



**Cultural Identity and Diaspora Experience in the Works of Jhumpa
Lahiri: A Critical Study**

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Abstract

The paper is a critical reflection on how cultural identity and experience of diaspora in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri, one of the most influential contemporary writers of Indian-American literature is depicted. The main theme that Lahiri addresses in his fiction is the life of immigrants of India in the United States and its psychological, cultural and emotional complications resulting in migration. In a close analysis of key works like Interpreter of Maladies, The Namesake and Unaccustomed Earth, this paper will examine the theme of displacement, alienation, generation conflict, hybridity and search of belonging. The paper has argued that Lahiri describes cultural identity as not a fixed construct in that it is a dynamic and changing process, which is influenced by memory, migration and cross-cultural experiences. Through the emphasis on the tense relationship between the traditional and the modern values of the West, the works by Lahiri help to see the internal struggle of the diasporic subjects who can be located between two worlds. After all, this paper shows that the stories by Lahiri provide an in-depth account of how hybrid identities develop and how the issues of selfness are being constantly negotiated in the context of the diasporic state.

Keywords

Diaspora, Cultural Identity, Hybridity, Migration, Displacement, Indian-American Literature, Generational Conflict, Belonging, Jhumpa Lahiri.

Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the brightest representatives of the modern Indian-American literature, in which she understands how to depict the topic of diaspora, migration, and cultural identity very delicately. Her writings delve into ambiguous emotional and psychological lives of people who exist between two cultures in the process of negotiating the issue of belonging to an unknown social environment. Cultural identity is a key issue in the framework of the diasporic literature where the process of migration interferes with the fixed ideas of home, tradition and identity. Lahiri uses fiction to trace the construction of identity, what is criticized and rebuilt in the realm of displacement (Bhabha 2). Instead of emphasizing the physical relocation, she uses her almost unobtrusive narration style and domesticity to provide an understanding of the diaspora as a process of negotiation of culture. Cultural identity is an idea in Lahiri works that is intertwined with the problems of memory, language, tradition and the generational change. Her characters find it difficult to balance between the inherited Indian cultural values with the social reality of the American life. The first-generation-immigrants are trying to ensure continuity of culture by holding the traditions and rituals and language of their homeland. Conversely, second-generation characters have identity crises, in their bid to become assimilated to mainstream society and be aware of their ethnic difference. This is paradox of conservation as well as assimilation that makes it a characteristic feature of Lahiri in the



exploration of the diaspora (Hall 223). Movies like *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth* are a strong piece of work that depicts emotional aftermath of migration. By employing the themes of alienation, nostalgia, generational conflict and hybridity, Lahiri brings out the disjointed and shifting character of diasporic identity. Her characters are often in a third space of the cultural boundaries that meet to create hybrid identities that blend the elements of the homeland and the host culture. Instead of providing the cultural identity as permanent or definite, Lahiri creates its qualities dynamic and fluid, which is shaped by the experiences and cross-cultural contact. Cultural identity and experience of diaspora as critically studied in the writings by Lahiri is thus an important issue in the English literature context as it throws light on larger postcolonial issues to do with displacement, belonging and self-definition. Through looking at the complex interactions that took place between tradition and modernity, memory and adaptation, this paper aims at getting an insight into how Lahiri has written out the complexities of living between cultures in an ever more globalized world.

The main character of the *Interpreter of Maladies* is a middle-aged Indian taxi driver and tour guide, Mr. Kapasi, who resides in Odisha where he takes tourists to visit historical sites such as the Sun Temple in Konark. On a certain day, he is employed to drive the Das family an Indian-American couple of Mr. and Mrs. Das and their three children visiting India as tourists. Though the family is modern and comfortable, there is lack of emotional closeness in the family. Mr. Kapasi works half-time as an interpreter in a doctor office where he translates symptoms of Gujarati patients into English. Mrs. Das is intrigued as he calls it romantic and this appeals to Mr. Kapasi and makes him suggest that she is more romantically attached to him (Lahiri 49). As they travel, Mrs. Das reveals to Mr. Kapasi one of her personal secrets: one of her sons was born of an extramarital affair and her husband is not aware of the fact. She tells that she has been living with the feeling of guilt years long and requests Mr. Kapasi in his job as an interpreter of maladies to interpret her anguish. Mr. Kapasi, however, is aware that she is not really trying to find some moral insight but she only is trying to find reprieve to her own distress. His ideal view of her breaks down and he is disappointed and disillusioned. There is a symbolic scene at the end of the story when a sheet with the address of Mr. Kapasi that was an optimistic sign of the connection in the future flies and is lost. Lahiri through this experience raises the themes of isolation, misunderstanding, cultural alienation, disappointment in marriage and the need of human beings to feel emotions.

The Namesake narrates of the Ganguli family, who leave Kolkata (India) and move to United States and do not know how to balance their culture as an Indian and as an American. The novel starts with Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, a Bengali couple that relocate to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where they get married. Lone & culturally isolated, Ashima struggles to fit into the American society, and Ashoke is an engineer and attempts to provide a stable life to his family. Their first son is called Gogol, a provisional name, which becomes permanent, later on, because of the situation. The name is adapted after the Russian author Nikolai Gogol and the name is a metaphor to the cultural confusion of the child and it is one of the main themes of the novel (Lahiri 76). As Gogol matures, he is ashamed of his weird name, and he has problems with his dual identity as an Indian-American. He is torn between the old fashioned values of



his parents and his need to fit in the American society. He later changes his name to Nikhil, which is legal, and tries to reinvent himself and dissociate himself with his past. Even with this transformation, he still struggles with emotional and cultural contradictions, particularly within the framework of relationships and personal decisions. Gogol starts to realize the meaning of his name and rediscover the history and culture of his family after the sudden death of his father. The novel deals with issues of identity, cultural displacement, family relations, tradition and modernity as well as search of self-understanding. Using the stories of the Ganguli family, Lahiri depicts the obstacles of immigration, generation gap and emotional ride of being in-between two worlds.

Unaccustomed Earth is a compendium of related tales that cover the lives of Bengali immigrants and children in their fight to identity, family relations and cultural alienation in America. The central piece, a title story, Unaccustomed Earth, is about a young Indian-American woman, Ruma, who resides in Seattle together with her American husband and son. Ruma also feels lonely after the loss of her mother and she thinks of asking her father who is a widower to come and stay with her because it is her obligation to do so. Nevertheless, her father, who has found a new independence following the death of her wife, would rather travel and live on his own instead of relying on his daughter. The two during his visit have a silent emotional relationship with each other, yet both of them suppress their real emotions Ruma hides her problems and her father conceals his friendship with another woman. They accomplish this in their relationship that is marked by generational differences, emotional distance and the evolving nature of family relationships (Lahiri 15). A trilogy of interrelated tales Once in a Lifetime, Years End, and Going Ashore also belong to the collection and follow the story of Hema and Kaushik, the families of which have long-standing history. Migration, loss and personal choices are all aspects that cause their lives to overlap since childhood until adulthood. Although they form a strong emotional bond in adulthood, the relationship becomes tragic, which raises the idea of separation and temporary nature. In these stories, Lahiri presents the idea of cultural identity, the conflict between generations, loneliness and isolation, love, loss, and seeking belonging to the new surroundings.

The expression of cultural identity in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri takes the central place in her literary exploration of the process of diaspora, migration, and belonging. In the fiction, cultural identity is not a definite, unitary phenomenon, but is a directional and mercurial phenomenon that Lahiri represents as a result of geographical location, memory, language, generational divergence and cross cultural interactions. Her stories mainly revolve around the lives of Indian immigrants in America and their children, who are torn apart in the process of growing up wanting to follow the traditions inherited and at the same time meet the requirements of the modernity in the west. With his slight psychological understanding and modest writing Lahiri introduces the idea of cultural identity as a zone of arbitration in which characters hesitate to find a balance between their cultural origins and the new realities (Hall 225). Cultural identity is also closely associated with displacement in most of the works by Lahiri. Migration provides a disconnect between the country where a person is born and the country he or she is in, hence a cultural dislocation. To preserve the identity, first-generation immigrants tend to stick to the



memories of India. The food, language, religious rites and community meetings are some of the ways that they reproduce a section of their homeland. This effort to maintain continuity of culture is a sign of their fear of losing their culture in a new destination. But at the same time, it is in these practices that the diasporic identity as frail and constructed is also presented. The homeland ceases to be a physical entity and turns into a symbolic memory that is maintained to provide emotional attachment. Meanwhile, Lahiri is very cautious in describing the turmoil that is present within the head of second-generation immigrants. They are born or brought up in America unlike their parents and are mostly exposed to the Western cultural norms. The development of their identity is complicated by the fact that they are not fully Indian, being not fully American. This intermediacy usually leads to confusion of identity, rejection and rebellion against the parental demands. The conflict of the cultural heritage and individual freedom turns out to be a motif. Characters have a high rate of having difficulty with names, language, relationships and lifestyle choices which represent greater fears of the self-definition. With help of such experiences, Lahiri stresses that the identity of cultural is not a gift one receives passively, it is a matter that needs to be negotiated and remade. Generation gap is one of the key elements of Lahiri depicting cultural identity. The former generation is more characterized by the concept of defining identity based on tradition, family honor and maintenance of culture. The second generation, on the contrary, usually pursues independence, assimilation and self-expression. This clash between the generations turns out to be a potent instrument with the help of which Lahiri explores cultural change. The younger characters might not at first accept their ethnicity and view it as a burden or a restraint, but most of them end up accepting the value of ethnicity. This identification does not imply that we are reverting to tradition but rather creating a hybrid identity that is a combination of the two cultures.

This description of hybrid identity is what is of special interest in explaining the relevance of Lahiri to the diasporic literature. Her works are hybrid to the extent that they imply not the eradication of other cultures by other ones but their fusion. Her characters slowly come to learn to occupy a third space where various cultural affiliations exist. This area gives them the opportunity to re-identity themselves outside of hard determinisms of East and West. The identity of the culture becomes, therefore, dynamic and adaptive, defined by experiences and changing social values. Lahiri does not support assimilation as the final solution but offers another idea that the identity within the diaspora is stratified and manifold (Bhabha 38). Another theme that is still present in the representation of cultural identity by Lahiri is alienation. There is a sense of isolation and emotional loneliness by characters even in the family set up. The uncertainty of belonging is highlighted by cultural misunderstanding between spouses, parents and children and friends. These emotional nuances are not addressed in a dramatic manner, and this is exactly the style of narrative that Lahiri employed. The cultural identity can unite as well as separate people, which can be understood in the silence, distance, and unspoken tensions of her stories. The desire to be part of something is always present and is complicated by the changing cultural environments. Furthermore, the everyday domestic experiences Lahiri gives emphasis to bring the ordinary immigrant lives to greater heights of consideration of cultural identity. By mundane activities of preparing traditional



food, festival celebration, or traveling to India she illustrates how culture is enacted and maintained in day to day activities.

The theme of identity crisis and self-discovery is one of the major themes used by Jhumpa Lahiri in all her writings, especially in the way she depicts the diasporic characters, as they are unable to define themselves based on their cultural affiliation in a divided world. Identity crisis in the context of the Lahiri fiction is caused by the struggle between the cultural tradition received and the requirements of a new social and cultural environment. Her characters, particularly the second-generation immigrants, are mostly confused about their cultural identity as they are torn between what their parents were raised in as Indians and Western civilisation that they are brought up in. This feeling of in betweenness brings up a sense of emotional tension, alienation and not knowing who they are (Erikson 109). As an example, in *The Namesake*, the dislike of his name in Gogol Ganguli is a symbol of his life-long conflict with his cultural background and identity. The way that he has gone through denying his identity as an Indian to gradually embracing his own heritage can be said to be the process of self discovery that is influenced by his personal experiences and the cultural understanding of his environment. On the same note, the characters of Lahiri often go through the psychological transformation by relationships, family expectations, experiences in life, which finally guide them to a better comprehension of their cultural and personal identity. By these stories, Lahiri does not introduce identity as something fixed and pre-determined but as a dynamic process that can be changed as a result of migration, memory and cultural negotiation. In such a way, identity crisis in her works becomes an inevitable part of the path to self-realization, in which people have to balance various cultural forces and mature and more integrated sense of self. The clash of tradition and modernity is the other theme of great importance in the works by Lahiri, as it is connected with the conflict of the diasporic people who cannot reconcile the cultural values that they have inherited and the demands of the modern life. The tradition in her fiction is the customs, beliefs, rituals and social rules related to Indian culture and the modernity is the western ideals of individual freedom, personal choice and social independence. Lahiri depicts the efforts of the first-generation immigrants in trying to conserve their culture through adhering to traditional attitudes and practices like arranged marriage, family commitments, religious practices and cultural values in a new land. Nonetheless, second generation immigrants, whose life is shaped up in the western cultures, tend to oppose or challenge these cultures when they desire independent thoughts and self-identity. This has a conflict in culture and generation especially in families where parents insists on the cultural continuity whereas the children insist on the modern ways of living and culture (Giddens 52). Lahiri uses the experiences of her characters to show how this tension results in the confusion about identity, emotional tension and cultural negotiation. Instead of making tradition and modernity appear as two opposite worlds, she demonstrates that these differences are worked out slowly by people, as they accustom to changing and incorporating the aspects of one another. In that way, the opposition between tradition and modernity in the works of Lahiri supports the changing character of cultural identity and the difficulties of preserving cultural belonging and organizing the social change. Diaspora experience in Jhumpa Lahiri works is

described in an emotional, psychologically realistic and culturally sensitive manner. Her fiction touches upon the real-life experiences of the Indian immigrants in the United States: Indian immigrants are portrayed as victims of displacement, nostalgia, and cultural alienation; the theme of the conflict between generations and the progressive acquisition of a hybrid identity is covered. Lahiri introduces a provocative view of diaspora through her meticulously developed characters and non-confrontational style of narration in order to create not only a physical movement but an emotional and cultural situation that defines identity, relations and belonging (Safran 84). Lahiri portrays immigrants and the Indian characters in her masterpiece collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* who are facing the issues of emotional alienation and cultural misunderstanding. Much tells of the poor relationships, ineffective communication and disconnection to the culture. The immigrant characters are frequently caught between these two worlds neither able to totally go back to their home country and at the same time they do not feel at home in the country they are living in. This feeling of in-betweenness is translated into a characteristic of the diasporic condition.

Lahiri in *The Namesake* brings out a vivid account of the immigrant experience as the Ganguli family life. The novel eloquently reflects the predicament of first generation immigrants like Ashoke and Ashima who are unable to replicate the feeling of home in an alien country. Emotional cost of migration is shown through Ashima who feels lonely, homesick, and relies on cultural practices to make her feel at home like cooking traditional food or celebrating Bengali festivals. To her, America is a place of solitude and emptiness in the beginning, where she feels alien even in the most basic of activities. Meanwhile, the paradigm of the second-generation experience has been reflected in the novel by Gogol who has the identity crisis typical of children of immigrants. He is raised in the environment of the American culture, unlike his parents, but he is aware of his ethnic difference. The fact that he feels out of place with his name is a reflection of his struggle with cultural association. Generational contrast is also a characteristic of the diaspora experience in this case: the parents, trying to continue the cultural continuity, the child wants to be assimilated and independent. As Gogol goes through his path to self-reconstruction, Lahiri shows how diasporic identity changes as time goes, and that it is created through memory, loss and acceptance. Likewise, in *Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri continues her investigation of diaspora outlined in the previous novel to a more developed level, analyzing the way in which the identity changes throughout the generations. The characters of the stories in this collection have mostly become accustomed to American society, but still, they are emotional remnants of Indian roots. This collection differs with her previous work, in which she contemplates more on cultural shock and displacement, but on emotional distance, changing family relations and slight cultural shifts. Here, the diaspora experience is not so much concerned with open conflict as with silent negotiation. The characters themselves tend to deal with loneliness, broken romantic affairs and struggle to create a stable attachment in a mobile, globalized society. Although cultural assimilation might seem to be working, there is still this feeling of being rootedless. According to Lahiri, the resolution of diaspora does not solely occur because of adaptation, but rather, it becomes a permanent component of the personal identity (Braziel & Mannur 5).



In these few works, the diaspora experience is marked as one that is full of memory and nostalgia. The first-generation immigrants tend to have an emotional connection to India, which they romanticize as the home and a place they know. But their memory of the homeland slowly fades and metamorphoses. Even the visits to India often demonstrate a distance between the memory and reality, which increases the sense of dislocation. To the second generation, India can be a symbol of cultural descent and not a life experience. This misperception further separates the generational gap and creates different types of identity formation. Lahiri manages to show how diaspora has stratified identity that embraces a bit of both the motherland and the new land (Clifford 311). The other significant aspect of the diaspora experience in Lahiri texts is the theme of alienation. At times characters are lonely in their marriages, families or communities. Emotional distance is escalated through cultural displacement where people are unable to describe their experiences in a cross-cultural setting. However, Lahiri does not display diaspora as a tragic or negative state only. Rather, she focuses on development, adjustment and development of hybrid identities. Her characters slowly come to find their way between two or more spaces of different cultures and develop identities that are neither purely Indian nor purely American. This intermingling is indicative of the intricacy of the contemporary global existence where the cultural borders are becoming more permeable. Finally, the process of negotiation and change is depicted as an endless diaspora experience in the works that Lahiri has chosen. It is about losing, missing, yet about enduring and rebirth. Attempting to concentrate on the domestic sphere and ordinary situations, Lahiri raises the immigrant narrative to the universal level, demonstrating that the issue of finding a place and seeking oneself is a universal human problem. Her subtle conceptualization of diaspora supports the emotional price as well as the creative potential of a life between cultures, which is why her work has been regarded as an important input to the modern-day diasporic literature. The diaspora formation in the *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri is depicted as the emotional, cultural, and psychological conflict of people in between two cultural worlds. The set is comprised of a line of stories, which address the themes of displacement, alienation, cultural disconnection and identity search of Indian immigrants and their families. Lahiri portrays the presence of migration that produces feeling of rootlessness, as people are not connected to their country of origin and yet, they fail to cope with a social and cultural setting of the new country. The characters of the immigrants tend to be lonely and isolated while they struggle to maintain their cultural practices, language and values in a foreign environment. In the most subtle but realistic descriptions of the daily life Lahiri shows the emotional intricacies of the life in diaspora when the physical migration results in the psychological distance and the conflict of cultures (Rushdie 12). Through a number of his stories, Lahiri points out the challenges of the first generation immigrants who strive to preserve their cultural heritage, but still adapt to the society of the West. These characters tend to reproduce their motherland in their customary activities like food, rituals and community contacts, as a sign of their urge to maintain their culture continuity. Nevertheless, their attempts also focus on their feelings of cultural alienation and failure to fit in the host culture completely. Meanwhile, Lahiri examines the life of people who are not emotionally close, even though they live in one place. In the title



story, *Interpreter of Maladies*, an interpersonal exchange between Mr. Kapasi and the Das family depicts emotional estrangement, cross cultural misunderstanding and identity issues between the Indian Americans who are disconnected to the cultural background. The narration shows how diaspora may result in the fragmented sense of identity, people are unable to determine their belonging to a particular culture. Besides, diaspora as described by Lahiri is characterized by language obstacles and poor relationships. The emotional detachment of many characters in the collection in their marriages and families is a reflection of the cultural displacement on a wider human relationship. There is usually a clash between the traditional values of the Indians and the western way of living, a clash that is misunderstood especially to the second generation immigrants, who are raised in a new cultural setup than their parents. This difference between generations emphasizes the changeability of the cultural identity in diaspora. With her delicate portrayal of everyday life, Lahiri represents diaspora as a phenomenon of physical movement and simultaneously as the process of constant negotiation between memory and reality, tradition, change and belonging and alienation. The narratives show that immigrant experience is both about loss and adaptation since people constantly reinvent themselves in reaction to the new cultural conditions. Therefore, *Interpreter of Maladies* is a crucial insight into the diasporic experience, which highlights emotional ambiguities and cultural transactions that characterize the lives of people between the two worlds.

The notion of Diasporic identity in *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri is presented as complex and dynamic in the migration process, memory, disparities between generation, and cultural bargaining. The novel chronicles the life of the Ganguli family and most notably Gogol Ganguli whose individual experience becomes a successful recreation of the immigrant life and identity that is being constructed in the diaspora. Lahiri brings out the meaning of diasporic identity as a nation of origin and the of the country where the individual resides; diasporic identity is in tension and transition where people always debate on the cultures that the country of origin gives to them and the present-day reality (Brah 16). In the situation of such first-generation immigrants, Ashoke and Ashima, diasporic identity has been described as one which is marked by nostalgia, culture preservation and emotional alienation. They have immigrated to the United States and they are attempting to form a home feel in a foreign land carrying their Bengali traditions, language, eating and socializing habits. Ashima is the one, who represents the emotional alienation of the immigrant who is unable to tolerate the homesickness and alienation of the culture. She attempts to uphold the tradition and this is a sign that she is desiring to hold on to her cultural continuity and safeguard her identity in a new land. Nevertheless, despite the attachment she has towards India, she gradually gets used to the life in America, and this shows that the identity of the diasporas can be transformed with time and experience as a result of adapting.

Gogol on the other hand is the second generation diasporic subject which is worse hit by the identity crisis. Having been born and brought up in America, he is not deprived of the values entailing the Western world, yet, he knows that he is different due to his ethnicity and weird name. His cultural identity crisis is carried over to the fact that he is embarrassed by his name.



Gogol initially refuses to acknowledge that he is an Indian and desires to fit into the American society and does not identify with the family tradition. He begins to re-identify himself as he grows up however and loses people personally as well as in relationships. His gradual acceptance of his name and culture is a move towards self-discovery and culture reconciliation. Lahiri embodies identity of diaspora as a hybrid and stratified one, this hybridity is created by the past and present (Vertovec 5). In the novel, identity as a phenomenon in diaspora is not absolute and it is dynamic as per the personal experience, the generational change and intercultural interactions. Lahiri serves as a reminder to us about how the Ganguli family life is fraught with conflict and struggle when it comes to life in the diaspora. Alienation and confusion are the immediate consequences of migration, but there is a chance of making oneself more inclusive and broader. This is why *The Namesake* brings up the theme of the diasporic identity as the process of the continuous negotiation of the traditional and modern world, the memory and the process of the acclimatization, which leads to the appearance of the balanced and hybrid identity.

The idea of the conflict with the generations and relations in the family is one of the primary motives of the works created by Jhumpa Lahiri, in particular, she is speaking about the problem of the evolution of the experience of diaspora and cultural consciousness. The clash of parents of the first generation of immigrants against those of the second generation and the variations of the culture, emotions, and ideas that occur in the families of immigrants may be seen in her fiction. The primary cause of this conflict is the opposite cultural values, expectations and adaptation to the host society. The older generation is much related to the indigenous traditions, customs and social norms whereas the younger generation who grow up in a different cultural environment is quite independent and assimilating and self-assertive. Lahiri discusses the importance of connection between generations in identity formation, emotional relationships and cultural negotiation in the diasporic like situation as she carefully describes family relationships (Appadurai 33).

Generally, the books authored by Lahiri present the first-generation immigrants as people who are emotionally and culturally attached to their country of origin. Having been migrated to a new country, they are likely to experience displacement, nostalgic and cultural loss. Therefore, they fight to save their culture by maintaining the conventional practices such as language, religious practices, food and social practices among the family members. Parents make the best efforts to impart such cultural values on their children and they see it important to conserve their culture and identity. Their labor is not only an indicator of their desire to maintain their cultural background, but it is also an anxiety of assimilation and the fear of the loss of the traditional values on the foreign environment. Family has thus been a significant setting of continuity of the cultural ongoing whereby traditions and expectations are reinforced through the daily undertakings (Berry 9).

The second generation of the immigrants who are expanding in the host country are however exposed to a different reality in terms of culture. They are not covered as their parents to westernism values such as individualism, freedom of choice and independence. Their socialization in schools, peer group and the society at large makes up their attitudes, dreams



and way of life. They are therefore likely to believe that their parents are old fashioned. The difference in cultural orientation leads to tension in the family and children are divided between the family obligations and personal desires. They are able to reject arranged marriages, they do not conform to the traditional practices or may reject parental authority in the process of expressing and attaining independence. The struggles that second-generation immigrants must go through to reconcile their cultural belonging and identity are brought out by Lahiri in these conflicts. The concept of identity and belonging is also different in the works by Lahiri, which reflect the generational gap. The first generation case has the identity being very much connected to the cultural heritage, collective values and social responsibility, whereas the second generation has a more individualistic understanding of identity because of the effect of the host society (Parekh 162).

Nevertheless, Lahiri depicts the generational differences not only as the factors dividing the family, despite the conflicts and tensions. Rather, she talks of understanding, reconciliation and mutual accommodation. Parents and children in the long run adapt slowly and change their views and this brings about a cultural negotiation and emotional maturity process. Second-generation characters tend to value their cultural background and are ready to see what their parents had sacrificed, and first-generation immigrants are taught to accept the new social reality and emerging identities of their children. Such a process indicates the dynamism of the relationships within families in the context of diasporic life when the cultural values are constantly being reinterpreted and renegotiated. In addition, the description of generational conflict as depicted by Lahiri brings out the creation of the hybrid identities that blend both cultures. In their experiences, characters are able to come to terms with old-fashioned values and the new desires, and live a harmonious identity that goes beyond the cultural borders. The family relations, thus, turn into arenas of cultural change, as people bargain over the identity and re-establish their belonging. The conflict between change and tradition eventually helps in self development and personal understanding. Finally, it is possible to state that the theme of generational conflict and family relations in the works of Lahiri mirror wider issues of the cultural shift and identity of the diasporic world. Lahiri takes us to a delicate insight into the immigrant experience through her examination of family conflicts, cultural disparities and negotiating emotions. Her use of generational conflict highlights how difficult it is to continue cultural traditions as she tries to adjust to the new social settings. Simultaneously, her stories show the strength of family ties and the chances of reconciliation in case of empathy and cultural knowledge. In such a way, the works of Lahiri provide an in-depth understanding of the changing family relationship and the continued bargaining of identity of the diasporic communities.

The experience at first generation of immigration as depicted by Jhumpa Lahiri in her books can be described as a complicated process characterized by displacement, nostalgia, culture maintenance and acculturation. The first-generation immigrants are immigrants that literally move out of their native country to another one taking with them the strong cultural values, recollections and customs. In the stories written by Lahiri, these characters tend to abandon India to pursue education, jobs, or improved life, but their exodus causes emotional solitude



and acculturation. They regularly feel as though they have lost more than just their geography but their familiarity, community and social belonging. The homeland is still at the core of their identity, and they strive to recreate the elements of it in the new setting in terms of food, language, religious practices, festivals and tightly knit ethnic communities. This continuity is a coping mechanism which allows them to continue in a continuation and emotional stability in a foreign society (Cohen 26).

Simultaneously, first-generation immigrants have difficulties with loneliness and cultural alienation. The fact that they can hardly shop, socialize or even raise children in a new culture tend to remind them of their difference in everyday life. They can be shy in the open because of the language barriers or new traditions, which support their marginality. They find solace in their common cultural practices in the family life but they also fear their loss of their roots to their children. They tend to be anxious and begin to parent in a specific way, focusing on discipline, cultural education and following traditional values. They can, however, be emotionally strained because of their attachment to the homeland as their children who are brought up in the host country do not share the same cultural orientation. Nevertheless, Lahiri shows first-generation immigrants as strong and adjusting individuals despite all these difficulties. After some time, they slowly acclimatize to the environment and start creating social networks and a sense of belonging, although it may be partial. They make their identity multifaceted based on the memory and determined by the new experiences. They do not entirely assimilate and instead tend to have a dual consciousness as they feel belonging to both their home country and their new country. Therefore, the first-generation immigrant experience in the writings of Lahiri can be customized as the balancing act between preserving and adapting, losing and gaining, and migration as a transformative yet emotionally hectic process (Castles and Miller 34).

The identity struggles of the second generation that can be traced in works of Jhumpa Lahiri are a reflection of the psychological and cultural tensions that are present in the life of a person who is born or brought up in another country they are not connected with the homeland of their parents. The second generation characters do not have the perfect memories of their native country like the first-generation immigrants, but they are raised within the cultural context of the host society and, at the same time they are influenced by the traditions of their parents. This two-fold pressure forms a problematic and in many ways contradictory sense of identity. They are often torn between two cultural worlds that they do not fully belong to their ancestral heritage and are not fully accepted in the prevailing culture of the society that they inhabit. This uncertainty results in confusion, alienation and constant search of self-definition. Second-generation characters in the narrations of Lahiri tend to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable about their ethnicity especially in their adolescence stage and early adulthood. They can rebel against the practices of the old customs, language, eating habits, or family expectations, which can be considered as a barrier to assimilation and acceptance by society.

The theme of parent and child cultural war is another eminent theme in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri as it serves to depict the conflicts that exist within the immigrant families because of differences in terms of cultural values, expectations, and social experiences. This struggle is



mainly due to the disparity between the first generation immigrant parents who want to make sure that they maintain their cultural traditions and their children who are raised under a different cultural setting and embrace the values of the host. Parents usually highlighting on traditional values, family things, respect to the authority and obedience to cultural values like arranged marriage, language maintenance and social tradition. To them, cultural continuity is the only way of preserving their identity and heritage in the foreign land. But a child brought up in the west would value individuality, choice of personal expression and choice and has an inclination to challenge or rebel against what his parents expect. Such cultural outlook leads to problems of misunderstanding, tension of emotions and lack of communication in the family (Kymlicka 89). Parent-child cultural conflict in the stories by Lahiri is not only a conflict of values but also a manifestation of the identity and belonging struggle. Children will be thinking that their parents want them to do the same and this limits their freedom and ability to integrate in the society and parents would be thinking that their children are rejecting their culture. This misunderstanding between each other leads to emotional distance and poor relations. Meanwhile, Lahiri demonstrates this conflict as something natural and productive, as a result of which both parents and children slowly learn to see the position of each other. This negotiation will result in adaptation and creation of hybrid identities that hybridize aspects of the two cultures over time. Therefore, cultural conflict between parents and children in the works of Lahiri shows the difficulties of cultural acculturation in the families of immigrants and emphasizes the changing essence of identity, family relations and cultural identity in diasporic situations (Taylor 34).

The main theme of the works by Jhumpa Lahiri is hybridity and negotiation of identity, which is a complicated process in which the diasporic people shape their sense of self when residing within the frameworks of two or more cultures. Hybridity is a concept that means mixing or intertwining of various cultural identities, values and traditions and this leads to development of new and composite identity instead of total acceptance or total denial of any culture. In her stories, Lahiri presents her characters as they face an unending bargaining between their inherited cultural and the host society. The hybrid identity is the process by which the diasporic people come into the creation of the composite sense of self by blending the aspects of their indigenous culture and the culture of the host society. The hybrid identity is the reaction on the difficulties of migration, cultural displacement and identity crisis, when people become the subject of various cultural influences that influence their beliefs, values and the way of life. The feeling of in-betweenness can be applied in the stories of Lahiri, whose characters do not exactly fit the native land where they used to live, and they do not exactly fit the new society, with its predominant culture. This situation forces them to strike a compromise between the old cultural values, family values and the new social values, and in the end, the blending of cultural identity is developed (Young 26).

One of the most widespread motifs in the stories of Lahiri is alienation, which represents the feeling of estrangement of people who have to live in alien cultural environment. Her characters are a lot of times out of place not only with the host society but with communities they belong to and even with family members. In the case with first-generation immigrants, alienation is

caused by the cultural distance along with the language barrier and the lack of knowledge of the social practices in the new country. They are usually lonely and isolated as they seek to adapt to a new environment which is not that familiar to their native country. The daily life experiences like communication, socialization and cultural involvement become difficult and this strengthens their feeling of being outsiders. This sense of alienation does not only exist at the physical level but also at the emotional and psychological level as people have problems expressing themselves or establishing meaningful relationships. Meanwhile, second-generation immigrants have another experience of alienation because they usually feel culturally torn between the past and the mainstream society in which they have to coexist (Said 173). The motif of belonging is also the logical reaction to alienation and nostalgia. The characters in Lahiri keep searching the feeling of home, of receiving and belonging to the world where the cultural borders are unclear and unstable. The aspect of belonging in her works is not only restricted to the geographical space but also emotional attachment, cultural awareness and acceptance of the society. Through relationships in their families, cultural practices and personal success, characters are trying to create a sense of belongingness. However, the diaspora experience can usually make this process complicated, because people can feel that they can neither belong to their home country nor to the country that they adopted. Lahiri introduces belonging as a process which changes and develops as opposed to a given status. Her characters also come to learn slowly to compromise their differences in terms of culture and embracing the intricate nature of their identity (Yuval-Davis 199).

Conclusion

To sum up, the works by Jhumpa Lahiri offer a sensitive and delicate picture of the experience of cultural identity and diaspora. Her stories reveal the mental and emotional conflicts of immigrants striving to find their ways in the realm of the two cultures. By presenting a picture of first and second-generation immigrants, Lahiri brings out a case of alienation, nostalgia, cultural negotiation and identity crisis. This notwithstanding, instead of making diaspora a strictly tragic scenario, she gives a hint of possible reconciliation in terms of the formation of hybrid identities that combine both the aspects of the homeland and the host culture. The input that Lahiri has made to the diasporic literature is her skill in making the small familial situations move to strong insights into the exile and home. The travels of her characters prove that identity is not fixed but constantly formed by memory, interaction and choice within the culture. Therefore, the works by Lahiri present a great literary exploration of the contemporary state of diaspora, granting a better insight into the cultural shift and human search of self-identification in globalized world.

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