

## Feelings of Isolation and Loss in Jhumpa Lahiri's *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*

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### **Abstract-**

*Aristotle has rightly said, 'Man is by nature a social and political animal'.(Asikaogu 37).It means a human being cannot live without the company of other human beings which inferentially states that company of others has the survival value in it. The others should be those with whom one accompanied and got habitual to live. Otherwise one feels isolated even in the company of other human beings that really happens with the diaspora people. They feel isolated and detached from the culture and its people with whom they became habitual in the past. Isolation increases social anxiety and leads human being towards low self-esteem and loss. Therefore isolation and loss is a social issue that is handled by the diaspora writers with their own experiences. Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the diaspora writers who invite discourse on isolation and loss through their short stories. Hence, the purpose of the research article is to locate the feelings of isolation and loss in Jhumpa Lahiri's *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*.*

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Alienation, isolation, migration, homeland

Jhumpa Lahiri, a recipient of Pulitzer Prize for her novel, is one of the prominent American authors who have been conferred with many honorary awards. She was born to Indian parents who were migrated from Calcutta to London. She brought up in London and aspired to get nationality of America. Her fictional work has autobiographical elements in it. She is a writer of short-stories, novels and essays and professor of creative writing. In her simplistic and journalistic style, she presented the issue of the diaspora through the imaginary character Mr. Pirzada in her short story *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*.

The word ‘Diaspora’ is derived from ancient Greek word *diaspeiro* which means ‘to sow over’. In view of Hebrew, diaspora is *Hebrew Galut* that means exile. The historical base is that the exile of Jews among the Gentiles after the Babylonian Exile or the aggregate of Jews or Jewish communities scattered “in exile” outside Palestine or present-day Israel. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as “People settled far from their ancestral homelands”.(Merriam web). The meaning of diaspora is applicable to all those who left their homeland and settled in another country. Although its concern seems to be at the level of geography, the study of these people involve so many things such as memories of native land, disintegration in the host country, exile from the home land, myth of returning to homeland, personal loss, etc. The study of diaspora has been originated in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the writers who write about their diaspora experiences.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* is one of the most beautiful short stories narrated by Lilia, an Indian American girl who is born and raised in the United States of America where people are staying from foreign affairs. The story took place in the month of autumn in 1971 in New England. It moves round the protagonist Mr. Pirzada, originally Bengali, but chose to live in Pakistan (East) and became professor of Botany and had three storeys building in Dacca. He used to visit Lilia’s family every eve to dine with them and watches the news to come to know about his family. His family includes his wife and seven daughters who live in Dacca. He was awarded with grant by Pakistan government to study foliage of New England. The grant awarded by his government was insufficient to live and conduct the research in America that is why he had to live in a graduate dormitory. He had no proper stove to prepare food and television set to watch the news from his own country; therefore he used to go to Lilia’s home to dine with them and watch news. He was worried about his family, because this was the time of civil war in Bangladesh.

Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s family are from different countries, but they are kind and cooperative in nature. As Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s family are from different countries, their cultures are also different from each other. But their behaviour is same as if both of them belong to same country. Lilia says, “Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every

night for supper with their hands” (Lahiri 1). These cultural resemblances between the two persons created intimacy between them and brought them together.

In the beginning, when Lilia’s parents recognized the last names of Mr. Pirzada through the university directory, they invited Mr. Pirzada to come and visit their home. The act of inviting someone to one’s own home was not in the culture of Americans. Lilia’s family knew nothing about Mr. Pirzada but they still invited him to come and visit their home after talking to him over the phone. Mr. Pirzada’s visits establish a bond of love and affinity with Lilia’s parents even after Mr. Pirzada comes from Pakistan and Lilia’s parents are from India.

However, when the Bangladesh Liberation War broke out in 1971, prompting Mr. Pirzada to fear for the lives of his wife and daughters, Lilia begins to understand how hard it is to be cut off from one’s homeland and caught between two cultures. The story suggests that living in diaspora may bring new opportunities and exciting cultural exchange, but at the same time it also means accepting feelings of alienation as well as a certain amount of cultural and personal loss, as Lilia and Mr. Pirzada struggle with the distance between the United States and South Asia.

Lilia, unlike most of the people, knows that she has dual cultural knowledge: she learns about her home nation at school and the region her parents left behind at home. Lilia is handed map tests at school about the Thirteen Colonies, which would later become the United States of America. She has "a map of the world tacked to the wall" at home, with lines painted on it to show her parents' trips through South Asia. These two sorts of maps represent Lilia's two worlds: her school world concentrates on a small portion of the United States, whereas her home world is more worldwide, with a focus on the Indian subcontinent.

The gap between these two maps illustrates Lilia's dual cultural identity, providing her with a more varied perspective on the world than her contemporaries. Lilia understands things that the other people in her life don't because of her multiple universes. Mr. Pirzada, for example, is perplexed when he sees pumpkins on front porches around Halloween. As a result, Lilia explains jack-o'-lanterns to him and even demonstrates how to carve one "like others [she] had spotted in the neighbourhood." Lilia is able to pick up on "local" information and habits that her parents and Mr. Pirzada often fail to understand because she was raised in an American suburb.

Similarly, while Lilia's television is always on, she is astonished to learn that this is not the case for many of her classmates—her friend Dora's family, for example. Because television is how Lilia and her family learn about what is going on in the world, the absence of television at Dora's house indicates that Lilia has a better awareness of global affairs than her classmates.

Mr. Pirzada used to visit Lilia's house daily. She understands the situation of Mr. Pirzada occurred due to the violent condition arose in his country as she grows closer to Mr. Pirzada. She begins to feel like she doesn't fit in either the white American or the South Asian immigrant communities. When Lilia and Dora go trick-or-treating as witches, many of Lilia's neighbours say, "Several people told me that they had never seen an Indian witch before." (6). Lilia is delighted to partake in Halloween traditions, but the residents of her suburb make her feel strange due to her ethnicity, despite the fact that she and Dora are dressed identically and doing the same thing. This kind of feelings increases the intensity of isolation in the mind of Lilia. Lilia, too, feels distant from her family at times. Mr. Pirzada is Lilia's favourite, although his "comfort" with her parents makes her feel "a stranger in [her] own home." Lilia's parents and Mr. Pirzada have direct knowledge of South Asian culture, geography, and politics, which Lilia lacks due to her upbringing in the United States. Lilia's father is frequently concerned that she is not receiving the education she requires.

Even more bitterly, Lilia learns that living in diaspora frequently means being cut off from those with whom one loved and lived for several years and detached from cultural heritage. Mr. Pirzada's tension has been increased due to the violence in his homeland. Therefore, he is never totally present with Lilia's family, even though he comes over every night. Lilia points out, "Our meals, our actions, were only a shadow of what had already happened there, a lagging ghost of where Mr. Pirzada really belonged." (3). His real life is taking place hundreds of miles away, without him, because he is separated from his wife and girls and is unable to contact them. Physically he is in attachment with America, but mentally he is attached with his family that shows his isolation and loss. Lilia pointed out the expressions on the face of Mr. Pirzada, "I turned to look at Mr. Pirzada; the images flashed in miniature across his eyes. As he watched he had an immovable expression on his face, composed but alert, as if someone were giving him directions to an unknown destination." (3) Mr. Pirzada, like Lilia, feels caught between worlds.

One world was of America where he was living and the other world was of his family living in East Pakistan. Therefore he tries to "belong," implying that diaspora comes with a sense of isolation. When Mr. Pirzada leaves, Lilia is forced to feel first-hand the agony of separation-only then she understands:

It was only then, raising my water glass in his name, that I knew what it meant to miss someone who was so many miles and hours away, just as he had missed his wife and daughters for so many months.(7).

As a result, while Lilia's diaspora experience is generally thrilling and informative, she learns that living between two cultures sometimes implies feelings of isolation and loss.

Thus, Jhumpa Lahiri's short story *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* is a true example of diaspora writing that focuses on the issues of diaspora people irrespective to the boundaries of human being such as religion, country or culture. Lahiri shows the isolation and detachment of diaspora people through the characters Mr. Pirzada and Lilia. She also shows the intensity of loss and isolation increases, when the war situations occurs in the homeland.

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