

The Motif of Isolation in Unaccustomed Earth: Hema and Kaushik

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Abstract

Isolation, alienation, confusion and rootlessness are the perpetual themes in Jhumpa Lahiri's works. She belonged to an Indian immigrant family who born in London and brought up at Rhodes Island, United States of America. She experienced the rootlessness because of the migration so her stories reflect the predicaments of migrants. Her stories hold the harsh reality, struggle and crisis of human life. The geographical moments made the individual has deep psychological and social impact. Jhumpa Lahiri explored the up and downs of the migrants who trapped in the chains of assimilation. This article aims for thematic study Jhumpa Lahiri's story 'Hema and Kaushik' in 'Unaccustomed Earth.'

Keywords: Alienation, Meaninglessness, Crisis, Freedom, Isolation, Human relationship

The last story of 'Unaccustomed Earth' is Hema and Kaushik. The story entangled between reality and illusion of these characters. In the three dimensions of the interconnectedness of the story come on the writer vividly portrayed the helpless characters search for unattainable desires. During the quest of belongingness and fulfilment of desires, the characters lost their happiness. Lahiri's unique power of narration furnished the uncovered picture of failures of human life with universal significance. Catherine Rendon mentions in her reviews in 'World Literature Today' that-

"The tautness of the tale in its entirety is dazzling, even though at moments Lahiri veers into cinematographic shorthand, with the inclusion of recent international tragedies that give the story an epic sweep. Again Lahiri shows a gift for storytelling and conjuring a variety of scenarios and outcomes. Her characters' dialogue is credible, as are their aspirations, even if at times they seem a bit pretentious. Sometimes she also delves into those hidden places we all have, regardless of nationality and upbringing, which define our most compartmentalized selves." (2009)

The three stories could be linked together and turn into a novel but Lahiri's chose to divide the story into three sections. The story crafted which makes it highly meditative. The set of interwoven short stories namely, 'Once in a lifetime,' 'Year's End', 'Going Ashore' provides comprehensive picture of the lives of two characters Hema and Kaushik. The unexpected tones of life create such battles and laws that in the end of story they fail to find solace.

These characters life is dominated by confusion and chaos. They meet failure in the meaningful quest of belongingness. Lahiri enacted the relationship between the two with universal significance by placing them as a subject of reading. They are not part of any fairy tales with happy endings but they are the people from common walk of life with flaws. The lack of communication and disconnection with self-made them the modern human being

without any sense of direction. The traumatic saga of these two characters leads to unconventional ending of the story.

Each story depicts a certain type of loneliness in different ways. For instance in 'Unaccustomed Earth' Ruma with her alienation and his father with Mrs Bagchi who try to distract themselves from their loss. Aparna and Usha in 'Hell-Heaven', both of them struggled to accept the loneliness. Sudha and Rahul of 'Only Goodness' walked through the journey of loneliness and try to survive through it. These characters belong to different spheres of life told the shady dark saga of life that forced the characters to seek for an answer of their existence. The complicated life choices and unfathomable circumstances pushed men to do bottom of their reason to search the true meaning of life.

'Once in a lifetime' is narrated through Hema's pointed view. Hema's family's relationship to the Chaudhry's who relocated to Boston from West Bengal. She addresses Kaushik in the opening lines of the story 'I had seen you before, too many times to count, but a farewell that my family through for yours, at our house in in man square, is when I begin to recall your presence in my life' (Lahiri 223). In 1974 the children's decided to go back to India. The loss of companionship and friendship created strong ties between the both families at that moment. Kaushik's and Hema's mothers had a special bond of sister hood that created an illusion because in that context Hema and Kaushik to be two siblings who raised together. But Hema and his strong attraction for Kaushik. Throughout the story Kaushik's existence in Hema's life was complicated. 'She undergoes a cyclical process of hatred, indifference and love towards him'. There was a sense of doubleness and confusion in the mind of Hema regarding Kaushik. When Kaushik left India, he left winter clothes in Hema's house. Hema inherited those clothes and she expressed her anger 'I had to wear your coat, which I hated so much that it caused me to hate you as a result,' (Lahiri 226). But with time Hema out grows about Kuashik's presence and there was no longer any physical trace in the house. Both the families lost their bond but unexpectedly in 1981, choudhrie's informed that they're going to return to Massachusetts. When Hema heard the news she started recreating Kaushik in her mind, 'as a boy of eight or nine, frozen in time' (Lahiri, 228). She was curious about the physical appearance of Kaushik because she didn't see him for a decade. When Chaudhry arrived, him was surprised for, I had not expected you to be handsome. I had not expected to find you appealing in the least (Lahiri, 232). He was delusional about Kaushik was rejected.

During the stay it he was house for two months the two families created is certain distance due to their diverged habits and different attitude. The difference was connected to the different perspective regarding their roots and cultural practice. The common language, culture and tradition created a strong bond between the two families but on the second arrival of Kaushik's family fail to sustain the same bond with her most family. her most parents were surprised to see the great change in Kaushik's Mother's extravagant western lifestyle. They were astonished by her behaviour when she started smoking, drinking and use English language all the time. She was travelling in the leisure time became very picky in searching new house. Hema observed, 'Somewhere in that cramped house a line was drawn between our two families' (Lahiri 245). And finally Kaushik family moves out from him as house.

Hema likes Kaushik's parents because they are more progressive and modernised then her parents. Mr Chaudhuri helps Hema in writing report for school on ancient Rome. She shared warm relationship with Kaushik's mother. She expressed 'I sensed your boredom. Are you was also nervous at being sent off with you, disturbed by the immediate schoolgirl attraction I failed. I was used to admiring boys by then. 'But never someone as old as you, never someone belonging to the world of my parents'. (Lahiri, 234). Hema was well aware of the

fact that Kaushik has no interest in her. But her desire was that Kaushik she could observe her presence or he could come to know him and like him.

One day during the snowfall the two families came closer in the middle of increasing separation. The two children of the house were cheerful with excitement but the excitement turned into sadness when Kaushik opened up to him about his mother's illness. Kaushik and Hema went to a graveyard where there are six tombstones of the entire family. Hema was horrified to find Kaushik's grave with the name as Emma. The name Emma created terror in her mind as it rhymes with her name. Hema was angry when she learns about the illness of Kaushik's mother. 'I was furious that you had told me, and that you had not told me, feeling at once burdened and betrayed, hating you all over again (Lahiri 251). Hema's double consciousness and confusion regarding her relationship with Kaushik is highlighted in the story. She had a strange attraction towards Kaushik as in adolescence as well as a sense of distance from him. It was partly because Kaushik never showed affection towards her. If the Chaudhuris wouldn't have left Boston then the relationship between them would have taken a different turn. The separation created an illusion in the mind of Hema and it did not give a chance of growth a friendship between Kaushik and her.

The storyteller of 'Year's End' is Kaushik. He possibly addressed Hema throughout the narrative. The narration of Kaushik revealed his feelings towards his mother's demise and his father's unexpected second marriage immediately after her death. It created an existential nausea. 'A diluted version of nauseating sensation that had taken hold the day in Bombay that I learned my mother was dying, a sensation that had dropped anchor in me and never fully left.' (Lahiri, 254). In the first section of the story 'Once in a lifetime' provides understanding from his perspective. But in yours and exposed Kaushik's helplessness regarding his mother's illness and unwanted migration. Hema was unaware about the entire situation of Kaushik. From Hema's point of view Kaushik can be perceived as distant, passive and detached. But the real reason behind Kaushik's detachment was his agony of losing his mother. Mr Chaudhuri deliberately removed all physical traces of Parul where as it was impossible in the part of Kaushik to accept her death.

'Year's End' speaks about the struggle of Kaushik in the new situation when he went to his father's house in North Shore on Christmas his heart was overwhelmed with nostalgic feelings due to the absence of his mother. On the other hand his father found a substitute for his wife. He was unable to cope with the imposed change that brought after his mother's death. He gave up his struggle while living in the house and ran away. Add from the other file.

During the Christmas reunion Kaushik found difficult to adjust with the strangers under the same roof. Kaushik was forced to live in a strange home among strangers. His mother was more progressive and less traditional. But Chitra was traditional. Kaushik's process of adaptation starts with having Indian meal as food. It was difficult for Kaushik to accept Chitra and her daughter's presence in the house while he was struggling in accepting his mother's death. It was difficult to confront his father in this situation and he reveals that 'he is not easy for me' (266). The presence of Chitra creates constant comparison with Parul in Kaushik's mind. He wanted to protect the last trace of his mother while the whole family was forgetting her. It was strange for him to observe the changes in his father's personality and behaviour due to Chitra and her daughters. For Kaushik they were the intruders who attempt to remove all traces of his mother. Though he was sympathetic and repulsed with the presence

of the step sisters. He was sympathetic because his step sisters also lost one parent but that did not compensate for the loss.

The escape of Kaushik was triggered when Rupa and Pihu discovered a shoebox filled with Parul's pictures before the New Year's Eve. The Shoebox is a metaphorical representation of unburied tombstones that is mentioned in 'Once in a lifetime'. That was the last memories of Parul. When Kaushik discovered that his step sisters opened the box he reacted "You have no right to be looking at those," I told them. "They don't belong to you, do you understand?" They nodded, Rupa trembling as if with cold, Piu's lips pressed tightly together.(203)

The unbearable truth came to reality when Kaushik realised that what time everyone is going to forget about his mother. He was so disappointed that he left home and starts five days journey without knowing the destination. "I wanted to remove the pictures from the house, as far as I could. I returned to the guestroom, hastily packed my things, and then got into my car, telling myself that my father and Chitra would be back from their party soon enough. My actions felt spontaneous, almost involuntary, propelled by the adrenaline of a state of emergency, but I realize now that on some level I had been thinking of running away for days. Rupa and Piu never came out of their room, never opened the door to see or question what I was doing, and when I started the car they did not rush out of the house to beg me to stay.(203)

Kaushik could not bear the defeat. He neither get his mother's back nor change his family relationships. He went up to a Cliff in Quoddy Head State Park. It was a landscape full of snow from where he can see the ocean waves. He was unable to interpret his feelings as he faced the harsh reality. He returned to the cemetery where he once went with him. He dug a grave and buried all his mother's photographs. Finally, accepting the fact that she will never come back. He decides to complete his graduation and travel to South America. The story exposed the inner psych of. Kaushik Lahiri publicly described and justified the feelings of nostalgia, helplessness and hatred. Kaushik turned into an orphan after his mother's death because he didn't share an emotional bond with his father. His father on the other hand did not offer any emotional or moral support during the loss but he chose to move on with his life by accepting and you wife and her two daughters. After Parul's death his husband finds another family and her son loses the whole family.

The last story going ashore is told in a third person omniscient narrative style. The word assures is used in the title to suggest Kaushik's search for peace on the site of the sea. It started with Hema who is in her middle ages and works as a teacher in Wellsally City chess Latin language. Rome was a space of freedom for Hema. She stayed alone but he was happy because she was going to get married to Navin in January who is an Indian professor of physics. He intends to move with her to Boston after their marriage. She was assured that she found a solution of her isolation while getting married to an Indian man. She was optimistic 'she felt scared by enabling her to bring a dead world to life to' (99). After her failed relationship with a married man called Julian she decided that she can't be a middle-aged woman without husband and children. The anxiety of living a sad life and death again it could in her reign she found graves in the national Etruscan Museum in Villa Giulia. The story turns into Kaushik live before he arrived in Rome. He explained his plan for the future is a photo journalist. He travelled to Gaza, to the West Bank and many countries. His jaw was to click pictures of crimes and show it to the rest of the world. So is a photograph or he

photographed the dead bodies. He didn't meet his family for yours. He was unable to create bond with other people and failed in relationship with Franca an Italian man. So he went to Rome whose streets still made him think, now and again, of his mother' (307). He accepted a new job offer in Hong Kong as a photo editor. His friend Paola warned him that 'he was making a mistake, warning him that it was death to the photographer (308). But he wanted to move to Hong Kong because there was no other choice for him. It was a coincident that her mind classic met in Rome. The sudden meeting created a new bond connexion that could not left unattended (311). Hema was still attracted towards Kaushik. They shared the events that had affected them for so many years. They talked about the beautiful memories they shared together. They spent four weeks to get rid of the past and think of the future. They again went to the museum where they saw the urns. Hema realised that she has never belonged to any place that way. Kaushik ask her to move with him to Hong Kong and advised her not to marry Navin. She refused Kaushik's proposal because she didn't want to leave her professional career and start a new life in a different setting other than America or Indian. Kaushik accused her to be covered is on that he must start to cry. Kaushik's old feeling of hatred and nostalgia turn into rage when Hema refused to join him in the new venture. Hema goes back to India in order to get married. But Hema didn't stop thinking about Kaushik while shopping for the wedding. She felt a sense of guilt by getting married to Navin will stop when she heard about the terrible tsunami that hit Indian a Shrilanka coasts, she was anxious to find out about Kaushik wellbeing. She checked his website and look for photos but that did not give any help. The next day she checked for the newspaper to find out Kaushik's proof of life but she couldn't find any.

Hema came to know about Kaushik's death when she was unable to find out any of his photographs. She was unable to process her emotions and started to hate Navin. She started to resent her decision and thought about the future with Kaushik.

The appealing part of these three stories is that there is no sense of time and space. First two stories are told to one another by the major two characters without reaching to any conclusion. So the context seems meaningless in these two stories. When Hema and Kaushik meet again in Rome, the last story seemed to make sense for the reader and the characters confess their love to each other indirectly. But that event didn't take the expected turn as they went their separate ways.

The names and the story also hold significant meaning. Hema means 'golden'. Hema lost her gold bangle in the airport just before the death of Kaushik. The loss of gold is considered as sign of a forbidding event. Her husband's name was 'Navin' which means 'new'. She wanted to start a new life with him which is symbolically named. Kaushik mothers name was Parul which means flow of water. When Kaushik drowned in the tsunami he saw 'for a moment, Kaushik saw his mother also swimming, so her body is still vital, a brief blur and decides to swim to the Cove to see his mother he was not afraid (331). Kaushik drowned holding his mother's remains. He dies because of the flow of water. Lahiri skilfully named the characters to give meaning to the story.

Going Ashore, the last story contents the tragic events which are presented in a non-dramatic manner. Hema had the same kind of sense of belongingness and search for identity as Kaushik. After breaking up with Julian, Hema desired to get married. She wanted to escape from the past memories of Julian. Julian did not divorce his wife so Hema turn into his mistress. So him as end ever of settling as a wife remained unfulfilled. So she decided to

marry Navin despite of the fact that she does not have any emotional bond with him. Marriage for her is the only way to escape from loneliness. Her decision of getting married did not show any enthusiasm. The awkwardness is evident.

“Like the young smiling couple sitting affectionately on top of a shared casket, there was something dead about the marriage she was about to enter into. And though she knew it had every chance, over the years, of coming to life, on her way home, in the yellow light of evening, she was conscious only of its deadness.”(Lahiri 301)

When she met Kaushik again in Rome her attraction towards him rekindled. She establishes physical relationship with him. When cautioning asked her to move with him to Hong Kong she refused. She knew that there will be no marriage or absolutely no security of the future of the relationship. So she chose to get married to the strange man from India.

Hema and Kaushik have existential threats. Their lives are isolated existence. Both tried to search for their identity in the alien world. Kaushik tried to escape from the complicated family situation. He could not go put the circumstances after his mother’s death. The isolation depressed him. He travelled away from his country in order to escape from his reality. He experienced ‘But no turbulent emotion passed through me spoke, only a diluted version of the nauseating sensation that had taken hold the day in Bombay that I learned my mother was dying, a sensation that had dropped anchor in me and never fully left.’(Lahiri 254)

Hema’s life was also covered with darkness of isolation. Hema was confused regarding her relationship with caustic. She was not married till her late 30’s. She went to roam in search for her one identity. She wanted to free herself from the past and future.

Jhumpa Lahiri explored the relationship of self-understanding and identity in the story. The character’s confusion, lack of communication and detachment lead to separate ways. Their wish and circumstances didn't match in their favour. Kaushik buried his happiness and flee from himself. His ‘self’ hunted him so he never settled in one place, death succumbed his struggle in the end. The story of ‘Hema and Kaushik’ revolves around the failed attempts of unite and reunite of these characters. The structure demands to interpret the story with the theme of conflict. The distance between the characters forecast the unsettling in emotional intimacy. Hema was haunted by the absence of Kaushik. Hema’s expectation for same attachment from classic left her in the sense of otherness.

The title of the story Hema and Kaushik are symbolically revealing the disconnection and detachment although protagonists. The title ‘Once in a lifetime’ speaks of the rare occasion or the limited time the protagonists spend time with each other. The next story ‘Year’s end’ holds the major events of the story. During the end of the year Kaushik’s mother passed away and the death took the happiness of Kaushik. This title's carries a sense of lost opportunities and the sense of decay. ‘Going ashore’ holds a metaphor for life .it provides a new hope .but ironically Kaushik didn't reach ashore but died in tsunami. Though, Kaushik’s search for stability ended with his death. The forwarding death echoed in the whole story. Hema stepped into a dead marriage. Kaushik reporting on crime, mostly deals with the photographs of dead bodies will stop the encounter of urns in the Museum by Hema are the instances of that presented in the story.

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own trouble. He was self-hunted by his own loss so he never settled in one place; death succumbed to his entire struggle in the end. The story of him an encaustic revolves around the failed attempts of unites and reunites. The structure demands to interpret the story with the theme of conflict. The distance between the characters forecast the unsettling in emotional intimacy. Hema was haunted by the absence of Kaushik. Her expectation for some attachment from Kaushik left her in the sense of otherness.

Hema has confusion regarding the boundaries that wrapped her in cycle of life and death. she was in self-denial and questioning every advancement in life. It made her repulsive. Her distance and attachment towards Kaushik throughout the story is evident. She knew that Kaushik would never settle in one place. Hema says “You belonged elsewhere she concludes. Encapsulating his refusal to be moored in one place or in home is see is and feels he needs to be “ (Lahiri 236)

The meeting of Hema and Kaushik is mysterious from the beginning. The attraction between them remains unresolved and unsettled. They met again and again due to play off the destiny but did not form a strong bond with each other. Both of them accepted the distance which was a permanent entity in their lives. Kaushik didn't change his choices due to his closeness towards Hema in the later part of the story. He wanted to pursue his job in Hong Kong on the other hand Hema craved for security in life. So Hema chose to go to India and get married to Navin. Loss was the constant companion of Kaushik. Kaushik became a homeless wanderer after his mother's death. ... “He never fully trusted the places he had lived, never turned to them for refuge. From Childhood, he realized now, he was always happiest to be outside, away from the private detritus of life.“ Kaushik's father started being indifferent towards him. So he distant himself from his father. Kaushik developed a sense of detachment. He double loved an inability to settle in one place. This instability also reflected in his several relationships. There was no place of commitment or connection in his life. He didn't have strong bond with anyone. Kaushik fell to free himself from the haunting memory of his mother. In the last paragraph the story when caustic was about to die, he could see his mother will stop the tsunami took Kaushik who left nothing behind. Lahiri presented the pessimistic side of life which does not give a chance for a happy ending.

The text also throws light on the identity of characters in a hybrid cultural setting. The traditional thing goes clutched their route traditions and culture on the other hand the new born generation in the host country tries to identify them as per American tradition. In both the cases, the original tradition is not vivid. The new generation remain confused because they tried to find out a way in between two completely contrast cultures. They lived between two different subcontinents. In the story ‘Unaccustomed Earth’ Ruma grew in a setting of both English and Bengali. But she seldom spoke in Bengali. She was born in America but raised with Bengali values. Her physical features identify her to be different than white American woman. She is Independent, strong and wealthy. But she felt distant from the root culture as well as never identify herself as a pure American. Therefore ,her identity remain vogue .

In ‘Hema and Kaushik’ but there is a reflection of clash between American and Indian thinking. Hema describes the old Indian in sleeping arrangement in there new house. “ my mother considered the idea of a child sleeping alone accrual American practise and therefore did not encourage it, even when we had the space. She told me that she had slept in the same bed as per parents until the day she was married and that this was perfectly normal. But I knew that it was not normal, not what my friends at school did, and that they would ridicule

me if they knew. The summer before I started middle school, I insisted on sleeping alone.” (229)

Hema was afraid to sleep in the perfect silence in the darkroom but still she didn't confess her fear. Hema is raised as per Indian norms. Hema's mother belonged to a humble background. She never ate food on a table or used a commode. Therefore Hema grew with the fears of failure and Inferiority. She try to balance between her freedom and Social Security. Her mas belonging Ness is evident when she says quote I envy them.... I have never belonged to a place that way”(320).

Reshmi Dutt and Ballerstadt wrote that ‘Lahiri’s female characters, for example Hema, travel is a form of liberation; it creates a sense of intentional foreignness that is different from the feelings of dislocation felt at “home” in the United States or on visits to India’ (170). In the between of being Indian an American him or finds her home in Italy. In her Rome days it is observed that she found a sense of liberty in Rome. Lahiri descried

“Now she was free of both of them, free of her past and free of her future in a place where so many different times stood cheek by jowl like guests at a crowded party. She was alone with her work, alone abroad for the first time in her life, aware that her solitary existence was about to end. In Rome she savoured her isolation, immersed without effort in the silent routine of her days. ... Like Calcutta, which she'd visited throughout her childhood, Rome was a city she knew on the one hand intimately and on the other hand not at all – a place that fully absorbed her and also kept her at bay. “(299)

Hema choose the unpredictable route buy deciding to get married to an Indian man. She was the dutiful daughter, mistress to a married man and bride often arranged room. It was a conscious choice in her part to marry an Indian man.

The experience of immigrant is context specific. Therefore, it provides space to compare and differentiate the same community in diverse settings. The ethnic groups feel distinct and what is your from their existence, continue their identity by employee their tradition in material culture such as food habits, clothes end behaviour. They do not change the religious beliefs, habits, tradition and lifestyle being in a different culture. So we find bear identity a produced and reproduced and they are in the process of constant transformation.

Unaccustomed Earth synthesizes the intense despair and alienation of the immigrants. They were dislocated and wandered between the two worlds without any knowledge about their future. Michiko Kakutani in his review of Unaccustomed Earth articulated that

“Startled two countries, two cultures and belong fully to neither. it’s a typical Jhumpa Lahiri narrative about Bengali immigrants challenges to build is stable life for themselves in an unaccustomed earth. The left behind their comfort and family members in the native. Lahiri presented from both male and female point of view of the changes, loss, struggle and existential crisis of these immigrants. See has an eye for telling details about the Indian immigrants and the circumstances they went through in the process of displacement.”(2008)

Tasha Robinson calls the book as ‘a symphony of eight moments’ because the eight stories projected eight different pictures. The versatile writer offered the vast picture of lives of the characters articulating their struggle from their childhood to death. Their constant struggle of finding the true meaning of their existence or their failed attempts of to find their identity is the main theme of the stories. Immigrant’s lives are more challenging from the native. The have to adapt and adjust with new surroundings, people and culture. They tried to preserve

their native tradition in a new setting that creates confusion and comes in their way of adapting the host culture. They are considered as ‘unique’ or ‘other’ by the host country. The immigrants tried to create their own identity or some tried to free themselves from their root identity. The complexity of life is presented by Lahiri in each story of *Unaccustomed Earth*.

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