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Cross-cultural Dilemma in Jhumpa Lahiri's the interpreter of Maladies

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Abstract
The focus of the current article is on Lahiri's ideas, particularly the cross-cultural dilemma. In all of her books, Lahiri eloquently developed the issue of cross-cultural conflict. This study examines Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* for its topic of cross-cultural problems. *Interpreter of Maladies* is a short story collection by Jhumpa Lahiri that focuses on cross-cultural issues to provide a natural chance to compare the existence of opposing cultural ideals. Lahiri depicts the lives of Indians and Indian Americans stuck between their ancestral culture and the society in which they now find themselves in all of her writings. Lahiri is an outsider to Indian society who is still trying to figure it out. For instance, she admits, *I'm lucky that I'm between two world.....* Lahiri uses her cultural background as an Indian American in her writings to create plots and characters that express the juxtaposition in her own life.
Culture denotes creative people's arts, customs, and institutions, as well as meals, languages, clothing, civilization, political history, and conditions. As a result, we can differentiate one group of people from another and one nation from another. Multiculturalism appears to institutionalize another means of expressing a nation's cultural identity in the context of its vicissitudes. Multiculturalism denotes the coexistence of many civilizations. Lahiri is a well-known fiction writer on the world stage. The idea of international identity and the anguish of cultural displacement runs across all of the stories. She sought to express her sentiments via writing rather than taking consolation in it, and she received praise for her efforts.

Keywords: diaspora, multiculturalism, dilemma, identity, cultural dislocation, cultural belongingness, alienation and assimilation

Introduction
Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London in 1967 but was reared by her father, a librarian, and mother, a teacher, in South Kingstown, Rhode Island. As a result, Lahiri, who is Indian by lineage, British by birth, and American by immigration, is influenced by a multi-cultural lifestyle, which is a prominent topic in many of her writings. Lahiri's mother wanted her children to be aware of their Bengali background, so they visited relatives in Calcutta frequently (India). Her compositions were influenced by her numerous childhood travels to India and her parents' continued involvement in the Indian community despite their immigration to America thirty years ago. Lahiri has received several honors for her works. Interpreter of Maladies (1999), The Namesake (2003), Unaccustomed Earth (2008), and The Lowland (2013) are among her best-known works. In 1993, she received the Henfield Foundation's Trans-Atlantic Award. *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri's debut short story collection, won the PEN/Hemingway Award (Best Fiction Debut of the Year) in 1999. The title piece, *Interpreter of Maladies*, was nominated for the O. Henry Award for the best American short story the same year. In 2000, she received the Addison Metcalf Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2000, The Third and Final Continent of *Interpreter of Maladies* was named one of the Best American Short Stories. Three of her tales were published in The New Yorker, and she was designated "one of the 20 greatest authors under the age of 40" by the publication. The Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2000 for her debut short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*, was the highest accolade for her brilliance thus far. She is the first Indian woman to be honored with this honor. She earned the M. F. K. Fisher Distinguished Writing Award from the James Beard Foundation in 2000 for her article 'Indian Takeout' in food & wine Magazine. Nobody's Business was chosen as one of the Best American Short Stories in 2002. Unaccustomed Earth, Lahiri's second collection of short stories, won the Frank O. Connor International Short Story Award in 2008. In 2009, she was awarded the Asian American Literary Award for Unaccustomed Earth.
In her writings, Jhumpa Lahiri deftly depicts the cross-cultural conundrum. Her culture and background were affected by both Indian and American cultures. Many of her stones portray the isolation and loneliness of immigrants stuck between two vastly different cultures, and many of them are inspired by this multi-cultural existence. Staying in the predicament is uncomfortable, but getting out is tough. The migrant is a part of both worlds and none of them at the same time. Because the majority of the characters are of Indian descent, India continues reappearing as a place, or more symbolically, a character's memories. She says,

"No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile in whichever country that I travel to, that's why I was tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile." (An Interview, www.citypaper.net)

Interpreter of Maladies is used to illustrate how cultural information may be communicated through writing whether or not the author is aware of it. It is a collection of short tales featuring persons of Indian ancestry who live in the United States, primarily in New England. Within the collection, there is a range of storylines that show a varied community of immigrants. Characters in the stories range from children trying to make sense of their home lives versus their school lives, to young adults unsure of their identity as Americans and their ties to their heritage, to older adults who are constantly struggling to accept their new lives while forgetting their old. These individuals react to their family, friends, and foes in very diverse ways, providing an unbiased depiction of the diversity of Indian immigrants' personalities despite their similar ethnic heritage. It aims to dispel prejudices by emphasizing a diverse cast of characters, settings, and narratives set in the same historical and cultural setting. *Interpreter of Maladies* tries to reflect a complete culture within the constraints of a single work, and Lahiri succeeds by harmonizing several number of images rather than giving simply one, as many short story collections or single short stories do. Lahiri, on the other hand, presents a balanced picture of Indian immigrant culture through these conflicting components. For example, she utilizes the stories to depict the many aspects of society and carefully juxtaposes them with one another to form a global whole. The unfaithful husband in Sexy and the adulterous Mrs. Das in *Interpreter of Maladies* demonstrate this balancing.

Character specifics are used by Lahiri to make statements about the sense of solitude that pervades each story's events. Mrs. Sen, for example, resonates with many solitary immigrant women of all origins, not only of Indian heritage, with its devastating portrait of a lady attempting to integrate but hesitant to let go of the elements of her life in India that "do not fit." Mrs. Sen babysits at her house in the United States while wearing the exquisite saris she meticulously imported from India but no longer needs. It is the trips to the fish market and letters from India that keep her feeling whole while illuminating her very emptiness. The reaction of Indian audiences to readings by Lahiri have been concerned with ideas of identity and representation, issues surely experienced by all immigrants trying to adapt to a new culture.

The Treatment of Bibi Haldar is a narrative set in a location other than a US Northeastern coastal city. In Calcutta, an epileptic lady with few relatives remains in the resentful care of her cousin and his wife while looking for a spouse and treatment for her afflictions. While it remains consistent with Lahiri's overall theme of isolation, she says herself that "*The story is basically about the town's involvement in Bibi's search for a husband and her own sense of happiness*." (Aguir Arun, Pifmagazine.com, 28 July 1999, Pifmagzine, 8 Oct. 2001) Bibi Haldar's identity is solidified by the community because she has no biological relatives. Lahiri uses the community technique to highlight this character's heightened sadness in her city, even though surrounded by the same people who have always surrounded her.

A Real Durwan, like The Treatment of Bibi Haldar, is set in India and contains solely individuals whose origins are not discussed because they are residents of their nation. The protagonist of the story is a sixty-year-old woman, deported to Calcutta as a result of the Partition, whose problems of adaptability to a new culture are brought to the fore. "*No one doubted she was a refugee; the accent in her Bengali made that clear*," (IOM, P-72) which is why she is always inclined "*to exaggerate her past at such elaborate lengths and heights*" in order to protect herself against the aggressiveness of the new cultural environment. From the perspective of a Westerner prone to prejudice and stereotyping, the story could be interpreted as focusing on the Indians' cruelty and indifference to the Other, since Boon Ma is cruelly thrown into the street after being accused of theft by those whom she had served for years in exchange for a shelter. Even if one forgets that the short story collection is set in Calcutta, the story is about failing human connections, apathy, and brutality brought on by poverty in the original nation. Lahiri's stories revolve around a cultural clash. Its treatment, however, is not confined to the conflict between India and America; it can occur on both sides of the border. Mr. Kapasi, an Indian taxi driver and tour guide who is also a skilled linguist, and an Indian American family traveling India are the subjects of the collection's title story, *Interpreter of Maladies*. The Dases are perceived by Mr. Kapasi from the start as foreigners as they "*looked Indian, but dressed as foreigners did*." (IOM, P-44) During their first encounter, Mr. Das has an air of confidence given by the fact that "*Mina and I were both born in America*." (IOM, P-45) Mr. and Mrs. Das do not make an effort to reclaim their sense of belonging, although they are quite interested in Despite their appearance, the Das family cannot be mistaken for Indians. They look and act American. Mr. Das is unable to function without his tour book, which contains the material he believes he requires to have an understanding of India. The exoticism of India's people and places piques his interest. The Das family's contact with India is a case study in intercultural communication gone wrong. Reaffirming their nationality as Americans Mr. Kapasi, on the other hand, feels that he identifies with Mrs. Das during their excursion to Konarak's Sun Temple. He sees in her the same dissatisfaction he had with his marriage. "*The signs he recognized from his own marriage were there — the bickering, the indifference, the protracted silences*." (IOM, P-53) But communication is hindered again, as Mr. Kapasi was looking for a friend, while Mrs. Das was looking for someone to "*interpret her common, trivial little secret*," (IOM, P-66) which is why he felt deeply insulted. Mrs. Das misinterpreted 'the *Interpreter of Maladies*'. She wanted some remedy to cure her consciousness, expecting to feel better and relieved. Mr. Kapasi wanted instead to "*fulfill his dream, of serving as an interpreter between nations*." (IOM, P-59) In this story Lahiri's main concern is the status of the Indian immigrant in

America, or at best, the precarious condition of the Indians in India would mean to over-simplify and ignore many of the issues from which much of the artistic vigour of Lahiri's stories is derived.

Although a Temporary Matter is set entirely in America, Shoba and Shukumar are of Indian descent. The narrative does not go into detail on their failure to adjust to a hostile cultural milieu. It instead focuses on the deteriorating relationships between a husband and wife following the death of their child, and even though the fact that the two would be expected to stick together given the tragic incident and the threatening cultural environment, the walls separating the young couple become even thicker. They are unable to communicate and have become distant to the point of separation.

One of the nine stories appears to have a more emphasized political component, in the sense that the reader is tempted to take it as dealing with contemporary political issues because of an explicit reference to the Bangladeshi struggle for independence in 1971. Mr. Pjada was born in Dacca, which is now the capital of Bangladesh but was once part of Pakistan (in 1971). Pakistan was in the midst of civil war during that year. When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine, which depicts the cultural unification of an Indian Bengali family and a Pakistani young man in a distant country, continues Lahiri's exploration of isolation. Dacca was on the eastern frontier, struggling for independence from the reigning regime in the west. However, the story, told from the perspective of a little girl named Lilia, avoids politicization entirely, focusing instead on questions of identity and intercultural communication. The primary focus of the story is on the child's perception of the world and her consciousness. Lilia's initiation is contingent on her becoming aware of the distinction between self and others across visible and invisible boundaries. She says that "*Like my parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room ... drank no alcohol ... Nevertheless my father insisted that I understand the difference and he led me to a map of the world taped to the wall over his desk ... Mr. Pirzada is Bengali, but he is Muslim, my father informed me. Therefore he lives in East Pakistan, not India*." (IOM, P-26)

The Third and Final Continent, the final story in Lahiri's first collection of nine stories, deals with the realities of arranged marriages and the long process of integration into American culture from an Indian perspective. Lahiri gives the first-person story of an Indian man preparing for the arrival of his new bride while living under the roof of an elderly American landlady, possibly based on aspects of her parents' lives in the United States. The stark contrasts between his bachelor's existence in a room in this woman's house and the journey he goes to understand who his bride is brazenly commentedbrazenly comment on the cultural differences and commonalities between the two civilizations. In both of these partnerships, there are feelings of solitude and a need to band together to survive. By introducing the couple's college-aged child at the end of the story, Lahiri presents the concept of cultural identity fading over generations. They bring him home to "*eat rice with his hands and speak Bengali*" (IOM, P-197) which are "*things [they] sometimes worry he will no longer do after [they] die*." (IOM, P-197) Lahiri presents a couple who's only remaining connection with the country of their origin has a definitive death with their own end because the assimilation of their son into American culture leaves no room for their own cultural orientation.

The stories, set across national, but also generation, or gender frontiers, contribute to the writer's finely finding an identity of her own, reconciling her two selves as, *"like many immigrant offspring, I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen."* (Interview, Newsweek International Magazine, US, 20 Sep. 1999) Consequently, the collection may be interpreted as the writer's journey into her new, even if not necessarily true, self, a journey of initiation into the major adaptation problems of the contemporary world. On a first reading, Jhumpa Lahiri's collection of short stories seems to offer an image of the complicated cultural relationships between India and the West, investigating the troubled position of the displaced individual caught between two cultures which, in most cases, she finds unfamiliar. On a second, more in-depth reading, all the stories record journeys across visible and invisible frontiers that the characters must transgress in order to find their real self. According to Michiko Kakutani, "*many of Ms. Lahiri's people are Indian immigrants trying to adjust to a new life in the United States, and their cultural displacement is a kind of index of a more existential sense of dislocation*." (The New York Times, 06 Aug. 1999: 48)

The meeting between East and West, as well as individual movement across national borders, is only a pretext for Lahiri to delve deeply into the challenges posed by the encounter between the self and the Other, the state of the disturbed modern self, and, more crucially, human nature. In this regard, Jhumpa Lahiri's writings follow the pattern of most contemporary fiction, with an equal interest in the essence of individual consciousness and the self as the nexus of various cultural forces, taking into account both the private and public spheres and how they interact and influence one another.

Jhumpa Lahiri's first-generation Indian-Americans treasure their heritage and memories as an essential, inseparable aspect of their roots and identity. They 'look forward to the issues and modalities of their hybridization and cross-cultural fertilisation in the expanding heterogeneous arena of the United States, rather than more absorption in the dominant culture,' because they were born and nurtured in America. They reject to be labelled as "anonymous" or "other."

Lahiri illustrates not only her diasporic characters' uprooting from their birthplace and their loneliness in an unfamiliar geographical region, but also that one's home is wherever one lives or has lived; in this example, the United States. Almost all of her stories contain a yearning for the homeland, for the life they lived in India before immigrating to the United States. Even second-generation settlers are bound by their parents' birth country. They are Americans in terms of politics and nationality, but they must deal with the 'additional baggage' of their parents' memories of their homeland. The first-generation settlers are concerned that their children would lose

their parents' traditions and culture and become entirely Americanized. As a result, they must preserve their forefathers' traditions in the "Little India" that they have created in their flats. Visits to India on occasion keep them in touch with their "roots," and the charm of India keeps them tied to her.

Lahiri's fictional portrayal of the immigrant scenario is believable because it shows her great observation and understanding of the folks caught between their traditional past and modern present. Lahiri's protagonists, who live at the crossroads of Indian and Western cultures, struggle to make sense of a strange new world where old relationships, as well as old mores and etiquette, are out of place. Other diasporic writers shared their stories as well. Meena Alexander, Stephen Gill, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, and many other talented emerging writers share a diasporic consciousness and represent an extraordinary diversity of tenacities. They have described the problems of migrants such as racial discrimination, feelings of inferiority, loss of native culture, and many other issues.

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