



Critical Study Of The Concept Of Home In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the evolving concept of home in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Namesake*, highlighting how diasporic identities shape and reshape feelings of belonging across generations. The study explores home not simply as a physical dwelling but as an emotional, cultural, and psychological construct influenced by migration, memory, and identity negotiation. Through an analysis of Lahiri's portrayal of the Ganguli family, the article reveals the contrasting ways in which first- and second-generation immigrants perceive and inhabit home. For Ashoke and Ashima, home is deeply tied to cultural memory, nostalgia, and the desire to preserve Bengali traditions within an unfamiliar American landscape. Their sense of belonging emerges through attempts to recreate cultural rituals and maintain emotional ties with India. In contrast, Lahiri presents the second-generation experience through Gogol, whose understanding of home is shaped by a hybrid identity and internal conflict. His journey underscores the fluidity of home, suggesting that belonging for diasporic youth is neither fully rooted in the ancestral homeland nor entirely in the host country. The study also considers the role of mobility and transition, illustrating how migration produces multiple, overlapping notions of home. Ultimately, this article argues that *The Namesake* offers a nuanced and dynamic exploration of home as a continuously negotiated space within the diasporic experience.

Keywords: Diaspora, Home, Identity, Belonging, Nostalgia

1. Introduction

Home has emerged as a theme in migration and diaspora studies, as it represents the life experiences of people who go through various cultural identities. As a child of immigrants herself, Jhumpa Lahiri gives these tensions an incredible delicacy in *The Namesake*. The novel portrays the characters and their sense of belonging influenced by displacement, nostalgia and pressure of assimilation. Current researches bring up problems of naming, identity, and generational conflict, but few focus on how the very concept of home is being negotiated. The interpretation of the home by Lahiri gives a good idea of the emotionality of diasporic life and cultural hybridity. The idea of home in the book *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri has been extensively studied in the diaspora, migration, and identity studies. According to scholars, home to the immigrants is not simply a place but a place of emotional, cultural and psychological bargaining. The studies conducted among the immigrant families reveal that the process of migration tends to destabilize well-being, stability, and emotional security, particularly in the case of women who need to adapt to new cultural settings (Ahn et al., 2018). In the digital and global arenas, diasporic identities have been controlled by online relationships that determine how migrants can sustain their associations to their country of origin (Andersson, 2019). *The Namesake* is also reflected in film analysis, and film critics dwell upon the imaginations of the story by Lahiri that vividly reproduce the world of feelings of a life of immigrants (Bahri, 2007). Exile and displacement questions continue to be pivotal towards the definition of home in diaspora. The emotional conflicts of exile that Chishti (2017) tells about are very similar to the love that Ashima has towards Calcutta. Multicultural theorists also suggest that the question of which culture to follow makes the belonging of immigrants difficult (Colombo, 2015). Identity scholars demonstrate that multilingual and transnational experiences enhance the process of negotiating home across borders by migrants (Duff, 2015). The mental issues of displaced people, in particular, children, demonstrate the role of migration as a distortion of cognitive and emotional development (Graham et al., 2016). The belonging itself is

multidimensional as it is created by relational, cultural, and emotional routes (Hirsch and Clark, 2019). Mobility introduces additional layers because identities change with movement and social interactions in spaces (Hua, 2017). This fluidity is shown through the novel by Lahiri, and it shows how both Ashima and Gogol are building a home by changing forms of identity (Lahiri, 2004). Rootlessness, cultural transition, and identity reconstruction are one of fundamental themes in diasporic literature in general (Laxmiprasad, 2020). A comparative analysis of the stylistic path of Lahiri reveals that there is a strong connection between language and self-translation and how the authors represent identity in their literary works (Monaco, 2019). The experiences associated with migration differ significantly depending on the geography, the social classes, and the patterns of settlement, and the rural migrants face very specific issues that define belonging (Patel et al., 2019). According to Diaspora theorists, literary depictions of displacement assist in explaining the way migrants strike a balance between memory and modernity (Raina, 2017). Contextualisation of Indian diasporic fiction contextualises Lahiri as a part of a wider tradition, which examines the continuity of culture through the use of narrative (Raina and English, 2018). Home creation is central to memory, and identity and its intersections make migrants formulate how they can make a sense of belonging when change is occurring (Ratnam, 2018). Diasporism and social mobilization all over the world affect the way home can be imagined, at a personal or group scale (Stacey, 2018). Forced displacement also makes the narratives of return more complicated, whereby the patterns of violence and movement make it impossible to be fully reintegrated into the spaces of a motherland (Tegenbos and Vlassenroot, 2018). The psychological aspect of home as a comfort and pain is highlighted by the emotional feelings of longing and homesickness (Troebe et al., 2015). Lastly, race and language, which can also shape the migration experience of migrants, affect their integration and identity, and are also relevant (Von Esch et al., 2020). Combined, these studies illustrate that home in *The Namesake* is dynamic, multifaceted and influenced by nostalgia, cultural remembrance, identity crises and migration. Many literary analyses have investigated identity development and cultural clash in *The Namesake*, but there is a lack of scholarly work on the multidimensional concept of home as a notion created within the novel. The vast amount of existing research views home as a background motif and does not consider it a key framework to build emotional and cultural paths of characters. As such, there is a knowledge lapse in terms of how Lahiri reconstructs the idea of home as a corporeal, psychological, and symbolic place of the diasporic subjects.

Objectives of the Study

1. To discuss the way *The Namesake* reflects the concept of home in the first- and second-generation immigrants
2. To examine how cultural memory and identity are incorporated in the sense of belonging in characters
3. To investigate the role of displacement and hybridity in the transformation of the meaning of home

2. Home as Physical Space

The meaning of home as a geographical location in *The Namesake* is the main focus of the immigrant experience and determines the identity of the characters. In the case of Ashoke and Ashima, their Massachusetts home at first seems alien and shanty, a place to stay and not a home. The physical space between Calcutta and the Americans strengthens their emotional space, and the American household seems foreign and disconnected with their culture. Lahiri takes domestic spaces in form of kitchens, living rooms, and bedrooms to represent the gradual adaptation of the characters. Gradually, the house is covered with memories, rituals, and family habits, which point to a gradual negotiation between the Indian traditions and the American ways of life. Nevertheless, this change is lopsided. Ashima tries to replicate Calcutta with food and other cultural uses, but the children see their American place of residence as natural and permanent. So, physical home is both a refuge and a cultural battlefield, and it refers to the differences in comfort and belonging between generations. Lahiri shows that a geographical move cannot be complete without an emotional restructuring of the space, and home cannot be created in the simplest way of merely taking possession of space, but rather filling it with the experience of being lived in. Table 1 shows how *Namesake* describes home as a physical context through the cultural adjustment and the generational gap. It underlines the impact of first-generation immigrants like Ashoke and Ashima on their understanding of the American house as something strange and transient, whereas their children see it as something normal and enduring. This comparison shows the difference in comfort, belonging, and cultural adaptation in the same home.

Table 1: Representation of Home as Physical Space in *The Namesake*

Aspect of Physical Home	Description in the Novel	Characters Involved	Significance to Theme
Foreignness of American House	Massachusetts home initially feels unfamiliar, temporary, and culturally distant.	Ashoke, Ashima	Highlights immigrant dislocation and emotional distance from homeland.
Domestic Spaces	Used symbolically to	Ashima,	Shows how home is slowly

(kitchen, living room, bedroom)	show stages of adaptation and identity negotiation.	Ashoke, Gogol	reshaped through routine and lived experience.
Cultural Reconstruction	Ashima attempts to recreate Calcutta through food, rituals, and cultural practices.	Ashima	Reflects cultural preservation and emotional continuity.
Generational Perception	Children perceive the American house as natural and permanent.	Gogol, Sonia	Reveals generational contrast in belonging and cultural comfort.
Layering of Memory & Ritual	The house becomes a space filled with memories and family routines over time.	Entire Ganguli family	Demonstrates how physical space transforms through emotional investment.
Home as Cultural Battleground	Conflicting expectations and identities collide within the domestic setting.	Ashima vs. children	Symbolizes tension between Indian traditions and American lifestyles.

Source: Compiled by the author based on textual analysis of *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003).

3. Home as Emotional and Familial Attachment

Home in *The Namesake* is not limited by geographical areas, but is also defined by emotional attachment and family relationships. Lahiri shows the family of Gangulis as emotionally bound and yet tense due to cultural expectations and identity issues. Home cannot exist without family, as is the case with Ashima, who longs to be with the family in India. It is the longing to have the emotional security. She creates home with the help of relationships, either talking to Calcutta or meeting the other Bengali families in America. However, Gogol is emotionally displaced even at home, the demands he is supposed to fulfil are in contrast to his need to be independent. His identity crisis interferes with the emotional attachment to his family, and at some point, he finds himself pushing himself away to re-establish his identity. Gogol starts cherishing family relationships more than cultural rebellion after Ashoke dies, and this rate of emotional realisation of the home. According to Lahiri, home is maintained by care, memory, and equal vulnerability and not geography. Emotional home is a place of conflict, settling, and development, proving the fact that a sense of belonging is fostered with interpersonal relationships, not with physical organization.

4. Home as Cultural Memory and Nostalgia

Cultural memory influences how the characters perceive the meaning of home, and more so among the first-generation immigrants. The nostalgic feeling of Calcutta is always present in Ashima's actions, customs and affective landscape. Lahiri does not depict nostalgia as a sign of weakness but a way to survive culturally, it turns out to be the survival tactic of Ashima in her foreign surroundings. Festivals, food, and Bengali traditions are cultural landmarks that reconstruct bits of a forgotten homeland. These memories are comforting, yet they cause her to feel displaced further since the comparisons that she makes between India and America remind her of what she has lost behind her. In the case of Gogol, cultural memory lacks coherence and integrity, he receives nostalgia as a second-hand experience and is not able to fully understand it. The tension between perceived homeland and actual reality is seen in his trips to India. Lahiri demonstrates that cultural memory is a source of connection and alienation at the same time, they serve as a bridge between the past and the present, but it is impossible to turn back completely. Home is thus partially created through memory forming as a result of longing and selective remembering. Table 2 shows how the cultural memory and nostalgia have influenced the knowledge that the characters have. It also brings out the manner in which the first-generation immigrants such as Ashima find emotional comfort in the memories of Calcutta, as they find comfort in food, festivals, and practices to bring familiarity to America. These cultural anchors contribute to the sense of belonging and make it known that migration has brought emotional distance.

Table 2: Influence of Cultural Memory on the Concept of Home in *The Namesake*

Aspect	Description	Characters Involved	Significance
Nostalgia for Homeland	Ashima's constant longing for Calcutta shapes her emotions, routines, and worldview.	Ashima	Reveals how cultural memory provides emotional continuity amid displacement.
Cultural Anchors	Festivals, Bengali food, and traditions recreate fragments of Calcutta in America.	Ashima, Ashoke	Shows how cultural practices preserve identity and soften the impact of migration.
Selective	Memories comfort Ashima but also	Ashima	Highlights dual function of

Memory	deepen her awareness of what she has lost.		memory: connection and pain.
Inherited Nostalgia	Gogol experiences cultural memory indirectly, without fully understanding its depth.	Gogol	Demonstrates generational gap in emotional connection to homeland.
Imagined vs. Lived Homeland	Gogol's visits to India reveal tension between idealized memory and real experience.	Gogol	Shows that home becomes partly imagined and cannot be fully reclaimed.
Bridge Between Past and Present	Cultural memory connects characters to their roots while reminding them of displacement.	Whole Ganguli family	Emphasizes impossibility of full return and the hybrid nature of diasporic home.

Source: Compiled by the author based on textual analysis of *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003).

5. Home as Identity Formation for the Second Generation

Home is entangled identity negotiation place to the second-generation immigrants, such as Gogol. Gogol is torn between being a Bengali and an American, unlike his parents, who have a clear understanding of origin. His name is the expression of this contradiction: it is the mark of the cultural heritage and the curse that he is unable to get rid of. Lahiri connections with friends, romances and his friendship changes as he tries to find his identity. The struggle between living in the Bengali family and the American social life generates a sense of tension and a divided identity, which is based on conflicting cultural expectations. As time passes, Gogol is taught that the concept of home is not a standard cultural group but one constructed by experience and self-acceptance. Lahiri notes that to second-generation immigrants, the process of forming identity involves the need to reconcile inherited identity with the reality experienced, implying that home is in fact a constructed space within an individual being developed with time and changed by experience.

6. Home as Mobility and Transition

Mobility is an important factor that contributes to how the characters understand the concept of home. Lahiri shows that migration is not a one-time event but an ongoing process of movement, adjustment and redefinition. To Ashoke, whose life is marked by the literal and symbolic travels, mobility turns out to be a quest towards stability and opportunity. The changes in Ashima- between Calcutta and Cambridge, wife to widow- reveal her changing sense of belonging. She ends up splitting her life between India and the United States, which translates into the diasporic truth of having two or more homes. The mobility of Gogol is connected to identity; every change, move- home to college dorms and apartments, and relationships- symbolises a change in emotions. Through these changes, one can see that the concept of home is dynamic and varies based on the situation and the growth of the individual. Lahiri implies that mobility is destabilising the established definitions of home yet also creates the prospects of a new form of belonging.

7. Conceptual Understanding of Home in *The Namesake*

The Namesake review shows that Lahiri forms home as a dynamic thing that is created through various interwoven dimensions such as physical space, feelings, memory of culture and identity formation, and mobility. Instead of introducing home as a definite or permanent space, Lahiri introduces it as a lived experience, being shaped by individual past history, generational role, and cultural bargaining. To the first-generation immigrants, home is something that is remembered and recreated in rituals and practices that help them remember their origins. This highlights home as a place of continuation in the midst of disruption. Home is a topography of the interior, as is the case with the second generation, which is characterised by a hybrid identity. The weakening of the sense of belonging in Gogol represents the issue of trying to find ways out of the traditional heritage and the new social requirements. Home, according to the novel, is not necessarily entirely in the homeland or the host country but the dynamic meaning of the self as developed through lived experience. Mobility contributes to this knowledge further by showing that home is not a limitation to boundaries but also change. The characters bear numerous attachments at the same time, and this depicts that diasporic home is multi-layered, dynamic and highly personal. This theoretical meaning makes *The Namesake* a dense text.

8. Conclusion

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri is the deepest look at the idea of home and how it is fluid, multi-layered, and highly emotional in the circumstances of the diaspora. Lahiri conveys through the lives of the first and second-generation immigrants that home is neither defined nor fixed but in a state of flux created through memory, relationship, identity and movement. In the case of Ashoke and Ashima, home is associated with the cultural background and nostalgia, which is a longing towards something familiar in the face of displacement. They use their efforts to reconsider the Calcutta home in domestic American spaces in order to show their strength in the cultural memory and the emotional work involved to reinvent the sense of belonging in a new

territory. Home to Gogol is more of a mental path, as opposed to a physical place. The multiple identities, the problems in his relationships, and the efforts to define himself are examples of the difficulties of the second-generation immigrants. Lahiri demonstrates that home to these people is negotiated in a life situation, acceptance of the hybridity, and reconciliation of the past and present. Mobility also makes the meaning of home more intricate and vivid to the Ganguli family. Their physical and emotional changes emphasize that belonging is a process and not an end. Finally, Lahiri demonstrates home as a personal development with place and people being a close interaction. Research claims that *The Namesake* confronts the inflexible definitions of home and focuses instead on its flexibility and changeable nature. With a subtle but insightful narration, Lahiri provides the reader with an understanding of the detailed realities of the diasporic existence, in which home is both recalled, created and recreated through the course of time and space.

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