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DIASPORIC HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN INTERPRETER OF MALADIES BY JHUMPA LAHIRI

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Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies, the Pulitzer Prize winner of 2000, is a collection of nine stories that pact with the characters from Bengal, Boston, Calcutta and other areas of the U.S.A. The aforementioned short stories deal with the modern problems of the so-called modern and material World. The characters mentioned in these stories are living in this very era; no character is self sustained, happy and satisfied one. They are tangled in weak and morally shattered relationships. Some of them are struggling for bread and butter and side by side shelter to hide them, all psychological ones. This book is an impressive effort at interpreting the psychological maladies of this century. The characters in this book are depicted in such a way that they are shown to have maladies like alienation, guilt complex, self-sufficiency, over ambitiousness etc but there are people who carry on their life as it really is. Such people set an example before the readers- an example of ideal husband, ideal wife and good citizen. That shows if life is lived quietly without creating problems it really becomes a pleasure to live. Jhumpa Lahiri's stories are the impressive explorations of the human conditions as it shapes and is shaped by the varying textuality of the human personality and offer confirmation to her interest in creating an organic evolvment of both the content and the form. This paper will be dealing with the nine stories of Interpreter of Maladies that would portray various human relationships. The characters live, cut off from their base called culture and faith. Jhumpa Lahiri has proved her note worthy effort picturing these much human relationships.

Key-Words

Diaspora, hybridity, locatedness, human-relationships, Identity.

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Introduction:

Literature is part of the riches of human experience. It felicitates people's experience, their living, their pain and celebrates their humanity. The most accomplished women writers have assimilated the social factors operating at the time or risen above them and converted them with great economy to the subject matter of one fiction or another. The last two decades have witnessed a growth of a new category of Indian English writing which could be called non-resident Indian. The work of these writers of the diaspora focuses on the imaginary homelands. The primary concern of their work is the life of the immigrant.

A refreshing new voice in diasporic fiction from America, Jhumpa Lahiri was born in Rhode Island, U.S.A. Her stories have appeared in many American Journals, including the New Yorker prize for best first Book, the PEN Hemming Way Award and were short listed for the Los Angeles Times Award. Lahiri has a story sense of her roots. She is aware of the struggles which take place when people try to replace a traditional way of life with a modern one in a country not one's own. As far as she is concerned, the more one tries to change the more one remains the same. America comes in the way and old relationships and ways comes under threat. It is so confidential that picture of immigrants struggling as she has said to keep their identities afloat with their feet planted in two separate boats-one belonging to their homeland and the other to the new land before them. Jhumpa Lahiri has quickly become an International best selling and Award winning author.

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This paper explores some of the stories among nine stories of Interpreter of Maladies as they sign a new voice Indo-Anglian Literature with theme of diasporic human relationships. In every aspect of relationship involving the characters of these stories, we find elements of Identity crisis, alienation, exile, lack of love and care in varying division. It presents a standardized view of the Indian abroad who longs for his roots as evident by the authors own view and writing. The stories of Interpreter of Maladies speak directly or indirectly about South Asian diasporic community notion of Identity loss and Identity crisis. Some of the stories of Bengal, Boston and beyond can be seen as representative of this diasporic locatedness. The narratives within Lahiri's text goes within the traditional categories of binary oppositions to begin with but relocates these binaries within a more problematic pattern at the end as if the stories are directed towards the questioning of bipolar opposites that are inescapable in a cultural encounter.

'A Temporary Matter' one of the stories of "Interpreter of Maladies" recalls five days of an estranged couple, Shukumar and Shoba, settled in Boston being submissive at the end of revealing and narrating their secrets to each other during the dark hours of an electricity failure at night. The title 'The Temporary Matter' refers not only to the temporality of their relationship but also to the actual incidence of an electrical failure that affects those five days. Man woman relationship becomes a burden to carry on unwillingly and reluctantly. Shoba and Shukumar are such husband and wife who don't really enjoy the company of each other. But they carry on the life as if it is a task to live the life. Their small thread of relationship became thinner after the loss of their child. Shukumar enjoys cooking because:

"It was the one thing that made him feel productive. If it weren't for him he knew, Shoba eat a bowl of cereal for her dinner".

The opportunity to sit hours together, to eat together and to speak easily comes to them, due to the failure of electricity. In the candle lights they burrow up their past and try to find gems of sweet memories. What Jhumpa Lahiri wants to propose here is that life is not a one-way tour to an unknown destination but a deliberate Journey into the selves of each other for fixed and unfixed destinations. It seems Shoba and Shukumar's Journey has not even set for that destination yet writes Jhumpa Lahiri:

"They weren't like this before. Now he had to struggle to say something that interested her, something that made her loop up from her plate, or from her proof-reading files. Eventually he gave up trying to amuse her. He learned not to mind silences".

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It is a monotonous life style; no one can enjoy such bondage of life placed on one's back against one's wishes. To meet the dangerous gap they both tell their past experiences. Now each day, Shukumar noticed her beauty which had once overwhelmed him seemed to fade. The cosmetics that had sounded superfluous were necessary now, not to improve her but to define her somehow. It all shows that the relationship of the husband and wife, after losing the child, has not crossed the boundary of body, beauty and sex. With time, husband and wife should grow up and should come out of the mire of sex and should raise themselves to the level of further growth. When he tells her that their dead child was a boy of five pounds, they sit together and weep.

Mainly focusing on the power of relationships and the personal connections of Lahiri's diverse characters, Caleb Crain says that the author;

"Breathes unpredictable life into her pages leaving the reader ...wishing he could spend a whole novel with its characters".

The review explores how characters like Twinkle in "This Blessed House" obtain something worthwhile out of relationships seemingly doomed to failure. It dwells on the same difficult situation of husband-wife tense relationship. Lahiri has presented a couple which tries to cope up with a new world they have just entered. They are Sanjeev and Twinkle and Crain concentrated on Lahiri's presentation of the force of relationships rather than their sentiments as he asserts that not even religion is as powerful as Twinkle's tears of protest. Their arranged marriage had not given them sufficient time before marriage to understand each other. Therefore they are trying to peep into each other's selves. The matters are very trivial but the tension they build is very tiresome. Jhumpa Lahiri writes:

"Though she did not say it herself, he assumed then that she loved him too, but now he was no longer sure. In truth Sanjeev did not know what love was, only what he thought it was not".

It is Lahiri's ability to create characters with which the audience can that makes the book magic. Lahiri uses character description in her stories in such a fashion that she is able to effectively and passively comment upon human relationships. The stories of Jhumpa Lahiri's first book whisper and scream traces of India through the details of the characters that become fictional testaments to the complex world of Indian immigrants in the United States. Her characters often exist simultaneously in two cultures; the American reality and the sphere of Indian tradition.

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