

Negotiating Roots and Routes in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that

1. The thesis titled “Negotiating Roots and Routes in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies*” is my own original work while completing my postgraduate degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

This thesis, titled “Negotiating Roots and Routes in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies*,” submitted by Meheraj Rubayat Islam (23263003) of Fall 2025, has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master's of Arts in English on January 7, 2026.

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Abstract

The research paper examines the representation of South Asian diasporic experiences in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, focusing on the struggle between cultural backgrounds and migratory paths as a negotiation. Drawing on theories of hybridity and alterity in a postcolonial context, particularly in the work of Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said, the investigation explores how identity is articulated and put under stress and reconfiguration (redefinition) by displacement, memory, and cultural encounter. Based on qualitative textual analysis, the dissertation uses four chosen stories, specifically: "A Temporary Matter", "Interpreter of Maladies", "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine", and "The Third and Final Continent" to explore emotional turmoil, psychological complexity, and cultural dilemma that first and second-generation Indian immigrants face in the United States. The characters in Lahiri's stories exist in the interworld, where they are uncertain of their identity, and it keeps shifting. Movement and migration are part of their identity rather than residing in a particular place. The immigrants of the first generation draw power from the recollection of their homeland and cultural heritage, that enable them to survive in new surroundings. In comparison, the second-generation needs to seek belonging differently and, in most cases, in scattered and challenging social and cultural networks. The psychological impacts of migration and resettlement, which include the sensation of loss, longing, fear, and resilience, are also exposed by the stories. Lahiri's examination of interiors, the unstated, austerity, and metonymic objects all contribute to this sharp portrayal of cultural struggle and emotional negotiation. Overall, the study shows how diasporic identities in Lahiri's writings are formed in the relationship between inherited cultural pasts and migration experiences. The work also contributes more broadly to

diaspora and identity studies by its attention to the affective dimensions and lived experiences of transnational lives.

Keywords: Diaspora; Hybridity; Cultural Memory; Migration; Postcolonial Identity; Transnationalism; South Asian Literature.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Migration has been a tremendous movement of the late 20th and 21st centuries, which has changed the cultural, political, and social arrangements all over the globe. Transference of mankind between national, cultural, and language environments has not only impacted the life of the communities hit by it, but it has also influenced the inner emotional/psychological discourses of the individuals. This scenario of diaspora and translocation generates new selves, mixed cultures, and complicated ownership processes, which become the basis of a diasporic literature. Indeed, so have writers from formerly colonized situations around the world who have met this new global mobility where it stands, chronicling how migrants manage to live with either or both their “roots” (the historical, familial and cultural ties that bind them back to a place) and/or their “routes” (the moved journeys and adaptations they are forced into in new places). Jhumpa Lahiri, a British-American writer, has emerged as a remarkable figure who has contributed phenomenally to the project of framing migration, cultural alienation, and identity construction in contemporary literature.

Lahiri’s (1999) *Interpreter of Maladies*, winner of the 2000 Pulitzer Prize, absorbs diasporic living with an acute emotional sensibility. Although a volume of short stories, its narratives construct an integrated thematic universe based on the lives of Indian immigrants in the United States and their recollections, histories and affective connections with India. Through characters on the hyphen between two cultures, Lahiri dramatizes the dilemmas of assimilation, alienation, cultural memory, and the emotional burden of multiple identities. These stories show

how the immigrants navigate their identity between the past and present, tradition and modernity, home and host country. For Stuart Hall, diasporic subjects must reckon with “the recognition that identities are never unified and stable but always in process” (394).

The idea of “negotiating roots and routes” directly addresses this condition. ‘Roots’ are a common memory, culture, and kinship along with the past of a nation in its diasporic selves. These roots act as an anchor, an emotional centre of gravity that the migrants carry with them. ‘Routes’, in its turn, glorifies physical, emotional, intellectual, and psychological approaches to new experiences, possibilities, and cultural landscapes. As James Clifford remarks, “though the condition of being rooted defines diaspora, so do the routes through which people travel, circulate, and imagine themselves” (251). These intersecting tracks that Lahiri's characters move on are places that collide in some instances more than they complement one another.

Postcolonial theory offers a good perspective on theorizing these negotiations. The concept of ‘hybridity’ presented by Homi K. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* explains that identities are produced in the “third space” between cultures, where people are in a continual state of self-reworking and self-negotiation (55). Lahiri does not show her characters as fully a part of one culture or totally out of another. They do not belong to a specific cultural or national group. . Rather, her characters develop mixed (hybrid) identities that enable them to endure, oppose, or overcome the influence of fixed identities enacted by society. Similarly, Edward Said's book, *Orientalism*, also plays a significant role in the orientalism of the South Asian immigrants who are faced with orientalist views that try to define or essentialize them (2). These paradigms can be used to explain how Lahiri's characters compromise their opposing cultural needs, personal desires, and their exterior representations.

The South Asian diaspora, or, more importantly, the Indian diaspora, has played a paradigmatic role in the English literature of the world. The transnational mobility of people increased during the late twentieth century, allowing Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, and Jhumpa Lahiri to assert the phenomenon of displacement and trans-culturation as a characteristic feature of immigrant writing. Lahiri is not just distinct in this collection; she is distinguished by her sly and nuanced depictions of the mundane. Rather than dramatize large-scale confrontations, her stories shed light on small battles of intimate understanding between husbands and wives, the quotidian isolation experienced by immigrants, the misinterpretations that spark across cultures, and the personal arrangements people strike in order to survive emotionally in unrecognizable terrain.

“A Temporary Matter”, “Interpreter of Maladies”, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, and “The Third and Final Continent”, some of the richest stories in the collection depict memory as it is contorted by migration. They provide portraits of human beings for whom life and interests manifest themselves more “(...) as a homing desire,” in Avtar Brah’s words, ‘than as a homeland’ (192). That longing represents the longing for home and family, for continuity in a life shattered by exile. Lahiri’s stories point to the contradiction of diaspora: the desire for home, the fear of cultural erasure, the joy in reclaiming a heritage, and the pain of learning to survive in an unfamiliar world.

Within this framework, the current thesis examines the way in which Lahiri’s subjects attempt to deal with the dialectic tension between their roots, cultural, emotional, and historical, on the one hand, and their estranged routes, migration, displacement, and cultural transformation, on the other. From a postcolonial perspective, the study explores how Lahiri represents the inner

landscape of being an immigrant that, in turn, sheds new light on related discussions about identity, hybridity, and belonging within diaspora studies.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It has been noted in scholarly observation that displacement, alienation, and assimilation have become recurring motifs in Lahiri's fiction, but little if any focus has been made on the aspect of having to negotiate concurrently cultural anchors and migratory paths within the ambit of postcolonial hybridity. Existing research largely considers the stories as individual studies of immigrant life rather than part of a network of narratives that collectively chart emotional and psychological struggles over identity. Scholars like Rupal Sarkar look at the "ambivalence" in Lahiri's characters (147), and Supriya Patil discusses language being a "bridge and barrier for immigrants" (201). But how characters renegotiate their identities in the liminal spaces between originating and receiving cultures remains largely unexamined.

Another deficit is the lack of "hybridity" in Bhabha and "Otherness" in Said to accompany the close readings of Lahiri's chosen stories through the mentioned theorists. Although these theories are often casually referred to, no systematic investigation has been conducted of their relevance to Lahiri's narrative techniques, character construction, and themes. The central question concerns how Lahiri creates a literary "third space" that mirrors the migrant's partial assimilation and fractured self.

Consequently, the main concern of this project is the absence of a model that holistically integrates postcolonial theory, diaspora studies, and narrative analysis to investigate how characters in Lahiri's works navigate between space and place. This thesis attempts to remedy this

lacuna by offering a systematic, theoretically framed reading of some of the stories from *Interpreter of Maladies*.

1.3 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the characters in *Interpreter of Maladies* negotiate their postcolonial identities between their Indian heritage and their experiences in the United States?
2. In what ways does Lahiri represent hybridity and the creation of “in-between” identities in the selected stories?
3. How do themes of diaspora, displacement, and cultural memory shape Lahiri’s portrayal of roots and routes?
4. What narrative strategies does Lahiri employ to depict the emotional and psychological dimensions of the immigrant experience?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze how Lahiri’s characters negotiate their identities between cultural roots and migratory routes
2. To explore hybridity as a central concept in interpreting Lahiri’s portrayal of cultural conflict and identity formation

3. To examine how diaspora, displacement, and cultural memory inform the thematic structure of the selected stories
4. To evaluate Lahiri's narrative strategies, such as symbolism, characterization, and language, in depicting diasporic identity

1.5 Scope of the Study

As stated before, this study analyses four selected short stories from Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. "A Temporary Matter", "Interpreter of Maladies", "When Mr. Pirzada came to dine", and "The Third and Final Continent" in terms of close textual and thematic reading. These four stories are selected for their more direct connection with the main themes of diaspora, cultural negotiation, and identity construction are found in the thesis work on "roots and routes." The narratives are analysed in the context of postcolonial hybridity and diaspora theory, with a main focus on Bhabha and Said. It does not attempt to give a detailed analysis of the works of Lahiri, nor does it reach her subsequent novels or other literature. The focus here is on literary readings, not empirical research or fieldwork. Thus, this study adopts a limited framework on selected stories and theoretical concepts in which it could have a manageable direction to comprehend how Lahiri represents the issues of identity, migration, and cultural clash.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study has its relevance as it enriches our understanding of the presentation of questions of identity and belonging in migratory contexts in contemporary South Asian diasporic literature.

The analysis also sheds new light on the emotional and psychological status of immigrant arrival through the readings of stories by Lahiri through the prism of the postcolonial theories of hybridity and cultural negotiation. It contributes new knowledge to the research corpus and shows how the characters of Lahiri's stories manage the challenges between their cultural inheritance and accommodating structures that arise during the process of dispossession and absorption. The study also places *Interpreter of Maladies* in the context of broader discussions of multiculturalism, transnational identity, and diasporic experiences. More so, within the framework of a literary critique, it provides an interpretation of how Lahiri incorporates subtle narration techniques such as symbolism, silence, memory, and daily gestures of interaction to illustrate the immigrant experience. Overall, the work could be seen as a contribution to the academic discourse in the field of postcolonial studies, diaspora studies, and modern world literature because it provides a narrower theory-driven reading of the fiction written by Lahiri.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The basis of this research paper is the postcolonial theory and diaspora studies, with some of the major concepts used being the theory of 'hybridity' suggested by Homi K Bhabha and the critique of *Orientalism* by Edward Said. The idea of the 'third space' offered by Bhabha is especially useful in discussing how characters in *Interpreter of Maladies* played the role of interpreting between their cultural background and the forces of their new environment. Within this liminal setting, people develop hybrid identities that do not fully belong to their indigenous culture or fully become a part of the dominant culture. This paradigm is necessary to test the internal conflict and bargaining problems of the protagonists of Lahiri as they debate about being homeless and being at home. The concept of satire on the Medieval and Renaissance traveling

records is enhanced by the ideas of Said regarding Orientalism that criticize the way the West creates and constructs the East as Other. This viewpoint assists in understanding external pressures, stereotypes, and cultural misrecognitions that are frequently faced by immigrants in diaspora. In addition, the works of theorists Hall and Clifford are used to provide a theoretical framework, with Hall referring to identities as fluid and always in the process of being made, while Clifford suggests that diaspora is rooted in routes and movement. These theoretical stances, overall, offer a detailed groundwork on which to scrutinize struggles and negotiations in cooperative as well as individual identity formation that Lahiri depicts within the migratory/multicultural universe.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Several key terms are used in this study to frame the analysis of identity and migration in *Interpreter of Maladies*. ‘Diaspora’ is the process of sending the citizens of their native land out and maintaining their emotional, cultural, or linguistic connection with it. The concept of ‘hybridity’ presented in the postcolonial theory refers to the construction of new identities that are the result of the interaction between cultures, and are usually influenced by the history of colonization or migration. ‘Third space’ is the in-between cultural space linked to Bhabha, which refers to the space where hybrid identities are created and where people are shaping the set of conflicting values in different cultural backgrounds. ‘Cultural roots’ are those traditions, memories, and values that one inherits from their homeland, but ‘routes’ are the experiences of movement, adapting to the new environment, and transforming. ‘Otherness’ refers to the act of dominant cultures defining some groups of people as fundamentally distinct or lesser, and it becomes unequal power relations. Lastly, ‘diasporic identity’ refers to the changeable, shifting sense of identity that

is created by displacement, nostalgia, and cultural negotiation, and the difficulty of belonging into a place and place.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Postcolonial Theory: An Overview

Postcolonial theory emerged in the second half of the 20th century, attempting to describe and then critique the cultural aftermath of colonialism. It looks at how processes of colonial rule continue beyond political independence, and seeks to understand how postcolonial societies negotiate questions of identity, representation, and cultural authority. Ground-breaking voices such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha spearhead the new studies in focusing squarely on the psychological trauma of colonization, the politics of representation, and hybridity. Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* famously diagnosed the maladies of racial self-hatred inscribed through colonial subjugation (11). Orientalism posited how Western rhetoric conceived the East as exotic, primitive, and an inferior other, in order to justify imperialist domination (Said 5). Building on such criticism, Spivak analysed the silencing of subaltern (here: female) voices in colonial and patriarchal settings ("Can Subaltern Speak?" 287). Post-colonialism, therefore, provides a means of describing power relations and the identity disunity, cultural frustration, and negotiation that form an implicit aspect of the history of those societies that premise their past on that of settlement or colonial empire.

A theoretical model for this purpose is already overdue, not just for making sense of the problems that arise in recent diasporic writing, but also those focusing on home culture and new space. Colonialism has established a second boundary, which defines the experiences of contemporary immigrants, especially exiles resident in Western countries. Robert J.C. Young also suggests that the effects of colonialism become embedded in memory and culture even after formal

decolonization. The postcolonial theory of diasporic applies the previous analytic framework, postcolonialism, to explore how Asian migrants resist and accept against Western discourses and visual representations as well as their cultural center. For example, post-colonial identity “is understood as a negotiation between historical memory and the exigencies of the present” (Loomba 124). This negotiation is evident in the emotional, psychological, and cultural battles depicted in Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction. As such, postcolonial theory offers rich resources for reading the politics of power, identity, and cultural hybridity.

Indeed, postcolonial scholarship in general, particularly more recent work, is also anxious to stress the mutability rather than fixity or essence of (post-)colonial identities. Ashcroft Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin assert that “postcolonial Identities are always being inflected as people and cultures engage with new environments” (202). And here we are well within the diasporic subject in the making, one constituted precisely by unceasing migration, memory, and cultural negotiation. And even as the postcolonial condition does not end with migration, migrant experiences often ask more questions about ethnicity, belonging, and nationality. Critics such as Benita Parry believe that these continued renegotiations of identity are reflected in postcolonial literature and the characters who inhabit the cultural border zone (85). This fluidity is central to what Lahiri considers in *Interpreter of Maladies*, for dislocations are typical among the identities in which her characters find themselves over and over again not so much sheared off from home as severed less by actual geography than by feeling and tradition.

2.1.1 Hybridity and Cultural Negotiation in Postcolonial Theory

One of the most pervasive concepts in postcolonial studies is Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha contends that "cultural identity is neither stable nor pure but generated through mechanisms of engagement, translation, and negotiation" (37). Hybridity is produced in this, what he calls the "third space", an area where edges of cultures are negotiated and intercultural or new identities are established (55). "Third space", for Bhabha, is thus subversive in nature because it undermines the authenticity of dominant cultures by revealing their lack of permanence. Hybrid formations thus upset the essentialist meanings of cultural authenticity.

Hybridity in Bhabha is key to how immigrants in literature can occupy two worlds at once. Hybridity, as scholars like Jonathan Rutherford argue, can be conceived of as a "space that is productive for rearticulating cultures" (9) rather than simple mixing. This reading illustrates some aspects of how hybrid identities actively reshape cultural significations instead of simply consuming them. Diaspora life is one of lived hybridity; everyday choices, feelings, and social interface are shaped by difference. That is why, according to Pnina Werbner, "the diasporic communities are more likely to accept hybridity as a survival and adjustment strategy as a way of intermediary between tradition and modernity" (14). This is seen more prominently in South Asian diasporic fiction, where the characters are always caught between the cultural ideologies of their ancestral country and those of Western society.

In this regard, the notion of 'third space' proposed by Bhabha can be used as an effective means to analyze immigrants in *Interpreter of Maladies* by Lahiri who do not completely integrate into American culture, or who do not completely stay in the Indian society. The stories of Lahiri show how immigrants are hybrid in the negotiation of cultures and the disintegration of emotions. Opponents like Vijay Mishra have argued that "the characters of Lahiri live in a condition of

diasporic melancholy, a feeling of emotional displacement accelerated by the issue of hybrid identity” (32). The compromises of the characters reflect the idea of Bhabha, who says that “identity is produced through the continuous questioning and rephrasing” (114). Hybridity, in turn, offers a convenient frame of analysis of voices of the in-between that emerge in the stories of Lahiri.

2.1.2 Edward Said’s Orientalism and the Construction of “Otherness.”

Edward Said, in his analysis of *Orientalism*, examines how the cultural ‘Other’ or the East is constructed in the discourses of colonialism by the use of stereotypes, misrepresentations, and unequal power relations. According to Said, the Western theories of epistemology formed dichotomies between civilized/savage and rational/irrational (6). There are also long-term impacts of the image on populations residing in the postcolonial world, and specifically on the Western immigrants who reside today around orientalist stereotypes in their everyday lives. Said’s paradigm focuses on the politics of representation and the struggle between self-identification and identification under dominant cultures.

The other publications by such scholars as Peter Childs and Patrick Williams continue the analysis of the effect of Orientalism on the contemporary media, cultural narratives, and social perception of immigrant communities, provided by Said (196). These images shape the ways in which diasporic subjects are seen and how they see themselves. Hall contends that not only is cultural identity formed through common history, but also in the way people are positioned by dominant discourses (393). Hence, Orientalism offers a new perspective for interpreting South Asian immigrants’ marginality and their stereotyping in popular culture.

Said's theories may be held specifically against Lahiri's depiction of immigrant characters that have to negotiate Western stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings. Critics, including Deepika Bahri, claim that "Lahiri's fictions subversively criticize Western clichés of South Asian identity by showing her characters are always perceived as alien or exotic despite all their efforts at trying to adapt" (63). Orientalist assumptions frequently govern the relationships between Lahiri's characters and the American social world as well. Lahiri's immigrants, for instance, experience moments of misrecognition that highlight their otherness. These experiences seem to confirm Said's argument that the West builds the Other as a known category, limiting its understanding (57). Hence, Orientalists paradigm is used in this thesis to read external forces that act upon identity construction in Lahiri's stories.

2.2 Hybridity and Identity in Postcolonial Contexts

Hybridity is seen as a key contributor to the shaping of identity in postcolonial and diasporic situations. Identity is not treated as an identity, something concrete and fixed, but rather as a process, created in relation to the historical, social, and cultural. Identity. This fluid identity is in line with Bhabha's concept of hybrid identities taking place within the third space, where cultural borders become permeable. Immigrants are often negotiating between different cultural demands, and their identities can be layered, shifting, and at times contradictory.

Paul Gilroy's work and that of other scholars emphasize the significance of movement and intercultural transfer in the constitution of identity, notably amongst Black Atlantic and diasporic communities (17). Similarly, Clifford highlights the importance of routes rather than roots for diasporic identity and argues that "identity is formed by difference and displacement, not by

ontological essence; it is a product of migration, memory (and forgetting), and cultural translation" (251). These narratives imply that identity is not created by a static attachment to one origin but by movements between multiple places.

Hybridity among South Asian diasporic groups is frequently associated with emotional and psychological ambivalences. Anita Desai suggests that "it opens possibilities for both reinvention and cultural discord" (1994: 102). Immigrants are pulled between belonging and alienation, tradition and adaptation. Avtar Brah's notion of 'homing desire' more clearly defines the emotional dimension of diaspora, that is to say, "between the literal homeland and the desire for a familiar space and cultural fixity"(192). This wish drives hybridized identities, constructed through fragmentation, nostalgia, and negotiation.

Lahiri's writing reflects the intricacies that are talked about by Rupal Sarkar and other critics. They say that Lahiri's characters are "negotiated selves" that have been shaped by the impact of hybrid cultures (147). Similarly, Sikita Banerjee states that Lahiri's short stories depict the delicate struggle of keeping one's culture while at the same time adapting to a new social environment (78). The hybrid identities in *Interpreter of Maladies* embody how postcolonial immigrants experience the whims of "culture" as they mediate and juxtapose the questions of continuity and change. Their narratives also exemplify Hall's claim that identity is always in process, constantly being produced and reproduced by both the individual and society.

2.3 Diaspora, Migration, and Cultural Negotiation

Since its publication in 1989, Bruce Robbins's *The Servant's Hand* has served as an excellent starting point for discussions about the historical, cultural, and political significance of

migration. Although diaspora, traditionally defined as involuntary displacement, has evolved in modern scholarship to include voluntary movement and transnationality identities. Authors, such as Rogers Brubaker, assert that “diaspora concerns a 'relationship between homeland, host land and dispersed communities” (6). These triangular dynamic influences the way migrants conceptualize home, belonging, and identity. Diasporic identity, therefore, is formed by a dual mode of attachment and displacement.

Migration creates new cultural environments with which it is necessary to negotiate and adjust. William Safran catalogs the attributes of diaspora communities: "memory of the homeland, myth(s) of return, physical and/or psychological return to homeland, maintenance and development of links with the homeland...; ethnocentrism; commitment to a renovation in cultural life” (84). But recent theorists tend, instead, to stress mobility and fluidity over essentialized identity. Arjun Appadurai’s theory of “global ethnoscares” underscores the constant movement of people that builds and rebuilds cultural borders (33). What Steven Vertovec informs us is that diaspora is not just scattered people; it’s bodies of people with the “multi-local attachments” (281). These are the theoretical notions that can account for immigrants’ cultural complexity in Lahiri’s stories.

Negotiation with cultures is imperative as far as the life of diaspora is concerned, and this includes how to adapt to new cultural values and, at the same time, preserve their own inherited cultures. Robin Cohen and other scholars claim that “diaspora identities are formed through the dualism of heritage culture versus the host- land cultural expectations” (130). Immigrants may take the cultural practices they have come with and put them in a new light, which might lead to hybrid identities. This negotiation of identities usually results in an emotional balancing act where people

adjust to the expectations of their family while following their own personal goals in a different environment.

In the literary world, the diaspora stories mostly dwell on the themes of nostalgia, alienation, and fragmentation, besides also focusing on the aspects of cultural shame. Mishra argues that the diasporic writing is frequently about “loss, longing, and the prospect of re-rooting” (45). Lahiri’s works are a prime example of this pattern, with her characters grappling with the multifold lines that make up their emotional universe and thus moving them from nostalgia for home to the struggle in the host country they are now residing in. Scholars such as Anshuman Mondal believe that Lahiri’s characters are situated in “liminal zones” where their sense of belonging is always questioned (62). And such negotiations are pivotal in determining the emotional and psychic landscapes of *Interpreter of Maladies* as well.

2.4 Previous Studies of Jhumpa Lahiri

Jhumpa Lahiri has been the focus of analysis for her depiction of immigrant identities, cultural conflicts, and the merging of identity. Initially, researchers have mostly associated Lahiri with assimilation, alienation, and cross-cultural interactions. For example, Madhurima argues that “Lahiri’s stories powerfully reflect the 'psychological fragmentation' of those immigrants who find themselves amid several cultural frameworks” (120). In her view, Lahiri belongs to a bigger postcolonial debate about displacement and belonging.

Many reviewers have used postcolonial vocabulary to describe the drift of Lahiri’s works. Rupal Sarkar studies the manner in which Lahiri’s characters “negotiate hybridized cultural identities and exist in Bhabha’s invigorating third-space”, mainly in the stories concerning

“transcultural relationships” (149). She argues that “Lahiri’s stories analyse the ambivalence and cultural in-betweenness, which are the main aspects of the diasporic life”. Supriya Patil discusses language and silence as components in building the immigrant identity and proposes that communicative lacunae in Lahiri's works serve as a symbol of cultural deracination (203). Her story portrays how language gets intertwined with identity and how it becomes the vehicle for selfhood.

These aspects of migration, memory, and nostalgia become not only themes but also the main topics of essays on Lahiri. Banerjee compares Lahiri’s characters with those “caught in a ‘conflict of attachment,’ torn between longing for home and accommodation” (80). Similarly, Mondal agrees that Lahiri represents migration as “constant negotiation and emotional pendulum swinging” rather than stable identity (66). Both works focus on the emotional layers that the characters of Lahiri possess.

The topics related to the family and the passing of generations have been investigated as well. Fakrul Alam, for example, describes the experiences of the first and second-generation immigrants regarding identity and states that Lahiri’s stories are “setting issues of generation within the frame of cultural negotiation” (54). Priti Chandan deals with the analysis of marriage and intimacy in Lahiri’s works, but he finds that emotional distance is one of the impacts of cultural displacement in married relationships, which can be furthered by the case of married relationships (29). The themes in Lahiri’s stories comprise not only gender and identity, but also the issues of the clash of cultures.

Researchers have also analyzed the narrative techniques of Lahiri. Leela Dhingra points out how Lahiri wields quiet symbolism like food, objects, and gestures to represent cultural negotiation (112). Lahiri’s spare style, Gitanjali Roy says, reflects the quiet anguish of immigrant

existence (73). These readings shed light on the narrative tactics that have made Lahiri's work so appealing across cultures.

Overall, previous studies illustrate that Lahiri's fiction is a substantial part of South Asian diaspora writing. However, much of the current research takes hybridity, identity, nostalgia, and communication as separate items instead of considering their mutual formative roles in shaping roots and routes.

2.5 Gaps in the Existing Literature

In spite of the significant amount of criticism of Lahiri, there are numerous lacunae. By and large, investigations of identity, hybridity, and displacement tend to be undertaken as independent, self-contained themes that are not fully incorporated within an overarching structure of negotiating roots/routes. Although scholars like Sarkar and Patil theorize hybrid identities and linguistic displacement, few explicitly link these themes to the theories of diaspora, which emphasize mobility, memory, and cultural restaging.

Second, a majority of the studies center on Lahiri's novels rather than her short fiction. *Interpreter of Maladies*, while popularly read, has not consistently prompted as much theoretical richness as *The Namesake* or *Unaccustomed Earth*. This opens up the chance to present short stories as part of a broader postcolonial and diasporic spectrum.

Third, there is relatively little published scholarship that has systematically linked Said's Orientalism with Bhabha's "third space" in a single framework of analysis. These theories are applied as separate ones and less in contexts and foreground both internal negotiation (hybridity) and external representation (otherness). A unified approach has the potential to more clearly

address both internal pressures on immigrants for identity-complexity and external pressures that reduce complex identities to stereotypes.

Fourth, despite this fact, few close readings approach “A Temporary Matter”, “Interpreter of Maladies”, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, and “The Third and Final Continent” in what concerns the four stories as paradigmatic roots-and-routes narratives. These narratives provide fertile ground to understand how emotions and the move towards migration are combined, without, however, being processed in their thematic unity.

Lastly, there is a dearth of sustained discussion regarding narrative strategies such as silence, symbolism, memory, and intimate domestic scenes, which Lahiri employs in the creation of diasporic identity. Although some analysts do consider these features, a more methodical effort that links narrative form and postcolonial theory has not yet emerged.

So, this thesis aims to fill these gaps by adapting postcolonial theory and diaspora studies with close textual analysis in order to chart how Lahiri's characters work between roots and routes via cultural memory, displacement, hybrid identity, as well as narrative strategies.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

It is a qualitative literary analysis. As the paper is on the interpretation of cultural identity, hybridity, migration, and narrative techniques in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, a qualitative method is most suitable to analyze how meaning-making happens through language use, character construction, or any other literary elements like symbolism and thematic type. The research method is based upon close reading, with the help of postcolonial theory and diaspora studies. The aim of the design, however, is not to test hypotheses or "to measure" variables but rather to make meaning and explain how those stories represent negotiations of roots and routes in diaspora. The study is interpretivist, and it seeks to capture storylines and textual subtleties rather than generalize about populations. Such a design enables the investigator to investigate complex crossings of identity, cultural dislocation, nostalgia, and hybrid subjectivity as they are rendered in literary presentation.

3.2 Qualitative Textual Analysis

The methodological tool applied to this thesis is qualitative textual analysis. For this method, the chosen stories are carefully examined to find the common themes, story frameworks, symbolical references, and character archetypes. Textual analysis considers the text as a cultural and ideological product, the characteristics of which mirror the beyond social, historical, and political contexts. Using close reading, the study looks at how Lahiri conveys meaning through the narrative's point of view, imagery, silences, memories, interpersonal interaction, and cultural allusion.

The discussion gives special attention to how characters move between points of cultural origin and migration, opening up for emotional and psychological negotiations. This technique also enables contact with “culturally subtle elements that matter”, including metaphors, tone, gaps in narrative, and descriptive detail in the representation of the diasporic self (Godjak 2013). Qualitative textual analysis thus provides a rich and multilayered reading to Lahiri’s stories in the light of postcolonial and diaspora theories.

3.3 Image of selected stories from *Interpreter of Maladies*

This study examines four stories by Jhumpa Lahiri in her collection *Interpreter of Maladies*: “A Temporary Matter”, “Interpreter of Maladies”, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, and “The Third and Final Continent”. These stories were chosen for their combined clarity and variety of representations of cultural negotiation, psychological alienation, and subject formation among South Asian immigrants. “Temporary Matter” addresses emotional loss, communication failure, and the muted dislocation that comes from living in a foreign culture to us. The story “Interpreter of Maladies” presents the cultural dissonance between the American family and their Indian heritage. The narrative touches upon the themes of loneliness, cultural identity, and the quest for emotional attachment. “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, for instance, examines remembering, ties of home, and the immigrant’s ambivalence about belonging as political turmoil erupts. “The Third and Final Continent” tells a story of cultural assimilation, self-transformation, and the incremental work, so often painful, of self-creation in an unfamiliar place. Comprising these stories that can be read as representing various diasporic relationships of spousal bonding, transgenerational connections, and individual revelation, they are effective readings in the study of root and route negotiation.

3.4 Data Collection

The sources of data used in this work are all text-based primary and secondary sources. The introductory data are the interpreted stories from *Interpreter of Maladies*. Secondary sources consist of scholarly essays, paired with books, dissertations, and books that are focused on the theoretical aspects of post-colonial theory, diaspora studies, and South Asian immigrant narratives, as well as Jhumpa Lahiri's contributions to contemporary literature. Those references came from academic journals, electronic databases, libraries, and reliable internet sources. Secondary data gathered in the study contributes to developing it by way of theoretical relevance, critical approach, and existing interpretation of Lahiri's production. No interviews, questionnaires, or fieldwork data were involved because the research concentrates only on literary reading.

3.5 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework of the present study is mainly based on Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity and Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Bhabha's theory of the "third space" informs how Lahiri's characters manage and navigate cultural identities that are neither embedded in their own native country nor exclusively enmeshed with America. This paradigmatic axis highlights the characteristics of people who have a diaspora background, such as fluidity, openness, and the ability to change their identity, which also shows their inner dialogues when characters move from one culture to another. Affected by Western stereotypes and power dynamics (the dominant narratives), which portray immigrants as cultural "Others," they become the most influenced identities among which Said's *Orientalism* can depict the external forces that form the identity. Together, these models present a good map for grasping not only the mental formation of identity but also the outward portrayal of culture. The models give the researcher a framework to use when

they find the themes of power, cultural memory, displacement, or feeling in Lahiri's works, which is helpful in reading her text from a post-colonial perspective.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Since there were no human participants involved in the study reported in this article, it doesn't need to be reviewed from an ethical point of view. Proper credit has been given to the primary and secondary sources by the use of MLA format, both in-text and in the works cited page, in order to maintain academic honesty and to prevent plagiarism.

Further ethical consideration involves objectivity and transparency in the analysis, avoiding distortion of interpretations, and ensuring that all arguments are supported by reputable sources / sound theoretical reasoning.

Chapter 4

Negotiating Roots and Routes in Lahiri's Work

4.1 Cultural Memory and Indian Roots

Cultural memory is a central moulding force in the identity and feeling space of immigrant characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. Memory is not just remembrance but a set of habits that shape over time, customs, desires, and historical memories that accompany migrants into their new environs. According to Jan Assmann, cultural memory bears the communal past that people transmit from one generation to another (129). For the Indian immigrants in Lahiri's stories, cultural memory provides the mooring that tethered them to home, enabling continuity in displacement. In "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," for instance, Mr. Pirzada holds on to remembrances of his family in Dhaka during the 1971 Liberation War. The routines and rituals that he has about the morning, a regular breakfast time, watching the news, buying a bag of candy to give to Lilia before he leaves for work, and posting letters- represent activities that link him back to his past (Lahiri 26). They are the memories that keep him engaged with his native place despite barriers of geopolitical borders and physical distance. Banerjee have mentioned that Lahiri uses memory not as a passive thing, but an active one, in the hands of the immigrants, which they use to communicate with both their host and home culture, "more significantly" (80).

In the story "The Interpreter of Maladies", Lahiri demonstrates that mere Indian origin is insufficient unless people actively retain and live their culture. This is presented in the contrast between Mr. Kapasi and the Das family. Mr. Kapasi is the embodiment of Indian cultural memory since he is knowledgeable about Indian languages, has traditional values, and is driven by a sense of commitment in his job and personal life. The Das family, on the other hand, are the Indians who

are culturally alien to India. They act like tourists and fail to attempt to learn the country's history, values, and social regulations. This cultural loss is evident in the confession given by Mrs. Das and her affair. She is guilty but is not sure how to cope with her guilt since she has no serious moral or cultural code. She hopes that Mr. Kapasi will resolve her problem, and this demonstrates her inability to make any sense and the absence of emotional fulfilment. To the Das family, India is no more than heritage, whereas to Mr. Kapasi, it is a space that is lived in and experienced. Lahiri is saying that cultural roots should be followed and remembered otherwise people will lose their emotional connection and fail to comprehend the current issues.

Immigrants' act of recalling their past is also a witness to their cultural identity struggle in the world of assimilation. For South Asian immigrants, the memory of their language, food, festivals, and family structures often resists the erasures that come with Western cultural domination. The formation of diasporic identity, according to Clifford, is not only dependent on mobility but also on memory (251). In Lahiri's stories, they are the emotional life raft that the characters cling to. In "The Third and Final Continent," the narrator remembers the early years he spent in London and Calcutta, memories that bind south-Asian immigrant communities recreated in a portrait of the immigrant experience. Characters in Lahiri's works are "negotiating their new lives through the lens of inherited memory" (Mondal 62), and thus, roots are presented as the active forces in the identity framework.

The collective memory of a culture is one aspect that works against assimilation. Hall proposes that identity is formed largely "in the continuing drama of memory, history, and representation" (393). For the diaspora, this conflict of identity is very close because the immigrants have to decide whether to follow the memory of who they were or the image of who they should become that is given to them. In "A Temporary Matter", the figurative nature of Shoba

and Shukumar's shared past, among other things, the heritage of India, becomes the emotional core of their relationship even though their present is marked by grief and alienation. Their cultural memory makes their separation all the more tragic than it would otherwise be. Alam argues that Lahiri uses memory to expose "the inner cracks caused by uprooting" (54).

Furthermore, cultural memory conditions relations between generations. For children born or raised outside of their parents' homeland, exposure to cultural roots might be fragmented and selective because of the lens through which they negotiate with parental memory. Second-generation immigrants often "struggle with negotiating identity outside of the inherited narrative, rather than life lived" (Desai 104). Lilia's idea of Indian and Bangladeshi politics in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" is framed solely by the memories of her parents and the contradictions that she glimpses across American classrooms. They belong to what Brah terms "diasporic genealogy," whose roots are passed down not through direct experience, but through stories and rituals (192). In this way, cultural memory in Lahiri's fiction is not an aesthetic or nostalgic accessory, but rather a form of survival to broker identity, belonging, and emotional integrity under the force of diaspora.

4.2 Migration, Displacement, and Emerging Routes

Migration is a transformative experience in which immigrants are forced to renegotiate their identities. The notion of 'routes', as according to Clifford, is concerned with movement, change, and continual negotiation (256). The process of migration does not happen as a one-time, plainly narrated process to the characters of Lahiri but rather as an active process of reconfiguration due to emotional unsteadiness, cultural conflicts and financial apprehensions. The stories introduce migration as a liberating and disruptive phenomenon, which opens new opportunities but also causes the displacement and alienation of culture.

Lahiri in the story “Interpreter of Maladies” introduces the theme of migration, displacement, and new pathways by giving the readers the impressions and experiences of both the Indian immigrants and the return migrants who cross the borders of India and the United States, but never feel quite at home in either of them. The Das family is the symbol of postcolonial immigration to America: they are ethnically Indian but culturally American, who does not know Indian traditions, language peculiarities, and social norms. Their tour to India is not a journey to ancestry but a type of tourism as it demonstrates how migration may bring distance to cultures instead of belonging. Mr. Kapasi on the other hand has not moved physically but his profession as a tour guide puts him before globalization and diasporic transnational routes daily. He is at the cross between locals and migrants, a translator of not only languages, but also a cultural misunderstanding. Dislocation is both emotional and geographical: Mrs. Das is lonely in her own marriage and own family, and Mr. Kapasi is fantasizing his affiliation out of his restricted social status. The new paths that are taken in the narration, namely, tourism, diaspora travel, and intercultural experiences, substitute the notion of home with the transitional, temporary movement. Lahiri therefore demonstrates that migration does not necessarily result in liberation or realization; on the contrary, it seems to create fragmented lives, miscommunication and silent alienation, exposing the mental price of existing between cultures.

Migration in “The Third and Final Continent” is a journey between a number of national and cultural worlds: the story starts in Calcutta, passes post-war London, and ends up in the United States. This story shows that Vertovec present a concept of multi-local affiliations in the context of diaspora because migrants develop multifaceted attachments to various places. Mrs. Croft's encounter, and the arrival of his wife are experiences demonstrating the fact that new paths bring about hybrid identities. The fact that he envies Mrs. Croft's independence and her discipline is

contrasted with his inner cultural programming, which implies the first step to internalization. However, his continual involvement in Indian traditions, for instance; waiting at the door to offer Mala a small amount of turmeric, makes it clear that his acceptance of new forms of lifestyles does not substitute tradition. Rather, these changes are present alongside profound cultural traditions based on ritual and humility.

Migration has some effects as well in emotional displacement. The subjects of diaspora are supposed to experience that they are neither of the two, neither in the native country nor in the host country, but learn how to manage to be the subject of in-betweenness (Safran 84). This liminality also exists in the “A Temporary Matter” where the life of the couple in America is characterized by being alien, cold hearted and traumatized. They are displaced both personally and culturally, though even more lost since they are not used to the comforting frameworks of the community, they are in. The displacement of emotion is also a hallmark of a diasporic narrative, because as Mishra has proposed “characters in a diasporic narrative struggle with exilic consciousness” (45). Lahiri makes this awareness in the narration of silent gestures, silence at the dinner table, non-communication between spouses, and longing to feel at home in their own culture

Moreover, migration transforms gender. The female characters of Lahiri also feel pain in a more profound way, as being so alien to the cultural norms in the presence of new social forms. In the ‘Third and Final Continent’, by illustration, Mala is forced to adjust not only to a new land but also to a new marriage and an unfamiliar homeland. As Chandan indicates, Lahiri reveals how migration compromises traditional gender roles, hence weakening conjugal relationships. Such displacement of gender contributes to the general complexity of appropriating new paths.

The migration path also consists of social and economic adaptation. In the stories of Lahiri, immigrants take up lives and jobs that are struggling. The central character in the story ‘The Third

and Final Continent' is unnamed and works diligently at a university library, and this fact supports the theory of Appadurai that argues that "migration is not without global meaning and a global desire to get material wealth" (33). But there are the social elements of adaptation, making friends with the neighbors, acquiring Western ways, or effective communication across cultures, that may be more difficult to negotiate.

Lastly, in Lahiri's writing, migration is not the direct path to assimilation that portrays: it is instead a battle, a battle between memory and identity, a battle between cultural friction and the psychosocial adjustments to one's own situation.

4.3 Identity Crisis and Cultural Clashes

The South Asian diasporic literature is based on the problem of identity, which is also a major concern in the way Lahiri describes the life of immigrants. Cultural dissonance occurs when individuals perceive the values of two cultural systems, along with their corresponding norms, laws, or expectations, as incompatible. This diaspora identity is what, according to Hall, "is a constant, a negotiation between similarity and difference" (402). This negotiation is the catalyst of conflict, misunderstanding, and emotional tension among the characters of Lahiri.

Cultural dissonance presents itself as a puzzle of the identity categories imposed to Lilia in American schools in the story 'When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine'. Confined by her teacher that the political situation in Bangladesh had nothing to do with the identity of Lilia, Lilia faces a form of symbolic rejection. According to Childs and Williams, such instances also demonstrate the way in which 'Westerners' can overlook or downplay the histories of immigrants (197). Lilia must negotiate the messages she has absorbed at home with those of her school and ethnic peer

environment. It is this discord that constitutes a gentle but compelling struggle with which she will have to come to terms and integrate into her identity.

And in “A Temporary Matter,” identity conflict plays out at the crossroads of cultural expectation, emotional trauma, and marital insecurity. Shoba and Shukumar grapple not only with grief but with their changing cultural identities. Not keeping in touch with intimacy and communication rituals mirrors their loss of cultural mooring. According to Desai, internalized cultural fracture is accurately represented by Lahiri as a feature of the immigrant situation (102). It is this rupture that the characters’ cultural memory cannot connect to the affective present.

And identity struggles similarly apply to assimilation pressures for immigrants. It is this tension that as Cohen maintains, diaspora populations always have to balance between tradition and absorption of new culture (130). Lahiri’s “The Third and Final Continent” embodies this tension in her narrator’s struggles to negotiate Indian behavioral customs with American ones. His arranged marriage to Mala stands in stark contrast to the casual, individualistic approach of Western culture. This cultural friction at first leads to a gap between the hearts of this couple, only for it to eventually become the cornerstone of hybrid self-identity.

Additionally, academic literature demonstrates that identity battles are played out in language practices, food consumption patterns, social interchanges, and daily choices (Dhingra 115). Lahiri conveys these quiet tensions by showing where her characters refuse to assimilate an American custom or yearn for a familiar cultural practice. Banerjee notes that Lahiri’s fictional characters habitually flux with ambivalence between honor and shame associated with their heritage (79). This oscillation mirrors the cultural contradictions encoded in diasporic identity.

In all of these stories, Lahiri suggests that the conflict of identity is not a passing phase but an ongoing struggle to define oneself within a historical context, social order, and cultural tradition. Her characters embody what Parry terms “the unrested identity of postcolonial subjects” (87). They negotiate their identity not as a set of constants but as an ever-shifting, dynamic negotiation.

4.4 The “Third Space” and Hybrid Identity

The “third space”, hypothesized by Bhabha, is a useful resource for analyzing the cross-cultural identity in Lahiri’s fiction. In the third space, culture is not positioned alongside other cultures, or that gets the better over them and subsumes them under its own; instead, there are interactions and collisions which produce something new, which is different (55). Lahiri’s characters often find themselves in this liminal space where cultural lines are blurred, and new subjectivities begin to form.

In “The Third and Final Continent,” the narrator’s dealings with Mrs. Croft typify this meeting place: a third space of negotiation. Raised in a culture that celebrates collectivism, arranged marriages, and family dependence, he comes to admire Mrs. Croft’s radical independence and uniquely American point of view. Gradually, these experiences reconfigure his own identity, synthesizing the legacy of the past with new cultural values embraced. Rutherford notes, hybridity is a “colorful disruption” where identity becomes re-created in the light of changed circumstances (11). Lahiri’s narrator depicts it as he learns to adapt to American ways without surrendering his Indian heritage.

Similarly, in the story “Interpreter of Maladies”, Mr. and Mrs. Das and their children visit India for a tour. They were born in America, but India is their homeland. They are dressed in shorts, wear sunglasses, and also wear western outfits, even as they are on a tour of rural India.

Their speech, containing an English accent, and their body language underline their alienation from India. They are not emotionally attached to the Indian places they visit. India is considered a tourist destination instead of being a homeland.

Likewise, in “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, the home becomes a scene of hybrid generation. The combination of South Asian dinners, American programming, and diasporic political angst makes the family residence a third space where cultures mix. Lilia is formed in this mix-n-mash environment. Banerjee observes that Lahiri turns to domestic interiors as “a site of crucibles in the process of cultural syncretism” (82). Lilia comes of age, learning to decode the world through indicators from American culture and her parents’ South Asian values so that she becomes a hybrid identity not fully American, but also not wholly Indian.

Shoba and Shukumar in “A Temporary Matter” inhabit a third space, but they must do so with far more emotional electricity. Their house is a liminal space where cultural memory meets the rhythm of modern American life. Their nightly confessions are made possible by the scheduled power outage, and they serve as an emotional third space where suppressed truths, cultural imperatives, and private sorrows meet. Mondal contends that Lahiri paints these spaces as “sites of rupture and potential” (66). This transitional position corresponds to Bhabha’s notion of the third space, where alternative meanings and identities are generated.

Hybrid subjectivity in Lahiri is also a form of resistance. Hybrid identities" question the power of "the sovereign or dominant culture to fix them into unchanging places, to assign them fixed identities" because they represent multiplicity (Hall 401). Lahiri’s characters refuse to be totally assimilated, just because they maintain cultural habits, memories, and values. But they also push back against cultural dogmatism by adopting fresh social identities. And this twofold resistance is a mark of a hybrid subject. Werbner suggests that these hybrid identities are

“diasporic strategies of movement in multicultural worlds” (14). Lahiri’s stories illustrate these tactics through the subtler cultural negotiations her characters perform every day.

Thus, the third space in Lahiri is not just a theoretical construct – it is alive, felt, and always an ongoing experiment. It is the very space where characters negotiate between roots and routes to attain both hybrid identities (and thus reflect) on their diasporic condition.

4.5 Language, Silence, and Emotional Splintering

“Language and silence are the primary rhetorical devices in which Lahiri represents instances of emotional breakdown and cultural negotiation”. Communication, or the lack thereof, often serves as a metaphor for the struggles over identity that take place in diaspora. Language in Lahiri’s fiction, writes Patil, “serves as both a bridge and a barrier” (203). It serves to tether the characters to their cultural roots and, at the same time, underscore the chasm between immigrant experience and mainstream American life.

Emotion is mostly silent in the story, “A Temporary Matter”; the reason as to why Shoba and Shukumar cannot mourn together demonstrates the general cultural and personal displacement of the couple. The difference between their cultural presuppositions about marriage and the emotional alienation brought about by living in America cannot be described in words. Dhingra states that to Lahiri, silence reveals the emotional fault lines of the diasporic relationships (115). Their confessions at night touch on these fault lines briefly, but they in fact only demonstrate their lack of connection.

In “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, the language adopts the trappings of cultural identity. Lilia observes her parents switching between their English and their native languages; their mixed identities are created by the migration. One of the spaces upon which cultural meaning is

negotiated, according to Hall, is language (398). Mr. Pirzada's accented English, his affable gestures, and his habitual anxieties show us what it is like to have linguistic differentiation being bound up with emotional vulnerability. What is more concerning is that such a mispronunciation of South Asian words by Lilia points to the gap between generations in the language inheritance of the diasporas. Such linguistic slippages are appreciated because they show that the diaspora is gradually losing the sustenance of its culture (Desai 106).

Language, in the story "The Third and Final Continent" is the symbol of adaptation and negotiation. The way the narrator talks to the mother in a tight, self-conscious manner, is in contrast to the fluidity in the language of his mother when addressing Mala. It is this code-switching that depicts the two-sided individual Bradley wanders about. Gilroy has it that the diaspora subjects are likely to speak in a way that is a hybridization of forms of language, and this is a noticeable mark that is inculcated along with their cultural flaneuring (29). Lahiri encapsulates this hybridity in the mutations in the language her characters use, and as a result, she brings to the fore the ability of language to be expressive of both connectivity and isolation.

Silence also demonstrates to us how characters solve displacement. The minimalist prose by Lahiri captures the quiet burdens of migration as Roy notes (74). The characters themselves hardly or never declare their alienation; they disclose it in the intervals between their statements, in the conversations without words, in the soliloquies. This lack of story is parallel to the affective silence that most migrants face when they transit through foreign cultural landscapes.

In the story "Interpreter of Maladies", the Das's live a rather loveless marriage; Mr. and Mrs. Das's relationship is depicted as a quiet, habitual indifference through their minimal communication. Their silence isn't a sign of peace; it is a mirror of their emotional disengagement, lack of intimacy, and decay of the familial bonds. Mrs. Das's passive manner of replying to her

husband and children, frequently with delayed or minimal responses, indicates a silent withdrawal from her domestic role. Her secret, the paternity of Bobby, is something that has been bottled up inside her; as a result, the silence has become louder through the years. She hasn't told her husband; she hasn't confessed to anyone until she met their tour guide in India, Mr. Kapasi, to whom she discloses her past. Lahiri employs past silence to depict the consequences of unspoken truths, lack of emotional development, and self-denial.

Finally, language and silence thus come to be a reflection of diasporic division in the form of a narrative. Lahiri reveals the psychological underdog of the immigrant life in them, and depicts how the characters struggle with the roots and routes.

Chapter 5

Close Analysis of Selected Stories

5.1 "A Temporary Matter"

Lahiri's "A Temporary Matter" offers an extraordinarily intimate examination of marital dissolution in a process of diasporic dislocation. While immigration is not explicitly addressed as the moral theme of the story, the characters' emotional arcs are defined by their immigrant existence that further brands them as lost and isolated. Shoba and Shukumar are living through a tragic aftermath of the stillbirth of their child, but this human suffering is interwoven with their experiences as Indian immigrants in Boston. As Desai observes, Lahiri deploys the immigrant condition to amplify the sense of threat and alienation for couples living without extended family support (104). With no community culture to draw from, as in India, Shoba and Shukumar grieve in emotional solitude. Their unimaginative place in the suburbs – desolate of any communal spirit – comes to serve as a symbol for what has become of their marriage. This perhaps most mundane of domestic spaces reflects what Mondal terms the "quiet crises" of diaspora, where personal battles are intensified by an absence of cultural "rootedness" (65). As a result, the narrative is not simply that of marital disintegration but an essay on displacement of the heart.

Following the temporary evening power outage that plunges the couple into darkness, however, and causes them to have sex in a cramped space while trying to kickstart a last-minute construction job, Pass Over then creates this liminal space whereby they might finally speak truths that we know they for years had repressed. The darkness becomes a metaphor for the emotional blinders this couple has on, and their tentative confessions are a way into each other by being vulnerable. Lahiri's controlled prose reflects the hesitancy in their conversations. As Dhingra

notes, Lahiri frequently employs domestic ritual and everyday objects as a way to aesthetically position deeper emotional realities (112). The candles, dinner table, and shared meals are the means of temporary emotional short-circuit between them. But this reconnection is precarious, and the liability of intimacy in diaspora comes into focus.

Lahiri also represents the psychic dimension of Shukumar's immigrant experience. His education in the United States and sense of filial inadequacy reverberate beneath his clashes with Shoba. These sentiments reflect what Mishra calls the diasporic burden of inadequacy: immigrants' accommodation complexity related to competences and membership (44). As a result, Shukumar's loss is doubled: not only has he lost his child, but also the idea of his own future as a successful immigrant academic. This twin grief is the mix that clothes his silence and remoteness.

In the meantime, Shoba's actions represent another way of dealing with displacement. Like so many first-generation immigrants, she tries to take control by imposing a semblance of order — via work, routine, and independence. Banerjee argues that Lahiri characteristically shows how immigrant women deal with displacement through a degree of self-control and emotional withdrawal (79). Shoba's retreat is therefore conditioned by her effort to conclude personal mourning in accord with the imperatives of immigrant existence. That she moves out at the end of the story is an individual rupture as well as a structural difficulty of diasporic relations that Lahiri depicts with subtlety and control.

Intimacy, Loss and Cultural Distance

Intimacy in "A Temporary Matter" is synonymous with loss. Shoba and Shukumar's inability to grieve collectively illustrates the cultural expectations of emotional expression. In

traditional Indian society grief is frequently community property, shared with extended family and expressed within ritual. But in the American side of “Private Grief,” mourning is a personal burden. This connects with Brah when she writes, “diaspora turns cultural practice often into an act of individuality,” especially in a situation where communal structures are absent (193). The couple’s failure to grieve together breeds cultural strain, compounded by their life in a foreign country.

Their dark nights of confession is a symbolic space where they re-negotiate their intimacies. Roy comments on Lahiri’s use of silence and darkness to reveal the emotional chasms, (72). In the winking, flickering illumination of those candles, secrets are revealed that both unite and divide them. They try to regain their emotional closeness through these confessions, but the last revelation – that Shoba has been getting ready to leave him — smashes this fragile intimacy. Lahiri’s story shows how grief and displacement intersect in ways that complicate human connections.

This cultural distance is also a function of living between two worlds. The marriage of Shoba and Shukumar, which started with the hopefulness of a young immigrant couple, comes under new pressures neither one had faced before. In India, close family may have cushioned the emotional impact of loss, but in Boston, they grieve alone. They become an emotional liability, because they’re so far removed from their home support systems. Childs and Williams posit here that diaspora often results in the “emotional alienation within domestic spaces” (198).

So “A Temporary Matter” functions too as a study of intimacy unraveled by loss and displacement. The gap between them, cultural and emotional and relational, points to how the immigrant experience informs personal turmoil in profound ways.

5.2 “Interpreter of Maladies”

In the story “Interpreter of Maladies”, the lack of human connection is examined in relation to the short-lived interaction between Mr. Kapasi, a tour guide in India, and Mrs. Das, a tourist, an American of Indian descent. The duty of Kapasi to translate the illnesses of the patients turns out to be a metaphor of the universal desire to be comprehended. Kapasi misunderstands the mere interest of Mrs. Das in his work and perceives it as a romantic admiration instead of an attempt to find emotional relief. Their communication showcases the irony of not communicating as Kapasi fantasizes about intimacy, whereas Mrs. Das treats him as a possible confidant. The loss of touch with India on the part of the Das family highlights the alienation within the culture of the immigrants who are still foreigners in their native country and the country where they are immigrants, and the fact that Mrs. Das admits to infidelity illustrates her loneliness. The end of the story, when Kapasi loses the address slip, and the dream he had of a connection fades, symbolizes the collapse of his fantasy and the inability to hold onto such shallow ties. Using a lowly irony, symbolism, and cultural opposition, Lahiri shows the sadness of unfulfilled wishes and the human habit to find comfort in strangers, only to realize how thin and unsustainable such moments of comprehension are.

Hybrid identity, postcolonial hybridity

“Interpreter of Maladies” may be well read in the context of the hybridity theory of Bhabha, who emphasizes the cultural in-betweenness and broken identities resulting from colonial and diasporic experiences. The Das family symbolizes transitional identity: being ethnically Indian, but culturally American, having what Bhabha defines as the ‘third space’, when neither

Indian nor American ideals have been completely enacted. This hybridity leads to emotional indifference, confusion of morals, and the absence of rootedness, which is most evident in the non-committal approach to marriage and motherhood shown by Mrs. Das.

Mr. Kapasi, on the other hand, is more culturally rooted in India, but in a way, he is influenced by postcolonial hybridity in terms of his education in English and his job of an interpreter in a colonial medical division. His communication with the Das family reveals the inequalities of power relations in hybrid encounters where those in the diaspora are not only economically and culturally privileged but are also not deeply emotional. The misunderstanding between Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das reflects how hybridity, instead of allowing the dialogue, only creates miscommunication and alienation.

Finally, through hybridity, Lahiri demonstrates that the cultural mixture without morality leads to people becoming disconnected, and emotional alienation becomes the main struggle of the postcolonial, diasporic state.

5.3 “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”

In “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine,” diaspora is viewed from the perspective of an Indian American girl, Lilia, whose perceptions are a study in the nuances of identity creation. Based on the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, this story has a protagonist who is torn between homeland politics and immigrant aspiration for stability in the host country. Lilia’s parents are first-generation immigrants who hold a firm connection to the subcontinent, while Lilia herself is emblematic of second-generation hybridity influenced by American education and multicultural

environment. This generational divide is indicative of the “diasporic duality”, between living memory and inherited identity, to which Hall refers (394).

Mr. Pirzada serves as a symbolic figure from whose assumptions Lilia absorbs the idea of cultural belonging. Although in any technical sense Pakistani at the time, he has more cultural identity with his girlfriend Lilia’s Indian parents than he would, say, with American society at 18, reflecting one of many moments of South Asian identity transformation in this series. As Banerjee observes, Lahiri frequently transcends political borders to highlight common cultural histories (82). But Mr. Pirzada being in the home makes simple meals, rituals of communal memory, when food, language and collective concern about war restore a connection to the Indian subcontinent for all the characters.

The latter perspective is also evident in the story of the immigrant’s fractured sense of home. Mr. Pirzada’s psychological unrest, which reflects itself in his habits of nightly viewing rituals, exemplifies what Safran describes as the “diasporic longing for return” (83). His worry about his family’s safety speaks to the deep psychological toll wrought by displacement in a time of geopolitical crisis. Lilia’s deepening interest in him reflects her own newfound understanding of identity. Her school, where South Asian history is practically whitewashed from the curriculum as though it never existed (Oakland Unified School District recently expanded its south Asia-focused content in world history classes; last fall, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf voiced support to introduce an 88-page unit on Sikhism and more people of color emphasizing contributions students are not learning about) stands in stark contrast with closer-to-home political strife that subtends “polite” small talk overpaying for gasoline. Such disjunction causes what Desai terms, “an educational dissonance in diasporic children (109).

Homeland, Memory, and Belonging

In this story, home becomes a conceptual space less than an emotional or physical one. For Mr. Pirzada, home exists in memories, letters, and rituals — the things that make up his connection to Dhaka. Assmann contends that cultural memory survives through symbolic gestures (131), and Lahiri depicts this by having Mr. Pirzada give Lilia nightly treats, small acts of kindness that are essentially connect her emotional world. Each sweet acts as a keepsake of his yearning for his daughters and the tenuous tether that binds him to home.

The belonging in the tale comes through the shared cultural practices. Diaspora, as Mondal argues, is most often about the making of belonging elsewhere through cultural rituals rather than geographical vicinity (64: 2011). The dinners, the Assamese- and Bengali-spoken conversations, their shared anxiety about the war — create a micro-community in that American house. This witness is ephemeral yet significant, a manifestation of what Clifford terms dwelling-in-travel, in which connection and rootedness are defined by paths rather than roots (258).

Over the course of the passage, Lilia's understanding of Mr. Pirzada changes. At first, she views him through the narrow lens of American classroom categories, but she is gradually educated about his family and culture, and learns to be empathetic and globally aware. Patil argues that Lahiri frequently uses children as narrators to articulate a split between American multicultural rhetoric and the lived reality of immigration (207). Through Lilia, the reader sees the line between assimilation and memory, homeland and host land.

The ending of the story, in which we learn that Mr. Pirzada's family survived the war, highlights the emotional resilience of diasporic people. But the story also underscores how

displacement leaves identity fundamentally changed. Mr. Pirzada rushes back to America when he hears the news, but Lilia's destiny has still been redefined by her association with him.

5.4 “The Third and Final Continent.”

One of Lahiri's most celebrated portrayals of migration and reinvention is “The Third and Final Continent”, maps the narrator's passage from India to England and then on to America, hinting at diaspora as something that happens in layers. His traveling mirrors Appadurai's “ethnoscapes,” which pertain to the transnational flows of migrants moving across many cultural landscapes (33). Lahiri depicts him as a person moulded not just by dislocation but also by ambition and perseverance.

The early years of the narrator in London expose him to Western cultural values for the first time. The lack of a state radius, lack of resources and limited social network mean that Subi's contact with British society is but one rife with economic difficulty – typical for most first-generation immigrants. When he reaches Boston, his rented room with Mrs. Croft is where he acclimatizes to American ways. Croft herself is a figure of the most un-English independence and pride, indeed one which visits on all certainties of national character expose, yet it is through her that delicate observances impart themselves to our narrator. For Werbner, the diaspora subject often comes to learn new cultural forms through “the everyday practices of observation and negotiation” (15). The etching of a concave mirror on this narrative theme is the slow Americanization of the narrator, which Lahiri depicts well.

Being married puts a new spin on his travels. Mala, who comes later from Calcutta represents stereotypical cultural norms. Their initial courtship is formal and emotionally distant, reflecting the cultural expectations of an arranged marriage. But their narrative shows how new trade routes change cultural behaviors. As Banerjee notes, Lahiri's fiction repeatedly represents

arranged marriages transforming into hybrid unions in diaspora (80). In the storyline, the narrator and Mala familiarize themselves with the new reality, so does the hybrid identity.

Acculturation, Adaptation, and Identity Struggle

Assimilation, in this story, is not complete, nor is it linear. The narrator gradually acclimates to American life through work, a routine of sorts, language, and social encounters. Hall calls this adaptation an “incessant cultural production” (398). The narrator, rather than fully digesting his cultural past in favour of the new American life, appropriately takes what he fancies and leaves the Indian identity intact, creating a hybridity that Bhabha would describe as “signs of civilization” (58).

Adjustment is illustrated in a thousand little ways. The narrator’s education in how to buy groceries, rent an apartment, take public transportation and use American news media shows adaptation is built on the most quotidian commitments. Desai argues that Lahiri’s portrayal of adaptation is representative of the ‘micro-negotiations’ that are pivotal in immigrant life (105). Mala’s adjustment happens in small stages, from bewildered discomfort to discovering new routines and finding at least some shared companionship with her husband.

Negotiation of identity arises as a key theme because of the attraction he feels towards Mrs. Croft, an elderly American woman, has him admitting to this potential for cultural change. But his emotional ties to Indian traditions persist, not least in the way he greets Mala and presides over rituals of their married life. This gives force to what Gilroy calls “diasporic identity [which] flourishes in the tension between cultural retention and reinvention” (25). This tension courses through Lahiri’s and her narrator’s work as the two both struggle to create a hybrid identity from

different modes of memory, various modes of migration, and multi-levelled confrontations with other cultures.

The final reflection in the story is that of the narrator eventually assimilating into American culture while holding on to his roots. His remark that he has “been in the United States nearly thirty years now,” emphasizes the permanence of diaspora, calling to mind Safran’s assertion that diaspora often constitutes a ‘final settling’ rather than a temporary move (86). So, the narrator’s travels are those of a path finally, decisively unmaking, although not undoing the past from which he sprouts.

5.5 Comparative Perspectives of the Four Narratives

Cumulatively, “A Temporary Matter,” “Interpreter of Maladies”, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine,” and “The Third and Final Continent” provides a richly complex rendition and probing analysis of how Lahiri represents the play between routes of migration and roots of culture in the diaspora. Each story, different in terms of characters, emotional levels, and narrative techniques, manages to multiply anything these four stories have in common, mainly the relation of themes, including identity under construction, cultural memory, emotional displacement, and psychological difficulty of migration.

For one, the four tales all emphasize the fetishizing force of cultural memory in creating diasporic subjectivity. Memory is an emotional anchor in strange places, whether Mr. Pirzada’s nightly rituals or Shoba and Shukumar’s adopted customs or Mrs. Das’s recollections of her earlier life in “Interpreter of Maladies” or the narrator thinking back on India in “The Third and Final Continent.” This thematic metaphors with Assmann’s assertion that cultural memory is the means

by which identity can comfortably traverse space and time (132). In Lahiri's work, memory pulls the factory process into reverse; it doesn't wax nostalgic but creates a tragedy for survival and belonging.

Second, migration creates emotional and psychological dislocation in each of the four stories, although this takes a very different form. "A Temporary Matter" explores the breakdown of a marriage and worsens it with diasporic isolation; "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," geopolitical separation; "Interpreter of Maladies," cultural confusion and emotional alienation in these cross-cultural encounters; "The Third and Final Continent," adjustment, and hope. These fluctuations help confirm Clifford's assertion that diasporic experiences are, by nature, heterogeneous and based on individual situations (256). Lahiri's characters represent a variety of migratory experiences and not just one diasporic story.

Third, identity is constructed as hybrid, porous, and perpetually contested in every story. Shoba and Shukumar's ruined marriage demonstrate the emotional instability of diasporic identity. Lilia's nebulous state of mind illustrates generational hybridity, as she passes her cultural inheritance through an American set of models. Mrs. Das's encounter with Mr. Kapasi in "Interpreter of Maladies," whose characters experience fragmented identities. Mrs. Das functions as a hybrid figure, while Mr. Kapasi becomes aware that the familiar cultural connections he once relied upon have grown distant and may no longer be recoverable. In sharp contrast, the fictional I in "The Third and Final Continent" enacts fixity-into-hybridity through pliancy. Together, these two stories display Bhabha's third space and the formation of hybrid identities (55).

Fourth, speech and silence become refractions of the encounter between two cultures in Lahiri's stories. "A Temporary Matter" deploys silence for emotional disassembly; "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," generational language negotiation; "Interpreter of Maladies,"

communication breakdown across cultures, and “The Third and Final Continent” bilingual adaptation as hybridization. These findings support the hypothesis that language affects how we think about our place in the world and who we are.

Finally, all four narratives also delve into how migration remakes a person emotionally, psychologically, and socially.” Displacement splinters identity, but it also allows for new learning, transformation, and hybridized forms of belonging. It is not diasporic identity of the coming out of further negotiations, but rather what becomes fixed cultural essence (Hall 401; Gilroy 23). This is something that Lahiri’s characters are a medium for, performing it in the inscrutably quiet conversations about belonging and distance that are conducted in everyday life about roots and routes as they intertwine with our humanity.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Findings

6.1 Representation of Hybridity in Lahiri's Characters

Hybridity is perhaps the single-most striking feature of Lahiri's diasporic subjects, a product of the Bhabha "third space" of identity formation in which new cultural meanings emerge (55). Lahiri's characters invariably dwell in this liminal space, navigating between their Indian heritage and the cultural mores of their adopted country. Hybridity in *Interpreter of Maladies* is not just thematically deployed; it also reveals itself through emotional responses, cultural habits, and romantic entanglements.

In "The Third and Final Continent," the narrator creates for himself a growing, hybrid identity formed by exposure to Western culture. His shift from India to England and subsequently to the US is a story of migration, true, but it is also about an evolving culture. He finds his way to American rituals, paying rent on time, speaking with Mrs. Croft, and accepting the habits of eating in America, while remaining grounded in Indian family values. This multiplicity fits with Hall's declaration that diasporic identity results from an ongoing negotiation between the cultural past and present (394). The narrator's awe for Mrs. Croft, as well as his strong rootedness in Indian tradition demonstrate hybrid subjectivity which crosses binary oppositions.

In the story "Interpreter of Maladies," the Das family represents a hybridity of culture on a shallow level. They are Indian Americans, which puts them in the middle of the Indian and American way of life. Nevertheless, they have a rather selective relationship with India. Mrs. Das is clothed in western wear, learns English, and exhibits individualism of the Americans, but she

expects Mr. Kapasi to comprehend her emotionally, maybe just because he is Indian. This shows what Bhabha would term a “partial hybridity” - a blend of cultures with no profound or strong involvement or accountability to either. Their children, being of Indian descent, are culturally American and do not show any interest in India, nor do they respect the history and social norms of India, which highlights the cultural lack of connection between generations.

Lilia, in "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," embodies generational hybridity. As a second-generation immigrant, her bifurcated identity is refracted through the prism of parental memory and American context. She moves so easily between school culture and the cultural world of her home, a hybridity that Clifford explains as “identities formed by... routes rather than roots” (258). Her growing knowledge of South Asian politics, which is not taught in her school curriculum, demonstrates how hybrid identities are formed both by inherited cultural histories and by individual interests.

Hybridity is also present in “A Temporary Matter,” through the detachment experienced by the characters emotionally and culturally. Shoba and Shukumar’s relationship are emblematic of the conflicts that accompany life between generations, where their similar Indian background fails to save them from the isolating aspects of American individualism. Their grief becomes a hybrid, a mixture of culturally rooted expectations and Western anomie. Desai asserts that Lahiri often depicts “fractured identities under the pressure of diasporas” (104), and this split is visible in its failure to resolve domestic tradition with modern loss.

On the whole, Lahiri’s characters show that hybridity is not just a site of cultural blending; it is an incessant process of identity fashioning which entails resistance, adjustment and self-reinvention. Hence, Lahiri's work resonates with the more current postcolonial theory by portraying hybridity as an imaginative and yet agonizing area of becoming.

6.2 Weaving Roots (Heritage) and Routes (Migration) through Negotiation

One of the salient features in this story is Lahiri's subtle exploration of how to balance one's deeply ingrained cultural self and the new influences that emerge through cross-border migration. The dialectic between roots and routes is not smooth, nor direct. Instead, there is emotional whiplash, cultural friction, and a quest for a home.

In "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine", Lilia and her family place Mr. Pirzada in a kind of elastic pattern that shows how roots take form as memory, ritual, and emotional capital. His nightly rituals, scanning the news on Bangladesh, writing home to his family, and giving Lilia sweets, become ritualistic gestures that enable him to hold onto his culture across distance. Diaspora subjects continue to have, as Safran suggests, "imagined connections to the homeland" in such rituals (84). These acts ground him amid political upheaval and geographic dislocation. Lilia's parents, on the other hand, maintain South Asian traditions of hospitality and further cross-cultural continuity even as residents of a foreign culture.

But routes reconstitute identity by being soaked up with new cultural logic. Lilia, an American-raised child, negotiates American social expectations while internalizing her parents' tales of India and Pakistan. Her twofold exposure, then, mirrors what Brah calls the "diasporic desire to home" (193), both originating and hosting. The tension she feels between her teacher's lack of interest in South Asian history and her parents' emotional investment in it exemplifies the "roots" versus "routes" conflict.

In "Interpreter of Maladies," the story of the Das family in India symbolizes the literal and symbolic travel of migrants returning to their motherland as foreigners. Even though India is the cultural root of their culture, they use it as a foreign territory. This has shifted India into the realm

of spectacle and not lived heritage due to their migration to America. The careless attitude of Mrs. Das, the indifference of their children to history, and the family being culturally blind are an indication of how paths have undermined the bond between the family roots and the routes.

In “The Third and Final Continent”, the narrator’s migration shows a deft, if slow, working out of roots and routes. His Indian cultural underpinnings are strong — we see this in the rituals welcoming Mala and in the maintenance of familial respect — but his routes lead him toward new attachments in America. This hybrid marriage, moulded by tradition as much as by transnationalism, demonstrates how cultural negotiations give rise to new subjectivities. Vertovec’s concept of ‘multi-local attachments’ is especially evident in the narrator’s feelings of belonging to both India and the USA (281).

“A Temporary Matter” features a more forced negotiation. Shoba and Shukumar’s roots — cultural expectations of togetherness, family, and connectedness — come head-to-head with the routes they encounter in diaspora: isolation, emotional distance, Western individualism. Their mourning serves not as the place where roots and routes come together, but as the battleground between them. This separation resonates with Parry’s claim that postcolonial identities are also confronted with “incomplete reconciliation” between past and present (89).

It shows that Lahiri figures this negotiation not in a light of resolution but as an ongoing one productively inflected by issues related to memory, cultural pressure, emotional vulnerability and the imperatives of transnational life. The conflict of roots and routes becomes the emotional engine of Lahiri’s diasporic stories.

6.3 Psychological Praxes of the Diasporic Identity

The psychological struggle occupies a central place in Lahiri's portrayal of diaspora. The heartache of migration — loneliness, bereavement, anxiety, and a sense of loss, the splintering of identity — fuels the intrapersonal conflicts her characters face. Mishra terms diaspora as a 'state of perpetual melancholia' (45) that is in sync with Lahiri's portrayal of her immigrant characters.

In "A Temporary Matter," the emotional distress of displacement compounds the couple's grief. With no close relatives — as is typical in Indian familial systems of hierarchy and obligation to rely on for support — they grieve their loss together. Through their emotional silence, we see the psychological strain that comes from trying to balance personal anguish with the public demands of immigrant life. Their confessions in the dark are an effort to find emotional connection, but their psychic scars run too deep to close completely. Lahiri's minimalist style is said to echo the psychic piling up of an average diasporic individual, especially operative in the muted emotional language of this story (Roy 73).

In "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," psychological anxiety is born of geopolitical instability. Mr. Pirzada is in ever-present fear for his family during the Bangladesh Liberation War. His dislocation from them causes his feelings to break apart, and he finds himself constantly anxious and craving. Lilia, for her part, struggles with outward manifestations of psychological confusion as she tries to learn cultural and political identities. Her inability to place Mr. Pirzada within American definitions of nationality, however, illustrates the psychological separation between her bicultural worlds. As Childs and Williams observe, emotional tension typically occurs when the immigrant is exposed to a set of cultural systems which cannot fully contain the individual's subjectivity (199), and it is indeed the emotional center of Lilia's awakening.

In “The Third and Final Continent,” the emotional valence is more upbeat but no less cloudy. The narrator’s first days in America are full of fear, loneliness, and desperation, but he fights back against those feelings. His encounters with Mrs Croft offer him a kind of emotional entrenchment in an alien place. Their marriage also blossoms as his relationship with Mala grows, indicating the transcendent psychological possibilities of migrant life. But the story admits a persistent emotional ambivalence: although he had settled down in America, the narrator still loves his memories of India, illustrating Hall’s theory of identity as “unfinished and always becoming” (402).

Overall, Lahiri presents that diasporic identity is not distinct from the psychological realm. Her characters show us that diasporic identity is emotional as well as cultural, born of longing, loss, and belonging.

6.4 The immigrant experience in transnational spaces

Through Lahiri, transnational spaces are depicted as realms of possibility and constraint. These places the home, schools, workplace, and neighbourhoods, become battlefields where newcomers manage expectations for behaviour and relationships. Appadurai’s idea of global ethnoscapas is helpful in that it frames these spaces as dynamically formed through people’s circulation, ideas, and practices (34).

In the story “Interpreter of Maladies”, Lahiri discusses the immigrant life in the transnational spaces by showing how the Das family, who are Indian-Americans visiting India, is torn between two cultures and belongs to neither of them. The fact that they are like tourists to their original homeland underlines the depiction of dislocation and emotional distance, which usually comes along with diaspora. The fact that Mrs. Das confesses to Mr. Kapasi can be taken

as a symbolic gesture and the pursuit of clarity on the borders of the two cultures, whereas the fact that he is an interpreter reminds us that translation is necessary not only on the language level but also on the level of identity and emotion. In this experience, Lahiri shows how transnational space exposes the disjuncture of immigrant existence when tradition and modernity come into conflict and leave people alone and in need of belonging.

In “The Third and Final Continent,” the transnational space is literal, as well as symbolic. The narrator moves between England, America and another country to absorb different cultural systems that determine his identity. His rented space with Mrs. Croft recalibrates his perception of American standards, and in the end, Mala’s home serves as a hybrid domestic sphere containing Indian rituals and American values. Mondal offers that Lahiri uses such domestic locales to represent the “micro-politics” of cultural bargaining (68). The narrator’s encounter evidences that transnational locales require constant learning, adjusting, and self-revision.

In “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine,” the house is a transnational place where food, language and political anxiety meet. In the family living room, a refuge of South Asian cultural identity and the product of American television, multiple cultures can live together. According to Cohen, diasporic homes serve as “symbolic homelands” (129), and Lahiri can be seen presenting such dual function through cultural hybridity in the home.

“The Temporary Matter” describes an emotionally fraught transnational space. Displacement mirrors the internal one felt by Shoba and Shukumar in their apartment. Despite being physically situated in America, the house has lingering vestiges of Indian cultural values — notions of marriage, eating together and emotional candor — but they clash with American individualism. The transnational home turns into a battlefield rather than a haven, endorsing

Werbner's argument that the phenomenon of transnational space can be just as much about conflict as it is belonging (16).

Throughout these narratives, Lahiri reiterates that the immigrant experience takes place not just across borders but in the mundanity of ordinary places where cultures intersect. These findings underscore that transnational life is fluid, contradictory and profoundly intertwined with the physical and emotional places in which immigrants live.

6.5 Narrative Tools for the Representation of Cultural Conflict

One of Lahiri's most effective narrative devices is her understated storytelling technique that communicates cultural conflict without excessive explanation. Her employment of symbolism, spaces of silence, minimalism, and details of the domestic environment create indirect, yet powerful means to express cultural tensions.

Symbolism plays a central role. In "A Temporary Matter," darkness serves as both a cover and a light. The shadowy atmosphere cast by the darkness caused by the power outages makes for a brief alternate reality for Shoba and Shukumar to reveal truths that have been kept under glass. As Dhingra points out, objects or settings in Lahiri's stories carry emotional charge, serving as emblems for the convolutions of a life in transnational spaces (116).

In "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," food acts as a metaphorical link between cultures. The ornate South Asian dishes that Lilia's mother makes stand as continuity with cultural roots; the American location sets them in contrast. Patil suggests that food, as a metaphor of being utilized by Lahiri, demonstrates the negotiation of belonging (205). The candies brought by Mr. Pirzada for Lilia are more than just a mushy confectionary which define the themes of longing, love, and displaced identity.

Yet another important narrative device is silence. (For Lahiri, silence often serves as an emblem of emotional distance, cultural miscommunication or unsaid mourning. According to Roy, silence in Lahiri's fiction conveys "the eloquent but unspoken burden of diasporic anxiety" (73). Shoba's and Shukumar's marriage break apart not in a blaze of active contest, but through speechless retreat.

There is a minimalist quality to the prose that increases emotional tension in Lahiri's stories. Her language is sedate; it does not force the reader to emote, but instead draws him/her on deeper in search of meaning. Banerjee asserts that Lahiri's restraint reflects and models the emotional decorum required for a range of South Asian societies (78), resulting in a culturally resonant narrative mode.

Lahiri uses various tools of narration in the story "Interpreter of Maladies" to depict cultural conflict between the diasporic and native identities. Lahiri emphasizes the necessity of translating not only the language, but also feelings and cultural codes through the use of symbolism, for instance, the role of Mr. Kapasi as an interpreter. The description of the character of Mrs. Das as a detached and Americanized woman is juxtaposed with that of Mr. Kapasi, who is tied to Indian tradition, highlighting the gap between the homeland and the diaspora. This conflict is enhanced by the third-person limited point of view, which focuses on Mr. Kapasi and reveals India as seen through his eyes, and shows the foreignness of the Das family.

Finally, Lahiri deploys domestic detail to ground her culture clashes. It's the kitchens, dining tables, and living rooms that are the microcosms of diasporic negotiation. These private 'quarters' are more meaningful in this respect, as they are built to reproduce and adapt cultural norms. As Clifford points out, diaspora is lived through "those practices on an everyday basis"

that take place within the home (261). Lahiri uses these sites as narrative devices, showing us in new detail what cultural conflict looks like when it hits close to home.

Chapter 7

Contribution to Knowledge

7.1 Contribution to Postcolonial Literary Studies

This analysis adds to the relatively sparse body of postcolonial literary criticism by providing a close, theoretically informed reading of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* that explores Bhabha's notion of hybridity alongside Said's concept of Orientalism as mutually defining critical theories within one interpretative framework. Whereas these aspects of identity, displacement, and cultural conflict have been separately studied in the work of Lahiri, this thesis uncovers how they function simultaneously in the mediation between roots and routes. Via Bhabha's "third space" in close reading practice, the investigation explores Lahiri's characters' negotiation of transcultural border zones where boundaries collapse, and new identities are formed. The thesis contributes to the debate on postcolonial thinking by revealing how orientalist attitudes in the host society shape the interior dynamics of diaspora identity. This double analysis (internal hybridity and external othering) contributes to our understanding of how postcolonial identities are constructed not only in the long shadow of colonial encounters, but also as products of recent migratory experiences. The analysis thus proposes *Interpreter of Maladies* as a significant postcolonial text, for which liminal narrative techniques mediate the complex process of identity construction within transnational settings.

7.2 Contribution to the Diaspora and Identity Studies

The study makes a significant contribution to diaspora and identity studies by displaying how cultural memory, emotional displacement, and transnational experience intersect in Lahiri's

representation of immigrant life. The dissertation acknowledges the multiplicity of diasporic identity as not a fixed or essential category, but an ongoing negotiation that is inflected by inherited traditions and new cultural pathways. Through analysis of three major stories, “A Temporary Matter,” “Interpreter of Maladies,” “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine,” and “The Third and Final Continent,” it demonstrates how Lahiri depicts different modes of diaspora: traumatic, nostalgic, adaptive, and hybridizing. This variance contributes to diaspora theory by showing that diasporic subjectivity is heterogeneous and intensely personal. The thesis also accentuates the intergenerational aspect by examining how first-generation immigrants are more tightly tied to cultural roots while second-generation characters negotiate identity between fragmented memory, partial belonging, and multicultural context. These observations are a contribution to longer-standing discussions in diaspora studies about the multiplicity of immigrant experiences and the migrating boundaries of belonging particular to transnational spaces.

7.3 General Cultural and Academic Ramifications

The results of this study may have wider implications beyond literary studies. Culturally, the thesis centers on what it means to feel and live as a migrant, providing some useful considerations for theoretical debates regarding multiculturalism, integration and migrants’ community-related issues. By analyzing Lahiri’s subtle, sharp storytelling, the research finds that more than geographic displacement, diaspora is an emotional rupture and a cultural negotiation shaped by, and still bearing upon, history. These findings may have implications for sociologists, educators or policy makers and mental health workers who are interested in the life experiences of migrants.

From an academic perspective, the research underscores the potential of literary texts as "critical instruments," through which to explore social problems of identity dissociation, cultural

oversimplification, and negotiation of belonging-in contemporary globalization. The dissertation argues that intimate domestic stories glossed over in political or economic accounts of migration offer fertile ground for examining the personal aspects of diaspora. Moreover, in the context of postcolonial theory and diaspora studies, it offers a methodological model for future scholarship that is interdisciplinary, bringing literary analysis into conversation with cultural theory, migration studies, and global identity. In this sense, the study reassures us about literature's powerful ability to represent the complexities of diasporic life, and offers significant insights into discussions about migration, hybridity, and cultural transformations.

Chapter 8

Conclusion and Recommendation

8.1 Summary of Key Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the way Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* reflects on the negotiation of roots and routes for South Asian diasporic individuals through perspectives offered by postcolonial theory and diaspora studies. Critical considerations of four pivotal stories, "A Temporary Matter," "Interpreter of Maladies," "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," and "The Third and Final Continent," were instrumental in unearthing several key findings. First, Lahiri's characters all inhabit hybrid spaces that are a result of being influenced by both their inherited Indian cultural identity and resettlement in the host country. Their subject positions emerge in the "third space" where contesting cultural politics result in new, hybridized identities. Second, the stories show that cultural memory consistently functions as an affective tie for the first-generation immigrants and the second-generation figures often interpret roots through a fragmented or mediated past. Third, the stories reveal that migration creates emotional and psychic strains, such as sadness, homesickness, desire, and isolation. These pressures form diasporic identity as much as cultural and social. Fourth, the conclusion also highlights daily domestic spaces as important transnational sites of cultural negotiation that demonstrate how the immigrant experience is lived not only through dramatics but also by mundane interactions. Finally, silence, minimalism, symbolism and domestic detail as narrative strategies that Lahiri uses are essential devices to represent tensions between cultures and the emotional texture of diasporic living. Together, these discoveries suggest that Lahiri's literature presents a complex and

layered representation of immigrant subjectivity, which involves memory, displacement, cultural negotiation, and emotional shift.

8.2 Conclusion

The paper finds that Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* offers a deep and sensitive representation of diasporic persons attempting to match the roots of their culture with the moving routes that structure their life. In her unassuming and affectively accurate trajectory, Lahiri makes clear that diasporic identity is not a linear or cohesive construct; rather it is a fluid, dynamic negotiation between personal history and cultural memory in the light of lived experience of transnational movement. Her characters suggest that identity-making in diaspora is a complex, ongoing work characterized by ambivalence and hybridity, as well as vulnerability and endurance. Lahiri's work illustrates that roots and routes are not necessarily oppositional forces; rather, they exist simultaneously within the diasporic subject, shaping complicated issues of identity for those seeking to locate themselves in a new cultural environment.

Additionally, the analysis has demonstrated Lahiri's role in modern postcolonial literature by indicating that her works explore belongingness outside binary categories. Her stories deny a reductive view of assimilation and instead highlight the complexity, multiplicity, and fluidity of diasporic existence. The close readings performed in this study have revealed how Lahiri employs seemingly quotidian actions-meals, marriages, conversations, silence-as nuance and powerful sites of performative functions. In this, she highlights that diaspora is not only a geographic or cultural possibility but it is an emotional and psychological condition born from memory, loss, adaptation and hope. As such, Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* becomes a major piece of literature that

contributes to creating a more comprehensive map of what hybrid identity formation in the context of the global migrant landscape might look like.

8.3 Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study suggest several areas for future research. First, subsequent studies could conduct a comparative study of *Interpreter of Maladies* with some later works by Lahiri, including *The Namesake* (2003), *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), and *Whereabouts* (2021), to investigate how her portrayal of diaspora changes over the years. Comparative inquiry along these lines might also shed light on various thematic inflections of displacement, belonging, and hybrid identity through the different phases of her writing.

Secondly, gendered assumptions could be used to study how male and female characters are treated differently in Lahiri's fiction through discussions about cultural expectations. This understanding may have implications for how gender connects with diasporic vulnerability and empowerment.

Thirdly, works might expand the theoretical lens by incorporating other frameworks (affect theory, memory studies, transnational feminism) to further illuminate the emotional, historical, and gendered aspects of diaspora. Fourth, a comparative interdisciplinary approach could also examine the ways in which Lahiri's fictional representations correspond with the lived experiences of immigrants by using sociology, anthropology, or migration studies to that effect. Fifth, scholars could explore how the second-generation South Asian readers receive Lahiri's texts and how other hybrid identities read her fiction. And lastly, this model of research can include other South Asian diasporic writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai or Amitav Ghosh to

study larger volumes of cultural and translingual, memory, and identity in the migrant literature from South Asia.

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