

A STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS OF JHUMPA LAHIRI RELATING TO DIASPORA

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Received: May 30, 2018

Accepted: July 05, 2018

ABSTRACT

Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second category among all the Asian American writers who basically deal with India, who believe India as an exotic land for a living at any circumstances, and likewise with the problems of Indian immigrants adjusting in an alien land for their survival. In this article author interrogate Diaspora through the selected novels of Jhumpa Lahiri. Because Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most significant writers of the Indian diaspora in the present time, and she is expert in her writing skills. Her fictions are not the just fictions which we read but rather these are the real documentaries of Diaspora community and the real story which they are feeling about. Lahiri is renowned or is known for the finesse and poignancy of her prose and her writing, with the ability to subtly, mesmerizingly build an emotional connection or relation to characters. Lahiri's writing is characterized by her "plain" language which is easily understandable to others and her characters, often Indian immigrants to America who must navigate or move between the cultural values of their homeland or their birth place and their adopted home. Lahiri's fiction is autobiographical and is very interesting for reader's and frequently draws upon her own experiences as well as those of her parents who really know her, friends, acquaintances, and others in the Bengali communities with which she is familiar and is known among them. Lahiri examines her characters' struggles, anxieties, and biases to chronicle the nuances and details of immigrant psychology and behavior.

Keywords: *Diaspora, Jhumpa Lahiri, Novel, Fiction, Struggles, Anxieties etc.*

INTRODUCTION

JUMPHA LAHIRI

Nilanjana Sudeshna also known as "Jhumpa" Lahiri (Bengali; born on July 11, 1967) is a well-known and a famous American author and is very well known among all for her writing. Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most significant writers of the Indian diaspora in the present time, and she is expert in her writing skills. Lahiri's initiate the task of short story collection among which the first is *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) which won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, along with her first novel, *The Namesake* (2003), which was reformed directly into a popular film of the same name and is famous among all. Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second category among all the Asian American writers who basically deal with India, who believe India as an exotic land for a living at any circumstances, and likewise with the problems of *Indian immigrants* adjusting in an alien land for their survival.

DIASPORA

Today Indian Diaspora has emerged to be distinctive transnational communities, bridging the "local" and "global" together. It is made of experts in several different fields like IT, Medicine, Space Technology, Engineering and Management and so forth. The improvements in communication, as well as transportation technology, have facilitated further development in these networks among the Indian Diaspora in general and regional/ linguistic/ caste Diasporas especially. This is manifested in the socioeconomic, political and cultural networks through transnational and global organizations among the overseas Indian communities, involving their homeland, and also their kith and kin all over the world. During the past decade, these contacts are further facilitated throughout the encouragement and intervention of the government of India and a number of other state governments in various political as well as economic matters. It is obvious that, though distance separates the Indians, they remain linked to one another through ties of real or imaginary kinship, shared resources, as well as cultural exchanges. They preserve and recreate their identity in new homes across the globe.

"Diaspora today has become a blanket term absorbing various experiences of alienation, political compulsions, ambitions and material pursuits. One of the important themes of the non-resident Indian writing in English is an immigrant experience."

NOVELS OF JIMPHA LAHIRI

In Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, the Bengali diasporic community who has left Bengal and is living to a new place in Boston religiously celebrate Durga Puja and Saraswati puja and this way they are attached to their religion. However, for characters like Ashima, such festivities are less about religion and a lot more about the rejuvenation of the link with the old world – the home they have actually left behind. Ashima's life in exile is eased by the spiritual frenzy brought about by religious festivities. On the other hand, Gogol and Sonia, who are born and brought up totally in the West, find their parents' spiritual leanings intensifying their exilic condition. Their self-fashioning as Westerners receives a jolt every time they encounter a certain aspect of their ancestry either corporal or spiritual. Often the second-generation migrant's revolt against their ambivalent position. The Gangulis celebrate "with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati" (**Lahiri, Namesake**). But when Sonia, in one of her growing-up years, refused her Christmas gifts after taking a Hinduism class in college, "protesting that they weren't Christians" (**Lahiri, Namesake**).

In 'The Namesake' she describes the lives of two generations of an immigrant Bengali family, the Gangulis in America. It could also be said that in the literature of Diaspora, identities of individuals are closely connected to the space that they occupy and negotiate. Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction, they are especially in particular, explores this space-identity link. Her works also present international space or 'the third space' of Diaspora subjects as the sites of intersection of subjectivities, generations, and cultures. These spaces may also be called the 'contact zones' – locations where cultures meet in an asymmetrical order. Such spaces just not only highlight the geo-territorial reality of migration and Diaspora but will also suggest the possibility of a third space that goes beyond the territorial fixity. Works of Jhumpa Lahiri also carry tropes of a journey that implicate the urge of the subject to go beyond the territorial boundaries to create a distinct cosmopolitan subjectivity in motion. Many characters in her fictions appear as mere tenants of space, recommending their temporarily in occupying territorial or cultural locations.

Caught in such indeterminate spaces, her characters employ hybridization, a psycho-social strategy to feel at home in their state of homelessness. When this hybridization is examined in the context of the third space of a Diaspora subject, it becomes a device, a strategy to develop cultural contacts regarding personal interaction, food, and rituals. This theoretical paradigm mentioned by the author is helpful in considering clothes, language, music, film, and food as spatial connectors among the diaspora.

Her third book 'Unaccustomed Earth' quite different from other works because its characters are the children of immigrants. Lahiri's characters who are heavily dependent on homeland nostalgia and of course the characters are there mentioned by the author that look only toward progressing in diasporic space and they are unsuccessful in finding a space or recognition for their own identity. Lahiri is careful to emphasize the point that characters must work equally within the contexts of their diasporic space. Nonetheless, this does not mean that Lahiri's stories are simplified or too optimistic. As a matter of fact, her mixture of third and first-person narrations reveals a complicated process of self-construction: it is inherently personal, yet characters cannot avoid interacting with others during the process. The majority of her stories are written in the third person, with subtle shifts in perspective in between characters, a tendency that empowers certain characters at crucial thematic moments. The less used first-person narratives always reveal the learning process of a character attempting to situate the self within a social context. The switching perspectives within and between Lahiri's stories do not essentially emphasize a clash in between voices about the home and diaspora, but rather a clash of voices about home and Diaspora. The multiplicity of the voices which is seen in the story, even within singular characters at different places, emphasizes or put stress on the personal process of identity construction within a populated and new, diasporic space. *Unaccustomed Earth* is divided into two parts – part one, holding five stories and the second part is, with three. What binds the stories and of course the two parts together is the thematic of an alien space or the space of the host nation.

Unaccustomed Earth symbolizes the new earth as well as soil in which the descendants of immigrants along with their parents submerge their roots and culture. The title conveys a dual meaning. First, it is suggestive of the world of the first generation immigrants who are now not accustomed to the world of their children. Secondly, a distinct type of world is occupied by the children of immigrants who often look up to the associative life which they share with their parents but can no longer connect emotionally and psychologically with them. Lahiri's narration and plot construction are distinct. Every word assumes significance and language bear lucid and lyrical verve. Alienation, nostalgia, searching for the native land and of course, the dissatisfaction and mental agony resulting from them has been recurrently exposed in the stories.

Unaccustomed Earth examines the difficulties the central characters have in integrating and relocating their identities to an empowered space beyond their familial homes. Their identities are hybrid, but they also are of a vexed hybridity, deeply troubled by complicated and unresolved connections to their multi-cultural families of origin. The majority of the marriages are mixed or inter-cultural marriages. In these marriages two persons of distant historical, social as well as cultural backgrounds share their experiences with others and out of these shared experiences emerge a 'third space.' These marriages in between Indian Bengali male or female and American female or male create a "hybrid culture," a new form of culture where both of them negotiate on various fronts of life. Their encounter between two cultures, i.e. eastern and western constructs a hybrid culture where both the parties negotiate and interact to reframe and restructure ethnic essentialism, nationalism, and fundamentalism.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* narrates stories about different South Asian diaspora communities who have migrated from their homeland. Almost all of the characters of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* have fluid (which means a substance that can flow) or has migrated to some new place and are the identities like other contemporary postcolonial literary characters. As in most cases, they are citizens of two countries (their first country as well as their new country). So their national and cultural identities are not fixed. Their identities are more fluid. On the one hand, they belong to South Asia, but on the other side of the coin, they are living in the USA.

Jhumpa Lahiri reveals or tells the general people about the very experiences and psychological issues of migrated people from their homeland.

Her fictions are not the just fictions which we read but rather these are the real documentaries of Diaspora community and the real story which they are feeling about. She is a perfect interpreter of a cultural multiplicity. Lahiri's stories are perceptive critique of human relationships, bonds as well as commitments that one has to make with homeland along with the migrated land. The feeling of alienation pre-occupies the hearts of people from a cultural perspective as well as geographically cut off from their homeland. Feeling of loss runs all through her stories. Her stories establish interpersonal bond without bondage. South-Asian literature is well-known in the field of Diaspora and is undoubtedly enriched by Lahiri's contribution as she has very much written about migrated south people. Her characters and stories are made in such a way that they seem to be realistically outstanding to deal the theme of Diaspora. Lahiri portrays excellently the lives of people who are living in 'in-between' space, their alienation. Her stories can lead us to think deeply before going to assimilate into other community leaving our own homelands.

Jhumpa Lahiri herself as well born into a family of immigrants and having experienced the emotional conflicts in her life, sketches her characters in a very realistic manner. Lahiri's stories outline the tensions of adhering to one's cultural background in a foreign environment, and of course the conflicts of assimilation.

Jhumpa Lahiri, the first Indian author to win prestigious Pulitzer Prize in the USA for her variety of short stories "*Interpreter of Maladies*," is a second generation Indian writer whose caliber as a diasporic writer is excellent. She is a class herself in revealing Diaspora status by way of her works. Below are findings may help with guidelines or recommendations the young people aspiring to migrate outside the motherland to the other nations.

- The immigrant females have to struggle through the crisis of their identity. The identity for Diasporic woman perpetuates through the complexity of plurality in the singular self. They lose the Indian identity while gaining a new one in America. In the host countries, the effort to maintain the Indian identity through the use of objects from India like silk scarves, greeting cards, letters of parents, the recorded voices of their relatives and magazines, as tools to make the feel of Indian. The hybridity in their personality causes multiple identities. The objects play diabolic role in shaping and influencing the immigrant's psychology, anxieties, and behavior. They often encounter the unresolved personal and cultural identity crises because of their inability to reconcile their American identity with their Indian identity. A few of them like Ashima become the cultural mothers slowly for their community in America and start gathering people around them from the same background. The importance of a name and identity become central concept throughout the life of the second generation immigrants as they simply struggle with the Indo-American identity and rebels against parents. They attempt for the same cultural identity construction. However, the breaking of such identity signifies that the hybrid Indian-American identity lacks the essentialism of the purer types of identities. Along with the struggle to create their identity in the cross-cultural society, women also struggle first within the family to create an identity. They come out of traditional India in search of their identity in the Western world. The women in these stories construct their unique racial subjectivity and gender agency. Mukherjee's immigrant women do not

try as hard as Lahiri's to maintain their Indian identity in the foreign land; in stead, they try to come completely out of their Indian tradition where they are denied the full freedom. Many of Lahiri's women characters like to mix up or marry within their community and come back to that even after some misadventures with the foreigners. They build a reputation for Asian-Americans with remarkable educational and professional success and serve as the cultural backdrop.

- ☞ The immigrant women feel isolated from a culture perspective host land. The literature on various writers in chapter two also focuses on the immigrant women's cultural isolation. Their women protagonists' isolation becomes more intent basically because of they come out of the stability of the cultural frame at the motherland where other women of their community may identify with them. But in an alien country the immigrant woman feels double isolated; first from their close relatives and second among the strange people. They are actually isolated women first and after that as women belonging not to the native culture of the host country.
- ☞ The immigrant women are especially marginalized because on one side they are victims of the familial, religious, social as well as cultural compulsions at home and on the flip side, they are as well victims of the differences in the alien society. Their appearance, costume, and color of the skin attract the people of the host land to express superior oneness.
- ☞ Most of the immigrant women use the sex as a means to establish their relationships with the natives of the host land with the purpose of getting rooted in the foreign soil permanently. But that creates the more severe problems in their life. The immigrant women are seen as an object to satisfy the sexual lusts of the native men plus they are also never considered as equal human beings in the world of patriarchal cultures. The writers raise questions on the facts related to the sexual exploitation of the immigrant women in the context of cross-cultural encounters. They are actually sometimes blackmailed as well as sexually exploited by the Native Americans.
- ☞ The immigrant women are disillusioned when their dreams do not come true when confronted with reality. The majority of the immigrant women keep dreaming, hoping as well as expecting from the host land, however, they find nothing more than the frustration. The immigrant women face disillusionment in their relationships with men in the family and after that in the society as well as having the intensity of their feelings is sharpened by the context of cross-cultural encounters.
- ☞ In the patriarchal cultures a lot of the women feel guilty for being a woman, and in addition to this, the immigrant women feel guilty for staying far away from their home. During their adaptation to the host country, the immigrant women either fall a prey or willingly break away from the tradition, but likewise, cases result in the frustration, which ultimately leads to the nagging sense of guilt. The immigrant women carry forever a feeling of guilt in their heart for breaking away from their family, status, tradition, culture, religion, and motherland.
- ☞ The immigrant women face the clash of cultures. When a woman migrates out of her motherland, she carries the deep-rooted culture to the adopted country. The cultural practices at homeland do not match with the host one. Her social interactions turn into the cultural class. The clash of cultures begins first in the mind of the dislocated woman and after that in her social interactions with the native citizens of the host country.
- ☞ The people of various races create and retain their own cultures. When a woman of a particular race migrates out of her race to an alien place, she becomes an object of the racial discrimination. She appears to be odd in her color of skin, physical appearance, the tone of language, cultural and religious rituals, personal as well as social attitudes, etc. In the Western countries where white people like to see themselves as superior to the others. Each of them concentrates on the immigrant women and their mistreatment in the States and their experiences in the interracial relationships. The Western people call the immigrants with adjectives like 'American-Born Confused Deshi'(ABCD), 'others,' 'a brown monkey,' 'mischling,' 'black,' 'a damn Paki,' 'an untouchable' and 'a hubshi.'
- ☞ The sense of dislocation afflicts the immigrant women in the host country. When they migrate out of the stability of their original culture, they feel dislocated in the alien one because of their differences and of course the views of the natives to look at them. The geographical, social, political, legal and cultural setup of the host country, which does not match with her own motherland, leads her to feel dislocated among the foreigners.
- ☞ Also, the immigrant women feel divided in a completely new location at the host land, and when they spend a few years there and later return to the motherland, they find the motherland also alien one, because it too passes through significant changes. For that reason, the immigrant women happen to be alien as 'other' in the host land, and alien as 'a foreign returned' in the motherland.

- ☞ The immigrant women are afflicted by the feeling of nostalgia in the adopted land. They explore out their motherland through the memory and reminiscence. They express their feelings of nostalgia through their behavior and mood and prefer certain convenient ways to come out of it. They attempt to retain their memories with the assistance of the objects like Indian silk scarves, greeting cards and letters from parents, the recorded voices of their relatives, books as well as magazines.
- ☞ The immigrant women try to trace their roots in the motherland. The immigrant women never easily escape from their roots whichever the alien country they go.
- ☞ The immigrant women carry the expatriate sensibility all throughout their life. No migrant can totally wipe out the memories of his/her motherland and transform completely into a new person in the host land. The immigrants develop an expatriate sensibility out of the nostalgia and of course the fear of losing the cultural roots during their stay at the adopted land. They explore their motherland through the memory lane, which does not match the changed contemporary situation at the motherland. Their projection of it appears to be totally different and based on the periphery of two worlds.
- ☞ The majority of the immigrant women become victims of the insider-outsider sensibilities. The immigrant woman who belongs to a different culture is considered as an outsider in the host land. Her entire way of life distinguishes her from the mainstream society, and she turns into an object of comparison as well as discrimination. She tries to define herself while taking into consideration the factor of the 'other' in the process of it. She tries to form self-esteem or articulate her identity by filling in the absences or missing parts of personality when compared with the native others.
- ☞ The experiences at the host land lead the immigrant women to feel at an intense loss of their culture, language, relationships, religion, heritage as well as roots. This feeling of intense loss is strengthened when she returns to the motherland.
- ☞ The immigrant women pretend to be satisfied along with their achieved identity, liberation, new experiences as well as a sort of success. Hanging between two worlds they pretend to be satisfied. However, they suffer deep in their heart of heart for knowing the fact that their life in the host land is not the dreamed one. They have actually to negotiate constantly with the ties they want to strengthen with their host country. They also negotiate with their ethnic, cultural background that they wish to preserve or modify or fully re-invent.

A distinction will often be made between the two, i.e., Diaspora with "D" in the upper case and diaspora with "d" within the lower case: the former stands for dislocation of Jews and of course the latter represents cross-cultural displacement in a very general sense or away from their own place or country. The term diaspora can also be sometimes designed to imply the development of human civilization around the globe which is beneficial for all. The origination of the primitive human and subsequent dispersal to set up human societies in different parts of the world illustrates diaspora as well as having the diasporic condition which is required for the good setup of the society.

Diasporic consciousness is typically a complex or difficult term as it explains a lot to be understood and as it encompasses ideas along with exilic existence, a feeling of loss and consciousness of being an outsider, searching for home, and burden of exile, dispossession and relocation and hence one's need a place to settle because one feels alone and lifeless. The lives of immigrants would not have straight lines and are full of difficulties which can be felt. They reside hundreds of years of history in a life and also have several lives and roles which they have to do it successfully without any hesitation. They can experience a sense of alienation in the host countries, and there also has to give their best being felt as alien by the people of that country. Despite their attempts of acculturation, they do still at the periphery, and they are treated as others. "Migrants," says **Salman Rushdie**, "...straddle two cultures ... fall in between two stools" then they will suffer "A triple disruption" comprising the loss of roots, the linguistic and social dislocation and actually are not said that they belong to which place because they have mixtures of cultures of both the places." Trishanku, the character from the Indian epic Ramayana, who went to reside in to heaven although he needed to settle at a place midway between the earth and the paradise, serves as metaphor for the modern expatriate inhabiting the contested global local space and set an example for this generation so that the present generation are aware of it.

CONCLUSION

The plots of Jhumpa Lahiri show a deliberate progression from the consciousness of the first generation diaspora in Interpreter of Maladies to second generation diaspora concerns of multicultural assimilation,

miscegenation and generation gap in *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth*. With plots that are a slice of real life, the stories of *Interpreter of Maladies* have plots that are narratives of negotiation between cultures, either in the context of the diaspora situation or in the context of the middle class society in Calcutta. Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* is a straightforward paradigmatic plot encompassing the progress of successive generations of the Ganguly family towards acculturation in America. There is no ethnic conflict, and the focus remains on peculiar personal issues such as Gogol's name. The longer length of stories and ordinary day-to-day situations dealt with in *Unaccustomed Earth* serve to underscore the frustration and cultural dissonance of the second generation and its compromises in order to become a part of mainstream society. In all cases, the term diaspora carries with itself a sense of displacement or movement of the population so described or finds itself for whatever reason separated from its national territory, and usually its people or the people who are diasporic have a hope, or at least a desire, to return to their homeland at some point of time in their life, if the "homeland" still exists in any meaningful sense. Some writers have noted that diaspora may result or could be the reason for the loss of nostalgia for a single home as people "re-root" in a series of meaningful displacements from a place to another. In this sense, individuals may have multiple homes or different homes at different places throughout their diaspora, with different reasons for maintaining some form of attachment to each and every place they have been. Diasporic cultural development often assumes or acquires a different course from that of the population which was actually in the original place of settlement. Over time, remotely separated communities which have been seen tend to vary in culture, traditions, language and many other various factors. The last vestiges of cultural affiliation are found to be seen in a diaspora is often found in community who are very resistance to language change and are resist for the maintenance of traditional religious practice.

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