

## INTERPRETER OF MALADIES GLOBAL APPROACH AND LOCAL CONCERNS IN INDIAN SCENARIO: ANALYSING LAHIRI'S NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Jhumpa Lahiri although an American writer of Indian descent who came up with her first short stories collection named, *The Interpreter of Maladies*, which actually mirrored Indian culture in a broader perspective. She although struggles to understand Indian culture but she finds herself in between two worlds. Her characterization is her strength, hence created characters that are real, alive, complicated. In fact, that's the quality that she takes her reader to a variety of emotions and experiences. We cannot compare her to any other writer because of her broad subject matter. She emphasises on interpersonal relationships and the daily stress of survival, which are her universal themes to which we can connect to her. It is an exhilarating and liberating thing that her narration brings her exuberance to balance the gender representation.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Broader, Emotions, Daily Stress, Gender Representation*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Jhumpa Lahiri, is an immigrant feministic writer who emerged among a galaxy of writers in the realms of Indian English literature. She writes about the prominent aspects of an individual and social life from a Diasporas perspective which helped to attain recognition and importance through various reputed awards and honors. Her themes and techniques like victimization to self-protest make her fiction quite interesting.

The present study of her first short story collection "Interpreter of Maladies" beautifully portrays her Indian characters in a far-off foreign land, dealing the prevalent issues of adaptation and struggle for cultural identity like communication barrier. She brings this element of alienation in her writings by overcoming this challenge through their Indianism which is intrinsically built in them. She has magic in all the nine stories in the Interpreter of Maladies. It is her style of writing that every story of her presents sublimely the subtle detail and eloquently speaks about the yearnings of exile and emotional confusion of the outsider.

### **Lahiri's Women**

Lahiri portrayed her women characters both the ways, sometimes ordinary and sometimes extraordinary, both simple and complex, while strong and weak as well. Her women bring every color of life in her fiction. She primarily writes about

Indian Immigrant women and their challenges in connecting themselves to American culture while few stories present the condition of the female is the same throughout the globe. She very beautifully portrayed this parallelism in this collection of stories. The first story is about Shobha and Sukumar in “The Temporary Matter”, where the female protagonist Shoba tries to struggle with the loss of her baby during her pregnancy and the marriage with zero enthusiasm. In the story “Interpreter of Maladies” Mrs. Das has been struggling with herself because she has been hiding the fact that one of her children was not of her husband, is the focal point.

While in ‘Sexy’, Miranda who is not an Indian struggles to be in love with an Indian man. These characters reveal the continuous challenge which immigrant women and women in general, are waging within themselves, their aloofness and the lack of emotional support.

The story of Mrs. Sen in “Mrs. Sen” is a perfect example of Indian immigrant experience in America. It’s about a newlywed couple Mr. and Mrs. Sen, where Mrs. Sen runs a day care center, who feels better in shopping fine Indian sarees which most of the Bengali women have an obsession about, letters from India and buying fish, all is an attempt to make herself feel better. Instead all it does is nothing but hiding the emptiness she is experiencing.

### **Indian Immigration and Cultural Assimilation**

This same assimilation of experience is reflected in this character of the temple in the Blessed house, who forces on installing a sculpture depicting crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the mantel of their new house in spite of her husband’s objection. The culture gap between the east and the west is clearly seen here. This is a story about the emotional and cultural strife between a Hindu husband Sanjeev and his dislike for his wife Twinkle’s fascination for Christmas artifacts. This conflict is because Sanjeev being a recent immigrant is deeply in touch with his roots to India and its culture, unlike his wife Twinkle who is a second generation immigrant. He used to say

“We are not Christians,” (137 p. Interpreter of Maladies)

This is the feeling of alienation and adjustment shown in this story. While the character of Boorima in “A Real Durwan” and Bibi in “The treatment of Bibi Haldar” are destitute and live at the mercy of others.

### **Gaps in Communication**

There is, of course, a gap in communication expressed in the collection of stories, where the gap is visible among the people who communicate in the same language but with the foreign language speakers as well. Anyhow it is not that the characters don’t speak to each other but visibly they struggle to do communication.

Lahiri portrays that the importance of communication within the system of marriage has lost its place due to the gap of two cultures. She further displays that the gap isn’t between white American and Bengali or Indian immigrants but it’s between the second generation immigrants like Laila in “When Mr. Pirzada came to dine” where Laila does not understand Mr. Pirzada a Botany lecturer from Dacca to be different from her own parents. She shares her bewilderment with the readers and it shows the cultural and ethnic uncertainties of a second generation migrant subject like herself.

While in the story “the Temporary matter” Shoba and Sukumar also suffer from lack of communication where due to the stress of their stillborn baby could lead to indifference and a breakdown in communication between two people who once loved each other.

There is a continuous collapse of communication in ‘Interpreter of maladies’ where Mr. Kapasi does not communicate to his wife to whom he forces to drink his tea in silence in night leading to a loveless marriage. This is the title story aiming to show trauma of the loss of identity due to cultural gap.

It is clearly noted from the example of Mrs. Das who burdened herself under the boredom of marriage, where the impact of American Culture can be seen by having a son from an extramarital affair on the contrary, the Indianism was suffocating her own identity in an alien culture like this she very dramatically caught in the middle of the two different cultures. There is a same kind of malady which is the common thread through the stories, ie, Isolation, Sense of alienation.

“The partition as universal dislocation in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Interpreter of maladies”

Interpreter of Maladies is a collection of stories which belong to the genre of expatriate Indian writing, which includes two partition stories. This whole collection is constructed of the narrative of displacement as its foundations and in my reading, gender-specific negotiations allow Lahiri’s fiction mobility between the two different imaginaries and experiences of displacements. The immigrant woman characters form for Lahiri book the unifying connection of similarity with the figure of the refugee woman. I explored what it means to mobilize woman as a universalizing trope of “the displaced”

On one hand the connection between Mr. Pirzada and Lilia affirms a universal bengaliness that transcends history and geography and that connects the two Bengals, but equally easily, the connection is a broad gesture towards the universalism of human feelings on the popular front literary landscape positions. Lahiri is an interesting historic cultural spot and allows her work to be read differently from earlier Postcolonial or diasporic authors. It was a great surprise that Lahiri who was in her twenties had won Pulitzer for Interpreter of Maladies.

I found that each one of the nine stories in ‘Interpreter of Maladies’ is superbly crafted and delivered like carefully polished gems. She outstands other story writers by deploying two interconnected narrative strategies quite successfully, firstly she crafts very familiar, easily recognizable characters and situations and secondly, she questions this cognizance by presenting them with ethical issues with discomfort.

An ethical issue can be seen in the story “Interpreter of Maladies” in the intersubjective space between strangers’ encounters coincidentally.

### **Characterization**

Her characters are predominantly South Asian, but she has a quality to integrate them into the familiar life of U.S. Society. Arjun Appadurai’s says that the idea of this cloths, even though that is not speaking of Lahiri’s work. He writes.

“One of the principal shifts in global culture order, created by cinema, television, and video technology..... has to do with the role of the imagination in social life..... In the past two decades as the deterritorialization of persons, images and ideas have taken on a new force, this weight has imperceptibly shifted. More persons through the world see their lives

through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms” (Modernity at large, 1997, 53- 54)

Most of the stories are written from a perspective that is between cultures. The characters are refugees but are negotiating a path in a country, in America, that seems to provide opportunities or places, as in *A Temporary Matter*, *The Third and Final Continent*, *Mrs. Sen’s*, *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* and *This Blessed House*. Ties to the Asian sub-continent may be strong or weak, but they seem to be haunting. Living between cultures lends an extra layer of complexity to situations and relationships

Thus, one could make a case that what is refreshingly new in Lahiri’s work is the radical dramatization of familiar events mapped over ethical situations that hack back to a brand of American pragmatism. I feel she permits her readers to glare her characters, overt and covert motives as they pause and reflect upon options on how to act while located at the crossroads of an ethical quandary.

It may be observed that her stories are poised in non sequitur situation where her characters allow readers to share their commonsense concept of right conduct as they seek plausible, possible resolutions to their solutions.

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