
A comparative study of Jhumpa Lahari and Santha rama Rao's novels.

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ABSTRACT

A Comparative Study of Santha Rama Rau and Jhumpa Lahiri Manifests a Comparison of two writers of Indian origin .It is a comparison of just not the work of fiction but it is a comparison of two ages or we can term it as two periods of time, the contemporary society of modern India has underwent a certain level of metamorphism. An interesting aspect of the modern Indian literature, mainly the novels, has been the creative release of the feminine sensibility. Women in modern India have not only shared the exciting and dangerous burdens of the struggle for independence but also articulated the national impulse and the consciousness of cultural change in the realm of letters. In the personality of an individual like Santha Rama Rau the temper of Indian womanhood achieved its comprehensive synthesis; she was not only the lark of the Indian literary awakening but also the manifestation of the Indian imagination. If a plunge of the Indian womanhood into politics had been almost a common occurrence in the days of the freedom struggle, the literary enterprise too, held out its fascinating, if not always rewarding, attractions; in the development of the Indo-Anglian novel, the feminine sensibility has achieved an imaginative self-sufficiency which merits recognition in spite of its relatively later materialization.

The time when Santha Rama Rau emerged on the Indian literary scene, India was regaining and re-composing its rambling mansion, Santha Rama Rau has witnessed the pre-independent era. the era of trauma, the era of peace as such she has manifested this mental dilemma in her works, the target of Santha Rama Rau's fiction was the western society and her intention was to present the growth of Indian liberalization and independence, she was bestowed MORALLY with the responsibility of glorifying the Indian cause to the west. In her major writings which are mostly in the form of travelogues she exhibits the changing trends in the Indian society, she explores srutinise and artistically presents the real picture of her nation.

Santha Rama Rau was born in India on 24 January 1923 and is best known as a gypsy writer for her constant voyages she has undertaken before finally settling down in America. Santha Rama Rau has hardly spent more than ten years of her life in India, out of which six belongs to her childhood, she had her schooling in the states, and later she married an American and made America her home. In spite of all these facts, which seems to emphasize the alienness of Santha Rama Rau, she is essentially an Indian writer because she has essentially an Indian identity .the blurb on the jacket of Gifts of passage, after giving some details about her life, says: and yet.

Santha Rama Rau, she is essentially and Indian writer because she has essentially as Indian identity. The blurb on the jacket of Gifts of Passage, after giving some details about her life, says:

And yet ‘uprooted’ is not really the right word to use about her: her roots are still in her native land, her love of it is still deep, and each return is a return ‘home’.

This is certainly true. In her very first book, *Home to India*, which describes her ‘educational circuit of this new old land which was both our home and so very foreign’, Santha Rama Rau faces the problem of identity: I wasn’t a ‘real Indian’. The truth faced me at every turn. At first during those early weeks in Bombay, I hadn’t really wanted to be a part of the Indian people. I had wanted to return to England, graduate from Oxford, and Indian had seemed like an interlude – interesting, but quickly over, not a place to spend one’s life. It was too foreign, too inexplicable by my Western standards: I couldn’t fit in it anywhere, with my upbringing. (p. 67) (1)

But she soon realizes that After all, I was a part of the great Indian struggle for independence, and I found, to my surprise, that I resented being considered a rather ignorant outsider by the politically minded students. I wanted to be accepted by them, to be a ‘real Indian’..... I really felt an Indian identity for the first time. (p.67)

She discovers that she wanted to be a ‘real’ Indian, a ‘real’ Indian with a European upbringing. In her *Gifts of Passage*, she writes after a gap of fifteen years that she had ‘and indelible engagement with India’-

An engagement that even now, when I am married to an American, have a child who divides his allegiance between America and India, have lived so many years outside my own country, never entirely leaves me, and never allows me escape from an almost automatic concern with India. I make a very poor expatriate. (p. 27)

Her engagement with India is clearly reflected in a number of her books – *Home to India*, *This is India*, *Remember the House*, *Gifts of Passage*, *The Cooking of India* and *A Passage to India*, a play based on Forster’s famous novel. In two of her travelogues, *East of Home* and *View to the Southeast* she explores the larger Asian identity of an Indian. Like Jawaharlal Nehru, She is a true Indian and a true internationalist at the same time. While reading Santha Rama Rau we are constantly reminded of what Nehru says in his epilogue to *The Discovery of India*:

We have to play our part in this coming internationalism, and for this purpose, to travel, meet others, learn from them and understand them. But a real internationalism is not something in the air without roots or anchorage. It has to grow out of national cultures. Thus we shall remain true Indians and Asiatics, and become at the same time good internationalists and world citizens. (2)

Santha Rama Rau is a true citizen of the world, a globe-trotter, but, to use that famous image of Donne’s, one arm of her spiritual compass is fixed in India, with the other free to range over the entire world. She is a gypsy, as her grandfather used to call her, but a gypsy with her spiritual home in India, a gypsy who feels at home in an Indian saree, who, when she is to give birth to a child thinks inevitably of going to India:

Some atavistic urge made me feel, for example, that my son had to be born in India, at my parents’ house, in he accepted Indian tradition. (*The Cooking of India*, p. 7). (3)

Her father, Sir Senegal Rama Rau, was an Indian diplomat and ambassador. Her mother was Dhanvanthi Rama Rau, a leader in the Indian women’s rights movement who was the International President of Planned Parenthood.

As a young girl, Rama Rau lived in an India under British rule. When she was six, she accompanied her father's political trip to England. There she was educated at St. Paul's School for Girls, and graduated in 1939. After short traveling through South Africa, she returned to India to discover a different place than she remembered. She applied to Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, in the United States, and was the first Indian student to be accepted there. She graduated with honors in 1944. Shortly afterward, she published her first book *Home to India*.

When India won its independence in 1947, Rama Rau's father was appointed as his nation's first ambassador to Japan. While in Tokyo, Japan, she met her future husband, an American, Faubion Bowers. After extensive traveling through Asia and a bit of Africa and Europe, the couple settled in New York City, New York. Rama Rau became an instructor in the English faculty of Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, New York, in 1971, also working as a freelance writer.

Rau is the author of *Home to India*, *East of Home*, *This is India*, *Remember the House* (a novel), *My Russian Journey*, *Gifts of Passage*, *The Adventuress*, (a novel), *View to the Southeast*, *A Princess Remembers*, and *An Inheritance*.

She adapted the novel *A Passage to India*, with author E. M. Forster's approval, for the theatre. The play was produced for the Oxford Playhouse, Oxford, United Kingdom, moved to the West End in London, United Kingdom, in 1960 for 261 performances, and then on to Broadway in New York City for 109 showings commencing in January 1962. It was adapted by John Maynard and directed by Waris Hussein for television by the BBC in 1965. In 1984 the play was adapted for film by director David Lean.

Her short story, "By Any Other Name", is one of the essays in *Gifts of Passage*. It is in the Norton Anthology of English Literature and is widely studied. She married Faubion Bowers in 1951 and had one son, Jai Peter Bowers in 1952. The couple divorced in 1966. In 1970, Rama Rau married Gurdon B. Wattles, and had no children. Faubion Bowers died in November 1999 and is survived by his son, Jai. Jai is currently living in Scottsdale, Arizona, with his wife, Deborah Lee Bowers, and has a daughter, Whitney Elizabeth Bowers. Jai also has two stepchildren, Morgan and Ross Mandeville.

Rau wrote a short memoir called "By Any Other Name", as mentioned above. She, 5 and a half, and her 8-year-old sister Premila briefly attended an Anglo-Indian School where the teacher anglicized their names. Santha's name was changed to Cynthia and her sister's was changed to Pamela. The condescending environment in which they worked and played was not fit. When confronted with the additional indignity of being told by the teacher that "Indians cheat", her older sister came immediately to her little sister's classroom and they walked home, never to return to that school.

In *Remember the House*, which invited comparison with Mr. E.M. Forster's on equal terms, the central character, Indira (Baba) Goray, is given the author's kind of background – high social status and education abroad and Westernised circle of friends and relatives – and her moral perplexities and shifting values are most candidly portrayed. The novel form gave Santha Rama Rau greater freedom to probe deeper into her experience than even her autobiographies did. It gave her an opportunity to throw off her characteristic reticence and reluctance to expose herself. She knew long ago, quite early in her life, what one could achieve by using the fiction form. 'Who cares?' for example, was a successful story in which

she had examined the attitudes of foreign-educated Indians towards their traditional values. With *Remembers the House* (1956), Santha Rama Rau emerged as an important novelist of post independence India trying to hold a mirror to the problem of shifting values in a changing society. It was an extremely promising beginning. After reading *Remember the House* one feels that, if only she had involved herself with Indian society, she would have gone beyond her personal predicament and tackled, with her new-found mastery of the novel form, significant problems that faced Indian and would have emerged as a major writer. But that was not to be. Personal fulfillment is, after all, a primary concern. She had married an American and shared with him ‘an incurable addiction to travel’- one gypsy had married another gypsy and the only thing they could do together was to wander.

A young woman Indira and her emergence as a new woman on the Indian literary society. A similar quest for identity and self realisation was undertaken by one of the most promising and compatible writer of Indian origin, Jhumpa Lahiri like Santha Rama Rau, Jhumpa Lahiri is both a native and a alien.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born on July 11, 1967 in Lahiri was born in London, the daughter of Bengali Indian immigrants. Her family moved to the United States when she was three; Lahiri considers herself an American, stating, “I wasn’t born here, but I might as well have been.

Lahiri grew up in Kingston, Rhode Island, where her father Amar Lahiri works as a librarian at the University of Rhode Island, he is the basis for the protagonist in “The Third and Final Continent,” the closing story from *Interpreter of Maladies*. Lahiri’s mother wanted her children to grow up knowing their Bengali heritage, and her family often visited relatives in Calcutta (now Kolkata).[6] American author. Lahiri’s debut short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and her first novel, *The Namesake* (2003), was adapted into the popular film of the same name. She was born Nilanjana Sudeshna, which she says are both “good names,” but goes by her nick-name Jhumpa.

When she began kindergarten in Kingston, Rhode Island Lahiri’s teacher decided to call her by her pet name, Jhumpa, because it was easier to pronounce than her “proper names”. Lahiri recalled, “I always felt so embarrassed by my name.... You feel like you’re causing someone pain just by being who you are.” Lahiri’s ambivalence over her identity was the inspiration for the ambivalence of Gogol, the protagonist of her novel *The Namesake*, over his unusual name;

Lahiri’s debut short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* was finally released in 1999. The stories address sensitive dilemmas in the lives of Indians or Indian immigrants, with themes such as marital difficulties, miscarriages, and the disconnection between first and second generation United States immigrants. Lahiri later wrote, “When I first started writing I was not conscious that my subject was the Indian-American experience. What drew me to my craft was the desire to force the two worlds I occupied to mingle on the page as I was not brave enough, or mature enough, to allow in life.”[10] The collection was praised by American critics, but received mixed reviews in India, where reviewers were alternately enthusiastic and upset Lahiri had “not painted Indians in a more positive light.” *Interpreter of Maladies* sold 600,000 copies and received the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction (only the seventh time a story collection had won the award).

In February 2010, she was appointed a member of the Committee on the Arts and Humanities, along with five others.[4]

Lahiri's writing is characterized by her "plain" language and her characters, often Indian immigrants to America who must navigate between the cultural values of their birthplace and their adopted home. Lahiri's fiction is autobiographical and frequently draws upon her own experiences as well as those of her parents, friends, acquaintances, and others in the Bengali communities with which she is familiar. Lahiri examines her characters' struggles, anxieties, and biases to chronicle the nuances and details of immigrant psychology and behavior.

Until *Unaccustomed Earth*, she focused mostly on first-generation Indian American immigrants and their struggle to raise a family in a country very different from theirs. Her stories describe their efforts to keep their children acquainted with Indian culture and traditions and to keep them close even after they have grown up in order to hang on to the Indian tradition of a joint family, in which the parents, their children and the children's families live under the same roof.

Unaccustomed Earth departs from this earlier original ethos as Lahiri's characters embark on new stages of development. These stories scrutinize the fate of the second and third generations. As succeeding generations become increasingly assimilated into American culture and are comfortable in constructing perspectives outside of their country of origin, Lahiri's fiction shifts to the needs of the individual. She shows how later generations depart from the constraints of their immigrant parents, who are often devoted to their community and their responsibility to other immigrant.

This work aims at bringing out the feminist sensitivity in the novel *Remember the house* by Santha Rama Rau and namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri. Both these novelists exemplify and propose a redefinition of feminism in their works. Lahiri best exemplifies the family-centeredness of Indian woman, the most thoroughly articulated theory of womanism to date, in her narratives of Bengali-American families, whose members well describe both physical and cultural isolation, alienation and longingness for their homeland.

Though these writers never explicitly addresses feminism by name in their fiction, the manifestations of the various aspects of womanhood in their various works of fiction provide an insightful point of exploration. In viewing Lahiri through a feminist lens, one can see that Lahiri goes far in manifesting womanism and presenting, if only unintentionally or unadmittedly, challenges to and critiques of womanism. Lahiri's fiction focuses on the struggle of both Indian-American women, first and foremost, and the role of Indian-American men in individually and collectively creating and nurturing American and Bengali and Bengali-American identities in their new American landscape. Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* is a stunning example of feminist rebirth incorporating maternity that is both physical and cultural on the part of two protagonists, a mother, Ashima, and her son, Gogol, who, fittingly, searches for his own name and identity in Lahiri's new feministic novel.

Lahiri's newer short story and novella collection, *Unaccustomed Earth*, repeats concern for feminism but to a quite different, even, at times, opposite effect, and again the physical and cultural isolation becomes a duty shared by female and male protagonists. Lahiri's technique of both raising awareness of the strength of womanhood in the lives and actions of Indian-/Bengali-American.

Remember the house is essentially a psychological novel, dealing with the subtle maturing of an adolescent girl, but the psychology is presented not in terms of the development of consciousnesses in the Lawrence or Henry James but in terms of good dramatic situations, which are more creations of an extremely promising novelist, she deeply explores the insight of the protagonist's mind and provides the readers with every possible development, which finally ends in the happy settlement of the main character.

In *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri. In this novel, Ashima, a young Bengali-American immigrant gives birth to, both physically and culturally, her son Gogol, whose search for identity is entirely grounded on positive family role models, who nurture his intercultural identity growth. Lahiri reveals not only the defining power of names and expectations bestowed upon us by our parents but also the means by which we redefine ourselves.

The study of Lahiri's feminist aspirations seems incomplete without an investigation of her collection of short stories, [interpreter of maladies]

“Hema a Kaushik,” from her newest collection, *Unaccustomed Earth*. Here, Lahiri envisions for readers what a loss of womanist cultural might look like. (3)

Ashima's physical maternity begins early in *The Namesake*. At the very commencement of the novel, Ashima is pregnant, arriving in Cambridge, Massachusetts from Calcutta, India. She almost immediately gives birth to and rears Gogol, but the rearing Ashima takes on is greater than traditional childbearing, and, as Gogol soon learns during his own coming-of-age story, is generously bestowed on many American who have no blood ties to himself or Ashima. Indeed, Ashima purposefully becomes a mother of culture for herself, her son and many young Bengali-Americans, both early on in the novel and in its later pages, where she fosters new cultural transmissions with her Caucasian American friends.

In the beginning, Lahiri's unnamed, third person-omniscient narrator writes of Ashima's maternity:

“As the baby grows, so, too, does their circle of Bengali acquaintances...They all come from Calcutta/and for this reason alone they are friends. Most of them live within walking distance of one another in Cambridge. The husbands are teachers, researchers, doctors, engineers. The wives, homesick and bewildered, turn to Ashima for recipes and advice, and she tells them about the carp that's sold in Chinatown, that it's possible to make halwa from Cream of Wheat”. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 38; ch. 2) (4)

In this quote, Lahiri interweaves Ashima's physical maternity of Gogol with the communal maternity, here Bengali-American identity nurturing and translation, she shares with her Bengali-American friends. In helping others, Ashima's ability to mother herself culturally is laid forth, and she exemplifies both autonomous and communal growth, which are both necessary to womanist ideas of maternity.

Ashima's maternity, individual, familial and communal, only grows throughout the novel as Gogol and his intercultural identity develop, and, as the novel and Gogol's narrative concludes, Ashima begins a new chapter of her life, in which she plans to travel, splitting her remaining years between Calcutta and the American homes of Gogol and her daughter, Sonia. One can only envision Ashima further maternalizing herself and others in this next stage of her life, as she had in the previously narrated portions which readers are permitted to glimpse. As she sells her house, no longer necessary in her retirement, she hosts a final

Bengali-American party to mark the end of her days in the home she shared with her son, daughter, and now deceased husband on Pemberton Road. At this party, Ashima's maternity of the community is remembered and honored by guests who will miss Ashima's parties and the cultural learning they encouraged:

“Gogol does not know to whom these children belong - half the guests are people his mother has befriended in recent years, people who were at his wedding but whom he does not recognize. People talk of how much they've come to love Ashima's Christmas Eve parties, that they've missed them these past few years, that it won't be the same without her. They have come to rely on her, Gogol realizes, to collect them together, to organize the holiday, to convert it, to introduce the tradition to those who are new. It has always felt adopted to him, an accident of circumstance, a celebration not really meant to be. And yet it was for him, for Sonia, that his parents had gone to the trouble of learning these customs. It was for their sake that it had come to all this”. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 286; ch. 12) (5)

Indeed throughout the novel, it is obvious that the tie to Ashima's cultural maternity is the physical maternity of raising her son and daughter itself. In the quotation, Ashima's learning about Christmas for Sonia and Gogol is central, yet it enables her to later provide communal maternity at gatherings like her farewell-Christmas party. And yet, this womanistic rendering of maternity, it seems, is not only extended to women in the novel.

“Is that what you think of when you think of me?...Do I remind you of that night?”
“Not at all,” Ashoke replies, “You remind me of everything that followed” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 124; ch. 5). (6)

In naming his son, Ashoke not only nurtures Gogol's multicultural identity, he nurtures, like Ashima, a new identity that is all his own, and this independence, this womanistic maternity provides Gogol with yet another means by which to explore himself and his origins.

It is perhaps Gogol who best displays the most unique manifestation of womanistic maternity in Lahiri's novel, despite the fact that he is not a woman. Throughout the novel, it is uncanny how well Gogol can envision his mother's feelings and reactions to emotions and events he, Gogol, encounters.

Gogol thinks at his American girlfriend's parents' dinner party: “His own mother would never have served so few dishes to a guest. She would have kept her eyes trained on Maxine, insisting she have seconds and then thirds” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 133; ch. 6). In contemplating his mother's feelings and reactions in his own quest to think, feel and react, Gogol not only recognizes Ashima's Bengali heritage and its mores, but also his own need to incorporate both American and Bengali elements into his identity. He can no more deny that Ashima's entertaining methods are ingrained in his mind and part of him than he can deny that he often finds himself in American homes with American s entertaining. These exclusively American spaces, such as Lydia Ratliff s kitchen, in which Lydia says things like “You could be Italian” (Lahiri, *Namesake* 134; ch. 6), are different from his own (and his mother's) conceptions, but are geographically and culturally central to his life nonetheless. Upon having realizations like this, in which Gogol sees the need for both cultural identities, he gives birth to a form of cultural maternity of the self that is entirely his own.

It is as he is dating Maxine that Gogol realizes his fate - in that relationship alone- as a piece of cultural eccentricity. In effect, he becomes an object of comparison through which Lydia and her friends are allowed to better express their American ness. In these American - Bengali-American dialogues between the Ratliffs and their friends and Gogol, Gogol's Bengali identity is entirely masked. "I once had a girlfriend who went to India," an American party guest of Lydia's quips. "Oh? Where did she go?" Gogol returns. "I don't know. All I remember is that she came back thin as a rail and I was horribly envious of her," the American woman replies (Lahiri, Namesake 157; ch. 6). It might seem easy to articulate that Gogol, then, is an Oriental conversation accessory for the Ratliffs, but Lydia's own reaction to introducing Gogol reveals something horrifyingly more telling.

'But, you're Indian,' Pamela says, frowning. 'I'd think the climate wouldn't affect you, given your heritage.'

'Pamela, Nick's American ,' Lydia says, leaning across the table, rescuing Gogol from the conversation. 'He was born here.' She turns to him, and he sees from Lydia's expression that after all these months, she herself isn't sure. 'Weren't you?' (Lahiri, Namesake 157; ch. 6)

With the Ratliffs, as in the example above, Gogol realizes a total alienation from his Bengali roots. Lydia, Maxine and Gerald not only joke about mistaking Gogol's cultural and ethnic heritage as Italian, they are entirely unknowing about his cultural values and background, so central to his identity, as evidenced in his constant mental assessments of the differences between the Ratliffs' American mores and his family's Bengali-American values and actions. The freedom from Bengali identity, the loss of identity Lydia blatantly and inadvertently expresses in the presence of strangers becomes, to Gogol, insufficient for the purpose of defining and fulfilling himself.

In the end, Gogol realizes, in comparing Lydia, Maxine, and their non-Bengali American ness to his mother's Bengaliness, that he cannot deny his connection to his mother's culture, her maternity and his proximity to his mother's essentialism. However, it is in realizing that his mother and Lydia are two distinct examples of two very different cultures that Gogol realizes his own need for American - American -Bengali hybridity, of his necessity to incorporate both Bengali and American elements into his character. This realization Gogol experiences also comes as a result of immersing himself into an entirely Bengali-American relationship with his then-wife Moushumi. In concluding Gogol and Moushumi's marriage to be too Bengali-American , Lahiri implies that hybrid identity, here Bengali-American identity, is itself possible of the kind of essentialism that purer types of identity by which Bengali and Caucasian-American identity are sometimes typified. Gogol and Moushumi's relationship, Lahiri implies, is an example of cultural identity construction that is too local and too specific. Not only are the two partners Bengali-American s, but they are American s in the northeastern United States who rely too much on typical Bengali identity stereotypes such as over-education, preoccupation with parental influence and city and suburb living, tropes Lahiri identifies as too regularly followed by Bengali-American s seeking to carve out their own identity.

At conclusion, it is Gogol's own multicultural identity, placed not only between Bengali and American culture, but between American and Bengali-American culture, which can support not only the physical but the cultural maternity he has received throughout his life's journey thus far, in addition to his own maternity, resulting from his explorations of maternity past

and impending. In the final pages of *The Namesake*, Gogol envisions not only his self-generated maternity of his own cultural identity, but his potential for physical p/maternity (and thus further cultural maternity of another) as well, as he examines a copy of Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat," presented to him, a sign of cultural maturity his name, by his father:

Gogol gets up, shuts the door to his room, muffling the noise of the party that swells below him, the laughter of the children playing down the hall. He sits cross-legged on the bed. He opens the book, glances at an illustration of Nikolai

Gogol, and then at the chronology of the author's life on the facing page. Born March 20, 1809. The death of his father, 1825. Publishes his first story, 1830. Travels to Rome, 1837. Dies 1852, one month before his forty-third birthday. In another ten years, Gogol Ganguli will be that age. He wonders if he will be married again one day, if he will ever have a child to name. A month from now, he will begin a new job at a smaller architectural practice, producing his own designs. There is a possibility, eventually, of becoming an associate, of the firm incorporating his name. (Lahiri, *Namesake* 289-290; ch. 12)

Gogol's contemplation of his own future, his wondering about his own physical paternity and the unique connection he makes of to naming a child are examined in this quote which coincides with Gogol's undertaking a unique self examination instigated by his father's gift to him - a culture-giving name and a literary means by which to explore his own very unique identity. In this passage, as in others, Lahiri weaves together

Physical maturing cultural rearing, male and female cooperation, and self and communal examination and growth that greatly exemplify, even without explicit acknowledgment, womanist ideals.

Like Santha Rama Rau, who wrote that a women's roles both subjugated and empowered a woman, Jhumpa Lahiri manifests a curious way of attributing power to the women in her fiction. By placing her female characters in traditional roles - such as nearly silent, often jobless housewives and/or mothers - Lahiri displays, through the inner monologue and narrative of her female characters, their impact on other characters' consciousnesses, and their communal bonding - in short, their great power. These women use their constant re-evaluation of cross-cultural, Indian-American mores, often developed by implementing maternity, to improve their lives and the lives of those around them. In short, despite situating her female characters as outwardly powerless in western society, Lahiri reveals their inner adaptability yet not over-assimilatory nature. Such was the case with Ashima and Gogol.

Lahiri positions the heroine of the title short story to her newest collection *Unaccustomed Earth* similarly to Ashima. Ruma, a Bengali-American woman and former lawyer, is a stay-at-home-mom, expecting the birth of her second child, at the outset of her narrative. As she raises her son, Akash, a toddler throughout the entirety of the story (unlike Gogol who grows to adulthood in *The Namesake*), she pays host to her newly widowed father, and mothers both Akash, her father and herself both physically and culturally. This maternity originates through, aptly enough, her own ruminations based on the contemplation of her late mother's Bengali-American views, in addition to her own and her American husband's own experiences in America. Thinking of her father's gardening in unaccustomed soil, often late into the evening, Ruma is reminded of her Bengali mother's reluctance to eat before first serving her husband, "Her mother would complain, having to keep dinner waiting until nine

at night. ‘Go ahead and eat,’ Ruma would say, but her mother, trained all her life to serve her husband first, would never consider such a thing” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 16).

Thinking, later in the narrative, of her decision to remain jobless and her father’s lack of support for this decision, Ruma concludes, “Her mother would have understood her decision, would have been understanding and proud” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 36).

These contemplations of maternal values result in Ruma’s eventual decision to accept her father’s new post-marital relationship. In a moment that fulfills Lahiri’s message of the complexity - both cultural and emotional—of a woman’s cross-cultural, vernacular response, Lahiri presents Ruma sending her father’s accidentally left behind postcard to his new girlfriend into the mail. The significance of the postcard is that it both presents the possibility for Ruma’s admitted acceptance of the new relationship and, at the same time, presents the possibility of failure - the postcard Ruma mails may never arrive.

Given the optimism of both Ruma’s story and the narrative of Gogol, it seems that Lahiri’s optimism for maternity at an individual and communal level is high. But careful analysis of Ruma’s story recalls that her father’s maternity was, unlike Ashoke’s, quite limited. And the concluding and longest story in Lahiri’s new collection adds to a sharp contradiction of Lahiri’s earlier optimism.

Indeed, the most potent narrative of feminine suffering in Lahiri’s *Unaccustomed Earth* is the tragic narrative of maternity lost, both physically and culturally, in “Hema and Kaushik.” Unlike Gogol, who is often surrounded by a backdrop of lush multicultural and maternal success, Kaushik, the protagonist of Lahiri’s novel is surrounded by intercultural and maternal loss and destruction. even the French cuisine over which he and Moushumi fall in love is greatly opposite to the corpses and bloodshed of the post 9-11 world Kaushik daily encounters. A photographer of international disasters, Kaushik routinely captures images of international failure at hybridity, postcolonialism, international diplomacy, and more.

Hema catches a glimpse of the horror that fills Kaushik’s lens everyday: There were countless images, terrible things, things she’d read about in the newspaper and never had to think about again. Buses blasted apart by bombs, bodies on stretchers, young boys throwing stones. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 315) Readers, eyeing Lahiri’s global fallout, can only conclude that the young boys, rapt in vandalism, are, if even just for the moment, devoid of maternity.

Kaushik’s own potential for mothering himself and others is laid forth in this section of the narrative as well. Although he quickly gains a special sibling bond with the two daughters, Rupa and Piu, of his father’s new wife, Chitra, who have also lost a parent, teaching these girls how to handle American money, taking them to museums, an Aquarium, and Dunkin Donuts, the connection’s limits are soon revealed. Just days after declaring, “I felt separate from them in every way but at the same time could not deny the things that bound us together” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 272), Kaushik observes that a need for defined connection, a need for cultural maternity, is constantly resurfacing despite the connection he and his stepsisters share and have built. “We were all waiting for my father, waiting for him to return and explain, if only by his presence, why we were sitting together drinking tea” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 277), Kaushik thinks. But paternity is not necessarily maternity. Not all fathers - or mothers for that matter - uphold womanist maternity. And Kaushik’s father, upon his return, fulfills no maternal role to his son. He erects a totally impersonal Christmas tree

that shows no remnants of cultural or other genuineness with his late wife, nor does he project any potential for his future family onto this object. It sits, generic and meaningless in their living room. Upon hearing that his request that Kaushik take a picture of his family is denied, because Kaushik forgot his camera, his father's disappointment resurfaces in an exemplification of lost maternity, "That look of irritated disappointment, the one that had appeared the day my mother died, and was missing now that he'd married Chitra, passed briefly across my father's face" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 280). In short, the loss of maternity Kaushik feels is still irreplaceable to others (here, Kaushik's father) and Kaushik, a physical reminder of that lost maternity, recalls his father's disappointment best.

Kaushik's father, only ever referred to in the story as Dr. Choudhuri, is falling in love with his new wife, Chitra, and, for her young part, Chitra is successful at mothering her own daughters physically, if not culturally. Her hospitality, like Ashima's, even aids Kaushik and his father's working through their grief and new life scenario:

"Chitra cleared all the plates and took them into the kitchen, just as she had the night before, allowing my father and me to relax after dinner in a way that we'd never been able to during the last years of my mother's life" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 280)". (7)

Chitra, here, embodies a womanist maternal opportunity for healing, by performing a necessarily maternity. Not all fathers - or mothers for that matter - uphold womanist maternity. And Kaushik's father, upon his return, fulfills no maternal role to his son. He erects a totally impersonal Christmas tree that shows no remnants of cultural or other genuineness with his late wife, nor does he project any potential for his future family onto this object. It sits, generic and meaningless in their living room. Upon hearing that his request that Kaushik take a picture of his family is denied, because Kaushik forgot his camera, his father's disappointment resurfaces in an exemplification of lost maternity, "That look of irritated disappointment, the one that had appeared the day my mother died, and was missing now that he'd married Chitra, passed briefly across my father's face" (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 280). In short, the loss of maternity Kaushik feels is still irreplaceable to others (here, Kaushik's father) and Kaushik, a physical reminder of that lost maternity, recalls his father's disappointment best.

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Chitra, here, embodies a womanist maternal opportunity for healing, by performing a household duty that shows her own, nontraditional power, which Kaushik easily recognizes. But the loss of his mother's maternity cannot be filled directly by a substitute wife, no matter her hospitality. Chitra is not Kaushik's mother and her maternity, like all maternity Kaushik is exposed to, is very limited.

Kaushik is unnerved by his father's newfound love for Chitra, and his own maternity (Kaushik's) comes into play on behalf of his two step-sisters, "I sensed that they needed me

to guard them, as I needed them, from the growing, incontrovertible fact that Chitra and my father now formed a couple” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 282).

But, Kaushik’s narrative, not yet at a close, is interrupted by its perpetually recurring theme of maternity lost. When Kaushik discovers his sisters examining a box of his later mother’s pictures one night, he threatens and physically shakes the girls:

‘What the hell do you think you’re doing?’ I said now.

Rupa looked at me, her dark eyes flashing, and Piu began to cry.... I grabbed Rupa by the shoulders from where she sat crouched on the floor, shaking her forcefully...

‘You have no right to be looking at these,’ I told them. ‘They don’t belong to you, do you understand?’ (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 286)

Kaushik explodes, destroying any maternity he bestowed (perhaps even harming the young girls opportunities at trusting male maternity in the future) and severing yet another tie that could have built a much-needed cultural maternity Kaushik craves and searches for but never receives.

Kaushik’s eventual connection with maternity, even maternity lost, which is the best connection he can attempt to make, is with Hema, an old family friend whom he runs into, after years apart, in Rome. “ ‘Our parents,’ Kaushik had said lightly” (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 310), in answering friends’ queries about how he and Hema knew each other, when they coincidentally met abroad at the home of mutual friends. Throughout their affair, Kaushik and Hema both admit that their connection is partly due to Hema’s familiarity with Kaushik’s late mother. When Kaushik and his family moved to the United States early in the narrative, when Hema and Kaushik are only young teens, they stay with Hema’s family and Hema is one of the first to learn that Kaushik’s mother is dying of breast cancer. This revelation comes directly following Hema’s receiving her first bra, fitted for her in a department store fitting room while she stood beside Kaushik’s mother, whose bare, cancerous breasts she unabashedly flaunted before Hema. Yet, Hema is unabashed when she recalls Kaushik’s late mother naked, as she herself (Hema) undresses, just before sex early in her affair with Kaushik, after both characters have reached adulthood. At this passionate moment Hema recalls Kaushik’s mother, complimenting her own (Hema’s) beauty long ago:

Hema remembered that it was Kaushik’s mother who had first paid her that compliment, in the fitting room shopping for bras, and she told this to Kaushik. It was the first mention, between them, of his mother, and yet it did not cause them to grow awkward. If anything it bound them closer together, and Hema knew, without having to be told, that she was the first person he’d ever slept with who’d known his mother, who was able to remember her as he did. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 313)

Indeed, this quote displays that Hema’s mention of Parul only connects the two young lovers during sex. And similar nostalgia for Parul pervades Hema and Kaushik’s affair. Hema and Kaushik seem mutually drawn both to each other and to their shared memories of Kaushik’s late mother.

But Hema, unfamiliar with many facets of Kaushik’s daily life—the extensive travel, the horrific photos, the loss of maternity Kaushik experiences firsthand - cannot make a permanent connection to Kaushik, despite her love for him. She returns to her planned life, turned off by his impulsiveness, marries according to a prearranged engagement, and

becomes pregnant, living not unhappily (but still thinking of Kaushik) until she hears of his death.

I returned to my existence, the existence I had chosen instead of you...Those cold, dark days I spent in bed, unable to speak, burning with new life, but mourning your death, went unquestioned by Navin, who had already begun to take a quiet pride in my condition. My mother, who called often from India to check on me, had heard, too. ‘Remember the Choudhuris, the family that once stayed with us?’ she began. It might have been your child, but this was not the case. We had been careful, and you had left nothing behind. (Lahiri, *Unaccustomed* 333)

Kaushik’s paternity, biologically, and his cultural maternity, even the nostalgia of what little maternity his mother offered, is entirely gone from Hema’s earth in Lahiri’s sad conclusion. Indeed, maternity is lost in it, and even though she carries a child, Hema’s pain, and the disconnection she feels from her husband and her child’s father implies a perpetuation of pain and disillusionment that Hema will live only to pass on.

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