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POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY, TRAUMA, AND CULTURAL BELONGING IN *THE NAMESAKE* AND *SWADES*

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 26/05/2025 Accepted: 9/6/2025	Trauma in diaspora is often characterized by emotional fragmentation, generational disconnection, cultural alienation, and the stress of balancing competing cultural expectations rather than being restricted to experiences of physical exile or forced migration. It draws on trauma studies as well as postcolonial theory. Through careful textual analysis and theoretical framing, this research contends that Indian cinema is essential in uncovering the frequently neglected aspects of diasporic trauma. <i>Swades</i> (2004) and <i>The Namesake</i> (2006) collectively depict the emotional, cultural, and psychological challenges that individuals navigating diasporic identities encounter, despite variations in genre, tone, and narrative style. This study uses <i>The Namesake</i> and <i>Swades</i> to investigate diasporic trauma. <i>The Namesake</i> asserts that identity disintegration stemming from cultural hybridization and generational conflict is the focus of the book, whereas <i>Swades</i> provides an alternative narrative mode of reconciliation through homecoming and reintegration. Their perspectives on trauma, postcolonial identity, and belonging are, however, complementary.
Keywords Cultural theory, Diasporic identity, <i>The Namesake</i> , <i>Swades</i> , Hybridity, Trauma, Belonging, Migration.	
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INTRODUCTION

Migration is an intricate subject that offers both fresh opportunities and a sense of displacement, especially when it comes to diasporic identity. Although migration frequently presents the prospect of new beginnings, it can also have long-lasting emotional and psychological costs. This feeling of displacement for diasporic communities entails more than simply a physical move; it also entails a profound cultural and emotional upheaval that may result in both individual and collective identity fragmentation. The complex conflict between the need for belonging and emotions of alienation must

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be examined in order to fully comprehend the emotional and psychological experiences of the characters in movies like *The Namesake* and *Swades*.

The psychological effects of migration, identity disintegration, and cultural displacement are topics covered in both movies. Gogol Ganguli, the main character in *The Namesake*, struggles to reconcile his Bengali ancestry and American upbringing, while Mohan Bhargava, a NASA scientist, returns to India in *Swades* in an attempt to reconnect with his roots while lamenting his estrangement from them. These films are in line with the main issues of postcolonial theory, trauma studies, and cultural theory since they examine hybridity, intergenerational trauma, and belonging.

While *The Namesake* and *Swades* have been separately examined for their depictions of migration and identity, there has been minimal comparative research on how both works illustrate diasporic trauma and emotional healing through different narrative mediums such as literature and film. This research tackles this void by providing a comparative, interdisciplinary analysis of both texts, revealing their common yet unique perspectives on the intricacies of diasporic life.

This study aims to explore this issue by inquiring in what ways do *The Namesake* and *Swades* illustrate diasporic trauma and identity through distinct narrative styles, and what insights do their representations provide regarding the emotional and cultural negotiations of postcolonial belonging?

Postcolonial Theory: Hybridity, Cultural Conflict, and the Search for Identity

Postcolonial theory provides an engaging framework for examining the psychological and emotional experiences of diasporic characters, especially when applied to Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the 'third space.' According to Bhabha's idea in *The Location of Culture*, "the third space is a location of enunciation where identity and cultural meaning are continuously contested rather than set" (Bhabha 55). When people are uprooted from their homeland and forced to create new identities in a different cultural setting, this hybrid space is created. The third space becomes a place of both opportunity and tension for diasporic people, as identity is molded by ongoing engagement with other cultural narratives rather than being bound by a single, rooted provenance.

Diasporic Indian cinema serves as an important cultural archive, capturing the divided identities and complex identity challenges of immigrant communities. The representation of the Indian diaspora in films reflects the real experiences of displacement, nostalgia, and cultural fusion while also illustrating the mental scars and identity challenges arising from this transnational migration.

Vijay Mishra argues in *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (2007) that the diaspora signifies "a realm of collective trauma" and a "conceptual space of return." This highlights how diasporic narratives, in both literature and film, reenact the conflict between assimilation and cultural

Developing English Communication Skills Using AI Tools for Engineering Tamil Medium Students: A Survey-Based Study preservation. Mishra argues that the "injury of separation," frequently depicted through impactful imagery and narratives in visual culture, typically serves as the motivation behind diasporic art.

From this angle, the idea of "accented cinema," as defined by Hamid Naficy in *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001), is especially helpful in comprehending the distinctive cinematic expressions of diasporic and exilic filmmakers. Naficy claims that lived experiences of migration, displacement, and cultural hybridity are the source of accented film. It is influenced by the filmmakers' liminal spaces between cultures, countries, and identities, producing a body of work that defies easy integration into prevailing narrative tropes and cinematic traditions. In addition to being thematic issues, displacement, border crossing, and the emergence of hybrid subjectivities are structurally ingrained in the visual and narrative techniques of the films.

Self-reflexive visual techniques, including the deliberate inclusion of the filming process, the use of mirrors, or fragmented editing, are commonly employed in accented films to emphasize the act of representation itself. This reflexivity emphasizes the filmmaker's fractured sense of self and their complex relationship to both their home culture and the host society. Linguistic plurality, which depicts the polyphonic reality of diasporic life and involves the coexistence of various languages, dialects, or untranslated speech inside a single film, further upends the univocality of mainstream cinema. These films often blur the boundaries between reality and fiction, memory and history, and personal and political, challenging conventional notions of cinematic realism and narrative coherence.

The narrative and visual medium of diasporic Indian cinema often serves as a multifaceted exploration of trauma, identity, and belonging. Indian diasporic film serves as a site of identity creation around the convergence of memory and trauma with the personal and political facets of migration. Filmmakers tell stories about being in exile rather than merely being there by utilizing visual culture. This is beautifully demonstrated by the films *Swades* (2004) by Ashutosh Gowariker and *The Namesake* (2006) by Mira Nair. By depicting a successful expatriate's return to India, *Swades* reversing the course of *The Namesake*, which explores the internal struggles of a first-generation immigrant growing up in the United States, provides competing but complementary perspectives on transnational identity development.

This conceptual framework is especially useful for comprehending the main characters in *The Namesake* and *Swades*. Between his Bengali roots and his American upbringing, Gogol Ganguli lives in a transitional state in *The Namesake*, struggles with cultural identity and the burden of his name. His journey of self-discovery, catalyzed by his father's death, reflects the diasporic trauma of dislocation and the emotional process of reconnecting with one's roots. Mira Nair uses multilingualism, shifting locations, and fragmented storytelling hallmarks of Hamid Naficy's "accented cinema" to mirror

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Gogol's internal conflict. His identity is constantly being negotiated during his voyage, as he struggles with his given name, his parents' cultural expectations, and his own need for independence in American society. In Gogol's case, the third space is not only physical but also psychological because he alternates between accepting and rejecting his American and Indian identities. His hybrid identity is not resolved in a single moment but evolves through experiences of loss, love, and self-discovery (Lahiri 123). His experiences in the United States and the history of displacement of his immigrant parents have greatly influenced who he is. His father gave him the name Gogol following a horrific train disaster, signifying his mixed identity and a cultural relic that both signifies his emotional distance from and ties to his Bengali roots. In an effort to blend in with American culture, Gogol rejects his name and distances himself from his Indian heritage throughout the movie. He only accepts his name and his hybrid identity after his father's passing and he has made an emotional reunion with his cultural past. He realizes that his American upbringing and cultural background are inseparable.

Similarly *Swades* (2004), directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, is a Bollywood film featuring Shah Rukh Khan in the role of Mohan Bhargava, a NASA scientist of Indian descent who returns to India after years of residing in the US, is examined by *Swades* for his diasporic consciousness. The narrative chronicles Mohan's journey back to India to find his childhood caregiver, Kaveri Amma. During his visit to the rural village of Charanpur, he is profoundly impacted by the poverty, educational deficiencies, and social injustices he observes. While Mohan reconnects with his heritage, he slowly transforms from a passive observer into an active catalyst for change. Motivated by the villagers and their challenges, he chooses to remain and apply his expertise to foster progress in the community, particularly by constructing a small hydroelectric power station to supply electricity. The emotional contradiction of occupying the third space, first viewing India through an outsider's perspective and then progressively re-establishing a connection with his roots is reflected in Mohan's experience. The complexity of belonging and the pull and pull relationships between the local and the global are highlighted by his travels. Mohan is a returnee, unlike Gogol, who was born into a diaspora; yet, his encounters with poverty, culture, and community force him to re-evaluate what 'home' means. The third space serves as a fertile field for identity change in both stories, rather than just being a place of confusion or fragmentation. As he encounters the socioeconomic inequalities he had previously disregarded and observes the difficulties of rural India, Mohan's journey is one of cultural re-engagement. He struggles not only to reconcile his American identity but also to re-establish a connection with his cultural heritage. This process leads him to recognize that his identity is shaped by a combination of both cultures, which is a reflection of the idea of hybridity as postcolonial theorists have defined it.

This hybrid identity should be viewed as a place of resistance and cultural invention rather than as a weakness, according to Bhabha's thesis. In *The Namesake* and *Swades*, the characters are not stuck between two cultures; instead, they forge new identities and meanings in the midst of cultural difference. Diasporic people are therefore active participants in the reinterpretation of their identities rather than passive consumers of displacement, turning the third space into a site of cultural negotiation. (Bhabha 56).

Trauma Studies: Intergenerational Trauma and the Emotional Costs of Migration

A major theme in both *The Namesake* and *Swades* is diasporic trauma, which is defined as the emotional and psychological suffering brought on by cultural displacement, identity fragmentation, and displacement. Both stories depict characters who are suffering from estrangement, from their nation, their lineage, and occasionally even from themselves despite having different tones and plotlines.

Both first- and second-generation immigrants' trauma is depicted in *The Namesake* in a complex way. The trauma for Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli starts with the act of moving to a new country, leaving behind cultural comfort and family ties. For Ashima, in particular, the silent, long-lasting sorrow of cultural displacement is personified. Even after living in the United States for decades, her homesickness is a profound loss that endures, not simply a yearning for a location but also a grief for a way of life. The ironic meaning of her name, 'without borders,' becomes a metaphor for her identity dilemma as she tries to fit in in a nation that always views her as alien.

Gogol, their son, experiences trauma in a different way, a trauma of cultural discord and identity conflict. Gogol, who was born in America but brought up in Indian traditions, is raised in a culturally liminal environment. His name turns into a point of contention, a reminder of his father's background as well as a cultural past that he neither fully comprehends nor accepts. One significant event that intensifies this internal conflict is the passing of his father. It compels Gogol to face his sorrow as well as the cultural heritage he has long disapproved of. Both individual and societal tragedy are present here, including the loss of a parent and the abrupt, startling realization of one's ancestry. The psychological effects of diasporic fragmentation are reflected in Gogol's development, which is characterized by periods of alienation, shame, and ultimate reunion.

Swades offers an alternative, yet no less potent, account of diasporic trauma that is based on the emotional alienation that might arise from choosing to migrate voluntarily. Successful NASA scientist Mohan Bhargava is a prime example of a diasporic person who appears to be successful on the outside but harbors unresolved emotional alienation on the inside. His pain is more about the gradual loss of belonging than it is about the brutality of forced relocation. Mohan, who was raised in India but has

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now established a life elsewhere, finds himself torn between two worlds: the one that helped mold his early personality and the one that provides him with success and comfort.

His journey back to India involves more than just physical travel; it involves facing long-suppressed emotions. A visit to Kaveri Amma, his childhood caregiver, causes an emotional awakening that brings to the surface long-suppressed love, remorse, and responsibility. Mohan encounters a confusing conflict of identities and ideals while traveling through rural India and dealing with the reality of caste, poverty, and marginalization. He is forced by this encounter to make peace with the complicated and frequently painful realities of the real India and the sanitized ideal of 'home' he recalled. The fact that he has chosen to leave behind a piece of himself—his roots, his obligations, and his emotional ties is what traumatizes him.

In both texts, trauma is not limited to external events; it is internalized and often invisible. It manifests in the form of identity crises, guilt, cultural dissonance, and emotional detachment. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma as a belated experience, something that is not fully grasped in the moment but returns later with haunting intensity both *The Namesake* and *Swades* depict protagonists who must revisit the past in order to process their pain and move forward. Gogol must embrace his father's memory and cultural legacy, while Mohan must reconcile his privileged global identity with the responsibilities of his origins.

Trauma is internalized and frequently invisible in both texts; it is not just confined to outside events. Identity crises, guilt, cultural dissonance, and emotional alienation are some of its manifestations. Both *The Namesake* and *Swades* include protagonists who must journey back in time to absorb their suffering and move on, drawing on Cathy Caruth's idea that trauma is a belated experience, something that is not completely understood at the time but reappears later with haunting intensity. While Mohan must balance his privileged global identity with the obligations of his roots, Gogol must accept his father's memories and cultural inheritance.

Cultural Theory: Negotiation of Identity and Belonging

Cultural theory, especially Stuart Hall's idea that identity is a dynamic and fluid process, provides important context for understanding how diasporic people navigate cultural belonging. According to Hall, identity is a constant 'positioning' within the themes of history, culture, and power rather than a permanent essence passed down from the past. He highlights that identity is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'," influenced by the interaction of transformation, memory, and displacement (Hall 394). This theoretical framework is especially useful for examining the emotional journeys of the main

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characters in *The Namesake* and *Swades*, whose lives are characterized by emotional displacement, cultural hybridity, and the pursuit of belonging.

Gogol Ganguli's journey in Mira Nair's *The Namesake* exemplifies the deep conflict between a diaspora's own self-fashioning and inherited cultural identity. This conflict is symbolized by his name, 'Gogol,' which embodies both his parents' Bengali ancestry and the trauma of migration that molded their lives. Throughout his early years, Gogol distances himself from Bengali traditions and attempts to blend in with American culture by rejecting the cultural markers of his parents' world. However, his identity dilemma worsens once his father passes away, which is a turning point that makes him rethink his ties to his heritage.

This emotional reckoning reflects Hall's notion that cultural identity is not rooted in a singular origin but evolves through historical ruptures and moments of self-recognition (Hall 397). Intimate Bengali rites contrast with urban American environments, and Gogol's changing personality serves as a visual representation of this metamorphosis in the film. Gogol's introspective contemplation with his father's collection of short stories, by the end, signifies a symbolic synthesis of his two heritages and confirms his status as a hybrid subject influenced by both American experience and Indian tradition (*The Namesake*).

Similar identity negotiation takes place in Ashutosh Gowariker's *Swades*, when Mohan Bhargava goes back to his native country to find the person who raised him. A personal visit turns into a profound encounter with his displaced identity and moral obligations. Mohan, who at first embodies the logical, technocratic mentality of the West, progressively changes as he encounters the poverty, social structures, and resiliency of rural India.

Hall's theory becomes applicable here, particularly his emphasis on identity as formed "through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (Hall 395). As Mohan's romanticized recollections of India give way to a more realistic comprehension of the country's hardships, he redefines his diasporic identity through re-engagement rather than alienation. The emotional and psychological acceptance of a hybrid identity that connects the local and the global is reflected in his ultimate decision to stay in India and use his abilities for grassroots development (*Swades*).

The idea that diasporic identity is about living in a shifting 'in-between' space where various affiliations can coexist instead of having to choose between two cultures is supported by both films. Gogol and Mohan demonstrate how identity is always contested via experiences with belonging, loss, and responsibility, despite their varied diasporic roots. Instead of merely existing in a state of cultural

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limbo, their experiences show that the diasporic subject is actively involved in constructing a selfhood that finds strength in diversity and change.

CONCLUSION

This research examined how *The Namesake* and *Swades* depict diasporic trauma and identity via their unique narrative techniques, providing intricate insights into the emotional and cultural struggles related to postcolonial belonging. Although *The Namesake* offers a profound literary exploration of generational discord and identity disintegration, *Swades* uses cinematic realism to illustrate a protagonist's proactive reconnection with his heritage and sense of duty.

Collectively, these pieces demonstrate that diasporic identity is influenced by psychological scars and cultural blending, highlighting that belonging in a postcolonial setting involves an ongoing process of negotiation. The emotional paths of Gogol Ganguli and Mohan Bhargava highlight the intricate relationship among memory, displacement, and the quest for identity.

This research enhances postcolonial film and diaspora studies by connecting literary and cinematic depictions, emphasizing how various narrative styles express migrants' internal conflicts and the shifting aspects of identity. In the end, both writings propose that identity is not static or one-dimensional but is continually molded by past experiences, current circumstances, and the emotional truths of diasporic existence.

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