

The Maticinte Rpretation of Jhumpal Ahiri's Work

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<https://doi.org/10.61410/had.v19i1.176>

ABSTRACT

Most of the stories of Jhumpa Lahiri is set in the context of post-colonial migration. Most of the communications were done by letters. In the present context of modern technologies in communication and cheap transportation, world is increasingly shrinking. The advent of extremely fast internet, advanced smart phones, search engines like Google and amazing sharing platforms like social media in the form of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whats app etc., the communication and sharing of thoughts have become very easy. This has on one hand reduced the feeling of loneliness and homesickness at foreign land and on the other hand also enabled the people of homeland to learn about foreign culture. Extensive availability and accessibility of repository of information and almost real face to face like communication on daily basis has significantly changed the life of both side of the worlds. The immigrants are very much in touch with their people in homeland on daily basis though video calls chats just like they are staying in India but different city. The cheaper transportation makes it possible for them to visit India almost every year. Also, the number of immigrants have increased manifold as compared to post-colonial times. This large population results in forming of a very strong Indian community in the host country whose presence is acknowledged even at political level. This has made them more secure, revered, recognized and accepted in new land. Apparently, much of the economy of country like America is dependent on Indian Diasporas due to their professional excellence as doctors, scientists, engineers etc.

Keywords : Foreign culture, doctors, scientists, engineers.

Introduction:

Lahiri's literary work has won her several laurels and she is a distinguished personality in the world of English Literature, more recently in Italian as well. She debuted with an unusual path of collection of short-stories titled *Interpreter of Maladies* published in 1999 that won several eminent awards including the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the PEN/Hemingway Award. Her second book was her first novel titled *The Namesake* published in 2003. It was later adapted in a popular English movie *The Namesake* directed by renowned director Mira Nair the popular film of the same name. *Unaccustomed Earth* published in 2008 is her second short stories collection work that won the famous Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award. It also debuted at number one on the New York Times best seller list which is an achievement. Also, her second novel titled *The Lowland* was published in 2013 that went to The Luminaries by Eleanor Catton. Most of her work is an autobiographical experience of Indian-American immigration. Lahiri settled in Rome, Italy in 2011, and since then writing in Italian. Her latest work includes Italian essays and few translations from Italian to English. Lahiri received prestigious National Humanities Medal in 2014 by then President Obama and is currently working as a professor of creative writing at Princeton University.

Though Lahiri was born in London but she considers herself American. Her family moved from West Bengal to London and finally settled in America when Jhumpa Lahiri was three. She was raised in Kingston, Rhode Island where her father Amar Lahiri worked as a librarian at the University of Rhode Island. Lahiri's mother was very much attached to their roots and wanted to

raise their children in a way so that they are connected to their cultural heritage. His father inspired the protagonist character in the last story of *Interpreter of Maladies* titled The Third and Final Continent. Lahiri has been regularly visiting her relatives in Kolkata and most of her knowledge of Bengali culture is through the conversation at home and visits to Bengali communities. Her teacher at kindergarten in Kingston, Rhode Island, used to call her by her pet name Jhumpa as it seems easier to pronounce as compared to her original name. Lahiri recalled, "*I always felt so embarrassed by my name. You feel like you're causing some one pain just by being who you are.*" Lahiri's confusion and embarrassment over her identity and name inspired the story of Gogol in *The Namesake* who is also suffering from identity crisis and ambivalence over his unusual name Gogol. In one of the editorials of the News week, Lahiri mentions that there was always an intense pressure for two things while growing up. Firstly, to be loyal to the old conservative world where your parents belong to and secondly to be fluent in the new world as well in order to get that acceptance and recognition in the new society we are actually living.

Lahiri has an exceptional academic record with multiple degrees in her kitty like an M.A. in English, an M.F.A. in Creative Writing, an M.A. in Comparative Literature, and a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies from Boston University. After completing her dissertation and fellowship, she has also taught creative writing at Boston University. Her official website is www.randomhouse.com/kvpa/jhumpaahiri. The name of the website and the careful use of the word Random House suggest that she considers herself belonging to not one single land but a multicultural global citizen who belong to everywhere or nowhere.

Lahiri lives in Rome with her husband Alberto Vourvouliakis-Bush who is a senior editor of TIME Latin America. They have two children, Octavio and Noor. Lahiri wrote, "*When I first started writing I was not conscious that my subject was the Indian-American experience. What drew me to my craft was the desire to force the two worlds I occupied to mingle on the page as I was not brave enough, or mature enough, to allow in life.*"

Lahiri has written several short stories and non-fictional work for The New York Times magazine like *The Long Way Home*; *Cooking Lessons* that signifies the importance of food in author's bond with her mother. She has also worked as vice president of the PEN American Center and an appointed member of the Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

Most of her work is based on her own Indian-American immigrant experiences and her keen observation of the people around her like her parents, relatives, friends, Bengali communities, American fraternity etc. She closely monitors the struggles, challenges, conflicts, anxieties, excitement and insecurities faced by different generations of immigrants. Her writings are characterized by careful details of her character's psychology and behavior. In her initial work like *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*, the focus was much on the struggle of oscillating between two contrast worlds, the struggle to keep a balance between the two, the pain of losing the hold of our roots during displacement and difficulty in raising children in a new world. However, in *An Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri's characters show a growth and evolution in their journey of struggle to adjust in new culture. They reached the next stage where they have settled down in new country and have comfortably constructed their new identities outside their country of origin. Lahiri's characters are now able to build their new home away from homeland. However, now the focus is more on the individual's emotional and cultural needs rather than community as a whole. Lahiri portrays the issue of generation gaps between different generations in Indian Diasporas and how the shadow of migration continues to lay its impact on second and third generations as well.

Literature can be defined as a recorded expression of the creative urge of an artist with his heights of imaginations and sensibilities. However, literature is a perfect mirror of reality which depicts several colours of life be it shiny or gloomy. To bound literature by just imagination would be an under statement as literary works portray the pattern of thoughts and social norms contextual to that particular social period.. In the post-modern globalized society, where world is

a small village, there has been a tremendous exchange of culture, religion, ethics and a new class of Diaspora has emerged in globalized society. The diasporic principles have maintained a collective identity far away from their home lands despite of range of ethnic and religious minorities. The diasporic community go through agamut of challenges and opportunities in both the irhost countries and home lands that needs to be properly understood and addressed. Essence like cultural displacement, conflict in identities, migration and several other diasporic experiences are reflected in the work of expatriate writer.

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most illustrious female short-story writers representing Indian diaspora who has gained significant fame in popular-culture. She has been known for presenting not only diasporic feelings but also human dilemmas and conflicts of mind during the course of migration. Her short stories effectively depict the elements of rootedness and cultural alienation experienced by civilizations in history. Her short stories enable to see the life of Indian diaspora in a new way like never before. She is basically an objective story-teller who tries to present the diasporic characters and their predicaments in most detached and unbiased way. One of the catchy feature of Jhumpas writing is her chosen style of less use of images and keeping the language very simple with plain. She keeps the stories short and attractive enough to retain readers' attention. The sentences are mostly Short and succinct with minimum use of similes and metaphors. But she make a point to create picture in words by making actions flow like a perpetual river. The ending of stories gives easiness to mind and heart of the readers without creating any panic or anxiety. In January 2001, Lahiri described the feeling of absence of belonging at a press conference in Calcutta. —No country is my mother land. I always find myself in exile in whichever country I travel to, that why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile.

Jhumpa Lahiri's the mes and narrative estyles has a touch of modernity which is evident in all her work. In the story titled *A Temporary Matter* where the marriage of Shu kumar and Shoba seems to have fallen apart because she delivered a stillborn child, to an extent that their marriage became a temporary matter. They emotionally drifted away so much even though they were staying together until a temporary electricity power cut that finally broke the ice between the two.

Lahiri is a brilliant story teller as she beautifully gelsher Indian recollections with issues like marital disharmony in diaspora communities. Lahiri excels in surprising her eaders with unexpected twists. Just as the readers contemplate a happy reconciliation of Shu kumar and Shoba ,Shobha decides to shift to new apartment. Shoba couldn't handle the consequences of losing the baby and the feeling of anger, frustration, self-pity and dejection caused her marriage to fall apart.

Lahiri's workd epicts the themes of cultural transposition and confusion that leads to cultural alienation. It a lo focuses on themes of loss of innocence, conflicts in identity, tremendous confusion in hyphenated children, disturbances in diaspora marriages of marriage and troubles in romantic relationship. Lahiri beautifully weaves the theme of clash between religions, traditions and generations in her fictions. Apparently, the author doesn't attempt to escape the experiences and challenges she faced during her formative years; in stead she chose those circumstances to weave her characters strongly and wrote convincing stories to enrich her themes and narrative style.

Review of Literature

Cross-cultural nuances in the works of diasporic is quite eminent and has been discussed widely in a number of critical studies. Lahiri's technique, narrative style, characterization, representation of society, her socio-political and cultural concerns are presented. As much has been explored, the interesting partis exploration of the depth of the writings of this literary genius and find out the hidden grounds regarding her social concerns. It gives a wide scope to explore

more about Lahiri and her writing techniques and command over social nerve. Her representation of exploitation is also remarkable. There is much to explore in this field and many writers from all over the world are writing in the field.

Interpreter of Maladies: A Rhetorical Practice Transmitting Cultural Knowledge is written by Taylor Shear. This essay shows the proficiency of Lahiri in utilizing the cultural foundation to put together various aspects of life of Indian diaspora in America and represent it beautifully through short stories collection. *Negotiating Borders of Culture :Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction* by Debarati Bandyopadhyay explains that strong attachment for own culture, belongingness and family bonds brings a feeling of expatriate among immigrant diaspora to get back to the place they once moved away from. The cultural gap and conflicts in identity gives a constant feeling of expatriate among Indian communities in foreign land. *Paradoxes of Generational Breaks and Continuity in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake* by Venkatesh Puttaiah feels that Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* attempts to draw the attention towards second generation of immigrants instead of first generation and hence establish inter connectedness between the two generations. The article peaks about how the two generations in Ganguli family are united and divided on certain issues. *Diasporic (Dis) locations: Home, Garden and Third Space in Jhumpa Lahiri's Unaccustomed Earth* by Anil S. Sugate views the writings of Jhumpa Lahiri with a dimension of negotiating space. It added that such diasporic literature, the space occupied by the characters plays an important role in shaping the identities of individuals both in domestic and public sphere. These diasporas are subjected to intersection of numerous generations, cultures and social spaces.

Diasporic Crisis of Dual Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake by Sujata Ranare reveals that most of the stories of Jhumpa Lahiri has a flavor of expatriate and the emotional and cultural challenges faced by immigrants while adapting to new world. Her books like *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, *The Unaccustomed Earth* majorly talk about the state of desolation, conflicts of identity and cross cultural nuances in Indian diaspora in foreign land.

Objectives of the study:

- i. The objective of the work is to present cross-cultural differences and the feminist vision through the different works of the writer, Lahiri
- ii. To explore Lahiri's point of view about literature, philosophy, religion, society
- iii. To show art and techniques used in the literary work of the writer
- iv. To understand and cogitate the matric interpretation of Lahiri's work
- v. To foster, facilitate and enhance a comprehensive and critical study about society and culture realistically
- vi. To learn and explore her motif to present her concern for native tradition and culture

Methodology also includes a judicious study and use of articles, reviews, interviews, books, online sources and material related to the study.

Jhumpa Lahiri who describes her self as the global citizen who belongs now here is a proficient writer whose literary works epitomize the emotional situation of Indian diaspora in post-colonial and post-modern era. Her work illuminates about the challenges experienced at every stages by Indian- Americans and their different generations due to their loss of identity, rootlessness, multiculturalism and assimilation. The stories written by Lahiri depict the struggle of first generation immigrants when they try to adjust themselves in a totally different world and how badly they feel homesick away from their homeland and cultural heritage. Her stories create a world of its own for the readers as they feel the journey of her characters from being totally alien to somebody who have managed to survive in new planet. These immigrants try to strike a balance between their dual identity by passing on their cultural heritage to their children. However, the second generation children are the ones who feel utterly confused as they could relate to both the worlds and feel uprooted. Her sublime narration and incredible story-telling skills take the readers so close to the characters and their emotions that every one of them looks

relevant and realistic. Though her theme is mostly focused on the cross-cultural lives of Indian Americans and Indian diaspora, but the human values and emotions like motherhood, relationship with parents, love, personal loss, deprivation insecurity etc. also gets enough room which doesn't need migratory experience.

The first story in *The Interpreter of Maladies* is "A Temporary Matter" that shows the theme of loss and marital discord shortly after the death of unborn child of Shoba and Shukumar. The trouble started in their paradise when both Shoba and Shukumar's relationship starts falling apart due to their different ways to handle the pain. Marriage becomes the temporary matter between them which means on the brink of breaking of their once a happy married life. They share same house but barely talk to each other and keep themselves occupied in some work as it seems they try to avoid each other. None of them takes the initiative to break the ice until one day a temporary electricity power cut gives them an opportunity to finally share their unsaid emotions since long time. Lahiri's use of word, "Temporary" shows her depth in writing style. She uses the word "temporary" for both power cut and indicates the state of temporary in their marital relation as well. The incidences of electric power supply cut are common in India and this lot brings out the Indianness of Lahiri. Lahiri surprises the readers when they just start to contemplate a possible reunion of Shoba and Shukumar as Shoba announces to get into a new house alone. The story tells how two different individuals take different ways to deal with the loss and its consequences like frustration, anger, guilt, helplessness and in the process gets alienated to each other to an extent that their marriage may come to an end. It is very important to vent out innermost desires, fears and anger in order to come to the terms with the realities of life. Lahiri's stories are abundant with the theme of loneliness and desolation both within family and also away from family. Lahiri makes a wide spread use of her knowledge of Indian history and complex Indian society which is reflected by her plots of Indian festivals, rituals, marriages, clothing, political events like partition of India or Naxalite movement and also the names of characters. The second book of Jhumpa Lahiri is her first novel *The Namesake* (2003) which is also adapted as an English feature film that received critical acclaim from all over the world. The novel is an autobiographical account that describes the condition of two generations of Indian immigrants, their struggles and evolution in new culture. Her writings reflect her own struggle when she finds that she is born in a country which is not her parents' home country. *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) is Lahiri's second collection of short stories that is focused mainly on the theme of cultural displacement and evolution of displaced immigrants over the period of time. All the eight stories are set in America (which is the symbolic unaccustomed earth) and shows the strong influence of American culture on both the first generations and second generations of Indian immigrants. The stories revolve around the various aspects of those second generations Indian diaspora who now have children from either Indian or American spouse. Besides the issues of migration and cross-cultural nuances, the stories also epitomize the changing dynamics of relationships between family members due to cultural conflicts and globalization.

Jhumpa Lahiri herself represents the second generation Indian American immigrant and her stories are nothing short of her own autobiographical experiences. This makes her writings and characters very real, raw, fresh and relevant. There is no fanciness but plain and simple narration that dives deep into the heart and soul of her well-sketched characters. Lahiri's fictional plots sublimely underline the struggle of two generations of immigrants. The first one is from the Indian born and raised migrated parents' perspective who struggles to find their new identity and home in a foreign land far away from their original culture and people. Besides, these immigrants also want to preserve their culture which they had left behind at their home land. And the second one is from the children of immigrants perspective who are born and raised in America and faces challenges to meet their parents' cultural expectations and also to assimilate smoothly in their land of birth. These children never feel the displacement directly but they do

feel the impact of the cultural legacies passed on to them by their parents. Lahiri is an exceptional story-teller who uses her amazing journey to create some mind-blowing deep and insightful characters and meaningful fictions that captivate the reader

Conclusion

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the highly distinguished diasporic writers of Indian origin whose mastery over flawless narration of short stories has contributed magnificently in the field of English Literature. Her writing is original, unique and class apart. Her simple language with deep insights about her characters makes her a luminous writer who is satisfied only with minute details and completeness in expression of thoughts. She is not the one who believes in creating voluminous writing. The present study of the fictional works of Jhumpa Lahiri finds her an inspiring and thoughtful story teller who is a master in her craft of narration. She has sublimely portrayed multiple themes through her realistic characters in all her stories. One of the most prevalent themes is the struggle of assimilation faced by Indian immigrant in foreign land. Jhumpa Lahiri, being herself a second generation immigrant child of Indian born parents gives an auto biographical account at several instances. The story line seems to be inspired by her own experiences while growing up in the country which was never considered home by her parents. Lahiri shows several kinds of different immigrant experiences. The process of adaptation to new culture is little challenging but smooth for the narrator of *The Third and Final Continent* as he knows the benefits in the form of new opportunities on new land. Similarly, In *When Mr. Pirzada comes to dine*, Lilia's parents are well aware of the advantage of fortune they can earn in America which they can never imagine back in India. Hence, there is little adjustment for them but it gets difficult for little Lilia as she is engaged in conflict of multiple identities and cross-culture on foreign land. However, Mrs. Sen in *Mrs. Sen* is never able to adjust happily in America. Her only reason to stay in foreign land is to accompany her husband. Every immigrant character irrespective of its generation is affected in terms of identity crisis and multiculturalism. There is a certain sense of rootlessness, alienation and loneliness in first generation immigrants. They feel homesick for everything be it food, clothing, language or rituals. There is again and insecurity of getting away from their cultural heritage and on other hand a constant fear of not being accepted by the host country. Another important theme highlighted by Lahiri is the pressure and unhappiness within marriage life whether it is love marriage or arranged marriage. These stories depict marriage as a union of two individuals nursing some enigmas and silences.

This is a common cause of generation gap, alienation and conflicts between the first generation immigrants and their children. The vast differences in the cultures of two continents that includes language, food, clothing, sexual behavior etc., all these bring the parents and second generation immigrants on two different pages. This forms the dividing sections within diasporic communities. Lahiri's writings are deeply influenced by her Indian heritage. *Interpreter of Maladies* displays the emotional trauma of being uprooted from the secured origin along with the anxiety of constructing new identity in an alien land. Though the immigration experience is full of learning but these come with a price in the form of conflicted identity, rootlessness and alienation. Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* depicts different shades of migration be it with in India or from India. She also brings the reality of class struggle, taboos, dogmas and superstitions by the stories of Boori Ma and Bibi Haldar. Lahiri shows the two split mindsets in an immigrant, one wants him to establish himself in foreign land for the sake of better fortune and career and other longs for the home, people and culture left behind miles away. Lahiri draws lot of imagination from her cherished memories and anecdotes narrated by her parents.

It is also important to observe the changes in the home land in terms of infrastructure, attitude, knowledge and awareness of people. Most of the south Asian countries like India, China, Japan, Singapore have developed mature cosmopolitan culture unlike few decades ago. The liberalization of economies and globalization has brought all the fast growing economies on similar pages in terms of food habits, clothing, thought process, fluency of language, education

and health infrastructure etc. It will be interesting to investigate the impact of these new technological advancements in establishment of global villages, global citizenship, international peace and socio-cultural tolerance.

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