



## JHUMPA LAHIRI'S DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN INTERPRETER OF MALADIES:AN ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract**

*This paper attempts to focus on Jhumpa Lahiri's short story **Interpreter of Maladies**. Most of her characters are drawn from throughout the world mostly from India and USA added to it she depicts the life of the Bengali immigrants who move to America faces dilemma in their cultural identity, they try to preserve the beliefs and cultural values and habits of life from the ancestor but they fail at one point of time, through this story Lahiri depicts the life of Mr and Mrs.Das who failed to follow their ancestral values in their life.*

**Key Words: Cultural Clash, Longingness, Interpreter, Understanding, Generational Gap, Marital Disharmony.**

Indian Writing in English tries to express a shared tradition, cultural and Indian heritage. During 1930 and 1965 is considered to be as flowering period of the novel. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao are the three pillars of Indian novels in English, contributed to this period. Their writing brings out new themes such as struggle for freedom, East West encounter, communal problem, plight of poor and untouchables, plight of women and landless poor etc. They try to project realism through the major characters in the novel, their characters are life like and they are very close to reality.

After this big trio, the remarkable novelists in the tradition of Indian English fiction are Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Arun Joshi, Manohar Malgaonkar, Khushwant Singh, R.P. Jhabwala, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Chaman Nahal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Chetan Bhagat, Arvind Adiga and many others.

All these writers possess the gift of storytelling. Storytelling begins its journey from Rig-Veda and Upanishad. During that time there are thirty two tales of the Throne dealing with King Vikramaditya or Somadeva's Kathasaritasager. These writers took the form of novel as a medium of storytelling.

Most of the South Asian Diasporic fictional world women writers are highly favoured with the short story genre. Through this they try to locate the present scenario and deal with immediate social realities, sometime it reveals their personal memories and the space between the homeland and alien country. They write out of their personal experience which is portrayed through the characters in the story.

A great significance in recent years has gained for Indian writing in English not only India but all over the world. Short story is considered as the most popular form of literary forms. Among many other diasporic women writers, Jhumpa Lahiri plays an important role in the fictional world through her writing. Her short stories address sensitive dilemmas in the lives of Indians and Indian immigrants through themes such as marital difficulties, miscarriages and the disconnection among the immigrants. **Interpreter of Maladies** is a collection of nine short stories. It is about the experiences of Indians who live in an alien country and how they suffer in the alien land.

Lahiri belongs to second generational writer; deals with India as an exotic land and also with the problems of Indian immigrants who struggles in the alien land. Interpreter of Maladies brings out the lives of Indian immigrants who live in America. Each story portrays the character's sufferings, sacrifices and struggles, quest for identity, alienation and the plight of those who are physically and psychologically undergone the pain of agony and suffering. They are physically in the USA and psychologically their minds are in South Asia.

**The Interpreter of Maladies** pictures the life of Indo-American couple Mr and Mrs Das, who visits India with their family. It tries to project the distance between the second generations from their ancestor's country. A contrast



between the first generation and the second generation immigrants is presented through the life of Mr and Mrs. Das and their parents. Their parents return to India and decided to live their remaining life over there, whereas Mr and Mrs. Das feels alienated to the culture and tradition of the ancestral land. They visited India as a tourist spot. They feel different and awkward by seeing the Indian culture and tradition, they feel emancipated at the sight of an “barefoot man,... head wrapped in a dirty turban, seated on top of a cart of grain sacks pulled by a pair of bullocks” (IM 49)

In general the story focuses on female protagonist Mrs. Das, she leads a lonely life because of the extra matrimonial relationship and her marriage with Mr. Das. She is represented as a type of woman for whom marriage is considered as sin committed in her life. She cares neither for her husband nor for her children. Mrs. Das considered love as a burden and marriage as obstacle to carry on with new relations. Marriage is neither stable nor valuable as it is considered as an institution.

When they came to India they got a chance to meet a taxi-driver Mr. Kapasi. He also works as a tour guide, besides that he also works as an interpreter in a doctor’s office. He feels happy to do the job as interpreter as the patients are very dependent on him and hence he is more important for them than the doctor himself. Even the doctor’s remedy depends on the accuracy of his interpretation. Mr. Kapasi himself says:

“He had never thought of his job in such complimentary terms. To him it was a thankless occupation. He found nothing noble in interpreting people’s maladies, assiduously translating the symptoms of so many swollen bones, countless cramps of bellies and bowels, spots on people’s palms that changed colour, shape, or size” (IM 51)

Mr. Kapasi had no good opinion on Mr. Das family, he differentiate them based on the race and colour. He finds out the distance between the husband and wife and their lack of communication and interest in the family life. Mr. Das is quite unimpressive and they doesn’t have any understanding between them. When Mrs. Das hears about Mr. Kapasi’s job she finds and describes it as a romantic job. At one point of time she feels attracted towards Mr. Kapasi, she even calls him as romantic and attractive, she even expresses it:

“She did not behave in a romantic way toward her husband, and yet she had used the word to describe him... Her sudden interest in him, an interest she did not express in either her husband or her children was mildly intoxicating” (IM 53)

Mrs. Das shares her feeling to Mr. Kapasi, as she feels the situation is complicated, because of a sexual intimacy with her husband’s friend who once stayed with them for few days. She kept it as secret for eight years without revealing to anyone. But at one point of time she reveals her secret to Mr. Kapasi. She believes that he would help her to get rid of the thought and give her some consoling words. She tells him even her husband doesn’t know about this. Kapasi as he is from typical Indian background, he feels the situation to be entirely different. He thinks that Mrs. Das has to play the role as a housewife and mother. But she accepts the fact that what she did was wrong.

At one point of time Mr. Kapasi feels that Mr and Mrs. Das is not a perfect couple. She longs for security, happiness, love and affection. Kapasi believes that this longingness made her to do so. In the story both the man and woman feels unsatisfactory in their marital relationship. Mr. Kapasi for the first time failed to give a remedy or solution to Mrs. Das. When Kapasi hear of the life of Mrs. Das he compared it with his life, he doesn’t have good relationship with his wife. Mrs. Das brings out that her life changed after marriage, she has to look over all the things, but there is no one to care for her. Mr. Das doesn’t even talks to her properly. She pointed out that:

“After marrying so young she was overwhelmed by it all, having a child so quickly, and nursing, and warming up bottles of milk and testing their temperature... Raj never looked cross or harried, or plump as she had become after the first baby.” (IM 63)

Through the life of Mrs. Das, it can be understood the expectation and longing of women. The husband with his patriarchal ideology almost completely ignores the individual needs of the wife. Mr. Das misses the reality of the



world around him, both in his marriage and in the scene outside the cab. All the characters undergo isolation in their life like the immigrants isolated from their families and move to the alien land, in the same way husbands are isolated from wives; and children are isolated from their parents; this made them to feel that they miss something in their life.

Lahiri as an emigrant writer, she is tries to act as an interpreter like Mr.Kapasi, She tries to express the feelings of an immigrants in the alien land. She probes deep into the life of the immigrants. She is a writer and the writer with a name as interpreter. She has evolved her own style by changing the mode of narration from past to the present and again reversing it without being nostalgic.

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