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Article

Diaspora, National Identity, and Decolonisation: A Nationalist Reading of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* and Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*

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Abstract: Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013) and Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* (2008) are diaspora narratives that simultaneously reflect India's domestic challenges and its international reputation. Lahiri reimagines the Naxalite insurgency in Bengal and its diasporic reverberations, while Kapur traces the dislocation of an Indian woman migrating to Canada. Read together, the novels underscore how internal turbulence and external migration both shape the nation's global image. This article offers a consciously nationalist and decolonising interpretation. It argues that postcolonial pedagogy—dominated for decades by colonialist habits of reading—has too often highlighted fragility and failure rather than resilience and responsibility. Read through the lens of the National Education Policy 2020, which urges a decolonised and value-based curriculum, these novels become teaching texts. They affirm constitutional democracy, civic duty, and cultural dignity while warning against imported ideologies and unanchored migration. In so doing, Lahiri and Kapur enhance India's soft power abroad and remind citizens at home that genuine freedom rests on a balance of rights and duties. Their work becomes a pedagogical intervention, preparing students to act as responsible citizens and confident global representatives. In this sense, diaspora fiction is not a lament of loss but a civic resource for building India@100 – Vikshit Bharat.

Keywords: diaspora; nationalism; NEP 2020; decolonisation; civic duty; migration

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Introduction

The fiction of the Indian diaspora has become one of the most significant means of narrating the nation in an age of rapid mobility and intense media scrutiny. Writers like Jhumpa Lahiri and Manju Kapur do not merely recount personal journeys of dislocation; they stage consequential conversations about India's image, its civic fabric, and its place in the world. Their novels remind us that what happens within India—political insurgency, social unrest, or debates around gender—and what happens outside it—migration, assimilation, alienation—are not separate stories. They are entangled strands of a single narrative about a country committed to democratic reform, cultural dignity, and ethical global engagement. However, a persistent tendency in the criticism of such works—especially in classrooms far from India—has been to read them through a lingering colonial scepticism. If there is unrest, it is taken as proof of democratic fragility; if a migrant struggles, the nation is pronounced deficient. This paper resists those shortcuts. It insists on a nationalist and decolonising **lens**, aligned with NEP 2020, which urges educators to recover literature's role in cultivating civic pride, ethical responsibility, and a balanced appreciation of rights and duties. The aim, then, is not to deny the challenges that Lahiri and Kapur depict, but to interpret them as opportunities for resilience and renewal. Violence, inequality, and alienation are not symptoms of inevitable collapse; they are part of a democracy's capacity for self-correction. Read this way, the novels become ethical commentaries on democratic patience, responsible migration, and the dignity that arises from cultural grounding. Literature, in short, is not ornamental to national life; it is one of its most articulate allies.

The objectives of this inquiry form a coherent agenda rather than a checklist. First, it examines how *The Lowland* and *The Immigrant* together narrate the domestic–international link: internal turbulence in India and diasporic experiences abroad shape the same global profile. Second, it places the novels within the **NEP 2020** framework, treating them not merely as texts for aesthetic response but as tools for classroom cultivation of civic responsibility and national pride. Third, it advances a nationalist interpretive stance: the novels are read not as indictments of India but as affirmations of constitutional resilience and social reform. Finally, it considers how the novels engage categories of inequality—class, caste, gender, migration—not as proof of national defect but as sites of democratic debate and ethical action.

The choice of Lahiri and Kapur is deliberate. Lahiri, writing from the diaspora, looks back to Calcutta in the 1960s and 70s, embedding the Naxalite insurgency in the intimate world of a family and the long arc of migration. Kapur, writing from Delhi but setting her story in Canada, explores the daily texture of diasporic life—its promises, pressures, and moral tests. Read together, these novels capture both ends of India's global presence: unrest within the homeland that echoes abroad, and migration outside the homeland that demands cultural anchoring. Both authors have a wide readership both inside and outside India, making their works well-suited for the decolonizing commitments of the contemporary classroom.

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Lahiri's *The Lowland*: Violence, Responsibility, and the Diasporic Ethics

Lahiri's novel returns to a fraught chapter: the Naxalite turbulence in Bengal. She declines the romance of rebellion and chooses instead the register of close moral scrutiny, showing how radical ideology corrodes not only public order but also the quiet architecture of family life. The brothers Udayan and Subhash embody divergent paths available to Indian youth. Udayan reads revolution as a shortcut to justice, borrowing a script that promises purification through violence. Subhash, cautious and reflective, prefers the slow grammar of study, work, and responsibility; he eventually moves to the United States for graduate study.

Udayan's radicalisation is not caricatured; Lahiri acknowledges the sincerity of his motives. However, sincerity is not immunity. The rhetoric that captivates him is imported, impatient with India's constitutional processes and sceptical of democratic compromise. The consequences are predictable and devastating: risk escalates, violence spreads, and the community's capacity for deliberation shrinks. When the police kill Udayan, the novel refuses both triumphalism and easy martyrdom. The cost is borne by those closest to him—his parents, his young widow Gauri, and his brother Subhash—who must live with the shards of a choice made in the name of an etherised purer justice. The scene is easy for global audiences to find in such episodes the proof of the fragility of Indian democracy. Lahiri invites a different inference: that a constitutional order committed to non-violence, due process, and incremental reform must guard itself against doctrinal shortcuts that glorify harm and trouble and loss to ordinary citizens. The point is not that India is immune to crisis, but that its democratic architecture is designed to absorb shocks, deliberate, and attempt correction. Subhash's response is the novel's moral centre. He returns from America, marries Gauri, and raises Bela, his niece, as his own daughter. These are not gestures of convenient charity but acts of binding obligation. Subhash's migration does not erase responsibility; it thickens it. He models a diasporic ethic that goes well beyond remittances: to carry one's duties across borders, to represent one's country with dignity, and to sustain the family as a microcosm of the nation's moral life. Lahiri thus counters the easy stereotype of the diaspora as one of detachment. In *The Lowland*, to live abroad is to extend, not escape, the obligations of citizenship.

Read through a decolonising lens, the novel resists the familiar Western classroom script in which India is figured as perpetually unstable. Instead, in the novel, violence is explained as a temptation to be resisted and constitutional patience as a virtue to be taught. It is to be realised that a democracy like India's advances through argument, negotiation, and civic commitment—not through the enchantments of imported revolution.

Kapur's *The Immigrant*: Migration, Gender, and the Measure of Dignity

If Lahiri shows how unrest at home shapes the nation's image abroad, Kapur begins abroad and works back to the values that make migration meaningful. *The Immigrant* follows Nina, an English lecturer from Delhi, who marries Ananda, a dentist who has been long settled in Canada. The promise of cosmopolitan mobility quickly

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complicates into a story of quiet dislocation. Nina's professional identity erodes; her search for meaningful work stalls; her marriage grows thin. None of this is played for melodrama. Kapur's realism is painstaking, and her diagnosis is precise: migration without cultural anchoring risks hollowing the self. Ananda offers a contrasting lesson. He embraces prosperity and assimilation with a zeal that leaves little space for empathy or cultural responsibility. The problem is not success; the problem is a success that forgets why dignity matters. In reducing migration to material mobility, Ananda turns opportunity into a flattening pressure to conform. The marriage becomes a site not of companionship but of misrecognition. Indian values associated with the institution of marriage are easily shown in the example to have been woefully forgotten, to the utter distress of the couple/wife. Kapur resists the tendency among readers to accept the binary in which India is home readily and the West is alien. Her point is subtler and more demanding: to migrate is to submit to a moral test. One must carry across borders the values that confer dignity—respect for family, care for community, fidelity to one's cultural inheritance. Nina's estrangement is not an indictment of migration; it is a lesson in what happens when migration is attempted without the ballast of belonging. For students poised to study or work abroad, the force of this lesson is immediate. NEP 2020's ambition—to prepare "global citizens with Indian values"—finds here a vivid narrative case study.

The novel foregrounds gender as integral to dignity. Nina's vulnerability is amplified by the silences of marriage and the precarities of work; her predicament recalls a larger truth: national image abroad is inseparable from the nation's willingness to honour women at home and in the diaspora. Kapur's intervention is therefore not merely cultural; it is constitutional (in Indian terms). It reminds readers that a country's greatness is measured by how it seeks to work out its protections and what happens to be the texture of its everyday justice. Read in the nationalist spirit and ideology, *The Immigrant* advocates a diasporic pride that refuses both chauvinism and erasure. Migrants, it is understood, must adapt, of necessity; but adaptation is not to end up in self-negation. Prosperity without pride is a form of impoverishment. Kapur seems to advise the readers very plainly to carry India into the world with grace, not apology.

Decolonisation and National Responsibility

A decolonising reading of these novels requires a shift in habits as much as in frameworks. For decades, academic criticism—especially in English departments far from India—has been trained to treasure fracture, melancholy, and loss as the marks of literature of consequence. The risk, however, is that readers are taught to overlook the resilience before them. Lahiri and Kapur write against that drift. Their novels register turbulence and displacement, but they are equally invested in recovery, responsibility, and reform.

Edward Said's(1993) *Culture and Imperialism* positions literature as counterpoint: a means of resisting dominant narratives that flatten complexity. In that spirit, *The Lowland* functions as a counter-narrative not to India but to imported romances of violence; *The Immigrant* counters the easy assumption that migration is either an inevitable triumph or an inevitable loss. Both novels insist on the dignity of

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constitutional patience and the necessity of cultural anchoring. They complicate the international media's appetite for crisis by restoring the long view - families heal, communities negotiate, democracies endure.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's(1988) question– "Can the subaltern speak?"– lands differently when read in a nationalistic approach. Udayan speaks, but his borrowed rhetoric bends his speech toward harm; the energy that might have built is consumed by a doctrine that sanctifies destruction. Nina struggles to be heard in marriage and the workplace; her pauses draw attention to structures that must be reformed if women migrants are to flourish. The novels suggest that voice matters most when combined with responsibility: speech that undermines democracy is not liberation, but forfeiture.

Homi Bhabha's(1994) doubleness–hybridity, mimicry, the third space–retains its interpretive reach, but Lahiri and Kapur demand an ethical supplement. Subhash and Nina are hybrid subjects in obvious ways, but hybridity without ballast risks dissolution. Anchored hybridity–cultural negotiation moored to national pride–proves generative. It is this "weighted" hybridity that the novels advocate: a way of being global that does not truncate home.

Amartya Sen's (2005) portrait of India as an argumentative civilization illuminates the novels' internal architectures. They are full of arguments–across dining tables, lecture halls, and quiet rooms; between brothers, spouses, and generations. The point is not that argument ends in unanimity; the point is that democratic life thrives on the habit of reasoned contention. Martha Nussbaum's (2010) confidence in literature's power to cultivate civic imagination deepens the claim. By inhabiting the losses and hopes of Subhash and Nina, readers rehearse the empathy that a constitutional democracy requires.

Beneath these theoretical frames lies an Indian compass: Gandhi's(1909/1997) non-violence, Ambedkar's dignity, and Nehru's(1985) democratic modernity. Lahiri criticises the seduction of violence; Kapur exposes the hollowness of assimilation without values. Both reaffirm the constitutional path. Decolonisation here is not a repudiation of modernity, but a reclamation of interpretive sovereignty -- the right to read Indian literature as part of India's living effort to remain free, just, and whole.

Comparative Analysis: Two Views on the Same Nation

Placed side by side, the novels offer complementary angles on one question: how should India narrate itself to itself and to the world? Lahiri begins at home, in the neighbourhood and the police cordon, and lets the consequences ripple outward to the diaspora. Kapur begins abroad, in the apartment, the clinic, and the job hunt, and lets the tug of home pull back into view. The arcs differ, but the ethic converges.

The Lowland cautions against mistaking destructive energy for transformative justice. The real heroism is not in the slogan or the secret meeting but in Subhash's everyday fidelity to duty: the long labour of care, the quiet repair of kinship, the steady representation of India abroad with dignity intact. *The Immigrant* warns against construing global mobility as pure ascent. Without cultural ballast, movement becomes

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drift, prosperity shrinks into pose, and belonging thins to costume. The novel's moral weather is clear – as long as migration is meaningful, it is faithful.

Together, the books yield a civic calculus that resembles a SWOT analysis of India's international standing. India's strengths lie in its resilience, argumentative democracy, and a diaspora capable of bridge-building. Weaknesses in this order include prominent susceptibility of the young and the mobile to misdirection, whether by imported revolution or imported nihilism. Opportunities along the line lie in cultural diplomacy, pedagogies that align competence with character, and diasporic networks that amplify India's soft power. Threats in a very glaring way point to misreadings at home and abroad that confuse turbulence with failure and teach students to despise the very nation that sustains their freedom, even to argue.

At the centre of the comparison stands a constitutional chord: the state is duty-bound to protect democracy and the dignity of its citizens; citizens are duty-bound to exercise their freedoms responsibly. Lahiri and Kapur dramatize what follows when that balance falters—and what becomes possible when it holds.

Pedagogical Implications: NEP 2020 and the classroom

If these insights are to matter, they must be taught with zeal, conviction, and on citation of evidence – both textual and critical. NEP 2020 emphasizes that education should be decolonized, competency-based, and value-driven. Literature, on this view, is not a decorative subject; it is a training ground for democratic life. *The Lowland* and *The Immigrant* lend themselves to such a pedagogy.

With Lahiri, students can trace the mechanics of radicalisation—how grievance meets ideology, how rhetoric outruns reality, how violence promises clarity and delivers ruin. They can read the counter-model in Subhash: obligation over impulse, repair over rupture. Classroom tasks can move from plot analysis to civic simulation: draft a policy brief that addresses youth unrest without sacrificing rights; write a dialogue in which a student persuades a friend to reject violent shortcuts; stage a debate on how to defend civil liberties while maintaining order. In each exercise, literature becomes an entry point for constitutional reasoning.

With Kapur, students can test the ethics of migration. What constitutes responsible adaptation? How do gender, work, and law intersect in the lives of women abroad? How can diaspora communities project India's dignity while participating fully in host societies? Assignments can pair close reading with practical design: outline an orientation module for outbound students on cultural anchoring; compose a code of conduct for diaspora clubs that balances integration with pride; write a reflective essay on "carrying India" in professional life.

Most of all, these novels humanise policy. Numbers—on unemployment, on visas, on remittances—tell one story. Fiction supplies the rest: the conversation at the table, the quiet ache of the job rejection, the small victory of a child's laughter after a year of grief. When students live with Subhash and Nina for a term, they rehearse the empathy and restraint that democratic citizenship requires. This is, no doubt, the heart of a decolonised pedagogy: not propaganda, not a naïve denial of difficulty, but a

disciplined refusal to read India through a lens designed by every dubious and devious means to belittle it. The classroom task is to cultivate minds that can recognise flaws, imagine remedies, and love their country without illusion or apology.

Conclusion: Toward India@100 – Viksit Bharat

Read together, Lahiri and Kapur do not very crudely bat for the nation—nor do they indulge in easy and cheap condemnation. Instead, they sketch out a path —one that resonates with the hopes every citizen committed to India's democratic journey carries. *The Lowland* rejects the glamour of imported violence and shows that healing lies in responsibility. *The Immigrant* rejects the emptiness of assimilation without values and shows that dignity travels with those who carry it. Both insist that India's future depends on honouring the compact between state and citizen -- protection and participation, rights and duties. A decolonising approach allows these insights to register fully. It reads turbulence as a test of institutions, not a proof of doom; it reads migration as a test of character, not a passport to erasure. It returns interpretive sovereignty to Indian classrooms and insists that national pride and critical intelligence are inextricably linked. As India approaches a century of Independence, the stakes are unmistakable. India@100 – Vikshit Bharat is not a slogan for posters but a program for people: resilient in adversity, confident in identity, generous in imagination. Literature has a role in that program. Taught with care, novels like Lahiri's and Kapur's prepare students to argue without hatred, to move without losing themselves, and to serve without noise. They strengthen soft power abroad and civic muscle at home. They remind us that the work of freedom is daily and shared. If the twentieth century demanded independence, the twenty-first demands stewardship—of institutions, of culture, of one another. Lahiri and Kapur help us teach that stewardship. In their pages, readers encounter not an apology for India, nor an indictment, but an invitation: to build, together, a resilient, inclusive, and dignified nation.

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