



COUNTER-HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE ON WOMEN: A STUDY OF JHUMPA LAHIRI'S INTERPRETER OF MALADIES

Dr. M. Kannadhasan

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract:

This paper aims to analyze the majority of the short stories in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* deal with the diasporic postcolonial circumstances of Indian and Indian-American lives. Their hyphenated Indian identities have caused them to be caught between the Western world and the Indian traditions they have left behind, leading to a constant struggle to adjust between the two worlds of the two cultures. These characters' ambivalent identities are what lends the collection's receptiveness to postcolonial studies. This paper addresses the difficulties in negotiating new identities through an examination of the inevitable Self/Other confrontation that occurs during the identity-formation process. It does this by focusing on the trauma and potential success, failure, or resistance of female subjects who negotiate their new identities in their confrontations with the culture of the other.

Key Words: Interpreter of Maladies, Indian Identities, Western World, Indian Traditions, Trauma, Resistance and Culture.

The works of award-winning author Jhumpa Lahiri have enthralled readers all over the world. Lahiri, who was born in London in 1967 and raised in both the US and India, draws inspiration for her writing from her experiences growing up in these two countries. She is renowned for her emotive and potent depictions of people who are torn between two different worldviews and languages and are trying to figure out who they are in the world. Her writing has received high praise for its literary dexterity, emotional depth, and sophisticated grasp of the nuances of the human condition. Lahiri, who has penned multiple books and received countless honours, is regarded as one of the most important voices in modern literature.

Interpreter of Maladies, her debut collection of short stories, won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2000, launching her as a significant literary talent. Her later works, such as the short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* and the novel *The Namesake*, have also been well-received by critics and readers alike. Lahiri's writing is distinguished by its exact and evocative use of language, coupled with its sensitivity and empathy. With a profound awareness of the human condition, she delves into themes of identity, displacement, and belonging. Lahiri's writings have influenced readers all over the world and have been translated into many languages.

Lahiri's stories have received widespread recognition. American and Indian critics have focused on them, with many of their pieces addressing various facets of one or more of these stories. In the context of post colonialism, Lahiri's fiction generally raises a few broad questions. One such reading of Laura Anh Williams examines the metaphor of food as a way to assert subjectivity. "Readers tend to read the collection as a "short story cycle" and not simply as a compilation of separate unrelated stories" (Mandal, 18).

It is suggested that a thorough examination of every female subject in this collection be done in future scholarly work, as it is far too much for one article to cover. Because of this, this essay must be selective and concentrate only on stories whose central themes deal more directly with how women construct their identities than how men do. "as long as they choose to or are forced to remain a separate community" (9). These are stories that deal with the pain, pressure, and potential success or failure of these female characters as they attempt to (re-)assert their agency, (re-)construe their subjectivity, or negotiate their identities through negotiation, acculturation, assimilation, or silence.

Mrs. Sen," the title character finds it difficult to adjust to life in the United States. She is scared of her son's continuous exposure to American culture and is unable to drive or navigate the streets. Lahiri explores the feelings of loneliness and isolation that can arise from cultural displacement through the character of Mrs. Sen. We witness firsthand how challenging it is to forge a sense of identity in a foreign nation. "White drum-shaped lampshades flanking the sofa were still wrapped in the manufacturer's plastic"; "Here, in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence"(Lahiri, 124; 128)

The pursuit of love and connection is a major theme in *Interpreter of Maladies*. Numerous narratives delve into the intricacies of relationships, especially those that transcend cultural divides. In the movie "Sexy," an American woman named Miranda falls in love with an already married Indian man named Dev. "At home, you know, we have a driver" or the confession that "Everything is there (Lahiri, 125; 126) Despite his lack of availability, she finds herself drawn to him because she is fascinated by his culture. The narrative emphasises the difficulties that can occur when two individuals with vastly dissimilar backgrounds try to build a relationship.

The seventh tale in Lahiri's collection, "This Blessed House," is situated between "Mrs. Sen" and "The Treatment of Bibi Helder." This Blessed House's Twinkle, the female protagonist, represents second-generation female immigrants who, after being immersed in the Other's culture for a considerable amount of time, have created such hybrid diasporic identities that allow them to survive and succeed even far above their male counterparts, those male immigrants like Sanjeev. This makes Twinkle's position noteworthy. In contrast to the other female characters whose experience of the Other's culture is traumatic.

This Blessed House, a recently married couple finds a variety of religious relics in their new house. Twinkle, the wife, is ecstatic to learn of the find and gets fixated on organising them. Sanjeev, her spouse, is irritated with her actions and believes he is losing control of his house. The narrative examines the challenges that can develop in a relationship when two people have divergent priorities and moral standards. "This Blessed House" tells the story of a young four-month-old married couple, Sanjeev and his wife Twinkle, who have just moved into a new house and are in the process of "unpacking their boxes" (Lahiri 151).

The quest for identity is a key theme in *Interpreter of Maladies*. Numerous characters in the stories are having difficulty balancing their American identities with their Indian ancestry. The main character of "Interpreter of Maladies," Mr. Kapasi, is an interpreter who travels with an American family as they explore India. "a more recent immigrant" then, Sanjeev like Mrs. Sen is a manifestation of liminality and is, therefore, a stage behind Twinkle (Kuortti 208). He becomes acutely aware of his own cultural displacement and the ways he has failed to connect with his Indian roots as he listens to their conversations. The narrative demonstrates how cultural identity can be a source of joy as well as a source of hardship.

"Expresses a state of 'in-between' as in a person who stands between two cultures" (Habib, 750) The value of communication is a key theme in *Interpreter of Maladies*. A recurring theme in the stories is the breakdown of character communication, especially in romantic relationships. In "A Real Durwan," Boori Ma, the building's caretaker, regales the occupants with fanciful tales from her past. She vanishes after being revealed to be a liar, leaving the residents to reflect on the significance of language and narrative. The narrative emphasises how crucial communication is to fostering a sense of community and forming relationships. Twinkle, whose cultural assimilation allows for some room for biased cultural orientation, is one way that this Blessed House celebrates such hybridity. Twinkle's actions, though, go beyond imitation. The reason is that when someone mimics, she hides a shame about her own culture, which in Twinkle's case is completely absent.

In conclusion, *Interpreter of Maladies* is an important piece of feminist writing that delves into several topics and themes pertaining to women's lives in patriarchal cultures. In addition to highlighting the difficulties women encounter in expressing their needs, expressing their identity, and achieving their goals, the book features women from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The book investigates how women's bodies and voices are policed in patriarchal societies, questions conventional ideas of femininity and female sexuality, and highlights the cultural disparities that women experience. Anyone interested in feminist literature and the struggles faced by women in patriarchal societies should read *Interpreter of Maladies*.

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