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Diasporic Identity and Cultural Alienation in Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study explores the themes of diasporic identity and cultural alienation in Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* (2009) and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013). Drawing upon Homi K. Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness, the paper examines how migrant characters negotiate cultural displacement, identity crisis, and belonging within multicultural societies. Both novels portray the complexities of migration and the psychological consequences of living between cultures. Through a comparative textual analysis, the study investigates the ways in which protagonists reconstruct their identities while confronting cultural marginalization, social isolation, and emotional estrangement. The findings reveal that diasporic identity is fluid and continually reshaped through interaction with host societies, while cultural alienation remains a significant challenge in the migrant experience. The study contributes to contemporary discussions on diaspora, migration, and identity formation in South Asian diasporic literature.

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Introduction

Migration and transnational mobility have become defining features of contemporary global society, reshaping cultural identities, social relationships, and ideas of belonging. In literary and cultural studies, diaspora is no longer understood only as physical movement from one homeland to another; rather, it is increasingly examined as a complex condition involving memory, displacement, cultural negotiation, and identity reconstruction. Diasporic subjects often live between inherited cultural traditions and the social

expectations of the host society, producing experiences of hybridity, uncertainty, alienation, and transformation.

The concept of diaspora has developed from its earlier association with forced dispersal into a broader framework for understanding transnational migration and cultural belonging. Safran (1991) explains diaspora in relation to collective memory, homeland consciousness, and the continuing emotional attachment of dispersed communities to their places of origin. Cohen (2008) further expands the concept by

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identifying diaspora as a flexible condition shaped by displacement, settlement, memory, and cultural continuity. Brubaker (2005) also argues that diaspora should not be treated as a fixed group identity but as a category of practice, claim, and identification. These perspectives are useful for examining literary representations of migrants who remain emotionally connected to their homelands while attempting to negotiate new identities in unfamiliar cultural spaces.

Identity is one of the central concerns of diasporic literature. Hall (1990) argues that cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a continuous process of “becoming,” shaped by history, culture, and representation. This view is particularly relevant to migrant characters who do not belong completely to either their homeland or host society. Their identities are formed through negotiation, memory, adaptation, and resistance. In the context of South Asian diaspora, such identity formation becomes even more complex because migrants frequently carry strong familial, linguistic, religious, and cultural attachments while simultaneously facing the pressures of assimilation in Western societies. Recent scholarship also confirms that South Asian diasporic identity continues to be shaped by family memory, community expectations, host-society pressures, and the experience of living between cultural worlds (Ullah, 2025).

Homi K. Bhabha’s postcolonial theory provides a useful framework for examining this condition of cultural in-betweenness. Bhabha (1994) introduces the concepts of hybridity, the Third Space, and unhomeliness to explain how identities are produced in spaces of cultural contact and negotiation. Hybridity challenges fixed ideas of cultural purity, while the Third Space becomes the site where new identities are formed through interaction between different cultural systems. Bhabha’s concept of unhomeliness is especially relevant to diasporic literature because it captures the psychological and cultural discomfort of subjects who are physically located in one place but emotionally and culturally attached to another. Recent studies of migration and unhomeliness also emphasize that home is not merely a geographical location but an unstable idea continually reconstructed through memory, belonging, language, and social recognition (Aman & Dahlstedt, 2021).

Closely connected with diasporic identity is cultural alienation. Alienation refers to a sense of estrangement, isolation, and disconnection from one’s social or cultural environment. In migrant experience, alienation may appear through language barriers, racial or ethnic exclusion, cultural misunderstanding, labour exploitation, gendered expectations, and the inability to feel fully accepted in the host society. Fromm (1955) describes alienation as a condition in which individuals become estranged from themselves and their surroundings. In diaspora, this estrangement is intensified because migrants are often required to perform adaptation while still carrying memories and obligations connected to their homeland. Clifford (1994) similarly observes that diasporic existence is marked by routes as well as roots, suggesting that movement, memory, and belonging remain deeply interconnected.

South Asian diasporic literature provides a rich field for exploring these issues because it frequently portrays characters who negotiate displacement, cultural conflict, memory, and belonging. Writers such as Monica Ali and Jhumpa Lahiri have contributed significantly to contemporary literary discussions of migration and identity. Their works examine how migrants and their descendants experience cultural transition, emotional dislocation, and the search for selfhood in Western societies. In such narratives, migration is not presented merely as geographical relocation; it becomes a psychological, cultural, and emotional process that reshapes the individual’s understanding of home, family, and identity.

Monica Ali’s “In the Kitchen” (2009) presents contemporary London as a multicultural and globalized urban space shaped by labour migration, class difference, and social inequality. The novel depicts migrant workers whose lives reveal the hidden tensions of globalization and the vulnerability of individuals living at the margins of British society. Critical discussion of the novel has also noted its engagement with xenophobia, transculturation, migrant experience, and the movement from exclusion toward cross-cultural awareness (Rajjak, 2020). Through its portrayal of migrant lives in the Imperial Hotel and wider London society, “In the Kitchen” exposes the cultural and economic insecurities experienced by those who struggle to belong in a foreign environment.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s “The Lowland” (2013), by contrast, approaches migration through family history, memory, political trauma, and emotional displacement. The novel traces the movement of characters between India and the United States and examines how migration transforms personal identity, family relationships, and cultural belonging. Recent studies on “The Lowland” have examined Gauri’s self-transformation and the novel’s representation of diaspora, identity, personality, and selfhood (Hossain, 2021). Other scholarship has also highlighted how Lahiri’s novel portrays migration as a process that changes both the external environment and the migrant’s perception of self (Vasundhara & Goswami, 2021). Thus, “The Lowland” presents diasporic identity not as a stable inheritance but as an evolving condition shaped by displacement, memory, loss, and reinvention.

Although Monica Ali and Jhumpa Lahiri have been widely discussed as South Asian diasporic writers, a focused comparative study of “In the Kitchen” and “The Lowland” through the combined lens of diasporic identity and cultural alienation remains limited. Existing studies often examine these writers separately or focus on broader themes such as migration, multiculturalism, gender, or ethnic identity. This leaves space for a comparative analysis that explores how both novels represent migrant subjects living between cultures, negotiating belonging, and experiencing different forms of alienation.

Therefore, this study undertakes a comparative textual analysis of Monica Ali’s “In the Kitchen” and Jhumpa Lahiri’s “The Lowland”. Drawing primarily on Bhabha’s concept of

unhomeliness, supported by broader diaspora theory, the paper examines how the selected novels represent diasporic identity, cultural alienation, and the search for belonging. The study argues that both novels portray migration as a transformative but unsettling experience in which identity is continuously reshaped through memory, displacement, cultural contact, and social exclusion.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Diaspora and Diasporic Identity

The concept of diaspora has become one of the most influential frameworks in contemporary cultural and literary studies. Initially associated with the dispersal of Jewish communities from their homeland, the term has expanded to encompass various forms of migration, displacement, and transnational belonging (Safran, 1991). Contemporary scholars emphasize that diaspora should not be understood solely in geographical terms but also as a cultural and psychological condition characterized by complex attachments to both homeland and host society (Cohen, 2008).

Brubaker (2005) argues that diaspora is not simply a bounded social group but a category of practice and identification through which individuals construct relationships with places, communities, and histories. Such a perspective highlights the fluid nature of diasporic identity, which is constantly negotiated rather than permanently fixed. This fluidity is particularly evident within South Asian diaspora communities, whose members often navigate multiple cultural, linguistic, religious, and national affiliations simultaneously.

The question of identity occupies a central position within diaspora studies. Hall (1990) challenges essentialist notions of identity by proposing that cultural identity is not a stable essence inherited from the past but an ongoing process of becoming. According to Hall, identity is continuously produced through cultural representation, historical experience, and social interaction. For migrants, identity formation becomes especially complex because they frequently occupy positions between cultures rather than fully belonging to either one.

Recent scholarship has reinforced Hall's argument by demonstrating that second-generation South Asian diaspora communities continue to experience identity negotiations shaped by family expectations, cultural heritage, and host-society influences (Ullah, 2025). These studies suggest that diasporic identity is not merely inherited but actively constructed through everyday interactions, memories, and cultural practices. Consequently, identity emerges as a dynamic process rather than a fixed category.

South Asian diasporic literature has repeatedly explored these tensions through narratives of migration, adaptation, and cultural conflict. Writers such as Monica Ali and Jhumpa Lahiri portray characters who struggle to reconcile competing cultural demands while attempting to establish meaningful lives in foreign societies. Their works illustrate how migration simultaneously creates opportunities for transformation and generates experiences of uncertainty, fragmentation, and belonging.

Cultural Alienation and Unhomeliness

Alongside identity formation, cultural alienation represents one of the most significant concerns within diaspora

studies. Alienation refers to feelings of estrangement, disconnection, and exclusion from social, cultural, or personal environments. Although the concept has been examined from sociological, psychological, and philosophical perspectives, it acquires particular significance within migrant experiences because displacement often disrupts established relationships between individuals and their cultural surroundings.

Fromm (1955) conceptualizes alienation as a condition in which individuals become strangers to themselves and to the world around them. In diasporic contexts, this estrangement may emerge through linguistic barriers, cultural differences, racial discrimination, social exclusion, or the inability to identify fully with either homeland or host society. Clifford (1994) similarly observes that diaspora is characterized by a continuing tension between roots and routes, suggesting that migrants frequently experience attachment to multiple places without complete belonging in any of them.

The experience of alienation becomes particularly evident in literary representations of migration. Diasporic narratives often depict characters who occupy liminal positions between cultures, creating a sense of uncertainty regarding identity, belonging, and home. Such experiences frequently generate emotional and psychological conflicts as individuals attempt to negotiate their place within unfamiliar social environments.

Bhabha's (1994) concept of unhomeliness provides a powerful framework for understanding this condition. Unhomeliness does not simply refer to homelessness or geographical displacement. Rather, it describes a psychological state in which the boundaries between home and world become blurred, leaving individuals feeling culturally and emotionally unsettled. For Bhabha, migrants inhabit an in-between condition where familiar cultural certainties are disrupted, creating both anxiety and possibilities for transformation.

Recent scholarship has continued to demonstrate the relevance of unhomeliness in contemporary migration studies. Aman and Dahlstedt (2021) argue that experiences of home and belonging are continuously reconstructed through memory, social interaction, and cultural recognition. Their findings suggest that home should not be understood as a fixed location but as an evolving social and emotional construct. Such perspectives are particularly valuable for analysing literary characters who struggle to negotiate belonging within transnational contexts.

Monica Ali and Jhumpa Lahiri in Diaspora Studies

Monica Ali and Jhumpa Lahiri are widely recognized as significant voices in contemporary South Asian diasporic literature. Their works have attracted considerable scholarly attention due to their nuanced exploration of migration, cultural identity, displacement, and belonging.

Critical studies of Monica Ali's fiction frequently focus on multicultural Britain, immigrant communities, and the consequences of globalization. Ali's narratives often examine marginalized migrant populations whose lives remain largely invisible within dominant social discourses. Rajjak (2020) argues that *In the Kitchen* portrays the realities of transculturation and migrant experience within contemporary London, revealing how cultural interaction can generate both exclusion and understanding. Scholars have also highlighted the novel's engagement with labour exploitation, social

inequality, and the precarious conditions faced by migrant workers.

Research on Jhumpa Lahiri has similarly emphasized themes of migration, identity, memory, and cultural negotiation. Critics have explored how Lahiri's fiction represents the emotional consequences of displacement and the challenges of belonging within transnational settings. Hossain (2021) identifies self-transformation as a central theme in *The Lowland*, arguing that migration functions as a catalyst for identity reconstruction. Likewise, Vasundhara and Goswami (2021) demonstrate how Lahiri's characters continually negotiate cultural affiliations while confronting personal and social forms of alienation.

Despite substantial scholarship on both writers, existing studies have largely examined their works separately. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to exploring *In the Kitchen* and *The Lowland* together through the interconnected perspectives of diasporic identity and cultural alienation. Furthermore, few studies have systematically applied Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness to a comparative analysis of these texts. This gap provides the foundation for the present study.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Homi K. Bhabha's theory of unhomeliness as its primary theoretical framework. Bhabha's postcolonial perspective challenges fixed understandings of culture and identity by emphasizing hybridity, liminality, and cultural negotiation. According to Bhabha (1994), identities are not formed within isolated cultural systems but emerge through interaction between different cultural traditions.

Central to Bhabha's framework is the concept of the Third Space, a liminal site where cultural meanings are negotiated and transformed. Within this space, individuals develop hybrid identities that resist rigid distinctions between self and other, native and foreign, or home and host. Such hybridity challenges essentialist understandings of identity and highlights the fluid nature of cultural belonging.

The concept of unhomeliness further extends this analysis by focusing on the psychological dimensions of cultural displacement. Unhomeliness describes the condition in which individuals feel simultaneously connected to and separated from multiple cultural worlds. This condition generates uncertainty and alienation but also creates opportunities for identity reconstruction and cultural transformation.

The application of Bhabha's theory to Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* enables a deeper understanding of how migrant characters negotiate identity, belonging, and cultural difference. Through this framework, the present study examines the ways in which both novels represent the complexities of diasporic experience and the persistent tensions between home, memory, and selfhood.

Comparative Analysis and Discussion

Both Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* explore the complexities of diasporic existence through characters who negotiate identity, belonging, and cultural adaptation within transnational spaces. Although the novels differ in setting, narrative structure, and thematic emphasis, they share a common concern with the psychological and social consequences of migration. Through representations of displacement, alienation, memory, and

identity reconstruction, both authors reveal the challenges faced by migrants attempting to establish meaningful lives between cultures. Drawing upon Homi K. Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness, this section analyses how diasporic identity and cultural alienation are constructed in the selected novels and how these experiences shape the characters' understanding of self and belonging.

Construction of Diasporic Identity in *In the Kitchen* and *The Lowland*

Diasporic identity emerges as one of the central concerns in both Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*. As Stuart Hall (1990) argues, identity is not a fixed essence inherited from the past but a continuous process of becoming that is shaped by cultural, historical, and social experiences. This perspective is reflected in both novels, where migrant characters constantly negotiate between homeland attachments and host-society expectations. The protagonists struggle to establish a stable sense of self while navigating unfamiliar cultural environments, demonstrating the fluid and evolving nature of diasporic identity.

In *In the Kitchen*, Monica Ali presents London as a multicultural and globalized urban space populated by migrant workers from diverse ethnic and national backgrounds. The Imperial Hotel serves as a symbolic representation of contemporary Britain, where people from different cultures interact, coexist, and compete for survival. Through the experiences of migrant workers, Ali exposes the realities of displacement, marginalization, and social invisibility that frequently accompany migration. Rajjak (2020) observes that the novel foregrounds transculturation and migrant experience, highlighting the complex relationships between cultural adaptation and exclusion. The migrants in the novel remain physically present in Britain but often feel emotionally detached from the society in which they live and work.

The thesis identifies that many migrant characters in *In the Kitchen* experience identity fragmentation because they are forced to balance cultural preservation with adaptation to a foreign environment. Their attachment to homeland traditions remains strong, yet successful integration into British society often requires compromise and transformation. Consequently, they occupy a liminal position between two cultural worlds. This condition reflects Hall's (1990) understanding of identity as an ongoing negotiation rather than a fixed category. Ali therefore portrays diasporic identity as a dynamic process shaped by migration, labour, class, and social interaction.

Another important aspect of identity formation in *In the Kitchen* is the relationship between migration and economic exploitation. Many migrant workers occupy precarious social and economic positions that restrict their opportunities for self-expression and social mobility. Their identities are frequently reduced to their labour roles, limiting their ability to achieve a meaningful sense of belonging. Through these representations, Ali demonstrates that migration can simultaneously offer opportunities for advancement and generate experiences of insecurity and exclusion. The search for identity therefore becomes inseparable from broader issues of power, inequality, and globalization.

In contrast, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* explores diasporic identity through a more personal and psychological lens. The novel traces the experiences of Subhash and Gauri,

whose migration from India to the United States transforms their understanding of self, family, and belonging. Unlike Ali's collective portrayal of migrant communities, Lahiri focuses on the emotional consequences of displacement and the ways in which migration reshapes personal identity. Hossain (2021) argues that self-transformation is one of the novel's central themes, particularly in relation to the changing identities of its principal characters.

Subhash's migration represents a gradual process of adaptation in which he attempts to establish a new life while maintaining emotional ties with his homeland. Although he successfully integrates into American society through education, employment, and family life, his connection to India remains an important component of his identity. His experiences illustrate the dual consciousness often associated with diaspora, whereby migrants simultaneously belong to multiple cultural worlds. Lahiri portrays identity as a continuous negotiation between past and present, memory and reality, homeland and host society.

Gauri's experience presents a more complex exploration of diasporic identity. Following migration, she deliberately reconstructs herself by distancing herself from traditional social expectations and familial obligations. Her pursuit of intellectual freedom and personal independence demonstrates the transformative potential of migration. However, this transformation is accompanied by emotional isolation and detachment from family relationships. As Vasundhara and Goswami (2021) note, Gauri's journey reflects the tensions between liberation and alienation that often characterize diasporic experiences. Her evolving identity illustrates both the opportunities and challenges associated with self-reinvention in a foreign cultural environment.

A comparison of the two novels reveals significant similarities and differences in their representations of diasporic identity. Both Ali and Lahiri portray identity as fluid, negotiated, and continually reconstructed through cultural interaction. In both texts, migration destabilizes traditional understandings of selfhood and compels individuals to redefine their relationship with home, culture, and belonging. However, Ali primarily examines these issues through collective migrant experiences shaped by labour, class, and globalization, whereas Lahiri focuses on the personal, familial, and psychological dimensions of migration. Despite these differences, both novels suggest that diasporic identity is never fully resolved but remains an ongoing process of negotiation and adaptation.

The analysis therefore supports the argument that diasporic identity in *In the Kitchen* and *The Lowland* cannot be understood as a stable or fixed cultural category. Rather, it emerges as a dynamic and evolving construct shaped by displacement, memory, adaptation, and cultural interaction. Through their nuanced portrayals of migrant lives, Monica Ali and Jhumpa Lahiri reveal the complexities of identity formation in an increasingly interconnected and transnational world.

Cultural Alienation and Unhomeliness in *In the Kitchen* and *The Lowland*

Cultural alienation constitutes one of the most significant dimensions of the diasporic experience represented in Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*. While

migration offers opportunities for personal and economic advancement, it frequently generates feelings of estrangement, displacement, and uncertainty regarding identity and belonging. Both novels demonstrate that migrants often find themselves positioned between cultural worlds, unable to fully identify with either their homeland or their adopted society. Such experiences correspond closely with Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) concept of unhomeliness, which describes the psychological and cultural condition of existing in an in-between space where traditional notions of home and belonging become unstable.

In *In the Kitchen*, cultural alienation is portrayed through the experiences of migrant workers who occupy marginal positions within British society. Although London presents itself as a multicultural and cosmopolitan city, the novel reveals the social inequalities and exclusions that continue to shape migrant lives. Many characters remain disconnected from mainstream society despite their physical presence within it. Their daily experiences are characterized by economic insecurity, cultural isolation, and limited social recognition. Consequently, migration fails to provide a complete sense of belonging, and the migrants continue to experience emotional and cultural displacement.

The thesis identifies that the migrant workers in Ali's novel frequently experience a sense of rootlessness resulting from their separation from homeland, family, and familiar cultural environments. Their identities become fragmented as they attempt to navigate the demands of a foreign society while preserving aspects of their cultural heritage. This fragmentation contributes to feelings of alienation because the migrants no longer feel entirely connected to either their native culture or their adopted environment. Such experiences illustrate Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness, where individuals exist between cultures without fully belonging to either.

Ali further demonstrates that cultural alienation is intensified by labour exploitation and social invisibility. Many migrant workers perform essential functions within the hotel yet remain largely unnoticed by the wider society. Their contributions are valued economically but not socially or culturally. As a result, they experience a persistent sense of exclusion that reinforces their alienated status. The novel therefore suggests that globalization has increased cultural interaction while simultaneously creating new forms of marginalization and inequality.

In *The Lowland*, cultural alienation is presented through a more intimate and psychological narrative. Lahiri explores how migration affects individual consciousness, family relationships, and emotional attachments. Although Subhash successfully establishes a life in the United States, he continues to experience an emotional connection to India that complicates his sense of belonging. His memories of homeland remain central to his identity, demonstrating that migration does not erase cultural attachment. Instead, it creates a dual consciousness in which the migrant simultaneously inhabits multiple cultural worlds.

Gauri's experience represents an even more profound example of alienation and unhomeliness. Following migration, she deliberately distances herself from traditional social expectations and family obligations. While this decision provides personal freedom and intellectual independence, it

also results in emotional isolation and detachment. Her inability to establish lasting connections with family members reflects the psychological consequences of displacement. Lahiri portrays Gauri as a character who is physically located within American society but emotionally disconnected from both her homeland and her adopted environment. Consequently, she embodies Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness in its most explicit form.

The thesis further highlights that identity crisis and cultural alienation are closely interconnected in both novels. The inability to establish a stable sense of belonging frequently results in uncertainty regarding selfhood and cultural affiliation. Characters struggle to define who they are because they occupy positions between competing cultural systems. This condition is particularly evident in diasporic contexts where traditional markers of identity such as homeland, language, community, and family become disrupted through migration.

Despite differences in narrative style and thematic emphasis, both Ali and Lahiri present cultural alienation as a defining feature of diasporic existence. However, the sources of alienation differ significantly. In *In the Kitchen*, alienation emerges primarily from economic exploitation, social marginalization, and cultural exclusion within a globalized urban environment. In *The Lowland*, alienation is more closely associated with memory, personal loss, emotional distance, and family fragmentation. These differences reflect the distinct contexts within which the novels are situated while simultaneously reinforcing the broader diasporic experience of displacement and uncertainty.

A comparative reading of the two novels therefore demonstrates that cultural alienation extends beyond geographical relocation. It encompasses psychological, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions that continue to influence migrants long after physical migration has occurred. Through their portrayals of migrant lives, both authors reveal that belonging is not automatically achieved through settlement in a new country. Instead, it remains an ongoing and often incomplete process shaped by memory, cultural negotiation, and social acceptance.

The analysis supports Bhabha's argument that migrants frequently occupy an unhomey space where boundaries between home and world become blurred. In both *In the Kitchen* and *The Lowland*, characters experience this condition through their inability to fully identify with either homeland or host society. Consequently, cultural alienation emerges not as a temporary phase but as a persistent aspect of diasporic identity. The novels ultimately suggest that the search for belonging remains one of the most enduring challenges of the migrant experience in the contemporary globalized world.

Comparative Discussion: Similarities and Differences in the Representation of Diasporic Identity and Cultural Alienation

A comparative examination of Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* reveals that both novels offer insightful representations of diasporic identity and cultural alienation, although they approach these themes through different narrative perspectives. Both authors portray migration as a transformative experience that reshapes personal identity, cultural belonging, and social relationships.

Their narratives demonstrate that diasporic identity is neither fixed nor stable but is continually negotiated through interactions between homeland memories and host-society realities. This representation aligns with Hall's (1990) argument that cultural identity should be understood as a process of becoming rather than a fixed state of being.

One of the most striking similarities between the novels is their depiction of identity as fluid and evolving. In both texts, migrant characters struggle to maintain connections with their cultural origins while adapting to unfamiliar social environments. Such experiences reflect Brubaker's (2005) understanding of diaspora as an ongoing process of identification rather than a clearly bounded social category. Similarly, Cohen (2008) argues that diasporic communities frequently negotiate multiple affiliations and cultural loyalties, a condition clearly evident in both Ali's and Lahiri's narratives. The characters' identities are shaped not only by their countries of origin but also by their encounters with new cultural, social, and political realities.

The two novels also share a concern with the problem of belonging. Safran (1991) suggests that diasporic subjects often maintain emotional attachments to their homeland while simultaneously seeking acceptance within host societies. This dual orientation creates tensions that complicate identity formation and social integration. In *In the Kitchen*, migrant workers remain physically present in Britain yet frequently experience exclusion from mainstream social structures. Likewise, in *The Lowland*, characters continue to negotiate the emotional and cultural influence of India despite establishing lives in the United States. In both cases, migration does not eliminate attachment to homeland but instead creates a complex relationship between past and present, memory and reality.

Bhabha's (1994) concept of unhomeliness provides an especially useful framework for understanding the experiences portrayed in both novels. The characters frequently occupy an in-between cultural space where conventional notions of home, identity, and belonging become unstable. They are neither fully integrated into the host culture nor completely rooted in their culture of origin. This condition generates feelings of uncertainty, displacement, and cultural fragmentation that characterize much of the migrant experience. Aman and Dahlstedt (2021) similarly argue that belonging is not a fixed geographical condition but a continuously negotiated social and emotional process. The experiences of the characters in both novels support this interpretation by demonstrating that home is often reconstructed through memory, relationships, and cultural practices rather than physical location alone.

Despite these similarities, significant differences exist in the ways the two authors represent diasporic experience. Monica Ali focuses primarily on collective migrant realities within the context of globalization, labour migration, and multicultural urban life. As Rajjak (2020) observes, *In the Kitchen* highlights the experiences of marginalized migrant communities whose identities are shaped by labour exploitation, social exclusion, and economic vulnerability. Ali's narrative therefore emphasizes structural inequalities and the broader social forces that influence migrant lives. Cultural alienation in the novel emerges largely from external

conditions such as discrimination, invisibility, and unequal power relations.

In contrast, Jhumpa Lahiri concentrates on the personal and psychological dimensions of migration. Hossain (2021) notes that *The Lowland* foregrounds self-transformation and the internal struggles associated with displacement. The novel explores how migration affects family relationships, emotional attachments, and personal identity. Gauri's journey, in particular, demonstrates how the pursuit of individual freedom can simultaneously produce experiences of isolation and detachment. Similarly, Vasundhara and Goswami (2021) argue that Lahiri portrays diasporic identity as a process of continual transformation shaped by memory, loss, and self-reinvention. Consequently, alienation in *The Lowland* emerges more frequently from emotional and psychological conflicts than from the socio-economic conditions emphasized by Ali.

Another important difference concerns the role of community. In *In the Kitchen*, identity is largely shaped through collective experiences and interactions among diverse migrant groups. The multicultural environment of London functions as a space where different cultural identities intersect and compete. Conversely, *The Lowland* focuses on individual and familial experiences, emphasizing the personal consequences of migration rather than broader community dynamics. While Ali examines migration as a social phenomenon, Lahiri presents it as an intimate and deeply personal process.

Nevertheless, both novels challenge assimilationist assumptions that migrants can completely detach themselves from their cultural origins and seamlessly integrate into host societies. Instead, they demonstrate that diasporic identity remains characterized by hybridity, negotiation, and cultural complexity. This observation supports Bhabha's (1994) argument that cultural identities are produced within liminal spaces where different traditions interact and transform one another. The migrant characters in both novels therefore occupy hybrid positions that resist simplistic classifications based on nationality, ethnicity, or culture.

Overall, the comparative analysis demonstrates that *In the Kitchen* and *The Lowland* provide complementary perspectives on the realities of diaspora. While Ali foregrounds collective experiences shaped by globalization, labour, and multiculturalism, Lahiri emphasizes personal transformation, memory, and emotional displacement. Together, the novels reveal that diasporic identity and cultural alienation are interconnected processes that continue to influence migrants long after physical relocation has occurred. Their representations contribute significantly to contemporary discussions of migration, belonging, and identity formation within South Asian diasporic literature.

Conclusion

This study examined the representation of diasporic identity and cultural alienation in Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness. The analysis revealed that both novels portray migration as a transformative process that reshapes identity, belonging, and cultural affiliation. The characters in both texts experience displacement, identity negotiation, and a persistent search for belonging while navigating unfamiliar social and cultural environments.

The findings demonstrate that diasporic identity is fluid and continuously reconstructed through interactions between homeland memories and host-society realities. Consistent with Hall's (1990) concept of identity as a process of becoming, the characters develop hybrid identities shaped by adaptation and cultural negotiation. Furthermore, both novels highlight cultural alienation as a significant consequence of migration, reflecting Bhabha's (1994) notion of unhomeliness, where individuals exist between cultures without fully belonging to either.

While *In the Kitchen* emphasizes collective migrant experiences, labour exploitation, and social marginalization, *The Lowland* focuses on personal transformation, memory, and emotional displacement. Together, the novels provide valuable insights into the complexities of diasporic existence and contribute to contemporary discussions on migration, identity formation, and cultural belonging in South Asian diasporic literature.

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