

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction:

This research work discusses about the tradition of India which is distinct from the West. The significance of the cultural roots are visibly distinct in the novels of Jhumpa Lahiri. It focuses on the two novels of Jhumpa Lahiri- 'The Lowland' and 'The Namesake'.

India is a land of diverse culture and languages. Jhumpa Lahiri's books are conscious effort to hold the Indian cultural heritage. She mostly discusses about the culture prevalent in Kolkata. Her portrayal of Bengali culture in her novels and short stories exemplifies her Indian sentiments. Though her family migrated to England, Indian customs and traditions are reflected in her novels. She has profound values of her roots.

'The Namesake' and 'The Lowland' replicate the Bengali traditions and customs of Calcutta. The Indian cultural essence such as the food habits, traditional attire or customs are mostly anticipated. She also adopts the Indian names for representing her characters. The plots of the stories are set in India. It explores the hues of the country. The traditional way of life and its values are depicted in it. Her works are the cultural integration of both the countries- the inherited traditional values as well as the acquired values. It focuses on the difficult intermediate situation between two cultures. The sociocultural and religious aspects of Indian culture is well portrayed in her novels and short stories. The stories are conflict for self-identity. Jhumpa's typical Indian attitudes and thoughts struggle to divulge its way out. All her works echo her Indian origin. Her novels glorify the traditional heritages and artistic representation of the cultural adherence. She adheres the Indian outlook through the characters of her novels. Her fictional characters signify the inner conflict from the conventional way of life in India.

"The Namesake" and "The Lowland" attempt to unfold the impediments of migration and highlighted the integration of different cultures. It reflects the dynamic changes among the

migrated families. The concern for identity crisis has been portrayed in “The Namesake” and “The Lowland” through the characters especially the second generation immigrants. As identity represents the uniqueness of an individual or a particular group. Some elements that can determine identity are- location, gender, race, history, nationality, sexuality, religious beliefs, ethnicity, language, aesthetics, customs and food.

Jhumpa Lahiri as a novelist uses her heritage to draw artistic references. Her roots are deeply imbedded within her which she uses as a novelist. The use of Indian setting in all her novels is evidence of her roots. The significance of national values and cultural identity in literature is inevitable. She conveys the issues of rootlessness, assimilation, dislocation, identities, hybridity and relationships. Her novels signify her diaspora experiences. The cultural integration in a foreign land tend to create a hybrid identity. She portrays the transnational stories in her novels. Her familiarity to both Indian and American culture is apparently marked in her novels. She mostly describes about the life of Indian immigrants who have settled in abroad. Most of her protagonist are second generation immigrants. Her novels offer an interesting perspective of diasporic identities.

Jhumpa Lahiri uses following approaches to affirm her identity:-

- Highlights ideal environment of India.
- Glorifies cultural matrix of Calcutta.
- Acclaims national heroes such as Gandhi.

1.2 Biography:

Jhumpa Lahiri is a contemporary fiction author of novels and short stories. She is an American author born in London to Indian immigrated parents. She was born on July 11,

1967. Her name is Nilanjana Sudheshna Lahiri but she adopted her nick name Jhumpa. She is one of the prominent authors of her time.

Jhumpa studied English literature at Barnard College, New York. She pursued her Master's degree in English and Comparative literature from Boston University and achieved a doctorate in Renaissance Studies.



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Figure 1: Jhumpa Lahiri

She won the Pulitzer Prize on 2000 for “The Interpreter of Maladies”. She also received the O’ Henry Award, PEN/Hemingway Award and the Frank O’Connor International Short Story Award. Her debut short story collection *The Unaccustomed Earth* was also the New York Times best-seller. *The Lowland* which is also a well acclaimed best seller novel was shortlisted for the 2014 Baileys Women’s Prize for fiction and the Man Booker Prize 2013. Her first novel “The Namesake” is adapted into a movie in 2007 by Mira Nair.

¹ Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/images/XAYWHR>

Her works are Anglo-Indian fiction which often discusses the cultures of India and the West. The overlapping cultural blend is clearly found. The cultural roots of the author plays an important role in her works. Jhumpa has made numeral visits to India and her books are witness of the familiarity to the Indian culture. Her mother's influence is worth mentioning as she constantly tried to raise them with Bengali sensibilities.

The collection of Jhumpa's works are- *The Interpreter of Maladies*, *An Unaccustomed Earth*, *The Namesake*, *The Lowland*, *In Other Words*, *The Clothing of Books*, *Hell-Heaven* and *Only Goodness*.

This research paper emphases on some of her selected novels- *The Namesake* and *The Lowland*. Both the novels have received numerous accolades from different parts of the world. The stories are vivid and exemplary account of authenticity.

1.3 Illustration of Folklore in literature:

Literature is the written form of art. It includes all the written texts with artistic values such as poems, drama, fiction, non-fiction- letters, autobiographies and diaries. Folklore comprises of the unique possessions of values, customs and traditions of a particular community. It embodies beliefs, languages, arts, rituals and the way human live and react towards changes.

The literature plays a major role in preserving culture. It serves as illustration of socio-cultural phenomena. Thus specifics of culture are referred through the social, historical, linguistic and other cultural implementations in literary texts. Literature acts as the mirror of reflecting the artistic representation of folklore.

*Literary historiography emerged in Europe during the eighteenth century and the central characteristic of this new sensibility is that literature recorded a people's past and sustained their cultural identity; this literary past, in turn, was a living patrimony to be preserved and passed down. It was mostly fostered by writers, novelists, folklorists. The literary historiography is rewriting of past within a wider public debate about national origins linguistic identities and political entitlements.

Both folklore and literature connects with the society. Literature embody culture through the plots, setting, themes and characters. The art of literature is a creative and expression of the emotional, spiritual, or intellectual concerns of humanity. It is the manifestation of culture as it documents human knowledge, belief, activities, behaviour and performances.

Documentation of the cultural heritage of a community is utmost important. It helps in the preservation of this unique inheritance. The significance of folklore in literature can help in preservation and strengthen the cultural values and document history.

Representing folklore in literature is also a form of documentation. Certain social aspects of assimilation or intercultural communication may be a threat to the authenticity of cultural values of a community so documentation can help in retaining the practices or beliefs. It can also help the future generation reconnecting to its roots.

- The narratives of historical events or places.
- The traditions, values, customs and beliefs.
- It marks as catalysing the cultural identification of a community.

The literary works often represent the cultural background of the authors. Their language, food habits, rituals, beliefs, values are demonstrated in their works.

Jhumpa Lahiri's books involve the Indian sensibility despite of the fact that she was born and brought up in London. Her novels depict the ethnicity of Calcutta. The folk cultures of Bengali community are well represented in her novels as well as short stories.

*Blackburn & Dalmia. 2004. India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century. Permanent Black.

1.4 Interrelation of Culture, literature and Language:

The underline relationship between culture, language and literature play a great role in the advancement of a society. Culture is embodied in our literature and language. Literature is a useful resource which can be used to communicate. It helps to reconnect to the roots in an alien cultural settings. The intercultural communication is essential due to the diversity of cultures and variety of languages.

Sapir remarks, "Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desire by means of voluntarily produced symbols." Language is an integral part of culture. As language is a primary vehicle of communication, culture is shared and passed down through language among a particular community. It shapes both culture and behaviour of an individual.

Language and culture are as inseparable. Language determines the cultural patterns of perception, approach and behaviour of a community. The language plays a significant role for a community – politically, economically, socially and culturally. It holds the unique identity of a community. Culture can shape language and vice versa. Such as- 'Namaskar' is a

cultural aspect of the Assamese community which is a coded cultural message but not necessarily for others. According to Malinowski (1964), the relationship of language and culture probably focus on the study of culture as a system led him to the conclusion that linguistic behaviour could best be delineated and interpreted in its appropriate socio-cultural contexts.

Literature portrays the society. Literature represents social and cultural aspects. The artistic literary works of various authors and poets exclusively express their sensitive socio-cultural traits. Such as- Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, R.K Narayan, A.K Ramanujan, Toru Dutt and etc. The literary works are artistic manifestation of cultural and linguistic adherence of an author.

The novels of Jhumpa Lahiri associates culture, literature and language. She uses some prominent cultural aspects demonstrated by language and literature. Vocabulary, values, kinship terms, codes & conducts, discourse configuring, speech acts display certain aspects of her cultural adherence. Her novels also suggest the socio-cultural aspect of cultural and linguistic assimilation.

According to Larsen-Freeman (2012a, p. 23) remarks, “When we focus on language in use rather than language as an abstract formal system, we see it rooted in the context and culture of the local speech community to which the participants belong.

This research work is based on the cultural approach. Cultural approach considers literature as the notable representation and vehicle of a particular race’s culture and tradition. This approach involves- the sociological, ideological and artistic aspects.

1.5 Folk elements in Indian English Literature:

Indian English Literature is considered as important literary endeavour. The contribution of some of the prominent litterateur in the growth and development of Indian English literatures are: R.K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Toru Dutt, Salman Rushdie, Sarojini Naidu, Arundhati Roy, Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri. They have enlightened the literary works with its vividness and quality. Their prolific works with rich cultural heritage have also marked among the world literary scene. The Indian English Literature often expresses the themes of nature, identity, assimilation and modernization. In fact they have introduced folk elements such as oral tradition of storytelling; through myths, legends, proverbs and fables in Indian English to the West. Their effort to uphold the rich cultural heritage have resulted in international success. The contribution of such writers in the development of Indian English Literature by using words of Indian regional languages is commendable. Thus they have given a new dimension to the field of literature.

The profound attempt to portray the Indian society and the socio-cultural themes in the English literary works by the natives of India is praiseworthy. Mostly the oral literature, material culture and social customs are anticipated. The contemporary literary scenario reflect the new challenges, changes and the complex dilemmas of modern World. It deals effectively with the social realities.

R. K. Narayan is one of the prominent Indian English novelists. He blended Indian myth and philosophy with literature. He illustrated a collection of legends entitled 'Gods, Demons and Others' drawn from the Mahabharata and the Puranas. His novels like 'The Guide' & 'Swami and Friends' represent Indian culture and customs.

Sarojini Naidu as an eminent poetess has earned fame by her distinct creativity. Her poem *The Village Song* echoes the Indian mythical characters such as Radha, Krishna, Ram and river Yamuna.

The publication of influential works such as Khushwant Singh's 'The train to Pakistan', Toru Dutt's 'Sita', Mulk Raj Anand's 'Untouchable' are fine specimen of literary excellence of India. They have blended folklore with literature to describe the Indian society. Jhumpa Lahiri also has notable contribution to Indian English Literature.

The picturesque beauty of India and the folk elements are illustrated in these literary works. These writers contributed in the growth of Indian English Literature in a global platform. The writers demonstrates self-consciousness regarding the social, philosophical, cultural issues of contemporary Indian society. Their critical account of the complex colonial and postcolonial situations are skilfully interpreted. The textual experiments of theoretical and intellectual insights are vivid. The depiction of Indian folk elements have shaped Indian English Literature distinctly.

1.6 Objectives:

This research work is prepared to accomplish the following set of clearly defined objectives. These objectives summarize the results sought to be achieved in the research process.

- To endorse the folk elements of the novels.
- To study the importance of folklore in catalysing the cultural identity.
- To scrutinise the assimilation of different cultures.

1.7 Research Methodology:

Types of Research-

- Analytical Research - Analytical research is to analyse and critically evaluate the facts and information already available.
- Fundamental Research - Fundamental Research tend to make generalizations about the phenomenon and can be termed as 'gathering knowledge for the sake of knowledge'. It mainly aims to answer the queries of why, what or how and which contribute in the research area.
- Qualitative Research – Qualitative Research is concerned with phenomenon involving quality or kind. This kind of research work is based on qualitative phenomenon.

Research Approach: The above mentioned researches are based on qualitative approach to research. It is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour.

Data Collection: This sociological research include the precise and detailed survey of the published materials. This research work involves secondary sources of data for studying the cultural significance in the books of Jhumpa Lahiri.

1.8 Literature Review:

The surveys of the literature and works done on the Jhumpa Lahiri, Diaspora Literature and Indian English literature. It is the list of works and researches already done in this field.

1. Suchita Joshi in her paper 'The Namesake: Account of a Name, Looking for its Bearer' discusses about the achievements of Jhumpa Lahiri as Indian Women

Novelists in English. She remarks Jhumpa Lahiri's works as the impressive exploration of human mind and life. She has made the tales of human idiosyncrasies thought provoking and soul searching. She is a true artist in a sense that as an author she plays an interpreter.

Expatriate tradition and diaspora are getting more inclusive, defined and gaining popularity in the literary world. Expatriate writing is the work of the exile who have experienced the unsettlement at the existential, political, geographical and metaphysical levels. Jhumpa exposes an assimilative consciousness in her fiction. Her concern for immigrant's sociological, psychological and spiritual maladies are interpreted.

2. Malti Agrawal in 'New Perspectives on Indian English Writings' discusses about some of the prominent of Indian authors writing in English. This edited volume includes various research papers. These research works are based on the works of authors, such as- Jhumpa Lahiri, R.K.Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Das, Nissim Ezekiel and many others. These prominent authors have attempted all major literary genres. The writers also use the native idioms and also words from their own vernacular to capture the true picture of the Indian society. These research papers show the sensitive issues of the society such as cultural hegemony, clash between ethnic groups, and conflict between different ideologies.
3. Gauri Shankar Jha presents her view about diaspora perspectives of writers in an article- 'Indian Diaspora Fiction in English'.

Jha remarks as, "Normally diaspora fiction lingers over alienation, loneliness, homelessness, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, questioning protest assertion and

quest of identity : it also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures, discriminating margins of two different social milieus, internalizing nostalgia and suffering a force amnesi-we may call it a salad bowl where identity of each ingredient is under question”.

4. Aneta Fibingerová in her thesis, ‘The Journey Motif in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*: The Indian American Characters and Their Intricate Ways towards Universal Human Identity’ discusses about the journey motif which can be found among the characters between the two cultures that are clashing (i.e., the Indian and American cultures), and also a notion of a journey as one’s way to identity. The novel stresses about the cultural identity. The main focus of *The Namesake* is, thus, not to define its characters in terms of culture only but as human beings whose background culture is definitely an important part of their life but it is not enough to define them entirely. The novel emphasis on the universality of human experience with its focus on generational conflict, makes *The Namesake* universally relatable.

5. Dr. Richa Bijalwan in her paper, ‘CULTURAL DISLOCATION AND CHANGING IDENTITIES IN JHUMPA LAHIRI’S *THE LOWLAND*’ represents cultural dislocation, identity, diaspora and hybridity.

‘Lahiri’s outlook on the Immigrant fiction is different. The writers tend to write about the worlds they come from and it is just so happens that many writers emerge from diverse parts of the world than they finish up living in to another, either by selection or for unavoidability of the conditions and consequently write about their experiences. The word Diaspora, exile, alienation, belongingness, expatriation are mostly similar to each other in meaning in the world of diaspora writers and they include some kind of

ambiguity in nature and tells about being both an immigrant and representative in the foreign land’.

1.9 SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY:

This research work on the illustration of folk elements in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novels would help to build a platform to understand the importance of folklore and cultural identity. It is an attempt to portray the canvas of Indian and diasporic sensibility. The research work would also make an earnest effort to represent.