

Deconstructing Diasporic Dynamism: The Narrative World of Jhumpa Lahiri

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Abstract: The word "Diaspora" takes its origin from the Greek word "dia" (through) and "sepeiro" which literally means "scattering or dispersion." The term was first used in the context of the experiences and predicament of the Jews who were rendered homeless after the Babylonian conquests. This term now shares meaning with a large semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community and ethnic community. Diaspora suggests a dislocation from the nation state or geographical location of origin and relocation in one or more nation states, territories or countries. In this research paper I will mainly focus on Deconstructing Diasporic Dynamism with special reference to the Narratives World of Jhumpa Lahiri.

Key words: Deconstruction, Diaspora, Immigrant, expatriate

Introduction: Modern diaspora is denoting 'Cyber coolies' who are seen sprinting to accomplish their will or desire in the foreign countries. In fact, the utmost will power of the immigrants tends to go through the acculturation in different countries or host culture, and thereby retaining their native identity and culture as well. First-generation immigrants desperately seek to relive their native or home culture in the foreign territories by means of their cultural practices which are not exactly 'anti-Semitic' – rather wide enough to rekindle one's own culture in foreign territory. They are to confront the vehement lack or crisis during their attempt to acclimatize in the host culture, consequently driving them to recreate their homeland on the alien shore, which is emblematic of the song "Aam[i]vin desi tara" (I am a star of alien country). On the other hand, in the perspective of the second generation – that is, the children born of the immigrants – the country of their birth is not similar to the country of their origin. Consequently, they fall into the trap of two cultural milieus, which results in formation of persona with dual identities. Diasporic subjectivity, thus, truly pertains to Bhabasque dictum of 'half-life' which provokes the ontological question of ambivalent identity or 'in-between-ness'. As Somdatta Mondal observes:

This issue on the one hand, develops the tension between the desire of assimilation and the need for ethnic identity in the younger generation, on the other hand, it creates a conflict between generations, between mothers and fathers who want to maintain cultural ethnicity and the children who want freedom to be more American. (Mondal 85)

The *Pulitzer Prize*-winning litterateur and Princeton University-Professor of Creative Writing, Jhumpa Lahiri, herself assumes such global flow and from her earlier essay “*Intimate Alienation: Immigrant Fiction and Translation*” (2002) to her latest publication (until 2018) *The Clothings of Books* (2017), she seems to have attained such global citizenship, identifying her self-amputation, location based multiplicity, and nomadic identity. Although, Jhumpa Lahiri starts emphasizing upon the *Italian phase* since her *In Other Words*, her recent published edited book *The Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories* (2019) also reveals the same tune in which she states.

My aim is to present a portrait of Italy that reflects its reality. I prefer to work against a reassuring but ridiculous perception encapsulated by an American who once said to me, ‘Nothing bad, can possible happen in Italy. Of course, it is one thing to experience Italy as a tourist, another thing to live there.

As a short story writer Jhumpa Lahiri inculcates new meaning and a new perspective in her shorter fiction. Her stories describe human experience and she sincerely presents predicaments of diasporic way of life. Basically she is an objective story teller, who delineates diasporic culture dispassionately. Jhumpa’s less use of images and simple language with plain functionalism is her chief attribute as a mature writer. She presents stories, attractive stories and compels readers’ attention. Most of her sentences in the stories are short and succinct. She uses less number of similes and metaphors. But she knows how to create picture in words.

In her stories, actions flow like a perennial river. The stories end with ease, without any torment of seldom invoking surprise of suspense in mind and heart of the readers. Jhumpa Lahiri does not require any introduction to the readers of modern fiction. Her maiden venture short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* has won her prestigious —Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in the year 2000. Her works deal with the internal strife and changing human predicament among identities and cultures. One of the themes Lahiri deals in most of prolifically is the search for identity, as defined by the self, by others, by location and by circumstances. In Lahiri’s stories, everything including gender, homeland, geography, occupation, and role within the community, can act in determining and qualifying identity.

Lahiri brings up interesting questions as to what can and cannot act as agents in the determination of identity, and many of her characters struggle against or conform to outside definition. Jhumpa Lahiri has travelled extensively to India and has experienced the effects of colonialism there as well as experienced the issues of the Diaspora as it exists. She feels strong ties to her parent's homeland as well as the United States and England. Growing up with ties to all three countries created in Lahiri a sense of homelessness and an inability to feel accepted. Lahiri explains this as an inheritance of her parents to India.

Lahiri, the daughter of a librarian and school teacher, has always been inclined to creative writing. Lahiri remembers a need to write as early as ten years old and she has always used writing as an outlet for her emotions:

When I learned to read, I felt the need to copy. I started writing ten page novels' during recess with my friends' writing allowed me to observe and make sense of things without having to participate. I didn't belong. I looked different and felt like an outsider. At a press conference in Calcutta in January of 2001, Lahiri announced the description of the absence of belonging, —No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile in whichever country I travel to, that's why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile. (Lahiri 17)

Her first two literary works, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*, spotlighted mostly on first generation Indian American immigrants and their struggle to raise a family in a country very different from theirs. They describe their attempts to keep their children familiar with Indian culture and traditions and keep them close to their cultural roots even in an alien land.

The stories of her third literary work *Unaccustomed Earth* have dealt with the destiny of the second and third generation immigrants. As subsequent generations become more and more assimilated into American culture and are at ease in the construction of perspectives outside of their country of origin. Lahiri's two novels *The Namesake* and *The Lowland* highlight the needs of the individual. She shows how later generations of immigrants depart from the restrictions of their parents who are often devoted to their community, family, and other immigrants.

The stories revolve around the difficulties of relationships, communication and a loss of identity for those in Diasporas. No matter where the story takes place, the characters struggle with the same feelings of exile and the struggle between the two worlds by which they are torn.

The stories deal with shifting lines between gender, sexuality, and social status within a Diaspora. Whether the character is a homeless woman from India or Indian male students in the United States, all the characters display the effects of displacement in a Diaspora.

In *A Temporary Matter*, a significant story of *Interpreter of Maladies*, an electrical outage forces married couple Shoba and Shukumar to confront their unspoken pain over the loss of a child. The darkness gives them a safe space to confess secrets. Shoba and Shukumar admit minor indiscretions in the beginning and lead up to nagging doubts about their marriage. In the end, Shoba admits, she is moving out and Shukumar admits to holding his son after he died.

In *When Mr. Pirzada Comes to Dinner*, a young Indian-American girl meets a Pakistani man her family routinely invites to dinner. Somewhat cut off from the culture of her immigrant parents, Lilia does not understand that Mr. Pirzada, since Partition, is no longer considered the same as her parents. The Indian war with Pakistan in 1971 endangers Mr. Pirzada's daughters. Witnessing his love and fears, Lilia gains a new awareness of a world larger than her own. In simple yet beguiling prose, Lahiri portrays the complexities of South Asian immigrant community in the United States with her unique art.

In *A Real Durwan*, deals with an old woman, painfully at odds with changed times and desperately making efforts to reconcile her past and to her present. The pain of loss that Boori Ma in *A Real Durwan* feels can also be interpreted in terms of how people feel about her. They sympathize with her for the loss of her family and take her to be a homeless migrant in pain.

In *The Third and Final Continent*, the narrator recounts the first six weeks of his life in America in 1969, balancing a new job, a new wife, and a new country. While awaiting his wife's green card, the narrator lives in the spare room of a 103-year-old woman, Mrs. Croft who is struck by his kindness. The narrator acclimates to his new life, cherishing Cambridge and his new beginning. However, he is nearly indifferent to the arrival of his wife, Mala. At first they are strangers. When the narrator takes Mala to meet Mrs. Croft, a moment of intimacy and understanding between the two bridges their divide. The narrator then speaks from the present and marvels at the journey his life has encompassed:

“As awkward as it was, and as endless as it felt to me then, thenightly encounter lasted only about ten minutes; inevitably she would drift off to sleep, her head falling abruptly toward her chest, leaving me free to retire to my room.” (Lahiri 266)

Thus, Most of Lahiri's insightful writings concern the betwixt andbetween challenges associated with immigration and with generationalshifts. This collection of engaging and beautifully written storiesexamines both challenges. Many readers will be haunted by these quietlydeveloped narratives.

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