

Shaden Adel Nasser

---

# Conceptualizing ‘Transnational Homes’ In Jhumpa Lahiri’s “When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine” and “Mrs. Sen’s”

Shaden Adel Nasser  
Assistant Professor of English Literature  
Faculty of Women for Arts, Science & Education  
The Department of English Language & Literature  
Ain Shams University

**Abstract:**

One of the diasporic writers, who carry exceptionally genuine Indian feelings abroad, is Jhumpa Lahiri. Lahiri’s first book, a collection of nine stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, was published in 1999. Her writings are described as “diaspora fiction” by many Indian scholars and was named “immigrant fiction” by American critics. Thus, it can be said that Lahiri’s fiction is a unique addition to the existing Asian-American Literature. This study examines the sense of home in Lahiri’s fiction from different perspectives in relation to human relationships and to the sense of place. A focus on the variegated meanings of “home” enables us to examine questions which are concerned with the human, social and personal costs of displacement and dispossession. Thus, this paper attempts to highlight important issues relevant to the human relationship with home, and to examine the ways in which the idea of home is present or absent in the stories analyzed. It poses several questions: What is the difference between the literal and the metaphorical sense of home? How does making a physical surrounding “home-like” help immigrants? And how can an immigrant turn a house into a home? These questions will be examined through an analysis of Lahiri’s “When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine”, and “Mrs. Sen’s”. In conclusion, the paper aims to assess whether Jhumpa Lahiri succeeded in conceptualizing the sense of home in diverse ways and to what

**Conceptualizing ‘Transnational Homes’ In Jhumpa Lahiri’s “When  
Mr. Pirzada came to Dine” and “Mrs. Sen’s”**

---

extent she managed to allow her readers to understand psychological and physical senses of home in relation to everyday life.

**Keywords:** Jhumpa Lahiri , the sense of home, identity, memory, nostalgia, Indian Diaspora.

## تصور للمنازل العابرة للحدود الوطنية

في

"عندما أتى السيد بيرزادا لتناول الطعام" و "السيدة سنز"

لجومبا لاهيري

د. شادن عادل ناصر

مدرس الأدب الانجليزي

كلية البنات للآداب والعلوم والتربية

جامعة عين شمس

### ملخص:

تعتبر جومبا لاهيري واحدة من الكتاب المهاجرين الذين يحملون مشاعر أصيلة لموطنها الأصلي في الهند. وقد نشرت لها أول مجموعة قصصية بعنوان "Interpreter of Maladies" في عام 1999. وقد وصف العديد من المثقفين الهنود كتاباتها بأنها من أدب الغربية ، كما لقبتم كتاباتها من قبل النقاد الأمريكيين بأدب المهاجر. وبالتالي يمكن القول أن روايات جومبا لاهيري تعتبر إضافة فريدة ومميزة للأدب الآسيوي الأمريكي الحالي.

وتبحث هذه الدراسة في معنى الوطن من وجهات نظر مختلفة فيما يتعلق بالعلاقات الانسانية و الشعور بالمكان في الغربية. والتركيز على المعاني المتنوعة لكلمة السكن يتيح لنا البحث عن اجابات للمشكلات الانسانية والاجتماعية والشخصية المتعلقة بالغربة والنزوح. ولذلك يحاول هذا البحث أن يسلط الضوء على القضايا المتصلة بعلاقة

## Conceptualizing 'Transnational Homes' In Jhumpa Lahiri's "When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine" and "Mrs. Sen's"

الانسان بالسكن ودراسة الأوجه التي تكون فكرة الوطن موجودة بها أو غائبة و ذلك في القصص التي يتم تحليلها. ويطرح البحث عدة تساؤلات: ما هو الفرق بين المعنى الحرفي والمعنى المجازي لفكرة السكن؟.كيف يمكن لتحويل الأجواء المحيطة بالغربة الي جزء من الوطن أن يساعد المهاجرين في الاحساس بالوطن الأم؟ وكيف يمكن للمهاجر أن يحول المنزل في الغربة الي جزء من الوطن؟ كل هذه التساؤلات يتم بحثها من خلال تحليل قصتين قصيرتين للكاتبة جومبا لاهيري وهما "عندما أتى السيد بيرزادا لتناول الطعام" و "السيدة سنز" . وختاماً، فإن البحث يهدف الى تقييم ما اذا كانت جومبا لاهيري قد نجحت في ابراز تصورات متنوعة لفكرة السكن في الغربة ، والى أي مدى تمكنت الكاتبة من اتاحة الفرصة لشخصياتها ولقراءها لالقاء نظرة على الفروق الدقيقة للاحساس النفسي والمادي بالسكن العابر للحدود الوطنية وذلك فيما يتعلق بالأحداث اليومية الحياتيه.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** جومبا لاهيري ، وطن الغربة ، الهوية ، الهجرة الهندية.

## Conceptualizing 'Transnational Homes'

Shaden Adel Nasser

---

In  
**Jhumpa Lahiri's**  
**“When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine” and “Mrs. Sen's”**

Shaden Adel Nasser  
Assistant Professor of English Literature  
Faculty of Women for Arts, Science & Education  
The Department of English Language & Literature  
Ain Shams University

**Introduction**

The significant changes witnessed in the past two decades and the increasing interest in ‘diaspora’ have helped in extending the meaning of ‘diaspora’ and ‘home’ in various directions. ‘Diaspora’ refers to the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from their homeland. Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling state that ‘diaspora’ is derived from the Greek word –dia, ‘through’, and ‘speirein’, ‘to scatter’” and is denoted in Webster’s Dictionary as ‘dispersion from’ (179). All diasporas are perceived by Vijay Mishra, in his book *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (2007), as ‘unhappy’, but each one in its own way. What diasporic people share in common are collective identity, the memory of their homeland together with their cultural heritage represented by their native language, religion and traditional values. All these aspects appeal to their emotions by giving them a sense of devotion and belonging that sustained them in their exile. This is best described by Judith Shual:

A diaspora is a social construct founded on feeling, consciousness, memory, mythology, history, meaningful narratives, group identity, longings, dreams, allegorical and virtual elements all of which play an important role in establishing a diaspora reality. At a given moment in time, the sense of

## Conceptualizing 'Transnational Homes' In Jhumpa Lahiri's "When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine" and "Mrs. Sen's"

---

connection to a homeland must be strong enough to resist forgetting, assimilating or distancing. (Shuval 43)

Diaspora always appeals to the imagery of traumas of departure and displacement which is a very important aspect of the experience of migration. According to Steven Vertovec, the term 'diaspora' is often applied to 'describe practically any population that is considered 'deterritorialized' or 'transnational' moving to a new land leaving the motherland behind, and whose social, economic, and political links "cross the borders of nation states or, indeed, span the globe" (277).

In her book *Cartographies of Diaspora* (2005), Avtar Brah posits that the concept of diaspora involves a notion of home which is represented as "the lived experience of locality" (192). 'Locality' here refers not only to the place where one belongs, but as Svetlana Boym suggests "materiality of place, sensual perceptions, smells and sounds" (353), on which the feelings of nostalgia depends. Brah elaborates that home can also be seen as 'a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return in spite of the possibility of visiting the geographic terrain which is perceived as the 'homeland'. Thus, home seems to have two meanings for Brah i.e. an imaginary and mythic space placed at a distance, and a nostalgic feeling of home that stems from lived experiences and memories of that particular place.

Traditionally, most migration studies have recognized that the most outstanding condition that begins when one leaves his/her own country is the feeling of not yet belonging "here" but no longer "there". The individual mostly suffers from the pain of being far away from his/her home. In addition, the memories of the motherland and the grief of leaving behind everything familiar worries him/her. However, many contemporary studies, such as Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994); Vertovec (1999);

and Glick Schiller (2004), have acknowledged that migrants nowadays tend to preserve diverse types of ties with their homeland and are integrated in the country of destination at the same time. Thus, the notion of ‘transnational migration’ have emerged to consider these types of migration practices.

In the same vein, Regina Lee classifies three main types of diasporic consciousness: the first is ‘idealization of homeland’ which includes a strong identification with the country of origin on the part of its diaspora. Migrants in this state define themselves in terms of emotional and spatial dimensions, and their diasporic experiences are controlled by the desire of return. The second is ‘boutique multicultural manifestation’ which appeared as a result of the cultural diversity environment, hence, migrants of this type know what the host society wants, and feed it to them, in order to gain as much acceptance as this type of consciousness allows. The third is ‘transitional or transformational identity politics’. Lee’s third conceptualization views diasporas in a transitional or transformational state, still evolving, and interacting in an informed way with the host societies (54).

Drawing on diaspora and migration studies with special reference to *Home* (2006) by Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling and *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) by Svetlana Boym, the paper explores the ways in which ‘home’ can be understood in the context of transnational migration and how the first and second generation migrants find ‘home’ in the transnational social field . In so doing, the analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri’s “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” and “Mrs. Sen’s” focus on spatial, emotional and rational understandings of ‘home’, with particular attention to the diversity of Indian migrants’ perceptions of home and homeland and to the significance of nostalgia, and collective memory of homeland.

## Conceptualizing ‘Transnational Homes’ In Jhumpa Lahiri’s “When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine” and “Mrs. Sen’s”

Leaving a place that one has termed ‘home’ since childhood and moving to a new home in a foreign country challenges an individual to grapple with the meaning of ‘home’. Assertively, home in migration is a place that is frequently connected with the migrant’s country of origin, as opposite to the host country, which is always denoted by the migrant as ‘a strange land’ (Ahmed 340). Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson claim that “being at home means being stationary, centred, bounded, fitted, engaged, and grounded” (27). However, other researchers, such as Lee Cuba and David M. Hummon, state that the sense of ‘home’ differs according to migrants’ different stages of their life cycle. They suggest that “older migrants are relatively more likely to construct a sense of home based on the dwelling place and previous experience with the locale; younger migrants more often rely on affiliations involving friendships, family, and emotional self-attributions” (548).

For most transnational migrants, homes are places of memory and are perceived as descriptive sites in which both personal and inherited connections to past memories of homeland are embodied. Karen Fog Olwig, Veena Das and Fiona R. Parrot view ‘home’ as a flexible term that varies throughout a person’s life span and is connected with time, memory, travel and transition. This concept includes “an actual place of lived experience and a metaphorical space of personal attachment and identification” (Armbruster 20). Thus, there are two distinguished meanings of home: the first is seen as ‘a place of refuge, freedom, possession, shelter and security’; and the second is realized as a place bound up with ‘family, friends and community, attachment, rootedness, memory, and nostalgia’ (Porteous and Smith 61).

In *Home* (2006), Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling provide a contemporary, western conception of home where home is described as the ‘multi-scalar’, material and imaginative place



through which power and identity intersect, dislocate, and extend common understandings of home. For them, home is much more than house or household. They define home as a place and a set of positive feelings such as ‘belonging, desire and intimacy’(2) and negative feelings , for instance fear,violence and alienation. Like Blunt and Dowling, I see that one of the central characteristics of home is that it is both a place and a set of sensations.

As for Nikos Papastergiadis, he claims that the ideal home is not just a house that provides shelter, or a place that contains material objects. Beyond the physical security and ‘market value’, “a home is a place where personal and social meaning are grounded” (2). Most migrants find home in repetitive social rituals, a recurrent habitual interactions, in memories, myths, and stories about homeland. This can lead to a romanticized and nostalgic view that is often in connection with the daily experience of home. Thus, home “is a rich site and subject for research...to explore the interplay of personal with shared and collective memories and experiences of home” (Blunt & Dowling 82).

The term ‘nostalgia’ comes from the Greek *nostos* which stands for returning home and ‘algos’ which means pain and denotes homesickness and a longing for home. Svetlana Boym, in *The Future of Nostalgia*, defines nostalgia as the longing for a home that no longer exists or never existed (xiii). Nostalgia for her is, a double experience “of two images of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life”.

In Europe from the late seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, nostalgia was regarded as a physical illness. But in the latter part of the twentieth century, nostalgia acquired a distinct conceptual status among researchers who associate the words “warm, old times, childhood, and yearning” more frequently with the term “nostalgia” than with the term “homesickness” (qtd in Sedikides & D. Baden

## Conceptualizing 'Transnational Homes' In Jhumpa Lahiri's "When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine" and "Mrs. Sen's"

202). While homesickness refers to one's place of origin and psychological problems such as, feelings of anxiety as a result of separation from home environment, nostalgia surpasses social groups and age. That is, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the conception of nostalgia changed direction to finally eliminate homesickness from its literature .

Today the general definition of nostalgia includes remembering past memories of homeland that enriches the migrants' emotions, creating a positive mood. Thus, "migration is the condition of memory, psychically and physically the only measurable thing, since the point of origin is lost entirely, and, though entirely real in its effects" (Creet and Kitzmann 6). Memory of homeland maintains the original identifications that supports self-identity. Besides, it is viewed as therapeutic as it helps sustain the hardships of movement onto a foreign country; and "it is also community-forming, by creating a bond among those recollecting together" (11). Krystine Irene Batcho distinguishes between nostalgia and plain memories by saying that one can remember without being nostalgic, but one cannot be nostalgic without remembering (362). Additionally, family and friends memories are considered significant sources in the nostalgic mood . Objects such as jewelry, antiques, toys and cooking utensils are also known to make people nostalgic (Havlena & Holak). Similarly, events such as weddings, gatherings and holidays have proven to intensify nostalgia.

Boym suggests two kinds of nostalgia as ways of determining longing:

Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on nostos and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of

remembrance. The first category of nostalgics do not think of themselves as nostalgic; they believe that their project is about truth. This kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories. Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time. (72)

From the previous quotation, we deduce that reflective nostalgia is predominantly based on the personal memories of homeland. Those who experience this type of nostalgia are aware that these memories are ruins. Thus, this defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future. Through such longing these nostalgics discover that the past is not merely that which doesn't exist anymore, but, to quote Henri Bergson, the past "might act and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality (Boym 84).

As for memory, it is intertwined with place into everyday life in the sense that "while personal memory makes place out of space, collective memory contributes to peoples' material and symbolic understanding of place through shared knowledges of buildings, streets, historical events, and other particularities of the place, as well as their sense of belonging to that place and their fellow inhabitants" (Keogan 8). Sites of memory, then, can include geographical places and their physical features such as monuments, buildings, and public displays, as well as their more symbolic attributes, such as shared memories, historical occurrences, origin

## Conceptualizing 'Transnational Homes' In Jhumpa Lahiri's "When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine" and "Mrs. Sen's"

myths, and each individual's sense of her or his self within that place (Hoelscher and Alderman 349). That is to say, memories of the past can help reinforce collective bonds between people and their place.

Frequently, in the case of unwilling migrants, there is a nostalgic and an idealized perspective toward home that is accompanied with a rebuffing of the host culture and a reluctance to assimilation with it. However, the voluntary migrants present varied sets of mixed imagery of homeland that is associated with their intentional will to be part in the host culture. Thus, Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson (1998) generalizes the idea of 'home' by suggesting that it encompasses "cultural norms and individual fantasies and brings together memory and longing, the ideational, the affective and the physical, the spatial and the temporal, the local and the global, the positively evaluated and the negatively" (8). 'Home' is, thus, a multilayered term. Hence, in the course of this study and through the analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" and "Mrs. Sen's", I will be examining the concept of home for both the first and second generation migrants on spacial and emotional levels in relation to the transnational environment in which they inhabit and the ways in which some of them manage to make 'strange places' their 'home'.

Indian Diaspora is considered the second largest diaspora from Asia as it spreads across three continents and has a long history. It has contributed a lot to world literature and is viewed as a complex process containing two different cultural dilemmas, loss of mother tongue as well as the multicultural shifts. This challenging encounter between two cultures provokes the mind of the Indian writers which can be seen clearly in their attitudes, values and approaches. Their consciousness of Indian cultural heritage and their attachment to India are the main elements that shape their

identity. The diasporic Indians have made a substantial contribution to the literary legacy. According to Makarand Paranjape, Professor of English, J .N. U., New Delhi, "a diasporic text can be examined in terms of location, dislocation and relocation. Location is the homeland" (17). Thus, the indian diaspora "as a subject of study has wide appeal across various disciplines, namely, anthropology, history, literature and cultural studies, and sociology" (Karmakar 77). It can be said that diaspora literature mainly uses the idea of home to represent the characters in a foreign land which often culminates in the creation of a different version of 'home'. Moreover, in diaspora literature, most homes are engraved in memory and idealized by nostalgia, "hence the self-conscious drama of diasporic identity: of the homeless self in search of both a home and a land, a home-land" (David & Javier xi). Salman Rhusdie terms the diasporic individual as a 'trans lated' individual. This translated self, according to Rhusdie, encourages the diasporic Indian writers to occupy themselves with the idea of 'home' in their writings. The literature on the diaspora discourse reflects this necessity (17).

Equivalent to great male Indian novelists as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, M.G. Vassanji, Shani Mootoo and Bharati Mukherjee , the contribution of women novelists is enormously significant. Many indian women writers both novelists and poets, are based in the USA and Britain. Some like Jhabvala and Anita Desai are late immigrants, others like Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second generation of Indians abroad who focus in their works on "the connections and clashes between Indian and American cultures, as well as the nations, in the context of immigration" (Clinton 7).

Describing her India past, Jhumpa Lahiri declared that "India is the place where my parents are from, a place I visited frequently for extended time and formed relationship with people and with my relatives and felt a tie over time even though it was a sort of

## Conceptualizing ‘Transnational Homes’ In Jhumpa Lahiri’s “When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine” and “Mrs. Sen’s”

parenthesis in my life to be there” (qtd in Kuortti and Rajeshwar 168) . Her connection with India is through her parents and grand parents. She is an Indian by ancestry, British by birth, American by immigration. Thus, as a second-generation immigrant to the USA, she does not have the same anguish of separation from the homeland as first-generation immigrants have. However, her close identification with the sentiments of her parents and her focus on their anxiety and sense of displacement in her books has made her a popular literary figure in India as well as in the USA. To the Times of India, she admits, “I learnt to observe things as an outsider and yet I knew that as different Calcutta is from Rhode Island, I belonged there in some fundamental way, in the way, I didn’t seem to belong in the U.S.” (qtd in Naikar 204). This explains why her writings are concerned with the consciousness of the need for regaining roots in the tradition of India and a regretful nostalgia towards that. Lahiri has skillfully probed deep into the Indian immigrant hearts and has pictured their varied experiences with great flexibility. Most Indian immigrants who live in America, still belong to their “home”. They are caught between the strict traditions they have inherited and the baffling *New World* they must meet every day (Sarangi 139).

Lahiri’s works are perceived as manifesting such notion of being uprooted from homeland and also putting emphasize on the quest for blending in the host country. She declares that her short stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) are “stories of Bengal, Boston and Beyond”. They conspicuously portray the complex and confusing cultures of the past as well as the present with its post modern intricacy. Moreover, they reflect the problems of immigrants in the migrated land such as, alienation, the sense of displacement, exile, difficult relationships and problems about communication. Her stories also “zoom in on small happenings and circumscribed settings, maintaining a spatial focus on the home and a formal and

thematic focus on the slight, inconspicuous, and fleeting events and affects in daily life” (Koshy 597). Her characters vary from Indians and Indian émigrés to American-born Indians. Her characters often feel as if they were cut off from their roots and their minds and hearts continue yearns for their “Imaginary homeland” (Salman Rushdie). The following is an analysis of two stories from the collection in which the process of creating “transnational homes” is closely investigated.

### **When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine**

Jhumpa Lahiri sets her story entitled “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” in Autumn 1971. It is written from the point of view of Lilia, a woman recalling her ten-year-old memories. The story recalls Lahiri’s experiences of growing up as a child of Indian immigrants. It begins with political reports of Bangladesh’s war of independence in 1971. The reader is reminded that whereas Lilia’s Hindu family is of Indian origin, Mr. Pirzada is a Pakistani-Bengali muslim, in his way of becoming Bangladeshi. Lilia recollects her memories of Mr. Pirzada whose daily visits to her family coincide with watching the T.V news about the Indo-Pakistan conflict which resulted in the splitting of Pakistan. As a representative of the second generation Indian in America, the story shows Lilia’s growing awareness of her fragmented identity, being unaware of the history and culture of her native homeland and completely engrossed in the American culture. She vaguely learns about the history of the Partition in the Indian subcontinent through Mr. Pirzada’s everyday visits to her house, whereas in school, the only history she learns is American history. This is revealed in her ability to fill in blanks on maps with “names, dates, capitals... with {her} eyes closed” (27), whereas, she feels totally estranged in front of the map of India. She even declares that she visited India “only once and had no memory of the trip” (26) This shows to what extent her perception of her homeland is absent and consequently, she finds

## Conceptualizing 'Transnational Homes' In Jhumpa Lahiri's "When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine" and "Mrs. Sen's"

her missing story of an 'absent homeland' in the presence of Mr. Pirzada.

On the other hand, Mr. Pirzada is a man from Dacca who exemplifies the isolation and loneliness of the individual who leaves home and family to do a research work in America. He cannot return to his homeland before he finishes writing a book about his discoveries. Mr. Pirzada's migration experience brings to our mind, an emotional and terrestrial sense of home. Collen Ward suggests that ties to family members left behind in the country of origin can be a source of anxiety and pressure and this acts against the post-migration adjustment and re-creation of a sense of home (qtd in Philipp 83). This can be related to Mr. Pirzada: The agony of losing touch with his wife and seven daughters because of war in Pakistan, shapes his diasporic consciousness and consequently, strengthens his desire to return back home. Everyday Mr. Pirzada comes to Lilia's house and brings her candy, in an attempt to recreate his home and the presence of his daughters. Lilia in return keeps the candy in a special sandal wood box that once belonged to her grandmother. This shows that she understands that her parents' guest is in some way connected to her Indian heritage and honors this fact by placing the gifts she receives from him in the Indian box. The strong emotional bond between Mr. Pirzada and Lilia is his only way to express his parental affection for this young girl who reminds him of his seven daughters. Mr. Pirzada in this state lives in two separate worlds, physically in America and emotionally in Dacca, thinking nostalgically of his homeland. His homesickness is evident before every meal with Lilia's parents, as he uses a pocket watch that is set to the local time in Dacca as if with it, he is keeping track of his lost home and family. This is intensified by Lilia's image of Mr. Pirzada's missing life in Dacca ,



When I saw it that night as he wound it and arranged it on the coffee table, an uneasiness possessed me; life, I realized, was being lived in Dacca first. I imagined Mr.Pirzada’s daughters rising from sleep, tying ribbons in their hair, anticipating breakfast, preparing for school. Our meals, our actions, were only a shadow of what had already happened there, a lagging ghost of where Mr. Pirzada really belonged. (30-31)

This image drawn by Lilia shows the symbolic significance of “the domestic home to an idea of the nation as home” (Blunt and Dowling 142). Thus, Mr. Pirzada’s home is the one “bound up with ‘family, friends and community, attachment, rootedness, memory, and nostalgia’” ( Blunt and Dowling 176).

Home, in this story, thus, can be defined on different levels, including a single building, a community, a sense of cultural identity and even an entire nation. The ways in which individuals feel at home is very much related to the sense of shared ‘rootedness’. Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s parents share the same cultural identity: they speak the same language, laugh at the same jokes and have more or less the same features. Lilia says, “like my parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea” (25). However, if home were determined by political and geographical scope, then the concept of home for both Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s parents would rather become problematic. We notice that Mr. Pirzada leaves his homeland in Dacca when it is part of Pakistan, heading to the U.S for research scholarship, but after partition, he returns to “the same” Dacca, which is then located in another place, Bangladish and consequently, loses his home. When he reunites with his wife and children at the end of the story , they are described by Lilia as being

## Conceptualizing 'Transnational Homes' In Jhumpa Lahiri's "When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine" and "Mrs. Sen's"

"having survived the events of the past year at an estate belonging to his wife's grandparents in the mountains of Shillong" (41-42). For Mr. Pirzada "physically and geographically it is the same, yet politically and emotionally everything is totally different" (Dasgupta & Lal 162). Thus, when one nation is divided because of a civil war, then people belonging to one nation become citizens of a different land and hence, a different sense of home. Here, we have two meanings for home expressed by Paul Gilroy in which "the lives of transnational migrants are often interpreted in terms of 'roots' and 'routes'... whilst 'roots' might imply an original homeland from which people have scattered, and to which they might seek to return, 'routes' complicates such ideas by focusing on more mobile, multiple and transcultural geographies of home" (qtd in Blunt and Dowling 199).

Beyond the concept of home as rooted, fixed and thoroughly tied to a remembered homeland, the term 'routes' comprises "more mobile, and often deterritorialized, geographies of home that reflect transnational connections and networks" (Blunt&Dowling 199) . This mobility does not impede Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora as a 'homing desire' when she states that, "the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins while taking account of a homing desire, as distinct from a desire for a "homeland". This distinction is important, not least because not all diasporas sustain an ideology of 'return'" (180). As regards Lilia's parents, home is not just 'here' or 'there', but both. They feel that having a sense of belonging to America does not mean that their attachments to their country of origin has diminished. Thus, the idea that home may be 'here' or 'there', both or neither, is not new (qtd in Erdal 366). In the case of Lilia's parents as transnational migrants, "assimilation into the host country and connections to their homeland may occur concurrently, supporting rather than opposing each other (Levitt and Schiller). A dual sense of home appears in Lilia's assimilated

mother's classification of "here" as the place of "a safe life, an easy life, a fine education, every opportunity" and "there" as a space of poverty and war (26). In other words, home for Lilia's parents is associated with an ambivalence because they remain split between the opportunities provided by the hostland, and a sense of loss produced by their migration from the homeland. Although Lilia's family openly makes efforts to adapt to American culture, which shows in their celebration of Halloween for example, their profound yearn to homeland is apparent in sharing with their guest, Mr. Pirzada, Indian food every night and in their strong interest in the events of the Indo-Pakistan war. Their house recalls Blunt and Dowling's depiction of home in diaspora as a site of memory in which "food and the social and cultural practices of cooking and eating are important in charting and maintaining a collective memory and identity, both within particular places and across wider diasporas" (212). Lahiri gives an account of their food habits:

They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands... chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea. (25)

Food, thus becomes an important ritual performed with Mr. Pirzada in an attempt by Lilia's parents to make up for the things they had at home. Such familial imagery is closely connected to the memory of homeland that gives them feelings of security and pleasure.

Lilia's parents' Indian home-makings fail to compensate the absence of Mr. Pirzada's family. We notice that this domestic imagery is what Mr. Pirzada lacks in the U.S. because of the loss of his family which means the irretrievable loss of his sense of home as well. Hence, if home is where the heart is, and Mr. Pirzada's heart is with his family, then 'home' is where his family is. This is best

## Conceptualizing ‘Transnational Homes’ In Jhumpa Lahiri’s “When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine” and “Mrs. Sen’s”

described by Peter Kabachnik, Joanna Regulska, and Beth Mitchneck posit that “Home is multidimensional, a concept in which temporality (past, present, future) intersects with spatiality (physical and imaginary) and social relations (family)” (317). Eventually, Mr. Pirzada leaves for Dacca and much to the joy of Lilia and her parents he was reunited with his family. Lilia’s awareness of the sense of home is achieved when Mr. Pirzada goes back to Dacca, and reunites with his wife and seven daughters. She comments on Mr. Pirzada’s departure by saying, “it was only then...that I knew what it meant to miss someone who was so many miles and hours away, just as he had missed his wife and daughters for so many months. He had no reason to return to us” (When Mr, Pirzada Came to Dine, 42). ‘Home’, thus have been partially recreated for Mr. Pirzada, through food and community; yet the physical presence of his family could not be totally compensated. “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, thus is a story which attests to the multidimensionality of home as a concept. It is an attempt to reconstruct home in diaspora through physical and imaginary means. Characters succeed for the most part to recreate home through food, social ties, and collective memory. Yet, their success is only partial and the “transnational home” signifies both gain and loss simultaneously.

### Mrs. Sen’s

Most of Jhumpa Lahiri’s characters in *Interpreter of Maladies* perceive home as intricately connected with the memories of people they know in their native land. This is apparent in the case of Mrs. Sen in Lahiri’s story “Mrs. Sen’s”. Unlike Lilia’s tale, which is narrated from Lilia’s point of view, “Mrs. Sen’s” is narrated through a third person omniscient narrator, furthermore, Lahiri here abandons historical and political accounts, focusing on ordinary human experiences. Mrs. Sen’s home tells us another story of

migration. It retells a touching story of physical estrangement from the protagonist's homeland which turns more and more into construction of memory. Thus, "Mrs. Sen's" home is seen as a place of personal memories of home and homeland across transnational space. Throughout the tale, we see how Mrs. Sen creates mimic India in her American house. The foods, the kitchen equipments, her recipes, clothes, books and all items evoke the life she had back in India. Even though she had to leave India, these items bring back the memories of the place. She constantly refers to India as her "home" even after she is settled down in an America. One would see that Mrs. Sen is captured between the two contradictory senses of home suggested by Avatar Brah: the first is home as the site of origin and the second as the locale experience in a foreign country. Like most Indian migrants away from the familiar ties, Mrs. Sen hesitates between "nostos" and "algos" reconstruction and crisis. All through the story, she strives to restore the old home, India, by recalling scenes of her idealized past life and by transferring elements of that life into her new place in America. Through the analysis of the short story, the depiction of food rituals and the re-enactments of Indian customs and traditions are evidence of nostalgia for the protagonist's lost home.

We notice that the possessive 's' in the title in "Mrs. Sen's" is rather ambiguous, but it may refer to her new place in America where she feels like a stranger. In her struggle to create a stable identity for herself in the host country, her apartment is overflowed with the sights and smells of her home in Calcutta. She longs for past days in her Indian home and with her family. Moreover, she spends her time thinking about what might best prepare for the evening meal from the Indian cuisine "for first-generation immigrants like Mrs. Sen, the home was a recuperative, nostalgic Indian space, which was nevertheless reconstituted, inscribing new possibilities and reconfigurations, thus embodying...the trauma of dislocation" (Awadalla 105). Thus, the story raises two important questions:

## Conceptualizing ‘Transnational Homes’ In Jhumpa Lahiri’s “When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine” and “Mrs. Sen’s”

first, what does it mean to be at home in diaspora? and how does an alienated detached migrant make up for his/her lost home in a foreign country?

Mrs. Sen is a lonely immigrant wife of a mathematic professor who was forced to leave her home in India and stay in America. She feels detached and isolated in a place not of her choice. To lessen her feelings of strangeness, she talks all the time of home as a valuable place of piety and community. She says “everything is there” (113). In order to overcome her loneliness, she accepts the job offer of babysitting an American boy named Eliot, who becomes her companion and listens to her nostalgic stories about Calcutta. The reader sees the recalled events and scenes through the eyes of Eliot even though the story is told from the point of view of the omniscient third person. Eliot’s curiosity about everything related to Mrs. Sen and comparing his family and their life style with what he observes at Mrs. Sen’s, enable Lahiri to give the reader a vibrant and glowing picture of Mrs. Sen’s Indian home in America. We see how Eliot enjoys watching Mrs. Sen while chopping things, “seated on newspapers on the living room floor .... prying the pimpled yellow fat off chicken parts and gripping the chicken with both hands” (“Mrs. Sen’s” 114-116). Eliot eventually understands that when Mrs. Sen mentions home, she means India.

Mrs. Sen’s ‘blade’ plays a very important role in recalling past memories about Indian society. She had brought the blade from India at a time when there was at least one in every household. Mrs Sen’s use of the traditional tools of cooking recalls Blunt and Dowling’s emphasis on charting and maintaining a collective memory and identity, both within particular places and across wider diasporas” (212). Her attachment to this ‘culturally-coded’ piece turn her emotions into concrete reality, it further nourishes her memory; and helps her to grapple with her feelings of nostalgia.

The memory of social relations, family bonds, networks of friends and neighbours can further relieve the melancholic feelings of dislocation in “transnational Homes”. Finding the American life distressing and intimidating, Mrs. Sen expresses her longing for home through her manners of waiting for letters coming from Calcutta and her listening passionately to cassettes of Bengali people speaking. By trying to resurrect her life in India, she recreates the home which Avatar Brah defined as “...a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination” (Brah 192). Furthermore, she recounts how in India during weddings or large gatherings: “all the neighborhood women...bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle of the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night...It is impossible to fall asleep those nights, listening to their chatter” (115). She adds that in her homeland “not everybody has a telephone. But just raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole neighbourhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with arrangements” (116). Unlike her lonely and alienated life in America, Mrs. Sen recalls warmly the sense of kinship and compassion that the people in her home country share with one another. This vivid picture triggers memories of good old days, and intensifies her nostalgia or sense of loss for the home she has left behind. In other words, Mrs. Sen represents modern nostalgia which “is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual” (Boym 31). This nostalgia can be described using Boyem’s term “reflective nostalgia” (173) where it “dwells in algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance” (72). Thus, the sense of home, for Mrs. Sen, is not just family and friends, but as Peter Kabachnik, Joanna Regulska, and Beth Mitchneck suggest, “the home of the memory and imagination...can be even more significant than physical homes” (321). The absence

## Conceptualizing 'Transnational Homes' In Jhumpa Lahiri's "When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine" and "Mrs. Sen's"

of a sense of identity in the foreign country leads Mrs. Sen to cling to her memories when she once had a strong sense of identity in Calcutta, India. In addition, her recalling of the past helps her cure the painful disintegration of the present.

Just as domestic objects can stimulate positive feelings of familiarity against feelings of dislocation in "transnational homes", food, habits and routines can also help migrants recreate such homes feel. The preparation of food is an important ritual of home-making in diaspora. In the case of Mrs. Sen, she feels nostalgic for the fish she had grown up eating twice a day. Fish becomes an important symbol of cultural identity in this story. For her, the fish in America tasted nothing like fish in India. She also recalled memories of eating fish almost every day in the morning and evening. The narrator tells us how Mrs. Sen's family "ate fish thing in the morning, last thing before bed, as a snack after school if they were lucky. They ate the tail, the eggs, even the head" (124). It is not only the consumption of food through eating that produce 'at home' feelings, but also the practice of grocery shopping. The arrival of fish at the local store is received with ecstasy as a piece of news from home and Mrs. Sen is always eager to hold the fish, to cook it and to serve it to Mr. Sen When she submits to the pressures of cultural nostalgia, we find her taking Eliot with her to buy fish, which is almost the principal food of Bengal and one of her favourite culinary repertoire. Mrs Sen earns the reader's sympathy with her inflated passion for Indian food which she craves in order to overcome the dislocation she experiences. Food for her becomes what Sanjukta Dasgupta and Malashri Lal describe as a "cultural signifier that could be a source of empowerment and control... of bonding...of a form of resistance to assimilation and at the same time a nostalgic longing for a lost world" (157). "Mrs. Sen's" is, thus, a story that illustrates a woman's grief for being far away from homeland caused by her migration and made her a victim here.



---

## Conclusion

Findings of the present study suggest that Jhumpa Lahiri's handling of themes such as integration, displacement, home, nostalgia, and rootedness makes her a Diaspora writer par excellence. Analyzing the two short stories has provided us with a clear image of how Indian migrants view "home" and of how they exert efforts to recreate it in diaspora leading to "transnational homes", which signify both "nostos" reconstruction, and "algos" pain.

Characters differ in grappling with nostalgia in the two stories under study; some prefer to stay in the host country reconstructing Indian "home" in America, as in the case of Lilia's parents. Others return back home with no intention to leave homeland again, like Mr. Pirzada. Others, like Mrs. Sen dwell in "reflective nostalgia": their inability to return physically, and their displacement do not erase their bond with their previous place to which they constantly return through memory. Both Mrs. Sen and Mr. Pirzada represent the immigrant's struggle to survive in diaspora; they both try to fight their homesickness, and communicate, in different ways, the nostalgia for their own country which they have left behind. Thus, as Lahiri skillfully reveals, the concept of home is not the same to different people of diaspora. Yet, most of her characters as the above analysis has shown experience different levels of perplexity and distress in their "transnational homes".

Lahiri's writings are full of details of Indian food, indian life styles and traditional rituals which constitute the pillars of such "transnational homes". Lahiri skillfully succeeds in revealing the distress of the Indian migrants who are baffled between two different cultures; yet, she manages to commemorate, and at times even to celebrate her characters' feats of creating "transnational homes" in diaspora in spite of the pain.

**Conceptualizing ‘Transnational Homes’ In Jhumpa Lahiri’s “When  
Mr. Pirzada came to Dine” and “Mrs. Sen’s”**

---

**Works Cited**

- Ahmed, Sara. (1999). *Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement*. International journal of cultural studies 2(3), 329-347.
- Al-Ali, Nadjie, and Khalid Koser. (2003). *New approaches to migration?: Transnational communities and the transformation of home*. Routledge.
- Armbruster, Heidi. (2002). *Homes in crisis: Syrian orthodox Christians in Turkey and Germany*. 17-33.
- Appadurai, Arjun. (1996). *The Production of Locality*. Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. U of Minnesota P. 178-201.
- Awadalla, Maggie, and Paul March-Russell. (2012). *The postcolonial short story: Contemporary essays*. Springer,.
- Basch, Linda, Nina Glick Schiller, and Christina Szanton Blanc. (2005). *Nations unbound: Transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments, and deterritorialized nation-states*. Routledge.
- Batcho, Krystine Irene. (2007). *Nostalgia and the emotional tone and content of song lyrics*. The American Journal of Psychology, 361-381.
- Blunt, A. and R Dowling. (2006). *Home*. London. Routledge.
- Brah, Avtar. (2005). *Cartographies of diaspora: Contesting identities*. Routledge.
- Boym, Svetlana. (2001). *The future of nostalgia*. Basic Books.
- Chambers, I. (1990). *Border Dialogues*. London: Routledge.
- Clinton, Greg. (2016). *Reading and Interpreting the Works of Jhumpa Lahiri*. Enslow Publishing, LLC.
- Creet, Julia, and Andreas Kitzmann, eds. (2014). *Memory and migration: Multidisciplinary approaches to memory studies*. University of Toronto Press.
- Cuba, Lee, and David M. Hummon. (1993). *Constructing a sense of home: Place affiliation and migration across the life cycle*. Sociological forum. Vol. 8. No. 4. Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers.

- Das, Veena, Jonathan M. Ellen, and Lori Leonard. (2008) *On the Modalities of the Domestic*. Home Cultures , 349-371.
- Dasgupta, Sanjukta. (2007). *Locating 'Home' in a Liminal Space: Longing and Belonging in the Fiction of 'Bengali' American Women Writers*. *Interpreting Homes in South Asian Literature*, 75-95.
- Dasgupta, Sanjukta, and Malashri Lal, eds. (2007). *The Indian family in transition: Reading literary and cultural texts*. SAGE Publications India,.
- Daiya, Kavita. (2011). *Violent belongings: partition, gender, and national culture in postcolonial India*. Temple University Press.
- David, Marianne, and Javier Muñoz-Basols, eds. (2011). *Defining and Re-Defining Diaspora: From Theory to Reality*. Inter-Disciplinary Press.
- Davis, Fred. (1979). *Yearning for yesterday: A sociology of nostalgia*. Free Press.
- Després, Carole. (1991). *The meaning of home: Literature review and directions for future research and theoretical development*. *Journal of architectural and Planning Research*, 96-115.
- Easthope, Hazel. (2004). *A place called home*. *Housing, theory and society* 21(3), 128-138.
- Erdal, Marta Bivand. (2014). *This is my home*. *Comparative Migration Studies* 2(3), 361-383.
- Gilroy, Paul. (1993). *The black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. Verso.
- Hage, Ghassan. (1996). *The spatial imaginary of national practices: dwelling—domesticating/being—exterminating*. *Environment and planning d: society and space* 14(4), 463-485.
- Havlena, William J., and Susan L. Holak. &quot; *The Good Old Days&quot;: Observations on Nostalgia and Its Role in Consumer Behavior*. *ACR North American Advances* (1991).
- Hoelscher, Steven, and Derek H. Alderman. *Memory and place: geographies of a critical relationship*. *Social & Cultural Geography* 5.3 (2004): 347-355.
- Hubbard, Phil, and Rob Kitchin, eds. (2010). *Key thinkers on space and place*. Sage.

**Conceptualizing ‘Transnational Homes’ In Jhumpa Lahiri’s “When  
Mr. Pirzada came to Dine” and “Mrs. Sen’s”**

---

- Kabachnik, Peter, Joanna Regulska, and Beth Mitchneck. (2010). *Where and when is home? The double displacement of Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia*. Journal of Refugee Studies 23(3), 315-336.
- Karmakar, Chandrima. (2015). *The Conundrum of ‘Home’ in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora: An Interpretive Analysis*. Sociological Bulletin 64(1), 77-90.
- Keogan, Kevin. (2010). *Immigrants and the cultural politics of place: A comparative study of New York and Los Angeles*. LFB Scholarly Pub.
- Koshy, Susan. (2011). *Minority cosmopolitanism*. PMLA 126(3), 592-609.
- Kuortti, Joel, and Mittapalli Rajeshwar, eds. (2007). *Indian Women's Short Fiction*. Atlantic Publishers & Dist.
- Lal, Malashri, and Sukrita Paul Kumar. (2007). *Interpreting Homes in South Asian Literature*. Pearson Education India.
- Levitt, P. and Glick Schiller, N. (2004). *Conceptualizing simultaneity: A transnational social field perspective on society*. International Migration Review. p.1002-1039.
- Lee, Regina. (2004). *Theorizing diasporas: Three types of consciousness*. Asian diasporas: cultures, identities, representations, 53-76.
- Mallett, Shelley. (2004). *Understanding home: a critical review of the literature*. The sociological review 52(1), 62-89.
- Mishra, Vijay. (2007). *The literature of the Indian diaspora: theorizing the diasporic imaginary*. Routledge.
- Moore, Jeanne. (2007). *Polarity or integration? Towards a fuller understanding of home and homelessness*. Journal of Architectural and Planning Research, 143-159.
- Naikar, Basavaraj S., ed. (2002). *Indian English Literature*. Vol. 2. Atlantic Publishers & Dist.
- Olwig, Karen Fog. (2002). *Travelling makes a home: Mobility and identity among West Indians*. *Ideal Homes?* (pp.80-90). Routledge
- Papastergiadis, N. (1996) *Dialogues in the Diaspora: Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity*. London: Rivers Oram Press.

## Shaden Adel Nasser

- Parrott, Fiona R. (2005). *It's Not Forever' The Material Culture of Hope*. Journal of material culture 10(3), 245-262.
- Pazo, Paula Torreiro. (2016). *Diasporic Tastescapes*. Vol. 8. LIT Verlag Münster.
- Philipp, Annika, and Elsie Ho. (2010). *Migration, home and belonging: South African migrant women in Hamilton, New Zealand*. New Zealand population review, 36, 81.
- Pink, Sarah. (2013). *Doing visual ethnography*. Sage.
- Porteous, Douglas, and Sandra E. Smith. (2001). *Domicide: The global destruction of home*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP.
- Rapport, Nigel, and Andrew Dawson. (1998). *Home and movement: a polemic. Migrants of identity: perceptions of home in a world of movement*, 19-38.
- Reddy, Vanita D. (2009). *Re-Modeling Minority: Mapping Critical Femininities in the South Asian American Diaspora*. PhD Diss. University of California.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin.
- Sarangi, Jaideep. (2004). *Bond Without Bondage: Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri*. Studies in Women Writers in English, 2, 139.
- Sedikides, C., T. Wildschut, and D. Baden. *Nostalgia: Conceptual Issues and Existential Functions*. HANDBOOK OF EXPERIMENTAL EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY.
- Shuval, Judith T. (2000). *Diaspora migration: Definitional ambiguities and a theoretical paradigm*. International migration 38(5), 41-56.
- Snel, Erik, Godfried Engbersen, and Arjen Leerkes. (2006). *Transnational involvement and social integration*. Global networks 6(3), 285-308.
- Stewart, Susan. (1993). *On longing: Narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection*. Duke University Press.
- Taylor, Stephanie. (2010). *Narratives of Space and Place*. New York: Routledge.
- Thompson, Susan. (1994). Suburbs of opportunity: the power of home for migrant women. *Metropolis Now: planning and the urban in contemporary Australia*, 33-45.

**Conceptualizing ‘Transnational Homes’ In Jhumpa Lahiri’s “When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine” and “Mrs. Sen’s”**

---

- Tolia-Kelly, Divya. (2004). Locating processes of identification: studying the precipitates of re-memory through artefacts in the British Asian home. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29(3), 314-329.
- Vertovec, Steven. (1999). *Conceiving and researching transnationalism*. *Ethnic and racial studies* 22(2), 447-462.
- (1997). *Three meanings of" diaspora, exemplified among South Asian religions*. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6(3), 277-299.
- Vildaitė, Dovilė. (2014). *Negotiating notions of home and belonging among young Lithuanian migrants in Ireland*. *Ethnicity Studies/Etniskumo Studijos* 2.
- Walter, B. (2001). *Outsiders inside: whiteness, place and Irish women*. Routledge.