



Saarth E-Journal

Saarth E-Journal of Research

E-mail: sarthejournal@gmail.com
www.sarthejournal.com

ISSN NO: 2395-339X
Peer Reviewed
Vol.8, Issue.1 No.15

Impact Factor: 6.89
Quarterly
Jan. to March - 2023

A Postcolonial Perspective on the Stories of Jhumpa Lahiri

***Khyati Prakashkumar Pathak**

ABSTRACT

As one of the dominant fields of cultural studies, postcolonialism initially deals with the interactions between colonizers and colonized. However, as time went by, West's domination of its colonies began to disappear on the surface level. Although colonialism seems to have ended in its official form, the wave of immigration in recent decades has heralded new versions of colonialism. Thus, attention to the phenomenon of migration and cultural products around it has gained a special place in postcolonial studies. Therefore, postcolonial theory has not limited its agenda to the study of colonized countries and empires but has given it a global dimension by analyzing situations of minorities such as immigrants. When people from the East began to immigrate to the West, they face with many problems. Referring to the main concept of the post colonialism indicates an extension of a nations rule over territory beyond its borders and a population that is subjected to the political domination of another population. As one of the genres in Jhumpa Lahiri's literary works is postcolonial, so this study try to have a severe perspective on her short stories. The study will use post colonialism as the primary theoretical framework to engage in textual and discourse analysis as the different elements of the study require.

(*Khyati Prakashkumar Pathak, Research Scholar, Reg. No. 210202020, H.N.G.U., Patan.)

The study will also partially employ cultural materialism to consider the capitalist society inhabited by the depicted subjectivities. An effort will be made to understand how the Bengali subject, once displaced will react to and be acted upon by the new culture and how will his conditioning be affected or will he be reconditioned to internalize a different set of values. The Diaspora retains elements of the culture of origin, but remakes them entirely. Whether the result is synergetic or not, Post colonialism (also Post - colonial theory, Post-colonial studies, and Post-colonialism) comprises methods of intellectual discourse that present analyses of, and responses to, the cultural legacies of colonialism and of imperialism, which draw from different postmodern schools of thought, such as critical theory. Post-colonial literature addresses the problems and consequences of the de-colonization of a country and of a nation, especially the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated colonial peoples; and it also is a literary critique of and about post-colonial literature, the undertones of which carry, communicate, and justify racialism and colonialism.[1] The contemporary forms of post-colonial literature present literary and intellectual critiques of the postcolonial discourse, by endeavouring to assimilate postcolonialism and its literary expressions.

KEY WORDS: Postcolonialism, Cultural, Jhumpa Lahiri, Literature.

ABOUT JHUMPA LAHIRI

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London and raised in Rhode Island. She is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and author of two previous books. Her debut collection of stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, the PEN/Hemingway Award and The New Yorker Debut of the Year. Her novel *The Namesake* was a New York Times Notable Book, a Los Angeles Times Book Prize finalist and was selected as one of the best books of the year by USA Today and Entertainment Weekly, among other publications. She lives in Brooklyn, New York. She took her B.A in English from Barnard College. Later, she attended Boston University where she got her M.A Degree in English, Creative Writing, and Comparative Studies in literature. Also, it was in Boston University where she received her Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies. After graduation, Lahiri shortly taught creative writing at Boston University and the Rhode Island School of Design. Lahiri has travelled extensively to India. She has also experienced the problems of Diaspora as it exists. Hence, her books are under the impacts of these two factors. She has two collections of short stories, named *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), as well as three novels, *The*

Namesake (2003), *The Lowland* (2013), and *Dove Mi Trovo* (2018). She gained an instant reputation by the publication of her first collection of short stories.

❖ *THE NAMESAKE*

In *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri gives an insight into a Bengali family living in the United States. Lahiri's autobiographic work contains her personal experience of identity crisis caused by a life between traditions and names. *The Namesake*'s narrator Gogol is the child of Bengali parents and grows up in the United States. Gogol's parents Ashima and Ashoke immigrated to the US to make a better living. Right from the start, Lahiri exposes the problems of Indian traditions concerning names. Ashima has adopted her husband's surname but refuses, for propriety's sake, to utter his first name: "It's not the type of thing Bengali wives do...A husband's name is something intimate and therefore unspoken" (2). To Bengali wives, this is a sign of respect and veneration.

Bengalis have two names: a private pet name, which can be compared to a nickname, and an official good name. But the narrator grows up with only one name: his pet name Gogol. The boy is named after the Russian writer Nikolai Wassiljewitsch Gogol. Unlike Bengali names, this name has no meaning. It is a link to the father's survival from a train accident. Jhumpa Lahiri explains the problem: "Not only does Gogol Ganguli have a pet name turned good name, but a last name turned first name. And so it occurs to him that no one he knows in the world, in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake". Therefore, the narrator has no reconnection to the world. In his youth, Gogol begins to hate his name, which in turn causes self-hate. He refuses to be who he is.

Gogol and his sister Sonia are primarily influenced by the American culture which causes the parents to mix traditions and customs. As a consequence, the children are stuck in between cultures. In America, Gogol and Sonia are Americans of Indian descent and somewhat different. In Calcutta, the hometown of their parents, they are strangers. While Ashima and Ashoke "slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves" by being in their familiar surroundings in West Bengal, the children "stand out in their bright, expensive sneakers, American haircuts, backpacks slung over the shoulder. During their first visit in Calcutta, Gogol and Sonia experience a culture shock. Back home in America, they "are disconnected by the space, by the uncompromising silence that surrounds them. They still feel somehow in transit.

In order to overcome his identity crisis, the narrator changes his name. In Erikson's terms, Gogol's identity crisis is a "necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another". Therefore, he decides to shed his identity as Gogol and live a new life as 'Nick', which is an abbreviation for Nikhil. Thereby, he follows in plenty of people's footsteps: "European immigrants had their names changed at Ellis Island...slaves renamed themselves once they were emancipated. For a moment, this process is a release, an act of freedom, the return of autonomy. But Gogol has problems to adopt his new identity and draws a conclusion: "He had tried to correct that randomness, that error. And yet it had not been possible to reinvent him fully". In the end, he accepts his sense of being different as a part of himself. Jhumpa Lahiri's conclusion is that "these events have formed Gogol, shaped him, and determined who he is", "always spoke to each other in English" (Lahiri 1999:98). However, at times, this mimicking was faulty which lead to some kind of a mockery which is tangible in the narrator's tone: "She tuned the radio to a station that played symphonies. 'Is it Beethoven?' she asked once, pronouncing the first part of the composer's name not 'bay,' but 'bee,' like the insect." (Ibid 94) Moreover, her English become falter when she is under pressure. She whether messed up syntactically like when she said: "Everyone, this people, too much in their world." (Ibid 95), or messed up the stress position in a word "It is very frustrating," Mrs. Sen apologized, with an emphasis on the second syllable of the word." (ibid:96) either way, although she is trying to mimic American's speech, she has an error in her speech which seems

❖ *Interpreter of Maladies*

The stories of Jhumpa Lahiri's first book whisper and scream traces of India through the details of the characters who become fictional testaments to the "complex and conflicted world of Indian immigrants in the United States". The title for the book came to Lahiri years before she actually began to formulate it when she ran into "a friend who acted as a Russian liaison in a Boston doctor's office". She says that the phrase "Interpreter of Maladies" was "the closest [she has] ever come to poetry". Her characters often exist simultaneously in two cultures: the American reality and the sphere of Indian tradition Interpreter of Maladies, 1999.

Jhumpa Lahiri says that her experiences in Calcutta "nourished [her] interest in seeing things from different points of view". Such ability is what allows Lahiri to write from the perspectives of such seemingly different characters. Her points of perspective range from a cab driver/tour guide in "Interpreter of Maladies" to that of an adult recounting her child-

like fascination with a recurring visitor in “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine.” Lahiri uses character details in order to make assertions about the sense of isolation that governs each story’s events.

“Mrs. Sen” speaks to the many isolated immigrant women of not just Indian descent, but of numerous origins through its poignant depiction of a woman trying to assimilate but unwilling to let go of the aspects of her life in India that “do not fit.” In the United States, Mrs. Sen baby-sits in her home wearing the intricate saris brought carefully from India which have no remaining purpose. It is the trips to the fish market and letters from India that keep her feeling whole, while also illuminating her very emptiness. The reactions of Lahiri’s Indian audiences to her readings have been concerned with ideas of identity and representation, issues surely experienced by all immigrants trying to adapt to a new culture. Lahiri said in an interview with *Newsweek* that the main character in “Mrs. Sen’s” found its basis in her mother working as a babysitter for American families.

One particular story whose setting is not primarily a US North-eastern coastal city is “The Treatment of Bibi Haldar.” An epileptic woman in Calcutta with few relatives remains in the grudging care of her cousin and his wife while attempting to find herself a husband and a cure for her ailments. While it remains consistent with Lahiri’s overall theme of isolation, she says that “the story is basically about the town’s involvement in Bibi’s search for a husband and her own sense of happiness”. Community solidifies the identity of Bibi Haldar because she has no real family. Through the communal device, Lahiri identifies the accentuated isolation of this character in her native city even when surrounded by the same people that have always surrounded her.

The final story of Lahiri’s first collection of nine, “The Third and Final Continent,” addresses the realities of arranged marriages and the long process of assimilation into American culture from an Indian perspective. Perhaps moulded upon aspects of her parents’ lives in the United States, Lahiri presents a first person account of an Indian man preparing for the arrival of his new bride as he lives under the roof of an aged American landlady. The vivid differences between his bachelor life in a room in this woman’s house and the journey that he takes while teaching who his bride is boldly comments on the cultural differences and similarities between the two cultures. Senses of isolation and a coming together in order to survive are evident in both of these relationships. At the end of the story,

Lahiri introduces the notion of loss of cultural identification through passing generations by mentioning the college aged child of the couple. They bring him home to “eat rice with his hands and speak Bengali” which are “things [they] sometimes worry he will no longer do after [they] die”. Lahiri presents a couple whose only remaining connection with the country of their origin has a definitive death with their own end because the assimilation of their son into American culture leaves no room for their own cultural orientation.

Jhumpa Lahiri says that her experiences in Calcutta “nourished [her] interest in seeing things from different points of view” (Patel 80). Such ability is what allows Lahiri to write from the perspectives of such seemingly different characters. Her points of perspective range from a cab driver/tour guide in “Interpreter of Maladies” to that of an adult recounting her child-like fascination with a recurring visitor in “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine.” Lahiri uses character details in order to make assertions about the sense of isolation that governs each story’s events. Senses of isolation and a coming together in order to survive are evident in both of these relationships. At the end of the story, Lahiri introduces the notion of loss of cultural identification through passing generations by mentioning the college aged child of the couple. They bring him home to “eat rice with his hands and speak Bengali” which are “things sometimes worry he will no longer do after die” . Lahiri presents a couple whose only remaining connection with the country of their origin has a definitive death with their own end because the assimilation of their son into American culture leaves no room for their own cultural orientation.

❖ **THE LOWLAND**

The story of *The Lowland* setup in the Tollygunge where two brothers, named Subhash and Udayan, of age gap of only one and half years, grow into young adults in Tollygunge. Udayan joins Marxism to change the society, where as Subhash goes to Rhode Island in US for his Ph.D in Oceanography. Udayan married to Gauri, after courting for two years, against wish of his parents. Gauri is a simple and a bookish girl. The main twist of the novel happens when Udayan was killed amidst the Naxalite insurgency in India in 1970’s. Subhash returns from US and marries Gauri, out of love towards his brother and takes her to Rhode Island, who is by then pregnant by Udayan child. A daughter, named Bela is born in Rhode Island and the story revolved around these characters. Tollygunge underwent many changes over these three centuries. During early 20th century people started growing paddy fields on open land. It had few acres of the lowland behind which two ponds exist side by side. During rainy season the embankment between them would vanish. This lowland and ponds are remnants of

once Adiganga and sea flowed there. The flora and fauna of the Tollygunge is beautifully illustrated such as blue hyacinth which grows as a weed in lowland, tamarind trees and wild almonds in Tolly club, eggs of Warbler's nest, egrets, jackals etc., when Subhash and Udayan were children. The water in the ponds was clean and they used to cool off in the ponds on hot days and even poor people would bathe there, and after rains the flood water turned the lowland with wading birds. After Independence, and partition of India and Pakistan, Hindu refugees from Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong started occupying the Tollygunge. These Hindu refugees were accommodated but ignored by Indian government. "They made shelters of canvas or thatch, walls of woven bamboo. They lived without sanitation, without electricity, in shanties next to garbage heaps, in any available space". Because of these refugees the once Adi Ganga is now a sewer canal from southwest Kolkata. When British left India, the environmental degradation in India did not dropdown, on contrary it got "accelerated". Many research studies have shown that the environmental issues in India have become worsen after colonial period. "Although Colonial rule throughout the world was accompanied and supported by exploitation of forest and environmental destruction, Independence has not put a stop anyway to these processes. Rather, the disruption of the relationship between local societies and natural resource bases has continued in the worldwide moment towards modernization".

The imperial rule has taken new shape in second half of the 19th century in the form of 'modernization', 'globalization', 'neo-colonization', cultural imperialism', etc., though the geographical and political power ended, and the economical control retained in the former colonies of the west. All post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to the forms of "neo-colonial domination", and independence has not solved the problems. The development of new élites within independent societies, often buttressed by neo-colonial institutions; the development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations; the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in settler/invader societies—all these testify to the fact that post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. The profit which colonial empire desire is continuing to flow even after the independence of various colonies, through the active collaboration i.e., through "media" and "advertising" of "Empire's products". "These products are themselves not always manufactured within the Western country, as the sites of production are dispersed, but the profits still flow into the coffers situated in Europe and Ameri. Let us look what happened after independence to the Tollygunge in the novel *The Lowland*. Tolly club remained as a

symbol of colonialism and capitalism in Kolkata. People filled all over the Tollygunge but Tolly club which has hundred acres, walled off for the enjoyment of a few. Udayan who rebels the capitalism in India and joins Marxism for seeking a change in the society, says that “Tolly club was proof that India was still a semi colonial country, behaving as if the British had never left”. In 1980s, people started tossed waste into the ponds of Tollygunge. People are not doing this unknowingly or innocently but they were doing it deliberately. They are doing this as an illegal practice to all ponds and paddy fields all over Kolkata to turn the swampy land to solid so that a new land can be claimed.

Land filling was process adopted to reclaim the new land in various places in India during colonial period and also after independence. For instance, the ‘land of seven islands’ which is Bombay was land filled to reclaim land in 18th century by East India Company. It took over 150 years to land fill them to form the urban Bombay. “Various reclamation plans and schemes executed in 19th century offered more space for further urban expansion” of Bombay. After independence for employment in industries the rural population has moved to urban areas all over the India. “Urban population in India has increased from 62.44 million in 1951 to 285.35 millions in 2001, thereby showing nearly fivefold increase in urban population”. The whole garbage of the Tollygunge would end up there: wrapper of biscuit packers, butter, empty bottles of Dettol, shampoos, *etc.*, “Each day it diminished: a little less water to see through the terrace grille. Bijoli is mother of Subhash and Udayan, she watches as the two ponds in front of the house, and the tract of lowland behind them, are clogged with waste”. After the death of Udayan, everyday in the evening she carries an urn filled with flowers to honour his dead son’s memorial stone erected in the lowland. When she started seeing the waste around the memorial stone, “each day she removes a small portion of unwanted thing” in the lowland. She know she can never remove all of it but the task ‘satisfies’ her. After end of colonial period in India, the government took the place of the British, but the system was the same i.e., capitalism. Some of the incidents from the novel analyzed to show the social, economic, and political legacies of these former colonies still as same as the colonial rule even after the independence. In 1967, Naxalism started in many places in India to fight against capitalism. Naxalism under the party name CPI (ML) spread “like wild fire, it quickly spread and became a full-scale militant insurgency where the farmers, armed with their primitive weapons, bows and arrows came together in collaboration with communist activists and revolted against the centuries of oppression by the rich landlords”. In 1970’s Marxism in Kolkata was in full flare. To counter such an act of

terrorism, the government of Indian renewed an old law that authorized the police to enter any homes without a warrant and arrest young men without charges was reinstituted. "The law had been introduced by the British to counter any freedom movement. Reinstating the law was felt necessary to cut off the legs of the naxalite movement".

Another instance from the novel is that even after the independence, the country clubs like Tolly Club are open for the foreigners who did not leave India after Independence, and there was a birthday party for the child of a British family still living in India, with ice cream and pony rides, a cake in which candles burned. Though Nehru was Prime Minister, it was the new Queen of England, Elizabeth II, whose portrait presided in the main drawing room. One more instance from the novel is that it talks about the involvement of western engineers in construction of cities in India in 1970's. People of India come to know through newspaper that the Dutch engineers laying down pipes to bring in silt from the Hooghly, closing up the lakes, turning water into land. Irony strikes when the real salt lake is destroyed to construct a city named 'Salt Lake'. "They'd established a planned city, Salt Lake, in its place". Tollygunge was compared and contrasted with similar landscape of the west, Rhode Island in US. When Subhash is in Rhode Island, he could relate some physical aspects of Rhode Island to the Tollygunge. Both places were close to sea level, with estuaries where fresh and saltwater combined. As Tollygunge, in a previous era, had been flooded by the sea, all the Rhode Island, he learned, had once been covered with sheets of ice. The advance and retreat of glaciers, spreading and melting over New England, had shifted bedrock and soil, leaving great trail of debris. They had created marshes and the bay, dunes and moraines. They had shaped the current shore. Rhode Island was a naturally formed whereas Tollygunge was an extracted one, a human made. The mangroves that once thrived in Tollygunge are compared to the Marsh Grass *Spartina* of the Rhode Island and the egrets in Tollygunge are compared to the herons of Rhode Island. In one of the letters Subhash mentions, "As strange as it sounds, when the sky is overcast, when the clouds are low, something about the coastal landscape here, the water and the grass, the smell of bacteria when I visit the mudflats, takes me home". Rhode Island is narrated as having people enjoying nature and co-exists with nature, and from the school itself the students are trained to grow and maintain ecological balance. The eco-conscious of the authors, perhaps, is portrayed through the character 'Bela', who after graduation joins as an agricultural apprentice. All the year, she works in various farms and helps the farmers of rural America states. In the novel, she is the one who educates

her father of consuming fresh farm products rather the supermarket ones. “Jhumpa Lahiri’s eco-consciousness has deftly been envisioned in the character Bela.

In 2010’s, Gauri, wife of Late Udayan and Subhash, when visiting Rhode Island after 40 years, she had flown to Boston and from there she rents a car at the air port to drive the rest of the way. “She entered the zip code in the car’s GPS, but soon found that directions weren’t necessary. The names of the exists leading to the different suburbs and town came back to her” Rhode Island in 2010’s is describes as ‘supermarket tuned as post office’, pharmacy that is open for 24 hours, ‘a greater variety of places to eat’, Japanese maple has grown three times of its height, more flowers, black –eyed susans, daylilies, chrysanthemums etc. Around same time Gauri, also visits Tollygunge and she reaches the house where she once lived and walks to see the lowland. “She has forgotten no detail. The colour and shape of the ponds clear in her mind. But the details were no longer there. Both ponds were gone. New home filled up an area that had once been watery, open”. She was taken by shock, “Both two ponds were gone, new homes filled up an area that had once been watery, open”. The lowland was also gone and she could not distinguish that area from the rest of the neighbourhood. She was totally unprepared for the change she was witnessing and she could not trace the memorial stone of Udayan anywhere. Over a span of half century, we can see total destruction of ecological landscape of Tollygunge, whereas landscape of Rhode Island is still exactly the same. Tollygunge in 2010, is described as ‘cell phones’ ‘crammed tightly’ with constructions, ‘streets busy with vehicles’ ‘horns, ‘pollution’, ‘not a single empty plot’, ‘no space for children to play cricket or football’, ‘all rooftops thick with antennas’. The narrator tells us that, “the two ponds across the lane would overflow and become one,” very similar to hybrid characters, who after exposure to two cultures, form hybrid identities. Being positioned in the ‘third space,’ the protagonists inevitably come to terms with their Diasporic condition and make every effort to blend in. Gauri is eager to embrace whatever the adopted land offers. She chooses to live in the United States forever and never to return to her homeland. “In any case, California was her only home. Right away she had adapted to its climate”. It is signalled that Gauri is willing to join the new community from the first months of her life in America.

This idea is symbolically presented by the depiction of Narasimhan’s life as an Indian immigrant in America. He is an Indian professor at the campus where Subhash studies. “He had an American wife and two tanned light-eyed sons who looked like neither of their parents”. Lahiri shows how hybridity yields something totally new which deviates from what

is expected. Subhash lives in the U.S. for a few years, and when he takes a trip to India, he realizes he can never be the same person as before. He feels more like an American than an Indian. While walking on the streets of Tollygunge, he sees “Europeans wearing kurtas, beads. Exploring Calcutta, passing through, he looked like any other Bengali he felt an allegiance with the foreigners now. He shared with them knowledge of elsewhere. Another life to go back to. The ability to leave”. The first time Gauri wants to go out for a walk in Rhode Island, she tries the dress that her husband has recently bought for her. She “put on her winter coat over her sari”. This is apparently how no one looks like in America. Women either wear leather coats if they are Americans or saris if they are Indians and not both of them at the same time. She herself starts to feel the severity of her being different. Once in the campus lounge, she starts a small talk with an American girl whose “body was unencumbered by the yards of silk material that Gauri wrapped and pleated and tucked every morning into a petticoat... Gauri felt ungainly. She began to want to look like the other women she noticed on the campus, like a woman Udayan had never seen”. She senses the urge to liken herself to the American girls whom she sees on campus. What she needs is to “adopt an identity in the U.S. that transcends national boundaries” (Alfonso-Forero 39). “For the sake of retirement, for the sake of simplifying the end of her life, she would need to become an American”. For instance, she copies what other American married women do, “adopting the Western custom of wearing a wedding band during the day”. She also keeps her hair short and never tells her little daughter about the Indian custom of women letting their hair grow very long. It puzzles Subhash’s mother when she finds out that Bela, Gauri’s daughter, has not learned about such customs. Subhash’s Mother. Your mom hasn’t taught you to keep it tied?... There isn’t a rule about it at your school? Bela. No. Subhash’s Mother. You must keep it braided. At night, especially, two on either side for now, one at the centre when you are older. Her mother had never told her this. Her mother wore her hair as short as a man’s. Gauri has changed significantly since she left Tollygunge; she now looks only slightly like the mainstream women in the town. Bela shows Gauri’s photo to her grandmother’s maid. Looking at it, astonished, the maid says, “[s]o stylish”. Gauri well exemplifies “the victimized “third world” woman who is liberated by her adoption of an American identity” (Alfonso-Forero). Nevertheless, no matter how hard she tries to assimilate herself to the Western women, she cannot definitely turn into one of them. As the narrator suggests, “in spite of her jeans and boots and belted cardigan, or perhaps because of them, Gauri knew she stood out”. She knows that only by changing her outfit, she cannot fully resemble typical American women, and realizes that there exist non-removable obstacles. Her

appearance and accent cause people to ask her where she is from, and even to form certain assumptions.

For instance, when she is invited to give a talk in San Diego, the university sends a driver to pick her up, so that she does not have to drive. Gauri greets the driver at the door, but he does not realize that she is his passenger. He mistakes her for the person who is paid to open the door for another person. “Tell her, whenever she’s ready, he’d said”. The narrator tells the reader about Gauri in her old age, after she has lived most of her life in the United States: And yet she remained, in spite of her Western clothes, her Western academic interests, a woman who spoke English with a foreign accent, whose physical appearance and complexion were unchangeable and, against the backdrop of most of America, still unconventional. She continued to introduce herself by an unusual name, the first given by her parents, the last by the two brothers she had wed. In spite of Gauri’s wish, her “inescapable ‘Bengali’ nature” accompanies her until the end of her life. Language and Customs Lahiri uses a simile to refer to the foreign language. In the section that Gauri’s neglect of motherhood duties is mentioned, the narrator says that Gauri’s daughter, Bela, thinks that “[h]er mother’s absence was like another language she’d had to learn,... because it was foreign, a language never fully absorbed”. Narasimhan, who is an Indian professor at the American university, looks after Subhash at his arrival. Because he knows the town and the campus very well, he offers Subhash help and invites him over for a couple of times. He tells Subhash, “I’m supposed to keep an eye out for you” . They speak with each other about Rhode Island and Tollygunge, which makes Subhash realize that Narasimhan “still understood a word or two of Bengali”. Narasimhan has accepted English language as the main way of communication and more importantly as a cultural element. He has not spoken his native language for such a long time that he only remembers a few words of it. His “adoption of master language for the purpose of self-expression may be a sign of the loyalty of fear, although that loyalty is also shown to conflict with his own middle-class aspiration of freedom, aspirations set in place by the introduction of Western learning”. Subhash leaves India for the United States alone. There, he observes how customs differ from those in India. However, he cannot share his perceptions with anyone. He keeps thinking about the huge differences, and almost everything strikes him as strange, new, and different. For instance, when he thinks about the Indian calendar, he remembers that “[t]he following day was August 15, Indian Independence. A holiday for the country... An ordinary day here”. During the first months of his life in America, the idea that, for instance, August 15 is not celebrated

at all puzzles him. It is just a matter of time for him to get used to the fact that America is a whole new country, and that he must not expect to see the Indian customs be observed in the U.S. On the other hand, when Subhash travels to India after a couple of years, it is quite noticeable for him that “[h]is mother would eat after serving them, as she always did”.

This is what he had never paid attention to, but now that he has lived elsewhere, he notices the striking differences. He now knows that India is the place where he can put aside the spoon and the fork since he can enjoy “[t]he freedom to eat with his fingers”. Watching his mother, he notices that “her dark hair [is] decorated with its bright column of vermillion, to signify that she [has] a husband”. Moreover, he now understands how typical Indian parents behave inappropriately when communicating with their daughters-in-law. He witnesses that his parents mistreat his brother’s widow, not even letting her eat with them in the same room. She has to stay in the kitchen and eat there. Subhash “didn’t say what came to his mind. That Udayan would’ve hated them for segregating her, for observing such customs”. Subhash prefers the American code of conduct in this regard. Adopting the New Culture in *The Lowland*, cultural exchange is demonstrated through cultural adoption. There are three main points that Lahiri takes into account to impart the idea of cultural exchange: the dress code of the Indian immigrants, their refusal of arranged marriage, and their negligence of the Indian rituals and traditions. Dress Code Lahiri uses the dress code to emphasize the mixed nature of the way the Indians dress. Gauri enters America wearing traditional Indian clothes. As time goes by, she realizes that she needs to dress like the modern American women she sees on campus. Subhash helped her and “bought her a coat, a pair of boots, thick socks, a woollen scarf, a cap and gloves”. At first, she wore American clothes with hesitation, but these clothes gradually replaced all her traditional, Indian clothes. After a few years, when her husband asks her why she tore her clothes, she replies, “I was tired of those”. Years later when her daughter asks Subhash, “An we buy one [sari] for Ma?” he replies, “[s]he never wears them”. This reveals how greatly Gauri has changed during the course of the years she has lived in the U.S. No matter how conservative and traditionalist she initially was, she feels the urge to conform to the western society. As Alfonso-Forero mentions, the migrants “feel they must adopt these “modern” strategies in order to compete with the Western world”. When Gauri paid a visit to her hometown after decades of living in the United States, the people in the neighbourhood “were glancing at her now that she was out of the car. Taking in her sunglasses, her American clothing and shoes. Unaware that once she, too, had lived here”. Different, eye catching, Western clothes that Gauri was wearing

draws attention of the people in Tollygunge. Even those Indians who never travel to the West are influenced by how the Westerners dress. Subhash's younger brother, Udayan, never takes a trip abroad and has never seen people from the West; nevertheless, his "clothing hung on him loosely. He wore kurtas but also European-style shirts". He puts on the Indian clothing along with Western clothes, choosing from them whatever he prefers.

Refusal of Arranged Marriage In addition to the adoption of dress code, refusal of arranged marriage is a significant manifestation of culture adoption in Lahiri's work. In their book, *Companion to the American Novel* (2006), Abby Werlock and James Werlock discuss the issue of arranged marriage in eight novels most of which are either written by immigrant authors or by American authors who touch on the lives of immigrant characters. As Rupa Huq argues, "a set of 'Asian values...' are wedded to [the Asian] tradition, spanning religious practice, arranged marriage, female subordination and a resistance to change". In *The Lowland*, Lahiri delineates the so-called Asian value of arranged marriage and portrays the young Indian boys and girls who tend to reject their parents' interfering with their choice of spouse. Subhash and Gauri are aware of the Western culture and traditions to some extent and thus choose their own spouses even when they are still living in their hometown. Udayan, who does not wish to continue his studies in the U.S., is well aware of the traditions of marriage in the West, appreciates this aspect of the Western culture and says, "Like Chairman Mao, I reject the idea of an arranged marriage. It is one thing, I admit, that I admire about the West". When his parents see their son, Udayan, getting married to someone whom they do not approve of, they tell Subhash that, "we hope you'll trust us to settle your future". And Subhash promises to let them arrange his marriage. Things do not turn out as their parents wished, and Subhash also gets married to a woman that his parents do not like. When he is trying to propose to Gauri, he is simultaneously pondering over his parents' reaction. "He mentioned nothing to his parents, knowing that they would only try to dissuade him. He knew the solution he'd arrived at would appal them... But he was no longer afraid".

Negligence of Indian Traditions Although Subhash and Gauri partially succeed in leading a Western life, "much stands to be lost culturally if they simply appropriate Western ways". They appropriate Western ways at the expense of most of the culture and values of their motherland. Back in India, both Subhash and Gauri followed most of the Indian traditions and rituals; however, as they settle in the United States and get accustomed to the American traditions, they both tend to adopt the American lifestyle. Subhash starts an affair with an American divorced woman after a couple of months of his life in America. For a

couple of times, they do certain ordinary things, as if they were already husband and wife. “Going together to the supermarket, filling the cart with food, putting the bags in the trunk of her car. Things he would not have done with a woman, in Calcutta, before getting married”. Subhash’s relationship is considered a taboo in his country, yet knowing that none of his relatives can witness what he does in America, he feels free to do as he pleases; “it was merely the shoals of physical distance that allowed his defiance to resist”. At her arrival, Gauri realizes that, unlike her ex-husband Udayan, Subhash does not expect her to serve him. “She was thankful for his independence... Udayan had wanted to be served”. She is also dazzled that Subhash “would leave out the ingredients in the morning, icy packets from the freezer that slowly melted and revealed their contents during the course of the day”. At her old age, “in California, Gauri has her toast and fruit and tea”. She no longer cooks rice, samosas, or other Indian food full of curry. Instead, she fancies eating fast food, toast with cream cheese, and other kinds of Western cuisine, the food she knew nothing about when she moved to America. When she first tasted cream cheese, she ate it all “not knowing it was intended to be spread on a cracker or bread, savouring the unexpected taste and texture of it in her mouth, licking the paper clean”. How Subhash and Gauri raise their daughter, Bela, also exemplifies their rejection of Indian practices. Bela is allowed to live separately from her parents, and travels around the country, living the life of a homeless person. Although both her parents are successful scholars, she is given the liberty to leave her studies at B.A. level and make a living by farming instead. In addition, Subhash never interfered with Bela’s marriage. “If he’d raised her in Calcutta it would have been reasonable for him to bring up the subject of her marriage. Here it was considered meddlesome, out-of-bounds. He had raised her in a place free from such stigmas”. Gauri, unlike typical Indian mothers, dedicates all of her time to her studies and neglects her little daughter. She speaks of her Ph.D. dissertation “as she might speak of an infant, telling Subhash that she worried about the pages being blown out an open window, or being destroyed by a fire. She said it worried her, sometimes, to leave them unattended in the house”. After years of living on her own, Gauri initiates a homosexual relationship with a Ph.D. student whose dissertation Gauri was supposed to be the outside reader of. “She had no recollection of crossing a line that drove her to desire a woman’s body” . But in America, she enjoyed the individual liberty to take lovers of either sex; something that she could not have dreamed of in India.

CONCLUSION

Postcolonialism used to only deal with the interaction between colonizers and colonized. However, as time goes by and colonialization ceased to be on the surface level, some postcolonial theorist starts to examine and study immigrants and their cultural products in the light of postcolonialism notions. Throughout history the Diaspora generations have been most actively engaged in the acts of mimicry as a means of surviving in the mainstream of the host society. Jhumpa Lahiri's novels deal with issues that appear banal and everyday but raise questions about culture, identity, the position and condition of the subject in an Americanized neo-colonial world. She has explored this condition existing between two cultures and yet inhabiting a space that belongs to neither. Jhumpa Lahiri, though being American forms part of the Diaspora of writers who may be identified with and analyzed in postcolonial framework. Nevertheless, the questions of identity in her fiction invite compelling and critical scholarly enquiry.

REFERENCES

1. Lahiri, Jhumpa. (1999). *Interpreter of Maladies*. New York: Flamingo
2. Parmanand, Jha. (2002). "Home and Abroad: A Study of Interpreter of Maladies." In: Jhumpa, Lahiri: *The Master Storyteller: A Critical Response to Interpreter of Maladies*. Bala, Suman (ed.) New Dehli: Khosla Pub House
3. Tölölyan, Khachig. (1991). "The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface". *A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring. 3–7
4. *Jhumpa Lahiri: Professor of Creative Writing*". *Lewis Center for the Arts, Princeton University*. Retrieved August 17, 2018.
5. Aguiar, Arun. "One on One With Jhumpa Lahiri", *Pifmagazine.com*, July 28, 1999. Retrieved on 2008-04-13.
6. *Lahiri, Jhumpa (November 29, 2015). "Teach Yourself Italian". The New Yorker*. Retrieved January 18, 2019.
7. *Lahiri, Jhumpa (2017). In other words. Ann Goldstein. London. ISBN 978-1-4088-6613-9. OCLC 949821672.*