



CULTURE CONFLICT IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S UNACCUSTOMED EARTH

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Abstract

This paper tries to study the human relationship and culture translation in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story collection "Unaccustomed Earth". It also studies the intricacies in family life and resentment. It also gives space to the way the culture translation shaped their lives. This study also focusses on the problems of immigration and how the expatriates accustomed in an alien land. Some of the characters fail to assimilate into the new culture. They fail somewhere and end up hopeless. This paper also analyses the lives of such characters. Longing has a special place in diasporic lives and the complex network of family relationship is also discussed in this short story collection. The family relationship in this immigrant live is quite different.

Because of the impact of the host culture and the influence of home culture human relationship will lose its meaning. The sense of being 'in between' made the lives of the immigrants unpredictable. This short story collection focusses on the conflicting emotional experience of the characters as a result of migration. The plots develop through the assertion of transnational identity.

Keywords: migration, alienation, diaspora, culture conflict and identity formation.

Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London in 1967. They migrated to US when she was 2 years old. She was brought up in Rhodes Island. Her real name was Nilanjana Sudheshna. She did her graduation from Bernard College and has awarded Doctorate in Renaissance Studies. Her short stories were published in American journals like New Yorker. She was awarded Trans-Atlantic Award, O'Henry Award, PEN/Hemingway Award and Addison Metcalf Award. She is the first American of Indian origin to bag Pulitzer Prize for her first published collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies*. Her second collection of short stories is *Unaccustomed Earth*, published in 2008

Human Relationship and Culture Conflict in *Unaccustomed Earth*

Unaccustomed Earth (2008) is a collection of eight stories in two parts. In all these stories she is trying to portray a world of emotions. The stories are about personal traumas and conflicting experiences which caused the course of life. Lahiri sometimes used some insignificant little things with greater symbolic meaning. Sometimes she used all these as an intermediate between the characters and their lost dream. She talks about the expectations of the characters, their roots as well as sprouts. All the stories deal with the impact of displacement and alienation. Because it produces a sense of loss, a feeling of up rootedness and the ambiguous mindset. Because in their mind the conflict between the land of residence and land of belonging is in its height. In Lahiri's fiction the diaspora is the result of "brain Circulation". She is most often criticized for the treatment of diaspora as a simple thing by over-generalizing it. Because she belongs to the second generation immigrants from affluent families who enjoys freedom from caste, gender, religious bias. Her second collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) won Frank 'O' Connor Prize. All the stories in this collection are discussing the problems related to belongings as well as un belonging. Because she herself experienced the same pressure. One can include her in the group of midnight's children from Rushdie's novel. Her stories focus on the issues of multiple identities, problems of displacement, roots and rootlessness. Lahiri's definition of diaspora is similar to the definition of Vijay Mishra's. He says thus:

Diasporas are people who would want to explore the meaning of the hyphen

But perhaps not press the hyphen for fear that this would lead to massive

Communal schizophrenia. They are precariously lodged within an episteme

Of real or imagined displacements, self-imposed sense of exile; they are haunted

By specters, by ghosts arising from within that encourage irredentist or separatist

Movements

(Mishra 2007)

In all the lahirian stories the readers can see the first generation immigrants are hovering in between two worlds. They are caught in the process of assimilation. They are in the endless process of translation. According to Lahiri culture translation is the essence of diaspora life and solution to the problems of identity crisis. For her translation is not confined to language but it means translation of culture. Because it is essential to survive in an alien land. Because it becomes essential to survive the psychological impact or trauma created by the migration. It is the most essential cognitive process in the life in an alien land. In her stories she talks about untranslatability. Sometimes people fail to translate in to the host culture and remains in the realm of failure. They live with a sense of unbelonging or multiple belonging. These characters live with a deep sense of failure and loss.

In all the stories in the *Unaccustomed Earth* a sense of loss pervades and this inherent loss is compensated with a hope which lies in culture translation. In the first story *Unaccustomed Earth*, the child Akash, Ruma's son is getting deep-rooted in the foreign soil. Because he is half American it is quite easy for him to live in that culture. In the beginning of the story Ruma is waiting for her father who is living alone after her mother's death. She tried to keep in touch with him through some postcards. She cannot accept the fact that her father is going to live with her family. But she fails to disclose this to anybody. There the narrator details how he developed a bond with his grandfather and then with the Indianness through gardening. He could learn a couple of Bengali words and a rhyme. Ruma, even though a second generation immigrant, she could not translate into the host culture successfully. Her mother's death made her lost. Because at first she could not admit her absence. Her thoughts regarding her father's coming back and stay with her, made her confused. Just like that of Ruma and her father there is another relationship between a mother and son in the story "*Years End*". In this story Kaushik cannot accept his father's second marriage. His second wife was a widow with two children. In the beginning he wanted to revolt but accepted the reality.

I was suddenly sickened by her presence, the sight of her standing in
Kitchen. I had no memories of my mother cooking there, but the space
Still retain the memories, her presence more than any other part of the
House. (263YE).

In the story he tried to be good with his step mother and step sisters even though in the depth of his heart he hated them. So when the time came he spit out the venom to the two step sisters. He says thus:

"You don't have the right to be looking at those, they don't belong to you", ----

"Well you have seen it for yourselves, how beautiful my mother was. How much

Prettier and more sophisticated than yours. Your mother is nothing in comparison

Just a servant to wash my father's clothes and cook his meals. That's the only reason

She is here, the only reason both of you here. (286,287 YE)

The feeling of loss and hurt made Kaushik and his father strangers. His anger towards his father made him hate Chitra and her two innocent daughters

In the story *Hell-Heaven* the desperate attempt to get deep rooted in the foreign soil is portrayed clearly. In this the central female character Aparna could not adjust to the lifestyle and culture of her adoptive land. Once she moved out of India and went to Berlin. Then went to Central Squire in America. She was really obsessive of her past life in India. This made her life even worse. Because she desperately tried to recreate her Indian life inside her apartment in which she was living. This pushed her down to a love triangle. When Pranab entered their life all her world changed. Because her husband made her life strange by taking her to an entirely alien land. But Pranab filled this void with Indian music, food, film and memories. In this story loss is being regained but only temporarily. He could recreate India in her home. This story is also about the failure of Indian traditional marriages. Aparna's daughter could translated in to the western culture. In all her childhood teenage she was fighting with her mother who is obsessive of her Indian culture. Aparna was always worried about her daughter being influenced by American culture. For Aparna, life was a hell in US. For a long period of time both mother and daughter were strange to each other. In almost all the stories the second generation always looked at the first generation with a judgement attitude that too in American standard. The second secret love relationship is between Hema and Kaushik in the story "*Going Ashore*". In this story Hema is betrothed to Navin and is already on the way back to India for the wedding ceremony. But she planned to stay in Italy for a while and spend time there. There she met Kaushik, one of her childhood friend. She remembered her crush towards him in her childhood. Kaushik is a photo journalist now and is a real transnational citizen who travelled extensively. There was something mysterious between them. People misunderstood them as lovers. She had a feeling for him. They went to Kaushik's room and spend time there. His slightest touch and attention for her created a bond between them. The hidden love then began to develop as a strong intimacy and they started lovemaking. Hema did not have a guilty feeling as she is betrothed to Navin. There developed a strong bond between them they stayed together for short period of time making love, exploring new places, capturing new pictures and finding new places. She kept avoiding Navin and enjoyed spending time with Kaushik, even though she knows the reality that all these would end up in a week's time.

Lahiri shows various sensitive relationship through all these stories. Only a few of them succeed in continuing their love, but majority of them fails somewhere. All kinds of marital and extramarital relationships in these stories experience various kinds of upheavals. In "*Only Goodness*" Lahiri portrays the sibling relationship. Sudha and Rahul are the two siblings living in New York. Their relationship was like any other sibling relationships in the world with all small fights, envies, jealous... Both of them developed a drinking habit secretly. As they grow this habit also grow and became uncontrollable in Rahul. Now all her sisterly advices have no effect on him and spoiled his education, career and life. Later Sudha married Roger and now have a baby. This drinking habit became a problem in Sudha's family life. Her only baby Neel had a narrow escape from death. After this incident she ordered Rahul to go from her. In the story "*Nobody's Business*" Lahiri tells about pure love. This is the story of three inmates of an apartment. Sang is basically of Bengali origin now fallen in love with Farouk, an Egyptian. He was more sophisticated in looks than Paul. Paul was in jealous of her relationship with Sang since he is secretly in love with her. Paul witnessed their love and break ups. he found could find the fact that Farouk is cheating on her. One day he got a telephone call from a lady who says that she is Farouk's lover. At first Sang didn't believe Paul and yelled at him not to interfere into their affairs. Later Paul could prove his words with evidence and save her from the treachery of Farouk.

Conclusion

In all these stories from "*Unaccustomed Earth*" (2008) Lahiri portrays different human relations. Each story has different plots but focus on same theme of relationships, past and present. It talks about how migration effected the development of identity and relationships. In all these stories the effect of migration and

diaspora are detailed. These are the stories of readjustments and redefinition of one's identity. In all these stories, first and second generation immigrants are separated from each other. Culture conflict is the central idea in all these stories.

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