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Feminism motherhood womanhood in the novels of Jhumpa Lahiri

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Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri is undoubtedly the first immigrant writer who is considered with the maladies of her characters and tries to be their interpreter. She is an artistic and the artist's other name is an interpreter. The real name of Jhumpa Lahiri is Nilanjana Sudeshna. She was born on July 11, 1967. She is an American author of Indian origin. We know her for her short stories, novels and essays in English and more recently in Italian. The portrayal of women in the novels of Jhumpa Lahiri is unique. The women characters of the novelist redefine the nature of women. Women are portrayed as individuals, breaking the rules of patriarchy and redefine their gender roles. They the myths of womanhood and motherhood. They fight with courage and resist various challenges in relationship including material life. For example in her novels Lahiri explore Gauri's expression of identity, her struggle with love, Bela's choice for individuality and pragmatism in life.

Jhumpa Lahiri portrays women of all ages, clothes in many different personalities what always as a person coming to terms with some aspects of her life. New sensibilities are being forged within these pages, new feelings being hammered out new areas being explored. All the different types of women characters have one thing in common, though some are submissive, some are revolting. Jhumpa Lahiri in her fiction depicts and celebrates the womanhood and the femininity of an everyday woman in its entirety.

Keywords: Feminism, consciousness, family values

Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the 21st century leading women novelist of Indian origin. Her works largely reflected issues of identities in the first and second women generation in the west. In her novels Jhumpa Lahiri has presented women sensibility minutely. She has presented the real condition of Indian women in U.K. and U.S A. Ashima Ganguly in *The Namesake* is typical example of this. Character of Ashima is portrayed by Jhumpa Lahiri in two sides first a Calcutta girl and second American living lady.

Her homelessness was seen during her pregnancy when she was busy in stands in the kitchen of a central square apartment making rice krispies and planters, peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chilli paper wishing there was mustard oil to pour into the mix. She feels homeless and emotionally breaks down and misses many relatives. Her mind is always busy in compared many things between hostland and homeland. We saw another example of this on Gogol's 14th birthday. For the first time in his life, he has said no to the frosted cake. "She makes sure to prepare his favourite things: " lamb curry with lots of potatoes, litchis thick chana dal with swollen brown raisins, pineapples chutney, sandwiches molded out of saffron tinted ricotta cheese"

Ashima made her mini Bengal in America not only in making dishes but also in her look. Ashima presents first generation diaspora and this is the main reason that clashes with her second generation. She always disapproved her children of being American. They loved Christmas rather than Durga Puja. They loved American food rather than rice dal and Bengali foods. Ashima is dissatisfied with the way the life they are living. She is unhappy when she saw her son Gogol's involvement with two white women and her daughter also. Through her character Lahiri showed the picture of the typical Bengali women of the 1960s. Now she is a good house wife and a good mother. For her family is all in all. She took all her decisions for the welfare of her family members. In her character, we saw Ashima is different from American career oriented women.

Next character is Moushumi Mazoomdar. She is a Bengali lady but she was born in England so we can call her an Indian American woman. She is a second generation character in the novel *The Namesake*.

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She is the most complicated character in the novel because she had several relationships with many people, who had different cultural backgrounds and nationalities. Moushumi is searching for her own identity why not accepting the surname of Gogol's family "Ganguly". She continues her surname "Mazoomdar".

Next character is Gauri Mitra in the novel *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri. She is the central character of the novel. In Gauri's character we saw many parts of her life such as single, first marriage, widowed, remarriage, separated and divorced. The character of Gauri is more contrary to society. She is afraid of being a mother. She is always marginalised by not only her laws but also society members. She sees things too much and she loves philosophy too much. She is an isolated woman. She saw many ups and downs in her single married widow and remarried life. She chooses her career rather than her husband and daughter. She rains throughout her life to set her way. Gauri's attitude towards villa was not so good. When she was pregnant her negative image of a child reflects in the novel. "she felt as if she contained a ghost, as Uday and was. The child was a vision of him in that it was both present and absent. Both within her and remote". After her delivery she is not comfortable as her part she remains herself that all mothers needed assistance. Her necklace can be seen when she left alone in a room and walk outside when she was only six years old. Her ambition to pursue higher education and career forces her to escape the responsibility as a mother and wife. She felt pleasure in her separate life. Her role changed from wife to widow, from sister in law to wife, from mother to childless woman. When she is living with Subhash in America, she changed in her outlook. She had short hair and dressed in American style but Subhash did not like her new makeover. In America she used to mingle with the American community in university.

In Sonia's case, in the novel *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, however trigger a relatively much less sense of alienation and nostalgia. She seems to gradually assimilate the bits and pieces of American culture and attach herself to 'American common sense' without many of hiccups and setbacks. She lives on her own in San Francisco, works for an environmental agency and studied for her LAST. But when she hears the news of the sad demise of her father due to a massive heart attack, she flies back from San Francisco to be with her mother. She stays with her mother and works paralegal, hoping to apply to law school nearby. It is Sonia who takes care of her widowed mother compared to Ruth and Maxine, Sonia is of a different cast. Unlike Moushumi, she does not seem to have several sexual relationships. Like her mother, she has a sense of duty. Like the traditional Indian woman, Sonia marries her boyfriend a half Chinese boy, Ben and is happy in their shared world.

Jhumpa Lahiri's women protagonists are mostly Indians either living in India or the U.S. In an alien land with constant cultural collisions caused by cultural transplants and leading to cultural alienation, these protagonists find it difficult to adjust, to cope, and to come to terms with the reality around them. Moreover they are always mourning for the homeland left behind. They need to adjust socially economically as well as culturally. The ladies portrayed in a friction are two sides of the same coin sometimes they are independent, sometimes dependent, sometimes they are aggressive, sometimes passive, and sometimes they are subjective in their approach and sometimes objective. Most

women have been conditioned from childhood to swallow their anger but if a distressed lady is going to learn to value herself, she must accept and learn to deal with her feelings of anger instead of masochistically turning them against herself. She has her circular journey towards home and identity, being recognised as an unsettling race through alienation, cultural dismemberment, sex, modernity, urbanism, and muted boundaries between time and space, life and death, identity and authenticity. Frustrated and distressed women are two sides of the same coin, but when we spin the coin on its edge one side blurs into the other, just as most of a women characters blend into a multi dimensional character.

Bela, daughter of Gauri in *The Lowland* like other female characters of Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction is a second generation character in this novel. Like Sai, Sonia Moushumi she also faces identity crisis because she is a migrant of the second generation in a foreign land. Through the generations Lahiri shows how they so disinterestedness when they listen to their parents talking in their native language. She follows a life of without any principles and she prefers a bundering life. The difference between Gauri and her daughter such as when Gauri settled in America after marriage, she cuts short hair and also discards to wear sarees and she also takes wine at night, this shows how she changed herself and become a diasporic woman but she takes warmth through Indian shawl on the contrary Bela who was born in America, she has long hair and keeps it braided and she also has some knowledge of Bengali the differences show contrast between the mother and daughter of our Indian family.

Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the category of Indian diaspora whose only link with Indians is their origin. See rights about the people around her, i.e. about Indians settled abroad long back, their sensibility and consciousness which makes it difficult for the theme to cut off from their roots.

Jhumpa Lahiri captured range of problems in a short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*. The loneliness and sense of alienation felt by immigrants inability of the second generation in getting rid of deep seated Indian sentiments, the predicament of being non neither Indian nor Western, the desperate attempts of immigrants adjust, their fear and anxiety all are covered in different stories in *Interpreter of Maladies*. Jhumpa Lahiri distinctly portrays the situation of exiled Indians. The people navigate between inherited tradition and the baffling new world the encounter everyday. Like Ashima, Moushumi's mother is also a typical example of an Indian wife. A traditional woman in India does not hold a job but remains home maker. She is almost ignorant of the outer world. Similarly, although Moushumi's mother lived abroad for thirty two years in England and now in the United States, she does not know how to drive a car, does not have a job and does not know the difference between a checking account and saving account and yet she is a perfectly intelligent woman was an honours student in philosophy at presidency College before she was married off at twenty two.

Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian by ancestry, British by birth and American so she targets the western audience deliberately portraying the Indian American life. This sense of freedom is one of the greatest thrills of writing fiction for her and she discovered her authorial freedom by publishing her debut book. By discussing her private sphere of creative power one may copiously categorise her as an American author, as an Indian American author, as a British born

author, as an immigrant author, and as an ABCD author, (ABC stands for American born confused Desi which describes culturally challenged second generation Indian in the USA). To Indian academics she has written something known as diaspora fiction and to the USA academics immigrant fiction and this kind of demarcation amuses her.

The characters live, cut off from their solid base called culture and faith. Jhumpa Lahiri has proved her uncommon merit in picturing these human relationships in different contexts and on different levels. She also explores the large heartedness of Indians in incompressing foreign culture with their social culture realm of interaction. Lahiri in her fictional writing presents the Indian migrants who feel dislocated in other countries and face cultural dilemmas. We find in her writing a deliberate detachment and aloofness that alienates the writer from her work and also quite interestingly refuses to propitiate the reader who expects her, and e her soul herself, to sing the mournful nostalgic tunes to the countrymen of her lost i.e. her own country.

Diasporic women in other novels take first place to her families especially their children in the hostland but in the case of Gauri, she always keeps herself away from her family and she does not care about anything that she should do for her family. Unlike other diasporic women she is not dutiful to her family. When she has two options family and career but she chooses her career. She has no feelings of any kind of loss and rootlessness. She attempts in her all possible way to establish herself firmly in a newland without the support of her family. Her success becomes failure in the sense of Bela, who did not receive the love of her mother and Subhash who never leads happy married life with Gauri and marries with another woman, Elise Silvia, he met at Richard's funeral.

In every novel of Jhumpa Lahiri's in which women such as sometimes they tried to adjust with their difficult situations, sometimes they want and try to cope with them what all the women characters of Jhumpa Lahiri's novels have one point is common that they are always nostalgic for their homeland. Through her novels Jhumpa Lahiri celebrates womanhood and the femininity of every day women in its entirety. Although she portrays all ages women in her novels but they have different personalities and all are some similar aspects of their lives.

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