

Bordered Belonging: Gender, Diaspora, and Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth*

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Abstract: Jhumpa Lahiri, through her writing, offers a powerful exploration of identity, culture and belonging, offering insights into the experiences of immigrant communities and the challenges they face. This study examines how Lahiri's female protagonists navigate the shifting emotional and cultural boundaries that define diasporic existence. The title reflects the central idea that belonging for diasporic women is never fixed but constantly shaped by gender expectations, cultural displacement, and the pressures of adapting to new social environments. The primary objective of this paper is to explore how identity crises emerge for women situated between inherited traditions and the demands of a different cultural landscape, and to understand how these tensions influence their sense of autonomy, selfhood, and familial roles. Through close reading of the two works, the study uncovers the emotional negotiations that accompany diaspora, particularly the struggle to reconcile personal aspirations with cultural expectations. Although they confront alienation, cultural fragmentation, and the burden of patriarchal norms, they also discover moments of empowerment and cultivate redefined forms of belonging that challenge traditional boundaries. Lahiri's female characters—spanning first- and second-generation immigrants—negotiate a complex terrain shaped by cultural displacement, familial expectations, and the conflicting demands of tradition and modernity. It offers a nuanced understanding of the characters' experience, highlighting the complexities of identity, culture and belonging. Ultimately, the paper argues that Lahiri's female protagonists embody a multifaceted identity crisis that reflects the broader condition of the diaspora—an ongoing negotiation between memory and mobility, heritage and self-determination.

Keywords: Diaspora, Gender, Identity Crisis, Cultural Displacement, Belonging

Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction offers one of the most sustained literary engagements with the gendered experience of diaspora in contemporary South Asian American writing. This article presents a comparative analysis of Ashima Ganguly in *The Namesake* (2003) and Ruma in *The Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), examining how gender mediates diasporic alienation, belonging, and identity formation across generations. Drawing on feminist diaspora theory and existing Lahiri criticism, this essay argues that Lahiri portrays diasporic identity as a gendered, affective, and unfinished process. While Ashima embodies the pain of first-generation displacement and gradual self-fashioning, Ruma represents second-generation inherited dislocation and emotional ambivalence. The article demonstrates how Lahiri complicates celebratory narratives of assimilation by foregrounding women's emotional labour and the persistence of gendered expectations within transnational families. Critical discussions of diaspora have increasingly moved away from celebratory models of multicultural assimilation toward more nuanced examinations of affect, memory, and gendered subjectivity. Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction is central to this shift. As Brinda Bose notes, Lahiri's work "locates diaspora not in dramatic cultural conflict but in quiet emotional negotiations, particularly within domestic spaces" (HHDI 54). Women, in these spaces, become the primary bearers of cultural continuity and emotional endurance. This article undertakes a comparative study of Ashima Ganguly and Ruma to examine how gender structures diasporic identity differently across generations. While Ashima's life is defined by geographical displacement and cultural nostalgia, Ruma's identity crisis emerges from emotional inheritance and ambivalence toward independence. By placing these characters in context, the article positions Lahiri's fiction within feminist diaspora discourse and argues that gender remains the most persistent axis of displacement in transnational life.

Gender, Diaspora, and Identity: A Theoretical Framework

The concept of diaspora has evolved considerably within contemporary literary and cultural studies. Earlier understandings emphasised exile, displacement, and the longing for an ancestral homeland. Contemporary scholarship, however, views diaspora as a dynamic process of negotiating identity across multiple cultural spaces rather than a temporary condition awaiting return. Identity is now understood as fluid and continually shaped by migration, memory, culture, and belonging. Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction reflects this modern understanding by portraying immigrant lives as ongoing journeys of emotional, cultural, and psychological adaptation rather than narratives of either permanent loss or complete assimilation.

Among the most influential theorists of diaspora, Avtar Brah introduces the concept of "diaspora space," arguing that diaspora extends beyond physical migration to encompass the social and cultural spaces where migrants, native populations, and successive generations negotiate identity. In *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), Brah contends that identities are shaped by the intersections of gender, class, ethnicity, race, and generation rather than by a single cultural origin. This perspective is particularly relevant to Lahiri's protagonists. Although Ashima Ganguly and Ruma belong to

different generations of the Bengali diaspora, both inhabit what Brah describes as diaspora space, continually negotiating inherited traditions alongside contemporary American life. Their conflicts arise not merely from geographical displacement but from occupying multiple cultural positions simultaneously.

Stuart Hall further expands the discussion by rejecting the notion of identity as a fixed or inherited essence. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Hall argues that identity is "a production" that is "always in process," continually reconstructed through history, memory, and representation. Lahiri's female protagonists exemplify this fluidity. Ashima gradually reshapes her identity as she adapts to life in America, while Ruma struggles to reconcile her American upbringing with Bengali familial expectations. Rather than presenting identity through binaries such as Indian versus American or tradition versus modernity, Lahiri portrays it as an evolving negotiation shaped by changing relationships, motherhood, migration, and personal loss.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space" provides another significant framework for understanding Lahiri's fiction. Bhabha argues that cultural encounters generate hybrid identities that exist between established cultural categories rather than within them. Lahiri's characters neither fully assimilate into American culture nor remain exclusively rooted in Indian traditions. Instead, they inhabit an intermediate space where multiple cultural affiliations coexist. Ashima's decision to divide her life between India and the United States and Ruma's negotiation between American individualism and Bengali familial values illustrate this hybrid condition. Their identities emerge through continual cultural negotiation rather than through exclusive allegiance to a single nation or tradition.

While postcolonial theory explains hybridity and identity, feminist scholars emphasise the gendered dimensions of migration. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues in *Feminism without Borders* (2003) that specific historical and cultural contexts shape migrant women's experiences and that migration often reinforces rather than eliminates patriarchal expectations. Women frequently assume responsibility for caregiving, emotional labour, and the preservation of cultural traditions. Lahiri's fiction reflects these concerns. Ashima becomes the principal guardian of Bengali customs within her family despite her own emotional isolation, while Ruma struggles to balance motherhood, professional aspirations, and inherited expectations of filial responsibility. Their experiences demonstrate that migration transforms geographical boundaries but does not necessarily dismantle gender hierarchies.

Susan Stanford Friedman similarly observes that migration often expands men's public opportunities while increasing women's domestic responsibilities. This distinction is evident in *The Namesake*, where Ashoke adapts to American society through his professional career, whereas Ashima initially experiences migration largely within the domestic sphere. Lahiri thereby reveals how women's displacement frequently remains invisible because it unfolds through caregiving, household responsibilities, and emotional support rather than through public institutions.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak further argues that women often become transmitters of cultural memory within diasporic communities. Through rituals, language, family traditions, and caregiving, they preserve collective identity across generations while simultaneously sacrificing aspects of their own autonomy. Lahiri repeatedly assigns this role to her female protagonists. Ashima recreates Bengali festivals, cuisine, and customs in America, while Ruma feels responsible for preserving her deceased mother's values and maintaining familial continuity. Their experiences reveal that women inherit not only cultural traditions but also the emotional burden of sustaining them.

Scholars of South Asian American literature reinforce these theoretical perspectives. Brinda Bose argues that Lahiri relocates the diaspora from public political conflicts to the intimate spaces of domestic life, where loneliness, caregiving, and family relationships become central sites of identity formation. Inderpal Grewal likewise suggests that diasporic women frequently bear the responsibility of preserving cultural continuity across generations. At the same time, Susan Koshy's concept of "minority cosmopolitanism" emphasises that mobility does not necessarily guarantee emotional belonging. Lahiri's protagonists may achieve geographical mobility and social integration, yet they remain shaped by memory, gender, and familial obligation.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for this study. Brah's diaspora space, Hall's fluid conception of identity, Bhabha's Third Space, Mohanty's feminist critique of migration, Friedman's analysis of gendered mobility, Spivak's emphasis on cultural transmission, and the contributions of Bose, Grewal, and Koshy collectively illuminate Lahiri's representation of diasporic womanhood. Their work demonstrates that diaspora is not simply a condition of geographical displacement but an ongoing process of negotiating identity through gender, memory, emotional labour, and intergenerational relationships. Within this framework, Ashima and Ruma emerge as representative figures whose experiences reveal that identity remains unfinished, belonging remains contested, and migration continues to shape women's lives across generations.

Ashima Ganguly: the Reconstruction of Identity

Ashima Ganguly, the central female protagonist of *The Namesake*, represents Jhumpa Lahiri's most compelling portrayal of first-generation immigrant womanhood. Rather than presenting migration as a straightforward path toward economic opportunity or assimilation, Lahiri depicts Ashima's journey as an emotionally complex process shaped by loneliness, cultural displacement, and gradual self-reconstruction. Her migration from Calcutta to the United States is determined by marriage rather than personal ambition, making her experience not only a geographical relocation but also the loss of familiar relationships, cultural identity, and emotional security. Lahiri suggests that for many immigrant women, migration entails a dual displacement: separation from the homeland and continued negotiation of patriarchal expectations within the family.

From the opening chapters, Ashima's vulnerability is evident. Shortly before giving birth to Gogol in a Boston hospital, she is surrounded by unfamiliar customs, language, and people, without the support of the extended family that would traditionally accompany childbirth in India. Lahiri uses this moment to symbolise the larger immigrant condition, where even ordinary experiences become unfamiliar because they occur outside established social networks. Childbirth, usually a communal event in Bengali culture, becomes an experience of profound isolation, highlighting the emotional consequences of migration. Lahiri captures Ashima's condition through one of the novel's most memorable observations: "Being a foreigner...is a sort of lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts." (*The Namesake* 49). This metaphor emphasises migration as a permanent psychological condition rather than a temporary stage of adjustment. Like pregnancy, immigration involves uncertainty, vulnerability, and anticipation; unlike pregnancy, however, it offers no definitive conclusion. Ashima remains suspended between two worlds, never entirely belonging to either. Her experience illustrates how displacement becomes embodied through loneliness, anxiety, and the continuous negotiation of unfamiliar surroundings.

Ashima's experience reflects Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space, where multiple identities intersect and are continually renegotiated. She exists simultaneously as an Indian woman, immigrant, wife, mother, and later widow. Unlike her husband Ashoke, whose academic career facilitates his integration into American society, Ashima's daily life is largely confined to the domestic sphere. Her limited access to professional and public spaces reinforces her dependence on family relationships and intensifies her sense of isolation. Lahiri thereby demonstrates that migration is deeply gendered, with women often experiencing displacement through domestic responsibilities rather than public participation.

The contrast between Ashima and Ashoke further reveals these gendered inequalities. For Ashoke, America represents professional opportunity and intellectual growth. For Ashima, it initially signifies absence—the absence of family, familiar customs, neighbourhood relationships, and everyday cultural practices. Lahiri observes that Ashima often feels she is "living someone else's life," a statement that reflects Stuart Hall's conception of identity as an ongoing process rather than a fixed condition. Her previous identity remains rooted in India, while her new life in America initially feels temporary and emotionally incomplete.

Yet Lahiri refuses to portray Ashima solely as a passive victim of migration. Gradually, she transforms the domestic sphere into a space of cultural preservation and agency. Through preparing Bengali food, celebrating religious festivals, teaching her children their cultural heritage, and maintaining friendships with other immigrant families, Ashima actively reconstructs a sense of community. These practices are not merely nostalgic attempts to recreate India but deliberate acts of preserving cultural memory within a new environment.

Nilanjana Deb argues that Lahiri reimagines domestic space as a site of agency rather than confinement. Ashima's household becomes a cultural archive where

language, rituals, and traditions are transmitted across generations. Her ability to adapt Bengali customs to American circumstances exemplifies Homi Bhabha's concept of the Third Space, in which cultural meanings are continually negotiated rather than rigidly preserved. Rather than choosing between Indian and American identities, Ashima gradually learns to inhabit both.

Motherhood further shapes Ashima's identity. Following Gogol's birth, she fears raising children in a country where she has no relatives or established support system. Lahiri writes: "She is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one." (*The Namesake* 6) This fear extends beyond practical concerns to the preservation of cultural identity. As the primary caregiver, Ashima assumes responsibility for transmitting Bengali language, traditions, and values to her children. Mohanty's feminist analysis of migration illuminates this burden, arguing that immigrant women often become custodians of cultural continuity while adapting to unfamiliar societies. Their labour, though largely invisible because it occurs within the home, is essential to the survival of diasporic communities. At the same time, Ashima recognises that Gogol and Sonia naturally develop identities shaped by American society. Their comfort within American culture reassures her as a mother but also reminds her of her own continuing sense of difference. This generational divide reflects Gayatri Spivak's observation that women frequently transmit cultural memory while witnessing its inevitable transformation across generations.

The turning point in Ashima's development occurs after Ashoke's sudden death. Widowhood, though deeply painful, becomes the catalyst for personal independence. She begins working at a public library, manages her finances, travels independently, and develops relationships beyond her immediate family. Employment is significant not only because it provides financial security but because it expands her participation in American public life. Susan Stanford Friedman's work on women's mobility helps explain this transformation, suggesting that movement through public space often represents an expansion of identity rather than merely physical independence.

Ashima's most important act of self-definition occurs at the novel's conclusion when she chooses to divide her time between India and the United States. Rather than selecting one homeland over the other, she embraces a transnational identity that acknowledges multiple attachments. This decision embodies Bhabha's notion of hybridity by rejecting rigid national categories and accepting belonging as plural and evolving. As Ananya Jahanara Kabir suggests, Lahiri presents loss not as an endpoint but as the beginning of female autonomy. Lahiri does not portray Ashima's journey as a complete resolution of displacement. Her loneliness never entirely disappears, nor does she fully reconcile memory and belonging. Instead, Ashima's transformation lies in her ability to inhabit multiple cultural worlds without abandoning either. Through resilience, adaptation, and emotional growth, she reconstructs an identity that remains dynamic rather than fixed. Through Ashima Ganguly, Lahiri challenges immigrant narratives centred solely on economic success or cultural assimilation. Instead, she foregrounds the emotional labour performed by immigrant women whose contributions often remain invisible within public histories of migration. Ashima's story

demonstrates that the most significant dimensions of diaspora emerge within domestic life, caregiving, and everyday acts of cultural preservation. Her journey ultimately affirms that identity is continually recreated through memory, resilience, and the enduring effort to transform displacement into belonging.

Ruma and the Second Generation: Inherited Diaspora

While Ashima Ganguly embodies the visible displacement of the first-generation immigrant, Ruma, the protagonist of the title story in *Unaccustomed Earth*, represents the subtler dilemmas of the second generation. Born and raised in the United States, Ruma enjoys the linguistic fluency, educational opportunities, and social mobility unavailable to her mother. Unlike Ashima, she does not experience the immediate alienation of migration or struggle to adapt to American society. Yet Lahiri demonstrates that the second generation inherits a different form of displacement, rooted not in geography but in memory, emotional obligation, and gendered expectations. Ruma's identity emerges from the tension between American individualism and the collectivist values embedded in her Bengali heritage. Through her experiences, Lahiri argues that diaspora extends beyond physical migration, shaping later generations through inherited cultural values and emotional responsibilities.

Unlike Ashima's visible struggles with cultural adjustment, Ruma's conflicts are largely internal. Although fully integrated into American society, she remains influenced by familial expectations concerning motherhood, caregiving, and filial duty. Her experience illustrates Vijay Mishra's concept of the second-generation diaspora, in which displacement survives through memory and inherited cultural consciousness rather than direct experience of exile. For Ruma, India exists less as a physical homeland than as an emotional inheritance transmitted through family traditions and relationships.

At the beginning of the story, Ruma appears to embody the ideals of modern American womanhood. She is highly educated, professionally successful, and married to an American husband, Adam. However, after the birth of her son, Akash, she leaves her legal career to become a full-time mother. Although this decision appears voluntary, Lahiri gradually reveals that it is shaped by deeply internalised assumptions about caregiving inherited from her Bengali upbringing. In stepping away from her profession, Ruma unconsciously repeats the domestic role she once associated with her mother.

Her deepest anxiety is captured in one of the story's most revealing observations: "She feared that her life would turn out to be just like her mother's." (*Unaccustomed Earth* 47) This fear reflects not a rejection of motherhood itself but of the loss of individuality that Ruma associates with her mother's life. Throughout childhood, she witnessed her mother's unwavering devotion to family, often at the expense of personal fulfilment. She admires that sacrifice while simultaneously fearing its consequences. Lahiri thus exposes the psychological conflict experienced by many second-generation immigrant women, who seek personal autonomy without abandoning the cultural values that shaped them. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's feminist

analysis of migration provides an important framework for understanding Ruma's predicament. Mohanty argues that migration frequently preserves patriarchal structures by assigning women primary responsibility for caregiving and emotional stability. Ruma's withdrawal from professional life therefore reflects not simply personal preference but the enduring influence of gendered expectations that privilege motherhood over female self-realisation.

Motherhood occupies the centre of Ruma's identity, yet Lahiri deliberately avoids romanticising it. Caring for Akash offers emotional fulfilment but also narrows the possibilities of her personal and professional life. Her experience recalls Adrienne Rich's distinction between the lived experience of motherhood and the institution of motherhood. While maternal love is genuine and meaningful, social expectations often reduce women to caregiving roles. Ruma's identity gradually becomes defined more by domestic responsibility than by intellectual or professional achievement, illustrating the continuing tension between fulfilment and self-sacrifice.

The emotional burden intensifies after the death of Ruma's mother. Although physically absent, her mother's influence continues to shape Ruma's decisions and self-perception. She feels responsible for preserving her mother's values, family traditions, and emotional legacy. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's observation that women function as custodians of cultural memory is especially relevant here. Ruma inherits not only cultural practices but also the obligation to sustain them, demonstrating how diaspora continues across generations through emotional inheritance rather than direct migration. This sense of responsibility becomes particularly evident in Ruma's relationship with her widowed father. Expecting him to move into her home, she assumes that caring for him is both a moral duty and a continuation of Bengali family tradition. However, his refusal to live with her challenges these assumptions and forces her to reconsider her understanding of family and obligation.

Lahiri captures her conflicting emotions in the observation: "She was both relieved and wounded by his independence." (*Unaccustomed Earth* 58) This paradox reveals the complexity of Ruma's emotional world. Her father's independence frees her from responsibilities she quietly fears, yet it also unsettles the role she has prepared herself to perform. Lahiri demonstrates that emotional belonging is often accompanied by guilt, obligation, and conflicting expectations rather than certainty. Ruma's discomfort deepens when she discovers her father's relationship with Mrs Bagchi. Although she intellectually accepts his right to companionship, she experiences his new relationship as a betrayal of her mother's memory. Her response exposes the persistence of traditional gender expectations. She unconsciously assumes that lifelong devotion to a deceased spouse is a moral obligation, particularly within the family structure she inherited. Lahiri thereby illustrates how modern social choices may coexist with deeply internalised patriarchal values.

Inderpal Grewal argues that diasporic women often become custodians of cultural continuity across generations. Ruma embodies this role as she attempts to preserve family traditions, care for her son, and honour her mother's memory. These responsibilities are largely self-imposed, yet they reflect broader cultural expectations

surrounding femininity and caregiving. At the same time, Monica Chiu's notion of the liminal emotional space occupied by second-generation women illuminates Ruma's inability to articulate her own desires. Her frustrations emerge indirectly through anxiety, hesitation, and self-doubt rather than open resistance, revealing an identity suspended between competing cultural values. A revealing contrast develops between Ruma and her father. While he gradually embraces independence through travel, friendship, and companionship, Ruma becomes increasingly confined by domestic responsibilities. Lahiri deliberately reverses conventional assumptions about progress: the older immigrant achieves greater personal freedom, whereas the younger American-born woman remains emotionally constrained by inherited expectations. This inversion challenges the assumption that assimilation naturally produces female emancipation.

By the story's conclusion, Ruma begins to accept her father's independence and recognises that love does not require perpetual sacrifice. Although this realisation does not resolve all her anxieties, it marks an important stage in her emotional growth. Her journey reflects Stuart Hall's understanding of identity as an ongoing process rather than a fixed achievement. At the same time, Bhabha's concept of hybridity explains her position between American individualism and Bengali collectivism. Rather than choosing one identity over another, she gradually learns to inhabit both.

Through Ruma, Lahiri presents the second generation as inheritors of the diaspora rather than its beneficiaries alone. Her experiences demonstrate that migration leaves enduring emotional legacies extending beyond those who physically cross borders. Although Ruma enjoys educational and social opportunities unavailable to Ashima, she remains shaped by inherited ideals of caregiving, family responsibility, and female sacrifice. Her story reveals that gender continues to mediate experiences of belonging across generations, transforming visible cultural displacement into subtler forms of emotional and psychological negotiation. Together with Ashima's journey, Ruma's narrative affirms that diaspora is not merely a condition of migration but an ongoing process of negotiating identity, memory, and belonging within the intimate spaces of family life.

Comparative Analysis of Ashima and Ruma

A comparative reading of Ashima Ganguly in *The Namesake* and Ruma in *Unaccustomed Earth* demonstrates Jhumpa Lahiri's nuanced understanding of diaspora as a gendered and intergenerational experience. Although the two women belong to different generations of the Bengali diaspora and occupy distinct cultural contexts, their lives are connected by recurring patterns of emotional labour, cultural responsibility, and the continual negotiation of identity. Through these characters, Lahiri argues that while the outward forms of displacement evolve across generations, gender remains the central axis through which women experience belonging.

The most apparent distinction between Ashima and Ruma lies like their displacement. Ashima experiences migration as a literal rupture, leaving behind her homeland, family, language, and social environment to begin life in an unfamiliar country. Her loneliness arises from geographical separation and cultural unfamiliarity.

Ruma, however, never undergoes physical migration. Born and educated in the United States, she is culturally fluent within American society. Yet her identity remains shaped by inherited expectations, emotional obligations, and familial memory. Despite these differences, both women occupy remarkably similar positions within their families.

Each assumes responsibility for preserving emotional stability, maintaining family relationships, and sustaining cultural continuity. Ashima recreates Bengali traditions through festivals, language, and domestic rituals, while Ruma feels obligated to care for her father, nurture her son, and preserve her mother's legacy. Their identities are defined less by individual ambition than by their capacity to care for others. The expression of this labour, however, differs across generations. Ashima openly accepts domestic work and cultural preservation as integral to her role as wife and mother. Her sacrifices are visible and consistent with the expectations placed upon first-generation immigrant women. Ruma's emotional labour is more internalised. Rather than openly embracing traditional roles, she negotiates them through guilt, anxiety, and uncertainty. Lahiri suggests that modernisation has not eliminated patriarchal expectations but has transformed them into subtler forms that coexist with education, professional opportunity, and individual choice.

Belonging also develops differently for the two women. For Ashima, India initially represents home, while America signifies isolation and uncertainty. Over time, she establishes meaningful connections within American society and ultimately embraces a transnational identity that acknowledges attachments to both countries. Ruma's journey follows the opposite direction. Firmly rooted in American society, she gradually recognises the enduring influence of Bengali familial values on her relationships and self-understanding. Whereas Ashima moves from cultural certainty toward hybridity, Ruma moves from assumed certainty toward self-reflection.

Motherhood further illustrates the continuity between the two narratives. For Ashima, motherhood becomes both a source of purpose and a means of preserving Bengali culture despite her own sense of displacement. For Ruma, caring for Akash provides fulfilment but gradually eclipses her professional aspirations. Lahiri does not critique motherhood itself but questions the expectation that caregiving should define women's identities. Through both characters, she exposes the unequal distribution of emotional responsibility within immigrant families.

Lahiri's portrayal also challenges assumptions about generational progress. Although one might expect the American-born Ruma to enjoy greater freedom than the immigrant Ashima, the opposite often appears true. Following her husband's death, Ashima develops greater independence through work, travel, and transnational living. Ruma, despite her education and social advantages, remains constrained by inherited ideals of caregiving and familial duty. Lahiri therefore questions assimilationist narratives that equate social integration with female emancipation, demonstrating instead that patriarchal expectations frequently adapt rather than disappear.

Ashima and Ruma should be understood as complementary figures rather than contrasting ones. Ashima embodies the visible hardships of first-generation migration,

while Ruma represents the emotional inheritance carried by the second generation. Together, they reveal that diaspora is not simply a matter of crossing national borders but an ongoing negotiation of gender, memory, family, and belonging. Lahiri's comparative portrayal demonstrates that identity remains unfinished and that belonging is continually reconstructed within the intimate spaces of everyday life.

Conclusion

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth* offer a nuanced exploration of how gender shapes diasporic identity across generations. Through Ashima Ganguly and Ruma, Lahiri moves beyond conventional immigrant narratives centred on economic success or cultural assimilation, instead foregrounding the emotional, psychological, and relational dimensions of migration. Her fiction demonstrates that diaspora is not merely a geographical condition but an ongoing process of negotiating identity, memory, and belonging within transnational families.

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