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## **A Diaspora Journey from Struggle and Haunting Memories to Assimilation: A Study of Selected Short Stories of Jhumpa Lahiri**

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Diaspora is a name given and widely accepted to the community of a particular nation or region living outside its own country and sharing some common connections that give them an ethnic and consequent bonding. Diaspora is the term that originates from Septuagint Deuteronomy “Thou shall be a diaspora in all kingdoms of the earth”, as the Oxford English Dictionary refers to the term (Mishra 13). The term ‘Diaspora’ was first time used for the dispersal of Jews, when they were forced into exile to Babylonia resulting from the uprisings in Palestine in 598-97 and 587-86 BC. Recently ‘diaspora’ is used, in the words of James Clifford, to signify the lives of ‘any group living in displacement’ (Mishra 13).

In the modern perspective diaspora is a word used spontaneously to describe all the displaced groups of people who try to preserve their cultural identity under all circumstances. Diaspora means the strong feelings about the country of origin for the migrants of first generation whereas for the second generation the ties and bonding with the ‘home’ gradually gets replaced by the adopted alien country. So, the diaspora includes expatriates, exiles, refugees and immigrants. Expatriates migrate willingly to the country of their choice but are unable to break away with their past. A sense of ‘rootlessness’ defines them. The exiles are those who are forced to leave their homeland. Refugees abandon their homeland due to war or other calamity, or on some political or religious obligations. Immigrants wilfully leave their countries in search of greener pastures with a positive frame of mind. Thus, the diaspora covers travellers, victims, seekers, achievers, professionals etc.

The process of migration is a very old phenomenon that started first with the migration of the first generation from India to Africa and many countries of Asia in the form of indentured labourers. The collapse of the British Empire led to one more process of migration, wilfully or unwillingly, to the United Kingdom, Canada, the USA, Australia and many other countries. Likewise, transnational migration took place owing to ethnic and racial conflicts. What is today prevalent is the form of migration caused by the process of globalization and advancement in “ultra-modern communication technologies” (Sareen 1) that has ushered in an era of the diasporic culture. The Indian diaspora has been formed by scattering of population and not, in the Jewish sense, an exodus of population at a particular point in time. The sporadic migration traces a steady pattern if a telescopic view is taken over a period of time from the indentured labourers of the past to the IT technocrats of the present day. Sudesh Mishra in his essay “From

Sugar to Masala” divides the Indian diaspora into two categories—the old and the new. He writes that:

The distinction is between, on the one hand, the semi-voluntary flight of indentured peasants to non-metropolitan plantation colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Surinam, the Guyana, roughly between the years 1830 and 1917; and the other the late capital or postmodern dispersal of new migrants of all classes to thriving metropolitan centres such as Australia, the United States, Canada, and Britain. (276)

There is no denying the fact that Indian diaspora has attained a new identity due to the processes of self-fashioning and increasing acceptance by the West.

Diasporic Literature is a very vast concept and an umbrella term that includes in it all those literary works written by the authors outside their native country, but these works are associated with native culture and background. In this wide context, all those writers can be regarded as diasporic writers, who write outside their country but remained related to their homeland through their works. Diasporic literature has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of migration and expatriation.

Generally, diasporic literature deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia and quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. It reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of the immigrant settlement. Uma Parameswaran has defined it as follows;

...first is one of nostalgia for the homeland left behind mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is a phase in which one is busy adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is the shaping of diaspora existence by involving themselves ethnocultural issues. The fourth is when they have ‘arrived’ and start participating in the larger world of politics and national issues. (165)

For the present paper Jhumpa Lahiri’s select short stories from *Interpreter of Maladies* are selected for exploring various themes prevalent in her diaspora writing. With the passage of time the things have changed a lot. *Interpreter of Maladies* convincingly illustrates mostly the lives of the second generation Indian migrants in the United States. The themes of alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia and quest for identity are not so dominant in these stories. They are almost absent. Neither do they deal with disintegration of cultures. These stories highlight how memory does play a significant role to keep oneself attached to the Indian roots and culture. Besides, the stories do emphasise the need of communication to survive the mutual understanding and relationships. The stories are about assimilation that the second generation has achieved in the ‘new home.’ This is possible because big issues like religious intolerance and racial discrimination are no longer the main concern of the writers belonging to

the second generation who were born and brought up in the foreign land. Small things matter much in the current world (Saha 195). Little unacknowledged things gain enormous importance in changed circumstances. It is here that divergent reactions by Indian, Western and diasporic characters towards similar situation differ only casually. The stories selected for detailed studies are “A Temporary Matter”, “When Mr Pirzada Came to Dine, and “The Third and Final Continent”. These stories explore how life of diaspora vacillates amidst haunting memories of homeland, struggle for survival and finally reaching assimilation.

“A Temporary Matter”(JhumpaLahiri) is a story of struggle to save and preserve the conjugal relationship that is on the brink of disaster. The story also focuses on the grief of a mother who loses her baby at the time of its birth. This single traumatic happening creates a wall between husband and wife—Shukumar and Shoba. They live under the same roof but do not share their joys and sorrow as they did earlier. Both of them are reeling from the loss of their child. They do not want to keep in touch with their friends and keep themselves busy in their own way—Shobafilling her time with work and Shukumar procrastinating in finishing his dissertation. Besides, they try their best to avoid each other as is clear from the lines: “Instead he thought of how he and Shobha had become expert in avoiding each other in their three-bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible” (5). Even they do not eat foodtogether:

For months now they'd served themselves from the stove, and he'd taken his plate into his study, letting the meal grow cold on his desk before shoving it into his mouth without pause, while Shobhatook her plate to the living room and watched game shows, or proofread files with her arsenal of colored pencils at hand. (8)

The baby's death distanced them overnight that reminds us of Robert Frost's “Home Burial” where a mother whose baby dies turns hostile to her husband and hates him for his callousness though the husband equally loves the child. It is true that Shukumar does not attend his wife at hospital when she is into labour but the fault does not lie with Shukumar as Shobha herself forces him to attend the academic conference in Baltimore. Shukumar seemingly appears callous to Shobha's mother who, when Shukumar mentions the baby's death, says, “But you weren't there” (10). The importance of communication within a marriage is a prevalent theme in the story. Here the sorrow of the lost child causes a communication breakdown in the relationship of Shukumar and Shoba. This silence between them eventually destroys them because, in their grief, Shukumar and Shoba grow to become different people. Since they no longer share experiences, the couple grows apart. They do not sit together. When Shobha leaves to work Shukumar is still in his bed. He does not help his wife. On the contrary it is Shobha who prepares morning coffee for him and keep it in the kitchen so that he may drink it when he wakes up. The distance has made their life morose and as far as Shobha is concerned she treats the house “as if it were a hotel” (6).On the other hand, Shukumar feels irritated in her company. This lack of understanding and communication has emerged only after the death of their baby:

They weren't like this before. Now he had to struggle to say something that interested her, something that made her look up from her plate, or from her proofreading files. Eventually he gave up trying to amuse her. He learned not to mind the silences. (13)

The communication gap assumes so serious form that it distances them so much so that "He couldn't recall the last time they'd been photographed. They had stopped attending parties together." (16)

In such circumstances there is need to develop a sort of communication to save the marriage and spousal relationship. It is husband who must talk to his wife when she is in grief. One has to take the initiative—the first step to extend the helping and affectionate hand that may help the other to dispel the clouds of grief and trauma.

Communication gap is abridged soon when a deus-ex-machina in the form of systematic power outages allows for intimacy between the couple not achieved since the death of their son. Here one point is worth mentioning that the diaspora looks back to their 'home' for solution through their rich culture and values amid crises. It is Shobha who turns to India to overcome the crises she and Shukumar are confronted with. Here we can mention what Prof. Paranjape concludes with the argument that India is an 'Idea'; the idea of mind and spirit, not a territory only, and an Indian diaspora has a mystic relation with the homeland. Indian abroad, like Jews, will never be able to forget their homeland or motherland. (Srivastva 3-4) They are forced to live in darkness for a few days. Darkness denotes mortality, death, deep suffering and adversity (Jayaram) as per Hinduism and Shobha, it seems, wants to avoid that fear and anxiety caused by the death that has overpowered both of them after the loss. Shobha suggests something to cope up with the one hour power cut off in the evenings for a few days. She says, "I remember during power failures at my grandfather's house, we all had to say something" (13). And in this way a way is singled out to strike communication with each other that will surely remove the gaps. The death of the child creates a metaphorical darkness in their life where they are not able to see and understand each other. Ironically, it is the real darkness that brings them closer to each other. Each day Shukumar prepares food in the evenings before the power outage and they sit together, of course after a long gap of time, to have their food and drinks. Both are so curious about the talks and the secrets they reveal to each other that Shukumar prepares food early and Shobha comes home earlier than usual. She also misses the gym so that she may reach home faster. Both of them reveal their secrets to each other. It is during such dark moments that they avoid distances:

Something happened when the house was dark. They were able to talk to each other again. The third night after supper they'd sat together on the sofa, and once it was dark he began kissing her awkwardly on her forehead and her face, and though it was dark he closed his eyes, and knew that she did, too. The fourth night they walked carefully upstairs, to bed, feeling together for the final step with their feet before the landing, and making love with a desperation they had

forgotten....By the time the lights came back on downstairs, they'd fallen asleep.  
(21)

The darkness is both a metaphor for Shukumar and Shoba's relationship and a safe space for the couple to bond. Both have been groping around in the dark for the sense of normalcy that was destroyed by the death of their child. The planned blackouts force an intimacy that the couple hasn't known for a long time. By the second day, they are so liberated by the darkness that they begin to anticipate it. Finally, they turn off the lights when the planned outages cease. Darkness ushers in intimacy, which allows the couple to make love for the first time since the child's death. By the end of the week, the snow outside begins to melt. The thawing mimics the freedom both Shukumar and Shobha now feel from their grief.

It is again during dark evenings that they disclose their rather painful secrets. She tells Shukumar that she has decided to live apart, "I've been looking for an apartment and I've found one". Shukumar is not happy to know this as it sickened him "knowing that she had spent these past evenings preparing for a life without him" (23). Shukumar, on the other hand, violates the wishes of his wife by revealing the gender of the child. He is not as callous as he appears to Shobha and her mother. What she assumes it was a mystery about the child for him was not so. He discloses that he "had arrived early enough to see their baby, and to hold him before they cremated him.... Our baby was a boy" (24). Shobha had requested the doctor to keep the sex of the child a secret. She wanted it to be a mystery. Nevertheless, Shukumar violates the wishes of his wife by revealing the gender of the child. This darkness has helped their feeling of love and compassion for each other resurrect and "they had survived a difficult time" (22). During dark evenings they not only come closer to each other, make love, speak at a stretch, share their secrets, though painful, but also cry dejectedly attaining a sort of catharsis. Shobha turns lights off, sits at the table and Shukumar joins her. They weep together, for the things they now know. It seems as if with tears flow all their sorrows and pain and they emerge purified purged of all emotions. We cannot say that the baby who will never cry tears the two apart. Who knows Shukumar like the father of Frost's "Home Burial" will do the same he does:

"Where do you mean to go? First tell me that.

I'll follow and bring you back by force. I will!—"(Frost: "Home Burial")

The readers sympathetically wish that period of isolation from each other were a temporary matter and they also wish that they had started living together with love and harmony.

Memories always remain significant aspect in diaspora writing. The memories evoked are of past times, place and people as they were when the writer experienced them. "A Temporary Matter" has occurrences of memories. It is her memory of India that she remembers how during power failure they "had to say something" (13) to keep oneself busy during power outages.

Shukumar is often lost in episodes of memory related to his visits to Calcutta. In America he has cherished these memories as love for the land where he was born and brought up. He remembered how as a teenager “he preferred sailing camp or scooping ice cream during summers to going to Calcutta. It wasn’t until his father died, in his last year of college, that the country began to interest him, and he studied its history from course books as if it were any other subject. He wished now that he had his own childhood story of India”(13). It is on account of memories of India that triggers a longing for India to have his childhood there. It is evident that diaspora even after successful assimilation finds it difficult to forget their land and home and remain nostalgic.

To Shoba also power outage reminds of India as she says, “It’s like India”. “Sometime the current disappears for hours at a stretch. I once had to attend an entire rice ceremony in the dark” (12). Both Shukumar and Shobha are attached and rooted to their homeland so much so that they often visit their country through memories though they are well-settled in America.

“When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” (Jhumpa Lahiri) can be studied from different perspectives. Like all other diaspora writing memories of homeland play a significant role in this story told from the first person perspective of Lilia, in her tenth year living in America with her parents. The Partition of India has been a most prevalent theme in the literature of the sub-continent. It is through memories that Lilia’s father mentions the Partition violence and its subsequent consequences. The war between India and Pakistan in 1971 and struggle of East Pakistan for a separate sovereign country reminds us of 1947 when India was divided into two nations. What happened in East Pakistan in 1971 had already happened in India in 1947.

It is really surprising that the theme of the Partition has been dominant one as the creative writers of different communities from India and Pakistan poignantly record the loss and suffering, trauma and agony experienced by humanity during the single historical-political event (Chopra 48). The theme of Partition has also been dealt differently by diaspora writers like Salman Rushdie. Shauna Singh Baldwin, herself a migrant from India to Canada and then the United States, picks up the theme of the partition of India in *What the Body Remembers*, a historical novel set in Punjab between 1920s and 1940s. Baldwin opines that:

It doesn’t really matter if we are Indians writing about a recent memory or immigrants stuck in a past version of India or Indo-Canadian writing about a mystic Homeland. What matters is that most diasporic writers write about India and Indians with love instead of contempt, offering glimpses of a complex active people with high aspirations. Through our writing, we have certainly reinterpreted India for ourselves, revisited it and taken our readers with us. (Srivastva 8)

No wonder even after more than seventy years the partition of India still becomes the subject of exploration for several creative writers, included diaspora writers. Jhumpa Lahiri, through her

character, Lilia's father, in the very beginning of the story highlights the occurrences in East Pakistan where violence wreaks havoc:

In March, Dacca had been invaded, torched and shelled by the Pakistani Army. Teachers were dragged onto streets and shot, women dragged into barracks and raped. By the end of the summer, three hundred thousand people were said to have died. (25)

Lilia's father keeps her reminding of India of the past where he once lived. Mr.Pirzada, a lecturer in Botany has received a grant from the government of Pakistan to study the foliage of New England. He will be away from his family for one year. He is worried about the political situation in his home country. Equally worried is he about his family left behind. Lilia's parents invite him home for dinners and he often enjoys their company. Here we must highlight the *athithidevobhava* (guest is a god) characteristic of Indian culture. Lilia's parents make him feel at home. When Lilia refers to Mr.Pirzada as "Indian", her father retorts, "Mr.Pirzada is no longer considered Indian.... Not since partition. Our country was divided in 1947" (27). It surprises Lilia and she imagines the illogicality of dividing India as she thinks:

It made no sense to me. Mr.Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents, Mr.Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea. (28)

Through the narrator the author has expressed her dissent for dividing India on the basis of religion. She denounces the illogical decision that decided the fate of India.

Mr.Pirzada, a Muslim, is treated as a guest by Lilia's parents. They share his worry for his children. It reminds us of hundreds of incidents during the partition when people of one religion turned saviours to the people of other religion in distress. Here Lilia's parents manifest true Indian spirit—cultural trait of *dharma*. Real *dharma*, lies in the right conduct which includes love, truth, non-violence, concern for others and equanimity of mind. (Gupta 66)

Lilia's father has told her stories of violence wreaked during the partition and she is contented, "I would never have to eat rationed food, or obey curfews, or watch riots from my rooftop, or hide neighbours in water tanks, to prevent them from being shot, as she [her mother] and my father had". (29)

Mr.Pirzada, too, loves Lilia like his own daughter and offers her candies every time he makes his visit to their home. She covets each evening's treasure in a small "keepsake box" made of carved sandalwood beside her bed, in which long ago in India her grandmother used to store the ground *areca* nuts. Mr.Pirzada's visits and his offering her candies remind her of India

and her grandmother. She says about the keepsake box, “It was my only memento of a grandmother I had never known, and until Mr. Pirzada came to our lives I could find nothing to put inside it.” (32)

Lilia is attached to India through keepsake box as Mr. Pirzada is attached to his land through his ‘silver watch’ that he keeps in his breast pocket set to the local time of Dacca, eleven hours ahead. He keeps the watch in front of him on the coffee table while taking meals. It is only after coming in contact with Mr. Pirzada that Lilia’s interest in the history of Pakistan is evoked and this she does by visiting the library where she finds out a book on Pakistan and starts reading it. Lilia’s father is dismayed, like any other first generation diaspora, that his daughter is ignorant of current events in India. She gets so much attached to Mr. Pirzada that she starts worrying about his seven daughters and his wife. Whenever she chews the candy given by Mr. Pirzada to her, she prays that Mr. Pirzada’s family is “safe and sound” (35). Her prayers symbolise prayers for all those who are away from their ‘home’ and family.

Like most diaspora or the migrants Mr. Pirzada suffer from the pain of being far off from his home. The memories of motherland, the anguish of leaving behind everything familiar agonizes the minds of migrants like Mr. Pirzada or Lilia’s father. William Safran has observed rightly about these migrants, “...they continue to relate personally or vicariously, to the homeland in a way or another, and their ethnic-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by existence of such a relationship.” (23) When the war between India and Pakistan breaks out, these twelve days are full of distress and tension for Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s parents as well. The narrator says, “...those twelve days of the war was that my father no longer asked me to watch the news with them, and that Mr. Pirzada stopped bringing me candy, and that my mother refused to serve anything other than boiled eggs with rice for dinner” (45). During these days Mr. Pirzada sleeps at their home. In the middle of the night Lilia’s parents make calls to their relatives in Calcutta to learn more detail about the situation. Lilia sees togetherness in Mr. Pirzada and her parents:

Most of all I remember the three of them operating during that time as if they were a single person, sharing a single meal, a single body, a single silence, and a single fear. (45)

This is nothing but a sense of attachment and inseparability with the person who belongs to the same country, speaks the same language. Lilia’s parents feel in the company of Mr. Pirzada as if in their own land and among own people. During the days of war Mr. Pirzada fails to get in touch with his family in Dacca and that communication gap becomes problematic for him. At that time it is the television set that symbolises a medium of communication as he gets every news through it.

At last Mr.Pirzada returns to his country and Lilia is happy that his family is safe who survived the violence at their relative's in Shillong. Mr.Pirzada's absence makes Lilia sad. She remembers him saying:

I felt Mr.Pirzada's absence. It was only then, raising my water glass in his name, that I knew that it meant to miss someone was so many miles and hours away, just as he had missed his wife and daughters for so many months. (46)

She knows that he will never come back. They will never meet him. Lilia continues eating the candies Mr.Pirzada has offered her but now that her prayers have fructified in the form of his meeting with the family, she throws the rest of the candies.

And this noble act of Lilia provides the most optimistic word in the whole story, the selfless human concern for those who are suffering. Her action speaks louder than words. Lilia reminds us of Miranda, Shakespeare's loveliest and sweetest creation, 'Eve of an enchanted paradise'. The simplicity and tenderness of her character are at once laid open when she seems to echo words of Miranda:

Oh, I have suffered  
With those I show suffer. (Shakespeare)

"The Third and Final Continent", the final story of Interpreter of Maladies(JhumpaLahiri) leaves a very positive notion on the readers about the immigrant experience and life in America. The story is about the narrator's journey from struggle to happy assimilation in the foreign land. The story also focuses on the memories of homeland. His struggle for career and survival begins in 1964 when having a certificate in commerce he visits England for study and job. He remembers:

I lived in North London, in Finsbury Park, in a house occupied entirely by penniless Bengali bachelors like myself, at least a dozen and something more, all struggling to educate and establish ourselves abroad. (190)

Here he struggles and survives among his Indian brethren working together and listening to the songs of Mukesh .When he is offered a full-time job in America, he again struggles to get himself adjusted there. He lives, for six weeks, at the YMCA in Central Square in a room that contains a cot, a desk and a small wooden cross on the wall. No cooking was allowed. He subsists with meagre things—just a plastic bowl, a spoon and small carton of milk and cornflakes for his first meal in America. The only negative experience he has is at YMCA where he fails to enjoy sleeps amidst a lot of noise of traffic distracting him all the time. The struggle that he undergoes is suggestive of all struggling diaspora in America or elsewhere in the world.

Unhappy experience at YMCA drives him to seek another residence. This leads him to Mrs.Croft's boarding house.Mrs. Croft, more than a hundred year old lady receives him

warmly and addresses him as 'dear' (194). He shares her kitchen. In evenings she asks him to sit by her side on her piano bench and talks to him. She never counts the money he pays her as a rent. Mrs. Croft's daughter, Helen says to him, "But I think she likes you. You are the first boarder she's ever referred to as a gentleman" (202). He, too, has developed a sort of bond with Mrs. Croft that when he leaves Mrs. Croft's house, as he has rented another house so that he may live with Mala, his wife who is on her way from India to America, he feels "disappointed."

The next time the narrator pays a visit with his wife to Mrs. Croft's she calls Mala, in her Indian dress, "a perfect lady" (213). The approval of Mrs. Croft, a woman with out-dated opinion, about Mala suggests that they will be accepted by everyone in America. Not only this acceptance of Mala by Mrs. Croft gives the narrator a hope for his new country but he has also fully assimilated to the country he has joined as an immigrant. It is again at Mrs. Croft's house that the narrator and Mala share their first meaningful glances and laughs. These moments of shared experience create intimacy and their marriage truly begins in Mrs. Croft's house.

After the death of his parents it is nothing that draws the narrator to India. Again, this is in contrast to Lilia's father who keeps remembering his country and wants that his daughter should keep herself in touch with the history of her home—India. The narrator does not mourn his past and his homeland and family he has left behind. He is more like Lilia's mother who understands that the opportunities afforded by a move to America compensate for the pull of the motherland. But it does not mean that he has forgotten all about India. He is an American citizen now with a house of his own. The connection with India is not snapped altogether. He admits, "Though we visit Calcutta every few years, and bring back more drawstring pajamas and Darjeeling tea, we have decided to grow old here." (215)

He has accepted America as his 'home' as he tells his son showing Mr. Croft's house, "...here was my first home in America, where I lived with a woman who was 103" (215). He advises his son to struggle and survive in America. "Whenever he is discouraged I tell him that if I can survive on three continents there is no obstacle he cannot conquer" (216). The narrator, thus, accepts America as his home because he knows as Uma Paramesvarn believes and claims, "Both exile and home is here, within the new homeland." (2003:107)

The story is a fine example of positive assimilation that takes place hand in hand with a healthy marriage. The narrator accepts his wife as readily as he accepts America as his home. Again it is Mrs. Croft who helps him accept his wife. It is the day where she calls Mala a perfect lady the distance between the narrator and Mala begins to lessen. He buys Indian spices, takes Mala out, buys a camera to cherish the sweet memories, loves her and finds "pleasure and solace in each other's arms" (214). Thus, America not only provides them with job and home but also love and a way to accept each other.

On the other hand, Mala, too, adapts and gets herself adjusted easily to the new surroundings—new 'home'. She, who had spent five days shedding tears, in Calcutta after marriage, missing her parents is happy and satisfied in America with her husband. She adapts to her husband's adherence to American practices, food and customs. Nevertheless, the story is a fine manifestation of how diaspora finds it difficult to snap all bonds with their motherland. Even after happily assimilated in the new home they are attached to their culture and ways of life. Even in America Mala wears sari and covers her head with the one end of her sari, put vermilion to her parting. During their sporadic visits to India they cannot forget to bring Darjeeling tea and drawstring pyjama that keep them attached to India.

Similar examples of assimilation to American culture are found in the story, "When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine". The narrator, Lilia's American name itself suggests that her parents have selected a name for her that is American. Lilia's family celebrates Halloween, the festival not celebrated in India. They also put Jack-o-Lantern on their doorsteps as the Americans do. She as a witch, with her American friend, Dora goes door to door asking for Candy corns. There is only one instance of identity crisis when several people tell Lilia that they have never seen an Indian witch (43). However, this is an isolated example found in the whole story. It is Dora's mother who drives her back to Lilia's as soon as it grows darker and both Dora and Lilia have sorted through their "plunder" (44). Likewise, Shoba in "A Temporary Matter" has faith in her American friend Gillian who will give her a ride to hospital in case of emergency.

In "The Third and Final Continent" the American Lady, whose dog barks at and holds the one end of an Indian woman's sari that drags on the road, says "sorry" to the Indian woman. Saying sorry by the American lady suggests acceptance of immigrants in their land and respect for them.

Though the narrator of the story is finally settled in America, the memories of the past, his country, parents and relatives haunt him time to time. The narrator reels off sweet and sour memories of his country. It is the pang evoked through the memories of his mother that shakes his whole self. The room where in Calcutta he spends his first night with his wife reminds him of his mother:

At times, I thought of the tiny room on the other side of the wall which had belonged to my mother. Now the room was practically empty; the wooden pallet on which she'd once slept was piled with trunks and old bedding. Nearly six years ago, before leaving for London, I had watched her die on the bed, had found her playing with her excrement in her final days. Before we cremated her I had cleaned each of her finger nails with a hairpin, and then, because my brother could not bear it, I had assumed the role of eldest son, and had touched the flame to her temple, to release her tormented soul to heaven." (198-99)

When he comes to know how at the age of 103 Mrs. Croft survives even after she has lost her husband, he surprisingly remembers the widowhood has driven his own mother insane. He remembers:

My father, who worked as a clerk at the General Post Office of Calcutta, died of encephalitis when I was sixteen. My mother refused to adjust to life without him; instead she sank deeper into the world of darkness from which neither I, nor my brother, nor concerned relatives, nor psychiatric clinics on Rash Behari Avenue could save her. (205)

He painfully remembers the struggle his brother wages after the death of their father. "After my father's death my brother abandoned his schooling and began to work in the jute mill he would eventually manage, in order to keep the household running", remembers the narrator. (205).

Thus Jhumpa Lahiri's stories are a fine blend of struggle—struggle for survival in new land and struggle for preserving relationships and Indian culture. These stories deftly explore various aspects of haunting memories of one's country and people and finally end with cheerful assimilation in the new 'home'.

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