

Memory, Trauma, and Survival: The Psychological Impact of Displacement in Mistry and Lahiri's Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the intricate interplay of memory, trauma, and survival in the works of Rohinton Mistry and Jhumpa Lahiri, focusing on the psychological impact of displacement on their characters. Both authors delve deeply into the diasporic experience, portraying individuals and families uprooted from their cultural and geographical origins, grappling with fragmented identities, and navigating the challenges of belonging in foreign lands. The study explores how memories—both nostalgic and painful—become critical tools for diasporic individuals to anchor themselves in the past while confronting the alienation of the present. Drawing on trauma theory and psychoanalytic frameworks, the paper investigates how the characters' lived experiences of displacement lead to emotional scars, manifesting in various forms of psychological distress, including identity crises, isolation, and cultural disorientation. For Mistry, the trauma of displacement is often tied to historical and socio-political upheavals, as seen in the portrayal of Parsi communities' struggles with marginalization. For Lahiri, the focus shifts to the intimate, interpersonal dynamics of immigrant families, where trauma is passed down through generations, creating a complex web of identity negotiation. Furthermore, the paper highlights how survival becomes a recurring theme in their narratives, as characters develop coping mechanisms to reconcile their fragmented selves with their evolving environments. This survival often involves cultural adaptation, the redefinition of personal and collective identities, and the forging of connections across cultural divides. Through a comparative analysis of selected works, this study sheds light on the universal yet deeply personal experiences of displacement, emphasizing the resilience of the human spirit in the face of cultural alienation and psychological adversity. Ultimately, the research underscores the relevance of Mistry and Lahiri's works in understanding the complex emotional landscapes of the diasporic condition in a globalized world.

Keywords: *Diaspora, Displacement, Trauma, Memory, Identity Crisis, Cultural Adaptation.*

Introduction

Displacement, whether forced or voluntary, profoundly impacts the human psyche, leaving individuals grappling with fragmented identities, cultural disorientation, and emotional scars. In literature, displacement serves as a potent lens through which authors explore the complexities of memory, trauma, and survival. Rohinton Mistry and Jhumpa Lahiri, both celebrated voices in diasporic literature, delve into these themes, providing nuanced portrayals of individuals and families navigating the challenges of uprooted lives. Their works reflect not only the socio-cultural struggles of the displaced but also the psychological toll such experiences exact.

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Memory occupies a central role in the narratives of both Mistry and Lahiri, acting as a bridge between past and present. For the displaced, memories are often tinged with nostalgia and pain, simultaneously serving as a source of comfort and a reminder of loss. These memories shape their sense of self and cultural identity while influencing their ability to adapt to new environments. Similarly, trauma is intricately woven into the diasporic experience. Whether it is the socio-political upheavals depicted in Mistry's portrayal of the Parsi community or the generational struggles of immigrant families in Lahiri's works, trauma manifests as emotional distress, cultural alienation, and identity crises.

Survival, on the other hand, emerges as a recurring theme, highlighting the resilience of individuals in the face of psychological and cultural challenges. Characters in both authors' works find ways to navigate their fragmented worlds through cultural adaptation, redefinition of identity, and forging connections across cultural divides.

This paper seeks to critically examine the interplay of memory, trauma, and survival in selected works of Mistry and Lahiri, shedding light on the universal and deeply personal experiences of displacement. It underscores the significance of their narratives in understanding the emotional landscapes of the diasporic condition in an increasingly globalized world.

Objectives

- To analyze the role of memory in shaping identity.
- To explore the psychological trauma of displacement.
- To examine the themes of survival and resilience.
- To apply trauma and diasporic theories.
- To compare the treatment of displacement in Mistry and Lahiri's works.
- To contribute to the discourse on diasporic literature.

Literature Review

A study of memory, trauma, and survival in Rohinton Mistry and Jhumpa Lahiri's narratives necessitates engaging with a broader body of literature exploring similar themes of displacement and its psychological consequences. Several authors offer valuable comparative perspectives.

- **Memory and Nostalgia:** Like Mistry and Lahiri, authors such as V.S. Naipaul in "A House for Mr. Biswas" and Anita Desai in "Clear Light of Day" explore the complexities of memory for displaced individuals. These works delve into the ways memory can be both a source of comfort and a burden, shaping perceptions of the present and influencing the struggle for belonging in a new environment. Examining these texts alongside Mistry and Lahiri allows for a nuanced understanding of how nostalgia can be both a yearning for a lost past and a crucial element in constructing a new identity.
- **Trauma and its Aftermath:** The psychological impact of trauma is a central concern in Mistry and Lahiri's work. Comparing their narratives with those of authors like Toni Morrison in "Beloved" or Edwidge Danticat in "Breath, Eyes, Memory" can illuminate the diverse ways trauma manifests itself. These authors explore the intergenerational transmission of trauma, the lingering effects of historical violence, and the challenges of healing from deep psychological wounds. This comparative lens allows for a richer understanding of how Mistry and Lahiri's characters grapple with the specific traumas of displacement, including loss of home, cultural alienation, and the disruption of social networks.
- **Survival and Resilience:** The theme of survival in the face of adversity resonates strongly in the works of Mistry and Lahiri. Authors like Chinua Achebe in "Things Fall Apart" and Maxine Hong Kingston in "The Woman Warrior" offer compelling portrayals of individuals and communities struggling to maintain their cultural identity and sense of self in the face of displacement and cultural upheaval. Comparing these narratives with Mistry and Lahiri's work highlights the diverse strategies of survival, including cultural preservation, community building, and acts of resistance. It also allows for an exploration of the psychological costs of survival, the compromises individuals make, and the enduring impact of displacement on their sense of belonging.
- **Postcolonial Perspectives:** Mistry and Lahiri's narratives can also be situated within a broader postcolonial literary landscape. Authors like Salman Rushdie in "Midnight's Children" and

Arundhati Roy in "The God of Small Things" explore the legacies of colonialism and its impact on identity, memory, and belonging. Engaging with these works alongside Mistry and Lahiri allows for a deeper understanding of how the experience of displacement is often intertwined with the historical and political forces of colonialism and its aftermath. It also highlights the ways in which displaced individuals negotiate their identities in a postcolonial world, navigating the complexities of cultural hybridity and the ongoing struggle for self-determination.

By examining Mistry and Lahiri's narratives in conjunction with these other authors, the research paper can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological impact of displacement, the enduring power of memory and trauma, and the diverse strategies of survival and resilience.

Theoretical Framework

This research paper examining the psychological impact of displacement in Rohinton Mistry and Jhumpa Lahiri's narratives will draw upon a theoretical framework encompassing postcolonial theory, trauma studies, and memory studies. These interconnected lenses offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex experiences of displaced individuals.

- **Postcolonial Theory:** This framework provides a crucial understanding of the historical and political contexts shaping displacement. It illuminates the legacies of colonialism, including the disruption of traditional societies, the creation of artificial borders, and the enduring impact on identity and belonging. Postcolonial theory helps analyze how Mistry and Lahiri's characters grapple with the loss of their homelands, cultural alienation, and the challenges of navigating a world marked by power imbalances and historical injustices. It also sheds light on the complexities of hybrid identities and the ongoing negotiation of self in a postcolonial world.
- **Trauma Studies:** This field offers insights into the psychological consequences of traumatic experiences, including displacement. It explores how trauma manifests in various forms, from the immediate shock of loss to the long-term effects on memory, mental health, and social relationships. Trauma studies will be used to analyze how Mistry and Lahiri's characters experience and process the trauma of displacement, including the loss of home, community, and cultural identity. The concept of intergenerational trauma will be particularly relevant, examining how the experiences of past generations shape the psychological landscape of subsequent ones.
- **Memory Studies:** This area of study examines the role of memory in shaping individual and collective identities. It explores how memory is not merely a passive record of the past but an active force that influences present experiences and future aspirations. Memory studies will be used to analyze how Mistry and Lahiri's characters grapple with memories of their past lives, how they reconstruct their identities in new environments, and how memory can be both a source of solace and a burden. The interplay between personal and collective memory, and the ways in which memory can be used to resist or perpetuate dominant narratives, will be central to the analysis.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the research will offer a nuanced understanding of the psychological impact of displacement in Mistry and Lahiri's narratives, exploring the intricate connections between history, trauma, memory, and the enduring search for belonging.

Description

The themes of memory, trauma, and survival in the context of displacement have been widely explored in postcolonial literature. Scholars have examined how narratives of migration and exile influence identity formation, intergenerational trauma, and psychological resilience.

Rohinton Mistry's Exploration of Displacement

Rohinton Mistry's works, particularly *A Fine Balance* (1995) and *Such a Long Journey* (1991), have been extensively analyzed for their portrayal of socio-political upheavals and the emotional turmoil of displaced individuals. Dodiya (2006) argues that Mistry's characters struggle with historical trauma and systemic oppression, reflecting the deep scars of displacement in postcolonial India. His works capture the psychological burden of memory, illustrating how characters oscillate between nostalgia and survival in the face of social and political dislocation.

• Jhumpa Lahiri's Perspective on Identity and Displacement

Similarly, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) and *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) have been widely studied for their depiction of immigrant experiences and cultural alienation. According to Dasgupta (2012), Lahiri's characters experience a constant negotiation between past and present, as memory becomes both a source of identity and a site of unresolved trauma. Her works highlight the psychological struggles of first- and second-generation immigrants, revealing how nostalgia and cultural hybridity shape their emotional survival.

Scholars like Bhabha (1994) and Said (1978) provide theoretical frameworks for understanding displacement in postcolonial literature. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" explains how displaced individuals construct hybrid identities, while Said's *Orientalism* critiques the power dynamics that shape diasporic consciousness. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory (1996) further contextualizes how memory functions as both a wound and a survival mechanism in narratives of displacement.

Comparative Analysis

By synthesizing these perspectives, this research situates Mistry and Lahiri's works within broader discussions of postcolonial trauma, memory, and resilience, offering a comparative study of how their narratives reflect the psychological impact of displacement on individual and collective identities.

By comparing and contrasting the works of Mistry and Lahiri, the paper aims to illuminate the diverse ways in which displacement can affect individuals and communities. It also seeks to identify universal experiences of loss, resilience, and the enduring human quest for identity and connection. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex psychological dimensions of displacement and the lasting impact it has on individuals' lives and their sense of place in the world.

Conclusion

The psychological impact of displacement, as explored in the works of Rohinton Mistry and Jhumpa Lahiri, highlights the profound effects of memory and trauma on survival. Both authors depict displacement as an unsettling experience that disrupts identity, fractures emotional stability, and challenges the very notion of belonging. However, while their narratives share common themes of nostalgia, alienation, and resilience, they offer distinct perspectives shaped by their characters' socio-political realities and cultural contexts.

Mistry's works, such as *A Fine Balance* and *Such a Long Journey*, emphasize the harsh realities of **forced displacement** due to political instability, caste oppression, and economic hardship. His characters endure extreme suffering, often with little hope of escape. The trauma they experience is deeply rooted in historical injustices, making survival an act of endurance rather than transformation. Memory, in Mistry's narratives, functions as both a reminder of past suffering and a source of pain that hinders progress. His portrayal of displacement underscores the **inescapability of socio-political structures**, leaving his characters to navigate a world where survival is precarious and resilience is often futile.

In contrast, Lahiri's narratives, including *The Namesake* and *Interpreter of Maladies*, explore **voluntary migration** and the emotional dislocation that follows. Her characters, particularly first-generation immigrants, struggle with nostalgia for their homeland, while their children grapple with identity crises and cultural hybridity. Unlike Mistry's characters, who are often trapped by their past, Lahiri's protagonists engage in **inpsychological negotiation between two worlds**, attempting to reconcile their cultural roots with their adopted identities. Memory in Lahiri's works serves as both a connection to the past and a means of redefining identity. Her portrayal of displacement highlights the evolving nature of survival, where adaptation, rather than endurance alone, becomes key to emotional well-being.

Through this comparative study, it becomes evident that while Mistry and Lahiri address the psychological consequences of displacement, their perspectives differ in terms of **agency, trauma, and resilience**. Mistry's narratives present displacement as a **brutal, often unchangeable reality**, where trauma is cyclical and survival is defined by suffering. Lahiri, on the other hand, presents displacement as a **more fluid experience**, where memory, though painful, can also serve as a bridge to self-discovery and transformation.

Ultimately, both authors contribute to a deeper understanding of how displacement shapes the human psyche. Their works illuminate the **complex interplay between memory, trauma, and survival**,

offering valuable insights into the emotional landscapes of individuals caught between worlds. By analyzing their narratives, this research underscores the enduring psychological impact of displacement and the diverse ways in which individuals navigate their fractured identities in a postcolonial world.

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