



# Naming Jhumpa Lahiri: Canons and Controversies

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## Naming Jhumpa Lahiri: Canons and Controversies From Lexington Books

Jhumpa Lahiri is among the few contemporary writers being read widely by both mainstream and minority audiences, the general public and academic scholars, in the U.S. and globally. While her works focus on specific ethnic experiences of highly educated, upper middle-class professional Bengalis and their children living in New England since the 1970s, they simultaneously address universal themes that consistently keep them on the *New York Times* bestseller lists, and that have made the film adaptation of her novel, *The Namesake* (2006), into a transnational phenomenon. Lahiri is also one of the first South Asian American writers to be included in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*.

Even though South Asian diasporic writers have won many prestigious international prizes, the meteoric success of Jhumpa Lahiri has raised new questions regarding her naming: Is she a Bengali American writer? An Asian American writer? An Indian writer? An American writer? A postcolonial writer? Does what we name her matter? Does this naming determine whether, and how, and by whom Lahiri's texts are read and taught, and to which literary canons they belong? Why is Lahiri's writing so successful among multiple audiences, whether in Bengal, Boston, or beyond?

*Naming Jhumpa Lahiri: Canons and Controversies* addresses these and other questions, and explains why naming matters, to whom, and how paying attention to these questions can deepen our appreciation for the politics surrounding Lahiri's works and our understanding of the literary texts themselves. This collection marks a significant evolution of the field of Asian American studies as it does not merely include scholars of South Asian descent writing about a South Asian writer in an ethnically confined context, but rather allows for intertextualities and conversations among scholars of varied ethnicities and fields including postcolonial, popular culture, psychoanalytic, film, women's, American, and world literature studies.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

This timely volume expands our understanding of Jhumpa Lahiri's universe by engaging the ways she creates spaces where identities shift and coalesce in unexpected but surprisingly true ways. The thoughtful essays tease out the ways narrative form and structure reflect the creative intelligence that produces works of art. Congratulations to the editors for a superb collection! (Rocío G. Davis, professor of English, City University of Hong Kong)

This dynamic first collection on Lahiri's fiction addresses accepted, conflicting, and evolving definitions about family, nationality, home, ethnic-global movement, and canonicity that her work and literary popularity raise. Its scholarly alliances and divergences guarantee that it will continue to provoke such necessary debate. (Monica Chiu, University of New Hampshire)

### **About the Author**

#### **Editors:**

**Lavina Dhingra** is Professor of English at Bates College, and has served as Faculty Associate Dean of Admissions from 2006-2009. She is the contributing co-editor of *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America* (Temple University Press, 1998) and is completing a book manuscript on South Asian American women's literature. She has published wide-ranging essays on South Asian American issues including interviews with Ved Mehta and Meena Alexander, articles in *Amerasia*, *Journal of Asian American Studies*, *Hitting Critical Mass*, and several essay collections and biographical encyclopedias. She teaches courses in Asian American women writers, filmmakers, and critics, Indian diasporic literature, modern British literature, reading and writing lyric poetry, and feminist literary criticism, among others. She has chaired several MLA committees and has served as the President of the South Asian Literary Association.

**Floyd Cheung** is Associate Professor of English and of American Studies at Smith College. He is also a member of the Five College Asian/Pacific/American Studies Certificate Program, for which he served as the founding chair. Interested in the recovery of early Asian American texts, he has edited *H. T. Tsiang's novels And China Has Hands* (Ironweed Press, 2003) and *The Hanging on Union Square* (Kaya Press, 2012) and co-edited Kathleen Tamagawa's memoir, *Holy Prayers in a Horse's Ear* (Rutgers University Press, 2008). He is the contributing co-editor of *Recovered Legacies: Authority and Identity in Early Asian American Literature* (Temple University Press, 2005). His essays on Asian American literature have appeared in various edited collections as well as journals including *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, *New Centennial Review*, *TDR*, and *Studies in Travel Writing*.

#### **Contributors:**

Karen M. Cardozo, Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt, Ambreen Hai, Bakirathi Mani, Susan Muchshima Moynihan, Rani Neutill, Rajini Srikanth

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