

Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies: The Stories of Diaspora and Cross-Culture...

[Parts of the World](#), [Asia](#)



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Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri was one of the most significant writers of the Indian diasporic in the present time duration. Her prose was scattered with the details of traditional Indian names, food, cooking and wardrobe, it has been giving character and flavor for her stories. The rhythmic sentences and her adept intelligent for depicting persons and landscapes lull the reader. This was illustrated in the following excerpt from *The Treatment of Bibi Halder*.

At her insistence, they used to showed her their own photo albums embossed with designs of butterflies, she had pored over the snapshots that the chronicled the ceremony and butter poured in fires, garlands exchanged, vermilion-painted fish, trays of shells and silver as well as gold coins.

While she used to brings out the warm, loving the nature of the Indians, she also noted down the benefits of being in America literature. Despite of all the independence, royal and comforts provided by the America, the immigrants experience a dire needed to meet and talked to people from their own lands.

They did miss the love and affection of their own pupils. Lilia used to observe her parents closely who have been used to trail their fingers and through the columns of the university directory and used to circling surnames familiar of their part of the world.

Food and Identity

Interpreter of Maladies is replete with the references to Indian food items. Food, Even though apparently a trivial matter, the plays a very significant role in their own society as well as in nation. It is used to symbolize privilege, economical class and social position. For the immigrants and non-residents, food becomes associated with their own identity. It induces a sense of belonging in a foreign country. Here, they have given familiar items of food brought immense pleasure. Hence, it became a significant aspect of cultural exchange and bonding. Jhumpa Lahiri used food and dining as a vehicle to display the deterioration of familial bonds, and community, culture through the transition from Indian ways of life in American ways of life. This is most evident in the genre of short stories.

In the story was entitled with When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine, food comes as a fistful soil from their motherland. Food was the factor that binds Mr. Pirzada with the character Lilia's family. Mr. Pirzada came from Dacca whereas Lilia's parents were from India. But they used in same food and this was establishes affinity between them. They used to ate pickled mangoes with their meals, and they ate rice every night for supper with their hands like, parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering into a room,

chewed fennel seeds to after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea.

Lahiri's Mrs. Sen's used to a food as Mrs. Sen's home, family, friend and her own country. Sen was a typical Bengali for whom fish was inevitable.

Absence of fish in the diet for some time made her sulk like a child. She used to share her passion for Bengali food with Eliot. Whenever the fish arrives at the local shops, it was the greatest news to Sen.

The Third and Final Continent revolves around the life of a Bengali gentleman who had pursued his studies at Britain and his job in the America. In spite of her contact with three continents, he and the person wife still maintain their cultural identification and food was one of the most important factors that help them in retaining of their Indians. Even in American place the smell of steamed rice and a dish of chicken made with fresh garlic and ginger on his apartment into a home. Thus, food was one of the most significant links binding the non-residential Indians to their own motherland. Not only the food items but eating habits also build up an Indian atmosphere in an alien land.

Love, Tradition and Identity Issues

These characters live in exile, as Lahiri herself observes, and these are defining and redefining the Indian-American diaspora identity in particular and immigrant patches to this promise land in general. Love, tradition and identity issues are always at the heart of the story and of the characters.

Who find happiness are those who can embrace their present circumstance

while at the same time never forget their Indian roots. We learn about Mrs. Sen who sits on her floor everyday chopping vegetables in the same way she did in India, with the same knife she used there. Her adherence to an insistently Bengali identity is evident in the fact that she doesn't even use a conventional western knife.

The wife and the husband in *The Place of Their Own* and *The Final Continent* were anxious whether their son could retain his Indian way of eating food. They drive him to Cambridge to visit him, or brought him home for a weekend, so that he can eat rice with them and his hands, and speak in Bengali, things they were sometimes worried he would no longer do after they die. The representation of the Indian culture was inherently present throughout her stories. Yet, it did not become exaggerated. In spite of the differences between the ages, nationalities and religions, Lahiri's characters tend to demonstrate the universality of life experiences. In *The Third and Final Continent*, they see the cultural differences between India, London and the United States through the eyes of a young Indian man.

The story was not only the isolation of the immigrants travelling to a foreign country, but also describes the yearning and craving for his love that lies in every human heart. Through the interaction between the young man and his aged landlady, and the author showed how soothing and comforting life could become if there was someone who can just listen to him for a few moments regardless of the age and the nation to which one belongs. The young man who has simple gestures everyday could fill with some color into the life of the old and lonely landlady.

Frontier Wars

The ambition that had first hurled across the world is part of his ability to know himself and to recognize that the strength he gains from his origins is the ideal foundation on which to build a strong identity. The frontier itself requires a more nuanced interpretation. The frontier is an elusive line, visible and invisible, physical and metaphorical, amoral and moral and the idea behind Lahiri's stories is that we all have to fight our share of frontier wars.

Jhumpa Lahiri seems to fictionally agree that the journey creates us. We become the frontiers we cross. Lahiri's stories explore human relations in a cultural context, but the writers approach to culture seems to be in terms of the one or two possible paradigms, large and respectively small culture. Culture was thus looked at both as the large ethnic, national or international entities and as any cohesive social grouping with no necessary subordination to large cultures. Therefore, none of the story is to be exclusively focuses on the encounter between the large cultures or on the one or two between and within the small cultures, but rather on the tension generated by the fact that individuals are forced to evolve in both. Lahiri's characters seem to confirm that the dislocation was the norm rather than the aberration in their time, but even in the unlikely event that they spend an entire lifetime in the one place, the fabulous diverseness with which they live reminds them constantly that they are no longer the norm and the center.

It was no longer and only the clash between national cultures that represents the writers main interest, although some of Lahiri's protagonists did seem

to conform to the typical imagination of the contemporary migrant, the individual severed from his roots, often translated into a new language, always obliged to learn the ways of a new community forced to face the great questions of change and adapt. It was the case of the protagonist of *The Third and Final Continent* who looks at himself from the very beginning of the typical migrant.

A Temporary Matter is about a couple growing estranged from each other after the death of their own child and how they become experts at avoiding each other in their three-bedrooms in the house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible. It is fully set in America, but Shoba and Shukumar were of Indian origin. The story was far from analyzing their inability to adapt to a hostile cultural environment. They used to find it impossible to communicate and got estranged to the point of separating.

Conclusion

The stories might be considered equally heterogeneous if analyzed in the terms of narrative technique employed. Two of the stories, *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* and *The Third and Final Tenant* were first-person narratives. The former was narrated from the point of view of a ten year child, and latter from the perspective of an Indian Immigration on America. The rest were third-person narratives, but the story was filtered through the consciousness and sensibility of a more or less involved into the character. It would be a difficult to say whether Lahiri's choice of method had anything to do with a certain pattern she had intended for the stories. But the effect she had obtained was a kaleidoscopic one. The reader was offered the possibility to

look at the issues of the stories deal with the form of various angles, although they cannot speak about a multiple point of view narrative.