



DIASPORIC ISSUES OF INCOMPATIBILITY IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THIS BLESSED HOUSE*

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Abstract: Diaspora writing frequently addresses the issue of losing one's own identity. The main characters in Diaspora literature go through a special type of transition where diverse languages and cultures mix and become something new. This paper presents the diasporic theme of incompatibility in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story *This Blessed House* which chronicles a brief moment in the lives of two characters, Sanjeev and Twinkle. The conflict between these characters stems from the collision of their two very different personalities in an unusual situation. They are two Indian immigrants who are able to function effectively in American society by blending in rather readily with the dominant culture, while their Indianness is never in question either, according to Lahiri's portrayal of them.

Index Terms – Diaspora, culture, identity, immigration, hybridity

Jhumpa Lahiri is both a migrant and a Diaspora writer because she is the child of Indian immigrants and travels across boundaries when she moves from England, where she was born, to America. In her works, she writes on the Indian Diaspora and tells tales that illustrate the ambiguity of the notion of identity and cultural uniqueness in the Diaspora. *Interpreter of Maladies*, a collection of short stories by Lahiri, has received a lot of positive reviews from critics all over the world. As Lahiri's characters enter new developmental stages, *Interpreter of Maladies*, one of her fictional works, breaks away from her earlier original ethos. *This Blessed House* is one of the stories in the collection of *Interpreter of Maladies*. A married couple is shown in an American environment in this short story. After only four months of marriage, Sanjeev and Twinkle are essentially incompatible in every manner. The couple is a representation of two distinct diasporic traits of people who are second generation immigrants. Sanjeev and Twinkle's adaptation to a different culture and set of beliefs is the subject of this story. The dual diasporic identities have an impact on Twinkle, a representative of second-generation immigrant women. Twinkle enjoys her positive hybridity, which also offers her an edge over the other characters. Sanjeev, a displaced person, wishes to retain his true identity. Lahiri explores the complications of an arranged marriage and the adjustments to be made to accommodate two completely different personalities within any relationship.

In contrast to Sanjeev, Twinkle adapted to the host culture and did so without much difficulty. While Sanjeev is a manager in a company and a prime example of the brain drain of the new Indian Diaspora who adheres to the traditional and religious feelings, Twinkle is a balanced new generation woman who accepts happy assimilation within the American background and has finished her Master's degree thesis. After being married and moving into a new home, the couples have disagreements about religious issues. Twinkle observed numerous religious items left by the previous owners in the house, including postcards, crosses, posters, and statues of Christ. In fact, Twinkle feels that "This house is blessed" because of these lovely and hospitable objects. Sanjeev, however, wants them to be thrown away and finds his wife's attitude to be childish. Sanjeev constantly telling her that "we are not Christian", despite her best efforts to persuade him to retain the items around the house. The harmony of their love is disturbed by the disagreement in their perspectives towards the emblems of Christ. The omniscient third-person narrator makes clear the two opposing viewpoints:

"Oh, Sanj." Twinkle groaned. "Please. I would feel terrible throwing them away."

Obviously they were important to the people who used to live here. It would feel, I don't know, sacrilegious or something." "If they're so precious, then why are they hidden all over the house? Why didn't they take them with them? (IOM 138)

Twinkle's nonchalant approach towards such crucial issues endangers Sanjeev's sense of cultural belonging. Sanjeev feels unwelcome in his own home, just like migrant workers do when they are abroad:

He was getting nowhere with her, with this woman whom he had known for only four months and with whom he shared his life. He thought with flicker of regret of the snapshots his mother used to send him from Calcutta, of a prospective of brides who could sing and sew and season lentils without consulting a cookbook. (IOM 146).

Sanjeev feels guilty for marrying Twinkle at this point. Despite residing in America, it is the picture-perfect expression of his traditional and Indian nature. Sanjeev is a representation of immigrants who uphold their traditions while living abroad. They always yearn to return to their ancestral home through rituals, customs, and remembrances. When living in such a diasporic environment, people adopt hybrid identities that are constantly negotiated and bounce between the present and the past. The tension that results from feeling both a part of and an outsider in a certain area and culture is a defining trait of Lahiri's characters. Twinkle and Sanjeev have adapted to the local culture in many ways, yet they are still Hindus. A point of friction between the two is the presence of Christian items in the home. Twinkle seems unconcerned about this, but Sanjeev disapproves of anyone claiming to be a Christian. He wants everyone to know that they are not Christians at the housewarming party, although Twinkle's ironic statement that they are "good little Hindus" suggests that she has no real interest in religion.

It is clear that Sanjeev is more conscious of his Indian roots than Twinkle is. They honeymooned in India, which demonstrates that they still feel some emotional ties to their native country. The fact that majority of the guests at the housewarming party are Indians is further indication of their affinity for India and the Indian immigrant community. Several of the women get up dressed in "their finest saris, crafted from gold filigree and draped in graceful pleats over their shoulders." (IOM 152). By the end of the gathering, a bust of Christ, the Christian religion's representation of the divine, has garnered more curiosity than anything Indian. Sanjeev is shown bringing the silver bust, against his better judgement, to the living room, where Twinkle has requested it be placed on the mantel. Sanjeev eventually learns to balance, as evidenced by his being "careful not to let the feather hat slip" (IOM 157) from the statue when it slowly follows his wife. This is either one of Sanjeev's final attempts to win over his wife or, in the opposite scenario, a sign that their character differences will eventually be balanced out and that Sanjeev will eventually adopt Twinkle's more spontaneous and playful approach to life.

The story serves as an example of how young Indian emigrants can adjust to a new society and set of beliefs. The fundamental cultural differences between Indian and Western American cultures have an impact on human relationships in a diasporic predicament. The best thing about Lahiri's story is that it focuses on how Sanjeev and Twinkle's adaptation and mutual understanding lead to their happy marriage. While it explores the emotional and cultural tension between a Hindu husband and his opposition to his wife's attraction to Christmas artifacts, the story captures our way of thinking. Yet, as Meenu Kumari pointed out, there has not anything to do with religious differences in thought; rather, it is the delicateness of individual opinion that makes up the whole issue:

The story arrests our attention as it records the emotional and cultural clash between a Hindu husband and his dislike for his wife's fascination for Christmas artefacts. But in reality, it is nothing about the religious divide, but it is the subtlety of human feelings that makes up everything. (75)

Hence *This Blessed House* shows the clash of two extremely dissimilar personalities in an unexpected circumstance and this is what causes the conflict between these people. According to Lahiri's characterization of them, they are two Indian immigrants who are able to integrate successfully into American culture by flinching easily with the prevailing culture, and their Indianness is never in doubt either.

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