



CULTURAL DISTINCTIVENESS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *INTERPRETER OF MALADIES*

English

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ABSTRACT

Culture collision emanates between nations and sometimes within nations too. Jhumpa Lahiri, author of the famous short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* is a Pulitzer Prize winner. Her works provoke cultural interpretation among the immigrants settled in exotic countries. Lahiri voices for the immigrants' mental ailments and articulate their struggle in the attempt of healings. The Indian immigrants of United States are encumbered by deplorable conditions and loss emancipation. They flunk to prove their self-identity and empathize with the emotional isolation. Her stories engage upon the inland and martial complications, encroachment and interruption between the two immigrant generations of America. The exertion and trauma of the characters sustained from the society, surrounding, children, and family are filmed in Jhumpa Lahiri's works.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Collision, Immigrants, Emancipation, Emotional Isolation.

Culture is rubricated by insignia, ceremonial values and races. The cultural environment designs one's mental and physical characteristics. The culture is developed by interaction with other people. Countries like United States are inhabited by disparate clusters of people. Their existence fetches unconventional cultures all over the country. This is known as 'subculture'. It emphasizes upon the economic status, gregarious classes, refinement and race. In *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication* the writer defines "intercultural communication is not only to the communication between individuals of diverse cultural identifications but also to the communication between groups of diverse cultural identifications" (4). In the same way in Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity* inscribes Satyajit Ray's keen understanding of the versatile cultural relation as he points out: In Ray's films and in his writings, we see exploration of at least three general themes on culture and their interrelations: the importance of distinctions between different local cultures and their respective individualities, the necessity to understand the deeply heterogeneous character of each local culture, and the great need for inter-cultural communication while recognizing the difficulties of such intercourse. (121)

Cultural mutations influence both men and women. Especially immigrant people in the existent society suffered between the cultural confrontations of two countries. The modern women writers accumulate with this theme and depict it with modest and magnificent manner. That represent the feminine and masculine social pattern of behaviour and sexuality imposed by the social and cultural norms. Many of the Indian writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Lavanya Sankaran, Bharathi Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai and Meena Alexander handle cultural perceptions in their works. The works of these writers compile the dilemma of parents, the first generation settlers and their children the second generation settlers in accommodations. The current paper argues the impact of culture on Indian Immigrants.

Jhumpa Lahiri has written from her own experience. Her parents from India settled in US, the cultural problems they suffered are reciprocated in Jhumpa Lahiri's works. Her works transact the search for identity and the loss of individualism. Her novel *The Namesake* possess autobiographical touch. The protagonist of the novel is the writer herself.

The famous short story collection of Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* is a collection of nine stories. The substantial characters of these stories are afflicted by their cognitive disputes. Among these nine short stories 'A Real Durwan' and 'Mrs. Sen's' are taken for study. The female characters of these stories possess conflict between their present and past life. They can't cope with the present situation which they live and couldn't come out from their earlier traditional life. Lahiri imparts the cultural discrepancies faced by the characters in elegant manner. She presents the problems between the eastern and western cultures. Moving towards other lands and adopting another countries'

culture as an initiation of globalization seems harder. The stories taken for study are in search of finding solution to these societal problems.

'A Real Durwan' the fourth story of *Interpreter of Maladies* elaborates the life of a sixty four year old sweeper woman Boori Ma. She has been assigned to clean the stair in an old apartment. Though a Pakistani woman she had to settle down in Calcutta, India due to some political enigmas. The adaptability of the new culture constitute problems within her. She narrates thus: "Yet there was a day when my feet touched nothing but marble. Believe me, don't believe me, such comforts you cannot even dream them" (72). Her displacement occurs at the time of India's partition with Pakistan. In Pakistan she had lived a royal life. Her conversation with others shows her past luxury. Boori Ma enumerates her daughter's marriage as "we married her to a school principal. The rice was cooked in rose water. The Mayor was invited. Everybody washed their fingers in pewter bowls" (IM, 71). At her home she tangles the skeleton keys at the end of her sari, it shows her wealthy life. But now she rattles the end of her empty sari. Jhumpa Lahiri's stories states the psychological suffering of the immigrants. Salman Akhtar says: Immigration from one country to another is a complex psychosocial process with lasting effects on an individual's identity. The dynamic shifts, resulting from an admixture of 'culture shock' and mourning over the losses inherent in migration, gradually give way to a psycho structural change and the emergence of a hybrid identity. (105)

Boori Ma is treated as a drudge by that apartment people. They allow her to stay under the roof of the building. They do not give a proper place to her. Mrs. Dalal, a resident of the storied apartment shows compassion towards her. She affords medicines and cares her. She fulfills her demands and approach kindly as: "You need a new bed. Quilts, a pillow. A blanket when winter comes ... I will have a word with Mr. Dalal when he returns from the office," Mrs. Dalal called back as she headed down the stairs. "Come in the afternoon. I will give you some pickles and powder for your back (IM, 75). But Boori Ma offers food to poor on festival days at her house. She recollects those incidence. Other people in that apartment grab her cruelly. This shows that the city residents as less emotional. She lodges on newspapers, she doesn't have any permanent bed. She feel comfort on narrating the story of her past life. She recites the stories about the loss of her family. As that of a typical Indian villages grannies she fills her mouth with betel leaves often. In spite of a wealthy life in her home land she suffers as a refugee.

Once the apartment encounter robbery. Though Boori Ma reports it suspicion uses against her. The following lines pictures the contempt of the apartment residents: "This is all her doing," one of them hollered, pointing at Boori Ma. "She informed the robbers. Where was she when she was supposed to guard the gate?" "For days she has been wandering the streets, speaking to stranger," another reported. "We shared our coal, gave her a place to sleep. How could she betray us this way?" a third wanted to know." (IM, 81) Boori Ma stands helpless. The incidence prove that in an alien land immigrant are left alone having no one to share their emotion. The apartment people don't bestow any

empathy towards her. This is a best instance of immigrant's stipulations in foreign land.

The story 'Mrs. Sen's' is about an Indian woman dwelling with her husband in America. Mrs. Sen scimmages difficulty on surviving in the new world. She strives to be well-behaved Indian wife. She always contemplates her homeland and its traditional culture.

She is physically in America but her entire thoughts encircle her Indian relatives. Her husband is a Mathematics Professor at University. Mrs. Sen takes care of Eliot, an eleven year old boy after his schooling. Eliot's mother invites Mrs. Sen to visit her house even after she guide her job. But Mrs. Sen doesn't know driving so Eliot comes to their house. She is in America but vacillate to follow the conventions of American culture. She never wears shoes. "Eliot noticed several paired lined on the shelves of a small bookcase by the front door. They were flip flops". (112) Even Eliot learns to leave his sneakers outside the door steps at Mrs. Sen's home.

Mrs. Sen's attentiveness of preparing Indian meals attract Eliot. She describes about the curved blade which exist at every Indian home. The Indian women use it at the time of grand feast cuisines for weddings. Eliot hates his home, Eliot and his mother lives alone on a beach house. Mrs. Sen's continuous speech, concern and love impresses Eliot. She always have an eye upon Eliot: "Nevertheless she refused to let Eliot walk around when she was chopping. "Just sit, sit please, it will take just two more minutes," she said ... (IM, 115).

Mrs. Sen encounters none to commute her perception so she makes use of Eliot. She says that at her home if she yells people appear and interrogate the reasons but in this unknown land no one come for solace. Eliot enquires about the vermilion powder at her forehead. She narrates that it becomes the symbol of married women in India. Two things establish happiness within her. The letter from her family and procuring sea side fish. Whenever she receives letter from her family she calls her husband and reads repeatedly. She endures happiness and takes Eliot for a walk. Nostalgic memories make one to cry out of the losses. In *New Worlds of Literature* Jermoné Beaty and Paul Hunter speaks of memory. According to them, "Thinking of home is often accompanied by nostalgia the absence or loss of loved ones, the remoteness of the home place we are cut off from our childhood homes are exiles. And the rest of us can perhaps understand, that we are all "exiles" from our past, our childhood, that universal "home"(1).

Mrs. Sen drags for her family members. She query's whether Eliot misses his mother. Mrs. Sen haggles at market places. Even though she lives in America she only follows Indian way of life styles. For Mrs. Sen harmonizing American culture is an unbearable one. She hates the lonely life of America. Her intention of preparing fish gives her the feeling of her home. She always thinks about her family members and their assistance in her activities. But in America she resides with her husband, in his absence she textures solitary. Mrs. Sen is afraid of car driving. But she is forced to learn driving even by her husband. At the end of the story she smashes her car on road side. Like Boori Ma, Mrs. Sen is incapable to survive on the alien land.

Boori Ma and Mrs. Sen both are longing for their home land. They can't emerge out from their past life. Both of their lives are compelled migration. The circumstances forced them to persist in the new world. The elegant critic Edward Said enunciates in his essay *Reflections on Exile* as: "Exile is the unhealable rift between human being and a native place, between the self and the true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever" (101). Through these works the writer indicate the inability of immigrants in the extraneous land.

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