse cultural experiences.

By examining the short stories of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, she highlights the generational gap caused by migration. She also mentioned Lahiri's *The Namesake*, in which the protagonist, Gogol, struggles to separate himself from his first-generation parents but eventually returns to them by the end of the novel. Kimak asserts that immigration is a powerful experience, with the capacity to separate families. The narratives of first-generation immigrants, in some cases, who have moved away from their homeland and now reside in Western societies, unintentionally contribute to supporting certain stereotypes or perceptions of their home culture. However, in the writings of the second generation, issues related to immigration and acculturation become less important than other concerns that are not

specifically related to South Asian Americans.

Mandera Sen, in her work entitled *Names and Nicknames* (2004), reviewed Lahiri's *The Namesake* and asserted that the novel is notably different from typical works written by Indian immigrants in English, who use their home country as a background for magical or exotic stories. This novel paints a more realistic picture of its characters, who try to figure out and make sense of their lives on their own terms. Through her novel, Lahiri showcased the importance of nomenclature as an identifier through the protagonist, Gogol Ganguli. She brings forth the practice of assigning two names in Bengali culture. Lahiri has presented the Bengali upper-caste, middle-class, well-educated immigrants to her Western readers, which separates them from other immigrant communities in America. Gogol wanted to set himself free from the shackles of his parents' constraints, and he did that by changing his name.

Sen wonders how the novel would have been if Lahiri had chosen a female protagonist instead of a male protagonist, and which female character from this novel she would resemble: Sonia, who sees herself as an American, or Moushumi, who adopts a third identity and isolates herself from her Indian community. Sen

speculates that perhaps Lahiri did not want the protagonist's experience to resemble her own as a second-generation immigrant, so she chose to focus on the male protagonist.

In her work, *Intergenerational Relations in the Context of Diaspora, A Study of Some Indian Women Novelists* (2012), Geetha Ganapathy-Doré first explored the concept of diaspora in general and then analysed intergenerational relations by examining novels written by Indian women diaspora writers to highlight the rise of transnational families. While themes such as political identity were prevalent in the last decade of the twentieth century, these writers focused significantly on intergenerational relationships in their works by highlighting the importance of Indian families, which are considered the cornerstones of Indian culture. Language, dress, and food were the preferred means of passing down cultural knowledge. The first generation prefers to speak in their native language to stay connected to their cultural roots and even teach their children the same language to help them understand their parents' past. Regarding attire, the first generation makes adjustments to their comfort level, while the second generation carries Western clothes in public and

reserves ethnic clothes for private functions.

Doré points out that while immigrants of the first generation get nostalgic for their ancestral home, the second generation often experience a sense of detachment from their cultural roots, and it is through their interaction with their grandparents that they feel the urge to look into their cultural heritage. Diasporic children act as mediators between their parents and the new culture because of their native-like accent. Doré distinguished Benedict Anderson's imagined community from the diasporic's transnational family by asserting that while an imagined community is formed by mutual empathy among its members, marriage alliances and blood relations are essential to the existence of a diasporic transnational family.

Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari has presented various interpretations of the diaspora and cultural identity of immigrants in his paper *Diaspora and Cultural Identity: A Conceptual Review* (2021). He classified diaspora theories into four groups based on the various aspects of their lives. The initial phase describes the forced migration of people, including the victimhood diaspora of Jews, Africans, and Armenians. The second phase featured the historical, social, and cultural diversity

of immigrants, which broadened the victimhood diaspora. The third phase focuses on how immigrants form their cultural identities by untangling contrasting ideas of their home and host countries. The fourth phase highlights the exploitation and beginnings of populations in developing countries.

Similarly, Bhandari categorized theories of immigrants' cultural identities into three groups based on three approaches: essentialist, social constructivist, and Stuart Hall's approach. The essentialist approach argues that individuals, as community members, inherit the fundamental characteristics of their cultural community and form a cultural identity that transcends time and space. Social constructivists reject essentialists' claims by arguing that there are no fundamental qualities that cannot change. They emphasized the role of social interaction in forming an individual's cultural identity. Hall combined both approaches, assigning equal importance to the roles of cultural heritage and social interactions in the formation of an individual's cultural identity.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri: Genuinely Similar, Genuinely Different, by Prachi and Mamata provides a comparative analysis of two cultures and continents through

Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and their female protagonists. In this paper, Prachi and Mamata present similarities and differences between the aforementioned writers. Lahiri and Divakaruni are both Indian-American Bengali women who have settled in the United States. They meticulously represent India and Indian culture on American soil through their works. They share a common interest in diasporic literature and their works are filled with the essence of Bengali cuisine and culture. They are known for their use of straightforward and plain language, and their characters often struggle to reconcile their roots with the adopted culture. While Divakaruni's female protagonists come from different eras, the female characters in Lahiri's works span a wide age range, from young girls to the elderly. Lahiri's characters face various challenges, but they do not experience marital abuse like some of Divakaruni's characters, such as the submissive character in 'The Bat'. They were typically free of domestic violence and physical abuse. Unlike the characters in Divakaruni's works, Lahiri's characters are not associated with mythical or fantasy elements.

In the work, *A Study of Chitra Divakaruni's Queen of Dreams in the Scope of Bhabha's Hybridization and*

Third Space by Abeer Oday Ismael and Prof. Dr. Lamiaa Ahmed Rasheed, the authors, by employing Bhabha's critical approach, 'Hybridization in the Third Space,' point out the primary concepts of cultural hybridity presented by Divakaruni throughout her work. It also sheds light on the suffering of the Indian diasporic community because of its cultural diversity. In her novel, Divakaruni presents a hybrid world in which identity and culture are not pure. This study further explores the various challenges faced by the young generation in the host culture in understanding different existing cultures, which ultimately results in the formation of multiple identities and values.

Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

Introduction

The Namesake is a pioneering work in the realm of diaspora literature that eloquently depicts the challenges faced by immigrants, including the pursuit of acceptance, the pain of alienation, identity crises, and clashes between two different generations. Jhumpa Lahiri, being herself a second-generation diaspora, expertly portrays the struggles of immigrants, particularly the identity crisis experienced by the second generation, through the character of Gogol. The novel revolves

predominantly around Gogol and his quest to unearth his sense of belongingness. Throughout the narrative, he strives to distance himself from his identity as an Indian American and even change his name to liberate himself from the cultural confines imposed by his parents. This novel highlights the generational differences that occur from the distinct perspectives and outlooks of the two generations regarding their cultural identity. While Ashoke and Ashima endeavoured to preserve their cultural identity through traditional practices in a foreign land, their children rebelled against these customs and sought to free themselves from perceived constraints. Ashoke shifts to America to begin his new life and feels proud to be a professor at the university, but Ashima grapples with homesickness, reminiscing about her family and life in India. During her stay at the hospital for childbirth, she counts the hours on her fingers, visualizes her family members' activities in India according to time, and remembers her past life. "Remembering is never a quite act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful remembering, a pulling together of the disembodied past to make sense of the present" (Bhabha 63). Lahiri's novel portrays the clashes between two cultures and the perspectives of two generations as

they navigate these challenges in their ways.

Cultural Identity

Gogol Ganguli, the central character of the novel, is a first-generation Indian American who faces a conflict in recognizing his true identity. The dual culture is ingrained in him, but he is unable to fully assimilate into any of the cultures. His name reflects his Bengali heritage and other foreign influences. He is named after the famous Russian author Nikolai Gogol, whom his father admires a lot. Gogol is his pet name, whereas Nikhil is his given name. In Bengali culture, there is a tradition of giving two names, a 'daknam,' or pet name, for use within the family and among close friends, and a 'bhalonam,' or good name, for official public use: "In Bengali, the word for pet name is daknam, meaning, literally, the name by which one is called, by friends, family, and other intimates, at home and in other private, unguarded moments. Pet names are a persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not always so serious, so formal, so complicated... Every pet name is paired with a good name, a bhalonam, for identification in the outside world" (Lahiri 25-26).

Growing up in a Bengali immigrant family, he was exposed to Bengali culture and traditions by his parents, Ashoke and Ashima, who tried their best to preserve their cultural practices and language, helping him understand his cultural heritage. They used to talk in Bengali among themselves at home, and Gogol was also made to understand and communicate in Bengali, which serves as a cultural bridge between him and his parents- "When Gogol is in the third grade, they send him to Bengali language and culture lessons every other Saturday, held in the home of one of their friends. For when Ashima and Ashoke close their eyes it never fails to unsettle them, that their children sound just like Americans, expertly conversing in a language that still at times confounds them (Lahiri 65). He was also occasionally made to attend Kathakali dance performances and sitar recitals to remain connected to their culture. Ashima made him memorize the poems by Tagore and informed him of the various deities followed in their culture. Whereas on the one hand, Ashoke and Ashima practiced their cultural rituals to stay rooted, on the other hand, they try to adapt the foreign culture partly for the sake of their children: "They learn to roast turkeys, albeit rubbed with garlic and cumin and cayenne, at Thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to

wrap woollen scarves around snowmen, to color boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter and hide them around the house. For the sake of Gogol and Sonia, they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati"(Lahiri 64).

When Gogol was admitted to kindergarten, he refused to go there as his parents informed him that he would be called by a new name in his school, Nikhil, a name that would only be used by his teachers and classmates. But Nikhil did not want to change his name, as he was afraid of being referred to as someone he did not know: "But Gogol doesn't want a new name. He can't understand why he has to answer to anything else... He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know" (Lahiri 57). However, his reluctance to embrace his name soon proved a huge mistake when he matured and began questioning his identity. During his field trip to the graveyard, while rubbing the surfaces of the gravestones to look out for his name, he felt an identity crisis. He realized that there would never be any memorial stone with his name, as he was aware of the cultural practices related to death and burial performed in Bengali culture as opposed to the place where he currently resides: "Gogol is old enough to know that

there is no Ganguli here. He is old enough to know that he himself will be burned, not buried, that his body will occupy no plot of earth, that no stone in this country will bear his name beyond life" (Lahiri 69). By the time he was fourteen years old, he started resenting his name even more. He hates the fact that his name has nothing to do with his real self, that it is "neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian" (Lahiri 76). Before entering the university, he changed his name to Nikhil, which, in a way, freed him from the boundaries of his parents and their culture. Changing his name was an attempt by him to shed his cultural identity and fulfil his desire to fit in and be like his American friends. He always wanted to be accepted in American culture, and changing his name paved the way. He distanced himself from his parents and started living alone and then with Maxine's family. He effortlessly approached Maxine's family because he felt a kind of hospitality he was not used to, and also because they introduced him to American culture and lifestyles. He loved their way of life and adapted to it as it gave him a sense of acceptance of the culture he always wanted. But at the same time, he was equally conscious of the fact that by doing so, he was betraying his own family and the cultural values he had grown with: "At times, as the laughter at Gerald and Lydia's

table swells, another bottle of wine is opened, and Gogol raises his glass to be filled yet again, he is conscious of the fact that his immersion in Maxine's family is a betrayal of his own" (Lahiri 141).

Moushumi, like Gogol, distanced herself from her family and culture by moving to Paris, thus adapting to a new culture altogether. The traditional values instilled in them by their parents somehow played a huge role in getting them married; however, their relationship did not prove fruitful. Gogol, after the death of his father, realized his responsibilities and came back to his family, but Maxine could not accept her life with Gogol and left. Although Gogol tried to escape from his cultural roots, he somehow got pulled towards those values after his father's death. When Ashima decided to spend six months in India and the States alternatively and to sell their house, Gogol felt a strange connection to the place: "He had spent years maintaining distance from his origins—his parents—in bridging that distance as best they could. And yet, for all his aloofness toward his family in the past, his years at college and then in New York, he has always hovered close to this quiet, ordinary town that had remained, for his mother and father, stubbornly exotic" (Lahiri 281). Not only Gogol but also Ashima, who could not accept this place as

her home for a longer duration of time, felt overwhelmed by the fact: "She feels overwhelmed by the thought of the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and is now in its own way foreign" (Lahiri 278).

Generational Gap

Both generations suffer as a result of migration but in separate ways. The first generation suffers from maintaining their cultural traditions and passing them on to their children, while the second generation struggles to balance their lives by maintaining their parents' cultural heritage and the American lifestyle. Their ideas and thoughts contradict each other at times, as the younger generation prefers to make decisions independently, but their parents expect a certain amount of hold over their lives. In *The Namesake*, this clash of ideas and thought processes can be seen in the characters of Gogol and Sonia and their parents, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli. Ashoke and Ashima named their son Gogol out of their affection and the significance this name holds in the life of Ashoke, but Gogol considered his name a source of embarrassment and a marker of his 'otherness.' Even when he was a child, he was aware that his name separated him from his American peers. Similarly, they named their daughter Sonali, but in order to fit into American society, her name was

changed to Sonia. Thus, although Ashoke and Ashima selected names for their children with deeper meanings, the children changed their names to assimilate into American culture. Ashoke and Ashima adhere to traditional Bengali customs and rituals and perform Durga pujas in their house, which is considered a very holy practice in their homeland, but Gogol and Sonia get more excited for Christmas and feel that these two cannot be compared: "During pujas, scheduled for convenience on two Saturdays a year, Gogol and Sonia are dragged off to a high school or a Knights of Columbus hall overtaken by Bengalis, where they are required to throw marigold petals at a cardboard effigy of a goddess and eat bland vegetarian food. It can't compare to Christmas, when they hang stockings on the fireplace mantel, and set out cookies and milk for Santa Claus, and receive heaps of presents, and stay home from school" (Lahiri 64).

Gogol and Sonia both grew up in an American environment and learned to live independently. When they matured, they started moving out of their homes and kept shifting places every year. However, when Ashima and Ashoke moved to a university town, Ashima felt more miserable and distressed than her migration from Calcutta to Cambridge.

She felt: "For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize that this is a sort of lifelong pregnancy- a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding" (Lahiri 49). The contrast between these two generations can also be observed in their food habits. While parents prefer traditional Bengali food, children like to indulge in American food. As a result, Gogol and Sonia buy food from supermarkets of their choice that their parents do not consume. Ashima prepares an American dinner once a week as a treat for her children. Ashima and Ashoke like to attend their cultural gatherings, where other Bengalis meet, on weekends, but their children do not like to be involved in such gatherings, as they feel they do not belong there. While parents miss their ancestral home and try to maintain ties through mail and phone calls, their children try to get away from them and live independently. Ashoke and Ashima wanted Gogol to come home during the weekends and spend time together, but Gogol tried to stay away from them as much as possible.

Analysis of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*

Introduction

Being an Indian immigrant, Divakaruni has very beautifully portrayed the dilemmas faced by people who migrated from their country of origin to a foreign land. In particular, she sheds light on the issue of the identity crisis faced by the second generation in their attempt to assimilate into the culture they think they are part of. However, this illusion of being part of the territory they live in shatters during times of national threat. In her novel, the author has combined fiction with elements of magic and myth. In a way, it is a fusion of real and fantasy worlds. The central character of the novel, Rakhi, struggles to trace her cultural heritage and to define her identity. She is shown as an independent woman who is divorced, a single mother, an artist, and runs a café, Chai House, with her friend, Belle. She became aware of her mother's power to interpret the dreams of other people and help them live their lives during her childhood and wanted to acquire the same powers, but to her surprise, she got to know later in the novel that her six-year-old daughter had inherited that power from her mother. Although she was not close to her father, they eventually grew closer after the death

of her mother and when he started translating dream journals for the sake of Rakhi. He also contributed to Rakhi's café by changing its name to Kurma House and by introducing authentic Bengali food. The attack on her café, which occurred in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre, deeply affected her and raised questions about her true identity.

Cultural Identity

The importance of culture in shaping an individual's identity cannot be ignored. Even though immigrants leave their homes behind, they carry their culture with them wherever they go, and strive to maintain it by practicing their traditions in foreign land. In *Queen of Dreams*, we witness this through the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Gupta, who uphold their cultural practices in the United States. Mrs. Gupta carries Indian dresses and prepares traditional food: "At home we rarely ate anything but Indian; that was the one way in which my mother kept her culture" (Divakaruni 5). It is because of this attachment to her culture and values that she recognizes the reason behind the shattering of Rakhi's Café: "The reason you don't have enough power to fight that woman there is that she knows exactly who she is, and you don't. This isn't a real cha shop"—she pronounces the word in

the Bengali way—"but a mishmash, a Westerner's notion of what's Indian. Maybe that's the problem. Maybe if you can make it into something authentic, you'll survive" (Divakaruni 67). However, Rakhi blames her mother for not knowing much about Indian culture, as it was her mother who drew a line between Rakhi and Indian culture, albeit for Rakhi's own good: How dare she accuse me! "And whose fault is it if I don't know who I am? If I have a warped Western sense of what's Indian?"(Divakaruni 67) Rakhi's statement reflects her identity confusion as she is unaware of her cultural heritage and feels incomplete without understanding the aspects of her life.

Similarly, Mr. Gupta helped Rakhi give her café an authentic Indian touch by changing its name and introducing traditional Bengali snacks and sweets, thus maintaining his cultural heritage. The café also holds a special place in the course of the novel, as it can be seen as the 'third space', a negotiating area where different cultures meet. It acts as a symbolic place where immigrants from other communities take shelter to find support and connection, which was the reason for further modifying its name to Kurma House International. When Kurma House caught fire, these people offered to mend it with minimal charges, as they believed it was

their place, a place to take refuge. Even though they belong to different cultures, they share a special bond: "Whatever food you can manage to make, we'll buy. And we'll sing and play and keep your spirits—and ours—up. We're all brothers and sisters here, after all, bhai-bahen. Even those who aren't Indian nod at this" (Divakaruni 181). Whereas Rakhi's parents are aware of and connected to their roots, Rakhi struggles to gain knowledge about the place where her parents grew up. Most of the paintings she draws are about India, a place of imagination that she has never visited but has researched from photographs: "Until now, most of her paintings had been about India—an imagined India, an India researched from photographs, because she'd never travelled there" (Divakaruni 8).

While Rakhi strives to know more about her roots, her friend, Belle, feels tired of knowing too much about India as her parents force her to follow Indian culture, which is quite opposite to that of Rakhi's parents. She does not want to involve herself in anything related to India, as she feels that following Indian culture means going back in time. She is scared that her parents will marry her to one of the farmers and that she will have to wear Indian dresses and cook traditional food. Belle prefers her American identity over

her Indian lineage. Another character in the novel, Jespal, is deeply connected to his cultural roots, lives by the teachings of Granth Sahib, and visits Gurudwara regularly, thus preserving his family culture. The attack on the World Trade Centre drastically changed the lives of immigrants; in particular, the younger generation, as it was through this incident that they realized that they did not belong to any nation and had to prove their solidarity and patriotism by ignoring their native identity, by putting American flags outside their houses and shops, and by wearing local dresses instead of carrying their traditional attire. This is evident in customers who were regular visitors to the Kurma House. The attack on Rakhi's café puts her in a state of dilemma and forces her to realize her true identity. When people sympathized with her, she felt, "They want to shake her hand. They declare that they welcome her presence in their community. She tries to be appreciative but only ends up resentful. They make her feel like a guest. I was born here, she wants to tell them. How can you welcome me?" (Divakaruni 208-209). In this way, culture holds a strong power in bestowing identity on individuals, which is evident in the characters of the novel.

Generational Gap

The difference between the ideologies of the two generations arises as a result of cultural shifts and evolving experiences within each generation. Intergenerational conflict occurs due to the old-country customs and values followed by first-generation immigrants and the younger generation, who grow up within the social and cultural world of the host country. In America, adolescents demand greater independence and autonomy, while their immigrant parents desire a certain kind of authority over their lives. In their rebellion, they adopt dresses, music, and dance that their parents do not understand and often cannot tolerate. Nonetheless, when parents are from different countries or cultures, the challenges and conflicts arising from different acts of defiance or behaviours get more intensified (Waters et al. 276).

In the *Queen of Dreams*, this contrast between the perspectives of looking at the world by two different generations can be seen through the characters of Rakhi and her parents. On the surface level, Mrs. Gupta never showed her guilt about leaving her home country and longing to go back to her community to anyone; however, after her death, Rakhi realized her mother's conflict and desire through her dream journals. Whereas Mrs. Gupta maintained her culture by carrying

traditional values, Rakhi somehow felt detached from her cultural lineage, even though she aspires to learn more about it, as her mother never acquainted her with her roots: "They've stayed up nights talking about how Rakhi sometimes feels too American, how Belle would love to shed the last vestiges of her desi-ness" (Divakaruni 12). The difference in their perspectives can also be seen through the attitudes Mr. Gupta and Rakhi hold towards the Kurma House. For Rakhi, that place was just a means of earning money, and she could not connect herself to it as her father did. Mr. Gupta enjoys serving food to his fellow Indians, singing for them, and spending time with them. To him, this place was much more than a business place to earn money. He even confronted Rakhi to introduce the honour system in the café to make customers feel trusted, which Rakhi was so unsure about as she felt that the other people, the immigrants, could not be trusted.

During the attack on the World Trade Centre, Rakhi wanted to keep her café open to showcase her high spirits and to keep running her business, but her father agreed to open the store as it is one such place that is close to the hearts of their customers and where they can discuss the incident and help each other if required. Belle, a first-generation Indian American,

aspires to ignore everything related to India as she prefers to be considered an American and to fit into that society, she even shortened her name from Balwant Kaur to Belle, even her parents were not allowed to call her by her real name. Contrary to this, Belle's parents force her to follow their traditional Indian culture, which she despises. When their café was running out of business, she was scared that her parents would marry her off to one of the Indian men that they always forced her to meet. Instead of worrying about her financial situation, she was more concerned with her marriage to an Indian man. When Jespal asks her for marriage, she gets confused, as she feels that they are polar opposites. Jespal is too traditional and follows the cultural values that she has always tried to escape from. Thus, the first generation's efforts to live according to the rules of their culture often clash with the second generation's desire to live their lives independently without any kind of forced rules.

Comparative Analysis

Through their works, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have realistically portrayed the sufferings of immigrants during their process of settling in a foreign land. Both authors come from different generations of Diaspora themselves and have reflected

their own experiences through the characters of their novels. As a member of the second-generation Diaspora, Lahiri was more exposed to American culture, but she shares empathy for the immigrants due to her experience of being raised by her immigrant parents, who could not bring themselves to accept the United States as their home. In an interview with Vibhuti Patel, she discloses: "I've inherited my parents' preoccupations. It's hard to have parents who consider another place "home"—even after living abroad for 30 years, India is home for them. We were always looking back, so I never felt fully at home here. There's nobody in this whole country that we're related to." Divakaruni belongs to the first-generation diaspora and has closely experienced the struggles confronted by immigrants. She was nineteen when she moved to the States and was thus fully aware of Indian traditions. She has presented through her works the clash of different cultures and the efforts of migrated people to maintain their cultural values while adapting to the culture of a foreign land and, in doing so forms dual identities. Lisa Lau claims that there "are people who are as multi-cultural as they are multi-lingual. They do not regard themselves as fully belonging in either culture, and have practically evolved a sub-culture peculiar to themselves. They try to take the best from both worlds, but

suffer the sense of hybridity and cultural entanglement". (241)

The themes of cultural identity and intergenerational dynamics have been put forth by both writers through their works. Divakaruni has blended the elements of real and fantasy worlds, whereas Lahiri has presented the internal conflict faced by the characters, thus focusing on the mental battle of the immigrants. In *The Namesake*, Ashima and Ashoke try to instil cultural values in their children, Gogol and Sonia, by practising various traditional activities at home. Ashima makes Gogol aware of different Hindu deities being worshipped in India, recites poems by Tagore, prepares traditional food, shows him photographs of his uncles and aunts, and speaks in Bengali among themselves. Thus, both children grow up in an environment where they are made aware of their ancestral roots. The case is, however, quite the opposite for Rakhi, the central character of *Queen of Dreams*, who longs to be aware of her culture but is kept away from learning anything about it. Her mother consciously created a barrier between two different cultures and wanted Rakhi to grow as an American, but later she realised her mistake: "It is my fault. I see now that I brought you up wrong. I thought it would protect you if I didn't talk about the past. That way you wouldn't be constantly

looking back, hankering, like so many immigrants do. I didn't want to be like those other mothers, splitting you between here and there, between your life right now and that which can never be. But by not telling you about India as it really was, I made it into something far bigger" (Divakaruni 67).

One visible contrast can be seen between the attitudes of the central characters of both novels regarding their attachment to their cultural roots. Whereas Rakhi strives to gain more knowledge about India and tries to connect with her heritage, Gogol makes every effort to push himself away from his cultural lineage as far as possible. In his attempt to do so, he even changes his name, which in a way frees him from the boundaries created by his parents in consideration of their cultural practices. Rakhi, on the other hand, finds herself American, but instead of running away from her roots, she wants to know more about them. Most of her paintings are about India, an imagined land that she has never visited but desired to see once.

One common thread which runs through both the novels is the second generation's struggle to find their actual identity as they keep on hanging in between two cultures, belonging fully to neither of them. Gogol refused to change

his name during kindergarten as he was unaware of its significance, but as he matured and understood things, he started feeling humiliated due to his name and changed it. He realized that his name was neither Indian nor American, but Russian. Changing his name was an effort on his part to create his identity, but it did not last long as he felt something missing, something incomplete in his life. His attraction to Maxine and her family's way of life was also an effort by him to get accepted into American society. Similarly, Rakhi tried to explore her cultural identity through her mother's dream journal after her demise. She suffered a huge blow when she witnessed how the people of the society whom she considered her own did not accept her as part of their community after the attack on America. One thing that is important to bring to attention is that by the end of both novels, the central characters have come to peace with their hyphenated identities. In the case of Gogol, after his father's death, he realises his responsibility towards his family, leaves Maxine, and comes back to them. His cultural teachings from his parents play a great role; on the other hand, Rakhi also comes to terms with her hybrid identity after facing an assault on her café. She realised she is neither American nor Indian: "I look at my reflection in the glass—the brown skin, the Indian features,

the dark eyes with darker circles under them, the black crinkles of my hair. It's familiar and yet, suddenly, alien" (Divakaruni 206).

Conclusion

Culture serves as a guiding force in the formation of one's identity. It imparts values that play a significant role in shaping our self-perception and our position in the world. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o remarks, "Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature; the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (15–16). Cultural identity is often perceived as a shared culture that represents a collective understanding of one's true self. It is rooted in shared historical experiences and cultural norms that serve as a common foundation for a particular group of people (Hall 443). The present research paper undertook a comparative study of the works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, which provides important insights into the complex relationship between cultural identity and generational dynamics in the context of diaspora. Through their novels, *The Namesake* and *Queen of Dreams*, the authors have given us a unique perspective

on the different aspects of immigrant experiences. This paper may offer new insights and perspectives on how cultural identity is maintained and evolves across generations in diaspora communities.

Lahiri's *The Namesake* portrays the complex journey of Gogol Ganguly, who struggles to come to terms with his Bengali heritage and American surroundings. It depicts the difficulties and challenges faced by second-generation immigrants. Gogol's struggle with his name and his resistance to accepting his cultural identity presents the complex journey of these immigrants. The same battle is discernible in Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*, where Rakhi's world turns upside down after she witnesses the assault on her café. That incident makes her realize that she belongs neither to India nor to America; and thus, accepts her hyphenated identity, just like Gogol, by the end of the novel.

The difference between the ideologies of the two generations and their outlook towards their culture, which differs for both generations, creates hindrances in their relationship, as a result of which they grow apart. The native country of first-generation immigrants becomes an alien country for their children, and while the first generation tries to preserve their cultural values, the

second generation strives to ignore those values and live according to the environment they are raised in, i.e., the culture of the host society. The first generation attempts to strike a balance between preserving their culture and assimilating into the host culture. "This struggle to achieve a balance between preserving the culture one has grown up with, and the culture with which one is expected to fit snugly is found in many immigrant writers" (Sree 171). They try to maintain their cultural roots in a foreign land by way of clothes, food, language, and interacting with people of their origin and creating their own social circle, thus creating an imaginary homeland, as Rushdie states: "— that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost: that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (Rushdie 10).

Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have made significant contributions to the field of diasporic literature. Lahiri, in her book *The Namesake*, has explored Gogol's journey towards embracing his identity, while Divakaruni in her novel, *Queen of Dreams* has depicted the blending of cultures. Both

authors provide insights into the experiences faced by immigrants as they navigate between two worlds. By comparing and analyzing these works together, we better understand the different approaches taken by Lahiri and Divakaruni in exploring experiences, family connections, and the evolution of identity across generations.

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