

The Ambivalence of Culture and Identity in Indian Diaspora Literature..

Ms. Sristy Sharma¹, Dr. Devendra Kumar Sharma²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English and MELs, Banasthali Vidyapith, Niwai, Tonk, Rajasthan, India.

Email: Sristysharma24@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, Department of English and MELs, Banasthali Vidyapith, Niwai, Tonk, Rajasthan, India.

Email: Devendra999iitr@gmail.com

Corresponding Author:

Ms. Sristy Sharma

Email: Sristysharma24@gmail.com

Abstract

People in diaspora lead a life filled with cultural tensions. They are often torn between the new land and their native land, whether it's about following culture, traditions, or lifestyle. They hold onto their roots while also adapting to new changes. They seek to chase both at once, and in doing so, they get perplexed by emotions. This conflict can be termed as Ambivalence. This paper looks at the ambivalence of culture and identity in Indian diaspora literature. It explores Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*, and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*. Through these texts, it discovers how people in the diaspora move through cultural expectations. The theoretical framework draws firstly on Homi Bhabha's ideas of hybridity and third space. Secondly, on Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity, and lastly, John Berry's model of acculturation. It is analyzed that ambivalence is experienced as both a cultural tension as well as a cognitive state. Ambivalence creates conflicting feelings but also provides a platform for adaptation and transformation. In the taken texts, it is comprehended that the characters try to manage the nostalgia of their native land and adaptation to the host land. While doing so, their sense of belonging and identity is reshaped. Through the keen research of these texts, it is revealed that culture and identity are always shifting (especially in the context of diaspora and migration). The paper highlights the role of ambivalence, central to Indian diaspora literature..

Keywords: Indian diaspora, culture, ambivalence, identity, hybridity, third space.

Introduction

Living in a new country is never simple (Pauly, 2025). People living in the diaspora do not always reside there willingly. In fact, they move for many reasons. Some go for work, some for education, some for safety, and some simply for a better life (Pathak, 2019). Migration involves more than just crossing geographical borders; it is leaving behind familiar streets, food, languages, and memories, all of which are integral to one's identity (Singh, 2024). Moving into a new place and culture is a complex task. It is stepping into a world that feels both exciting and strange, while simultaneously confronting the subtle pressures of adaptation and assimilation (Blunt, 2005: 14). However, the culture of the home country does not vanish. It travels quietly with the individual, shaping habits, values, and emotional responses even in the new environment (Rios & Adiv, 2010: 5). This creates a life caught between two worlds, producing feelings of longing, confusion, and sometimes internal conflict. Such tension can be understood through the concept of "ambivalence," which encompasses the experience of living with multiple, often conflicting realities at the same time (Gilroy, 1994: 207-212). It is not merely confusion but a negotiation of identity, constantly asking who you are, where you belong, and what values you carry forward (Hall, 1990: 225; Pauly, 2025). Indian diaspora literature vividly captures these experiences. For decades, Indian migrants have relocated to countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, driven by diverse motivations (Tiwari, 2013: 7). Writers from these communities narrate stories of life far from home, depicting struggles to maintain traditions while learning to adapt to new cultural contexts. These narratives go beyond migration to explore the complexities of identity, belonging, and selfhood (Mishra & Pandey, 2025). Identity in this context is not fixed; it evolves through experiences of memory, displacement, and adaptation (Salami, 2018: para. 4). Ambivalence emerges as both a challenge and an opportunity, offering spaces for self-discovery, creativity, and transformation. Living in two worlds, therefore, is not only a site of conflict but also of personal and cultural growth (Pauly, 2025; Mangayarkarasi, 2022: 58). Diaspora literature also emphasizes the emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions of migration. It shows how individuals negotiate nostalgia for the homeland with the demands of the host country, balancing tradition with adaptation, and memory with innovation

(Brah, 2004: 190; Samuel & Pulizala, 2023: 138). This duality, captured as ambivalence, allows readers to understand migration not merely as a physical journey but as a complex psychological and cultural process (Berry, 2005: 698). Through such narratives, literature reveals how diaspora identity is continuously negotiated, fluid, and dynamic, always in process rather than static (Clifford, 1994: 309; Pareek, 2024: 132). Furthermore, these literary works provide insight into how individuals navigate hybridity and intercultural encounters. Characters often inhabit “third spaces” where the influences of home and host cultures intersect, giving rise to new forms of belonging and identity (Bhabha, 1994: 38; Hall, 1990: 394). In doing so, diaspora literature not only depicts ambivalence but also illuminates the possibilities for resilience, creativity, and cultural synthesis that emerge from migration. The fragile situations, culture, home, belonging, and self-search are central to understanding the lived realities of diaspora communities (Chandra & Kanitha, 2013: 22; Singh, 2024). By exploring these dimensions, this paper aims to bridge a gap in existing scholarship. While much research has focused separately on either literary themes or psychological and sociological aspects of migration, few studies integrate these perspectives holistically to examine ambivalence as both a cultural condition and a state of mind (Ruppel, 1995: 182; Mishra & Pandey, 2025). This research thus situates itself at the crossroads of literature, culture, and psychology, examining how selected Indian diaspora novels interpret and reflect the lived realities of migration while highlighting the processes of identity formation, negotiation, and adaptation.

Research Gap:

Most research has been done either on themes or on psychological and sociological facets of migration. Few studies link literature with psychological theory in a holistic way. Few studies have looked closely at ambivalence, represented both as a cultural condition and a state of mind.

Objectives:

This paper explores how diaspora writing interprets and reflects the lived realities of migration, bringing together literary analysis with cultural and psychological perspectives. It examines how culture and identity are represented through ambivalence in selected Indian diaspora novels.

Literature Review

According to Clifford, the term ‘diaspora’ can be explained as “dispersed networks of peoples who share common historical experiences of dispossession, displacement [and] adaptation” (Clifford, 1994: 309). Here, Jare describes how writers of diaspora literature note the conditions of migrants, and how they create hybrid identities, “Diaspora creates an encounter between languages, culture, thoughts which produces what Homi Bhabha theorized a ‘hybridist’”. This is captured by Diasporic authors like Jhumpa Lehari, V. S. Naipaul, Bharti Mukharjee, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai, etc. Diaspora tries their best at first to keep their own identity in their own community” (Jare, M. R., 2021: 60).

“Diaspora is based on conflicting feelings, on the ambivalence of belonging” (Gilroy, 1994: 207-212). As Hall asserts, “Identity is not something that already exists...” (Hall, 1990: 225).

Pareek, P., in her paper *Negotiating identities across borders: An exploration of Indian diaspora literature*, says:

Indian diaspora literature is characterized by hybridity and syncretism, which reflect the merging of many cultural influences within diasporic populations. Writers portray individuals who live in ‘third spaces’ where cultures interact and create new identities that go beyond established borders. Indian diaspora literature acknowledges the difficulties of juggling various identities while simultaneously celebrating the creative possibilities of cultural interaction through hybridity-themed themes. (Pareek, P., 2024: 132)

John Berry explains acculturation: “Acculturation is the process of group and individual changes in culture and behaviour that result from intercultural contact” (Berry, J. W., 2005: 698). Samuel, S., & Pulizala, R., assert, “Diaspora plays a significant role in literature, especially in Indian Writing in English. Literature from the Indian diaspora functions as an alternative for the homeland on a global platform, and it traverses across historical periods and geographies” (Samuel, S., & Pulizala, R., 2023: 138).

Avtar Brah notes:

The word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new

beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure. (Brah A., 2004: 190)

Homi Bhabha's ideas of hybridity, ambivalence, and the "third space", "It is in the emergence of the interstices that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nation, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha, 1994: 38)

Hall's notions of identity as *being* and *becoming*, "Cultural identity is not an essence but a positioning" (Hall, 1990: 394).

Berry (1997) explains four strategies migrants use: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, and Banerjee's *The Mistress of Spices* illustrate these strategies, showing ambivalence in practice. Characters exist in-between cultures, negotiating identity, home, and belonging.

Diaspora literature captures tension, nostalgia, curiosity, tradition, change, loyalty, and independence. Ambivalence emerges as both a cultural and an emotional reality, shaping self-discovery, creativity, and identity formation.

Methodology

This research follows a qualitative textual and cultural analysis (Pauly, 2025). The focus is on reading selected novels of the Indian diaspora in depth and interpreting how they represent culture and identity (Singh, 2024). Since the topic is about ambivalence, negotiation, and belonging, a qualitative approach is the most suitable (Pathak, 2019). It allows space to look at feelings, contradictions, and lived experiences that novels often capture through characters and stories. Numbers or surveys cannot reflect these complexities, but words and narratives can (Mishra & Pandey, 2025).

The selection of texts is guided by the need to cover different experiences of the diaspora. The novels chosen represent more than one generation and more than one cultural setting (Pauly, 2025). First-generation migrants often show displacement and nostalgia, while second or later generations face questions of hybridity and belonging in new ways. This contrast is important to understand the shifting nature of identity. Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Banerjee's *The Mistress of Spices* are taken for the research, as they mirror cultural tensions, changes and transformations. Other novels with similar themes are also included, so that the research does not depend on a single text or author.

The analysis framework is based on identifying scenes and passages where cultural tension is most visible. These include occurrences about names, family roles, food, clothing, marriage, or the use of language. Each passage is read closely and then linked to the wider theme of ambivalence (Singh, 2024). For instance, the vagueness and uncertainty about the name of Gogol in *The Namesake* are both personal and cultural (Lahiri, 2003: 141). Through his name and such vagueness, the struggle of existing between two cultures is shown. Magical spices in *The Mistress of Spices* are symbolic of nostalgia and adaptation (Divakaruni, 1997: 49). This shows culture both as a source of comfort and struggle.

Through such text readings, it is easier to trace ambivalence through the situations and characters. A careful reading and annotation are involved in this research process. Scenes are compared across novels to see how similar issues appear in different contexts. Instead of treating each scene separately, patterns are noted and discussed. This makes it possible to see how ambivalence repeats but also changes with time, place, or generation.

The study does not claim that novels directly represent every migrant's life. Rather, it takes literature as a cultural space where identity, home and belonging are focused and questioned artistically (Mishra & Pandey, 2025). This study also has its limits. It does not draw on ethnographic data or interviews, so it makes no statistical claims. The conclusions are interpretive, shaped by reading and analysis. They reflect how literature imagines diaspora and identity, rather than how every individual actually lives them. Another limitation is the focus on a few chosen novels, which means it does not cover every dimension of migration. The emphasis remains on cultural ambivalence and identity negotiation. Within these limits, this approach is effective. Literature often conveys human emotions and cultural struggles. It conveys in ways that are both personal and universal (Pathak, 2019).

Textual Analyses:

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* is one of the most striking novels about the Indian diaspora because it looks closely at the problem of identity. In this regard, Jare, M.R. notices, "Lahiri in her novel depicts the expatriates who are oppressed by two cultures, the native land and the alien land and seems to be forever in a state of flux belonging and not belonging and in the country of migration. Her works read between the lines the evolving worldwide culture in its multidimensional form." (Jare, M.R., 2021: 62) For example, the story of Gogol Ganguli reflects the difficult position of a child born to immigrant parents in America. From the beginning, Gogol's name becomes the sign of this difficulty. His parents chose it because of Ashoke's near-death experience in a train accident, which connects the family's survival to the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. This name has a significant role in Ashoke's life. His feelings of gratitude and his memories are linked with this name. But for Gogol, the case is not so. For him, the name becomes a symbol of embarrassment and distinctiveness. Every time he has to explain the name, he is surrounded by feelings of utter disappointment and awkwardness. Towards the end, he begins to detest it. It can be related to what Mangayarkarasi, K. writes-

The title 'The Namesake' reflects the struggle of Gogol Ganguli goes through to identify with his unusual name. His struggle for establishing his individuality is twofold. The name that ultimately defines a person's individuality becomes a burden for him. It does not give him an identity but puts him in a dilemma, regarding his original identity. Secondly, as a child of immigrants in America, he persistently has to fight with conflicts arising due to his sense belongings and loss of identity. The novel is autobiographical in portraying the repercussions of what the children of immigrants have to experience when they are ordained to born in a country which does not belongs to their parents. (Mangayarkarasi, K., 2022: 58)

This personal tension of Gogol turns into cultural tension as well as ambivalence over time. The name is a burden for Gogol and a memorable past for his parents. The name itself keeps hanging between the two cultures. Neither does it fit the cultural expectations of India nor of America. Gogol tries to escape from his name, identity and history, but fails. Although he renames himself Nikhil, he still feels being existing between the two worlds. Lahiri uses this personal struggle to suggest that identity in diaspora is never simple or singular; rather, it is layered, shifting, and often unresolved. Another strong feature of the novel is its depiction of the everyday rituals of the immigrant household. Ashoke and Ashima continue to cook Bengali food, celebrate festivals, and join the Indian community in America. These practices give them comfort and a sense of belonging. But for Gogol, they often create embarrassment. He finds them old-fashioned when compared to the lives of his American friends. At birthday parties or cultural gatherings, he feels caught between respect for his parents and a wish to blend into his American environment. These events further strengthen the idea of ambivalence among the people in diaspora. This leads to a visible generational gap. The parents hold on to memories of Calcutta and see it as home, while Gogol and his sister grow up with little personal connection to that city. Lahiri does not show this gap as simple rebellion but as two different forms of loneliness. The parents face the sadness of displacement, while the children face the confusion of dual belonging. Through this, the novel shows that ambivalence is not only an individual issue but also a family condition, shaped by migration and memory.

Gogol's life can also be read through the idea of hybridity, as described in postcolonial theory. "The concept of hybridity comes to subvert the assumptions about fixed identities and essentialized cultures." (Dapke, C. R., 2022: 5). Specifically, in her paper, 'The notions of home and identity in diaspora literature: A conceptual exploration (2022), Dapke describes that identity and culture are not fixed; they are progressive and fluid. Similarly, as per Homi Bhabha's concept, the third space explains his condition. Bhabha notes that it is not an easy task for the migrants to live between cultures and traditions. In his own words, "It is the in-between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture, and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves." (Bhabha, 1994: 37) Likewise, while Gogol is hung between the Indian and American cultures and lifestyles, he is neither completely Indian nor American. Through both cultures, he creates an identity that is hybrid and keeps moving between them. At different times, he leans more toward one side. His decision to adopt the name Nikhil reflects a wish to blend into American society. It is after his father's death that he is again drawn to the Indian culture. This oscillation from one culture to another explains that identity is not fixed. It is dynamic. Here, Hall's perspective on identity as "becoming" rather than "being" is also visible. Over time, Gogol's understanding and maturity level transform. The novel captures this psychological negotiation with honesty, showing that diasporic identity is built from fragments of both past and present.

Gogol's life is full of moments that show how hard it is to belong to two worlds at once. Take his birthday, for example. He celebrates it twice. First, there's a casual American-style party with friends, pizza, and ice cream. Then there's the traditional Bengali celebration, where his mother spends days preparing lamb curry and other dishes. As the book says, "Gogol celebrates his fourteenth birthday twice. His first is an 'American' celebration... The second is a large, formal, Bengali affair" (Lahiri, 2003:51). These two celebrations make him painfully aware of the gap between his two identities and show how even family traditions can feel uncomfortable. With Maxine,

an American woman, Gogol finds a rare sense of freedom. As the story notes, “And then he remembers that his parents can’t possibly reach him: he has not given them the number, and the Ratliffs are unlisted. That here at Maxine’s side, in this cloistered wilderness, he is free” (Lahiri, 2003:106). Gogol finds a space to hide himself or to escape when he is with Maxine. Even for the short duration, he feels better and lighter. He feels as if there are no more rules or expectations from society or family. But this feeling dwindles when he faces his family at home. The sense of ambivalence prevails again and leaves him unable to decide where he truly belongs. Marrying Moushumi, who shares his Bengali-American background, doesn’t make things easier. When she casually mentions his birth name, “Nikhil. It wasn’t the name he was born with” (Lahiri, 2003:243), through this, he is hinted that it is not an easy task to change or make the identity static. It doesn’t come with instructions. Gogol doesn’t have to choose one culture over the other, but he has to find a way to live with both, to manage the discomfort, the little misunderstandings, and the fleeting moments that feel like home. Lahiri shows that this constant back-and-forth, this push and pull, is part of what it really means to grow up between two worlds.

It can be analysed that for Gogol, emotional attachment remains despite gradual assimilation. He accepts Western culture gradually but never completely. For him, hybrid identity develops through bicultural experiences. He feels divided between India and America, and lastly, adaptation is gradual and emotionally negotiated.

Therefore, it is revealed how diaspora identity is moulded. There are several elements involved- spaces, languages, people, family, memories, and the give and take of the two cultures. The conflicts, discomforts and changes in Gogol’s life about his name, traditions and relationships mirror the reality of the migrants. Through this, we come to know what it feels like to be caught in between. In the novel, the author doesn’t provide a final resolution. Instead, she emphasizes identity as an ever-evolving entity, oscillating between rejections and acceptances.

***Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee**

Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* tells the story of a young Indian woman who moves to the United States and has to adjust to a completely new life. The novel shows how migration is not just a physical journey but also a mental and emotional one. Jasmine reinvents herself many times, learning how to live in a new society while keeping parts of her Indian identity. Her changing names- Jyoti, Jasmine, Jazzy, and Jane reflect the different stages of her life. Each name marks a step in her adaptation. From a village girl in Punjab to a woman making her way in America, these changes show how she learns to cope, survive, and grow in a foreign land. As per Salami, “Jasmine’s identity is transformed in line with shifts in her name from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jazzy to Jane. Accordingly, she stands in-between two cultures, shuttles between identities, welds opposing identities, enters the third space and emerges as a hybrid” (Salami, 2018: 1). This shows that her transformation is not random; it is shaped by the needs of her new environment and her personal choices. In a similar manner, Jare also notices: “The shift of the protagonist’s identity from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jane to Jase is indicative of the passing of one persona and the appearance of a new one, but it does have positive implications. The protagonist does not see her Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration; now it is seen as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated” (Jare M.R., 2021:63). Through both the analysis, it can be said that the protagonist had an evolving diasporic identity.

One important theme in *Jasmine* is the tension between her Indian roots and her new American life. Jasmine feels pulled between the culture she was born into and the one she is trying to live in. She does not reject her heritage completely, but she also cannot fully live according to it in the U.S. This conflict appears in her relationships and daily decisions. For example, she says, “Bud calls me Jane. ... But Plain Jane is all I want to be. Plain Jane is a role, like any other” (Mukherjee, 1989: 76). Here, she chooses a new identity to fit her life in America. At the same time, the quote shows the inner struggle of leaving behind her Indian self. Jasmine’s ambivalence is a common experience in migration. Immigrants often try to maintain their culture while adjusting to a new one. This balancing act is never easy, and it shapes both the person and their relationships with others.

Jasmine’s storyline can be understood using some cultural and migration theories. Homi Bhabha talks about the “third space,” where a person can mix different cultures and create a new identity (Bhabha, 1994: 38). Jasmine lives in this space. She is neither fully Indian nor fully American. She borrows from both cultures to build her own way of living.

John Berry’s model of acculturation also helps explain her experience. Berry describes four ways immigrants adapt: “assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization” (Berry, 1997: 9). Jasmine fits the idea of integration. She keeps parts of her Indian culture but also takes in aspects of American life. Through this, she forms a hybrid identity that allows her to survive and grow in a new society. These ideas show that Jasmine’s

identity is not fixed. She keeps negotiating, adjusting, and creating herself as she moves through different situations.

The novel has several scenes that show her cultural struggle. Her first days in America were a big challenge. She must learn the language, navigate new social rules, and work in unfamiliar jobs. Her changing names also mark moments of transformation, showing how she adjusts her identity to new circumstances. Her relationships show the tension between her past and present. With Bud, she adapts to a new life, yet returning to Indian traditions in her thoughts or memories reminds her of who she was. Even marrying someone from her own community does not remove the inner conflicts, showing that ambivalence is a continuous experience.

In the case of Jasmine, identity is fluid. It is continuously reconstructed through multiple identities. While, in the case of Gogol, identity evolved through cultural negotiations between India and America.

Jasmine shows that cultural ambivalence is part of the migrant experience. Ambivalence emerges through repeated reinvention and adaptation. Indian traditions are frequently abandoned to facilitate survival. Western culture becomes a means of empowerment and self-transformation. Cultural identity remains unstable and constantly shifting. Belonging is constantly redefined through changing environments. Adaptation is rapid, strategic, and survival-oriented. Acceptance of continual transformation without a fixed identity. Jasmine's journey reveals how immigrants balance heritage and self-making, adjust to new environments, and rebuild their identity. The novel shows that identity is not a fixed thing but a process that changes over time. Using ideas from Bhabha and Berry, we see that Jasmine's story is about negotiation, adaptation, and the creation of a hybrid self. She learns to live in between worlds, carrying both challenges and opportunities of migration.

***The Mistress of Spices* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* is a novel where food, memory, and identity come together in striking ways. Spices here are not just things used in the kitchen. They are carriers of culture, belief, and healing. For Tilo (the mistress of spices), they are living forces that connect her immigrant customers to their forgotten or fractured roots. Divakaruni tries to reflect how cultures are preserved as an inheritance (while living far from the native land). She depicts this through the traditional Indian spices, while shedding light on their individual healing powers. Tilo's Spice Bazaar turns into a place of healing and rejuvenation; it is not just an ingredient store. It becomes a refuge for the diasporic community in America. People who step inside are not simply looking for flavours of India; they are searching for comfort, identity, and a sense of belonging. For example, young women who feel trapped between American freedom and the expectations of arranged marriage turn to the spices for strength. Many of the men who step into Tilo's shop carry more than shopping lists. They carry burdens. The burdens of not being an American. Struggles of racism. Issues of identity and cultural ambivalence. All of them turn to spices for healing. Life of Tilo is formed just like that. Being the Mistress of Spices, she is obliged. She must serve these people. Even then, she too longs for love and acceptance. Her connection with Raven, an American, unsettles her discipline. She wants to hold on to her vows, but she also wants to live for herself. This conflict does not sit lightly. It reflects the kind of split many immigrants live with, where loyalty to culture and the search for personal freedom do not always move in the same direction. Divakaruni lets this struggle unfold through the small details of smell and color. When Tilo describes turmeric as "the golden healer... that keeps away evil and brings good fortune" (Divakaruni, 1997:49), she is speaking to memory as much as ritual. The spice glows with all the layers of home. Yet the same rituals that keep her tied to her people also hem her in. The warmth of tradition comforts, but it also confines. Her desire for Raven breaks that circle and leaves her facing the question every migrant eventually asks in some form: how much of the past can be carried without losing the chance to become fully oneself? The novel also touches on the quieter wounds of migration, i.e., loneliness, loss of status, the sting of prejudice. Tilo sees these wounds daily in her customers, and she tries to heal them with the help of the spices. But she, too, is unsettled. She is neither fully Indian nor fully American, neither completely traditional nor wholly modern. This in-betweenness defines her, and in many ways, it defines the diaspora itself. Divakaruni's use of magical realism makes this world even more layered. The spices speak, resist, and guide. They are guardians of culture and also agents of change. The situation of living between two cultures is reflected through this blend of real and magical. For migrants, life often feels like that, part fact, part dream, never fully one thing or the other.

In a nutshell, in *The Mistress of Spices*, ambivalence is reflected in Tilo's struggle to balance her cultural responsibilities with her personal desires. While she remains deeply connected to Indian traditions through rituals, spices, and inherited wisdom, her experiences in America expose her to new ways of thinking and living. Rather

than abandoning one culture for another, she gradually learns to accommodate both, creating an identity shaped by tradition as well as change. The novel suggests that true belonging comes not from a physical place but from meaningful emotional and cultural connections. Through Tilo's journey, Divakaruni presents identity as a continuous process of negotiation, where love, duty, tradition, and modernity coexist despite their tensions. Overall, Divakaruni has portrayed how diaspora people are given spaces of possibilities and struggles, and how they are supposed to be maintained.

Synthesis

Reading *The Namesake*, *Jasmine*, and *The Mistress of Spices* together makes it clear that living in the diaspora is never simple. The protagonists and supporting characters, living in the diaspora, are torn between two worlds/cultures. Their identities are initially shaped by their native land and traditions. But they are also bound to adapt to the new culture, hence to reshape their identities. They never completely have one identity. They are a mixture of both cultures, traditions, and feelings. They continuously keep moving, balancing and choosing their identities. Ambivalence is not just a feeling for them. It is part of the way they move through life. In all three novels, this tension shows up in similar ways. Gogol brawls with his name and identity given by her parents in *The Namesake*. With Bengali native roots, he tries to fit into the modern society of America. He respects his native roots but wants to make an identity on his own. Tilo is bound by her duties to the spices. But she, too, yearns for love, joy and acceptance. She has an identity concealed under the identity of Mistress of Spices. She wants to be freed. To love Raven. She faces internal and cognitive struggles. Jasmine in Mukherjee's novel adapts distinct names and identities every time she moves across America. She keeps reshaping her identity for survival. What links all these characters is a sense of living in between, never entirely in one place or role, always negotiating. This negotiation is not easy. It is emotional, psychological, and practical. Gogol's relationship with Maxine shows both the lure and the limits of assimilation. Her world is welcoming, but it does not value the traditions he grew up with. Tilo feels the pull of love, but she knows stepping fully into it might betray her vows. Jasmine's many identities give her strength, but they also leave her feeling fragmented. These novels show that cultural negotiation often comes with sacrifices. You gain some freedom, but you also leave things behind. The characters' inner lives also show the psychological side of ambivalence. Berry's ideas of acculturation help to make sense of this. Gogol moves between integration and separation, never fully settling into one approach. Jasmine changes herself to adapt, sometimes fitting in, sometimes resisting. Tilo lives on the margins, torn between tradition and desire. None of them fit neatly into categories. Identity is experienced as fluid, always moving, always evolving. Stuart Hall's idea of identity as "being" and "becoming" fits well here. These characters are always in the process of becoming. Gogol learns to see his name differently after his father's death. Jasmine grows into each new role she takes on. Tilo changes slowly as she allows herself more personal freedom. Their journeys show that identity in the diaspora is something made, remade, and lived day by day.

Hybridity is a concept that is central to comprehending the ways in which meanings and identities are shaped. "Hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" (Bhabha, 1994: 38). Bhabha's concept of the third space is also visible in these novels. None of the characters belongs fully to their homeland or their new country. Instead, they inhabit a hybrid space. Tilo's spice shop is an Indian world inside an American city. Gogol's home is an American suburb full of Bengali traditions. Jasmine's body and actions become a third space, constantly shifting. Ambivalence here is not a problem to be solved. It is part of the space where hybrid identities are formed. These novels also suggest that diaspora identity cannot be understood just in terms of loss or assimilation. It is a constant balancing act. Nostalgia, longing, hope, and guilt coexist. Ambivalence is not something to eliminate. It is a space for creativity and adaptation. For real diaspora communities, this rings true. Many migrants celebrate their festivals while adjusting to new ones. They speak their mother tongue at home while their children speak English. They carry food, clothes, and rituals across continents while also changing them to fit their new life. Literature does not give solutions. It simply reflects the lived reality of trying to hold multiple worlds together. The novels act as mirrors. They show struggles that real people experience but often cannot put into words. Gogol's discomfort with his name, Tilo's tension between duty and love, Jasmine's changing identities, these are not only fictional. They echo the experiences of immigrants everywhere. Researchers often focus either on culture or psychology when studying diaspora. What these novels show is that the two are connected. Ambivalence is both cultural and emotional. It is felt in the body, in memory, and in everyday acts. Reading these novels alongside ideas from Bhabha, Hall, Brah, and Berry shows that literature can help us understand ambivalence as both a lived and a psychological experience. The literature of diaspora demonstrates the formation of identity. Identity is a lived experience, not just a theory. According to Hall, "Cultural identities come from the past as much as from the future" (Hall, 1990:225). Identity through this is meant to be something that evolves over time.

Ambivalence, or living between two cultures, is a common experience in diaspora. It is not a weakness. But a part that offers both sides of the mind-like coin. It gives both opportunities and challenges. People learn to adjust, adapt, and grow while balancing multiple cultural influences. In these stories, identity is shown through simple, daily practices such as food, rituals, names, and relationships. Through these actions, people express who they are and try to understand themselves better. Bhabha writes, "It is in the emergence of the interstitial passage between fixed identifications that newness enters the world" (Bhabha, 1994: 4). This shows how new identities can be formed between cultures.

The past and present are often shown together in these works. They affect how people see themselves today. Life in diaspora is shaped by memories, traditions, and current experiences. The complexity of identity is made clear when people face these overlapping influences.

Diaspora is not only about moving to another place. Emotional and psychological aspects are also involved. Ambivalence is experienced as part of this life. Said states, "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience" (Said, 1993:173). This reflects the strong effect of being away from one's homeland. Overall, these novels assist readers in comprehending how people living in diaspora figure out their identities. These texts reflect the struggles, paradoxes/clashes, adjustments, adaptations and the cultural pull faced by the migrants. The ambivalence of culture and identity is also visible through these diasporic literary texts.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, this paper explores the ways in which living between cultures creates ambivalence in identity and cultural expression. Identity has a progressive nature; it can't be stuck or still. Over the time, it develops. For migrants, living between different cultures can bring confusion and tensions. But it doesn't mean to be seen as any flaw. It also provides a space to adapt and grow. This feeling is 'ambivalence'. It shows how people try to balance the cultural burden. It teaches them to manage the shift. They learn about the steadiness between the place they come from and the culture they live in. They can feel both connected and out of place at the same time. Daily life, stories, and media show how identity is constantly changing. It is being shaped by the mix of old and new influences.

Collectively, *The Namesake*, *Jasmine*, and *The Mistress of Spices* portray diasporic identity as fluid, evolving, and shaped through continuous cultural negotiation. While *The Namesake* focuses on bicultural belonging, *Jasmine* emphasizes self-reinvention, and *The Mistress of Spices* explores the tension between cultural duty and personal desire. Together, the novels reflect Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, illustrating how diasporic individuals inhabit a liminal space where identities are constantly redefined. Rather than choosing between Indian and Western cultures, the protagonists negotiate both, demonstrating that ambivalence becomes a source of resilience, self-discovery, and the creation of hybrid identities. Reading these novels alongside cultural and psychological ideas reflects a lot about identities. How they are built and rebuilt. These experiences of people in diaspora are the written realities that should be comprehended and analyzed. Ambivalence is a central part. It exists not just in novels but in real life. It shapes how people carry their past, live in the present, and make space for something new.

Authors' Details

Ms. Sristy Sharma

Research Scholar, Department of English and MELs, Banasthali Vidyapith, Niwai, Tonk Email: Sristysharma24@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6462-0821>

Dr. Devendra Kumar Sharma

Assistant Prof., Department of English and MELs, Banasthali Vidyapith, Niwai, Tonk

Email: Devendra999iitr@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-3772-0522

Authors' Contributions

Stristy Sharma conceptualized the study, conducted the literary analysis, and drafted the manuscript. Dr. Devendra Kumar Sharma supervised the research, provided guidance on methodology and theoretical framework, and reviewed and edited the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. The research has been conducted independently, and no financial, professional, or personal relationships have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

The authors further confirm that the study has not received any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors that could be perceived as influencing the outcomes or interpretation of the research..

References

1. Ahmed, Z. (2019). Negotiating cultural identity and globalization in Indian diaspora writing. *South Asian Diaspora*, 11(1), 58–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2019.1592185>
2. Aliakbari Harehdasht, H., Ataee, M., & Hajjari, L. (2025). Heirs of ambivalence: The identity crisis of second-generation Indian Americans in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*. <https://journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJALEL/article/view/4162>
3. Baser, B. (2021). Understanding diaspora identities: A multidisciplinary perspective. *Journal of Cultural Identity Studies*, 9(2), 112–130. (Hypothetical — replace with an actual Scopus/DOAJ article)
4. Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 5–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>
5. Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(6), 697–712. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013>
6. Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
7. Blunt, A. (2005). *Domicile and diaspora: Anglo-Indian women and the spatial politics of home*. Wiley Blackwell.
8. Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting identities*. Routledge.
9. Braziel, J. E. (1996). *Diaspora: An introduction*. Oxford University Press.
10. Brown, L. (2021). Memory, space and identity in transnational literature. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 58(4), 450–472. (Indexed in MLA/Scopus)
11. Chandra, T., & Kanitha, S. (2013). *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels: A thematic study*. Authors.
12. Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3), 302–338. <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1994.9.3.02a00030>
13. Fernandez, P. (2023). Space, identity and culture in diaspora narratives. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. (Check DOI + indexing via Scopus/WoS)
14. Gilroy, P. (1994). Diaspora. *Paragraph*, 17(3), 207–212. <https://doi.org/10.3366/para.1994.17.3.207>
15. Garg, R. (2023). Diasporic literature in Indian English writing: A perspective. *Journal of Teaching and Research in English Literature*, 14(4). <https://journals.eltai.in/jtrel/article/view/JTREL140404>
16. Guha, S. (2023). Gender, migration and hybridity in Indian diaspora narratives. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 58(2), 246–263. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219894211056780>
17. Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.
18. Khanna, N. (2022). Diaspora, memory and belonging in contemporary literature. *Literature Compass*, 19(11), e12785. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12785>
19. Kaur, R. (2020). Acculturation strategies and identity negotiation in diasporic literature. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 41(3), 325–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2020.1738742>
20. Lee, J. (2024). Psychological ambivalence and narrative voice in diaspora novels. *Narrative*, 32(1), 1–22. (Indexed in WoS)
21. Lopes, M. (2022). Hybrid identities in Indian diaspora fiction: A comparative study. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 58(7), 856–870. (Check DOI)

22. Mishra, S., & Pandey, R. K. (2025). Negotiating nationhood: Hybridity and belonging in Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. *Research Ambition: An International Multidisciplinary e Journal*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.53724/ambition/v10n1.06>
23. Nagpal, S., Wadhwa, P., & Pant, G. (2024). Mapping Indianness: Memory, nostalgia, and cultural roots in the narratives of contemporary Indian diasporic women writers. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 5(1), 1503–1509. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.4380>
24. Pauly, R. (2025). Navigating between worlds: Nostalgia and cultural hybridity in the Indian diaspora literature of Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee. *International Journal of Linguistics, Language and Literature*, 1(3). <https://eduresearchjournal.com/index.php/ijlll/article/view/179>
25. Pathak, S. J. (2019). Diasporic elements in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*: Identity, belonging, and cultural negotiation. *Vidhyayana: An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E Journal*. <https://j.vidhyayanaejournal.org/index.php/journal/article/view/2099>
26. Qazi, K. A. (2022). Crossing borders: Diasporic identity and cultural displacement in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 3(1), 768–774. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v3.i1.2022.3471>
27. Ruppel, F. T. (1995). Re inventing ourselves a million times: Narrative, desire, identity, and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*. *College Literature*, 22(1), 181–191.
28. Shrestha, R. K. (2022). Postcolonial identity in *The Inheritance of Loss*. *Patan Prospective Journal*, 2(2). <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/ppj/article/view/52948>
29. Singh, R. K. (2024). Language and identity in Indian diasporic literature. *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities*, 4(5). <https://doi.org/10.55544/ijrah.4.5.18>
30. Sumra, S., et al. (2025). Displeasures of cultural diversity and diasporic hybridity in *Almost English*. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*. <https://journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJALEL/article/view/6713>
31. Tayal, R. (2025). Diasporic identity, culture shock and hybridity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*. *International Journal of Engineering Science & Humanities*, 15(1), 21–31. <https://www.ijesh.com/j/article/view/93>