

**SALAD BOWL OR MELTING POT: A PORTRAYAL OF IMMIGRANTS IN THE SHORT FICTION GALAXY OF JHUMPA LAHIRI**

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### **Abstract**

People living all over the world belong to different religions, follow different cultures and speak different languages. They have to adapt themselves to the changing situations and places lest they should experience untold sufferings. Life throws all a lot of challenges, both simple and complicated, and it is up to all to rise and perform, take decisions that can be sometimes satisfying, and sometimes disturbing, and walk through it as if none were affected by it. It is not an easy thing to do. Life is not a bed of roses to live easily as well as it is not a bed of thorns also. It is a two sides' coin. An admiring author, Lahiri belongs to Indian origin, born in London, frequent visit to Calcutta, grew up in Rhode Island, studied later married in New York, shifted to Italy, at present as a Professor in New Jersey. Hence, she has faced a lot of problems as an immigrant which she tries to express in her work. Her immigrants are the examples for both Melting Pot and Salad bowl associated spirits like seasonal beings. She is the great observer of versatile genius of analyzing various cultures.

**Keywords:** immigration, assimilation, culture, melting pot, salad bowl.

### **Introduction**

Culture is the heart of every nation. It is not only a practice of an individual but it is a backbone of every individual. Culture only gives confidence, it involves in humans' behaviours. It should not be a forced one. There are two major cultural ideas followed in every nation. They are Melting pot and Salad bowl. The melting pot indicates that most of the immigrants might have melted together. Some people have abandoned their cultures to become totally assimilated into American society. US is often called as a 'Melting Pot.' Some countries like UK consider cultural diversity as a positive one; immigrants have always been encouraged to maintain their traditions and their native language. This model is associated with the salad bowl concept, with people of different cultures living in harmony. Compared to the Melting pot, the Salad Bowl concept maintains the unique identities of individuals that would otherwise be lost to assimilation. Moreover Salad Bowl concept acknowledges the discrete identities and cultural differences of a multicultural society.

### **Importance of Culture**

Culture is strongly associated with human attitudes and emotions. Attitude is the center of all individual power in the world. It varies from person's to person's mentality, suffering. Good attitude completely shapes the person as a whole. Attitude decides everything of a person's life. Positive attitude is more than thinking good thoughts; it's the ability to access a beneficial state of mind regardless of their situation. Attitude arranges the mental furniture of body mind, re creational vehicle as they explore the world of experiences. Attitude is more than thinking, it extends mind beyond body in things around you and the behavior of other people.

The most important thing in human relationship is the one establishing good attitude. The daughter's attitude is different towards her mother and her response is unavoidable in life, where as a married woman attitudes, their responses will be entirely different form unmarried woman. Similarly

their longing, desire, freedom seems to be different attitudes. All the human being possess different attitude and responses according to their situation. They are not born with good attitude. It is they by themselves must shape good attitude and achieve their desired goals. Because of negative attitude, a lot of people's life leads in a dark. Whether life is happy or not that depends upon the person's attitude.

“An attitude de roughly, is a residuum of  
Experience, by which further activity is controlled  
And conditioned. We may think of attitudes as  
Acquired tendencies to act in specific ways  
Toward objects” (Krueger and Reckless, p.148)

### **Culture and Attitude**

An essential thing inhuman relationships is the one established through marriage, Alexander Walker in his book on the *Physiological aspects of Women*, states that “marriage is essential to the well-being of human society” (p.78). He then lists out the advantages arising from the happy married life of man and woman. The gifts of a perfect and happy married life are politeness, good humor, fact, understanding, flexibility and genuine love. The place where such qualities exist in plenty is a relaxed and loving home. The husband and wife who live there will never hesitate to compromise with each other and they also learn to make decisions together by sacrificing their independence to some extent form the continuance of their happy married life.

Attitude and response is the main concern in human life and also unavoidable in life. It changes according to their situation, whereas attitude decides the fate of their life and responses whether it is good or bad fulfillment in their attitudes can contribute to leading a satisfying and successful life. Their attitude toward what you wish and expect governs the response you get. To have a satisfying life, must have a good attitude and responses accordingly to their situation. Whether it is to be one of happiness or not is determined by the attitudes of persons. To make their life as hellish or heavenly life during their earthly life lies in their attitudes

Oxford Dictionary thesaurus defines attitude as a way of thinking or feeling about someone or something. A healthy attitude towards life can sometimes make wonders. Altitudes are essentially natural human responses to the good or will or indifference of others towards us as displayed in their attitudes and actions. Attitude is the centre of success and the good side about attitude is that you are not born with it, you just can change and shape it until it fit best with your desired goals. Attitudes differ from person to person and responses according to their situation. The good attitude always help the person to go in right way and to seek a successful life It completely shapes the human being as whole person of their life. It also depends upon a person's mentality, suffering, physical and situation etc.,

### **Jhumpa Lahiri and her writing**

A skilled writer of cultural studies, JhumpaLahiri pictured this cultural trilogy well in her writings. An American author of Indian origin, Lahiri was the child of Bengali Indian immigrants from the state of West Bengal; she portrays the characters both in the light of native and alien culture. She was born NilanjanaSudeshna but goes by her nick name Jhumpa. Her life span moves across many countries and cultures. She was born in London, observed and learned Bengali heritage through her visits to Calcutta, grew up in Rhode Island, studied in New York and Massachusetts, married a journalist and extended a comfortable life in Brooklyn, New York, later shifted her residence to Italy's capital Rome for a year with her husband and their two children. She is currently a professor of creative writing at Princeton University, New Jersey.As a writer of American English with Indian flavor, she presents both Indian and American cultures in her works.

At present, Lahiri is one of the most eminent Indo- American writers. Even though she is a woman of Indian origin, she can stand in a firm position as a prominent writer in America. Her stories comprises of Indian heritage, American dream, loneliness of dislocation, cultural displacement, sense of identity and belonging with one foot into two worlds at surface. But with deep insight into her works, a hidden point mentioned is that there's no success without hardship in everyone's life. The characters' suffering make them strong to survive anywhere like Lahiri. Through her stories, she circuitously exposes the importance of cultural awareness, cultural intelligence, cultural psychological aspects and cultural feminist ideas.

Her short story collections *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth* focus on the same vision of Lahiri. Both present the themes of cultural aspects in a perfect manner. Everyone has an individuality, has his or her own culture and own identity. But he or she must possess the quality of adopting into other culture according to the place like Chameleon. Place should not be an obstacle for his or her development. Lahiri portrays how her immigrant characters struggle to adopt into the new culture at first and how they become develop themselves with hope later. Wherever they achieve, their identity couldn't be changed. If an Indian man shines in America, all will praise him as an achiever from Indian only, because it is his or her born identity.

### **Interpreter of Maladies**

At first, *Interpreter of Maladies* consists of nine dazzling short stories and these stories narrate the lives of Indians settled in America. Lahiri incorporates three worlds in her life- India, the land of her ancestors, England, the land that gave shelter to her parents, and America, America, the land of her present residence. These three worlds can easily be grouped into two worlds of the East and the West. Each and every story of this collection powerfully mirror its author's shifting frame of reference and spanning two worlds of the East and the West and intertwining a delightful touch of fictional art. The stories reveal immigrants' suffering in a new land as well as those sufferings made them stronger to survive there.

In addition to this, one of the main determinants of success in life is attitude towards adversity. People who are all face hardships, problems, accidents, afflictions and difficulties. No one willingly choose the adversity but everyone can choose the attitude towards it. Comparing to man, woman are the most sufferer. Woman has always been a sufferer for no fault of her. She has to play different roles in her life. When she is born, she has to become the target of criticism of her being a girl. In her childhood she has to depend on her father. After marriage, she depends on her husband, and in her old age she depends upon her son for her subsistence. As a mother, she has to obey her sons, as a wife, she has to obey her husband, and as a daughter, she has to her parents.

An initial portrait of the first collection, *A Temporary Matter* is about a married couple, Shukumar and Shoba, suffers from the darkness that is the loss of their stillborn child. The darkness actually separates them lonely but later the power cut produces darkness, it helps them to share their grief, they console themselves and to be a more intimate couple. At the same time, their loss makes them to cry again and at the end they realised that their misery is the temporary sadness only and they hope for their happiness in their life.

Secondly, *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*, Mr. Pirzada is a visiting professor of Pakistan; he becomes much closer with the little girl Lilia in her household in Dacca for a brief period. Mr.Pirzada spends his time in Lilia's house with her Indian parents. Later, Mr.Pirzada returns to Pakistan and reunited with his family, however, Lilia feels isolate of his absence. This story exposes the strong hope of the little girl Lilia. Even though she is a little one to do not understand what life is, but Lahiri shows her optimistic hope in an accurate manner. In the third, *Interpreter of Maladies*, Mr. Kapasi, a tour guideguides Das family to visit the Sun Temple in India. Mr. Kapasi reveals about himself to Das that he

has another job as an interpreter at a doctor's office. One day, at the tourist site, Mrs. Das has the chance to reveal her secret to Mr. Kapasi. At the end, Mrs. Das shifts her attention on her children and decide to look after her family as well she will be honest to her husband thereafter.

Next to this, *A Real Durwan*, Boori Ma, the protagonist, is a durwan, a gatekeeper, in an apartment building in India. She became a victim of stealing a new basin, but she didn't steal. No one is ready to believe her words and as a result, she's thrown out onto the street. The residents started to search a real durwan than Boori Ma without knowing her value. Boori Ma feels for their complaint and walks towards to search a job in another area. The fifth story *Sexyis* about Miranda, a young white woman who falls in love with a married Bengali man, Dev. When she has the chance to spend with a little boy, she realized her misbehavior. At last, Miranda slowly splits from Dev and looks forward towards her future in a good manner.

Subsequently, *Mrs. Sen*'s about Mrs. Sen, wife of a professor at the local university and a baby sitter. She has the responsibility to take care of Eliot, an eleven-year-old boy. Eventhough she feels homesick for her family in India, she hasn't made many friends here and she's glad to have Eliot. She is very kind and attentive towards Eliot. She cooks Indian spicy items to him; Eliot loves to have those items more. Though driving is essential in abroad, Mrs. Sen is afraid of learning to drive and she depends on Mr. Sen. But one day, Mrs. Sen decides to drive herself and Eliot to the market but inopportunely they get into a car accident. So Eliot's mother pulls Eliot from Mrs. Sen's care. Mrs. Sen consoles herself and recovers from those unpleasant happenings. Though accident is a bitter incident, but that would be the great chance to focus on Mrs. Sen's boldness.

Afterwards, *This Blessed House*, Sanjeev and Twinkle, a young married couple moved into a new house in Connecticut. Sanjeev is a successful businessman and Twinkle is a student from Stanford. Even though they are made for each other, they have some controversial thoughts. But they are strong in their love and understanding after some problems. The following story *The Treatment of Bibi Haldaris* about a strange malady Bibi Haldar is suffering from. She lives with her cousin Haldar and his wife. One day, Bibi turns up pregnant and no one knows who made her pregnant. Bibi turns out to be stronger than before; she gives birth to a baby boy and turns Haldar's shop into her own and becomes successful as well cured of her illness.

At the end of this first galaxy, *The Third and Final Continent* is about a Bengali man immigrates to London and then moves to Boston in order to make a life for himself and, later on, for his wife of an arranged wedding. When he gets to Boston, he stays at a house owned by a Mrs. Croft, who's 103 years old. Later, he realises that he needs a better apartment for him and his wife Mala to live in once she arrives from India. He and Mala live together at the new place, at first, they are not close to each other but later they live happily.

However, all the immigrants of these nine stories reveal their suffering to adopt the new country, sacrifices their miseries and stronger to survive there. They are not back to their native, they have the power to endure themselves and develop themselves. Keeping Indian heritage in their minds and following the American culture are the two strong sides of every immigrant just like a coin. These stories deal with life as a whole and various bonds that are part and parcel of one's life. Through her short stories, Lahiri has demonstrated that these bondages, ups and downs one comes across in life make the character a complete social and cultural being. Like *Interpreter of Maladies*, another short story collection *Unaccustomed earth* also deals with these influential aspects. The characters in these stories represent the diasporic struggle as well as journey of the self. The meaning of one's survival lies not only within himself but also related to the world and the fellow beings and this awareness makes one strike roots into unaccustomed earth.

## **Unaccustomed Earth**

Focussing on the next galaxy that is collection of her short stories, *Unaccustomed Earth* is another short story collection of eight short stories, five stories comprise the first part; three stories, featuring the same central characters comprise the second part, follow a Bengali-American family through several cities across the world. All the stories are thematically related and probe the overarching themes and subjects of Lahiri's career- the adjustments made by Bengali immigrants as they try to adapt to American culture. The title opines that a change of home can be good for a person if only they strike their roots into unaccustomed earth. As changes are inevitable in this mortal world, Lahiri beautifully shows the immigrants' bond between the place they were born and the place where they have settled.

This galaxy starts with the title story, *Unaccustomed Earth*. An unnamed father visits his daughter, Ruma, and her young son, Akash, in Seattle after the death of his wife. The story extends to three generations of immigrants and their varying modes of acculturation. Ruma's parents, first generation immigrants, come to the U.S. in quest of better educational opportunities. After his wife's sudden death, Ruma's father feels more liberated and immerses himself completely in the American culture. Surprisingly, He wants Ruma to experience the kind of freedom he now has, he feels that he is free from the strictures of traditional Bengali practices, and can live with his girlfriend. Meanwhile, Akash becomes fascinated with his grandfather's language; he is thoroughly American, and knows next to nothing about Bengalese culture. The story ends happily with the father leaving Ruma and a crying Akash to travel the world with his new girlfriend.

Secondly, *Hell-Heaven*, explores a complicated parent-child relationship. The narrative perspective shifts to the more personal, first-person voice, Usha, a young girl living in Boston with her very traditional mother, Boudi. She recounts the piteous story of her mother as she glimpses through her childhood memories. One day, they meet a graduate student at MIT named Pranab Chakraborty. Though, Pranab is homesick, Usha bonds with him, and Boudi is love-stricken. But in the end, Pranab marries an American woman named Deborah. Unfortunately they divorced twenty-three years later. Later, Usha learns that her mother's love affair on Pranab after many decades only after a man she wanted to marry had rejected her.

Following story, *A Choice of Accommodations* follows Amit and his partner, Megan, the couple faces some troubles due to misunderstanding and at last they become happy. Next story *Only Goodness* is about blood relations' relationship, Sudha and her teen-aged brother Rahul, an addict to alcohol. There was a misunderstanding raised between Sudha and Rahul and at last Rahul has the hope that he will prove himself as a responsible brother to his sister, Sudha soon. The subsequent story and final story of part I, *Nobody's Business* is the story of a girl, the unmarried Sangeeta Biswas. She loves Farouk, an Egyptian man. As per the Indian Chant, "Truth alone triumphs" Sang realises Farouk's real face very soon. She takes Farouk's cheating as a lesson, and hope for her bright future.

The second part of this collection entitled as *Hema and Kaushik* are intimately connected, and make up a trilogy. These short stories stretch a chronological account of the lives of Hema and Kausik. They grew up together but end up living distinct lives and lose touch. When they have chance to meet again after some decades, they realise a strong and mutual bond with one another. Unfortunately before proposing their love, Kausik dies in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The whole plot of *Hema and Kaushik* is divided into three parts.

### **Art of Characterisation**

Accordingly Lahiri envisions the cultural aspects beautifully in these two short story collections. With deep dive on these two collections, each and every story reflects the Indian heritage as well as American culture amazingly. Though culture is essential to everyone and every nation, he or she must learn cultural awareness. It paves the way for cultural intelligence to the immigrants. Immigration is like

school-going incident. Every immigrant has the struggle to adjust and adopt at first to a new environment, surrounding and culture, but later they can be strong and shine. So, place should not be an obstacle to anyone for his or her development. Everyone must aware of his or her individuality at the same time he or she must learn the essential qualities such as adjustment, adoptability and flexibility to survive in another nation. Sometimes Lahiri's immigrants behave like the concept of melting pot but for the sake of situation only, but not always.

### **Salad Bowl concept**

To put it in a nutshell, Lahiri's characters are the best instances of Salad Bowl concept. They were not abandoned their original culture, they just try to adapt a new culture for the sake of family or education or career. Whenever the immigrants think of their mother culture, they will be real disciples of respecting their own rather than other cultures. Everyone has a mother, but wherever we go, we can find some other woman like mother caring us, supporting us, treating us as her children, but no one can replace the place of a real mother. Likewise in culture also, there will be no replacement. Immigrants can learn the various cultures but never abandon their original culture though it's in everyone's blood.

### **Conclusion**

Though Lahiri is an American citizen, she still celebrates as an Indian diaspora writer. Her short stories not only express the two countries' cultural aspects but they are the important instances to state that how essential cultural Globalisation is. Hence, literature has many branches such as Indian writing, American literature, Canadian literature, etc., every branch reflects its nation especially culture; it is a globalized one. Thus Lahiri's multisided talent of highlighting Indian culture presents the awareness about American Culture and how immigrants' sufferings make them stronger and stimulate them to overcome and at last support to survive in another nation.

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