

# Cultural Conflict and Cultural Shock in Jumpha Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*



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## Abstract

The main problem of diasporic writer is the feeling of displacement, identity crisis and displacement without roots. The diaspora writers perceive homeless or rootless in adopted land. The diaspora's works incorporate all experiences of diasporic communities which exist in several socio-cultural societies. The works of diaspora writers highlight sense of loss, alienation, identity crisis and cultural conflict. When people go from one country to another country, they have to face many problems related to geographical or cultural prerequisites which are generally different from their own country. Jumpha Lahiri is one of the epochal Indian-American diaspora writers in her time and all her works highlight the obstacles of immigrants and Indian diaspora. She represents dislocation of human condition. Lahiri has pertained all events like homesickness, loneliness and cultural dilemma between native land and adopted land. The migrated people face a serious confusion in their newly identity in adopted land. Actually the obstacles of the migrants are not only the obstacles of geographical migration, but also a serious challenge of cultural dilemma. In adopted land, they find conflict between two cultures, native culture and adopted culture in alien land.

**Keywords:** Cultural-Conflict, Identity Crisis, Sense of Loss and Homelessness.

## Introduction

Jumpha Lahiri is one of the significant Indian diaspora writers in her time, she born in 1967, in London to Bengali parents; later her family moved to Rhode Island and started her life in America. Jumpha Lahiri is not only a short-story writer but a famous novelist and all her works highlight the obstacles of immigrants and Indian diaspora. She creates all her episodes and characters for examining the cultural conflict between American and Indian. Her thematic concerns delineate physical and emotional loneliness, displacement, isolation due to cultural differences. She has written several novels and short-stories in which she delineates the cultural dislocation in the lives of immigrants. Lahiri wrote many short-stories collections as *Interpreter of Maladies* (1990), *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), and *The lowland* (2013).

## Aim of the Study

The aim of this research paper is to evaluate how cultural works in the life of migrated people or in adopted land, they face many obstacles in their adopted land. This paper delineates the cultural differences in Jumpha Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*. This research works on her struggle which is representative of every Indian woman who has migrated from one place to another. Being migrated to the foreign land, Indian people established their identities but share common dilemmas and suffering. They struggle hard to compromise between the two cultures: native land and adopted land. The works of diasporic women writers evolve around pain, sense of loss, identity crisis and cultural conflicts.

## Review of Literature

Related works of this paper have been analysed for the purpose of completing this paper as Chitra Divakaruni, Jumpha Lahiri, Salman Rushdie, Bhaba. The research works of Joshi, Prajapati, Dubey have been reviewed for this paper. Jumpha Lahiri in his book *Interpreter of Maladies* deals the quest for identity and cultural identity and cultural dilemmas. In *Imaginary Homeland*, Rushdie highlights the conflicts of identity in two cultures: "Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times that we fall between two stools but however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for the writer to occupy." (Rushdie15). Bhaba's work *The Location of Culture* delineates the concepts of hybridity,

cultural shock and production etc. It refers to a mixture of two separate cultures. Chitra banerjee Divakaruni's *The Lives of Strangers* highlights pertains the cultural encounter, dislocation, identity crisis etc. Divakaruni offers her readers to see into the multicultural world of her characters. She wants her reader to relate to her characters and enjoy and feels pain as her characters do. As Prajapati says that culture is usually the outcome of a country's physical, mental, emotional and philosophical sources. It governs trend and systems in particular territory of a society. And loss of identity in adopted land create problems in the life of migrated people. Dubey also describes every facets of their upbringing in the transnational cross-cultural space- their acculturation, borderland inhabitation, formation of hybridized reality and creation of a new amalgamated culture.

#### **Cultural Conflict and Its Outcome**

Jumpha Lahiri's second collection of short-stories *Unaccustomed Earth* published in 2008. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri delineates the complexities about cultural conflict and cultural dislocation pertaining to language, clothes, generation and food etc. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, we see that Ruma's parents use the Bengali names in Jersey and communicate with Indian –American in Bengali language, but Ruma does not speak Bengali language and uses English with all her friends and does not like to speak in Bengali language with him, but Akash and his mother Ruma communicate in American language and don't take interest in Bengali language due to cultural influence. Actually, it is not a native language for Ruma and Akash because they were reared in American culture so Bengali language is a foreign language for them and Ruma mother doesn't use a single word of English in communication with anyone and language diversity creates cultural dilemma in the lives of immigrants. In second story "Hell-Heaven", we see that Deborah talks with Usha about her family and she tells Usha about her brothers and sisters. Usha and Deborah speak freely in English and Usha feels more comfortable in English than Bengali. Her last story "Year's End" shows the dilemma of language and ways of behavioural differences create cultural dilemmas in the life of kaushik and her step-mother and her daughters. Chitra does not take interest in English language and likes to speak Bengali as Chitra says, "I would like for you to tell me Mamomi", (Year's End, UE260) in Bengali language. When Chitra communicates with khaushik, he feels that her voice is awkward and Kaushik comes to Chitra's house, Chitra calls Kaushik by his nickname, but kaushik feels unsteady by this name. Thus language diversity creates cultural conflicts in lives of immigrates.

Lahiri delineates cultural shock and dislocation in her short- stories through clothes and ways of lifestyle. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, we see that when Ruma's mother lives in American with Indian lifestyle and doesn't take interest in western culture, such as she wears colored saris with bindi and jewels which are not neglected by her daughter Ruma. As we see that in America, Ruma wears jeans, skirts and T-shirts which are not liked by Ruma's mother.

Actually, American ways of lifestyle create a conflict between Ruma and her mother in several ways. In her second short-story "Hell-Heaven", it has been highlighted that the relationship between Pranab and Deborah disturbs the life of Boudi and her family due to cultural dilemma and Pranab does not take interest in Bengali ways of life. Usha's mother doesn't like the relationship of Pranab with Deborah, an American girl due to her western lifestyle. As we see that she wears jeans, long brass-colored skirt and small silver spectacles but Usha likes the western lifestyle of Deborah. The American ways of lifestyle effect Usha in several ways when Deborah visits to her house with Pranab. She starts to wear jeans and t-shirts instead of salwar-kameez. In last-story, it has been shown that kaushik's mother likes American ways of lifestyle and she rejects Indian traditions, culture facets. She likes to wear western clothes like skirts, jeans and smokes cigarettes and she does not like Bengali Indian ways of life when Hema meets Paul, the way of lifestyle of Paul effects Hema in several ways and says 'There was your mother, her slippery dark hair cut to hair shoulders, wearing slacks and a tunic, a silk scarf knotted at her neck.' (Once in a lifestyle, UE 232). Paul does not like Indian ways of life by wearing western clothes, drinking and smoking.

Jumpha lahiri delineates cultural dilemmas through food and ways of eating. In her short-story *Unaccustomed Earth*, it has been shown that Ruma and her son don't eat Indian food but they prefer to eat pizzas and pasta. Akash hates Indian-Bengali dishes and likes to eat American food. When Ruma gives him Bengali dish, he rejects to eat it and likes to eat macaroni. In her story "Hell-Heaven", we see that Usha's mother does not respect Deborah when she reaches her house for dinner and she makes less spicy food but Deborah likes spicy food. Deborah and Pranab eat foods with their fingers instead of fork and they eat food by allowing their fingers to linger in each other's mouth. Actually, they kiss each other in front of everyone and Usha's mother does not like their activities and talks with Bengali women about their ways of life and criticize Pranab in several ways. Deborah's American ways of life create some cultural conflict in Usha's family. We see that Usha's mother takes interest in Bengali lifestyle. Boudi ignores Deborah's ways of life related to behaviour, foods and clothes which she wears. Actually, Deborah reaches to Usha's house, her ways of lifestyle effect Usha and like her western ways of life. She starts to love with Deborah and she says to her mother that she likes her skirts, gray eyes, sandals which she wears. At Deborah wedding, she starts to drink beer; she does not like Indian- Bengali ways of life. Thus, cultural dilemma occurs in the lifestyle of her family. Usha does not divulge her arcanum of her western lifestyle. When she enters into middle school and develops her relationship with American boys in her class but her mother does not like such kind of relationship with American boys. Usha's mother says that "If she were your mother, she would let you do whatever you wanted, because she wouldn't care. Is that what you want, Usha, a mother who doesn't care? (76).

**Conclusion**

Being a diaspora writer, Jumpha Lahiri writes about the Bengali people migrated to America. In adopted land, Indian people establish their identities but they face many obstacles in adopted land and suffering due to cultural diversities. They try to compromise between two cultures: native alienation, pain and cultural conflict, etc. Actually, we see that culture travels within and outside countries and take root in adopted land too. All the diasporic writers incorporate the theme of displacement, dislocation, identity crisis. The diaspora works delineate all the experiences of diaspora communities which exist in several socio-cultural societies.

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