



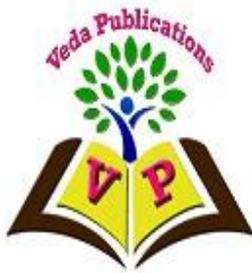
A CRITIQUE ON LAHIRI'S WORKS

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ABSTRACT



Jhumpa Lahiri, the distinguished diasporic writer, a master stylist, and the author of flawless, standard shorter fiction has contributed gem like fiction and short stories to the diasporic literature for over many years. Lahiri's fiction cannot be classed with the other contemporary writers. Her short stories and especially her personal note stem partly from formal considerations such as resistance to experimental tricks and partly from an avoidance of social thesis fiction and from a compulsion to explore the scope and sanction of human love. She is a creative artist with a fastidious taste. As a result she does not like to produce volume after volume or short story after short story. No half strokes can satisfy her, no unnecessary information or detail no word, no phrase is that does not exactly but briefly convey what she wants to convey. She is not a voluminous writer, but judged by even a very strict critical canon, she is a luminous writer all the same that is why her stories and novels have come to be regarded the inspiring models of artistic expression.

Keywords: *Diasporic Writer, Emigrant Experiences, Problem of Assimilation, Marriage and Love.*



The research work found that Jhumpa Lahiri is a master story teller with an innate and natural art of storytelling. She is very successful in portraying many themes through the character of her stories. One of the most important themes in her short stories is the problem of emigrant experiences and the problem of assimilation. The immigrant experience takes second forms in 'interpreter of Maladies'. For some characters like the narrator of the third and final continent, the formation to a new life is challenging but smooth. The narrator looks forward to the opportunity that the new country can afford. For Lilia's parents the move to America also affords them a width of opportunity not open to them in India, but the price is paid by Lilia in terms of connection to her culture. Mrs Sen flats-out refers to assimilate for her everything in India and there is no reason to attempt to make a life in new home. There is an emotional trade off when moving to a new land. Each character in this collection wrestles with identify, whether it displaced or descended from immigrants. There is a longing felt for the sake of one's birth, a fear of losing one's culture and fear of not being accepted.

Another major theme of her stories is the tensions and inter-connections between marriage and love. Love and marriage are complicated in Interpreter of Maladies. A marriage is the beginning of a new joint life for two people. In these stories, a marriage is an occasion of joys but also of secrets, silences, and mysteries. Twinkle and Sanjeev relationship crystallizes the desperate attitudes and attributes of marriage in Lahiri's collection although they are both born in America and Sanjeev are nearly strangers to one another. No matter what romantic failings transpire with couples, each husband and wife in the stories remain individuals each with their own secrets and desires Sanjeev doubts his love for his wife because of this disconnect. But as is proved by the narrator of the third and final continent, that distance can be closed by shared experience. Marriage is not a solid institution, but a fluid invention. Sukumar and Shoba are radically altered by the death of their child, and the toll is taken on their marriage. They are no longer the same people as when they met. Love is found in unexpected places and can shift in the wake of experience. By

reading "sexy" from the point of view of a mistress, the reader also understands that each romantic connection is unique and personal affair. There are no absolute and strict moralities.

Lahiri has stated that much of her writing is concerned with communication and its absence. Miscommunication or unexpressed feelings weigh on several characters, destroying their wellbeing. "A temporary matter" is the best example of secrecy taking its toll on a marriage. Shukumar and Shoba, lost in their own grief, cease communicating with one another. Blockouts allow them the feed and to share their secrets they have never shared. They are unfailingly honest and can no longer remain the illusion that their marriage is still variable. Mrs. Das tries to unburden herself by telling Kapasi, the secret of Bobbsy's conception. But only Mrs. Das can absolve her of her guilt. At the end of the story, nothing has changed in their marriage because she is not able to communicate her lack of love for her family to anyone other than a stranger. Twinkle and Sanjeev have different outlooks on life which cause initial discord between the newlyweds. So communications is necessary for all the healthy relationships.

An important theme that runs through her words is the complex relationship of another and a child. She has also dwelt on father and children relationship. As children grow older, the relationship between them and their parents shift, becoming either adversarial or enriched with greater understanding. During the bulk of "when for Pirzada came to dine" the narrator Lilia is only ten years old. She brings a childlike innocence to her relationship different from her parents despite being a Pakistani. Lilia's parents are frustrated by her ignorance of current events in their homeland, a by-product of her schooling in America. There is a disharmony between parents and children both across generational as well as cultural lines. There is an unspoken truth between Eliot and his mother. Eliot is keenly aware of his mother's sadness and also of her powerlessness to help. Conversely, the narrator of the third and final continent takes care of his mother when she is ill. He is forced to assume the role of an adult in their relationship. Rohin is also keenly aware



of his mother's pain and the situation that has caused the pain.

As regards, future love too, she brings up the complexities of religion and traditions. Maintenance of old traditions and customs while learning new ones is a part of the assimilation process for immigrants. Mr. Pirzada is puzzled by hallowing even the pumpkins; the costumes, and the candy all mystify him. In part, Mr. Pirzada worries enough over his daughters and the thought of Lilia freely inviting danger is too much for him. Twinkle reassures Sanjeev that they are good little Hindus despite her affection for discovered Christian iconography. Just because she is charmed by the statements does not mean that she has forsaken the customs of her ancestors. Mrs. Sen, unwilling to settle in America, obstinately upholds the patterns and routines of her life in Calcutta. Adopting new custom is the mark of a successful transition in to a new country Mala's effortless absorption of the American customs preferred by her husband indicates that her assimilation will not be as painful as Mr. Sen's.

Being a Bengali, Jhumpa Lahiri cannot ignore the theme of the partition. This aspect as a historical event and as a metaphor is employed by Lahiri characters are pitted against others and also divided within themselves. Mr. Pirzada and Booni Ma are the victims of the partition. Boori Ma is a refugee who may or may not have lost her family and luxurious home in the forced exile of Hindus and Muslims from each other's territories. Her new life is in shambles and she lives on the fringes of society. Boori Ma represents the cathartic effects of the events of 1947. Lila's reaction to Mr. Pizada is Lahiri's critique of the skirmish between the two religions. She is unable to see any real difference between Pirzada and her parents. Her naivete taps into an overreaching humanism that partition erodes. Someone like Miranda, who is neither Indian nor Indian American, is not immune to such a divide. Though she feels guilty about her tryst with Dev, her desire for him lingers. In Lahiri's fiction each person is in their own continent.

Both Pirzada and Bodi Ma are the victims of partition. Boori Ma sweeping steps by day is uprooted from her home and spends her days

cataloguing the misfortunes and losses that arose from her refugee status. Mr. Pizzada's teaching on the other side of the world, worries about his wife and daughters who are endangered by the escalation of war in 1971. Bori Ma is exiled by the residents of the building because she is reminder of the possibility of a failure in life. Mr. Pirzada is accepted by Lilia's family in America and Lilia remarks that he is not different. Only an imaginary life has decreed him differently.

She is also concerned about environment and nature. The environment often reflects the inner turmoil of the characters. The rubble filled sun temple that sits atop of a dry river is a metaphor of the reign of the marriage sanctity between Mrs. Das and Mr. Das as well as the disappointment that Mr. Kapasi carries with him. The gray waves outside Eliot's window believe a sadness that he is unable to express. The snow that meets after Sukumar and Shosoa return to honesty directly relates to thaw between the characters. In the treatment of Bibi Haldar, the changing seasons chart the life of the troubled main character. In the fall, she is shunned and in the winter she is isolated. In the spring, she is pregnant and emerges from her misery. There as a rhythm of life reflected in the changing reasons. Lahiri's description of environment often evokes a character's internal state. At the close of Mrs. Sen's, Eliot answers his mother that he is fine while starting at choppy grey waves signifying his liner turbulence. The thawing snow at the end of their rights of darkness signifies the thawing of commutations between Sukumar and Shoba.

Again in *Interpreter of Maladies*, all the characters in the nine stories of the book suffer from maladies. Some seek remedy for the matters of the heart and other are lost to the circumstances. Mr and Mrs Das, Shoba and Shukumar, Sanjeev and Twinkle face problems within their respective marriages. Boori Ma and Bibi Haldar live on the fringes of society, grasping for hope. Mr. Kapasi, Miranda Eliot and Mrs. Sen struggle to find their places in the world. Each character is grappling with wishes of identity; either directly related the immigrant experience. To some degree, Lahiri herself is the *Interpreter of Maladies*, laying bare bilingual themes of loneliness and isolation.



The question of immigrant identity is too well illustrated in her stories. All characters in Lahiri's stories are striving for identity. Many identity issues arise from the divide between old and new countries, customs, and ways of life. For some transition is natural. The narrator of the third and final continent loves his adopted land and decides to grow old in New England for Mrs. Sen the separation from Calcutta is too great to bear. Mr. Pirzada and Boori Ma are victims of the partition to varying Degrees. The binging questions of identity cause trouble in their lives.

Food is the recurring motif in Lahiri's stories. Love is expressed through cooking throughout the collection. Twinkle's meal for Sanjeev prepared on the fly with vinegar he told her to throw out represents both their butting heads and also her ingenuity. Her use of the unwanted ingredient proves to Sanjeev that her point of view is equally valid. That the stew is delicious help to put Sanjeev at ease about his decision. Mrs Sen's obsession with fresh fish is an effort to keep alive Calcutta also, by emigrating the American product, she uses it as an excuse to keep herself away from the country Lilia's parents reveal their similarities despite the lingering effects of partition. The intimacy in the shared meals between Shoba and Sukumar rekindle their passion and allow them to be honest for the first time in ages, even to the detriment of their marriage, food is a component of femininity in the treatment of Bibi Haldar Laxmi's hot mix is deemed to be spicy for Misanda.

Laxmi's *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), deals with complex and layered vision of interconnectedness, the unifying element in which is only ostensibly the South –Asian, especially Bengali Diaspora in America. The collection consists of light stories grouped in two sections. Each of the five stories in the book's first section is self accommodating. In *Hell-Heaven* the assimilated Bengali American narrator, introspects how little thought she once gave to her mother's scarifies as she reconstructs the fomenting, un-required passion her young mother had for a graduate student during the narrator's childhood. In *Only Goodness* an old sister learns accurate lessons about the limits of accountability to a self-destructive young brother. A

choice of Accommodation shows a paradigm shift in power dynamics between a Bengali-American husband and his workaholic Anglo Wife during a week and away from their kids at wedding of the husband's Pup school crush. And the American graduate student at the centre of Nobody's business Pines for his Bengali. American romantic, a graduate school dropout who entertains no romantic feelings for him, spurns the polite advances of prospective grooms from the global Bengali single circuit and considers herself engaged to a selfish, four tempered Egyptian historian. Lahiri finds three stories grouped together as Hema and Koushik explore the overlapping histories of the characters, a girl and a boy from two Bengali immigrant families, set during significant moments of their lives. The little story "Unaccustomed Earth" weaving the fabric of a father – daughter relation, throws light on the extent of seclusion, the character's experience in the process of executing their relational deity. The strong commences with prospect visit of Ruma's father to her home as Seattle. her, being dead, and the only brother settled in Australia, she feels that the visit to her father will be an additional burden on her as he is retired and is dispensed with every possession he had.

Ruma feared that her father would become a responsibility, an added demand, continuously present in a way; she was no longer used to. It would mean an end to the family she had created on her own herself and Adam and Akash and the second child that would come in January, conceived just before the move. She could not imagine tending to her father as her mother had, serving the meals her mother used to prepare. Still, not offering him a place in her home made her feel worse.

This single dilemma continues when Ruma engages in telephonic discourse with her husband, Adam, on the visit of her father.

"I can be imagine my father living here she said

"Then don't ask him to"

"I think the visit in his way of suggestive in"

"Thew ask"

"And if he says yes"?

Thew he moves in With us"

"Should I ask?" (Unaccustomed Earth)



Ruma's predicament is the result of her breeding. Children acquire the sense of filial duty from their family set up, and the second generation Diasporas, like Ruma, are removed from the concern that blinds the family in India. The modern western family is basically nucleus, and hence, isolates the elders every constitutes a family pattern that puts Ruma in confusion despite her Indian origin. Her father himself admits these aspects of her nature to Mrs. Bengali. Now that he was on his own, acquaintance sometimes asked if he planned to move in with Ruma. Even Mrs. Bagchi mentioned this idea. But he pointed out that Ruma had not been raised with that sense of idea or duty. She led her own life, had made her own decisions, and married an American boy. He did not expect her to take him in, and really, he could not blame her. For what he had done, when his father was dying, when his mother was not left behind? By then Ruma and Romi were teenagers. There was no question of his eight-year-old widowed mother moving to Pennsylvania. He had left his siblings look after her, until, she eventually died. However, very soon Ruma realizes that her father turns out to be a great, rather than, a burden. Her father's living Pattern has built on the avail of self – sustenance, and prefers to do everything, himself, and this habit of him keeps him engaged. For a retired and aged soul, engagement is necessary to shun off loneliness. After finishing with the dishes, he dried them and then scrubbed and dried the inside of the sink, removing the food particles from the drainer. He put the left over's always in the refrigerator, tied up the trash bag and put in to the larger barrel he had noticed in the drive way, made sure the doors were locked. He sat for a while at the kitchen table, finding with a saucepan whose handle – he had noticed while washing it was Wobbly. He searched in the drawers for a new driver and not finding one, accomplished the task with the tip of a steak knife. When he was finished, he poked his head in to Akash's room and found both Ruma and Akash sleep. Moreover she recollects the past life and its joys merely with the presence of her father. She notices how her son Akash mingles with her father; both together become a reservoir of family satiety for her. Her father too engages in semi-scenes of his wife as Ruma resembles her now a lot. For several

minutes he stood in the doorway. Something about his daughter's appearance has changed; she now resembled his wife so strongly that he could not bear to look at her directly. That first glimpse of her earlier, standing on the lawn with Akash had nearly taken his breath away. Her face was older now, as his wife's had been, and the hair was beginning to turn gray at her temple in the same way, twisted with an elastic band in to a loose knot. The features is haunting now that his wife was gone – the identical shade and shape of the eyes, the dimple on the left side when they smiled. Significantly, in the course of her father's stay at Seattle, Ruma gets accustomed to her father. In fact she had never been so closer to him before her marriage with Adam. While having conversation with her father when she was engaged in gardening, it is obvious that she wants him to stay with her quite contrary to her initial response.

Ruma's sense of desolation and isolation is understood by her father as he finds her in the position of her wife. His wife has also experienced the pang of managing the family alone in an alien land and has suffered deeper solitude. Like her mother, Ruma, though acquainted with American life style, is not exception to the solitude of life, and so craves to have her father with her.

Both Ruma and her father are intrinsically; selfish at the level of relationship. Her father has been escapist right from the beginning as far as the execution of his filial duty is concerned. To build his life and career abroad, he ignored the age of his old parents in India, and, ironically left in the similar circumstances, though self chosen. Even this choice of her father is motivated by his deep rooted selfishness and desire not to be entangled further in the maze of family relation. He has turned into a solitary wanderer; an agnori; a person who denounced all relations and live a life of a wanderer. In case of Ruma's father, no doubt, the denouncement of committed relation is inspired by the desire of uncommitted relation. It is uncommitted relation that characterizes diasporic existence in it's entirely and extremely, a part from inculcating a sense of isolation. For any kind of association commitment is imperative; the lack of its results in the breakdown of even the most intimate relation. Her father's choice, of Mrs. Bagchi instead



of her, in fact, an expression of his desire uncommitted, free from any thread of Bondage; the bondage that makes us suffer. This in kneecap tome earth he obese that the characters are lonely inwardly which is the chief cause of their suffering. However, here we also see the transfers from physical alienation to that of the metaphysical one in order to attain the unattached, uncommitted bliss and liberty.

Sense of alienation continues to run through Lahiri's hell – Heaven which seems to be a saga of broken hearts. The important woman characters: the narrator, her mother and Deborah are resented in such circumstances where they feel alienated in relation to their men. As the centre of the story lies the incompatible relation of the narrator's parents Shyamal and Aparna, resulting in the alienating feelings of Aparna.

Aparna finds a source to get rid of her tedious and monotonous domestic life in Pranab and their intimacy grows to such an extent that they might have been taken for husband and wife; whenever we went, any stranger would have assumed that Pranab Kaku was his father, that my mother was his wife. However the entry of Debora, an American, in the life of Pranab fetches a jealous better touch in Pranab-Aparna episode which enhances to such an extent that Aparna feels a sea of change in Pranab brought out by Deborah (Hell-Heaven).

Aparna turns more bitter and isolated after Pranab-Deborah wed-lock as she views every American to be unethical deducing from the experience of Deborah-Pranab relation where he denounces his family, the family which has cherished a lot of expectation from him, significantly, she conflicts the Indian social values with the new and changing values that she dwells avoid and suffers excruciatingly. Her daughters, the narrator, with her biological growth adjust with her American social milieu contrary to her advice. To avoid her irritation, or any confrontation, the narrator conceals many facts about her life from her mother, particularly her experience with boyfriends and alcoholic indulgence. Aparna turns so isolated and at times frustrated that she appears to be grudging of complaining soul. When my mother complained to him about how

much she hated life in the suburbs and how lonely she felt, he said nothing to placate her. 'If you are so unhappy, go back to Calcutta' he would offer, making in clear that their separation would not affect him one way or the other. (Hell-Heaven) moreover, the narrator also adopted her father's method of avoiding Aparna where by isolating her doubly.

Aparna thus has no good and true companion or genuine friend. That she has become meaningless to her husband is quite evident from the outset and the one whom she has loved secretly and deeply also denounces her, apart from her own blood that is the narrator, Usha; she is in fact a perfect example of the vicissim of the fractured pattern of diasporic relation and existence Deborah, like Aparna, also suffers the pang of alienation coursed by her inability to understand her husband despite their conjugal life. Aparna has always been apprehensive about the fact that someday Deborah will go out of Pranab's life in presence of an American man, which is common conception among the most Indian about the Americans however it is Pranab who divorces Deborah despite their two children, and marries a Bengali woman, leaving Deborah at lunch to look after the kids.

Here in Jumpa Lahiri's portrays the dirty facets of materialistic stand points as after math of globalization. The confluence of various cultural and social values under the aegis of globalization, unfortunately, transfers man to the level where individual materialistic concern matters more than anything else. Pranab is a typical global materialistic man who denounces his parents to procure the youthful love of Deborah and when she losses her youthful lustre, he denounces her too in order to get another woman of his community. Here too we witness lack of committed relation as in *Unaccustomed Earth*. Pranab is, by nature, flirtiest and fluid in relation, however, those who come in his contact an sober and committed. Both Aparna and Deborah are connected in the parallel game of destiny which leaves them to suffer the pang of alienation throughout their lives.

Alienation is Diasporic realities is mostly the artefact of conflicting personalities since the personalities are shaped by socio cultural values and the immediate milieu, conflict of values over to



convert, might be regarded as the root of alienation. In the contemporary global society everything is tested on the anvil of production and reproduction. It is the productive and reproductive aspect of an object or entity that determines its values and utility and relationship is not imperious to this paradigm. Such paradigm of globalization world couple with de-countered, de-rooted, and displaced realities of life of the Diasporas that accounts for incomprehensible and abysmal alienation of diasporic existence as couched in the above discussion of relation and circumstances of the characters in the story *Unaccustomed Earth and Hell-Heaven*.

Unaccustomed Earth is the earth as its canvas. Bengali is certainly there, but what is always there is a more insistent and deeper awareness in the stories of this volume and life's major problems are raised and answered in these stories, making Lahiri as a writer utterly embroiled in the existential challenges and opportunities of the humanity and practically investing remedies to address most pressing of our time's ills. She says like Hawthorne that the whole of the earth is available for the humanity to explore and cultivate for the purpose of making it habitable. She is aware that this very vast opportunity and promise and possibility and hope are what goal a couple from Bengal to try their fortune in an unknown soil that of America. However she is conscious of what man does to man and how human attitude and behaviour could be changed and humans everywhere would bond better allowing healthier promises to materialize for a more serene, secure and satisfactory future for the species.

Lahiri's 'Nobody business' tells the story of a strange new world of challenges and troubles and unpredicted distress when the protection of the parents in a social family set up stands withdrawn with the death of one's parents. The graduate student Paul who is the hero in this piece is alone in the world after his older adoptive parents passed away. His beautiful Indian house mate is Sangeeta. It is in the affairs of the personal life of Sangeeta that Paul keeps interested and that is something that should not have been his business.

The last three stories- *Once in life time, Year's End, Going Ashore* make up a trilogy. Hema and Koushik tell us about a boy and girl. They are

childhood friends. Their parents knew each other during their first days of being in America. It has Koushik's mother who had helped Hema's mother to get through her pregnancy. After that for several years, the family of the boy, Kaushik moved to Bombay. At her parent's Bengali party when she was six and Koushik was nine they met for the first time. When Koushik was just sixteen years old and a young photographer they met again. His family returned to America to stay for a while again. To say that they loved each other is a matter of guess work. They were family with an intimacy and frankness that bordered on a strong liking of a totally different kind that could not be love in its ordinary sense. Hema and Koushik in this chapter seem to offer an account of star-crossed lovers who despite their hidden personal appreciation for each other do not show that it could not also be love that they definitely needed to keep themselves happy. It stands out that prompt child of those families when they grow up to pursue their careers which would look to promise success of least to the order that the intimate competitions of the parental families indulge in. It is however this hiding from each other even as friends about what intensely and inanimately concern them, as not children and representing their respective families, but as individuals or as personal selves, as emotional beings that leads young people grown up in cultures of mutual intimacy keeps them jealously away from the truth of their real being, from the reality of their being themselves.

Jumpa Lahiri in her *Unaccustomed Earth* seems to have attempted to make it clear to the world at large that the humanity in its custom of perpetuating deficiencies and natures, it all the ways possible has the need to day to set up the cultural of cultures of love only. It is love that has to be realized in the form of the global culture of the humanity in our times. It is for this perhaps that she has in her own characteristic way shown how love heals and ensures a happy life, and when love's basic needs are met in the form of sincerity, honesty, openness of dealing with each other.

Indeed Lahiri's short fiction reflects the experience of diaspora. Though she has never lived anywhere but in America, India continues to form part of her fictional landscape. As most of her



characters have an Indian back ground, Indian keeps cropping up as a setting, sometimes more figuratively the memory of the characters. In *Interpreter of Maladies* the story remains attached to India. All major characters suffer from the feeling of diaspora. The Das family is a visitor to India and theirs is the passage to India. It is a journey of introspection expurgation, and purification. Mrs Das journey to India and there by meeting Kapasi and telling him about her agonized heart is a journey to happiness. India has become a metaphoric presentation of peace whereas Kapasi for interpreter of agony.

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