



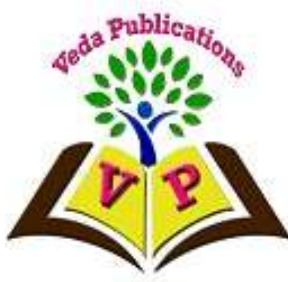
THE EXISTENCE OF MULTICULTURALISM IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *INTERPRETER OF MALADIES: A STUDY*

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ABSTRACT



The purpose of this paper is to understand how a diasporic framework influences multicultural identity with reference to Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. A diasporic identity provides a greater confidence to a exile writer who standing outside the national boundaries. Their diasporic locations in the U.S. or Britain and other countries which have well established broad looking communities provide them with a greater freedom. This research will explore this theme by taking into account the work of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. The paper will analyze how futile attempts are made to redefine national, racial and sexual boundaries.

Keywords: *Transnational boundary- Multi cultural Identity- Diasporas experiences- cross- cultural relationship- immigrant experiences*



Literature is not only a recorded expression of the creative age and heightened sensibility of the artists but also adds colours and life to reality. It is a depiction and celebration of life. Literary works are portrayals of the thinking patterns and social norms prevalent in society. In fact, works of art are the faithful representation of different factors of common life. Classical works of literature serve as food for thought and tonic for imagination and innovativeness. In the age of rapid globalization the formal and informal power of brain – border civil society networks are unpromisingly increasing the policymakers, business leaders, scholars and the civil societies themselves. In this context, Diasporas hold a great significance.

An expatriate writer's work represents Diasporas experiences and explores phenomena of migration, cultural displacement and its impact on the memorial. Every writer is influenced by his mentor or mentors. But he becomes great through his/her originality and nobility of expression. Lahiri has many things about her own practices of writing, her personal life and the influence of the contemporary writers on her. But she has something new in her literary output which is a great contribution to the contemporary culture of writing and that newness has brought her so many laurels. As a short story writer, Jhumpa Lahiri inculcates a new meaning and a new perspective in her short fiction. Her stories describe some of her own experiences. She sincerely presents the predicaments of the diasporic way of life. Basically she is an objective storyteller who delineates Diaspora culture dispassionately. Jhumpa's less use of images and simple language with plain functionalism is her chief attribute as a mature writer. She presents attractive stories in order to compel reader's attention. She uses less number of similes and metaphors. She can create a picture in words. In her stories, actions flow like a perennial river that never dries up. The stories end with ease, without any torment of seldom invoking surprise of suspense in mind and heart of the readers. Jhumpa Lahiri's maiden venture of short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) has won her the prestigious *Pulitzer Prize for Fiction* in the year 2000.

Jhumpa Lahiri has travelled extensively to India and has experienced the effects of colonialism and Diasporic issues parallel to it. She feels strong ties to her parents homeland -India especially Calcutta as well as the United States and England. Growing up with ties to all the three countries created in Lahiri a sense of homelessness and an inability to feel accepted. Lahiri explains this as an inheritance of her parent's ties in India. Lahiri, the daughter of a librarian and school teacher, has always been inclined to creative writing.

This shows the existence of multiculturalism in her works. Her works present themes such as cultural and social changes, struggle for preserving distinctions of being Indian, faith in cultural and religious practices, rituals and traditions, conflict between past and present immigrant's experiences faith in spirituality and disregard of materialism, conflict between tradition and modernity belief in the theory of Karma, mysticism, cross-cultural relationship and a sense of humanity. Though used in different ways, she used these themes very creatively. In fact, she has a heart of suggesting various things in a single situation. Themes like social-cultural changes, immigrant's experiences, faith in Indian Tradition and struggle for preserving Indian culture, immigrant experiences, and disregard of material life are found throughout the book. These themes mark Indianness. East West encounter, alienation in foreign land, sense of displacement, adaptation of new culture, sense of unbelonging mark multiculturalism.

The stories of *Interpreter of Maladies* are built upon the specific thematic structure of communication and interpretation. The characters communicate to express their feelings to others in order to escape from the traumas of their inner turmoil. They are in dilemma and need diagnostic interpretation. But, the interpretation is not easy. There are two possible reasons for that: one is an error in preferring an appropriate person who is supposed to have the interpretation of the malady. Secondly what they aim is different for which they are expecting interpretation. It means that they are unable to exactly identify what the malady is. So the interpretation is ineffective. Defective communication leads to the defective diagnosis. The



Interpreter of Maladies is a collection of nine short stories with the themes of identity, immigrant experiences, cultural differences, love and family. The characters are largely Indian or Indian American and their stories together paint an evocative picture of Indian's Diaspora. Her art in the collection of stories is unique in its scope and is babbling simple. There are varied engagements between pain and memory; for the cause of pain that memory recalls behind each painful experience is subjective and is different in each story of *Interpreter of Maladies*. Pain in *Interpreter of Maladies* might well be seen as a way expressing the inexpressible. Like truth, it transcends the narration one way or the other and stays beyond definite meanings. Each individual in this book has his/her way of looking things and the probable truth, and thus senses different kinds of implications in similar incidents. One's search for relief amidst the prevailing pain is frequently occurring feather of almost all the stories.

A Temporary Matter might be read as an attempt for temporary erasing of memory to escape its tortures. It is a story about a childless couple desperately attempting to come to terms with the fact of the death of their only child. The narrative could be thought of in terms of a pain that complicates their relationship seriously enough for either to carry on with his / her normal married life. It recounts a pain that evades a narration, a catastrophe tale of a broken marriage in which no one, in particular, could be accused of being responsible for the disaster. The pain that ensues after the death of the newly born child in the personal lives of the couple engulfs in their private spaces that it becomes impossible for them to carry on together. Thought no one could be said responsible for the death of the child, each looks at other with hatred, with suspicion, as if blaming him/her for the tragedy.

Interpreter of Maladies expresses pain in so many different and complicated ways that there appears to be no single specified way of expressing it in *A temporary matter*, at one point of time the idea of the impermanence of the taste of food is contrasted with the permanence of pain that has come to stay in the lives of Shoba and Sukumar and that had deeply influenced two of them living under

the same roof. Against the permanence of pain, other emotions appear impermanent. The readers can notice the way both Shoba and Sukumar talk to each other. They seem incapable of communicating with each other without inflicting pain. They speak only to deliberately hurt one another by narrating events that prove painful to the couple. Their way of hurting each other might be termed sadistic but they derive pleasure by inflicting their pain. The story pats their way of communicating with each other in the manner, which has already mentioned, proves an unhealthy relation between the pair. Further talks only prove to be more hurting and intense in inflicting pain. After Sukumar discovers that Shoba has been ruthless in her decision to stay away separately, Sukumar discloses the secret which he had promised to himself not to let Shoba know is about the birth and subsequent death of their baby, a fact to which he had access till then and had suffered under its burden alone.

Interpreter of Maladies also relates to loss of love between husband and wife who earlier thought of being in love and continued to stay with each other. The pain that emerges at a later stage and engulfs the entire relationship becomes the cause of a major reach. It can be seen as an extension of loss of love between the couple in *A Temporary Matter* where the couple is unable to feel the same affection and bonding they once had felt for one another. Those were the days they were newly married and 'eager to make love' even before they finished eating their dinner. Now they have lost interest in one another so that neither they can talk freely nor briefly enjoy each other's company. It is interesting to see how they both deliberately avoid one another in the small house and find reasons to hide behind their work to shun company.

CONCLUSION

Thus one can observe that the characters in Lahiri's works are always conscious about their history. Their disorder, disintegration and violation cause in them a sort of neurosis. To attain order they turn to different things. Some go to fantasy; some escape physically, some face reality. Indianness in characters forms one of the crucial part of her works. It is through the Indianness of characters that she succeeds in her desired themes. Is it what forms



Indianness in characters is their sensibility, love for humanity, pride for culture, faith in traditions and rituals, longing for order, and unmistakable faith in testing? Indians always preserve their trust in God. In what ever dilemma they are, they remember God for inspiration and guidance. Her works deal with internal strife and changing human predicament among identities and cultures. One of the themes Lahiri deals is the search for identity, as defined by the self, by others, by location, and by circumstances. In Lahiri stories, everything including gender, homeland, geography, occupation and self within the community can act in determining and qualifying identity. Lahiri brings up interesting questions as to what can and what cannot act as agents in the discrimination of identity and many of her characters struggle against or conform to outside definition.

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