

# Study of Alienation and Assimilation in Unaccustomed Earth

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**Abstract:** This research paper critically examines the diasporic discourse of identity and alienation in Lahiri's work. Through a close analysis of selected stories from *Unaccustomed Earth*, this paper delves into the themes of cultural displacement, the search for identity, and the feeling of alienation among the characters. Lahiri's portrayal of diasporic experiences reflects the complexities and nuances of the immigrant identity, the sense of unbelonging, and the constant negotiation between the old and new worlds. Moreover, it highlights how Lahiri's work engages with the tensions and conflicts that arise from the clash of cultural norms, the longing for home, and the struggle to reconcile with one's past while embracing the present.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Alienation, Assimilation, Unaccustomed Earth

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## 1. Introduction

*Unaccustomed Earth* is definitely a portrait of the psychological struggle for the Indians living abroad. Man is apt to crave for those things which he loses or can never attain; likewise, the Indians staying in foreign countries or the Indians origins in Lahiri's fictional world wholeheartedly craves for the Indian richness of culture and heritage that leaves a hallmark of both alienation and assimilation. They can neither come back to India nor can settle down peacefully out of it even if some of them return back to their motherland after retirement but there is no guarantee of happiness in store for them. This makes Jhumpa Lahiri's fictional characters look back to India for an easy and comfortable life. More often the characters do not Hawthorne in his novel, *A Scarlet Letter*, which allows Lahiri to accept such a caption for her second story collection.

Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato; if planted and replanted for too long a series of generations in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces and so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth. It is easy to say hard to practice, people staying away from their roots and motherland for fulfilment of certain requirements personal/official/familial feel neither secure with the new land and new surrounding nor discard completely the country- as both remain with their offspring but they are very much conscious of their belongingness from all these basic points of the present and the past living, one can find Lahiri's stories sharing not only autobiographical notes but also confrontational situations to integrate with the environmental and to fall back on the Bengali background.

To disperse the stone-cold silence from her father, sometimes Lahiri's constant shift of place for her character not only explores new places and experiences but also makes them adaptable to the new problem and situations. When they are alienated from a place, they are assimilated to a new one. Thus, Lahiri stories are more or less autobiographical. In this story, later it is revealed that Ruma moves from Brooklyn to a new place, where she knows no one, a quite new place. In order to curb her own lonesome hours, most of the time she recollects the sweet memories of her mother. Her search for her mother is rather endless and side by side Lahiri wants to create a mother-oriented society in this age of rapid family breakdown. In this story, as a rule, main character like Romi, Ruma's elder brother all are set in a plot to be suffered from alienation. At first, readers find Ruma alienated from her parents, her father is alienated from his family by his business trip to far-off lands; and now Romi, Ruma's elder brother is also alienated when he is staying in New Zealand far away from Seattle. Then Ruma ruminates about Romi's zero reaction to the sale of their parental home, which all the time carries their sweet childhood memories. Lahiri takes her readers back to the past days of the childhood of Ruma and Romi, thus the sale of the parental home-each one is an alienating factor. Lahiri's arrangement of flashback is not only space is another problem that vacates homes timely as well as untimely. Thus, creates both alienation and assimilation. There is a decisive moment in Ruma's life when she thinks of how to react if his father is willing to move in with her. She is doubtful whether to take her father in or not. When she seeks advice from her husband over this matter that is absent now.

As the story is written in third-person narration, the second story is described in the first-person narration. The narrator, Usha, the only daughter of Shyamal and Aparna, a Bengali couple depicts Pranab Chakraborty and his life with and without their family. Unlike the first story, Lahiri's tone shifts from old Indian values to contemporary issues of America in the core of its plot. The narrator begins the story with the description of Pranab Chakraborty, who is not really her father's younger brother. He is a fellow Bengali, from in the first place. They later invite Pranab Kaku to home and serve very fond Bengali meals of rice and mackerel curry. There continues the frequent visit of Pranab Kaku who becomes a part of their family. This is all incidental for immigrants and they experience heaven and hell while living in their relationship as they all are natives. They do not bother to care for one another but in the nation of their migration, they like to meet and share each other as they are one. This helps them to assimilate at a faster rate with the alien country.

Lahiri's stories resemble to that of O' Henry's in certain ways that they start with the conflict and end in a twist leaving a great deal of facts that the characters once alienated must be assimilated. Though Lahiri is not a humourist and caricaturist like O' Henry yet she seems to be walking on the footings of life in America because Amit, the husband must have been disappointed by entering into a marriage knot with Megan the wife, an American without the consents of his parents. Their excitement for having a love affair gradually vanishes from their marriage and it falls down upon them as a chore and they decide to bear it daily, without a complaint. They never quarrel as it is crystal clear from the accounts of the author, but there is a certain amount of hostility growing and getting deposited in their relationship for which none of them bothers to placate away, even if they try. They try in the wrong directions guided by guilt.

Later the cause of their trip to attend a marriage ceremony is given by the short story writer, as they are here at last in a hotel room for Pam Borden's wedding, which is to take place that evening at Langford academy, a boarding school where Pam's father was the headmaster and the same institution is then discovered by the readers that Amit has no attachment towards his past nor his school, but it is the cordiality of his personality that he has accepted Pam's invitation. Actually, Amit has inherited the attitude of both attachment and detachment from his parents, who never belong to one place in their life. Moreover, they seem to be the busiest parents who writing offer her ample space as the sense of loss is revived and the memory is sharpened too when Lahiri, the best storyteller depicts Amit: he had no nostalgia for the school and when letters came seeking alumni contributions or inviting him to the succession of reunions, he threw them out without opening them. Apart from his loose connection with Pam and a sweatshirt he still owned with the school's wrinkled name across the chest, there was nothing to remind him of those years of his of those years of his life.

After the reception, this is arranged after the marriage. She flies off with Roger for their honeymoon and then comes back to London. A few weeks later, news comes from her home that Rahul has left home and has also stolen their mother's gold jewels. In detail, Lahiri gives her readers an account of Rahul's worsening condition that he first becomes a drunkard Rahul that he has grown appreciative. He takes good care of Neel for the short term he lives with her and Roger in London. However, the ending of the story is the bitterest relationship that Sudha accuses Rahul with her tearful eyes: you passed out and you left our baby in a tub. You could have killed him do you understand. Thus, Sudha compels her brother to go away now for only goodness. Here Lahiri tells us how silly things matter in American lives. Eventually, Sudha narrates how her parents, lives have become monotonous away from friends and motherland but their early London days were happy days.

Many wish to marry Sang, even without knowing her properly, which indicates Lahiri's preference of arranged marriage or Indian way of marriage, not western marriage. The children of Indians parents living in America or some other countries even follow certain Indian traditions, not on their own accord or wish, but they are influenced by their parents, tradition and culture. Here in this story Sang agrees to answer them, who wish to marry her, because of the pleadings of her parents, who desperately want her to be married. Sang is never rude to her lovers but her voice is rather complaining to them. Heather, one of her housemates says: God sang I can't believe you are complaining. Dozens of men, successful men, possibly even handsome, want to marry you, sight unseen. And you expect us to feel sorry for you? Heather tells Sang that the proposals on the phone are romantic but Sang never agrees with them. Then she vividly describes about how others think of her without any depth of love: these men were not really interested in her. They were interested in a mythical creature created by an intricate case of the Indian couple. Here, does neither Penelope, nor Madame Defarge nor Sang knits, but Lahiri, the story writer. The day Sang moves in here to stay with Paul, Heather helps her, but Charles teases her as a little old-fashioned, which

she never minds. Sang rather wants to stay here till her marriage. In this connection, Lahiri depicts the conversion, choice and dream of Sang in this manner; even after three years of continues dating Charles doesn't ceremony.

Theresa ends the relation saying. I am sorry Paul, I can't help it, I just don't like the way you kiss me. She tells this when Paul is sitting naked beside her. It is true that perhaps Lahiri is never satisfied with the aggressiveness of the bachelors cohabited which compels her to write nude scenes in her story. Farouk has been portrayed as a mysterious person for Lahiri who slowly reveals the facts about him who is in physical relationship with Sang. Over the winter break, rejected by Farouk, sang goes away to London. She is excited by the news that her sister in London has given birth a baby boy. She informs her housemates, I am going to be called Sang, mashi and she explains that Mashi is the Bengali word for Aunt. It seems that without using Bengali words, Jhumpa Lahiri's stories are incomplete.

The theme of alienation and assimilation is dealt vividly in this story as both the terms are adjacent to each other as they are two sides of a coin. Snow in this story is used as a symbol of alienation is shown in the farewell party. Seven years ago, when Chaudhuri's alienated themselves from America which they hardly accomplish and also it is snow before they move into new house, before they can alienate themselves from Hema's family, cloistered by them own pain of the forthcoming death of Mrs. Chaudhuri. In this story, Lahiri makes Choudhuri family move frequently and Lahiri's habit of constant movement between two nations builds up the real story of her Diasporic intention. The story is rather a continuation that leads the part two of this collection towards a has married a widow who has two girls.

Kaushik is now merely twenty-one and has not still accepted his mother dead. He can't easily accept the second marriage of his father. We are all familiar with second marriage in India. However, we are not delighted with American marriages so many times in life what Lahiri exactly wants to discuss in this story. Kaushik does not oppose the marriage of his father for the second time. Besides, he visits his father, step mother and two step sisters. He also strays there with them for a few days. Kaushik's father informs him earlier about his marriage over phone that has lost his spouse two years ago and she has two daughters aged seven and ten. While describing about Chitra, Kaushik's step mother, Lahiri focuses on two languages-Bengali and English:

The protagonist attitude towards his new step-mother, Chitra and his inner conflict whether to like or dislike her or in an extension, whether to place her in his heart which is solely reserved for his deceased mother, is best depicted by his conversation with her. She speaks to him in Bengali, while he speaks to her in English. But little by little during his stay, he starts liking Chitra and her daughters. He gets closer to his step-sisters when he takes them to a nearby mall for a treat. His feelings for Piu and Rupa are best shown in these words:

I felt separate from there in every way but at the same time could not deny the things that bound us together. There was my father, of course. The knowledge of death seemed present in host stories- it was something about the way they carried themselves, something about the way they carried themselves, something had broken too soon and had not mended. Finding his two steps sisters in the same condition Kaushik has encountered himself five years back when he comes to America from Bombay at the age of sixteen and has to figure things out all once again. Before Christmas Eve, Kaushik and their mother for which he feels obliged to them and his heart is softened for the two. After a long lapse of time, at his graduation ceremony his father, Chitra and her daughters come to him to congratulate: we are both moving forward, Kaushik's father tells him after the ceremony. 'New roads to explore' it is not her character new road to explore but Lahiri's. The short story writer always brings a union after each separation and she never likes to see the Bengali families suffer from alienation.

The last story of Unaccustomed Earth is about unsuccessful love affair between Hema and Kaushik. The title of the story is quite appropriate since interventions of the two male counterparts for a female departs from each other and go ashore. Even when analysing symbolically, Lahiri never seems to Favor Kaushik crossing the shore of this world that is the death at the end of the story whereas Hema navigates back to India reaches the summit of the theme of alienation and assimilation. Here we find alienation rewinds in assimilation. When Hema is bonded to Navin by a very Indian marriage, she losses her first love, Kaushik. Perhaps to Hema, America seems a rootless land when even she compares two cultures, made clear in this following paragraph, which also gives us a glimpse about Navin's character who wishes Hema as a typical Indian bride: Before getting engaged, they had spent just three weekends together, spaced out over as many months, Navin coming each time from Mohegan to see Hema. They wandered chastely around Boston, going to museums and movies and concerts and dinners and then

beginning on the second weekend, he kissed Hema good night at the door of her home and slept as a friend's. He admitted to her that he had lovers in the past, but he was old-fashioned when it comes to a future wife.

In Rome, she communicates with Navin by email and over the telephone. Their conversations are heavy with the weight of things to come without looking at the past. She does not want to miss him but looks forward to Calcutta. According to her parents, Navin is a non-Bengali who has come from any province in India other than west Bengal. Hema's Americanized sense makes her refuse to think of it as an arranged marriage, but she knows in her heart that it is an arranged marriage done preferably by her parents. She has a but her assimilation lies there in the aspects of India such as India and Sri Lanka coast lines where Vivekanand Rock is there and she more fascinatingly ends the story in her choice of Indian arranged marriage.

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