

Jhumpa Lahiri`s *Unaccustomed Earth* and Githa Hariharan`s *The Art of Dying* :Unity of Thoughts and Diversity of Experiences

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Abstract

There are short story writers in India who can be known as “writers of India” because they belong to their own land, culture and rituals. They enjoy this status as they do not feel alienated but a Diaspora writer feels uprooted and can always feel a sort of loneliness .This paper is an effort to bring this diverse experience to the readers` notice by analyzing the proposed anthology of Jhumpa Lahiri and Githa Hariharan. This paper is a modest attempt to analyze the unity of thoughts and diversity of experiences in Githa Hariharan (Native writer)`s anthology *The Art of Dying* and Jhumpa Lahiri(Diaspora writer) `s *Unaccustomed Earth* .

Keywords: Diasporas, alienation, exile, women, death, roots, responsibilities

Women writers write in a different manner because they look at things with a different perspective and this makes their writings unique in one or the other manner. Jhumpa Lahiri and Githa Hariharan are Indians but with diverse experiences. Jhumpa Lahiri is a diaspora whereas Githa Hariharan belongs to India through and through. A Diaspora feels uprooted because he/she has to travel from one country to another due to ambition, study purpose , job or business. They go and get settled there but they always feel a sense of exile and alienation which can never be taken away from them. They find themselves in a totally new surroundings.

On the contrary the ‘at home’ or ‘natives’ feel deeply rooted into their culture. They are not lonely and need not to talk about a very different subject. They are not alien to their country and that is why they need not deal with delicate subjects of exile, mixed cultures , sense of belongingness and alienation.

When the word short story comes in our mind, then we are reminded of two versatile writers- Jhumpa Lahiri and Githa Hariharan. Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London ,on July 11,1967. She is the daughter of Bengali Indian Immigrants. Her family went to United States when shewas just three. She is an M.A. in English , M.F.A. in creative writing , M.A. in Comparative Literature and Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies. She married Alberto Vourvoulias –Bush (journalist) and lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband and two children. *Unaccustomed Earth* was released on April 1,2008 and it was number one on the New York Times best seller list.

The Native writer ,Githa Hariharan was born in Coimbatore in 1954. She grew up in Bombay and Manila .From there she went to U.S. and continued her studies. She returned to India in 1979 and started her career initially as an editor and later as a freelancer. She comes from a conventional and middle class family but she was given full support by her parents.

In *The Art of Dying*, she has taken variety of themes in the form of twenty stories. The writer has taken up different characters and different topics .Death, aging, conflict, women`s condition and loss are main themes of her stories whereas Lahiri`s stories deal with the themes of immigrants and diasporas. Her writing

is known remarkably for plain handwriting and characters that are Indian Immigrants to America and are stuck between two nations and two cultures. Her anthology has got two parts and it has eight stories but the paper will lay emphasis only on first part. The title story is about three generations, their relationships and conflicts. It is the story of Ruma, her father and her son Akash where lack of communication can be seen due to the guilt of moving away from roots. "Hell-Heaven" delves into the complex human relations and emotions of loneliness, love and jealousy in the form of two characters Pranab and Aparna. According to A.N. Dwivedi, "A Choice of Accommodations" is completely about the physical fulfillment of married couple." (A Spectrum of Indian English Literature, Ch IV) "Only Goodness" deals with the failing dreams of parents whose only son turns into an alcohol drinker. "Nobody's Business" is the story of Sangeeta who is in love with someone who is engaged with some other girl.

On the contrary, Githa's anthology is full of variations. "Untitled Poem" is a beautiful description of Indian couple. "The Remains of Feast" is a pathetic and heart-touching depiction of a great grandmother who is on death bed but wants to taste everything that she has never eaten. This can be seen as an attack on Indian Caste System. On one hand, readers have stories like "The Warden", "Close-Up", and "Virgin Curry" which deal with the projection of women and on the hand, we have stories like "Field Trip", "The Will" and "Gajar Halwa" which pour light on summer trips, Indian joint family, division of property and condition of servants in India. "Revati", The story of a child widow catches the attention of readers towards child-widows. The title story talks about the plight of a mother whose only son has died and she has to live. "The closed Room" depicts the slow end of a writer. Her stories are governed by the themes of death.

Githa Hariharan's style of writing is lucid and she considers technique as much a part of the story as the people, the events and language they use. In her essay "Discrete Thoughts", she says:

For some reason all of us like to imagine that a writer is a writer because he has a great deal to say (message) or is a good egg (social concern). Both these should be there but really, in the ultimate analysis, writer is a writer because she has a narrative skill- a balancing act she can perform. (214)

She has responsibility on her shoulders because she not only belongs but also lives in India and she knows everything that takes place in India. She is deeply rooted in the Indian soil and that is the reason why one can find variety of theme in her collection. The central theme is 'death' or 'process of dying'. The readers get different flowers in one bunch in the form of her stories because she depicts sugarcane fields in stories like "The Field Trip" and counseling halls in stories like "The Art of Dying". "The Reprieve" is a tribute to a dead wife and her stories also deal with pre-marital and extra-marital relations which can be found in Lahiri's anthology also. Hariharan gives an Indian touch to her stories as in her story "The Rainmaker", a daughter is able to see her mother, sitting under a Peepal Tree. She knows the Indian myths related to Peepal and that is why, it is mentioned in the story.

Lahiri's style of writing is also lucid but prosaic. Her stories are significant. The title story talks about changing places. Both the father and daughter change their places for one or the other reason. Lahiri has done justice with the title of her stories as "Nobody's Business" would have remained nobody's business if Paul was not there to tell Sangeeta the reality of her cheat lover Farouk. "Only Goodness" is the story of Sudha whose Child Neel finds her as the only goodness for him. In her stories, readers can find themes of extra-marital relationships as Indrajeet Hazra has opined the same about her story "Hell-Heaven" in *Hindustan Times*:

The story is told by the daughter of couple, who remembers, the delightful Pranab Kaku and his place in the household. Like Bhupati in Tagore's novella *Nashtanir* (The Broken Nest), the husband in this story is blind to the loneliness of his wife, and Pranab becomes more than a friend to this diasporic version of *Charulata*. (25-March-2008)

"Hell-Heaven" is a mesmerizing story of an arranged marriage which is not more than just a knot as the husband is too busy to feel his wife's loneliness due to his research and the wife tries to feel this gap in the form of Pranab who ultimately marries Deborah.

Thus, it can be said that these two writers have contributed to great extent to Indian English Writings and their writings are reflection of their own experiences in life where Lahiri writes of dilemma and loneliness of immigrants and their generation and Hariharan's women are lonely due to the condition of women in India and the inevitable existence of 'death'. Both have written stories in a language which is easy to

understand and good to appreciate. The theme can be taken as common in their writings because both talk about dilemma, loneliness and marital relations but experiences are different due to surroundings.

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