
Identity in Diaspora: A Study of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Interpreter of Maladies*

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Abstract:

The present paper aims at exploring and discussing the concept of identity in diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* with a special focus on three of these stories, viz., "Mrs. Sen's, *The Third and Final Continent* and *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*. In these stories, the author discusses diaspora and identity crisis and other issues, using creative writing skills and unique storytelling. The paper is concerned with two aspects of the collection narrative; mainly, the possibility of total integration into the host culture, in this case America, and how food is represented as a metaphor for home and subsequently as a sign of homesickness. The collection manages to display clashing portrayals of immigrants: where one can fully assimilate into the adoptive culture, while the other is seen in complete rejection, as they cannot fit into the host society. Notably, Lahiri does not portray the west as an evil demonic entity, but instead she illustrates it in through an objective lens. Diaspora and identity crisis are utilized in this study to examine the multiple meanings of the character's actions and the events that take place in the collection.

Key Words

Lahiri Jhumpa -*Interpreter of Maladies*-Identity Crisis-Diaspora-Indian Food

Introduction:

Jhumpa Lahiri is the first south Asian writer to win a Pulitzer Prize for her short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*. This award allowed Jhumpa Lahiri to have great influence on American literature when the collection came out in 1999. The overwhelming positive feedback this collection of anthological stories received had propelled Lahiri forward. The stories were praised for the universality of their narrative; however, they mainly focusing on Bengali immigrants, such as Lahiri herself or natives. Lahiri's works address the themes of loss and nostalgia which can be directed at a global audience too. Moreover, she tackles these issues from migrants, refugees and other points of view.

The Asian American minority has been continuously described as outsiders through terms such as "yellow peril" or a more 'positive' label, even seen as a congratulatory label, "the model minority". These labels, regardless of their positive or negative connotations, further created schisms between the many "different racial groups present in America at the time" (Srikanth and Song 15). In fact, the majority of Asian American suffered from discrimination and one form or another of stereotyping, which pushed the divide between them and American society. This issue can explain why many of the Asian-American explore them of quest for identity and diaspora, among others in Asian-American literature. It is worth noting that diaspora writers often aim to stand behind their communities, highlighting their suffering and struggles. As they, themselves, strive for a connection between them and their homelands. That is why a heavy presence of nostalgia can be noted in their writings.

Lahiri belongs to the "secure and confident subset of a post-1965 generation of Asian American creative writers" (Srikanth and Song 19). She was

born to Indian parents, making her a second-generation immigrant; lead her to being labeled “South Asian American” author. She occupied a unique position to be the voice of the voiceless from her community and others that fall under the umbrella of diaspora. Despite this, Lahiri was outspoken about her discomfort with her ‘hyphenated’ Indian-American identity, saying:

Less constant is my relationship to the term. When I was growing up in Rhode Island in the 1970s I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen (20).

As an immigrant who experienced diaspora, she could express the identity crisis that affects immigrant communities which can be reflected in her own characters, as they both have endured marginalization and solitude. This leads to the conclusion: to better understand Lahiri’s writings, understanding her background is necessary. Indian critic, Asha Chobey remarks: “The personal life of Jhumpa Lahiri is the very prototype of diasporic culture. She spent more than thirty years in the United States she still feels as an outsider. Though she has confessed that her days in India are „a sort of parentheses in her life, the fact she is at heart an Indian cannot be denied. The stories collected in her debut anthology *Interpreter of Maladies* deal with the question of identity” (6).

The anthology series “*Interpreter of Maladies*” won a Pulitzer Prize in 2000. The collection revolves around the lives of Bengali immigrants who live in Boston. The stories represent nine different worlds that tell us about the lives of these characters that the stories revolve around, while delving into their psychological problems, while exploring the environments that they live in. Michiko Kakutani said: “Ms. Lahiri chronicles her characters’ lives with both objectivity and

compassion while charting the emotional temperature of their lives with tactile precision. She is a writer of uncommon elegance and poise, and with ‘*Interpreter of Maladies*’, she has made a precocious debut” (qtd. in Devadoss 7)

“The Short Story in Articulating Diasporic Subjectivities in Jhumpa Lahiri’, a paper by Antara Chatterjee where she praises that Lahiri as one of the most eminent Indian writers who discussed such themes as diaspora and racism, among others:

Though writing from a vantage point distinctly embedded in an American cultural space, Lahiri can definitely be called a key practitioner of the contemporary postcolonial short story. She can be seen as perpetuating a literary tradition of short fiction in Indian-American women’s writing, specifically among Bengali-American women authors in the works of her predecessors like Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Divakaruni, who also write from a similar position and often about similar experiences (96).

Silvia Lutzoni describes Lahiri’s masterpieces, viz, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), *The Namesake* (2000), *Unaccustomed Earth* (2003) and *The Lowland* (2008) mentioning that: “show [her] primary concern with the subject of the life of first- and second-generation South Asian Americans, focusing in particular on the dialectic between the traditional way of life and the modern one” (111). She draws vivid characters who are “in a thick mist of human displacement, nostalgia and identity loss” (11).

Lahiri wrote *Interpreter of Maladies* in a melancholic sorrowful tone. As the central characters strive in order to cope with a world that they find difficult to assimilate to force them to feel caught between two worlds: “the text even transcends national boundaries, being set in both India and the United States” (Williams 451). Noting that the characters come from different backgrounds and lives. As Susan

Mann notes that “collections that are not cycles have traditionally been named after a single story to which the phrase 'and other stories' is appended.... Generally placed first or last in the volume, the title story represents what the author feels is the best work or, in some cases, the best-known work” (Garland14).

Each character can embody a specific mindset of the struggles of the diaspora. For instance, Mrs. Sen represents all immigrants who left their motherlands to live in an alien world, severely different from their world, which can be noticed through her great sense of displacement. As we follow her feelings, we can see the clear nostalgic impact that her memories of the past life she had in her motherland, India, creep into her thoughts, which further augment the already difficult instances of rejection of her new life in the United States. Mrs. Sen left her home country to join her professor husband in America, as she continuously displays her displeasure and dissatisfaction with her new American life, to Eliot, An American boy she often babysits. As she continues to tell Eliot about her old life in Calcutta, we can see a clear indication of her homesickness.

The story also includes instances of Mrs. Sen’s daily life, as she spends the majority of the story on her trek to the local fish market. While offering biscuits to Eliot’s mother on a daily bases, while she turns Mrs. Sen’s offer every time. Eliot’s mother has shown interest in Mrs. Sen’s babysitting experience and in her life in the U.S in general. At the end of the story, Mrs. Sen tries to drive herself to the market without any aid from her husband, only for her to end up in a car accident. Despite how small this event might seem on the surface; it helps paint a picture of the frustration and difficulty for immigrants to assimilate to their new host societies. In this regard, Ranasinha has stated the following ideas regarding this connection:

Mrs. Sen, like many of Lahiri's Indian characters, remains in a permanent exile, never fully belonging to North America. These stories foreshadow the sustained symbolism of death and problematic rootedness that colors her later collection of stories, *Unaccustomed Earth*. As we saw with Monica Ali, Lahiri also reverses the gaze and contests the expectation of the 'ethnic novel' to confine itself to translating minority experiences to broader readerships. This dual cultural translation or juxtaposition of both South Asian immigrant and white American worlds enables us to see both afresh (36).

Like many characters who suffer from diaspora and even hybrid culture, Mrs. Sen is divided between two worlds: her current host world and her old native culture. We can refer to Jhumpa Lahiri's collection, "*Interpreter of Maladies*", as an 'ethnic' narrative. With the two-world divide that is omnipresent in all of the short stories in this collection, the theme of duality is evidently shown in all stories. As the juxtaposition image of these two worlds, the Eastern and the Western world, collide, they greatly contribute to giving the stories a better meaning.

1. Alienation And Diaspora

The term 'diaspora' originally is referred to the 'dispersion' of Jewish people away from Israel. Here, it is worth mentioning that "diaspora which referred to the historical exile and scattering of the Jewish people in the pre-Christian era, now commonly represents any migration or dispersal of population around the world (Ang 142). For many immigrants who have shifted from their original spaces, the newly established home becomes a site where they find comfort or protection from the unaccustomed. On one hand, Lahiri's fictional works represent the domestic space to first-generation immigrants as an enlivening of one's sustained cultural or

ethnic identity, like an “island into which the host culture is only partially allowed to intrude” (Ridda 4).

Diasporic literature witnessed exponential growth late into the 20th century. It is often associated with the spirit of revolution and emphasizes championing diversity. A significant contributor to this growth is ‘modern Indian literature’. With names such as Salman Rushdi, Rohinton Mistry and Jhumpa Lahiri, along with many other giant names. Being among these names is not a small feat, as many of these names are great established authors, who helped propel diasporic literature to the influential instrument it is today. As she uses her writings to explore the mentality of immigrants, to better understand the processes they undergo to assimilate into the host culture. In the hopes of understanding the complex psychology of the diaspora, in their continued efforts of understanding and accepting new environments and cultures.

This has allowed Lahiri’s writings to give a voice to the voiceless diaspora. From her contributions of the genre, we can see the ample depictions of the various psychological traumas and mental conflicts that inflict the Indian diaspora in the United States. As her works continue to explore identity crisis, we get to observe the state of ‘in-between-ness’. This allows her works to future inspect the sense of alienation, marginalization and dislodgment that immigrants struggle with, when trying to find their own identity.

Amongst the different relations in this collection, the relationship between Mrs. Sen and the local boy, Eliot is very special. Their relationship is portrayed in a beautiful light. Mrs. Sen works as Eliot’s baby-sitter. This developing relationship and the supporting cast around it, such as Eliot’s mother and Mrs. Sen, Lahiri spotlights the dichotomy of the Western and the Indian customs. As we can see the

kindness that fills Mrs. Sen, as she is filled with joy, as she cares for the little boy as if he was her own. She spends ample time with him, while sharing her memories and past experiences from her homeland, completes all her house chores and caring for the boy's basic daily needs. She expresses delight in sharing her history and the rich culture she hails from. Despite the forging of this bond between the two, it is not enough to replace the longing she feels for her homeland and family. The alienation that she feels is vibrant in her words and feelings, let alone her actions. She iterates that where she came from everyone was happy throughout noisy nights, in contrast to "Here, in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence" (115).

The relationship between Mrs. Sen and Eliot is unique and strange as Eliot comes from a completely different background. Despite that staggering difference, she still feels comfortable enough opens up to the child, allowing us to see a sense of kinship, despite their completely different backgrounds. "Send pictures,' they write. 'Send pictures of your new life.' What picture can I send?... They think I live the life of a queen, Eliot...They think I live in a palace." (*The Interpreter of Maladies*, 125) this could be credited to Mrs. Sen's desire for belonging, which is intended to emulate the mental state of diaspora, as it can be seen in her words to Eliot: "My sister has had a baby girl. By the time I see her, depending on if Mr. Sen gets his tenure, she will be three years old. Her aunt will be a stranger" (*The Interpreter of Maladies*, 122). She says: "When I was your age, I was without knowing that one day I would be so far. You are wiser than that, Eliot. You already taste the way things must be" (123).

Indian people generally spoke loudly back where Mrs. Sen discussed other Indian customs, such as wearing the 'scarlet powder' and about the friendly and lovely relationship among people back in her homeland. She continued about other

important customs of Indians, such as food preparation, which is an essential everyday life, one that might be considered a celebration. Lahiri painted the image of Indian companionship amongst neighbors as an inclusive one, while the contrast is evidently different, from the American aspect. Eliot and his mother are never invited to Labor Day celebrations held by their neighbors. And unlike how the people in India spend their celebrations, they are never seen celebrating or ‘eating, drinking or laughing’ with their neighbors.

Seeing how Eliot and his mother are too alienated by their other neighbors proves the alienating nature that the west exerts. Unlike the overly welcoming, Indian culture, that Mrs. Sen belongs to. This creates a sense of attraction in Eliot to the completely different American culture, as he continues to admire his baby-sitter and her culture. When his mother decides that she will no longer allow Mrs. Sen to baby-sit him, both Eliot and Mrs. Sen, reject that idea. As losing their relationship means losing the connection that both built towards the external world that they live in. For Eliot that is India, and for Mrs. Sen that is America. As they both long to belong and stave off alienation, Gayathri Varma comments:

Throughout the story, the conversations between Mrs. Sen and Eliot are what dominate rather than those between her and Mr. Sen. It is Eliot who serves as an encouragement for Mrs. Sen to take the driving license, answers her anxious queries regarding driving, accompanies her to her favorite fish market, and she confides all her sad and ill-feelings about her inability to visit her relatives in India in him (45).

The house where Mrs. Sen lives becomes more than a space to love in. It becomes a house of distorted and struggling identities. This has allowed Eliot and Mrs. Sen to evolve beyond their own cultures, creating a hybridized culture in order

to fight alienation and find somewhere to belong. The author uses Mrs. Sen's home as a tool for examining the notion of identity conformation. In other words, the house is a motif to explore the difficulty a character undergoes in their attempt to lead a happy life in a host culture or country.

Other motifs are employed to symbolize other struggles that a diaspora suffers with. Such as driving, which Mrs. Sen tries to learn but is faced with difficulty in her learning process. This indicates her sense of weakness and isolation. She struggles to leave her home just as her mind struggles to leave her homeland. Needless to say, her husband's desire for his wife to learn how to drive is clear, as he believes her learning to drive would help her and in return him fit better into the host culture.

Her mental stagnation directly affects her physical mobility as she becomes incapable of escaping her past and as such incapable of assimilating to her present. So much so, that she decorated her flat with a nostalgic sense that evokes her longing of her homeland, everything around her reminds her of India so much that she "notice[s] in the lampshades, in the teapot, in the shadows frozen on the carpet, something the rest of them could not" (*The Interpreter of Maladies*, 113). This makes her home a unique meeting ground of two opposing cultural backgrounds, to meet and converse on the troubles born from their alienation. Diaspora see home more than just a house to live in; it is their 'current' place of residence and a symbol of their 'past' and cultural heritage. To spotlight these notions, Lahiri uses Eliot's perspective to better deliver an uncorrupted unbiased child's opinion. As Eliot realizes that home to Mrs. Sen is India and "not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables" (*The Interpreter of Maladies*, 116). Here, Antara Chatterjee stated that Lahiri examined the identity crisis that Mrs. Sen is suffering from, using the symbol of 'home':

In the figure of Mrs Sen, Lahiri projects the emotional dislocation caused by physical displacement, and the confusing and painful process of acculturation. For Mrs. Sen, 'home' is still in Calcutta, the place she has left behind, the image which she tries to retain through her memories. When she comes to America, this space of the home is problematized since it has to be refashioned in a new location. This implies, in effect, that her Bengali cultural identity is destabilized or threatened (100).

1. Food as an Image of Heritage

Food is an imperative element of any culture; it creates important and an essential ingredient in the life of a diasporic immigrant. As most literary works rely heavily on food as a metaphor for various uses, including how immigrants' minds work. In *Culinary Fictions* by Anita Mannur, she sheds light on the value food holds in the minds of all immigrants. (1-10).

Throughout the collection of stories, food is regarded as an important motif that partakes in relating to the female character's longing for their home country; with focus on the customs and traditions associated with specific food types. This allows them to assert their Indian identity through their cooking and food preferences, leading them to embrace of a sense of nostalgic belonging; while living in alienation. Food is important in the field of diaspora studies, because food is "a vehicle for memory" (Holtzman 365). It is important to note that food in this collection can be divided into two different categories: original Indian food and unoriginal Indian food.

Lahiri uses food to expose the truth about the Indian culture, and all the stereotypical misinterpretation ideals that the West has of Indian and Indians. As noted through the depictions of characters in the collection, Mrs. Sen for instance, is

seen as a traditional typical oriental individual. The author attempts to highlight the view that the host culture tends to view immigrants. The titular character in turn is criticizing the Western view of the Orientals.

Likewise, the rest of the characters in the collection offer us a diverse and wide view of characters all that suffer from displacement and are classified as diaspora themselves. Afterall, not all diasporas go through the same experience, which creates a host of unique individuals with their own experiences in a diasporic frame. This can be further studied in the scope of the ‘intersectionality theory’, but that is beyond this scope of the current study.

In Irma Maini’s paper “The Politics of Home and Food in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies”, she speaks of the identity crisis that plagues Mrs. Sen, which leads to a visible lack in self-confidence. This lack leads to seek other means to find her self-confidence, one of them is cooking:

Lacking a sense of identity in this new country, it is vitally important for her to hold on to her memories of a time when she was somebody. However, instead of just remembering the past, Mrs Sen uses the past to give meaning to the present by preparing and cooking foods of her native Bengal...Cooking is one activity Mrs Sen takes pride in; this is what gives her a measure of self-worth in a country that sees her as an outsider (158).

Food becomes a vessel that allows her Mrs. Sen to trek to her homeland, to bask in the nostalgia of past memories. As she is seen throughout her story, to be preparing an Indian dish, while reminiscing about her past:

He especially enjoyed watching Mrs. Sen as she chopped things, seated on newspapers on the living room floor. Instead of a knife she used a blade that curved like the prow of a Viking ship, sailing to battle in distant seas. . . . At

times she sat cross-legged, at times with legs splayed, surrounded by an array of colanders and shallow bowls of water in which she immersed her chopped ingredients (114).

Considering using food as a metaphorical element, Choubey (2001) shed light on that mechanic and how it relates to using food to symbolize the native culture of the immigrants. Thus, Lahiri is clearly using food as a tool to highlight the decline of the bond that immigrants are losing to their homeland and their heritage and culture. As Goran Galmuzina adds:

Food practices for racialized immigrant subjectivities can function both as an act of defiance and as compliance to pressures of assimilation. Williams emphasizes that when food practices articulate difference they embody an act of “subjectivity-making and self-assertion” (78).

Then, Foodways mentions that “participate in a literary tradition connecting the Asian American immigrant experience with a visceral, embodied experience of difference” (78). In Lahiri’s first collection of short stories foodways seem to operate as spaces “in which marginalized identities generate a sense of agency and difference with transformative and productive potential” (79).

Mrs. Sen’s devotion to her dishes is retaliation against the alienation that she feels through her inability to assimilate in the new host culture, namely her devotion to cooking ‘fish’. As we see her risking her life to drive to get fish from a relatively distant market. As fish connotes to the distant her motherland is now, fish can be interpreted a symbol of that land, from the distance, the uniqueness of the dish and her devotion to continuously cooking despite the difficulty obtaining it for her. Throughout the story, Mrs. Sen is seen uneasy and uncomfortable, she escapes this

uneasiness through “Food and cooking in this story again, thus, bring out the unease of living in an adopted land” (Chatterjee, 204).

By analyzing Mrs. Sen’s depends on food for emotional comfort, it can be seen that food also symbolizes her inability to assimilate perfectly into her new life. As such, food becomes a link between her past life and her present one. As she continues to try and find her footing in the new world, we can determine that she does not reject the American society she is plunged into, she simply cannot find her footing in this new world. If anything, she clearly admires the Western elements she lives in, including the cuisine. In Paromita Deba’s paper, entitled “The Journey of Food from ‘When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine’ to ‘Mrs. Sen's’ in Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*”, she states:

With lots of fish, Mrs Sen seems to enjoy the common American ‘clam cakes’, with a ‘good deal of Tabasco sauce and black pepper on hers’, linking them with the popular Indian savoury snack, ‘pakoras’. Here, interestingly, the Western seafood snack – ‘clam cake’ – is subtly linked with a typical Indian fritter eaten commonly at parties as well as an inexpensive street food – ‘pakora’ by Mrs. Sen, which in a way perfectly complement the mood and ‘occasion’ – the only happy outing of the trio in the story” (131).

2. The Eastern-Western Relationship

The Third and Final Continent, one of the stories in the collection, is narrated by an unnamed Indian man. The omission of his name is intentional as it partakes in illuminating his lost identity or his identity crisis. The Narrator moves to England to attend School of Economics. After that, he moves to the ‘third and final continent’, the Americas. In the United States where he worked as a librarian at MIT’s library, he reads a book that tells him that the U.S is less welcoming

than Britain. He and his landlady, Mrs. Croft, discuss the moon landing, as it is 1969, when the U.S touched down on the moon which Mrs. Croft refers to as ‘splendid’.

Mrs. Croft, by admission of her daughter, Helen, seems to believe that the narrator is the first tenant she ever believed to be a gentleman. However, Mrs. Croft immediately shows her approval of a man and a woman living together out of wedlock. The narrator marries a Bengali woman named Mala. Mala comes to visit him in Boston, as they both have the resolution and convictions to live and build a life in England. They have a son, who gets the opportunity to study in Harvard, explaining how the narrator does acknowledge that he is not the only one seeking opportunities in other parts of the world, away from their own homelands.

In this story, Lahiri explores hybridization through the bond created from the relationship of the friends, the narrator and the landlady, Mrs. Croft. This is a fierce and courageous woman, who “almost resembled a man” (178). Her stubbornness and clear independence do not spare her believe that the narrator has of her being a woman, that she still needs love and care.

The narrator still respects the lady greatly, as he only deals with her with civility and politeness. Their relationship becomes a solid friendship with frequent and regular, yet brief conversations. Both characters seem to feel a sense of isolation, which helps them bond over their separation from the rest of the world, giving the readers an emotional and moving friendship. As the man lives alone in a new host culture away from his land, like wise Mrs. Croft is an elderly woman, who lives alone isolated from her family and the rest of the world, making them both feel lonely, while they keep each other company.

Despite the mutual respect and friendship that they have for one another, the landlady still demanded that the narrator says “splendid!” whenever the moon landing is brought up. This brings for the notion of Western idealism, as despite the fact that the woman herself is kind and polite to the man; she still finds it imperative that the East acknowledges the accomplishments of the West which was offensive to the narrator, as he narrates:

“Instead she commanded, "Say 'splendid!'" I was both baffled and somewhat insulted by the request. It reminded me of the way I was taught multiplication tables as a child, repeating after the master, sitting cross-legged, without shoes or pencils, on the floor of my one-room Tollygunge School. It also reminded me of my wedding, when I had repeated endless Sanskrit verses after the priest, verses I barely understood, which joined me to my wife. I said nothing” (29-30)

The previous quote proves to the reader the nature of the West and the arrogance that fills the. Westerners have knowledge and have power, which makes them believe they are entitled to exert it on the weak. Making easterners seem submissive like ‘students’ that need to be educated by their bests which is manifested in the moon landing, as it makes the American Westerners even more arrogant and gives them and excuse to justify their desired dominion over the whole world.

Asl et al. states in the paper, “Panoptic spaces and the framings of South Asian diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri’s selected short stories”, that:

As an apparatus of administrative power that continues to permeate American society and pervades micro-politics of everyday life—as suggested by the

media coverage of Americans' landing on the moon as an archetypal example of American dream of "traveling farther than anyone in the history of civilization (Lahiri 195–196).

In addition, he rejects not its influence but its whole existence on them. Even though he is to some extent "insulted by the request" (196), besides seemingly denounces the landlady's domineering subjectification, he proves to be an accomplice in his own governmentality" (9).

Mr. Pirzada, the titular character of the short story "*When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*", is a Bengali man who is studying in America. While staying with his friends in America, his room is located next to the room of their 10 years old daughter, Lilia. Lilia's parents are originally Indian, but Lilia was born in the West. Lilia refers to Mr. Pirzada as "the Indian man", which gains the wrath of her father, who feels disappointed at his '10' years old is ignorant of the happenings in her homeland. As he states that Mr. Pirzada is no longer Indian, not since the escalation that tore Pakistan and India from each other. Surprised by the pumpkins placed at their neighbors' doorsteps, Pirzada asks what they are for. As it is October and Halloween is nearing, she explains to him the traditions of Halloween. Pirzada is repulsed by this practice, as he sees Lilia and her friend Dora dressing up and going to 'trick and treat', to which Lilia's mother tell him that it is merely an American custom.

During the political unrest that India was going through, and worry painted all over Mr. Pirzada's face, Lilia used to eat one candy in prayer for his family's safety. After a while, Pirzada goes back home, and is reunited with his family. He writes to Lilia's family to thank them for their hospitality and assure them of his safety. Knowing that Mr. Pirzada and his family are reunited and safe, Lilia throws

the candy away as she no longer sees any need for them, since they are all safe and no longer need her prayers.

In light of the relationship between the West and East, Lilia is a representation of the good side of Western culture, which is represented in their continuously growing friendship. When Mr. Pirzada and Lilia parted ways, depression creeps into the little girl and develops a sense of longing for her elder friend. Jungha Kim said the following on this matter: "Lilia's unsettled sentiments are a reaction to the revelation that life for Mr. Pirzada is fixated on his hometown, and hence a starting point for her to perceive another world that she had never been aware of but had always existed" (70).

This relationship developing between Lilia and Pirzada revealed a 'hybrid' identity to the reader. Their relationship starts of strained, as Lilia found no interesting values in their relationship, while the same can be applied to Mr. Pirzada. However, that lack of connection ends the more the two interact and become closer. Mr. Pirzada attempts to take care of the girl as she reminds him of his daughter back in India. Allowing a sense of mutual understanding and respect to develop, highlighting the importance Mr. Pirzada:

Now that I had learned Mr. Pirzada was not an Indian, I began to study him with extra care, to try to figure out what made him different. I decided that the pocket watch was one of those things. When I saw it that night, as he wound it and arranged it on the coffee table, an uneasiness possessed me; life, I realized, was being in lived in Dacca first. I imagined Mr. Pirzada's daughters rising from sleep, tying ribbons in their hair, anticipating breakfast, preparing for school. Our meals, our actions, were only a shadow of what had already

happened there, a lagging ghost of where Mr. Pirzada really belonged” (*Interpreter of Maladies* 28).

Respect, esteem and appreciation for the Oriental practices is evident from the previous passage. As Lilia finds Mr. Pirzada, his culture and his world to be an enigma, one that she tries to decipher. Leading up to the fact that he, unlike many immigrants that marginalize themselves, is curious and is open to learn more about the host culture, albeit for his temporary stay.

Unlike other characters, Mr. Pirzada is able to assimilate into the host culture. This is a contrast to both Mrs. Sen and Lilia’s father. He does not mourn his past and his homeland and the family he has left behind. He is more like Lilia’s mother who understands that the opportunities afforded by a move to America outweigh the pull of the homeland (GradeSaver 12).

Conclusion:

To sum up, Indian-American literature is often riddled with themes such as: quest for identity, identity disparity and diaspora and others. Diasporic authors are an authority on hands on experience of the diaspora struggles in a host culture. They also provide a voice to the marginalized minorities in their communities. Due to her hands on experience, Jhumpa Lahiri has proven herself to be a prominent writer and genuine author, who managed to portray the struggles of diaspora effectively. Focusing on the issues that plague the Indian immigrants in the U.S, such as the identity crisis.

In her collection of short stories, ‘*Interpreter of Maladies*’, Jhumpa Lahiri explored the mindset of the diaspora and their assimilation attempts into the host culture and how accepting and welcoming they are of this transformation. Canonically, Mrs. Sen struggles with learning how to drive a car in the short story,

'Mrs. Sen', which represents the difficulty that she feels to assimilate on the new culture she is living in. While her cooking skills remain consistent in staying true to her Indian heritage. Proving that she finds a connection that helps her maintain her link to her native home, India. Which exposes the notion of food (and any other item in the story) transcends any natural value it might have.

Despite the difficulty and rejection that many diasporas have exhibited in the stories, Mr. Pirzada from the short story, '*When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*', the story gives us characters who have fully embraced the western culture in Lilia and her family, while we see in Mr. Pirzada an immigrant/diaspora who is curious and more accepting of assimilation and accepting the culture. As the author emphasizes the importance of finding understanding between the East and West, to find harmonic coexistence.

In '*The Third and Final Continent*', the views the West generally share of the East are under a microscope. The West is symbolized by a 103 years old woman, named Mrs. Croft. While the East is personified in the unnamed, anonymous narrator, whose identity is obscured intentionally, no name and no age. Being the landlady that the narrator lives in, shows the West as a symbol of power, that holds control over where the Easterners are able to reside in. As she continuously pressures him to say "splendid" when discussing the American moon landing, showing her power over him. This can be described as the American view of the Eastern world, as they perceive them as children that should be amused and amazed by anything the U.S accomplishes.

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