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Mrs. M.Arthi¹

Dr.P.Kumaresan²

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¹Research Scholar, P.G and Research Department of English, Sudharsan College of Arts and Science Perumanadu, Pudukkottai, (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University), Tamil Nadu.

²Associate Professor in English, Sudharsan College of Arts and Science Perumanadu, Pudukkottai, (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University), Tamil Nadu



Cultural Identity Shifts in Female Characters of Jhumpa Lahiri

Mrs. M.Arthi¹, Dr.P.Kumaresan²

¹Research Scholar, P.G and Research Department of English, Sudharsan College of Arts and Science Perumanadu, Pudukkottai, (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University),Tamil Nadu.

²Associate Professor in English, Sudharsan College of Arts and Science Perumanadu, Pudukkottai,(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University),Tamil Nadu

Email: arthimayavan90@gmail.com¹

ABSTRACT

The idea of identity can be related to the modern study of culture, which has implications for the study of several topics like ethnicity. When something that is taken for granted to be consistent is altered, identity becomes a problem. Desire, such as the desire for safety, association, and acknowledgment over time and distance, can also be linked to identity.

Cultural identity, according to Stuart Hall, is a function of “becoming” as much as “being.” It belongs just as much to the past as it does to the future. It is not something that has always been there and spans space, time, history, and cultures. Cultural diversity gives people a past and a place to start from. But they change all the time, just like everything in heritage. They are sensitive of the ongoing “play” of history, culture, and power rather than being firmly fixed in a fundamentally zed past. We use the word “identity” to describe way different narratives position us and how we position ourselves within them. It is not anchored in a simple “recovery” of the past that is expecting discovery and, when found, will ensure our sense of self into eternity.

On other hand, because they are created by representations, identities are recognized within the context of cultural circumstances and lack universal characteristics. In her article Comparative Literature and Cultural Identification, Jola Skulj writes that “Cultural identity incorporates the question of the self and of culture” or reflecting the essence of culture, where the self represents an independent subjectivity of every human being.

Thus, identity determines a person, and it is in this area that women suffer more than males because they are responsible for upholding traditions. Jhumpa Lahiri, a supporter of women and recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2000 and 2013 Man Booker Prize nominee, depicts women’s issues and struggles creatively and particularly in foreign settings. Characters in her books struggle with identity, interpersonal connections, feelings of alienation, longing, loss, and hope more frequently. A reader gains a true understanding of the status, conduct, and personalities of Indian women who have settled both in India and abroad through Jhumpa Lahiri. The gender roles of the characters in “The Namesake”, “Interpreter of Maladies” and “The Lowland” have changed, according to a critical interpretation of Lahiri’s writings. The writer thinks that these phenomena indicate shifting status of men and women in society as they shift from conventional types to modern ones. One tactic for unnoticeably limiting women’s space is pre-programming. They are already pre-programmed on customs and traditions, thus they are not aware of the loss of their own areas.

Keywords: identity, culture, gender loss, changes, women suffering.

INTRODUCTION

Women have been truly performing the role of sustaining the family’s ethnicity since the beginning of human civilization. Schopenhaur contends that women are by nature supposed to submit, Aristotle thought women to be inferior, and Nietzsche argued that women are “God’s second error.” These definitions about women were given by men. This indicates that women would inevitably suffer in patriarchy, particularly patriarchy that is traditionally dominated by men and where even traditions do not support them. However, these notions experienced a transformation as a result of western influence, which came from liberal education and imposed new values and lifestyle norms on women.

Fighting is being done to free women from patriarchal family structures and male domination. As a result, a lot of the female authors are expressing their worries and anxieties, making women’s issues a main topic. The authors are overcoming barriers related to nationality, race, creed, etc. and creating a body of “literature of their

own.” Many female writers have expressed their disappointment about the world's predominance of men, and this is a significant echo.

The main interests of many contemporary women writers include highlight the condition of women, the growing issues, and the abuse of women on a physical, financial, and emotional level. Their focus has also included the mental suffering that women experience in households and throughout society. Suppression and mistreatment are only two of the numerous issues that women deal with on a daily basis several decades after the independence of India, women even see freedom and equality like a mirage. Independent action is not allowed for women. Some of history's great women showed their power by eradicating oppression. Generally speaking, literature reflects real life in a variety of circumstances. It is clear in numerous literary works. The societal structure and society have long held the view that women are beneath males. Women began to perceive the universe uniquely when the post-modern era began.

Women are portrayed as the silent victims and defenders of tradition and traditional values in Indian English literature. Ashima respects Indian beliefs, customs, and culture even in America despite being born and raised in India. While the second generation communicates its aberrations and deviations without requiring it or demonstrating it, the first generation of immigrants felt proud of their cultural history and did not like to violate it.

Former immigrants are often recollecting the advice given to them by their family members before they left India. The idea of a voyage is at the core of the concept of Diaspora, according to Avtar Brah. This journey results in the persona being translated into the immigrant self. The Namesake, which describes the Ganguly family over the many decades and is set in USA, is center on a voyage in the late 1960s.

Ashima Ganguly, Moushumi, and Sonia are three Bengali ladies from two generations. And the second Bengali child to be born in the United States, arrive in the nation as new brides in the winter of 1967. Ashima is a “fixed origins hesitant immigrant.” Ashima's initial hostility against her new country is a result of the cultural alienation she encounters on a daily basis in America.

A feeling of exile would be prevalent for a middle-income, pampered young woman like Ashima who had eminently little exposure to social and cultural debate outside of Bengali. Ashima frequently finds herself lost in the early phases of her migratory stay due to the requirement for regular translation in a setting where cultural connectedness cannot be achieved. She becomes pregnant on this foreign soil, which exacerbates her already uncomfortable sense of “foreignness.” She is not accompanied by Ashok on her new adventure, as she was when she first arrived in America as a new bride and got on to plane for the first time ever to meet her awaiting husband in a far away land. However, Ashima fiercely opposes the alteration of cultural identity that she has been raised with her entire life at the conclusion of the first excursion. She adapts over time by reenacting Calcutta in her social life in a new town of USA. Over her years of migration, she has had to renegotiate and transform her gendered working class Bengali identity into a gendered working class Bengali-American one. Making sure that the Bengali she spoke acts as a focal point for future Bengali immigrants and guaranteeing that one's adaptation to American society never leads in absorption are two ways to transform one's identity into a Bengali American one.

It is selective accommodation, Clifford notes, the urge to remain and be unique at the same time, and as a result, identity becomes synergetic. Ashima, a Bengali college student of nineteen years old, first appears in the story as she prepares to participate in a customary bride-viewing. She doesn't object to the process because she was brought up conservatively and comes from a working-class Bengali family in Calcutta in the middle of the 1960s. Ashima is anticipated to wed a good man that her family has picked as her husband because she is a daughter in the traditional Bengali cultural discourse.

She acknowledges the argument while also displaying a mild curiosity. Ashima finds the shoes Ashok, her future husband, is wearing outside the apartment building's front door and puts them on, “a pair of men's shoes that were not like any she'd ever seen” (NS 8). She can immediately tell that American-made shoes have an odd appearance and feel. As the reader could see, Ashima is open to trying new things, even if she does so slowly and cautiously; she is not giving up on the idea of tying the knot according to plan.

Mishra notes that Ashima seems to be worried about losing her cultural heritage or having it contaminated by contact with other civilizations. However, Ashima gives up when Ashok reject to go back to Mother land, emphasizing the advantages and unavoidable financial development for their child. Many of the white-collar Asian immigrants to the United States from the post-1965 generation undertook the extremely difficult migration for financial reasons. Although they were highly qualified, they also wanted the profitable benefits of migrating to the USA.

The similar reasoning may be seen in Ashima's unwilling acquiescence with Ashok's plans. Ashima's isolation from her family is most clearly described in the events leading up to the birth of her first child, which is where the author most poignantly depicts Ashima's yearning for family and familiarity. “Without a single grandparent or parent or uncle or aunt at her side, the baby's birth, like almost everything else in America feels somehow haphazard, only half true” (NS 24-5).

Ashima is thus shown in Lahiri's literature as a Bengali woman from the diaspora who is situated inside a cultural discussion that she never loses or misplaces anything. Ashima adamantly interacts with other Bengali migrants who belong to the same social class as her and who share her values. "They all come from Calcutta and for this reason alone they are friends" (NS 38).

Ashima's son Gogol points out that they go to other Bengali families every weekend, giving her the network she needs. Her family and the people she misses from her own country are represented through this network. Ashima is an example of a migrant who supports a single and sharing culture a type of collective "one true self"—hide[s] inside the many other, more fictitious or artificially imposed "selves" that individuals who shared ancestry and history hold in common, according to Hall's analysis the position of cultural is distinctiveness. They visit other Bengali families every weekend, as Ashima's son Gogol notices. She later endorsed Sonia and Ben's relationship, an American of mixed race, after Ashok's passing could be warmly interpreted as a further translation of her maternal identity; it exists for her efforts to understand the children's emotional and discursive positions in a culture and society.

In Jhumpha's writing, the prolong family gives a feeling of implanted and lessens conflict. The entire family appears in almost every scene but stays in the background thanks to Lahiri's talent. Ashima will always think of America as a place that "hosted" her, yet one that was neither resentful nor unfriendly, possibly even somewhat indifferent. Ashima's existence is shaped and reshaped by the decisions her family, husband, and, ultimately, his death, make for her. However, Ashima's gentle, predestined life was the dominant expatriate conversation inside the story's temporal frame, as Lahiri points out once.

In the Bengali middle class discourse of the diaspora at the time, Ashima is thus very much a cultural insider. "My parents had an arranged marriage, as did so many other people when I was growing up. My father came and had a life in the United States one way and my mother had a different one, and I was very aware of those things" (Chotiner (2008).21).

Due to their isolation as "racial/cultural outsiders" in white America, these people are forced into relationships that a close-knit diaspora of Bengalis in America during the 1960s and 1970s would view as illegitimate groups. Ben is portrayed as a white American in Mira Nair's film adaptation of *The Namesake*, suggesting that this relationship may be what allowed Sonia to fit in with the white majority in America.

The *Lowland*, this story depicts the situation of Indian women who are obliging by societal norms that have been preprogrammed. Lahiri suggests that women are capable of breaking free from social norms and becoming independent. Gauri continues to experience difficulties despite her environments changing. She adopts new identities in order to get over difficulties or severe trauma. Gauri, who is pursuing a degree in philosophy in Calcutta, marries Naxalite Udayan. Udayan's brother Subhash is a Ph.D. student in America who is unaware of his brother's illegal actions. When his sibling is killed, his parents abruptly summon him to Calcutta.

When he arrives in India, he learns that his parents had mistreated a pregnant Gauri since her union with Udayan was not prearranged. Lahiri illustrates the struggles faced by these married women. Subhash He makes unsuccessful attempts to win his parents over and get them to accept Gauri. Gauri is expected to dress in a white sari and act like other widows who are three times older for the functions that mark the end of Udayan's funeral ritual after a period of mourning.

After the mourning period ended they began to eat fish and meat again, but not Gauri. She was given white saris to wear so that she resembled the other widows in the family, women three times her age. (A fragment of narration in the *Lowland* by Jhumpha Lahiri) (*The Lowland*, 1 edition, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).

Although the sentences may appear to have no obvious flaws at first glance, deeper examination exposes limitations on women within the social context that are seen as natural (Pre-programmed). She is forced to live the life of a widow, which is often despised and viewed as amangal or ominous. Gauri is aware that her in-laws only wanted her child and did not want her. They frequently told her, "You won't be of help" (110). She could decide to go somewhere, as per her mother, and when Subhash pleads for Gauri by saying, "You can't separate them. For Udayan's sake, accept her" (114), his mother is enraged and speaks insultingly: "Don't lecture me on how to honor my own son." (114).

Gauri faces a deliberate coldness from her mother-in-law reinforced by her father-in-law was intend to drive her away from home. Subhash in an effort to save her from his parents, he gets married to her legally. He persuades her that nobody would bother her in America because no one was aware of the movement. She might continue her academic pursuits. It would be a chance to start over" (119). Gauri is urged to get married again before she has time to consider a recent loss. Gauri decides to travel with Subhash to Rhode Island after giving his suggestions careful thought in order to experience a change of scenery and pursue her long-desired academic goals. She leaves her in-laws' home to avoid the distress.

She changes her identity from Udayan's to Subhash's wife hoping it would help her But, Gauri marries Subhash in just to keep in touch with Udayan. She told herself in the back of her mind that she may grow to love him in the future, if only out of gratitude. When she writes, she once again expresses the belief that she is useless, as it

would be meaningless to save one earring if the other was lost. She isolates herself from him since she did not accept her new identity in Rhode Island. She has a separate apartment where she resides.

While still a young married woman, she had to suppress all of her sex desires and live a lonely life. Like other university women, Gauri tries to socialise with a mixed Indian community, but she withdrew when she realized she had nothing in common with them. She is pushed back into a horrific life as a result. Gauri's short hair, significantly altered visage, and adoption of an American fashion sense worry Subhash. Before and after the birth of her son Bela, she is plagued by unfounded anxieties. She is conscious of "how the slightest mistake on her part could result in Bela being ruined" (145).

Her own future-focused ruminations serve as both her source of food and her main predator. Gauri suffers when most people live freely anticipating their future. In the hope that society would change, Udayan had sacrificed his life. Gauri had anticipated a long-term marriage with him—not just a couple of years. Gauri and Bela were waiting for Subhash in Rhode Island. "For Gauri to be a mother to Bela, and to remain a wife to him" (152).

Additionally, she is not content with her second persona. Her lecturer Otto Weiss helped her enroll in a doctoral program for which she had a passion. After a trip to India, Gauri's daughter Bela refers to Subhash as "father," and when she returns home with her father, Gauri bids them farewell before permanently moving to California. Gauri switches her identity from a wife to a teacher in order to once more escape the monotony and solitude of living with Subhash.

After graduating, Bela continues to wander the country, staying away from Gauri and Subhash. Gauri mentors pupils while Subhash and Bela are not around. Her approachability has improved with her new persona, and despite exhausting herself, she keeps long office hours. Despite her prosperity, she likes solitude since it provides a type of companionship for her: "the reliable silence of her rooms, the steadfast tranquility of evenings" (237). Gauri changes identities:

From wife to widow, from sister-in-law to wife, from mother to childless woman... She had married Subhash, she had abandoned Bela. She had generated alternative versions of herself, she had insisted at brutal cost on these conversions. Layering her life only to strip it bare, only to be alone in the end (240).

Gauri wants to be friends with men, but she doesn't let them complicate her life. In order to satiate her intrinsic sexual cravings, Lorna again assumes a lesbian identity after finding Gauri for her research and sparking investigations of their own female bodies.

Thus, regardless of her background—India or America—memories Gauri's of Udayan continue to follow her about and have an impact on her life in the novel. She is entangled between commitments, desires, and paternal love. The author seems to be saying that no matter what decisions we make, our destiny and genetic make-up are set in stone. Jhumpa Lahiri explores diasporic postcolonial scenarios where Indians and Indian-Americans are caught between native traditions in their western lives in the sixth story in *Interpreter of Maladies*.

When caring for Eliot, a schoolboy, Mrs. Sen, the academic's wife, finds it difficult to fit into American culture. She challenges the other culture and is about to discuss a new identity. Her fixation with her heritage and home country prevents her from assimilating into the new culture. She runs from the present and seeks solace in the past, saying things like, "At home, you know, we have a driver," or admitting that "Everything is there" [Lahiri, 125; 126]. She escapes in an effort to get rid of her daily duties. She deliberately puts off driving, which is necessary in America, and continues to cook Indian food.

Mrs. Sen asserts her ethnic identity by associating herself with India in her interest in fish. Her ethnicity impedes her transition and acceptance, despite the fact that she expresses interest in Beethoven as a symbol of her initial embrace to the other culture. When she decides to change her identity and become an American, her internal upheaval is put to an end. For independence from a busy patriarchal husband who does not support her in the revolutionary act, she finally summons the guts to drive. The act also symbolizes that she overcomes her obstacles without the assistance of patriarchy and is embracing the new culture. When she first tries to cross borders, she fails, showing the pain she has been through. Her attempts to avoid reality also don't lessen her traumas or aid her in any way. She can only triumph over her challenges when she creates a new diasporic identity and embraces American culture. She assigns herself a grade ranging from escape to tolerance of the other culture.

In the seventh tale, Twinkle, the female lead, stands in for immigrant women of second generation. These people have hybrid diasporic identities that help them succeed more than men since they have spent a long time immersed in the other culture. Sanjeev and Twinkle, a newlywed couple, move into a new house in America that contains Christian antiques in the story *The Blessed House*. Twinkle is a hybrid and a second generation person because her parents spent a significant amount of time in California, but Sanjeev is an immigrant of first generation. Instead of a deadlock between two cultures, hybridity is inclined to hold even aspects of the blended culture that are in conflict. Twinkle's cultural assimilation is an unbiased cultural orientation. Upon finding a statue of Christ, she asserts "we're good little Hindus", but also leaves "a kiss on top of Christ's head" (Lahiri, 149).

Furthermore, she seems unfazed by the odd looks her name receives from guests and shows no regret or remorse in transforming her name from an Indian one to an American one. Lahiri says: “There is an actress in Bombay named Dimple Kapadia. She even has a sister named Simple” (Lahiri 164). Twinkle demonstrates her dynamic, positive hybridity as other immigrants struggle to integrate into their new societies. It’s important to keep in mind that it takes time for people to accept hybridity. All individuals whose current experiences of the culture of the other are ones of peril and bewilderment can have hope for the future thanks to Twinkle’s achievement in navigating a hybrid identity. For immigrants whose identities are constantly changing, openness is to come and hybridity, the alluring but unsettling diasporic experience, is what they may look forward to.

From *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar*, Lahiri illustrates difficulty to assimilating into a different culture. Its theme, the fallout from, is similar to that of her other works on the misery and distress of subaltern women. a native Indian woman who becomes homeless and destitute is globalised. Mrs. Sen and Bibi Haldar both yearn for: “At home that is all you have to do. Not everybody has a telephone but just raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole neighborhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with arrangements” (Lahiri, 128).

More than her own family members, Bibi’s neighbours are a collection of charitable, helpful Indian housewives. Bibi contains an odd, unidentified component with useless drugs. She yearns for a regular life with a husband and kids. The efforts of her female neighbors to make her feel normal are futile because she isn’t accepted as a wife. When she becomes pregnant, gives birth to a boy, and recovers from her peculiar condition, all of her confusion, worries, and feelings of rejection finally come to an end. In *Bibi*, the author creates an Indian female identity and illustrates the struggles of disadvantaged subaltern life in India’s Calcutta. Everywhere there is a process of absorbing various cultures, and new identities are created and destroyed. . Bibi’s averseness to the other culture is disguised as strange disease, an allegorical mental disease as a condition of which “her world was confined to the unpainted four-story buildings” (Lahiri, 173). Bibi suffers a result of breaking of codes by her physical look; “She was not pretty. Her upper lip was thin, her teeth too small. Her gums protruded when she spoke” (Lahiri, 174) and she suffers hardships and most of them internally in spite of the feminist community solidarity behind her.

Other women in that place encourage her “to occupy in little dialogues with neighbouring men” (Lahiri, 180), where the concept of the Self is mocked, but it paves for the development of the ultimate “hybrid” identity. Bibi, a semi-state of this and that, negotiates between the self and other to become a mother without becoming a bride. The hybrid nature of Bibi Haldar’s identity transformation, a type of resistance that muddies the waters the lines between the self and the other and starts a negotiation between the two, is what heals her. Her sickness causes her ongoing suffering, but she is able to beat it when she stops adhering to ethnic cultural norms and creates a new hybrid identity.

In *Sexy*, Jhumpa Lahiri occupies a middle ground and differs thematically in that its protagonist, Miranda, is an American woman who marries Dev, an Indian. People from other cultures are always attracted to one another and have an appeal. The sexual allure between Miranda and Dev dramatizes the dual sensation of charm and threat. After meeting Dev, Miranda became captivated with Indian culture and felt compelled to learn more about it. She visited an Indian provision store, went to an Indian restaurant, and tried to learn as much as she could about India and Indian culture. Miranda’s identity is then posited to openness toward the other as a result of this Self/Other conflict.

She negotiates the initial steps toward the ideal Self/Other relationship, in which the other is created without any narcissistic attempts on the part of the Self, and what Spivak refers to as a “ethical responsibility.” Whom “ethics are not only a matter of knowledge but a summons to a relationship” refers to (Landry, 5). However, she suffers and this request for a healthy Self/Other relationship fails since the immigrant Other’s reaction is not as honest as her own. Spivak contends that the best kind of connection is one that interacts with the other in basic and semi terms, exchanged and necessitates for equal kind of opening up on the part of the other.

Character of Dev in *Sexy* has an incorrect archetypal impression of Miranda throughout the entire novel, viewing her as a glamorous woman with tremendous sexual appeal. He is unable to participate in “the ethical posture of providing rambling place for the ‘Other’ to exist” as a result (Landry, 6). In order for the female subject’s one and only attempt to be ignored, silenced, and doomed to failure. Lahiri has taken steps to distinguish her female characters from those of the classic Indian mythical ladies, such as Sati, Savitri, or Sita. Instead, she has carved out a woman who can be acknowledged as a free individual with dreams and wishes for a new kind of woman. Jhumpa Lahiri, a writer from the diaspora, has Jhumpa Lahiri has attempted to present an identity that not only attempts to forge its own identity despite being revealed in two different realms. They must “join the race,” to paraphrase John Lennon. She has carved out the likenesses of strong, brave women who are determined to confront their fates no matter what.

In order to live their lives on their own terms and defy all moral and societal norms, the women in Lahiri’s novels have the conviction necessary to do so. The New woman that Lahiri presents in her writing is self-reliant, self-assured, and dynamic. She is also able to define herself in new ways and is well-equipped to deal with any

difficulties that may arise. This New Woman understands how to uphold the obligations that these conditions place on her and has her own commitments, desires, aspirations, ethics, and moralities.

CONCLUSION

The study's sole goal is to investigate how multiculturalism is portrayed in Jhumpa Lahiri's writings. Within these bounds, the study focuses on a diasporic writer who interacts with the host cultures to represent, compromise with, and absorb her own culture. She regards the customs and values of other civilizations as her own. Other people participate in this process concurrently and adhere to their culture. Religion also serves as a cultural proxy. The study examined culture in an apolitical and irreligious manner, separating religion from the characters' daily lives and practices. In addition to the conclusions, Lahiri's writings have addressed a variety of human relationship topics, such as parent-child and husband-wife interactions. Future studies can examine this aspect. The recent rise of regional sub-groups in diaspora research necessitates. . They should be examined because they give Indian diasporic writing something special. Ashima, Ruma, Sudha, Moushumi, Gauri, Mrs. Sen, and Twinkle are just a few of Lahiri's female characters who have displayed their diasporic journeys toward integration and acculturation. In contrast to their male counterparts, women go through a harder assimilation process that involves acculturation and a different sensibility for feeling culturally alienated. Feminist analysis of her diasporic female figures is also possible.

These characters travel over continents and borders, taking us across North and South America, Europe, and even into Asia, including Thailand. The women characters in this collection are all transnational beings - "the processes by which immigrants form and establish multidimensional social ties that link their societies of origin and settlement" (Shukla 12). These figures demonstrate how humans strive for both change and movement while yet needing to honor their ancestors' cultures and identities. They cannot ignore their previous identity and culture in order to forge a new one. . Their "homes are always provisional; borders crossed and identities are formed, on the move" (Bromley 124).

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