

The Diaspora sufferings in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri

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Abstract—Diaspora is a silent pain of carrying one homeland in the heart and learning to live in another. Jhumpa Lahiri is not just a writer, she is a contemporary writer mainly known for her emotive depiction of immigrant life and the traditional identity. She is born in a Bengali family but based in London, United States. Much of her works explores the sufferings, experiences and adjustments of the Indian immigrants and their life. When I read the works of Jhumpa Lahiri, I did not feel like I was reading about “immigration” as a political issue. I felt like I was reading about loneliness. About silence. About the quiet pain of living between two worlds. Lahiri does not present diaspora as something dramatic or heroic. Instead, she shows it as something very ordinary and very personal. Her characters go to work, cook food, raise children, fall in love, grow old, and yet, beneath these simple routines, there is a deep sense of displacement. In *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, and *The Lowland*, Lahiri explores the emotional and psychological sufferings of people who have left their homeland and settled in another country. Most of her characters are Bengali immigrants in America or their children. Through them, she shows that migration is not just a physical journey; it is an emotional one. It changes how people see themselves, their relationships, their culture, and even their own names.

Index Terms—Diaspora, Pain, Suffering, Silent, Homeland, Immigrant

Looking into the dynamics of diaspora writing we find that Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most prominent writers of India. The characters Portrayed by her may have stable jobs, family, friends, well settled house in America still there is one corner in their heart that feels incomplete, their heart aches for their own homeland. From outside they look happy, well settled but from inside they deal with emptiness that make them alone even in a crowd.

What I understood from Lahiri’s writing is that diaspora suffering is not loud but quiet. It hides in daily life. *Interpreter of Maladies*, written and published in 1999 was her debut work and she even won Pulitzer

Prize for this work (Lahiri 18). In this work, the emotional gap is shown clearly. The immigrants are not suffering or struggling for money and survival, even though they are educated and well successful and established, still, they carry a sense of living away, the distance that keep them away from their own homeland. Their lives are stuck between comfort and longing. In one of her stories *Mrs. Sen’s*, the protagonist in this story lives in America but she is an Indian, and she misses her homeland deeply, for her India is not just a country, it’s a place with which she has good memories. She does not only miss the place but she misses everything about the place like the sounds, the language, the people. She also misses buying fresh vegetables and fish from the market, the bargaining she used to do, talking freely in her own language without any restrictions, being surrounded by the people she loves, her friends and relatives.

This story by Jhumpa Lahiri shows that suffering in diaspora is never meant to be louder and about big things, it can also carry small things and trifle messages. It’s about missing the smell, celebrating festivals with family, gossips and conversations. It is about a feeling that a corner in your heart still belongs to that old place, even though you shifted to a new place. This kind of suffering cannot be seen from outside but it feels a different kind of pain inside. Jhumpa Lahiri projects the clearest sufferings in diaspora and it can be seen in the novel *The Namesake*. The story revolves around the character Nikhil Ganguli whose nickname is Gogol, he is been born and brought up in America by his Bengali parents (Lahiri 68). From the beginning; he sees his name as a source of discomfort. It is a Bengali pet name, people in America find it hard to pronounce and they often commit mistakes while taking his name. It is one of the reasons that he constantly feels left out and different from others. For everyone nickname is a marker but for him it is something he wants to escape. The problem is not just the name itself, it is about the

connection to the culture, to the place that he does not fully know (Hall 63).

By portraying Gogol Ganguli's character in the novel Lahiri has tried to show what the second-generation immigrants face. It is a different kind of suffering they go through, whereas the first-generation immigrants suffer the pain of leaving behind their homeland and settling into a new place, and their children find difficulty in explaining who they are in present. Gogol is a character who has been emerged with the American culture, went to American school and have friends from American background. Yet, he cannot fully adapt American culture because at home, he is expected to follow certain rituals, customs and values from India, that feel distant from the world outside. This creates a continuous inner tension in him. Even though being in America he is connected to India.

Gogol's chaos raises a deeper question about identity. He does not feel himself as full Indian even after being in India, he just has to pretend in front of his relatives, he cannot accept India as he was born and brought up in America. At the same time, he remembers that the citizens of America did not accept him as fully American citizen either. He is just stuck in between where no one can understand his pain, nor his parents neither the peoples of India or America. This in-between state becomes the main problem of his suffering. It cannot be seen from outside; it's an internal suffering and it's hard to explain what he is going through.

At first, the name "Gogol" slowly takes on symbolic meaning. Earlier, it feels like a pressure, a burden that he carries hesitantly. It links him to a story and a past that seem unfamiliar to his present life. But as he grows, he becomes mature, especially after his father's death, he tries to understand the emotional meaning behind it. Now he does not find his name strange but now he feels the importance. The novel teaches us identity does not comes from birth, but it changes with time, action and experience. It helps both the things to coexist at a time.

Also, Jhumpa Lahiri describes one of the most perceptive parts in her works, she talks about the emotional distance between the parents who are immigrants and their American-born children. The distance is not said loudly or having arguments, Instead, it grows quietly through differences in values, habits, and expectations. For the first generation, their homeland is not just a place but also an emotion that

they are attached with, the memories they hold on. For them, stability means holding onto the traditions and roots of their homeland in an unfamiliar place. However, the second generation are born and brought up in America, they absorb and inherit the culture of America. This creates a dissimilar tension between both the parents and the children.

As seen in the novel *The Namesake*, the characters Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli tries to preserve their Bengali traditions by performing rituals in their house. They try to celebrate their culture by cooking their traditional meals, celebrating festivals with family, keeping contact with the relatives in India. These practices help them feel connected to their roots. However, the children do not feel the traditions in the same emotional way as their parents feel. What feels like familiar to the parents sometimes feels like restriction to the children.

In Gogol's life, this emotional gap is more visible. He has to maintain two personalities in his life, one at home which follows Bengali traditions and other the American culture in which he has grown up. His parents' relation to their heritage contrasts with his desire for independence. The battle is not based on hatred or rejection, but it depends on different experiences of belonging. The parents feel the pain about what they left behind whereas the children are suffering the pain of growing up and battling with the identity.

Ashima loneliness in this foreign land shows emotional side of migration, basically for women. Ashima misses her homeland, her family and her language. When she arrives America, it took her time to get adapted to this new culture because most of the time Ashoke was not with her. He was busy in his work, and she lived alone whole day and that makes her feel low.

Through this portrayal, Lahiri shows that diaspora suffering can be experienced differently within the same family (Brah 61). The parents struggle with loss of homeland, while the children struggle with identity and belonging. Between them lies a space of unspoken emotion, a silent pain shaped by love, sacrifice, and cultural difference.

Also, the depiction of marriage in Lahiri's work is not something that is comforting but something that needs more exploration. In *Interpreter of Maladies*, human relationship hardly consist drama or something that is destructing, or devastating. Instead it gets weaker with

the advancement of time. The partners slow down their conversation, and choose silence over chaos. What makes these constrained marriages significant is that they exist within the larger context of migration. The couples are not only adjusting to each other, but also to a new country, a new culture, and a new sense of self. This double adjustment creates emotional pressure that is not always visible.

The husband and wife in many stories seem happy and stable from outside. They live in comfortable homes, have respectable jobs, and follow routine lives. But, inside the story is little different, distance grows between the partners in adjusting the new environment. Cultural transition often demands constant adaptation, learning new social codes, working harder to prove oneself, raising children in unfamiliar surroundings. In such circumstances, emotional expression becomes secondary. Survival and adjustment take priority. Gradually, intimacy fades without either partner fully realizing when it began to disappear.

A Temporary Matter offers one of the most powerful portrayals of this emotional drift. Shoba and Sukumar are grieving the loss of their child, but their grief does not bring them closer. Instead, it creates a wall between them. They stop sharing their daily experiences. They avoid meaningful conversation. The environment of the home becomes silence and heavy. The power cuts portrayed in the stories shows that in darkness, the comfortability grows and talks about hidden truths. Ironically, it reflects that they feel to speak more honestly and comfortably in darkness than in light. It shows the absence of the love and understanding in the relationship as in the absence of electricity. What once may have been a loving marriage now feels mechanical and distant.

Their isolation is intensified by the absence of extended family or community support. In a homeland setting, grief might have been shared among relatives, neighbours, or elders. In diaspora, the partners deal with their pain alone, both the person face different sufferings which they do not share with each other. This isolation deepens their emotional separation. The story suggests that migration does not directly cause their problems, but it removes the social structures that might have helped them cope. As a result, personal sorrow becomes heavier.

Lahiri's portrayal of marriage is subtle and realistic. She does not portray her characters as villains or

victims. Instead, she portrays how common people can steadily drift apart under emotional constrain. Cultural displacement magnifies existing weaknesses. When individuals are already suffering from different pain of identity, belonging, adjusting, they find difficulties to foster emotional closeness.

Lahiri, through her stories wants to show us that diaspora is not only about missing homeland but also about a distance between the partners. The pain of migration cannot be seen from outside but it can affect the most intimate corner of the lives. In Lahiri's writing, "Home" is never a simple word. It is not only a house or a country; it is a feeling that keeps shifting. For the first generation of immigrants, India continues to live within them, in memory, in language, in food, in rituals. Even after years in America, their emotional world is still tied to the place they left behind. The real root is linked somewhere else. This creates a divide between house and home, even though they live in a well settled house, but the essence of home is missing in that new place.

The children of the immigrant parents struggle with different kind of pain. As they are born in America, grow up there, build career, have education there, it becomes very complicated for them to feel the pain of their parents. But at the same time, in their household, they inherit stories, customs, rituals and expectations connected to their homeland, India. They grow up listening to memories of a country they may not fully know. For them, "home" becomes something both real and an imagination. It exists in daily family discussions and cultural practices, even if it does not exist in their direct experience. Carrying both the identities leads to confusion for the children mainly, a feeling of belonging in both the places and sometimes the feeling of belonging nowhere.

Lahiri frequently uses images of movement to show this instability. She portrays mainly the long-distance call from the relatives, the letters, airports in her work. Travel is constant. Families try to travel and balance both the cultures and identities, it feels like travelling from one world to another. This transition not always brings clarity. It shows that even living a fully well-established lives, they have the inner sense of incompleteness. In *The Lowland*, this emotional disruption is deeply seen in Subhash's life (Lahiri 77). When he left India for America, he creates a daily routine, pursues his academic career, and eventually forms a family. From external point of view, he seems

well settled. Yet there is a continuing loneliness in him. The memories of his brother, the political violence he left behind, and the mental strain of his past remain present. For him, America becomes a place of shelter, but not entirely of belonging. His inner world remains tied to events and relationships across the ocean. He misses his country, even though, he is physically far from his home but it does not erase the emotional bond; instead, it makes it more complicated.

When Lahiri's characters return to India after years abroad, they often experience another kind of expulsion. The homeland they remember has changed. Relatives have aged; neighbours look different, social norms have moved. The return, which might have been expected to bring comfort, instead reveals the passage of time. A time comes when they feel that they do not even belong to their homeland. This feeling leads to alienation and repression. It shows that home is not just a place, it's something where you live. Lahiri suggests that for many in the diaspora, home becomes a stratified concept (Clifford 33). It is not only singular but multiple. The memories, love, essence of their homeland stays in their heart and they cannot move on from it very easily. She portrayed her characters to live with these complexities. They may never feel that they only belong to one place, yet they try to balance their identity of both the places. The way they accept it has both, pain and patience, and also strength. The longing for a stable home never completely disappears, but it becomes part of who they are.

One of the most interesting parts in Lahiri's work is the language. Most of the immigrants often speak Bengali, their mother tongue at home, while children prefer English. This linguistic shift symbolizes cultural erosion. The child has to learn and adapt both the languages, as one is the mother tongue and the other is language they live in. And sometimes it creates a lot of confusion and frustration to balance both the languages, but still, they have to do it, as it becomes a part of their daily lives. Language carries memory and identity. When it weakens, connection weakens. Lahiri subtly shows how communication gaps emerge within families. Parents struggle to express complex emotions in English. Children feel awkward speaking their mother tongue publicly in America or in other foreign countries. This tension creates silence. Conversations become limited between both the parents and the children. Emotional truths remain untold. They slowly stop sharing opinions with each

other. The impressive thing in Lahiri's writing style is that, it's written in a very simple, restrained language that quietly mirrors this cultural silence.

Food plays a significant role in Lahiri's works; it is not merely descriptive but it symbolizes memory and belonging. Traditional dishes connect characters to India. Preparing traditional food for the family becomes an act to hold on to the culture, the roots, the homeland. In her work, the preparation of Bengali food by Ashima not only shows routine, but it reflects the preservation of roots in that unfamiliar land. However, when children prefer American food, the parents feel subtle rejection. They not only reject the food but they somehow reject the roots and traditions to which their parents are attached to. Again, the following of rituals such as weddings, funerals, and festivals also reveals the generational gap between the parents and the children, where the parents follow the tradition very strictly, the children resist to adapt the culture as they are mainly habituated and frustrated with the twin cultures.

Interestingly, Lahiri often sets her stories in American cities like Boston or New York, places filled with people. Yet her characters feel intensely alone even in the crowd. It shows that even after pretending to be happy and busy, people deal with loneliness in the crowd. Urban life does not guarantee social connection. In many stories, characters live in apartments, even their neighbours are busy in their own life. Social interaction is limited. In the foreign countries, people mainly prefer to live in a nuclear family, which escalates loneliness compared to the extended families that can be commonly found in India. The contrast between the two places, India and America deepen emotional suffering more. Lahiri suggests that modern immigrant life can be isolating despite technological advancement. Overall, it can be understood that diaspora suffering in Jhumpa Lahiri's works is not presented through dramatic events, but through quiet emotional struggles. Her characters experience loneliness, identity crisis, generational conflict, marital distance, and a constant search for belonging. The idea of "home" remains unstable, and many of her characters live between memory and reality, between one culture and another (Bhabha 103). This in-between condition becomes the central pain of their lives.

In the works of Lahiri, the way she described the diaspora sufferings felt really genuine because it felt

like as it is closely related to her own situation or background as she is also an Indian writer raised outside India. Her understanding of cultural shift appears personal rather than detached. She mainly writes about common immigrants, ordinary life but in that ordinary life, she shows the emotions in depth. Even in writing in such a simple language, migration is not only about new place, new people, or opportunity but it also comes with adjustments, sacrifices and the pain that cannot be explained easily. In the end, her works suggest that diaspora is not just a crusade across countries, but a lifelong emotional journey of adjusting, losing, remembering, and slowly accepting a divided sense of belonging.

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