

## **Exploration of the antagonistic experiences of an Indian woman in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Jhumpa Lahiri is among the most distinguished Indo-American writers. As a writer from the diaspora, she brings her remarkably contemporary Indian sensibility to other countries and skillfully expresses it via her work. Lahiri could depict the characters in the perspective of both native and alien culture, as she is herself a product of immigration and multiculturalism. Jhumpa Lahiri, deeply affected by the value of family ties and attachment to relatives back home, has had the anguish of not being able to define herself in the new country, where she would never feel like she belongs. Self-imposed exile and shifted realities are in many respects a disaster, they serve as a catalyst for her writing and help her to become a talented fiction writer. She is a well-known young Indian writer who serves as a sort of archetype for the plight of women in the diaspora. She investigates the concepts of identities as well as cultural and personal isolation.

**Keywords:** Culture, Diasporic, Identity, multiculturalism, isolation.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Lahiri's first novel, *The Namesake* (2003), was much anticipated. Similar to her short tales, the novel was highly acclaimed by critics and named one of the year's finest novels by *Entertainment Weekly* and *USA Today*. It was also a *Los Angeles Times* work Prize Finalist and a remarkable work according to the *New York Times*. Eventually, Mira Nair turned the book into a movie with the same name. The movie, which had actors from Hollywood and Bollywood, was released in March 2007. Indian people's cultural struggles and relocation are

discussed in this book. The primary obstacle that immigrants have while attempting to settle in a foreign country is balancing the customs of their home culture with those of the new one. Lahiri's second collection of stories, *Unaccustomed Earth* published in 2008 debuted at the top of The New York Times Best Seller List and won the coveted 2008 Frank O'Connor Short Story Award. Her next novel, *The Lowland* published in 2013, was included in the final list of the National Book Award for Fiction and was on the Man Booker Prize shortlist. It differs slightly from the earlier releases. It endures the tornado of political unrest and family relationships while discussing a great deal of immigrant-related topics. Lahiri uses an Indian tinge while writing in American English. She is hailed as an American novelist by the literary community in the country. President Barack Obama of the United States has appointed her as a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

### **Antagonist Experiences**

Jhumpa Lahiri explores the antagonistic experiences of an Indian woman throughout the world in her books *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, *Unaccustomed Earth*, and *The Lowland*. She learns about the intricate cultural encounters and changes, emotional imbalances, and relationships between spouses and children, parents and children, siblings, and husband and wife, as well as the process of determining one's identity in general. As a writer from the diaspora, she navigates a multicultural society from both the inside and the outside while attempting to reconcile her adopted identity with her original one. She also focuses on the experiences of second-generation Indian Americans with acculturation and contra-acculturation. Jhumpa Lahiri demonstrates how the second generation manages to adapt to the new nation and embrace its sociocultural norms while simultaneously feeling alienated and uprooted and yearning for the Indian way of life. A new social and cultural pattern is emerging globally as a result of globalisation. It has had a significant impact on all of the new writing that diasporic writers are producing.

Jhumpa Lahiri wants to highlight how women's identities are still developing and how they are caught between dissociation and acculturation. She describes the various facets of diasporic experiences and how, as a result of globalisation, they further diverge into preservation and appropriation, posing a threat to marginalised communities' identities and cultures. She makes clear that migrants are affected by globalisation in ways that are both appropriative and preservative for expatriates.

## **Feminist Approach**

The feminist approach of Jhumpa Lahiri differs slightly from that of other writers from the diaspora. She stands for the disparate perception of Indian women and their marginalisation within society. The patriarchy does not financially exploit her female characters in any way. Almost all the female characters in her writings are from diasporic communities that are struggling with issues of culture. She discusses the effects of patriarchy on Indian women's lives. The patriarchal Indian marriage concept is blamed for a woman's psychological trauma. Ignoring their feelings robs them of their individuality. Lahiri says:

“When I first started writing, I was not conscious that my subject was the Indian-American experience. What drew me to my craft was the desire to force the two worlds I occupied to mingle on the page as I was not brave enough, or mature enough, to allow in life.”

The idea that Western culture is applicable and accepted everywhere is exposed by Lahiri. She demonstrates how Western culture is incompatible. The first generation of diaspora immigrant women in her novels act as though they have been thrust into an odd universe and are always trying to figure out who they are. There is no supernatural force in charge of their lives. Because women have strong cultural ties to their ancestral land, women's identities are influenced by culture more so than men's identities in her works. The second generation forges a distinct identity that must be comprehended in light of their psychological evaluation. India is not considered home by female immigrants of the second generation. Their perception of America differs from that of the initial generation. In their strange new country and culture, first-generation immigrants experience isolation. The split psyche of women caught between two cultures is depicted by Lahiri. According to her, foreigners have established a third area. Her artwork depicts both male and female characters as well as the effects of the diaspora on these people's relationships. It demonstrates how gender boundaries are less rigid in Lahiri's fiction, which portrays men and women with distinct but equally important worries about their roles in the new environment, where cultural variety acts as a catalyst for the subjects' identity reconfiguration. She discusses the various facets of feminine identity. She reveals how women fit into the patriarchal role of protecting indigenous culture. In Jhumpa Lahiri's writings, first-generation immigrant women are frequently marginalised by patriarchy. She attempts to depict the plight of women in all of her novels. She tries to concentrate on her marriage and parent relationships. She aims to expose the

customs that teach women to fulfil their submissive roles in the home. Her books highlight the unease and unfavourable circumstances faced by contemporary Indian women living abroad under artificially created patriarchal customs.

### **Women's Issues**

Lahiri's ability to intuitively grasp women's issues and struggles aids her in creating a realistic portrayal of a modern woman. With compassion and empathy, she examines and analyses women's spiritual and emotional responses to their situation. Her female characters are always looking for purpose and significance in their lives. The journey of a woman from self-negation to self-affirmation, self-denial to self-assertion, and self-sacrifice to self-realization is chronicled by Jhumpa Lahiri. Her novels are all permeated with a feminine consciousness. She gives us an insight into the seemingly contented lives of homemakers suppressed by the power of men.

Lahiri's central characters appear more powerful. They are unwilling to give up their individuality in order to maintain the traditions and culture. Models set by society for women that try to address their issues are signs of new women who have been liberated and emancipated. They become free and emancipated as a result of their rebellion. She offers a feminist perspective on patriarchal values in addition to suggesting a modern woman's working philosophy to strike a balance between tradition and modernity. She depicts the mentality of Indian middle-class women, feeling constrained and oppressed by their patriarchal upbringing. Modernity is the declaration of the autonomous, unique identity, while traditions are the values of harmony and coexistence that represent the Indian way of life.

Her protagonists leave their secluded selves to claim own individuality as human beings, having passively performed their socially prescribed roles. According to Jhumpa Lahiri, a woman cannot realise herself unless she is true to herself. The restrictive role that is placed upon women only serves to engulf them in a maze of denial and repression. She needs to step outside of her family in order to fully express her identity and uniqueness. Her novels showcase her creative interpretation of femininity. She draws distinctions between the hopes, fears, aspirations, and frustrations of her female characters. They are conscious of their advantages and disadvantages, but they are impeded by social pressure and opposition from a predominantly patriarchal culture.

Their concerns lie in the search for a true sense of self and in comprehending life's existential issues. Through her representation of women in various roles— daughter, wife, mother, and an individual pursuing her gender identity—she offers an astounding insight into the psychology of women. She illustrates the issues, hardships, and struggles faced by middle class Indian women. Instead of providing her female protagonists with apt solution to their issues, she helps them to believe in hope so that they can go from hopelessness to optimism by means of self-examination, bravery, and resilience. In the tangle of cultural plurality, Lahiri delves into the cross-cultural experiences of women who have been uprooted as well as the potential state of simultaneous psychological and experiential belonging. Her novels have already extensively addressed the topics of identity and cross-cultural conflicts. Her perspective towards this problem is natural; she uses feminist theory to analyse the problem of cultural encounter precisely from the standpoint of women's identity. I had no idea that the experience of being Indian-American was my subject when I first started writing. My passion for writing stemmed from my desire to make the two worlds I lived in collide on paper because I was too fearful and immature to let them in real life. According to Himadri Lahiri: “Expatriate on the other hand, is a sort of static state; it is a refusal to become amalgamated into the new society. An expatriate considers his or her stay in the new country as a temporary matter and looks back to the “home” country for emotional sustenance. Both Ashoke and Ashima at the moment are therefore not in a position of exuberance.”

**Influence of Indian Literature** The way that women are portrayed in Indo-American books is influenced by the classic old Indian literature, which shows women as loving spouses or mothers. Indian women have always been seen as members of a marginalised community. They are represented as a male-ruled, wooden, and spineless being. Manu rules governed women's roles within the household and in society. Women were never allowed to be autonomous and were always required to live under a man's leadership. When their natural desires and ambitions are repressed, women suffer greatly. The traditional ancient Indian literature, which portrays women as dedicated mothers or wives, serves as the inspiration for the portrayal of women in Indo-American novels. Indian women have always been viewed as oppressed groups. They are portrayed as a wooden, weak being that is ruled by men. The place of women in the home and in society was determined by Manu rules. Women were forced to live under a man's power and were never permitted to be

independent. Women suffer deeply when their innate wants and goals are subjugated and suppressed.

A woman is actually adopted as a wife, mother, sister, and daughter at all times. She is not considered a unique person or a human being. A person does not become a woman by birth. The human female's role in society is not determined by her biological, psychological, or economic circumstances; rather, it is civilization as a whole that creates this entity, which is characterised as feminine and lies halfway between a male and a eunuch. The postcolonial authors of Indo-American novels, well-educated and gregarious, have a distinct take on the image of the woman. Liberal ideas spread throughout the world in the globalisation era thanks to western education and culture.

With regard to image of woman who struggle against the harsh social norms, the changes in theme, emphasis and design were made in the literature by women novelists like Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherji, Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri. These women writers tried to understand the mind of a woman who was divided due to the conflicts that arise when a person is at odds with their environment directly. In an effort to better represent the female characters in their novels, they have begun to try to understand Indian women. The fictional woman is a crystalline representation of the two distinct cultures. They presented the idea of women as extraordinary moral stewards. It is evident from Lahiri's writing that she bases her characters on the experience of immigration and the cultural differences between India and the United States. In addition, she compassionately and intelligently depicts enduring characters that go through common people's anguish and suffering. Mr. Kapasi, a character in the story "Interpreter of Maladies", represents the profound cultural difference between Indians who were born in America and those who are Indian citizens of India. He is continuously perplexed by such people, who "looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did" in his capacity as the Das family's tour guide (pp. 43–4). In relationships as well as in maintaining cultural harmony, patience is crucial. Lahiri has closely watched it unfold, and in "This Blessed House," she delves into the complexities of an arranged marriage as well as the compromises that need to be made in any relationship to allow for the divergent personalities of a couple. Clearly, Sanjeev misses his single life, "when he would walk across the Mass every evening." Sanjeev and Twinkle are a poles apart because he loves a structured

life and she is careless, indolent, and lazy with convention. She was also, according to p. 142, "excited and delighted by little things as if the world contained hidden wonders." Sanjeev feels "stupid" about these attributes since he cannot appreciate her zeal for life. Sanjeev gets even more sensitive as Twinkle grows fixated on the Christian relics that a previous owner left behind in their new home, fearing what the "people from the office" (p.139) would think of such Christian statues in a Hindu home. Although he detests Twinkle's fascination with them, he acknowledges that he "will tolerate" her "little biblical menagerie" in light of her refusal to leave them (p.139).

This indicates that he will put up with Twinkle's excesses in order to maintain harmony. He keeps tidying up after her, but their differences are brought to light when he plays Mahler's Fifth Symphony as a romantic gesture and Twinkle tells him not to "play this music" if he wants "to impress people" (p. 140). Twinkle lacks all of the charm of the "tender fourth movement" (p. 140). The couple was brought together by their parents' wishes, having only met "only four months before" (p. 142). This is the central scenario of their story, as it soon becomes clear that they are very different from one another: Twinkle is a second-generation American, whereas Sanjeev is the son of Calcutta-based parents. An additional barrier to their successful relationship's establishment is this fundamental cultural difference. Twinkle had just been dumped by an American man, and Sanjeev had been lonely in America. They felt they had certain similarities, like a "persistent fondness for Wodehouse novels," since their parents had brought them together (p.143). Lahiri demonstrates her absurdity sense with this comment. She demonstrates that adjustment and compromise should be made on both of them to have a smooth marital life, especially for people from culturally varied backgrounds, and such tolerance goes beyond a simple shared passion for writing. Even though Sanjeev picked Twinkle over all the other Indian brides that were recommended to him, he is unsure if he is in love with her. Although it is obvious that she has captured his attention, he "did not know what love was, only what he thought it was not" (p.147). Sanjeev asks himself, "What was there not to love?" in Twinkle. Lahiri demonstrates that for a marital bond to work, both parties must be able to accept one another's differences. This is especially true in arranged marriages, where the couple has to learn to love and respect one another. An underlying theme of human consideration can be found in many of Lahiri's stories: In "A Temporary Matter," Shoba and Shukumar eventually grow to care for



one another. Through Mr. Pirzada's forced separation from his family ("When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"), Lilia gains empathy. Miranda's compassion for the boy Rohin ("Sexy") teaches her to value herself. Eliot sympathises with Mrs. Sen, but his mother does not ("Mrs. Sen's..."). Despite not understanding Mrs. Croft completely, the narrator connects with her out of compassion.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Jhumpa Lahiri writes about women's experiences, both successful and unsuccessful, in the rapidly shifting sociocultural context of diasporas. She emphasises through her protagonist how women face discrimination on the basis of their gender from both male and female counterparts when they are mothers, wives, and girls. They are caught between the different life styles. She depicts a modern world that is socially and historically constrained. Women have been conditioned to blindly and unquestioningly adhere to the patriarchal family structure ideal. In the interest of maintaining family honour and for the greater good, the woman has been asked to put up with a variety of repressions and suppressions. Women's sexuality, as well as their experiences with pleasure, pain, love, grief, desire, and respect, were frequently disregarded. Jhumpa Lahiri draws attention to their subordinate status and the degradation that results in a society that is dominated by culture.

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