

# Portraying identity crisis in the novel “unaccustomed Earth” by Jhumpa Lahiri

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## Abstract:

The novel unaccustomed Earth alludes the way how shuttle between cultural milieus and the developing the negotiation in alien world. Lahiri spins the cultural difference between American-born Indian with Bengali parents.

Unaccustomed Earth basically dealt with shocking generation gap, which exposes the contrary experiences with the first and the second generation immigrants. The protagonist of the novel is Ruma. Memories introduce her of late mother who was an expatriate by nature.

The breaking of Indian patriarchal code of a woman being an obedient daughter, sincere wife, and responsible mother. Her patience towards nurture children acts as a helpmate to her husband fulfilling his potential and resigns herself from the limitations. She raised two children in America and spoke to them exclusively in Bengali, to the Indian ways of life. She elaborates Indian meals and more than 200 saris she owned.

This shows how Ruma clings her lifestyle towards the ways of Indian culture

Key words; patriarchal, cultural milieus, alien, inherent dangers.

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## INTRODUCTION:

Jhumpa Lahiri otherwise called Nilanjana Sudeshna is an American writer. She was the author of two acclaimed works-“the Interpreter of Maladies”, her debut collection of short stories, and a novel called “the Namesake”. The Namesake was made into a major motion picture by Mira Nair; she has received many accolades for her best fiction debut. She was awarded the The New Yorker’s best debut of the year, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

The unaccustomed Earth won 2008 International Short Story Award of Frank O’Connor International Short Story Award. She was raised in Rhode Island and had her studies in Boston University where she earned her Ph.D degree. She currently lives in Brooklyn; New York with her husband and two children.

This research focuses on the Identity crisis elements present in the novel Jhumpa Lahiri's "Unaccustomed Earth".

The novel examines the theme of personal identity of Bengali family in United States. The researcher emphasizes the impact of identity crisis on people present in the novel. Generally, Literature is considered as the body part of written works. Literature is referred to the major part of the work that contains intellectual values and develops the language.

The word literature is DERIVED FROM Latin word "Literatura" it means letter or Hand Writing. Literature is classified as fiction or non-fiction. In this there are many forms, such as novel, Short story, poetry and prose.

Moreover, literature is in the form of written record, the plot is about to entertain, and it contains economist, psychology, science, religious, politics, social and cultural. Among this the development of civilization is based on the History of literature likewise, in this novel the researcher identified the immigrant suffers and then the cultural conflicts and identity crisis are faced by the characters throughout the novel. Finally, the researcher going to focus on, how important an individual name represents their unique identities. The novel is analyzed on the generation gap between old mindset of the first generation and second generation immigrants. Then the themes of nostalgia, multiculturalism, culture shock and unsettling are addressed through the characters Ruma and Akash. And then the themes of identity crisis and culture stereotyping are addressed through the experience of Akash.

By the theme of the novel Lahiri's send a clear message to the people who are dreaming to settle in different countries for a better life. The most unexpected things will happen in the immigrant's life. The experience that they drive is the patience, adjustable, and acceptance. They are going to face the culture shock, rootlessness, sense of alienation, nostalgia and identity crisis.

Unaccustomed Earth, Lahiri presents the character of Akash and Ruma as nostalgic since they migrate to a new land and also the feeling of diaspora. They recollect the memories back at home especially in the character of Ruma. It also deals with the cultural identity crisis which is faced by both the generations of the immigrant. Therefore, Unaccustomed Earth is considered as a voyage towards self-recognition, self-definition, and self-realization.

The characters in the novel, brings out the comparisons between Indian and American life. For, Indian immigrants such as Ruma, her husband, father and her son, many aspects of American culture are new to them, so that they feel like strangers in American society. They struggle to maintain some of the Indian traditions, while adapting some American customs. Indian-American characters such as Ruma etc often feel foreign in both India and America. Although they were lost in between the world of their parents and the world in which they were born. Often they feel like tourist in their native land.

The immigrants, experience portrayed by Lahiri in the novel forms the central theme of the novel. Throughout the novel along with various characters, the researcher gets an elating

view of the diasporic situations that experienced by the immigrants. Akash want to be liberated from Indian backgrounds but after her mother's death, that the Indian values which she has inherited, from her mother makes her move closer towards her mother and her family.

Akash quest for identity is a never-ending search, because neither he cannot reject the Indian culture nor he could fully accept the American values. This turns out to be on draining and difficult process for him. He cannot reject the demands of tradition and values in his life and cannot afford to accommodate the temptations offered by a new culture.

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## **AIM:**

The main aim of this research is based on the problems faced by the immigrants till the end of their lifetime. Travelling from one place to other place the suffering of immigrant is the major problem as a Multiculturalistic. The researcher intention is to bring out the mental and psychological suffering of the immigrants and in order to establish their self identity and the sense of experience. The protagonist was in dilemma if to follow their own culture or he is in the urge of attraction towards the pop culture. And the hardship experience in the life of Immigrants. Therefore, the research brings out the multiculturalistic and identity crisis sensibilities in the novel.

## **Diaspora:**

Each of chapters has enough material for the novel "unaccustomed Earth". The tool of clever radical abbreviation of Diaspora suggests that similar chronological distortion is the implicative in the novel. The main characters in the novel. The collection is divided in to two parts in the first the affluent immigrants from India to America. Thus, the diaspora speaks in this novel as speaks Bengali and hope for arranged marriages like their own for the offspring also. The family often live in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The suffering of sadness of deep loss. Jhumpa lahiri asa daughter of Indian diaspora family, she shares her homeland desire that which experiences pain for they live in a marginal position between the two cultures. A quest for identity is probably called as the personal identity. This paper offers mainly the "inherent traditions of community and their origin and the assertion of the rights, self-pride, social injustice and personal suffering.

The crush of hopes and aspirations to start a new wavelength of the life. The degree of reality starts from Ruma as she delivers a baby of her new life in the United States of America. The inherent nature of existing in something as a permanent pain essentially a characteristic attribute. Any form of quest of identity has its inherent dangers.

The equality of Diaspora migration was considered to be the prey and property of alien country. It is said in the rational way that the "Diaspora" is otherwise like the banyan tree that which follows from Generation to generation. It has got a strong roots of affection.

But the Diasporas spread out his roots in several soils as that of the migration of the motherland and one where they settle lifelong. Acclaimed critically, for jhumpa lahiri novel and short stories.

## THE TRADITION THAT GOT LOST:

Abram's (2012) cites in his journal "Diaspora and identity in the Viking age"-The culture change has always been core theme in the diaspora which brings to that scholarly heritage is a focus not only on the social impact of perceived culture changes both on the recipient host communities and on the migrant groups themselves.

In the "unaccustomed Earth" Ruma a 38 year old Indian-American woman, with her husband and son moved to Seattle. Her 3 years old son named Akash to take care of, meanwhile waiting for her second delivery. The demise of her mother suddenly makes Ruma feel traumatic, the close relationship with each other. She very often with nostalgia and recalls her childhood days. She feels very bad that in no way that she can return to traditional culture because of her mother's death. Her worry is also about her father offers to visit her because she is afraid that her father would move in to live with her. "She was no longer used to it, Ruma feels feared that her father become a responsibility, an added demand, continuously present in her home, she no longer used to."

It is the culture of Bengali, people enjoy an extended where parents and children live together to care for one another. After certain stage the children should take care of the family responsibility which is called nuclear family, and also they for their parents when they grow up. The independent of life of America has deprived her of the traditional Bengali traditional culture. She felt that she has completely lost Indian culture against her parents wish she married a white man, started choosing to wear western clothes instead of Indian saris. Her mother left for her two hundred and eighteen saris upon her death, but "keeping only three with her" which was placed in a quilted zippered bag at the back of her closet, telling the friend of her mother to divide up be the rest". Nowadays she rarely uses her Bengali language now. The reason for using the foreign language is to accept the ideology that is embedded in it. It is clearly known that she has become stranger to her own culture. When her relatives from Calcutta calls her for wish of birthday to her or to her son, she trips over words, mangles tenses. Ruma remembers her mother who is a traditional woman and holds to many Indian traditions like endurance, patience and hard work. She is an excellent housewife who cooks well and runs the house "as if to satisfy a mother-law's fastidious eye"

Identity crisis is the most common thing that all immigrants face. It refers to the group of society or people. Although the people in the multicultural society are mixed with other people and without losing their unique identities, such as own religion, culture, habits. Various culture combined in the society will create a mental pressure in that one has to face the changes that is neither less nor give more pain.

"He stared out the window at a shelf of clouds that was like miles and miles of densely packed snow one could walk across." (Unaccustomed Earth, pg 7) The first thing that affect Akash is that, he felt that his situation looks like quite strong and unusual and it is not relevant to the particular place. Because he was in search of his real identity when they enter in to their teenage. These things happen by the multicultural approach, when they are combined in a society these types of struggle that migrants face in their life.

In each and every country, people are following various cultural norms such as home, freedom and failure. Mostly, the Indian and Indian –American characters, portrays the tradition, custom, and heritage. As the children of Indian immigrants and their parent's homeland are often unfamiliar to them. The United States is an uneasy no-man's land for the Indian and Indian-American characters, because their lives are a patchwork of both American and Indian customs.

Ruma, while sitting lonely, suddenly she feels lonely and permanently alone. By this she realized that she has not belonged to the country, neither has she left her country .finally; she realizes that she belongs to nowhere. She just drained and devastated with her husband .she lost all her job and time she spends in America .she feels isolated and rootlessness by both countries; she couldn't get with neither Indian nor American. She comes to America for her husband, but now, she couldn't find any kind of reason to stay in the country. She never likes the country also, she never feels America to be her home. She thought that a place that gives a kind of security.

The assimilation of culture and the values ,at the same time it gives a new understanding and new identities, spaces for growth, resolution of conflicts and a new culture . Lahiri conveys a crystal-clear message to third –world people. Multiculturalism gives the ideas of accept ability in different groups of people or religion. The character in the novel deals with many conflicts and doesn't find any kind belongings in the place.

Even though they were living as an immigrant for many years, they could not attain the belongingness in the place and feels dissatisfied, rootlessness in the society. To sum up Unaccustomed Earth, portrays that Lahiri had expressed herself and she doesn't allow her characters to be submerged under their problems.

The theme of immigrant and displacement of the human relationships. The whole novel is finding out the identity, and the cultural differences that the second generation immigrants face in their life. As this novel will not be a happy ending, but somewhat there is a realization of oneself. Finally, Ruma realize her own identity, and the importance of her culture. At last ruma started to learn the impact of multiculturalism and realization of herself and the importance of her identity make the novel happy ending.

### **“The identity crisis in the novel ‘Unaccustomed Earth’**

The identity crisis of the novel possess two visions, the sense of looking at ones's self through the eye of another (others), measuring one's soul that amused contempt and pity. But it is clear that their identity is divided in to several parts like difficult, impossible, unified identity and exile life.

The novel also portrays that struggle with double vision and double consciousness.

Vision-the way of approach in the society.

Consciousness-the inner feelings that reconcile the two cultures that compose their Identity.

In one aspect they see India as a homeland on the otherhand. They where they belong thinks America as their place, where they reinvent themselves. In order to survive in the family of white, they begin to internalize the pride and the prejudice and the values given against the minorities and considered themselves as inferior.

At the point of time the mind of the diasporian begins to shape by stereo type from the main society .finally. It is considered as a half-heaven as self-hate and self-debase.The attitudes of the first-generation immigrants are seen more American than their parents. ABCD- here refers to American Born Confused Desis. They should also face the challenges people who live in an alien land. When Ruma decided to marry Adam, an American, and her mother opposes and says,

“You are ashamed of yourself, of being Indian ,that is the bottom line”(Lahiri,26),A sense of isolation haunts Ruma even though she is bold enough to make her own choices. Here thus, Ruma and Usha presents how they struggle to develop an identity of their own, which is the amalgamation of both cultures. But the first generation Ruma’s father and Aparna are able to remember vividly a “home” back in India.

Here in this story ‘A choice of Accommodations’ dealt with displacement of marital life on the backdrop of the diasporic milieu. it is an experience of fear and nervousness. A story of interracial couple ,Amity and Megan attend the wedding of Amity’s college crush Pam Borden at blurt school, Langford Academy .The rising stress in their marriage discloses to the strangers at a wedding party collapsed after the birth of his two daughters .

Amit a rich son of Bengali parents, he had a privileged high class education in s boarding-school in America. HE DOES NOT HAVE CONFIDENT and is anxious and extremely nervous about himself.

Feels no memories towards his alma mater and does not keep any contact with his old friends. In all anticipated situations; he would obviously do something foolish and rash or thoughtless which would result in the girls ‘perishing under his supervision.

The generational gap on the issues of language and dress code. Has also been dealt in the story. The second generation, usha expatriate feels at home in English as she informs; ‘Deborah and I spoke freely in English ,a language in which, by that age, I express myself more easily than Bengali ,which i was required to speak at home’.(Lahiri ,2009:69)

The first generation never concerns to master the grammar of the language of their adopted land despite their stay therefore quite long time. In the matter of dress, usher is too enraged with her mother for making a scene before they left the house for the occasion of thanks giving as she forced her to wear a shalwar kameez. She was reluctant to do for an outing with her peer group in Indian dress as she felt at ease in the jeans.

### **Conclusion:**

This research paper gives an overall view of multiculturalism present in the novel. In future the result can analyse the self-esteem, self-actualization and self-identity of the characters present in the novel. Then the cultural conflicts can be analyzed by the theme of immigrants and their suffering for the search of identity. Also, the researcher may find out the adiasporic elements present throughout the novel.

The assimilation of culture and the values, at the same time it gives a new understanding and new identities ,spaces for growth ,resolution of conflicts and a new culture. Lahiri conveys even though they were living as immigrant for many years, they could not attain the belongingness.

The whole novel is finding out the identity, and the cultural differences that the second generation immigrants face the tragedy of losing their original identity

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