

Jhumpa Lahiri's Short Stories; Thematic Perspectives

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Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri's modern approach is evident in her Themes as well as narrative style. The themes of Jhumpa Lahiri focusing on identity, alienation, Isolation and diaspora in the fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri. Lahiri's works are concerned with diasporic postcolonial situation of the Indians and Indian – American who are caught between two identities and two cultures. The present study emphasizes a handful of Diasporic writers and their work which are significant to readers.

In 1993, in his ground -breaking book culture and imperialism, Edward w. said noted that it is -one of the unhappiest characteristics of the age to have produced more refugees, migrants, displaced persons and exiles than ever before in History.

Keywords; Diaspora, Identity, postcolonial, Displacement, Migration, now hereness.

Introduction

The central theme of all of Lahiri's works including Interpreter of Maladies are the difficulties that immigrant Indians face in relating to Americans and the ways in which Indian Americans are caught in the middle of two very different cultures. When we start turning the pages of Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies, we learn quite a few details about where the Das Family fits into this culture divide.

As the title story advances, we come to know that Mr. And Mrs. Das was both born and brought up in America, though their retired parents have now moved to India to live. The couple often come to India, bringing the children with them. They are Indian but not of India and their dressing ,their conduct and manners are All American .Though Mr. Kapasi recognizes some common culture heritage ,the spouses are Alien to India than any other tourist.

Mr. Das is completely dependent on tourist guidebook to tell him about the country through which they are travelling, and Mrs. Das could not be more uninterested in her surroundings if she tried. Although India is their parental home, Mr. And Mrs. Das are foreigners. Mr. Das even seems to take pride in his status as a stranger, telling Mr. Kapasi about his American roots with an -air of sudden confidence Although Mr. Kapasi and the Dases do share an Indian heritage ,their marriages reveal the extent of how different their culture really are .Mr. Kapasi believes that he can relate to Mrs. Das's unhappy marriage because his own marriage life is un happy. However, the relation fails because the marriage system of both the cultures has a huge difference ..This lack of

understanding reflects a different understanding of duty and family between the two cultures

These lines appear in the second paragraph of the story and highlight one of the story's central themes: the difficult of communication, particularly between Indians and Indian Americans. Here the narrator narrates emphasizing in which they are and are not Indian. After Mr. Dass calls Mr. Kapasi's job -romantic, Mr. Kapasi's begins to daydream about how they will become great friends. The daydreamer, however will never come to pass. Mr. Kapasi fails to see the real identity and attributes Mrs. Dass and vice versa and there is no way to bridge the gap between them and any sort of genuine relation. The truth is that there is no hope for a correspondence, much less a friendship. When his address flutters out of her handbag, ending all possibility of their ever communicating, Mr. Kapasi has already realized the impossibility of his fantasies. Another Collection of short stories, *Unaccustomed Earth* also portrays this aspect. Jhumpa Lahiri's second collection of short stories finds her at the rising apex of her literary career. Five stories comprise the first part; three stories, featuring the same central characters comprise the second part. The children often born in the United States, are more connected to the states. The Bengali culture is slipping away with each succeeding generation. Parents consider India as home, while the children only endure those repeated trips back there. Home for children is where they now live, a home with new languages, dress.

The title story takes its theme from a brief quote from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Custom-House*: "My children will have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortune may be within my control, shall strike their roots into Unaccustomed earth." Ruma's father nurtures a deep relation with his grandson through the planting of a garden, Ruma reconnects with her father, asking him to move in with her family. But he did not want to be part of another family, part of the mess, the feuds, the demands, and the energy of it.

This first story introduces a minor theme of these stories: the loss of one's mother and its impact on the lives of those who survive. In the first, the father is released from the responsibilities associated with family life. In a choice of accommodation, Amit feels his parents have left him years ago. Now, as he and his American wife Megan return to his prep school for reunion, he tells a stranger that their marriage has disappeared. Just as they choose the place where they stay for the weekend, they make Accommodation in their lives.

Unaccustomed Earth creates a beautiful literary journey that clearly illustrates the sagacity of Jhumpa Lahiri's writing, her sense of community, her ability to create an imagined world as real, as joyous, as painful as life. Jhumpa Lahiri's personal experience of growing up in an immigrant community has been widely utilized in her writing career. Living in-between two different cultures as a child of Indian migrants who had settled in the United States, Lahiri's, too, has had to struggle with a split identity. Jhumpa Lahiri's personal experience of growing up in an immigrant community has been widely utilized in her writing career. Living in-between two different cultures as a child of Indian migrants who had settled in the United States, Lahiri, too had to struggle with a split identity. Lahiri's sense of alienation, both from her American friends and her own parents, evolved eventually into one of the most dominant themes in her fiction.

In *Unaccustomed Earth*, her second story collection, Lahiri explores the theme of migration and Displacement with her typical poetic style and immense emotional involvement. The title of the collection is taken from a passage of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Custom-House* Suggesting that

transplanting people into new soil might, in fact, be beneficial; Yet Lahiri's stories are often dominated by an omnipresent sense of loss and security. Lahiri's well thought-out narratives strategies, conjoining the stories of the children with those of their parents, are implicitly explained in one of the stories.

In *Hell-Heaven* the narrator discusses her relationship with her mother while growing up, yet at the same time it unveils the tragic story of her immigrant's mother living in a foreign country and in an unsatisfying marriage. The title story introduces the same principal, it tells about the thirty eight yrs.-old Ruma, now expecting second child with her American Husband who is visited by her recently widowed father in her home in Seattle. The visit occupies the central space in the story. The father's stay uncovers Ruma's personal problems leading to an identity crisis and the reader gradually discovers that her cultural background plays a very crucial role in her life that she is willing to acknowledge. During the week-long visit, feared by both sides, Ruma and her father scrutinize each other; yet neither of them is willing to talk openly about their relationship and future plans. Ruma's father, who remains nameless till the end of the story, gradually realizes how much his daughter resembles his deceased wife as the difference between mother and daughter gradually blur and disappear. Exhausted by motherly duties and her second pregnancy, Ruma shuts herself in the monotonous world of domestic chores, following her motherly example. Ruma's social isolation and her preference for solitude, which inevitably leads to her discontentment and frustration contrast immensely with her father's socializing and travelling adventures. Ruma's father is painfully aware of his daughter's worries and unhappiness

Unlike her father, who was always prone to assimilation in certain matters, Ruma's mother represented the cultural anchor in the family -she had kept wearing her saris and jewels all the time, had spoken only Bengali with her Children, had created a circle of Bengali friends, and had regularly visited Calcutta to meet their relatives. Ruma is aware of the fact it was her mother who would have stuck out in this Net Northern landscape while her father resembled an American in his old age.

Despite Ruma's drifting away from her Bengali roots, she is painfully aware of a certain loss. her three-yr. old son Akash, -a perfect synthesis of Ruma and Adam(22) speaks only English hates Indian food and has no memory of her mother. The fragile connection to her present, past and to Akash's roots as well, is slowly disintegrating. Not even Adam her successful American husband, is able to provide the necessary consolation. The image of Ruma's desolate background garden become one of the central symbol of the story. This subtle image of transformation is paralleled by Ruma's and her father's different approaches to their lives. Ruma's, who is stuck at the same place, in the same worn-out soil, withers while her father, who refuses to settle down and establishes a new relationship (with Mrs. Bagchi) thrives. At the end, however in her garden, Ruma accepts the fact that her father has moved on; yet the question of Whether she will be able to do the same remains unanswered.

Similarly, *Hell- Heaven*, story in the collection which might remind the reader of Mrs. Sen's from *Interpreter of Maladies*, explores a complicated parent-child relationship. The narrative perspective shifts to the more personal, first person voice of the, already adult, daughter Usha, who recounts the pathetic narrative of her mother as she recollects, it from her childhood memories. An arranged Bengali marriage and subsequent emigration to a foreign country have

placed the protagonist of the Story ,Usha’s mother Aparna into a no-win situation .With a stranger by her side ,with whom she has almost nothing in common ,Arpana’s sense of isolation and loneliness threaten to escalate .But the accidental meeting with another Bengali, Pranab Chakra borty (called Pranab Kaku by the 7 yr. Old Usha) triggers her vitality and restores the balance in her life.

Pranab appears to be very opposite of Aparna’s husband. The shared love for music, film, poetry, common memories of their neighborhood in Calcutta, the Willingness to listen to her and spend time with her, make him an ideal partner. Usha, who begins to understand the intensity and the reason for her mother’s transformation only year later, become part of an illusionary harmonious family which exists, however, only in Arpana’s mind. Pranab’s influence on Usha’s mother, of which he is unaware, is symbolically reflected in one of the pictures made during their small trip;

Arpana’s Place in Pranab’s life is, however, soon supplanted by his fellow student Deborah, an American girl who is complete antithesis of Usha’s mother who eventually become his wife. Deborah’s presence violates the already established harmony in Arpana’s life and she perceives Pranab’s decision to marry an American as an act of betrayal. Usha, who falls in love with Deborah as well, unconsciously triggers her mother’s disintegration. This double betrayal is symbolically preserved in the pictures from their trips-Arpana being substituted by Deborah -thus creating a new illusion of a harmonious family. Only years later does Usha find out that her mother’s desperation led to an unsuccessful suicidal attempt. Hell-Heaven ,in this respect ,unveils the arduous migrants, condition .The uprootedness and displacement result in a personal crises which threatens the very life of the migrant in this case .

Most of the short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri portray a sense of fragmentation and rootlessness. An appraisal of a few of her stories here will give a perspective of his fragmentation and rootlessness. Mr. and Mrs. Das are not happy couple. Mr. Kapasi describes them as acting like brother and sister. The husband sticks his nose in a travel guide and ignores the family as much as he can.Mrs. Kapasi is not only a travel guide but an interpreter of maladies. He works for doctor that does not understand the language and interprets for the patient what he is suffering from. During the ride, Mrs. Das shows an interest in Mr. Kapasi when he tells her about his second job. she seems to give the job a prestige that Mr. Kapasi does not readily understand. She includes him in the family picture and even asks for his address to send a copy.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s characters tend to be immigrants from India and their American-reared children, exiles who straddle two countries, two cultures, and belong to neither: too used to freedom to accept the rituals and conventions of home, and yet too steeped in tradition to embrace American mores fully. These Indian- born parents want the American Dream for their children. But they are cautious about the pitfalls of life in this alien land, and isolated by their difficulties with language and customs. Many of the characters in these stories seem to be in relationship that are filled with silence and blackholes. Like many children of immigrants Ms. Lahiri’s characters are acutely aware of their parents’ expectations; that get into an Ivy League school, go to med school or grad school, marry someone from a good Bengali family. MS. Lahiri shows how some of these children learn to sidestep, even defy their parent Wishes. But she also shows how haunted they remain by the burden of their families’ dreams and their awareness of their role in the generational process of Americanization

Their parents often seem so exhausted just coping with the difficulties of surviving in a strange new world that talk about self-fulfillment or depression or happiness seems utterly irrelevant to them ; they are strangely pragmatic and unsentimental about their marriages, their work. These characters ‘American -born children are, at once, more romantic about the possibilities of finding genuine love and rewarding careers and more cynical too about the trajectories of most people’s lives. Often cast in the role of facilitator or fixer ,they are accustomed to serving as their parent’s ‘go-between and to easing their younger siblings’ way into full-fledged American lives.

The last three overlapping tales in this volume tell a single story about a Bengali-American girl and a Bengali -American boy, whose crisscrossing lives makeup a poignant ballad of love and loss and death. Hema and Kaushik get to know each other as teenagers, when Kaushik’s family comes to stay with Hema’s parents while they house-hunt in the Boston suburbs. Hema secretly-nurses a crush on Kaushik, but he is oblivious to her schoolgirl antics and preoccupied with his mother’s deteriorating health. His grief over her death and his rage at his father’s hasty remarriage will propel him into a career as a photojournalist, who spends most of his time travelling to war zones into distant parts of the globe.

Hema, meanwhile, becomes a professor, a Latin scholar, who after a long ,unhappy love affair impulsively decides to opt for a traditional arranged marriage ;through she is conscious of the deadness of this proposed partnership ,she tries to convince herself that the relationship will endow her life with a sense of certainty and direction. Then, against all odds, Hema and Kaushik run into each other in Rome on the eve of Hema’s departure for her wedding and embark on an intense, passionate affair. And yet it is an affair that conclude not with a fairy-tale happy ending but with an operatic denouement that speaks of missed opportunities and avoidable grief.

In the hand of a less talented writers it’s an ending that might have seemed melodramatic or contrived, but as rendered by Ms. Lahiri it possesses the elegiac and hunting power of tragedy – a testament to her emotional wisdom and consummate artistry as a writer.

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