



Maslow in Exile: A Psycho-humanistic study of Jhumpa Lahiri’s “*When Mr.Pirzada Came to Dine*”.

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ABSTRACT

This research paper presents a psycho-humanistic analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri’s *When Mr.Pirzada came to Dine* from the Pulitzer winning short story collection, *Interpreters of Maladies* under the framework of the Hierarchy of Needs proposed by Abraham Maslow. The core theme of the short story is mapped within the Asian Diasporic Literature in the context of Indian – Pakistan Partition during 1971 , dealing with how the displacement has put the emotional bonding with a family at stake, shaping of self –perception and helping evolution of moral growth. Mr. Pirzada, titular character, a middle aged man from Dacca, Bangladesh, is settled in America fo his research purpose. Maslow’s model comprising physiological, safety level, love, esteem and self actualization is portrayed through Mr.Pirzada . He is witnessed to be torn between emotional anxiety and geographic safety. Lilia, a little Indian Girl living in America and Mr. Pirzada takes in nuanced journey of both emotional and moral state of being. This analysis marks its beginning with Mr.Pirzada’s broken physiological and safety need that fuels his emotional turmoil of his family who is in endangerment of the war-torn situation. He routines in the evenings to surrogate the feeling of his home and temporary refuge in Lilia’s home. As the plot reveals, the meaningful gestures like sharing of candy, silent observation and conversation gradually thickens the emotional bond between Lilia and



Mr. Pirzada that satiates his needs of love and belonging. Maslow's highest tier of Self-actualisation is achieved through moral growth and emotional awareness. This paper highlights the diverse human dimensions of diasporic experiences in which the needs are not only external and material but also internal and more emotional. The emotional healing, moral development and restoration of love across the boundaries are studied in the narrative.

Introduction:

The Partition rupture is not merely geographical migration of masses but also deeply psychological that gives rise to collective memories of displacement and dislocation leading to cultural estrangement. The post colonial South Asian literature is formed as an effect to the upheaval of decolonialisation on both emotional and political ground. Literature that has evolved during this period, which broadly fall under the category of Diasporic writers who pen down their burden of trauma expressed through nuanced and complex relationship that is mostly torn between the dichotomies of homeland and heartland, memory and forgetting and belonging and exile.

Political fragmentation had been a great concern that influences literature with the images of loss of home, nation, kinship and identity reflecting deeper level of emotional rupture. Often the rupture is nuanced with cultural shock, hybridity, pressure of assimilation, and generational memory. This story pictures the emotional survival and the intensity of the human bonding during tensed political uncertainty. By presenting the household of Indian American family, Lahiri discloses a multi layered structure of narration with care, moral, and displacement. She focuses on expressing everyday intimate conversations that eventually builds bridge between strangers. From the voice of Lillia the readers are aware of the silent sufferings and the customary rituals of everyday that blurs the political boundaries presenting emotional intimacy to feel connected despite the chaos around them.

In Lahiri's story, the titular character, Mr. Pirzada who is living in United States –far away from his family has disrupted and uncertain survival that exposes how the fundamental human needs of safety, connection and esteem are under threat because of dislocation. His night routines at Lilia's family begin to nurture the need of physical and love and belonging that reclaims the emotional grounding. Mundane actions like-sharing meals, offering sweets and getting war updates establishes recognition and stability. On the other hand, Lilia through her relationship with Mr.Pirzada helped in her growing her empathy and



moral evolution and development that embarks the process of self-actualisation though not wholly still it buds the process. At the end, the deeper experience of needs and healing across border lead to metaphorical journey of ethics and moral. This research, in bridging psychology and literature, this research intends to analyse the characters with that frameworks that emphasizes wholeness and understanding relationships.

Lahiri explores how personal identity, emotional integrity and memory that are deeply moulded with transnational movements like partition. The psychological tensions that the characters develop through cultural dislocation and immigrant experiences are more emotionally and rationally dealt. While Maslow's hierarchy has been studied extensively in the grounds of education, management, its application in literary analysis is much more inclusive and promising. Human behaviour is driven by the foundational physiological needs that gradually elevates to safety, belonging and esteem that ends in self-actualisation. The positioning of Marlow's studies the physical exile from their homeland and emotional exile from his family where he is left with just psychological instability. Mr. Pirzada begins to develop a connection through routine with simple actions – deeper yearning for safety and belongings that provides partial emotional fulfilment.

This paper intends to study the story When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine, through the literary framework of psycho-humanistic theory by applying Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to identify how the characters cope up with their individual loneliness, displacement and identity fragmentation. Maslow had proposed a five-tier model of human needs- Physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization which is believed to the foundation of human development. By applying this psychological ground on literary work, the characters under crisis or transition can be studied.

The first level begins with physiological need- food, water, and shelter which are essential for mere survival. Mr. Pirzada's customary rituals of dining at night together at dinner table, enjoying the foods prepared by Lilia's mother and offering sweets reiterates the surrogate the social voids.

The daily dinners at Lilia's house fulfill a deeper, emotional hunger that goes beyond appetite. Food in the story becomes a recurring symbol of care, normalcy, and belonging. Food is not just sustenance but a language of survival, memory, and comfort. The warm, home-cooked Indian meals that Mr. Pirzada shares with the narrator's family create a sensory anchor to his homeland and a momentary refuge from the trauma unfolding in East Pakistan. "And so he came to our house to eat dinner and watch the evening news."(Lahiri,1), Mr. Pirzada's basic need for food and comfort is fulfilled by the Lilia's family. "Night after night, my parents and Mr. Pirzada enjoyed long, leisurely meals."(Lahiri ,2), reflecting the



importance of sustenance, comfort and human routine in a foreign land, to feel home land. “Fish cooked with raisins in a yogurt sauce... lemon wedges, and the chili peppers...”(Lahiri, 2), the detailing of food signify nourishment and care bestowed on fellow being. Food acts as a grounding force—bridging continents, preserving identity, and symbolizing nurturing when one's actual home is unreachable. The specificity of these meals reinforces the cultural familiarity and comfort that Mr. Pirzada craves in exile. These shared dinners do more than meet bodily needs, which also symbolically re-create a sense of home, and comfort, thus fulfilling the first tier of Maslow's model while simultaneously preparing ground for higher emotional and psychological fulfillment.

The second –tier is safety needs that involves personal security, health and stability. The characters are displaced individuals find themselves deeply disrupted. The story underscores how emotional safety is deeply shaken by political unrest, even across borders. Mr. Pirzada's soft-spoken demeanor masks a continuous state of fear for his family. The psychological fear is exposed through watching news as ritual to know the uncertainty of Mr. Pirzada's wife and daughter living in Dacca exhibiting geographical helplessness. “...he had not heard word of them in over six months.”(Lahiri, 3) Mr. Pirzada's emotional turmoil stems from the absence of news about his family's safety. Mr. Pirzada's reaction to Lilia going out alone reflects his deep concern for safety—projected from his own fear and helplessness. Maslow reminds us that without safety, people can't progress to higher needs. Mr. Pirzada's emotional dislocation is a direct reflection of how fear interrupts a person's ability to fully live in the present. Deep anxiousness of Pirzada about his family that's in war-torn Dacca- exhibits emotional and physical threat on his family. “He looked suddenly tired and small... and his eyes contained a panic I had never seen before.”(Lahiri, 5) Lilia's mother recalls past insecurity, valuing her daughter's current safe environment, “Imagine her having to read during power failures by the light of kerosene lamps...”, (Lahiri, 2) recounting the safer environment and about the instability of their life.

The third tier is love and belonging that touches the need for relationship, intimacy and craving emotional connection, this is where Lahiri's story portrays emotionally. the bond that Mr. Pirzada and Lilia shares is profound that are mediated through small routines, sharing and providing emotional space to express each other, comforting each other. Apart from marking this relationship social replacement, this provides emotional affirmation. Lahiri suggests that belonging can be cultivated through daily rituals and quiet empathy. Mr. Pirzada, though not related by blood, becomes part of the narrator's family through meals, concern, and shared sorrow. “He gave me a small plastic egg filled with cinnamon hearts. ‘For the lady of the house,’ he said...”(Lahiri, 2) accounting on the acts of affection and ritual reflect a growing surrogate familial bond. Belonging doesn't always come from biological or national identity.



Emotional proximity, not just geography, defines “home.” Lilia comes to empathize with emotional connection and separation—highlighting the need for familial bonds, “It was only then... that I knew what it meant to miss someone who was so many miles and hours away...”(Lahiri ,2) Though the physical distance from his family, Mr.Pirzada finds a sense of belonging and comfort in Lilia’s household. “...my parents and Mr. Pirzada operated during that time as if they were a single person...”(Lahiri,6)The sense of communal togetherness and emotional unity fulfills belongingness needs, by building a quiet emotional bonding with each other.

The fourth level of the needs is esteem that constitutes to respect both personal and from others, dignity, and recognition. the esteem in this story is manifested in the identity and displacement o the characters. As far as Mr.Pirzada who belongs to Pakistan is concerned, he resists such imposed identity. But, Lilia being an innocent child, questions the disparities . Even as a displaced person, Mr. Pirzada carries himself with grace and professional pride. His academic work and well-groomed appearance show his desire to maintain dignity amid uncertainty. “It made no sense to me”(Lahiri ,3). Mr. Pirzada presents himself in the most polite and polished person, Lilia could not differentiate his behaviour with his ethnicity. She sees him only with respect that restores his esteem, which reiterates that esteem is relatively socially- constructed. Self-respect persists even in exile. In Lahiri’s world, esteem isn’t about status—it’s about how one copes with powerlessness. Mr. Pirzada persists on establishing dignity with authority and social grace, Mr. Pirzada's academic position and government support recognize his intellectual contributions. “The grant was a great honor...”(Lahiri,1). His posture suggests dignity and self-respect even under strain. “Though his feet were perpetually splayed... he maintained an efficient posture...” (Lahiri ,2)Celebrating Mr. Pirzada’s reunion with his family signifies respect and emotional validation, “...my mother prepared a special dinner that evening... toasted our water glasses...”(Lahiri,5)

Finally, the last tier, self –actualization, the ultimatum of Maslow’s model hierarchy of need, in which an individual realises one’s full potential – not just achievement but mainly through moral growth, purpose of life, and authenticity of an individual. The moral awakening for Mr. Pirzada and Lilia is the ultimatum of the needs. The act of prayer is the act when Lilia transcends from childhood innocence and becoming morally considerate to other’s feeling and suffering. Lilia’s emotional evolution mirrors the need for self-actualization through empathy and awareness. Her silent prayers and her eventual understanding of what it means to miss someone show the growth of her inner world.

“He was busy finishing his manuscript...”(Lahiri,7)Mr. Pirzada continues pursuing intellectual work despite personal distress—illustrating personal growth and purpose. “I prayed that Mr. Pirzada’s family



was safe and sound... I had never prayed for anything before.”(Lahiri,3)Lilia’s emotional awakening and growth toward empathy and responsibility reflect her self-actualization. Self-actualization here is not lofty ambition—it’s the gentle unfolding of conscience and compassion, even in a young girl.

Lahiri’s writing frequently emphasize themes of cultural hybridity, integration, and nostalgia, the psychohumanistic approach encourages a deeper exploration of the emotional foundations of diasporic experience—those subtle yet vital mechanisms that assist individuals in preserving dignity, connection, and moral integrity in unfamiliar settings.

A notable realization brought forth by the Maslovian approach is how displacement hinders the satisfaction of even the fundamental human needs. Mr. Pirzada, despite being intellectually gifted and financially provided for as a university guest, is emotionally and psychologically damaged. His desire for his family in Dacca and his concern for their safety suggest that physical security in the host nation is inadequate without emotional and relational support. The recurrence of known rituals—eating meals, viewing the news, sharing sweets—transforms into a effort to recreate a sense of home and bonding. This corresponds with Maslow’s perspective that human needs are not strictly sequential but intricately connected: satisfying higher needs frequently necessitates the enhancement of the more basic, foundational ones.

In contrast, Lilia’s growth highlights the fluid nature of self-actualization as a moral achievement instead of an intellectual one. Her quiet watching of Mr. Pirzada’s feelings, her uncertainty regarding political identities, and ultimately, her hopes for his family, all signify instances of moral development. Crucially, this development is not dictated from the outside but driven from within—aligning with Maslow’s claim that self-actualization entails a “complete utilization and exploitation of abilities, talents, and potentials” (Maslow, 1954). Lilia's ethical vision—her ability to empathize with someone politically different—symbolizes a humanistic victory over traditional divisions.

Our comprehension of Lahiri's writing is broadened by the Maslovian lens, which shows how human motivation functions in displacement situations—not just in terms of bodily necessities but also in the need for affection, respect, and emotional fulfillment. It draws attention to the moral potential of cross-cultural emotional links and how they could be a means of fending off the dehumanizing consequences of political division. A more comprehensive literary approach that considers characters' moral and emotional lives as an integral aspect of their social and psychological reality is encouraged by this psychohumanistic interpretation. In contrast, Lilia's growth demonstrates the flexibility of self-actualization as a moral rather than intellectual turning point. Lilia's ability to care for someone who is



politically different—her moral imagination—represents a humanistic victory over inherited boundaries. Her silent observation of Mr. Pirzada’s emotional state, her confusion about political identities, and ultimately, her prayer for his family, all mark moments of ethical growth. Importantly, this growth is not externally imposed but internally motivated—reflecting Maslow’s assertion that self-actualization involves a “full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, and potentialities” (Maslow, 1954). Mr. Pirzada's story demonstrates how even the most basic needs—such as safety and belonging—remain insecure in the face of global uncertainty. Despite material security in a faraway nation, his emotional fragmentation persists, supported solely by surrogate familial traditions and symbolic acts of care. His reliance on a Dacca-set pocket watch, nightly television viewing, and closeness with Lilia are more than just routines; they are actions of psychological self-preservation. These partial and precarious fulfillments reflect Maslow's understanding that higher wants, such as esteem and self-worth, are heavily reliant on relationship stability. The psychohumanistic approach employed in this study highlights the significance of emotional nuance in diasporic narratives.

Lahiri's understated narrative avoids a dramatic finale in favor of subdued dignity, confirming that shared meals, silent prayers, and recollected acts of compassion are common ways for people to survive emotionally while living in exile.

To sum up, this reading confirms that Maslow's humanistic psychology offers a valuable critical lens for literary interpretation in addition to being pertinent to personal mental health. Through it, we learn that diasporic characters are constantly looking for moral clarity and emotional coherence in addition to surviving dislocation. Such demands are investigated, fought, and occasionally gently met in Lahiri's novel.

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