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Cultural and Personal Isolation in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novels

Poulami Malakar

Ph. D Research Scholar,
Utkal University, Vani Vihar.

&

Dr. Prajna Paramita Panigrahi

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Abstract:

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most influential Indo-American writers. She is the child of an immigrant and multiculturalism. Jhumpa Lahiri represents the female quandary in diaspora. She also explores the ideas of cultural isolations, personal isolations and identities. This paper aims to identify the aspects of Indian diasporic feminism and highlights the double marginalization, patriarchal dominance, sexuality, sacrifice, tolerance, acceptance, agonize, hardship, trauma, affliction, dolour, forgiveness, courage, love and care, passive suffering, displacement, migration, cultural resilience and diasporic consumption. The study analyses the four major works of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, *The Lowland*, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth*.

Keywords: Diaspora, feminist approach, culture, patriarchal Society, Identity, Cultural Isolation, Immigration and human relationships.

This study attempts to explore the female authority in a patriarchal society, cultural and personal isolation in Jhumpa Lahiri's selected Novels. The analysis intends to explore the suffering, tolerance, sadness and torment in the lives of immigrant Indian women as well as their struggle to establish their distinctiveness in a new world. It also sheds light on the Identity of diasporic, natural, cultural and personal isolation, particularly focusing on female identities in a patriarchal society. This paper attempts to explore and examine the concern of dislocation and cultural isolation. Diasporic experiences are linked to the culture, history, old traditions, society, lifestyle, duties, customs and practices of the individuals.

In the age of globalization, there cultural dissemination has taken place to another place and one cannot think in terms of a notion of pure culture. The women writers of the modern era explore various stage of feminine subjectivity, addressing themes that range from childhood to complete womanhood. These Indian women writers believe that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of woman. Great writers like Sashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Hariharan, Arundhati Roy, Markandeya and Jhumpa Lahiri captured the spirit of Indian culture and its traditional values in their works. Most of these female novelists are known for their audacious views that reflected in their novels.

Jhumpa Lahiri's first and foremost novel *The Namesake* arranges the inner space between two locations, cultures, identities and two generations. This Novel tries to identify the oneness and inequalities that explain self identity and the drift towards a trans-cultural, transnational identity. This paper proposes to address the complexity of identity arising from the use of a foreigner's name for a second generation Bengali boy, Gogol, who was born in America. A Bengali boy with a foreign name would not have been very unusual in colonial and post-colonial Bengal and would not have caused any cultural disturbance either, but in a foreign land even with a Bengali name, it is very difficult to build a strong identity. In *The Namesake* she describes the lives of two generations of an immigrant Bengali family, the Gangulis in America. It could also be said that in diaspora Literature. Identities of Individuals are connected to the space that they occupy and negotiate and some questions are arrives like does the character of Gogol have ever found out the real significance of Nikolai Gogol in his father's name. Here the question of identity has been a source of conflict and has led to wars throughout history. However it is more stubborn for those who have grown up in two worlds concurrently. Jhumpa Lahiri's novels present how immigrants face cultural and personal difficulties in foreign lands. Lahiri represents the loneliness and isolation in the lives of immigrants by portraying the critical situation. She describes the dislocation in the lives of Indians who are settled in abroad. She has characterised the lives of those who dwell in foreign land, leaving their respective families behind and enduring a permanent state of expectation and longing. Gogol realised how his parents had lived in America despite the challenges they faced. Gogol wanted to correct the name given to him by his father, but he could not correct his life. His life was a failure and his marriage was a mistake. He could change his name but he could not change the events that happened in his life. The name that Gogol always despised and hated eventually vanished. Being called Nikhil, however, did not

bring happiness to him either. In the end he realised that identity is more important than a name. *The Namesake* continually focuses on the contrasting experiences of two generations of proficiency. This novel gracefully explores the nostalgia, acculturation and contra-acculturation of Indian immigrants and it shows the cultural challenges faces by Asima and Gogol in American multicultural background. Like them, many Indian migrants face similar difficulties with cultural isolation, but they strive to adjust to the available culture in America.

Interpreter of maladies represents the crucial space between home and the world. The world is the external, domain, the realm of the marital, while home represents the inner spiritual self and true identity. When a person is away from their homeland for some time and cannot identify themselves with that land, their true identity stays rooted elsewhere. The psychological dislocation experienced by immigrants can cause their children to similarly feel a sense of alienation. In Jhumpa Lahiri's work, she consistently explores the experience of first and second generation immigrants who struggle to establish their own identities in a foreign land through her character. Their feelings of displacement from their homeland often lead them to a concerned state while they attempt to recreate a sense of home in an unfamiliar place. *Interpreter of maladies* delineates the anxieties and challenges faced by Bengali immigrants caught in the complexities of identity within an alien culture. *Interpreter of Maladies* aims to identify the primary barriers that prevent both Indian and American characters, immigrants alike, from navigating their differences effectively. This study discusses a less theorised subject: the failure to process cultural differentiation despite increasingly individual mobility. The present discussion depends on several studies that discuss specific features of East and West cultures. These findings are helpful in accounting for a sequence of cultural isolation. Moreover the cultural isolation is proof of the difference between Indian and American conceptions of identities. Jhumpa Lahiri's work focuses on cultural and personal identities among migrant and non-migrant characters from both Indian and American cultures, spanning different generations. Most of her characters fail to communicate across cultures and grasp to cultural differences, struggling to cross cultural borders despite their fascination with other cultures. In Jhumpa Lahiri's collection of short stories, she articulates the issues and barriers caused by cultural tension. One of her short story "Mrs Sen's" explores themes of dislocation and emotional isolation. This story is about lady Mrs Sen, who holds onto her homeland tradition while feeling separated from American culture. She continually attempts to construct a new identity through

her cooking. She presents her traditions and innocence in a new cultural environment admits confusion. Mrs Sen always misses her old life in India. Each time, she vividly portrays her growing sense of isolation, highlighting the loneliness and cultural disconnection of Mrs Sen in a foreign land. She went to the United States for a better life, but she consistently lived unhappily there, struggling to establish a new identity in immigrant society and unable to reconcile American culture with her Indian culture. *Interpreter of Maladies* deals with the trauma of immigrant life underscored by four of her short stories that depict a mislaid conception of idealized America. Identity has always been problematic in a foreign land however it is even more so culturally displaced persons, those who yearn for the familiarity of their surroundings while navigating unfamiliar territory in search of their true identity. In *The Lowland*, Lahiri takes pain to develop the character of Gouri as the novel progresses. The questions need answering in her life. Was it right to go against her family and marry Udayan? Was it right to wed for convenience and not love? Was it right not to want to be Bela's mother? Was it right to alienate herself from Subash, the very man who showed her a way to freedom? Did she use two brothers only for her freedom? Was Subash partially responsible for her unhappiness? Was it right to suddenly want back the people she had left any of her desire justified? Did she explore the complex cultural encounters and navigate emotional imbalance in relationships between parents and children, lovers, siblings, husband and wife and determination of identity in general. As a Diaspora writer, Lahiri navigates the complexities of multicultural society, exploring theme of native identity and the formation of new identities in adopted country. She also explores theme of acclimatization and contra-acculturation experienced by the second generation Indian-Americans. Jhumpa Lahiri shows how the second generation can acculturate in to the new country, embracing its socio-cultural values, while also experiencing a sense of nostalgia for Indian culture and sensibilities, along with feelings of alienation and up rootedness. She discloses the different aspects of diasporic experiences and how these experiences further deviate into perpetuation and appropriation under the sway of globalization, which is a challenge to cultures, to marginalized communities and their identities. Most of the women characters in her stories belong to diasporic communities and face cultural dilemmas. In her novel, first generation migrant women of diaspora are in constant search of their identity and nevigate as if they are thrown into an unsuitable universe. In Jhumpa Lahiri's work, feminine identity is often more profoundly affected by culture compared to masculine identity due to women's strong cultural

ties to their ancestral land. The second generation forms distinct identities that need to be understood based on of their psychological assessment. She exemplifies women's conformist attitude to the patriarchy. She reveals the patriarchal niche of women as a defender of native culture. In Jhumpa Lahiri's works, first generation immigrant women are often subjected to patriarchal marginalization. She not only presents a feminist insight into patriarchal values but also prescribes a balance between tradition and modernity as a working philosophy for the contemporary woman. She often correlates her characters cultural isolation with extreme personal isolation, suggesting that the cultural isolation causes the personal. *The Lowland* revolves around the profound impact of absence centred on a small place in the world. In this place Udayan fits but his loved ones must navigates their lives around this absence, his brother, parents, wife and the unborn daughter. *The Lowland* is different in that the isolation experienced by Subash, Gouri and Bela does not originate from American culture, but rather from their shared displacement with in Calcutta. In Calcutta, everyone knows Udayan and his fate, but in America, there is anonymity and a blank obscurity that allows for a certain mental clarity.

Jhumpa Lahiri elucidates in her works how the Indian American mother plays a pivotal role as a backbone of an Indian household, while also nurturing children who can successfully maintain a dual sense of identity as both Indian and Americans. Although this text focuses on Lahiri's novels, the role of the Indian American mother here is similar to the mother figure encounters in *Unaccustomed Earth*. *Unaccustomed Earth* symbolises both new territory and the descendants of immigrants struggling with the challenge of preserving their roots and culture admits their family's journey. In *Unaccustomed Earth* the central characters face significant challenges in merging their identities and adapting to new environment far from their family's native homes. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel; explores the lived experience of diasporic subjects as represented in her writings. It will show how an individual's life can necessarily get mixed up and messed up.

Jhumpa Lahiri explores the ideas of cultural and personal isolations and identities through various characters and her novels. Lahiri is handles of the complexities of immigrant experiences in an articulate and straightforward manner, closely analyzing the cross-cultural conflicts between Indian and Western cultures. She successfully explores the myriad landscape of human relationships by connecting the theme of immigration and displacement to that of

human relationships against the backdrop of both geographical and emotional Displacement. *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* explore the ideas of cultural and personal isolations through stories draw from Lahiri's Indian background, projecting the lives of second generation Indian Americans like Lahiri herself. Dissention in relationships between couples, families, and friends is portrayed in *Interpreter of Maladies* and *the Namesake*. She correlates her characters' cultural isolation with intense personal isolation suggesting that the cultural isolation caused the personal. Multiculturalism is a tool for justice that can help resolve many differences among various cultural communities, including minorities. Edward Said writes that Culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought. As Mathew Arnold put it in the 1860, Arnold believed that culture palliates, if it does not altogether neutralizes, the ravage of a modern, aggressive, mercantile and brutalizing urban experience. Living and writing in multicultural societies, abroad affects Indian writers at multiple levels influenced by both their native cultures and the culture of their adopted country.

Some writers, like Bharati Mukherjee, discard their diasporic identity and get assimilated into the foreign land. In contrast some others like Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banarjee, Divakaruni etc continue to write characters and stories that explore diasporic experiences. These Writers often perceive the entity of the foreign country as a social construct, a combination of feelings, consciousness, memories, mythologies, eagerness, dreams, hope, desire, aspiration as well as allegorical and virtual elements. Both *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* contain themes of conflict in relationships between couples, families and friends. Through these relationships Jhumpa Lahiri explores ideas of isolation and identity, encompassing both personal and cultural dimensions. Jhumpa Lahiri compares herself to Gogol. Even though both maintain ethnic identity, their self-identification as migrants has dwindled. However, unlike Jhumpa Lahiri, who intertwines with Gogol through her unique style of storytelling, Gogol feels insecurity both in his home land. As the Novel ends, however, Gogol learns that the answer is not to entirely abandon or attempt to diminish either culture, but to integrate the two together.

Lahiri represents a world bound by social and tradition norms within the context of the modern world. Women have subjected to oppression from the moment they entered the world,

expected to follow the patriarchal norms and family relentlessly set the family. The women have been expected to endure all sorts of repressions and suppressions in the name of family honour and for the excellent name of the children. Women's sexuality and their experience of pain, suffering, affliction, happiness, joy, gratification, pleasure, love or sorrow, desire, dream, hope or respect which were often regularly ignored. Jhumpa Lahiri highlights their inferior position and the subsequent humiliation in a culturally dominated society. Lahiri explores the cross-cultural experiences of dislocated women and their simultaneously psychological and experiential conditions of belonging in the maze of cultural multiplicity and plurality. The issues of identity and cultural clashes have already been extensively explored in her novels. She analyses the issue of cultural encounter specifically from the perspective of women's identity approaching to this issue through feminist literary theory, yet it remains a natural aspect of her narrative. Jhumpa Lahiri has luminously described the difficulties of uprooted individuals through her novel; Lahiri is concerned with the lives of Indian immigrants in America. The experience of uprooting, cultural isolation, personal isolation, human relationships and existential problems, ordinary issues are visibly dealt with her novels. Her novels go through the theme of isolation. Lahiri represents the problem and struggle of Bengali immigrants in America not only when interacting with the host but also the issue within the family and their innermost disturbance. She reveals how the individuals who left their homeland, despite being fascinated by the move, struggle to adapt and stay interconnected. However in the end Jhumpa Lahiri shows that all migrants wanted their routes over time and it is not inevitable that they should settle in the country of their origin.

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