



Journal Homepage: -www.journalijar.com
**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
 ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)**

Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/5067
 DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/5067>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

QUESTION OF IDENTITY AND ALIENATION: A READING ON JHUMPA LAHIRI'S 'INTERPRETER OF MALADIES'.

Dr. Tapan Kumar Rath¹ and Dr. Arun Behera².

1. Lecturer in English, P.S.Mahavidyalaya, Karlapada, Dist.Kalahandi, Odisha.
2. Associate Professor, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Whitefield Campus, Bangalore-560067.

Manuscript Info

Manuscript History:

Received: 04 June 2017
 Final Accepted: 06 July 2017
 Published: August 2017

Key Words:-

Identity, Family, Society, Culture,
 Communication, Interpreter

Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri is a famous literary figure in Indian writings in English. One of her more popular works the 'Interpreter of Maladies' deals with one of the most dominant issues plaguing the modern man: the issue of identity crisis. We have attempted, in this paper, how Jhumpa Lahiri weaves her characters around her immigrant experiences and the cultural divide between America and India. Attempts have also been made here to understand how she brings some characters into the plot who undergo pain and suffering for their double identity.

Copy Right, IJAR, 2017,. All rights reserved.

Introduction:-

Identity is questioned when someone is estranged and isolated and also when someone distinguishes herself/himself from the people and their culture. It may be of relevance what Partha Chatterjee says:

A separation of the social space into ghar and bahir, the home and the world. The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity.

When a person is out of her/his home land her/his true identity stays there for some time and she/he cannot identify herself/himself with that land. She/he rather feels alienated always. This sense of alienations afflicts the first and even the second generation immigrants. The psychological dislocation that the immigrants suffer can cause their children to feel a similar sense of alienation. Hence the big question: Is their displacement the cause of their fragmented sense of identity?

Identity through Family, Society and Culture:-

One gains a sense of identity through family, society and culture. For the culturally displaced, this is a difficult endeavor. Numerous such Indians try to identify themselves with the land but with a sense of coyness. Though they keep coming to their home land because it is their parents' or grand parents' place, they are unable to embrace the culture, tradition and beliefs of the land and their ancestral families. They stand between the adopted society and their own, adopted culture and their own, which in turn creates a crisis for them.

Interpreter of Maladies:-

Jhumpa Lahiri weaves her characters around her immigrant experiences and the cultural divide between America and India. She brings some characters into the plot who undergo pain and sufferings for their double identity.

In the title story the 'Interpreter of Maladies' (pp. 43-69), Mr. Kapasi signifies the 'divide' between the culture of America- born Indians and that of the Indians living in India. As the Das family's tourist guide, he is constantly bemused by the fact that these people 'looked Indians but dressed as foreigners did' (pp. 43-4). To him, they each seemed

completely self-observed: for more 'like siblings' (p. 49) than parents and children. The couple also appears to be emotionally unaffected by the reality of India — particularly the grim conditions under which many are forced to live. Mr. Das stops to take a photo 'of a barefoot man, his head wrapped in a dirty turban' (p. 44) treating him as if he is there to add local colour to his travels, rather than as a human being in his own right. Mr. Das is completely indifferent to the whole tourist experience. He shows his interests when Mr. Kapasi begins to tell her about his other line of work.

Mr Kapasi- the Man:-

Mr. Kapasi is a language interpreter for a doctor. Mrs. Das views the dependence of the patients on him as 'romantic' (p. 50) and is suddenly interested in Mr Kapasi as a man, rather than just a guide. She unexpectedly considers Mr Kapasi with a different view of himself as someone worthwhile. On the other hand, he is only considered a lowly worker and Mrs. Das sees him as bearing a great 'responsibility' (p.51). For him 'the job was a sign of his fallings' (p.52) as it underlined his lost dream of becoming an indispensable interpreter to diplomats. Mr Kapasi's job is simply the means by which he sustains his family, and has recently become a symbol of his wife's reproach for his inability to save his son from dying: 'she resented the other lives he helped.... to save.' (p.53)

Human Behaviour is basically the same in all Cultures:-

Mr Kapasi sees that human behaviour is basically the same in all cultures. Mrs. and Mr. Das are no more suited to each other than Mr Kapasi and his wife are. He recognizes the signs of dysfunctional marriage — the bickering, the indifference, the protracted silences (p. 53) — and is flattened by Mrs. Das' attention. Lahiri sees tolerance as essential to both the husband and wife although she explores the complications of an arranged marriage in 'The Blessed House'. She lays stress on mutual love and respect and implies that in conjugal life the couple should tolerate each other's differences. Shoba and Shukumar eventually develop mutual compassion in 'A Temporary Matter'. Lilia learns compassion through Mr. Pirzada's enforced separation from his family in 'When Mr. Pirzada Come to Dine'.

Communication is Essential:-

Lahiri also points out that communication is essential, both for societies and also for individuals within the society. Communication or the lack of it often leads her characters to feel emotionally isolated which in turn leads them to suffer from cultural displacement. While in conversations with Mrs. Das, Mr Kapasi begins to see her as a sexual being rather than simply a tourist. He feels very excited when she includes him in their picnic. Her offer to send him some photographs encourages him to anticipate some extension of their relationship; she would write to him and he would respond eloquently (P. 55). His hopes are fuelled further when Mrs. Das displays her interest in the sensuality of the carved figures at the Konark temple. Mrs. Das' polite behaviour indicates something deeper to Mr. Kapasi.

At the end, he is dismayed to find that she thinks of him 'as a parent' rather than a potential partner, and that she felt comfortable in expressing her thoughts to him because of his 'talents' (p.65) as an interpreter. Such miscommunications sometimes lead to harassment. This is particularly true for immigrants who feel divided between the customs of their homeland and those of their adopted society. Mr. Kapasi becomes the victim of this miscommunication. He feels 'insulted' being used by Mrs. Das who just considers him merely a tour guide.

Conclusion:-

The character of Mr Kapasi says that it is human misunderstandings which lead to misinterpretations, and not cultural divides. As the 'slip of paper' (p. 69) on which he has written his address floats away, he is reminded of the harsh truth that life is full of missed opportunities.

References:-

1. Chatterjee, Partha.1989. 'The Nationalist Resolutions of Women's Question' in Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History. New Delhi: Kali for Women. 233.
2. Clifford, James. 1988. The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art. Mass Harvard University Press. 274.
3. Lahiri, Jhumpa. 1999. The Interpreter of Maladies. London: Bloomsbury Publishing plc.
4. Naipaul, V.S. 1980. A Bend in the River. New York: Vintage Books.146.
5. Young, Robert J.C. 1995. Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race. London: Routledge.1995.