



Revisiting
Language and Literature

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**REVISITING LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE**

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The Local and the Global: Reflecting through the pages of Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction

Dr. Deepanita Bhanja

Centuries have passed and now we experience the local to be at par with the global. The world is one and so is the style adopted in literary circuit. Art and the nature of literature now seem to reflect upon a global social culture. Since education, technology, trade has made way to common practices in terms of following culture and lifestyle, modes of expression like literature is not untouched by this change. The aura of urbanization, liberalization and privatization has not only brought metamorphosis in work culture and its ethics but it has brought a vast change in the familial lives of the service class who aims to resettle and ready to migrate to different culture for a prosperous future. Holding on the mirror to the social changes, literature has now therefore freed itself from all the social taboos. Hence it has made way to unearth issues of sexual freedom and identity as well in a globalized culture that promises understanding, acceptance and independence. It has now become a tool and medium to establish and accept the hidden and veiled subjects which finally gives shape to the variety of topics discussed in the name of popular literature.

The canvas of literature since inception therefore strives to draw the expression of truth in different genres. The catalyst that writers, poets and dramatists use eventually to their literary expression is life, which captures all social, political, economic and religious changes. My present research paper is therefore an attempt to probably discuss some of these expressions that pull the literature towards what we call as popular literature in a globalized world. The subject of migration and Diaspora has captivated a lot of interest among prominent writers of Indian origin like Bharti Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Jhumpa Lahiri. The issue of establishing the sense of belonging in the adopted country is majorly a focus for many south Asian writers. As the third world is still developing and experimenting with new challenges, the young, aspiring and educated professionals find themselves flourishing but alienated in a foreign culture. The plot and sub plots of the fictional spheres now can be seen revolving more between the country of birth and the country of adoption. The two different worlds that the global individual has in his/her soul, therefore undergo several clashes and inner conflicts while dealing with identity and assimilation in universally established

culture. The local and the global hence confront some grim realities that are sometimes social and many a times personal.

Jhumpa Lahiri's work of fiction is probably an illustration of this globalized world that influences her characters, their settings and plots to unveil the local struggle and global maladjustments. *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), *The Namesake* (2003), *The Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) and *The Lowland* (2013) certainly reflect some of the issues of the educated and aspiring Indians confronting cultural clashes. While the global seems to prosper due to integration and association with all other countries and states, the local sense of belonging suffer due to fragmentation of self and displaced identity. The historical past and the fast progressing nations of the world is possibly unable to explain the social changes practically that has entered into our lives in the name of globalization. Right from the origin to its final achieved identity, individuals are eager to seek a ground of their own to retain the flavor of the local and also wish to experience the identity of the international.

Language, rituals, beliefs, food and festivals are the integral part of our lives. It gives identity and a space of our own to rightfully declare our inevitable sense of belonging. Hence literature captures these subtle experiences when it questions the international culture, language, food, lifestyle and even beliefs. Notwithstanding the fact that many Indian writers invariably write about these international trends of living and habits, Jhumpa Lahiri's personal experience of belonging to a globalized world and her very style of capturing sensory details is an integral part of my observations in this paper. In her novel *The Namesake*, Gogol Ganguly takes birth in a global civilization but finds his identity to be in a midst of two different worlds. Though his father and mother couldn't shed their local habits even in a foreign land they were very international in their matters of maintaining global cultures. Ashima, Gogol's mother very bravely accepts the global attitude towards leading a life after her husband's death. She intelligently balances her urge to take interest in her children's life and also understands the need to make them free and responsible. Her transition from a local lady to a globalized woman is beautifully captured through subtle detailing of circumstances. With regard to Gogol's inner conflict we get a continuous reference of Nikolai Gogol's novel *The Overcoat*. Lahiri through this line of thought expresses Gogol Ganguli's local sensibility hidden under the overcoat of a globalized world that gets exposed though a chain of events in his personal life. He confronts

his fears and insecurities and moves ahead to eventually face the challenges of a multicultural world. He witnesses her parents' strong ideas of marriage and companionship and also experiences his incapacity to practice the so called modern and free ideas of man woman relationship.

Lahiri's compilation of short stories in *The Unaccustomed Earth* is again a spectrum of international and popular standards of lifestyles that the thinking Indians adopt. But in the journey of becoming the global populace her characters come across some ingrained ideas that are very provincial and local in its nature. Personal differences, relationship conflicts and issues of parenting are very sensitively discussed through vivid detailing in the stories. Lahiri has invariably used Indian pathos and traditions to reflect upon the status of the migrating Indians in foreign culture. The trilogy of 'Hema and Kaushik' in the last section of the collection is a vibrant description of a bond that was never broken even when it was spread in different geographical locations. In one of their conversation Kaushik gives remarks on his global identity, ' "I 've never belonged to any place that way." ' P 320. The line reflect the idea of displacement that many young people feel at some point of their lives. Lahiri probably throws light on the changing face of man woman relationships that cross the boundaries of ethics and morals and possibly redefines the meaning of attachment, compassion, friendship and understanding in a fragmented world of relationship.

A newly found freedom is possibly thus reestablished by the new techniques of plot, settings and characterization. To experience an independent life and respecting the independent entity is the lesson learnt through globalized culture. Sticking to her ideas of the emotionally displaced people, Lahiri crafted a well knitted story of brothers in *The Lowland* following different ideals to lead life. Although it talks about some internal clashes within Indian continent, it make its mark by representing woman in a very unconventional roles denying the age old expectation to offer motherly love and not retaining the image of a devoted and sacrificial entity. The image of Gauri that lahiri has crafted probably hints the isolated lifestyle that slowly creeps into the life of internationally independent citizens trying to define a social identity of its own. Female characters in this novel show a transitional phase when India is gradually becoming a part of the global map. Gauri after discovering her new found freedom in a foreign land couldn't balance her motherly responsibilities with her career that she decides to embark upon. Two different worlds offering distinct possibilities, one is practical and another

one offers emotional settlement. A similar tug of war is recurrent in exposing the inner conflict of the other characters in the novel. The two brothers and their personal journeys of faith clash due to their association with one common entity which is Gauri. She lost her local identity and personal satisfaction after Udayan's death but achieved an international ground to explore her ideas after marrying Subhash. The local past never left her and she carried the heavy emotional baggage attached to her earlier husband Udayan. She lived with her past although the scenario of her personal life has practically adopted a global identity.

Her relationship with her daughter Bela hence suffered due to the clash of local sensibilities and global expectations. Though Bela was the symbol of unbroken chain of past events in Gauri's life, she was not fortunate enough to remain a source of love and attachment for Gauri. She on the other hand grew up to be a well grounded global individual having an understanding of her adopted father Subhash's contribution and unconditional devotion towards her upbringing. Although the reality of her birth and belonging shook her for a while but it didn't break her capacity to reclaim her faith in her father Subhash. It was Subhash, who proved to be the strongest character in the novel who stood like a pillar of strength to Gauri in her initial days in Rhode Island and remained a doting father at the time of crisis in Bela's life. While discussing Bela's whereabouts he very proudly confesses her utopian ideas of lifestyle which reflects a global culture,

She's a nomad.

Let me guess, she carries her life around in a backpack,
doing things to make
the world a better place?

How did you know?

Some kids form early. They're focused. Bela was one. (248)

This also has emerged through her fragmented relationship with her mother and her shaken beliefs of motherhood. For this and for the development of plot we can't blame the issues of displaced people searching earth beneath their feet. It is the idea that is in question which rises from the globalized world and promotes mono culture, hence relationship within a family adopt a culture which Subhash very bravely practiced in his personal life. He chose to be the global citizen who respects freedom of each and every individual. He neither tries to put the shackles of marital responsibility on Gauri nor does he act like a rigid possessive father to Bela.

Hence, in all her fictional works Lahiri takes several attempts to find out the true meaning of a globalized world which promises to be one, having one culture, one idea of living and one sensibility. She therefore questions the local sensibilities that fall to mingle and accept the global culture and try to establish their survival strategies through a ghetto wherever they go.

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