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**EMOTIONAL RIFT IN RELATIONSHIPS AND ALIENATION IN
*UNACCUSTOMED EARTH***

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The title story of the book, *Unaccustomed earth* is about the clash of two cultures, portrayed by clash between individuals and also the clash between their own selves. It is about three generations, and the relationship between the three, the father, his daughter, Ruma, and her son, Akash. The father, a retiree, and also a recent widower, visits his daughter's new home in the suburbs of Seattle. The story explores some of the difficult gender roles in America, such as Ruma's decision to leave her successful legal career to raise children, and her husband's hard work to support the family. It also explores the family issues associated with Ruma's Indian heritage, including her sense of obligation to care for her father and have him live with her and her immediate family. Like Lahiri's other stories, the themes are both cultural and universal. Although more traditional her father tries to persuade her to continue her legal career while being a mother. Also, her father is depicted as someone who was somewhat unhappy with his once traditional lifestyle. He is enjoying his newly found independence in his travels and a relationship with a female friend he recently met. What makes the story most compelling is the limited communication between the father and daughter, both afraid in some ways to acknowledge that they have moved away from their culture of origin and have embraced aspects of the new culture.

The forces of globalization have created and accelerated shifts that can seem staggering to all parents' intent on preserving cultural patterns and traditions. Whether Indian or not, most parents experience a sense of alienation while watching their children flourish in a world that increasingly appears unfamiliar and foreign.

Lahiri's sense of alienation, both from her American friends and her own parents, evolved eventually into one of the most dominant themes in her fiction. Most of her characters oscillate between two different worlds, struggling hard to keep them in balance. The author's words confirm that she was not spared either: "The older I get, the more I am aware that I have somehow inherited a sense of exile from my parents, even though in many ways I am so much more American than they are. In fact, it is still very hard to think of myself as an American."¹

Not surprisingly, the stories concern strains and challenges affecting mixed relationships or mixed marriages and stresses on disapproving and disappointed parents, while others focus on children succumbing to drugs and alcohol. All deal with some kind of emotional loss, but provide connections to feelings experienced by children and their parents in life's quiet and more kinetic negotiations

This is a tale of diaspora comprising of the first and second generations. Over the years the first generation protagonists' journey of nostalgia has diminished as he has settled abroad with his family and his parents are dead. It is usual with everybody and Jhumpa is very honest in delineation of relationships and alienation. It need not be opined that there is no nostalgia. Yearning for homeland becomes strong during the early years of migration. After settlement abroad the degree of yearning for home land and kins diminishes. The protagonist moves through the memory lanes and particularly in this story he is not worried about his kins in Calcutta because his dearest parents were no more alive. Jhumpa's treatment of the protagonist's bachelor days, the early days of his married life and the later family life are objective. The protagonist's exploration of his past days and comparison of the same with the present is the way of life that is common with all the immigrants settled abroad.

Jhumpa Lahiri's modern approach is evident in her themes as well as narrative style. The first story *A Temporary Matter* shows that for the young married couple Shukumar and Shoba, marriage appears to have fallen apart. It reached a stage where it became a temporary matter. Trouble started when Shoba delivered a stillborn baby, and blew over casting a long shadow on a normally happy marriage. When they finally lost touch with one another despite sharing a single roof, the temporary cut in power supply seems to have salvaged their failing relationship.

Lahiri excels as a storyteller when she combines her Indian reminiscences and the larger problem of marital discord and the apparently catastrophic end of the couple's marriage in a single frame. When the reader anticipates a happy reunion after the closeness that Shukumar and Shoba shared by exchanging untold experiences, it feels like a douse of freezing cold water, when Shoba announces her decision to move into a new apartment. Shoba's problem is her inability to deal with her anger and frustration of losing the baby for whose arrival she plans elaborately. In her state of disappointment and self pity, she did not care if her marriage fell apart. Lahiri beautifully explains the aspects of a marriage in Diasporas communities.

All of these themes were crucial in her becoming as a writer, which is well reflected in her short stories. Her works show themes of cultural displacement and disorientation, from which result cultural alienation. There are also themes of loss of innocence, troubles of marriage and romance. Lahiri manages to take the theme of clash between tradition and modernity and weaves it into her fiction. One is glad that Lahiri did not escape her circumstances which had a formative influence on her and instead chose to enrich her stories with those themes.

In Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* or even in her earlier works the two generations of diaspora are virtual strangers. The first generation migrants remain clustered together, sharing their collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland. Though they left it for the possibility of distinctive life in a tolerant host country, yet they know that they are not accepted by their host society and therefore feel insulated from it. For this insecurity they are constantly look out for people belonging to their own community, searching for epidemic and cultural communities.

The Diasporic predicament in relationships is well wrought out by the fictionist when she let her protagonists take different roads, quite opposite of those travelled by their immigrant parents. This is where the cultural and familial ties are broken in the *Unaccustomed Earth*. They all become strangers in their own worlds have to fend for their own survival in diaspora as Kaushik experienced.

The rootlessness that is at the core of the problems between Kaushik and Hema in the final story, *Going Ashore*. Kaushik has travelled extensively throughout his life, and finds that he craves for a more settled existence. Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle describe this need as how "in a fluid world of movement, place remains a deeply contested and symbolically rich site in which to constitute the self, even for those on the move".²

This confirms the importance of being grounded to one place and its centrality to the negotiation of identity. The inclusion of "those on the move" indicates that migrants are not exempt from this identity formation. Kaushik's restless lifestyle stands as a contrast to the other characters in *Unaccustomed Earth*. But even he, who throughout his life has been perpetually on the move, finds that he needs stasis. Although he is pessimistic about entering into office life and building a home somewhere, imagining that he will hate it, he realizes that he needs to lead a different life and "be still". However, he is unable to plan for more than perhaps a few years into the future, and does not have anyone else's feelings to consider, until he meets Hema in Italy. Unlike Kaushik, she has settled and lived in the same place for a

number of years. Here she has bought an apartment, which she inhabits by herself, and she is intent on continuing to live and work in this same space for the foreseeable future. Navin, the man she plans to marry, has agreed to these terms, and is moving to come and live with her, a sacrifice that Hema rates highly. When Kaushik proposes that she cancel her wedding, and join him on his way eastward to his new job in Hong Kong, Hema is infuriated and hurt by the suggestion. Just as Ruma is unwilling to accompany her husband on his various business trips, nor is Hema prepared to let Kaushik's movements run her life. Both women find that they need a secure place to strike their roots, and that a rootless existence as migrant women, totally dependent on their men, is not an option.

Rome and the greater Italy is the place where Hema and Kaushik meet and part with each other and as it is a place that they both have ties to, it is a fruitful setting for their love affair and for the negotiating of their roles as Indian American lovers. Hema likens Rome to Calcutta: Like Calcutta, which she'd visited throughout childhood, Rome was a city she knew on the one hand intimately and on the other hand not at all – a place that fully absorbed her and also kept her at bay. When Kaushik and Hema travel to the Italian countryside, they find themselves jealous of the locals who are obviously deeply rooted in the place where they have spent their whole lives. As postcolonial subjects, Hema and Kaushik lack this belonging to a particular geographical location, and are at best partially connected to Calcutta and Rome, the cities of their past.

To settle in a new location is a complex and ambiguous matter, and it has been described as “a process in which migrants often unwillingly and passionately engage”³ this juxtaposition of seemingly contrasting unwillingness and passion clearly indicates the ambiguous connection between immigrants and their new homelands.

The story is comprehensive studies of individuals caught in emotional tangles, between conflicts of family relationships and cultural traditions. The protagonists of the story try to establish their individual identities in a new milieu, experiencing at the same time the sense of displacement, alienation and isolation. These individuals, caught up in the confusion of their migrant lives, need to get connected to a family and friends for emotional fulfillment.

Hema and Kaushik stories depict familial ties, loss, restlessness, and exile. The trilogy remains most haunting with love, emotional tangles and death. Hema has her secret crush on Kaushik and comes to know of Kaushik's mother's secret illness. Finally Hema after several disappointing love affairs goes for an arranged marriage with Navin, leaving her first love Kaushik, but in death she will love him forever.

References:

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3. Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, Catherine Trundle. *Local Lives (Studies in Migration and Diaspora)*. Lexington: Ashgate, 2012. p.129.

