

# THE DIASPORIC ELEMENT OF DILEMMA: A STUDY OF JHUMPA LAHIR'S 'THE THIRD AND FINAL CONTINENT'

## Abstract

The writer of Indian Diaspora Jhumpa Lahiri's collection of stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, has *The Third and Final Continent* as its ninth narrative. The diasporic writing is about the blending of various cultures even while it portrays the traumas of alienation, in-betweenness, and longing for the homeland. Jhumpa Lahiri is a writer from the Diaspora who illustrates in her works how heritage, cultural influences, and adaptation are important factors in discovering one's true identity. She draws on her personal experiences of growing up in an immigrant family. This essay examines the diasporic element of dilemma in *The Third and Final Continent* by focusing on the narrator's experience as an immigrant and examining the dynamics of his connections with other characters, particularly as they develop. He feels welcomed and safe in his own India, but when he travels overseas, he begins to experience worry and anxiety. We see from his narrations how he adjusts to both European and American society, and it is by these experiences that he has the ability to assimilate and fit in with the new place he visits.

**Keywords:** diasporic element of dilemma, attention on a global scale, perspectives and experiences of the Indian diaspora.

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Indian Diaspora literature that is attracting attention on a global scale is frequently written by or about educated migrants or their descendants. It addresses issues like discrimination, identity crises, and nostalgia, among others. It operates in a cultural environment where diversity predominates and makes an effort to make sense of strange reality. It makes an effort to assimilate into the host country and society through a literary network that is tied to issues of equality and identity. As a result, concerns related to location, travel, crossing borders, original home and adopted home, and identity are present in all diasporic fiction. It is accurate to say that diasporic Indian English fiction is an important genre that accurately captures the perspectives and experiences of the Indian diaspora in general. It allows for debates about Indian immigration and provides that particular diaspora with a sense of emotional comfort. As female diasporic Indian writers reflect the Indian diaspora more and more, they are increasingly speaking in an informed, humble manner to readers of Indian English literature and emphasizing the shared experience of immigration. Jhumpa Lahiri is such a gifted author who is emerging in her ability to speak to readers of Indian English literature in a way that is perceptive, humble, and carries a sense of the shared experience of immigration.

Jhumpa Lahiri's short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* was honored with the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for her first attempt as a writer. It is an authentication to Lahiri's resourcefulness as a writer. The author is aware of the difficulties that arise when immigrants attempt to ingrain a traditional way of life in a nation that is not their own. In addition to exploring diasporic themes like identity crisis, alienation, nostalgia, cultural shock, and the disconnect between first and second generation US immigrants, she draws on the delicate dilemmas in the lives of Indian immigrants with the themes of love, fidelity, tradition, marital difficulties, and miscarriages. She describes the struggle her characters went through, pitting their fear and prejudice against the complexity and reality of immigrant psyche and behavior. Although not all of the stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* are set in America, they all include characters that have some sort of diasporic connection. As a result, the majority of the protagonists in this anthology of short stories struggle to adjust to life abroad.

The *The Third and Final Continent* one of the stories in this collection presents a largely upbeat account of Indian-American life. An epitome of all immigrants who travel to a foreign country in search of a better life is the nameless first-person narrator who finds it difficult to adapt to a new life in America. Like other immigrants, the narrator finds it difficult to understand and accept the traditions of a new country. Throughout his personal story of his travel to North America, the narrator describes how these worries intensify to the point where he is forced to comply with the laws of a foreign land. The narrator gradually develops a positive viewpoint of the nation in which he lives. It should be mentioned that in diasporic existence the immigrant must deal with the possibility that, after generations of living in a non-native nation, one's cultural roots may wane. They must live through these changes and maintain their optimism about their life. The 103-year-old widow Mrs. Croft, the story's quirky female heroine, is the owner of the room where the narrator resides. She assists the young man in overcoming his loneliness. He hears from her the qualities in his wife that he had not previously noticed. The Indian renter has no sense of Mrs. Croft's freedom. In stark contrast to his mother, whose cultural patterns are distinct, the narrator meets a different kind of woman:

I had never known a person who had lived for over a century. That this person was a widow, who lived alone, mortified me further still. It was widowhood that had driven my mother insane. (IOM 187).

Widowhood, in the narrator's opinion, represents feminine loneliness. In his mother's case, this scenario results in mental illness, although widowhood in Mrs. Crofts' case highlighted her independence. The man's meeting with Mrs. Croft gives him the opportunity to reconsider his mother's character from a different cultural perspective:

What pained me the most was to see her [his mother] so unguarded, to hear burp after meals or expel gas in front of company without the slightest embarrassment (IOM 187-188).

The narrative begins with his leaving from his native India and goes on with a description of his five-year stay in London. After getting a job at a library at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he returns to Calcutta, marries, and then takes off to the United States; leaving his bride behind, who will unite with him six weeks soon after. For the meantime, he is determined to be an occupant of a room at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Cambridge, Massachusetts of which Mrs. Croft is the owner. In this story, the narrator faces the barriers and adversities such as learning to tolerate a diet of cornflakes and bananas, or boarding in a cramped YMCA.

His departure from his native India is described at the start of the story, followed by details of his five years in London. He returns to Calcutta, marries, and then departs for America after landing a job at a Massachusetts Institute of Technology library. He leaves his wife behind, but she will reunite with him six weeks later. He is known to be residing in a room at the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), which Mrs. Croft owns. At this tale, the narrator must overcome obstacles and hardships like boarding in a squalid YMCA or learning to tolerate a diet of cornflakes and bananas. With this depiction, Jhumpa Lahiri emphasizes how any immigrant from a nation like India, where everyone lives close to a huge extended family, will feel alienated in a society where individuals cherish their privacy so highly that they are satisfied to live as strangers. The battle of Lahiri's narrator with an uncomfortable emotion brought on by the prospect of anxiety and dilemma in his immigration to the United States is similar to that of many other immigrants. Lahiri used sensual metaphors and idioms to help the reader comprehend how the average immigrant might feel when arriving in a foreign land. The narrator has severe discomfort upon entering the busy city of Boston:

The noise was constantly distracting, at times suffocating. I felt it deep in my ribs, just as I had felt the furious drone of the engine on the S.S. Roma. But there was no ship's deck to escape to, no glittering ocean to thrill my soul, no breeze to cool my face, no one to talk to. I was too tired to pace the gloomy corridors of the Y.M.C.A. in my pajamas. Instead I sat at the desk and stared out the window. (IOM 175).

These images act as unsettling visuals, and the narrator feels imprisoned and sad as a result of these uncomfortable sentiments. In this passage, Lahiri addresses a fundamental problem that affects all immigrants, who frequently find themselves in social circumstances where they, too, feel uncomfortable and out of place, to the point of discomfort and contempt. Together, these claims suggest that immigrants may experience anxiety, a sense of

alienation, and uncertainty despite being surrounded by people. Furthermore, Lahiri portrays the reality that immigrants commonly feel uneasy in America—or any other country where they are treated as *persona non grata*—because of societal pressures. This point is supported by a scene in which Mrs. Croft coerces the narrator to participate enthusiastically in the achievement of an American flag on the moon. The narrator, who at the time had just immigrated to North America, is made to feel like a helpless child who has no choice but to respond, "Splendid," even if such a consideration has no significance to him:

"There is an American flag on the moon!"

"Yes, Madam." Until then I had not thought very much about the moon shot.... The voyage was hailed as man's most splendid achievement.... The woman bellowed, "A flag on the moon, boy! I heard it on the radio! Isn't that splendid?" "Yes, Madam." But she was not satisfied with my reply. Instead she commanded, "Say 'Splendid!'" I was both baffled and somewhat insulted by the request. (IOM 183)

Like many immigrants, the narrator makes adjustments to blend in with society in order to feel at home in his new nation. Lahiri emphasizes the idea that one must change somewhat in order to blend in and feel at ease in one's surroundings. However, the loss of a person's cultural identity often follows the trade of their previous life. Although the narrator is initially embarrassed by the peculiar customs, he soon grows to accept them to the point where his prior way of life is no longer recognizable. In a metaphorical way, he changes his life and adopts a new persona. For instance, the narrator does something that is typical of the American way of life when his wife first arrives in the United States instead of kissing her and greeting her according to Bengali customs and he inquires about her hunger:

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I did not embrace her, or kiss her, or take her hand. Instead I asked her, speaking Bengali for the first time in America, if she was hungry. She hesitated, then nodded yes. (IOM 191)

This illustrates the fact that moving to a new country frequently leads to immigrants developing traits shared by those in that society. Although immigrants may struggle or find the most basic American traditions weird, as stated by Lahiri, they frequently adhere to American ideals. The narrator's wife Mala, for instance, wears a sari to keep herself covered, but the narrator affirms that "it doesn't matter" if she exposes herself because life is different in America. Lahiri makes an emotional remark on how adapting to American culture is a process that all immigrants go through. Lahiri claims that immigrants adapt to the traditions and mindsets of a new community, but she also says that they must be prepared for the potential that their cultural roots may fade over time. It is obvious that the *émigré* compels him to accept these changes while yet having a positive attitude on life, even as the immigrant's past eventually becomes paler. The immigrant can develop a personality and sense of flexibility as a result, which gives him confidence in his ability to overcome obstacles.

The narrator and Mala have adjusted to life in America as the story concludes. Their son is a Harvard student, and they have settled into their own house. In spite of this integration, they uphold their traditional traditions and make sure that their son can speak

Bengali. This implies that they have adopted American culture while yet remembering India. Every few years, they travel to India.

The young male narrator of *The Third and Final Continent* is indeed in diaspora, and becomes congenial in his new homeland (making the decision that it is his “final” continent) only after appraising his experiences with the 103-year-old Mrs. Croft. The stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* deal with characters that are in some form of Diaspora, even though not all of them are set in America. There aren't many important individuals in the novel who still reside in their native countries, and those who do usually belong to the first generation of their families to be raised in a Western culture. As a result, the majority of the characters in *Interpreter of Maladies* have to adjust to life in the diaspora in some way. In conclusion; *Interpreter of Maladies* is mostly on the Bengali diaspora in the US, covering everything from the challenges faced by second-generation Bengali-Americans like herself to the hardships of recent immigrants. To quote Avishek Sam:

The title of the story sounds voluble, but it is so full of meaning that perhaps, there can be no better title. *Maladies* accurately diagnosed and misinterpreted, matters temporary and life changing, relationships in flux and unshakeable, unexpected blessings and sudden calamities, and the powers of survival these are among the themes of Jhumpa Lahiri's extraordinary debut collection of stories. Imbued with the sensual details of both Indian and American cultures, they [the characters] also speak with universal eloquence and compassion to everyone who has ever felt like an outsider. (2)

Hence the main characters in works of literature about the diaspora experience a unique kind of transition where several languages and cultures combine and develop into something new. The younger generation works even harder to integrate and do away with the outmoded norms and principles that generations before them created for them, despite the desires of some to stick onto the past. Lahiri informs us about the issues and difficulties that both the older and younger generations encounter in her writing. Writing from the diaspora encourages the dismantling of international barriers and advances our comprehension of the multicultural environment. During the writing process, diaspora authors travel back to their home country, where they in some way champion a belief or ideal that has come to represent the culture from which they originally hail. Lahiri writes fictional characters who are immigrants, just like her parents. The challenges of settling down in a new country are experienced by her characters, who are also second generation immigrants who were born in England and America. However, they also recognize its advantages. Because it encompasses a wide range of experiences that are common in the various discourses related to the current transnational globalization, the term “diaspora” is also frequently used in modern research. These experiences include borders, migration, immigration, repatriation, exile, refugees, assimilation, multiculturalism, and hybridity.

## CONCLUSION

Therefore, it makes sense to say that Jhumpa Lahiri's narrative reveals the intricacy of diasporic life in terms of variances and diversities as well as the contrasts and paradoxes inherent in the human condition. In addition to showing how her diasporic characters are uprooted from their native country and feel alone in a strange place, she also makes the point that home can be found wherever one is or has been. Her experiences do, in fact, reflect the

unsaid anxiety of those attempting to accept their altered circumstances. It also covers the intricacies of interpersonal connections and how individuals from different origins can develop strong alliances by means of common experiences.

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