
SOCIAL DIVISION AND ALIENATION: A MARXIST ANALYSIS OF JHUMPA LAHIRI'S A REAL DURWAN

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ABSTRACT

*Alienation is referred to a person's state of condition where he isolates himself from the people in his surroundings. Sometimes, according to Karl Marx, it leads to the isolation or alienation of an individual from other people. And sometimes it becomes more complex when a person isolates himself from the self and the work he requires to do. Marx identifies these four types of alienation in his book *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. The researcher of this paper intends to find the concept of Alienation in the story "A Real Durwan" by Jhumpa Lahiri, taken from the collection *Interpreter of Maladies (199)*. "A Real Durwan" is a short story about the dislocated old woman of 64 years old who finds herself as a worker in her masters' house. She is supposed to clean the whole house and maintain the security of the whole*

society. At the end of the story, she loses her previous status of real durwan when they throw her out of society.

Key words: Isolation, Dislocation, Alienation, Self, Society

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1. INTRODUCTION

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* was published in 1999 and received various renowned literary awards and appreciations. Lahiri was born in Kolkata in 1967 but could not experience the culture of India. Although, she maintained her Indian name (Jhumpa Lahiri), but she never found any taste in local Indian culture. She, along with her family, spent some time in the United Kingdom and after that migrated to America. She completed her study in America and made a prolific contribution to Indian educated families who were living in a foreign land. She made a place among those Indian intellectuals who left their native country for a successful future in the West.

Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* had received many national and international awards. It had also been awarded Pulitzer Prize in 2000. Lahiri's experience as an Indian diaspora depicts a very contrasting image when it is compared to Bharati Mukherjee. The characters in Lahiri's fiction work are more alienated, dislocated, and marginalized. While, Mukherjee's characters are more sophisticated, ordered, and well-established. Lahiri's characters are South Asia characters who feel dislocated, disjointed and disordered while experiencing life in foreign countries. For instance, take the example of Mrs. Sen who cries all night in her room because she is alien to America and unable to adjust herself to the customs of American life.

The Real Durwan by Jhumpa Lahiri is a story about an old woman who is dislocated, alienated, and disordered after the partition. The story also reveals that Boori Ma is kept as a laborer and at the end of the story, she is thrown from the house. The researcher of the article aims to locate the isolated position of Boori Ma by using Karl Marx's concept of Alienation. He believes that the character Boori Ma is not only kept isolated but she is used as a means to clean the whole house. Just like poor laborers, Boori Ma is thrown outside the house without paying what she owes the house.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The researcher aims to explain the concept of alienation as simple as possible for the readers and as well as for the coming researchers. Further, the study of Jhumpa Lahiri from the perspective of Karl Marx would provide some new theoretical lenses in South Asian Literature. It would also help researchers to understand the disparity created by the economy in our society. Thus, after studying this article, readers and researchers will come to know about various reasons that are responsible for the isolation and dislocation of people due to economic disparity in our system.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

- To highlight the concept of Marx's Alienation.
- To guarantee the basic human rights of workers.
- To throw some light on the prevailing inequality in our society.
- To expose those reasons of the exploitations in the story *A Real Durwan* by Jhumpa Lahiri.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How does Jhumpa Lahiri present Marx's concept of Alienation in the story *A Real Durwan*?
- In what ways Lahiri present economic disparity in the story?
- How does Lahiri throw light on the manipulation of Boori Ma in the story?

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers M.C.Subhashini and Dr. K.N.Sharmila (2018) published research studies that examined the cultural alienation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. Both the researchers have shed light on the fact that Jhumpa Lahiri has raised sensitive issues that Indians or immigrated Indians encounter during their lifetime. These issues vary from very domestic to social like from complexities of marriage to disconnection between Indians in foreign countries (590). She has substantially mentioned most of the issues that Indians face on alienated lands. Researchers also found that Jhumpa Lahiri has formulated her characters in an assortment of stories that represent the real testaments of people (590-94).

Another researcher Andalib Ferdous (2015) has looked for the diasporic aspects in the fictional assortments of Jhumpa Lahiri's collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* and the other is *Unaccustomed Earth*. The researcher highlights the dilemma of the life of migrants and especially Indian migrants whose life oscillates continuously between Indian culture and conventions, and the culture of dislocated, alienated land where they immigrated. According to her, such people always remain in the dynamic state of transition from their original culture to the adapted culture. She also mentions that adapting to new culture also creates a new identity of the people. Sometimes they want to completely adhere to their host country and sometimes nostalgia takes them to become their descendants. The feelings of dislocation and alienation often trace the way of migrants. The researcher also observed that the fictional characters of Jhumpa Lahiri amalgamate their old self with new self and consequently identity crash happens (1-34).

There is not much work, and related literature review available on the collection of short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri. Due to the wide research gap in this domain of literature, the researcher decided to write his research studies on the fictional work of Jhumpa Lahiri to fill this research gap. Furthermore, the aspect of the theory of Karl Marx, which the researcher selected to write this study, was found to be explored previously by the researchers. That's why later related review will focus on the concept of alienation given by Karl Marx.

Two researchers Jeremy E. Sawyer and Anup Gampab (2020) have shed light on work alienation by highlighting social class, class consciousness, and activism. Researchers observed the negative influence of work alienation on the mental state and psychological health of people. The term alienation associated with class consciousness, and consequently class consciousness with activism. Karl Marx's theory of alienation greatly impacted domains of sociology, psychology, political science, and education, etc. Work alienation adversely affects the physical

and mental well-being of workers and as result, their competence also gets affected negatively. The concept of alienation can well be understood by the factors of social class and parameters related to work. In the studies, researchers concentrated on the investigation of social class, and work factors to comprehend alienation (200-15).

According to Om Bakshi's (2011) perspective, Karl Marx has regarded men chiefly for economic status and social class. He views Marx as someone concerned about the dilemmas society faced and especially the dejected status of workers. According to Marx, 'human essence' could be felt through work, labor, and most importantly productive activity. Marx's notions astonished many eminent scholars, thinkers, and philosophers. Marx was sure about the fact his views would not be even appreciated by workers. He protests through his theory that workers don't understand their rights, neither they accept and endorse their individuality (85-111).

Xiaying Lv (2018) stated in his research studies that Karl Marx considered labor alienation of capitalist society as the root cause of others' alienation in society. Karl Marx explicitly hypothesized that "every one of us in the process of their production will double affirm oneself and another person"(282-4). He was of the view that the labor class of society does not possess any asset other than their manpower and providing services for the capitalist class of society.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1. Research Design & Method

The researcher has analyzed the story by using a qualitative research design. It is used so that researcher can easily conduct his study in more natural settings of the things. Textual Analysis has been used to conduct this research work. The researcher has identified the issue in the story, and by using a theoretical lens, has solved the issue of Alienation.

6.2. Theoretical Framework

It is an understood phenomenon that in textual analysis the reader attempts to locate the problem and tries to fix it. *A Real Durwan* by Jhumpa Lahiri deals with the issue of lower and higher class which unfortunately takes us to Karl Marx's concept of lower and higher class. The author of the article aims to find the problem of the lower and higher class in the story and intends to resolve the issue by using Marx's understanding of Alienation. Marx's concept of Alienation is a very complex phenomenon. According to Muhammad Iqbal Shah (2015), Marx's Alienation is a "state of mind" in which a person feels completely isolated and dejected. In such situations, a person feels completely isolated, both mentally and physically. Shah adds that as far as the concept of Alienation is concerned, it is more situated in the social and political life of the people (p. 43). In the story, *A Real Durwan*, the character of Boori Maa is isolated and dejected both physically and mentally. Like laborers, Boori Maa does not get what she deserves to get.

7. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A Real Durwan by Jhumpa Lahiri is a story about an old woman of 64 years old who works in a house in Calcutta (Kolkata). Although, she claims to have a fascinating and charming past, yet she works for her survival in the house. After sometime, she is accused of letting robbers rob the "New Basin" and ultimately decides her future by throwing her outside the society.

Garrett Ward Sheldon (2001) defines 'Alienation' as a kind of feeling in which a person feels stranger, lonely, and dislocated. He loses contact with himself and other people surrounding him(7). Thus, elaborating on Sheldon's definition of Alienation, we can say that in Marx's Alienation, a person's rights to speak, property, and liberty have been alienated, categorized, and separated from the others; especially the bourgeois class. In the story "A Real

Durwan”, Jhumpa Lahiri’s first sentence introduces Boori Ma as a kind of worker in the house. She says “Boori Ma, sweeper of the stairwell, had not slept in two nights”(79). From the very first sentence of the story, we come to know that Boori Ma belongs to a poor class that enables her to work in the house of other people. She does multiple works at the same time, ranging from cleaning households to scattering cows from eating food materials. Further, Lahiri adds “She was sixty-four years old, with hair in a knot no larger than a walnut, and she looked almost as narrow from the front as she did from the side”(79).

In the past, Boori Ma had a family of four daughters and a husband with a lavish living. She often compares herself with her past. While describing the marriage ceremony of her third daughter, she says “At our house, we ate goat twice a week. We had a pond on our property, full of fish”(80). She is much aware of her current situation where she is only expected to do more work without having anything which she deserves. She has isolated herself from the rest of people, sometimes, even from herself too. For Marx, the process of alienation is the outcome of social and political prejudices. In the story, it is visible that Boori Ma is not local in the area. She is a refugee as she has lost her primary identity in the process of partition. Secondly, her social background has isolated and alienated her from other people. This is a two-way process that results in the complete disastrous fate of characters from the lower class.

While talking about Marx’s Alienation, Iqbal adds that for Marx, the feeling of alienation is the direct outcome of the “class-based, class-conscious ranking or stratified society” (p. 48). The laborers feel alienated because they know that they would not be able to get the final fruits of their labor. In the story, Boori Ma’s plight to recognize her past is in vain. The spectators and listeners only enjoy her stories for time being and do not take them into their hearts. She has her place to sleep. She does not expect to sleep in the house of her masters. Lahiri describes the residents’ attitude to Boori Ma’s isolated place in a way that arises more pity for the pure soul. She says “Most of all, the residents liked that Boori Ma, who slept each night behind the collapsible gate, stood guard between them and the outside world”(82). She has lost her primary identity, herself, individuality to provide a comfortable life to others.

Her masters, Mr. Dalai and Mrs. Dalai bring new basins into their house which is a sign of being rich in society. Mr. Dalai also orders a telephone connection for his house. While talking to Mr. Dalai, Boori Ma states that once she had basins in their house where she had petals in the water with an extremely diluted fragrance of perfumes. She feels dislocated between two extremes; past and present. Further, the behavior of her masters and residents has made her hopeless and isolated. Mr. Dalai and Mrs. Dalai always promise her that they will bring a blanket for her as her old one is of no use. Mr. Dalai says “Boori Ma, I haven’t forgotten. We will bring you back a sheep’s-hair blanket made in the mountains”(88). But, the readers do not see such action from Mr. Dalai and Mrs. Dalai till the end of the story. At the end of the story, she is charged with letting robbers rob new basins from her masters’ house. Without caring for her age and what she had for them, one of the residents says indirectly to Boori Ma “Boori Ma’s mouth is full of ashes. But that is nothing new”(91). Her fate is decided by everyone in society. She is pushed to the very extreme of loneliness, isolation of dislocation. Firstly by the political scenario of time, she has lost her initial identity. Secondly, her social status has made her isolated from other people, herself, and her work.

8. CONCLUSION

“A Real Durwan” by Jhumpa Lahiri depicts the story of Boori Ma who finds herself in the cage of social and political dislocation, isolation, and alienation. Belonging to a refugee class in a socially stratified society, Boori Ma finds herself trapped in two extremes; present and past. Unable to find any path, her life as a worker in society leads to extreme loneliness and hopelessness. At the end of the story, she finds herself in complete isolation when she is thrown

out of society. When analyzed through Marx's concept of Alienation, we come to know that the reason behind Boori Ma's fall is the division of the social class into higher and lower. In such societies, according to Marx, the workers feel dislocated and alienated from the people who surround them. They also feel isolated from the surroundings. More specifically, they feel alienated from themselves and the work they do. Boori Ma's life is filled with such instances that make her isolated, dislocated, and alienated in human society.

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