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Performing and Resisting Motherhood: Intersectional Feminist Readings of Cultural Identity in Diasporic South Asian Novels

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Abstract

The paper examines the transformative potential of narrative to reconstruct cultural representations of motherhood in the South Asian diaspora through an analysis of diasporic texts: Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. These texts rewrite the heritage of traditional scripts of identity and motherhood, shaping new readings of culture and migration. Drawing on hybrid feminist theory, which integrates gender performativity and intersectionality, this paper argues that diasporic texts depict women's performative roles within social norms through episodes centred on key events in the protagonists' lives. The analysis identifies moments in these texts where gender is enacted, rejected, and reimagined as powerful sites of feminist struggle. Findings illustrate how *Jasmine* depicts identity outside culturally predetermined scripts, while *The Namesake* explores the expectations imposed on a migrant mother within traditional Indian motherhood. The performative negotiations of these characters demonstrate how cultural, racial, and migratory identities intersect to shape their sense of self and empowerment. The research highlights how these narratives nuance experiences of compliance and resistance, embodying protagonists' self-interpretations and reshaping them through multiply inflected identities. This is, therefore, a significant addition to feminist literary studies, highlighting how literature transcends gender, aiming towards identity and complexity across transnational (globalised) borders. In this way, the research emphasises literature's role as a vital instrument for socio-cultural analysis, and it also illuminates diasporic narratives – not only as representations of existing cultural models but also as agents that transform norms related to womanhood and motherhood.

Keywords: Cultural Identity; Diasporic Literature; Feminist Resistance; Gender Performativity; Intersectionality