

## Correspondence Ties among Indian Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*

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### Introduction

This paper aims to observe the relations of Indian Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's second collection of the short story '*Unaccustomed Earth*'. This book represents a unique blend of the hybrid culture of the Bengali diaspora. It becomes important to understand the value of native culture in a foreign country. Indian migrants have impinged upon cultural values and relationships which becomes difficult for them to accept in their personal life. This paper is a review of the cultural domain. According to their conditions, they try to adjust to the new environment, but it has been observed that they remain unsuccessful while entangled between their native culture and host culture Jhumpa Lahiri, being an immigrant writer very deeply narrated all the short stories.

**Keywords:** Correspondence Ties, Cultural Shock, Tensed Relations, Hybrid Culture, Emotional Setback, Spaces.

Through different dimensions, Lahiri has presented the aspects of migration such as these immigrants leading a hybrid lifestyle, a two-way journey in which they unintentionally create spaces. They try to maintain their relations but they face a lot of challenges. Relations among Lahiri's characters are very complex as most of them are married out of their community. In the essay "Culture's In-between, Bhabha states on cultural hybridization in the context of third-world migration:

"The culture which develops on the new soil must therefore be baffling alike and different from the parent culture: it will be complicated sometimes by whatever relations are established with some native race and further by immigration from other than the original

resource. In this way, peculiar types of culture – sympathy and cultural – dash appear.” (Eliot qt. in Bhabha 2010: 54)The above-mentioned statement of Bhabha claims that it is the difference between both, native culture and the new culture, in which the gap remains and can be maintained only by adjustment. The relationship between culture and literature has its roots in different social spheres such as; race, class, language, and gender.

Through this dimension, one can view the web of human relations and their dependency on each other for instance, Indian cultural values in comparison to the American culture gain more importance due to their social importance.

Jhumpa Lahiri's short story '*Unaccustomed Earth*' describes the experience of Indian Immigrants who are stuck between relational ties due to following the native culture emotionally while living in America. Bandyopadhyay says, "The compulsion of a short story is that it must contain one and only one informing idea and that his idea must be worked out to its logical conclusion with absolute singleness of method. Within a defined, limited framework, a short story must throw a flood of light on one central incident." (Bandyopadhyay 57)

This way the protagonist is a middle-aged Indian woman Ruma married to an American boy, Adam. They both fell in love with each other at their first meeting despite their cultural differences they are leading a successful life in a hybrid manner. Migrants like Ruma find that “some new possibilities germinated and bore fruit that would never have been imagined in the seedbed of the homeland.” (Hurvey and Thompson Jr.1). They both have accepted the difference in their national identity, cultural values, and way of living. The harmonious co-existence of diverse cultural representation can be seen very deeply through the next generation, where the kids are getting a hybrid upbringing.

This story narrates Ruma's experience of seeing the world around her as a daughter and mother at the same time. The whole story narrates an incident when her father plans to visit her and stays for a week after his retirement. “The process of family reunification brings permanently settled immigrants together with their immediate or secondary family members within the host society.” (Messina and Lahav 10).

Ruma's father use to work in a pharmaceutical company and due to his job profile he has traveled throughout Europe in this way after retirement traveling became a part of his life, which he accepted but due to this, his daughter feels that he had neglected his family. Now at this stage of his life when his wife is no more, his son has been shifted to New Zealand and his daughter has been married and living far away with her husband he becomes alone and felt neglected. Above all this, he never planned to return to India to see and meet his relatives residing over there. An indefinite space develops in his life that he could not manage in a foreign land.

To come out from the isolation he found that traveling throughout the world was a way out, but the story takes another turn when he met an Indian lady Mrs. Bagchi on his trip to Paris. At the initial stage, they are not much interested to see and meet with each other, but with time they realised that they have some sort of commonness between them such as; both are Bengali diaspora, single, and have no further responsibilities to look after. This way they both decide to travel and overcome the alienation in their life. They do not have any direct relationship but their common interest develops further depth in their correspondence relations.

In the context of migrants, the role of correspondence relations plays a vital role, which needs to be examined in both ways. It is believed that the relationship is a kind of dependency of the first generation to the second generation and vice-versa. Relations as described in the dictionary, "The relationship between two people or groups is how they feel and behave towards each other." (Collins dictionary)

This story shows that it is not so that only children are dependent on their parents but Indians who are trying to adopt the American culture still feel emotional dependency upon their children and they are also dependent upon their kids in the same way. Lahiri represents the true picture of the Indian family with the importance of cultural values. The role of mother and father is quite different and the level of expectations from them are also very high. "It was her father who suggested the visit, calling Ruma as she was making dinner in her new kitchen, surprising her. After her mother's death, it was Ruma who assumed the duty of speaking to her father every evening, asking how his day had gone." (Lahiri 04)

The role of parents becomes more important than any other thing in life. The responsibility of Indian American females are more than Indian American Males, they are busy in their professional life on the other hand females love to maintain their family ties. This is the common belief that, on the whole, men tend to be more different in their responses to persons and situations, to be more goal-oriented, and that their identity depends to a much greater extent than does a woman's on what they do. While a woman nurtures, a man, as Ashley puts it, "tends to construct, i.e., to impose an order on things, whether it is the simple physical fact of initiating pregnancy, providing the home as shelter and protection, or the more spiritual tasks of disciplining the children physically and mentally, or undertaking the work of the wider social order. Where the woman allows the child to grow, the father causes the child to grow." (Ashley 140)

The further story takes us to that end where we give a close look at their entangled relations "The postcards were the first pieces of mail Ruma had received from her father. In her thirty-eight years, he'd never had any reason to write to her. It was a one-sided correspondence; his trips were brief enough so that he was not in a position to receive mail on his end." (Lahiri 04) The above statement proves that their relations were maintained only by postcards which her father feels is a very formal way of communication with his daughter. As he always use to remain on his business trips he use to update his family with a postcard but never expected it in return because his visits were not stable and sending a postcard is a slow process. So, it becomes evident that they do not have a direct mode of communication.

The Relationship between Lahiri's characters is very complex. Ruma is an ambitious Asian American but at the same time, she is very emotional about her relations. She is a lawyer by profession but still prefers to quit her job to look after her child. She sets the example of her mother in front of her for every small and big decision she has to take in her life. She use to think that her parents lead a very satisfactory life with all kinds of comforts, but when she, becomes a mother then she realizes the struggle of her parents. She often thinks that how difficult her mother had raised them in this alien land, where they don't have any helping hand in their bringing up. If a culture ceases to sustain and inspire "through its mores, symbols, models, laws, and rituals, the sanctity of the bond between a man and his wife and a father's involvement with his children, powerful natural forces will inevitably take over in favor of the mother-alone family." (Miller 19)

Lahiri's *'Unaccustomed Earth'* portrays her characters in a way that they move forward and backward. When Ruma got to know about her father's coming to her home she gets tensed on this and shares this news with her husband Adam. He gets happy hearing this news as he was away for a few days on his business trip, so he thinks that it is rather good that Ruma may not feel alone at home. "But Ruma disagreed. It was her mother who would have been the helpful one, taking over the kitchen singing song to Akash and teaching him Bengali nursery Rhymes, throwing loads of laundry into the machine." (Lahiri 06)

The above passage gives information about the helplessness of the Ruma, she became restless and tensed at the news of the coming of her father as she had never spent quality time with her father. So neither she is comfortable nor her father rather she starts thinking that in a place she would be more comfortable with her mother. In comparison with her father, she is closer to her mother. She enjoyed her mother's company but after her mother's death, she could not bear it because at every stage it was her mother who used to stand with her. One can get glimpses of correspondence relational ties here as Ruma was living far away from her mother, still, her mother's presence was in her life, as they both use to stay connected by telephone for hours. They use to discuss almost everything such as preparing dishes, going on trips, and even regarding Ruma's pregnancy and the upbringing of the children.

From casual discussion to any special moment, she relates it with her mother in a comparative manner with her father. Whenever Ruma use to prepare Indian dishes for her family in a western pattern or fast food for her son, her mother use to get surprised and rather scolds her for not preparing enough food for the family. She use to say, "Is that all?" her mother sometimes exclaimed in disbelief on the phone, asking Ruma what she was making for dinner and it was in such moments that Ruma recognized has different her experience of being a wife was." (Lahiri 22)

Initially, Ruma feels that her father is an irresponsible person who hardly takes any irresponsibility and never shares his emotions with his daughter. Ruma gets completely surprised and feels pathetic for her father. "She did understand, for deep down she knew that there was nothing wrong with her father. Though it upset her to admit it if anything he seemed happier now; her mother's death had lightened him, the opposite of what it had done to her." (Lahiri 04)

Perhaps after the changed attitude of Ruma's father, she was trying to figure out his actual mental status. At first, she thought that her father is unhappy due to his isolated lifestyle, but later on, after the revelation of the postcard written to Mrs. Meenakshi Bagchi, she understood that her father had accepted the harsh reality of her mother's death, which Ruma is unable to accept and still stuck in the past. She thinks about her childhood, and youth and sees herself today as a middle-aged woman who is still unable to understand her relations. She observes how relations have changed with time. Love is the greatest remedy for all relations in this world and that has been expressed by Jhumpa Lahiri. This helps her father to move forward in his life, love has only one expression and that is only giving to someone not getting from someone. It shows Human needs only love as a remedy when they feel pain from the inside. Her father does not bother about society and its rituals and strongly favors his personal opinion and freedom.

When she saw the footage of the Indian lady in the videos of her father's trip she just overlooked and could not correlate it to him but on getting the postcard everything becomes clear to her. She judged the behavior of her father during his stay at her home. With his entirely changed behavior, only one question continuously hovers in her mind, Does her father genuinely loves her and his wife or was he leading a practical life? For the whole week, she observed his behavior and notices how lively and freely he is living now as if he was living earlier overburdened and now relieved from all kinds of bondage. On the other hand, Ruma is still carrying those relationships which do not exist. "It did not prove to Ruma that her father had loved her mother, or even that he missed her. And yet he had put it there, honored her before turning to another woman." (Lahiri 59)

Ruma's father has led a very independent life now after retirement he doesn't want to be a burden on his daughter. So, he left her family and wants to lead the rest of his journey of life in the company of unknown people and unknown places. In contrast to her father's opinion, Ruma thinks that the bond of marriage and living with family members is more important than wandering here & there. Her father takes the path-breaking decision to be in the company of Mrs. Bagchi, who has no direct relationship with him. Ruma felt hurt after knowing her father's decision and also felt disrespected by her dead mother. Ruma is emotionally attached to her mother, so she is unable to understand the space, which has been developed in her father's life.

Her father was exhausted with the thoughts of dependency on others, so now he is happy to find the fellow feeling with Mrs. Bagchi. Though they do not have any relation but still willing to maintain correspondence relation and often try to communicate through email and letters. At Ruma's home, there is no shortage of space to live with them, rather it was a very big house, but love can fulfill everything she realized later. As her father had never shared any feelings with Ruma when her mother was alive but after her death he became lively. Cooking, gardening, story telling, and going out with family members had never been a part of his life, so Ruma thinks that he is doing all this because he is retired now and has spare time but in actuality, her father fell in love which gave him the strength to live at the fullest.

A human's feelings for someone to whom he never expresses his love may be seen vividly. It's man's failure that one can't express one's love in front of that person to whom one love much as also seen in Like many other stories of Lahiri This is a story that depicts a father-daughter relationship where writing becomes a source of expression. The relocation of individuals from around the globe has been monstrous. Since the start of the mechanical upheaval, it was proceeded to develop. Numerous social orders far and wide have turned out to be increasingly multicultural over the previous decade. Frequently it is discovered that individuals from creating nations are moving to created nations. India isn't an exemption from this reality. A few families are found to relocate to various created nations with distinct objectives and a bunch of dreams. The moving masses are heterogeneous, comprising researchers, engineers, specialists, medical caretakers, educators, and journalists as well.

## **Conclusion**

This is a social tragedy among middle-class migrants that these cultural barriers come in their way and create a communication gap between relations. Jhumpa Lahiri exposes the ground realities of the social and cultural values which are followed by migrants in foreign countries. Ruma's father felt like discussing with her his liking and friendship with the Indian women but he could not share his real feelings. In place of sharing his life's reality, he preferred to remain silent. Ruma took the same action when she had an opportunity to discuss it with her father, but she silently posted the mail and hides her feelings. A migrant character like Ruma's father has to face such kinds of challenges in their life, this is the harsh reality

that he has no one to share his feelings with. This correspondence relation takes her father to his comfort zone and gave him the motive to live with peace of mind. Lahiri has always been eulogized for presenting various forms of human relationships in her heart-touching short stories. It seems that she has acquired knowledge of every form of human relation. It is a very difficult task to present the complex and perplexing nature of human relations.

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