

# DILEMMA OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE JHUMPA LAHIRI'S INTERPRETER OF MALADIES

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**Abstract:** - Lahiri is generously admired for her nine well-knit stories in which she shows the characters drawn from throughout the world mostly from India, U.S.A. and U.K. etc. These immigrants are generally psychedelic and they are in search of their identity. Most of her stories are set in India and America so show the Indo-American cultural identity crisis. Most of her works presents the three generations of mainly Indian Bengali emigrants to America, they are in the dilemma of their cultural identity. She has made a search for her identity crisis with an emotional sympathy by her main characters in most of her stories who are actively involved in their works. In her works there are most of the first generation migrants who face cultural crisis even though they try their best to preserve their beliefs, values and other habits of life; but they have clash of their identity in the exile life. This paper will identify generally the identity crisis in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri's but the special stress will be on "Interpreter of Maladies".

**Keywords:-** Identity crisis, dilemma, main characters, migrant, exile.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London of Indian Bengali parents; her father was a librarian and mothers a teacher. Her parents had migrated from West Bengal to USA when she was just two years old; she grew up in Rhode Island America. She started her studies from a kindergarten school Kingston, Rhode Island. She completed her graduation from South Kingstown High School and B.A in English literature from Barnard College. She has received so many degrees from Boston University such as: M.A. in English, an M.F.A. in Creative Writing, an M.A. in Comparative Literature, and a Ph. D. in Renaissance Studies. She has taught the creative writing at the Boston University and the Rhode Island School of Design; also she has taught at the Princeton University as a professor of creative writing in the Lewis Center for the Arts. She lives in Rome with her husband and their two children. She has written mostly in fiction such as novels and short stories etc. The important novels are: "The namesake", "Boston: Houghton Mifflin" and "The Lowland"; and important short stories are: "Interpreter of Maladies" and "Unaccustomed Earth" etc. Lahiri's early short stories countenance negative response from publishers for so many years. Her first appearance short story collection, "Interpreter of Maladies", was finally on the rampage in 1999. The stories address receptive predicament in the lives of Indians or Indian refugees, with different themes on different topics such as matrimonial difficulties, the mourning over a stillborn child, and the extrication between first and second generation USA refugees. Lahiri later wrote, "When I first started writing I was not conscious that my subject was the Indian-American experience. What drew me to my craft was the desire to force the two worlds I occupied to mingle on the page as I was not brave enough, or mature enough, to allow in life"

Lahiri published her first short story collection "Interpreter of Maladies" in 1999. Its main theme is about the identity crisis of Indians or Indian immigrants, including their generation gaps in understanding and values. It was admired by American critics while as Indian critics show cold shoulder towards it and found loopholes in it. Some of them felt that the collection symbolized Indians negatively. It was awarded the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and sold 600,000 copies and the Hemingway/PEN Award in 2000. The first edition of this short story collection was published by Harper Collins. It has received great support from readers as well as from critics. The collection has a prominent heading, Stories From Beangal Boston and Beyond. The title shows a wide range of her stories across three continents having their locale in London, Boston, Calcutta and even Dacca. The title is taken from one of the stories in the collection which, like all the stories, show the identity crisis of Indians in their native land and in their adopted, Western homes. She writes fluently about the immigrant experience and about the divide between cultures, probing both the difficulties and joys of adjustment. Overarching themes and narrative styles culminate in an exploration of the Indian and Indian-American experience, through the eyes of a crowd of characters struggle with themes of identity. Interpreter of Maladies is Lahiri's. It deals with the circumstance of Bengali immigrants in the USA in diverse abilities. It discovers innumerable identity crisis and the situation of the character s within the larger background of the foreign developing public space as well as the close personal space. It has nine stories as: "A Temporary Matter" "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" "Interpreter of Maladies" "A Real Durwan" "Sexy" "Mrs. Sen's" "This Blessed House" "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar" "The Third and Final Continent". A brief summary of some of the important stories are as:

**A Temporary Matter:** - This story reflects identity crisis that the immigrants face in an alien land. The story deals with the life of Shukumar and Shobha in Boston. The story is about this couple who live as strangers in their house until an electrical outage brings them together. The temporary matter is that their electricity would be cut off for an hour for the five days. In darkness, they could share inner feelings of identity crisis to each other. They were enjoying the opportunity offered by the power cut. The story reveals the married discord or lack of communication in a marriage of second generation emigrant couple which resulted in the identity crisis for both of them.

**When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine:-** This story investigates the identity crisis of the single man, Mr. Pirzada, who leaves home and family to do a research work in America, and the trouble he goes through when the clouds of war start threatening over East Pakistan. Mr. Pirzada is a

botany professor from Dacca who lives in New England for the year after getting a research awarded from the Pakistani Government; he has left behind his wife and seven daughters who he has not contacted in months. The story depicts the character of Pirzada who suffers from the identity crisis due to the separation from his family, wife and seven daughters who are in his homeland Dacca.

**Interpreter of Maladies:-** The heading story '*Interpreter of Maladies*' depicts an accord with upset family relations rooted by the sensitivity of disarticulation which is not completely fixed when one is culturally dislodged, but might be practiced anywhere, even in one's own family. The title story is all about Indian American couple- Mr. Das, his wife Mrs. Mina and their three children Tina, Ronny and Bobby and is set in Puri. The story also exhibits the family space with lack of communication between the woman protagonist on the one hand and her husband and children on the other. Mrs. Das' secret alienates her psychologically from other members of the family. Her struggle is with herself and at the end of the story she seems to have fought her way back to the family fold and also seem to have been able to interact with others. Mr. Kapasi acts like a catalyst making her understand her malady. The cause of Mrs. Das's identity crises was monotony which happened from seclusion that was a product of her diasporic situation. But to assume that diasporic situation resulted in unfaithfulness would be an unstable assert. The real anguish and anxiety of the identify crisis occurred in Mrs. Das' next eight years of uncomfortable survival, where she can not even reveal her secret to anyone. Mrs. Das needs, as a confidante, someone who is close as well as far-away at the same time, just like the country of her origin.

**Mrs. Sen's :-** This story deals with the complete identity crises of a Bengali lady in the US. In this, a woman shifts with her husband out of her own country India to the foreign country of USA and is put in charge of taking care of an eleven-year old American boy. Mrs. Sen struggles very hard to become familiarized to the traditions and civilization of the United States but she cannot break out from the fact that, in her words, "Everything is [in India]" (113). In 'Mrs. Sen's' the Genitive in the title indicates her place, but she feels like a stranger in her own house and certainly in the new land. She has identity crisis because she has to use nearly all her time in the University habitation, as her husband Mr. Sen, Professor of Mathematics, is all time hectic in his educational work.

**The Third and Final Continent :-** In this story the young male narrator is undoubtedly in identity crisis, and becomes happy in his new native soil (making the decision that it is his "final" continent) only after evaluating his knowledge with the 103-year-old Mrs. Croft.

In short all the stories including above mentioned above deal with the theme identity crisis. All of the important Characters such as Shobha, Mira, Mr. Kapasi, Mrs. Das, Mrs. Sen Miranda, Boori Ma, Bibi Haldar experience identity crisis in one way or another way. Almost all of her stories emphasize the internal life of the characters with their isolating situation as she herself experiences the problem which is properly reflected remark:

"For though they had created me, and reared me, and lived with me day after day, I knew that I was a stranger to them, an American child. In spite of our closeness, I feared that I was alien. This was the predominant anxiety I had felt while growing up." (Lahiri, 2011: 79- 82)

There is no doubt in it that not all of the stories in "Interpreter of Maladies" does not take place in USA but all of them deal with characters in who felt identity crisis of directly or indirectly. Therefore, the majority of the characters in "Interpreter of Maladies" must manage with living in the diaspora and are in the dilemma of identity crisis.

In short, Lahiri's writing is distinguished by her simple verbal communication and her characters, often Indian refugees in United States of America who have to find the way between the civilizing ideals of their native soil and their assumed residence. Her creative writing is mostly about her own life and often depicts her own knowledge as well as those of her family members, associates, kiths and kens. She studies her characters' anguish and anxiety which is result due to their identity crisis and details of migrant manners and actions. This novel, in fact, may be taken her first book. She started to work on it in 1997. It took her nearly seventeen years to finish *The Lowland*, because of its contentious historical situation.

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