

# DISPLACEMENT AND LOSS OF IDENTITY IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE INTERPRETER OF MALADIES*

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## ADSTRACT:

Loss of identity and loss of love between families has become prominent issue faced by the immigrant in any society. Jhumpa Lahiri's works mainly focuses on the experience of Indian immigrants to the U.S and she also focuses on second generation conflict in alien land. This paper mainly focuses on Interpreter of Maladies, title "*The Temporary Matter* and *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*."

**KEY WORDS:** Loss of identity, displacement, cultural alienation, diaspora.

## INTRODUCTION:

Jhumpa Lahiri's real name was Nilanjana Sudeshna. She was born to Bengali parents in July 1967, in London. She grew up in the background of traditional Bengali culture. She observes her parent's sense of emotional exile when she immigrated to western world. This has been reflected in all her works and her narrative style lies between two different cultures. She is both an immigrant and diasporic writer. In all her works unique quality of Bengali tradition reflects to express conflict of second generation immigrant. She won Pulitzer Prize in 2000, the highest literary award of America for her debuted collection of "Interpreter of Maladies", collection of nine short stories. She is successful woman in wide diasporic literature world.

A migration, travelling and cross culture has become one of the major issues of the contemporary world. Jhumpa Lahiri is also diasporic writers like V.S Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Ruchira Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie etc.... Pradeep Anand says:

Diaspora is spreading of the seed when planted in different parts of the world, absorbs unique characteristics from the local soil. Every story about the Diaspora thus becomes a unique context, a co-ordination of space, time and experience, which someday will collectively tell the whole story of a Diaspora (Anand 4).

## DIASPORIC THEORIST:

The postcolonial theorists like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, James Clifford, Gloria Anzaldúa, Rey Chow, Felix Guattari, Theodor Adorno, Gilles Deleuze, Arjun Appadurai et al have, gave new identity to the world of literature.

Homi k.Bhabha argues that "the mimicry and production of stereotypes and hybrids in colonial discourse reflected not the strength but rather the weaknesses of colonialism- colonialism needed stereotypes to reinforce itself. Mimicry was resistance and subversion on the part of the native.

**INTERPRETER OF MALADIES:**

In *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri concentrated on marriage particularly the arranged marriages under Indian society. Each character lies between two worlds and also the citizenship of two countries. Being in an alien land their identities are not fixed. Lahiri deals with question of identity, alienation and often afflict first and second generation immigrants.

In an interview, when she was asked about the experiences of Indian immigrants to the United States from those of their American-born children, she answers:

“The question of identity is always a difficult one, but especially for those who are culturally displaced, as immigrants are, or those who grow up in two worlds simultaneously, as is the case for their children. The older I get, the more aware I am that I have somehow inherited a sense of exile from my parents, even though in many ways-----superficial ones, largely---- I am so much more American than they are. In fact, it is still very hard to think of myself as an American. For immigrants, the challenges of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, the knowledge of and longing for a lost world, are more explicit and distressing than for their children. On the other hand, the problem for the children of immigrants, those with strong ties to their country of origin, is that they feel neither one thing nor the other. The feeling that there was no single place to which I fully belonged bothered me growing up. It bothers me less now.”

(Lahiri 2008)

**A TEMPORARY MATTER:**

“*A Temporary Matter*” describes the conflict and suffering of the second- generation couple of Bengali origin and how a Bengali tradition and culture saved their marital bond from split. Indian immigrant couple, Shukumar and Shoba spend more time in doing their jobs and attending parties. Shoba always engage in doing her editing work and her husband busy in attending a conference in Baltimore, because of this, marriage life become down under the pressure of American life style. They suddenly faced different and drastic turn when Shoba suffers a miscarriage and Shukumar holds the dead child. After this incident they both become strangers and experts in avoiding each other. He and Shoba “ had become experts at avoiding each other in their three bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible.”(IOM, 5). In beginning, their materialistic needs and worldly pleasure blinded them and happy marriage life ruined and ends in failure. The situation of the life changed when the electricity department announces a power cut for five days. During these power cut, they start telling each others secrets something that they had never shared before. In one evening at the time of power cut Shoba remembered about the frequent power cuts at her grandmother’s house in India. She says “I remember during power failures at my grandmother’s house, we all had to say something.” (IOM, 12). She continued “I don’t know. A little poem. A joke. A fact about the world.....my relatives always wanted me to tell them the names of my friends in America” (IOM,12). Through these characters Lahiri portrays that, in American society marriage life turns into temporary matter. This has been reflected in Indian immigrant couple Shoba and Shukumar’s life. Here, Shoba and Shukumar are clearly Americanized. They had faced identity problem in America. They finally confessed their real emotion with each other and find lost identity. In this story loss of identity, alienation and relationship problem are major cause in “*A Temporary Matter*”.

**WHEN MR. PIRZADA CAME TO DINE:**

“*When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*” presents the theme of cultural displacement and loss of identity. The narrator of this story is a ten years old girl, Laila. As she born and brought up in Boston, she is not aware of development and geographical changes in her native land, Pakistan, changes like issue of partition, the civil war in East Pakistan, the fleeing refugees and the frequent clashes between east and west Pakistan war of 1971. Mr. Pirzada is a lecture of botany at

Decca University, comes to Boston to study of the foliage of new England. He is desirous for the welfare and safety of his wife and seven daughter and also political unset in Decca during the war of freedom.

Mr. pirzada was invited by the narrator's parents, who is his scholar friend. Narrator's parents and Mr. pirzada belongs to same country. Whenever he visits them Laila does not find any different between her parents and Mr. pirzada. She think: "It made no sense to me. Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents, mr. pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuit into successive cups of tea"(IOM,25). She thinks that he is an Indian like her parents but her father corrects her by saying that Mr. pirzada is a Pakistani and not an Indian and he further says "our country was divided in 1947, from the date of India's independence from Britain. Her father explained that: "one moment we were free and then we were sliced up"(IOM,25). He also explained her by drawing an X with his finger on the countertop like a pie- "Hindus here, Muslims there and Decca no longer belong to us" (IOM, 25). At the time of partition Hindus and Muslims had set fire to each other's homes and idea of eating in the other's company was still unthinkable. Lilia cannot understand how a single geographical space can be divided into two countries.

Living in an alien land, Mr. pirzada could not contact with his family in Decca. He yearn for moving for moving back to his country. In this story Jhumpa Lahiri pointed out two different aspects of culture. It is cultural identity creates a bond between Mr. pirzada and the narrator's family, on the other hand , war and language parted the human being forever in the same geographical region. At the same time she wants to point out that children of immigrants read and carry only the past history of native land of their parents and grandparents. The story ends with the return of Mr. pirzada to Bangladesh and also his heartily attachment towards his native land.

#### CONCLUSION:

Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies is about the conflict of individuality in the place of no origin. Each characters struggle to attain their identity in alien land and their great hope is that they would go back to their homeland which they belong to. The theme of her works relate to the experience of immigration, cultural confrontation, assimilation and intergeneration connection.

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