


Identity Crisis and Gender Performativity: Critical Discourse Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a conceptual discussion by using Judith Butler's theory of "Gender Performativity" that analyzes the tensions between self-identity and social identity. It proposes that identity is reflective of the correlation between the roles that people enact in society. The researchers scrutinized the role of gender and identity in the selected story of Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. It will be investigated in the light of cultural and feminist criticism as well as their theoretical concepts. This study is conducted by using descriptive-analytic methodology as well as the materials available in the valid libraries. To conclude, the application of Butlerian theories to the selected short story provides the best opportunity for creating a balance between gender and identity spheres. It endorses the theory that gender performance is not the real hallmark of one's identity. Indeed, formulating identity based on gender performativity is not necessarily incompatible with domestic values.

1. Introduction

Identity is most simply defined as a person's own sense of self. People strive to be classified as a "somebody" rather than a "nobody". The issue of identity has become a very challenging subject. Individuals face a wide range of social roles within different cultures. Contemporary feminism is a leading movement in challenging the traditions and conventions of 'patriarchal' society, which means any society that is based on masculine authority, hegemony, and ideology. According to M. Keith Booker:

Feminist literary criticism focuses on the relationship between literature and patriarchal biases in society and on the potential role that literature can play in overcoming such biases; many feminist critics have persuasively argued that literature plays a central role in the development of social attitudes toward women and of women's attitudes toward themselves. (Booker, 1996: 98)

Subversion of the traditional notion of gender and identity is one of the fundamental issues of contemporary feminism. Traditionally, identity is considered as the absolute entity but it conveys a more fluid and arbitrary notion today. In the present era, the old understandings of identity are breaking down and individuals are no longer constrained in the prison of fixed definitions and ascriptions. No absolute reality exists in the postmodern world and the question of reality is no more a one-dimensional issue at hand. Facts and fiction lose their boundaries and the line between reality and illusion diminishes.

The researchers examine the selected story of Jhumpa Lahiri, the outstanding contemporary Indian-American writer, through the theoretical and critical lens of Judith Butler, the ground-breaking and influential American post-structuralist and feminist philosopher. Utilizing the Butlerian theory of "Gender Performativity" foregrounds significant questions about identity and challenges the fixed assumptions about gender.

Statement of the Problem

The researchers seek to scrutinize the notion of identity in the selected story of Jhumpa Lahiri as associated with postcolonial terms such as hybridity, transculturation, and migration. Lahiri portrays cultural conflicts and issues of identities in the successive generations of Indian diasporic subjects in the West. While some critics, particularly in India, attack Lahiri for her cultural approach, she has received many critical appreciation and awards both at home and abroad. Let us now explain the main aims and delineate the scope of this study.

Male or female are used to refer to one's sex, the biology of a person but masculinity and femininity are used to refer to one's gender. In other words, gender is formed based on a certain set of qualities defined by a society or culture. While the sex of a person, generally speaking, does not change in his or her lifetime, the gender of an individual is a phenomenon that forms gradually throughout his or her life. (Allen, 1998: 115).

Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1976) has made a significant contribution to gender studies. Foucault asserts that "sexuality is more social than natural and that the traditional privileging of heterosexuality in the West has its basis in matters not of biology but social and political power" (Booker, 1996: 98).

The two concepts of "subjectivity" and "identity" are used interchangeably. However, it is important to point out their distinction; the notion of subjectivity is more preferred for describing how a person is constructed socially and culturally. In other words, while identity is considered as a flat and one-dimensional notion, subjectivity is a complicated and many-sided concept: "We may have numerous discrete identities, of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and a subjectivity that is comprised of all of those facets, as well as our own imperfect awareness of ourselves". (Hall, 2004: 134).

Performativity is a term coined by gender and sexuality theorist, Judith Butler. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler introduces her influential and controversial theory of gender performativity (Mitchell, 2010: 516). She denounces the binary of sex/gender and disputes that the existing connection between one's sex and gender is not a fixed and essential phenomenon. The differences imposed by gender roles are socially shaped and no inherent and natural cause exists at the heart of these differences. Butler maintains that "[G]ender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence" (Butler, 1999: 34). In other words, performativity addresses the idea that a subject's identity and gender are constructed through repetitive, stylized acts structured by social forces. The present study provides insight into the following questions.

Research Questions

- 1- How do "Feminism" and "Gender Studies" offer a more insightful view of identity formation?
- 2- How do "Gender role" and "Performativity" appear among the main characters of the selected story of Jhumpa Lahiri?
- 3- How do Butler's theoretical concepts shed new light on Lahiri's selected story?

2. Methodology

This study is conducted by using descriptive-analytic methodology as well as the materials available in the valid libraries. It is qualitative research that uses the library and related credible electronic resources as its primary method for gathering up-to-date information and data. The theoretical framework of the current study is mainly focused on feminism, particularly the key concepts introduced or challenged by Judith Butler. Postmodern feminist strategies are summarized in the following shape:

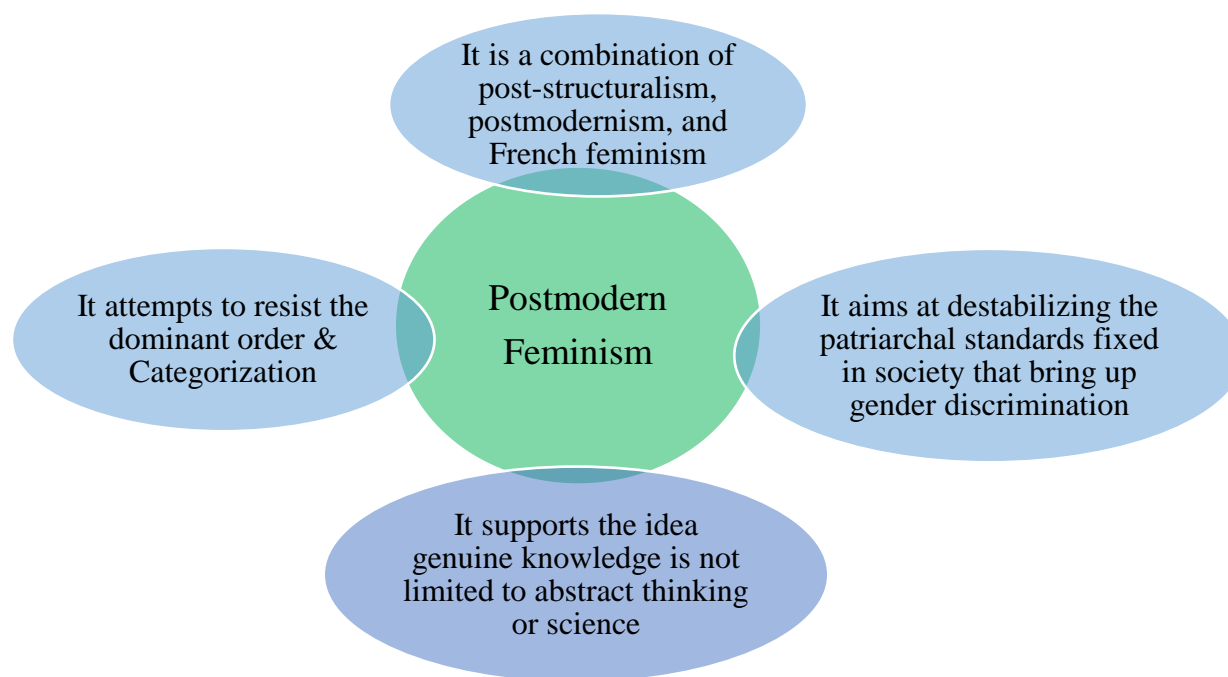


Image.1. Main Strategies of Postmodern Feminism

Butler criticizes the distinction made by fundamental feminisms between biological sex and socially-made gender. She believes that women's subjugation is rooted in many factors and may not be solved easily. Moreover, postmodern feminism shows a vague and unclear road to action. The present study provides the opportunity to examine the selected story from *Interpreter of Maladies*, namely, "A Temporary Matter" from a new perspective and uncover new interpretations.

Feminist Criticism: Reference to Judith Butler

The present section will introduce the main theoretical background of the study by contextualizing, explaining, and delineating different aspects of Judith Butler's theories. Finding a fixed intellectual position for Butler and the concepts she investigates is a difficult task, as Sara Salih rightfully states that: "To call Butler a poststructuralist (or a postmodernist – a label she does not consider appropriate) would elide the feminist, psychoanalytic, and Marxist frameworks within which her work is also located" (Salih, 2003: 5).

Yet, this section tries to draw a unified picture of her theoretical work for the sake of clear understanding, focusing on her genealogical analysis of the subject, her anti-essentialist ideas regarding the distinction between sex and gender, performativity, and citation. In addition, the present section also traces the roots of Butler's ideas and contextualizes them theoretically. As already demonstrated, Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988) are important sources of reference to this study since it is in these works that she brings forth her ideas on performance and performativity and also questions the feminist viewpoints regarding the category of woman, identity and subject.

In *Gender Trouble*, when explaining her constructive view of gender, Butler draws on Simone de Beauvoir and her famous claim in *The Second Sex*, where she writes "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." (Beauvoir, 1997: 295). Butler seems to accept the idea that there is no inborn quality that turns you into a woman yet she believes that Beauvoir's understanding leads to an essentialist, fixed understanding of the categories of man and woman without any regard to how these categories came into being:

If there is something right in Beauvoir's claim ... it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a construction that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification. Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the 'congealing' is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. It is, for Beauvoir, never possible finally to become a woman, as if there were a telos that governs the process of acculturation and construction. (Butler, 1999: 33)

Accordingly, Butler locates a contradiction within feminist views which makes them "discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation" (Butler, 1999: 3). Butler believes that feminist criticism should reinvestigate how these categories of identity are constructed, valued and how they include or exclude certain subjects or qualities.

Butler and Performativity

It is no doubt that among Butler's theoretical endeavors, one of the most difficult ideas to grasp is the concept of "performativity". In order to understand Butler's notion of gender as performance, it is important to concentrate on what she means by performativity, which plays an important role in the textual analysis of the present study.

In order to grasp the idea of performativity in Butler's terms, one has to look back at some of the ideas that led to its initial usage. Butler delineates the process of coming up with the idea of performativity in an interview, describing how she moved from Foucauldian understanding of power to Derridean approach toward speech acts. In the interview Butler clearly recognizes the influence of J.L. Austin's speech act theory and Derrida's deconstruction of Austin's theory in his essay 'Signature Event Context' (1972) on her development of the term:

I begin with the Foucauldian premise that power works in part through discourse and it works in part to produce and destabilize subjects. But then, when one starts to think carefully about how discourse might be said to produce a subject [...] it's useful to turn to the notion of performativity, and performative speech acts —understood as that speech acts that bring into being that which they name. [...] Then I take a further step, through the Derridean rewriting of Austin, and suggest that this production actually always happens through a certain kind of repetition and recitation. [...] Performativity is the vehicle through which ontological effects are established. (Butler, 1994:33)

The term performative was coined and developed by linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin. In his collection of lectures named *How to Do Things with Words* (1955). Austin distinguishes performative and non-performative speech acts. He considers such utterances as "I take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife" performative. That is, he argues it is simultaneously an utterance and also an action:

The term "performative" is derived, of course, from "perform": it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action.... The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even the, leading incident in the performance of the act. (Austin, 1980: 6-8)

Austin's theories as already mentioned were questioned by Jacques Derrida, the prominent figure of deconstructionism. In *Writing and Difference* (1978), Derrida argues that in the absence of a center and therefore he argues that the center is not a fixed locus but a function,

It was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse – provided we can agree on this word – that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (Derrida, 1978: 280)

Derrida's analysis of performative speech acts focuses on repetition, "play of signification", that is "iterability" of language. In Derrida's critical reading of Austin, the iterability of language allows every linguistic mark to be recognized and thus "cited" repeatedly. He asserts that iteration is always of variation and alteration. For him, the possibility of resignification is the main aspect of language. This Derridian reading is important for Butler; this is how she theorizes gender norms as signifying and repeatable discursive practices "cited," in new ways. In *Bodies That Matter* Butler writes:

Construction not only takes place in time but is itself a temporal process that operates through the reiteration of norms; sex is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration.... This instability is the de-constituting possibility in the very process of repetition. (Butler, 2011: 10)

This deconstructionist debunking of the center is at the heart of the concept of performativity. Butler's key ideas are illustrated in the shape below:

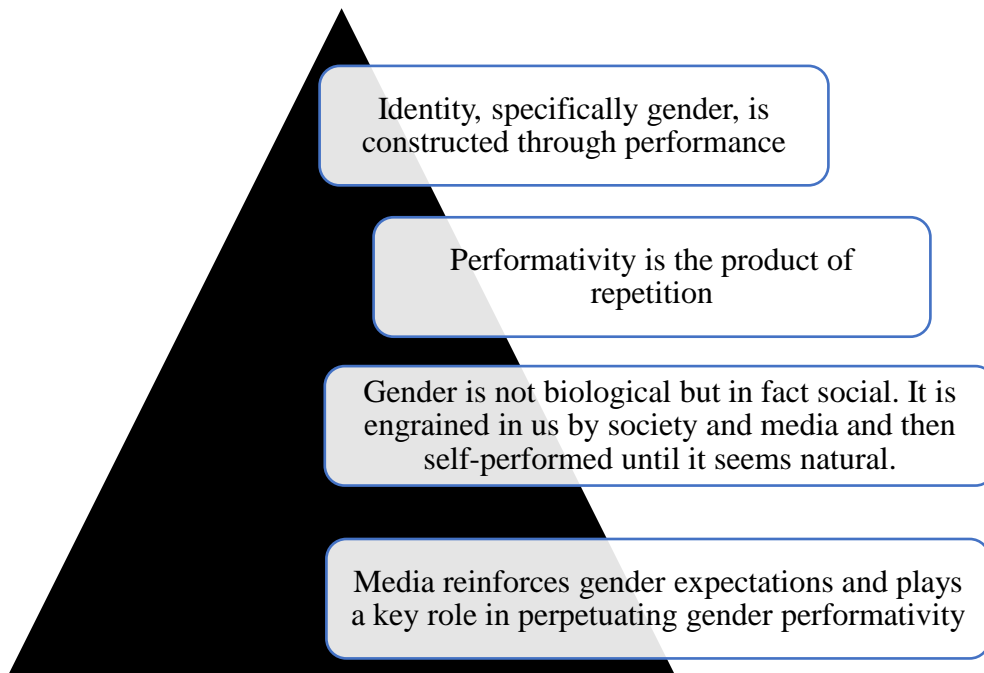


Image.2. Judith Butler's Key Ideas

It was mentioned above that Derrida, argues that there is no fixed universal structure behind the system we call language, that everything in the absence of center is "play", "function". What Butler proposes about gender is similar to what Derrida suggests about the lack of fixed center or structure behind the language. Suggesting that gender is performative, she dismantles the idea of preexistent gender identity; she destabilizes fixed categories of man/woman and female/male and emphasizes gender as a process, a performative act that keeps changing and developing. As stated by Salih, in Butler's view all existence is social and our bodies also have a social existence that is always already gendered. Therefore, one cannot ascribe bodies with a natural preexistence– a center, a transcendental– that precede their cultural ascriptions. This will result in reaching the idea that gender is not a "being" but it is an "act"; Butler develops this idea in *Gender Trouble* in the following words:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (Butler, 1999: 33)

Butler clarifies the subtleness with which gender plays a role in society. According to her, our notion of gender and what we consider male and female are socially constructed and not the result of a natural phenomenon. The assumption that gender is biologically defined allows for unfounded opinions about the meaning of woman/man or male/female and the way these subjects should behave.

3. Limitations of the Study

This study has certain limitations to be noted. The current study examines the concept of gender and subjectivity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. It investigates how the notion of gender influences characters of the selected fiction from cultural and individual perspectives. Due to time and space, the present study is able to only examine a selection of Jhumpa Lahiri's wide-ranging fiction; thus, many of her other stories and novels which may create a more thorough image of her fiction are not included here. The existing cultural gap between the current researcher and the author and characters of the selected fiction is another limitation of this study. And the last but not the least limitation is that the focus of this study is to explore and examine *Interpreter of Maladies* through the lens of postmodern and cultural feminism to elaborately investigate how gender is constructed and how different characters respond to their gender roles. The next section provides an explanation of the importance as well as the potential benefits of the present study.

4. Significance of the Study

Literature plays inarguably a key role in changing social attitudes toward gender and identity. It shows the way society looks at women and in the way women look at themselves. The current research is unique in its approach to Lahiri's fiction since it delves into her fictional works through the lens of postmodern theories, cultural criticism, and feminist criticism. At the same time, Butler's theoretical notions pave the way for the present study to illuminate the underlying assumptions about the question of gender and identity and challenge readers to question their understanding of these notions through the selected story of *Interpreter of Maladies*.

Gender and identity are the core issues of Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, her first short story collection. In this literary work, Lahiri includes nine short stories calling into question our presumptions of identity formation in its own unique way. The current study aims at challenging the traditional understanding of gender and identity by scrutinizing Lahiri's selected fiction through feminist cultural criticism, particularly Butler's theory of gender as performance. This study seeks to sketch how Lahiri's selected fiction challenges essentialist notions of gender and identity and in doing so, offers new perspectives for them.

5. Review of Literature

In this part of the study, some of the related literature written about Lahiri's short story will be explored and reviewed to provide a picture of what has been already examined critically. Judith Butler is a prolific scholar with a vast critical oeuvre, the exploration of which will definitely go beyond the limited scope of this study; nevertheless, the present research tries to discuss two of her most associated works with the issues of gender and identity, *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) which similar to theories of social constructionism show how social discourses can shape our identity and perpetuate the domination of women by men.

Sara Salih's book titled *Judith Butler* (2003) provides a concise yet informative introduction to butler's key ideas. In the beginning, the book offers an overview of Butler's ideas discussing why she is an important figure in the critical theoretical field. Salih tries to explain Butlerian ideas in their historical and intellectual contexts, discussing the thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan who influenced Butler's work. In addition, she examines the significance and impact of Butler on other thinkers and the reactions to her theories. Salih begins by discussing "the subject" and moves on to 'gender; 'sex', 'language' and 'the psyche'.

Moya Lloyd in her book *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (2007) explores various disputes around Butler's theoretical notions and interestingly defends Butler in these critical disputes by using Butler's theories. For an instance, to those who criticize Butler for her complicated and vague language for demonstrating her theories, Lloyd supports Butler as she asserts a unique and difficult language is a must for the elaboration of difficult ideas. Moreover, critics question Butler's emphasis on the role of language and discourse in subject formation or her focus on the key role of historical, social, and cultural forces in an individual's life. To find answers to these questions one has to read Lloyd's book on Butler.

In "Human Geography: Semiotics of Landscape in Jhumpa Lahiri's Narratives" (2014), Hasssan Rouhvand explores the relationship between culture and geography in Lahiri's fiction. The article seeks to find a purpose behind the politics of representation and construction of landscape in Lahiri's *The Namesake*, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth* in order to reveal the metaphoric dimensions of human geography.

To sum up the theoretical and practical review of literature related to the aim of this study, the existing literature does not explore and examine the nature of gender and related Indian/Indian-American historical and socio-cultural issues in Lahiri's selected works which are notable gaps to be covered in this study. Thus, benefiting from the previous related literature, the present study attempts to shed new light on the fictional world of Lahiri's narrative and present new interpretations by making benefit from some of the related theories of Butler and contribute to what has been done already on Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*.

5. Discussion

Postmodernism is the leading intellectual movement of the late twentieth century that replaced modernism. Modernism revolves around the principles of reason, objective reality, and individualism. However, the hallmark of postmodernism is relative feeling and social construction which lead to identity crisis. In this regard, Todd Gitlin declares:

Postmodernism is, more than anything else, a reaction to the 1960s. It is post-Vietnam, post-New left, post-hippie, post-Watergate. History was ruptured, passions have been expended, belief has become difficult; heroes have died and been replace by celebrities.

Postmodern literature seeks to bring marginalized minorities to the forefront as they have been put down throughout history. It has manifested itself as race and gender politics, advocacy journalism, political correctness, multiculturalism, and the rejection of science and technology.

Postmodernity shifted from the human optimism of modernity to a pessimistic mood of skepticism, uncertainty, and despair. The fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri is affected by the American culture which is full of absurdities and inconsistencies. The contemporary postmodern world rejects claims of universal meaning as to be imperialistic in nature. In their joint essay titled "What Does Postmodern Mean?" (2006), Steve Cornell and Summit Staff expose the reason behind the notion of "Postmodern despair". They demonstrate:

Dominate postmodern concerns for plurality, diversity, and tolerance have not led to a more stable and secure society. Instead, the postmodern era exchanged one misguided mood for another..., This mood change was fueled by the devastation and disappointments of two world wars. Philosophies of despair and nihilistic existentialism became popular fare throughout Europe. These philosophies would later provide the ideological framework for the rejection of authority and institutionalism in America.

In the next part, the researchers provide an overview of the identity crisis in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* which will help us see the postmodern world through her eyes.

5.1. Identity Crisis in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*

The issue of identity in this era has become a very challenging subject. In the past, people had stable roles, but nowadays a person takes different positions. For instance, an individual can be a woman, mother, housewife, and university professor simultaneously.

Therefore, a person faces a wide range of potential personal and social roles. In the present era, although a person may be born with only one particular identity, he or she can choose his or her identity or identities during life. In her fictional works, Jhumpa Lahiri implies that identity is a complicated term especially for the displaced. In the interview with Houghton Mifflin Company Lahiri admits:

..., the older I get, the more aware am I that I have somehow inherited a sense of exile from my parents, even though in many ways I am more American than they are .in fact it is still very hard for myself to think as American: for immigrants, the challenges of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, the knowledge and longing for a lost world are more explicit and distressing for their children. on the other hand, the problem for the children of immigrants, those with strong ties to their country of origin, is that they feel neither one thing nor the other. The feeling that there was no single place where I fully belong bothered me growing up. (Ferdous, 20015: 23)

Traditionally, identity was considered as an absolute entity but today it conveys a more fluid and arbitrary notion. In the present era, the old understandings of identity are breaking down and individuals are no longer constrained in the prison of fixed definitions and ascriptions. No absolute reality exists in the postmodern world and the question of reality is never a one-dimensional issue at hand. Reality could always be approached in different ways and facts and fiction lose their boundaries and the line between reality and illusion diminishes.

Far from essentialists who believe that identities are conspicuous and predetermined, Butler seeks to highlight the processes of identity formation and how the subject is constructed. Notwithstanding that Butler's analytical works are complicated and correlated, concepts such as gender, gender role, gender performativity, subjectivity, and the agency will be employed to shed new light on Lahiri's selected fiction.

Having experienced an "identity crisis", Jhumpa Lahiri explores the same theme in the literary works. Her fictional characters come to grips with the sense of alienation just like their creator. Being an expatriate, Lahiri generally writes about such communities.

1) "A Temporary Matter"

Interpreter of Maladies starts with the story of "A Temporary Matter" which deals with the nostalgic feelings of a Bengali couple and the way their attachments to a cultural tradition of Bengal filled the gaps in their married life. There is a gulf-wide misunderstanding between Shoba and Shukumar. During her pregnancy, Shoba is busy with proofreading drudgery and also prompts her husband for participating in the Baltimore conference.

The situation gets changed as Shoba suffers a miscarriage. She had convinced the doctor not to expose the infant's sex. The routine of secular life has made them ignore its real issues. Lahiri hints at their sorrow which has distanced them. She describes Shukumar who thinks deeply about their chilly relationships:

But nothing was pushing Shukumar. Instead, he thought of how he and Shoba had become experts at avoiding each other in their three-bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible. (Lahiri,1999:5).

Shukumar has become unwilling to work or use energy. He oversleeps in the mornings and Shoba has become slovenly too. Making predictions about the power outage, Shukumar is reluctant to spend time with Shoba. Lahiri states:

Tonight, with no lights, they would have to eat together. For months now they'd served themselves from the stove, and he'd taken his plate into his study, letting the meal grow cold on his desk before shoving it into his mouth without pause, while Shoba took her plate into the living room and watched game shows, or proofread files with her arsenal of colored pencils at hand. (P.8)

The story represents the reversal of gender roles and performativity. Shukumar plays the role of housekeeper instead of Shoba. At the same time, he is blamed for the miscarriage. It is the reversal of Indian custom in which the mother would take the responsibility on her own shoulder.

The electricity department informs the residents that power will be cut for five days. Darkness creates an opportunity for getting Shukumar and Shoba together again. Their confessions still hide their inner emotions. When they try to eat together in the darkness, Shukumar observes:

They weren't like this before. Now he had to struggle to say something that interested her, something that made her look up from her plate, or from her proofreading files. Eventually, he gave up trying to amuse her. He learned not to mind the silences. (P.12)

On the last day of the power cut, Shoba reveals her decision to live separately. The bitter news upsets Shukumar suddenly. For avenging her selfish wife, Shukumar makes her aware of their child's sex and the memory of holding it close to his heart. This revelation solidates their marital bond and gets them together in a flood of tears. Their cultural roots help them refashion their lost identities.

Shoba epitomizes those independent women who suppose their husbands to be cruel and seek to get out of their clutches. In this case, the death of their newborn infant adds fuel to the fire. The temporary blackout gained by electricity cuts provides the situation for Shoba and Shukumar to reveal their hidden identities and share their inner fears and thoughts in the dark (P. 4). The characters' confessions, however, do not culminate in a happy outcome for the marriage. Shoba informs Shukumar that she has rented an apartment and will get shifted there. In turn, Shukumar tells Shoba that their dead infant was a boy while Shoba was not aware of it. In the end, "they wept together for the things they now knew." Their marriage is broken up and they are going their separate ways.

Having been born in America, Shoba and Shukumar believe that the foreign land, America, has bestowed them with the chance to explore their identities and bring their dreams into reality. Shoba's dual character is strengthened by her mother's trips to India. The latter often cooks Indian meals, sets up a small shrine at home, and admires the patriarchal authority of Indian culture. The death of his father leads to Shukumar's intense longing for his Indian story:

It wasn't until after his father died, in his last year of college that the country began to interest him, and he studied its history from course books as if it were any other subject. He wished now that he had his own childhood story of India. (Lahiri, 1999: 13)

Srikanth (2003) explains that because of "ethnic studies and multiculturalism movements" in America, Asian academic immigrants were "encouraged to find their ethnic and racial 'roots'" (Srikanth, 2003:36). So, travels to home and scrutinizing ancestral heritage were encouraged. However, Edward Said declared that: "Identity — who we are, where we come from, what we are — is difficult to maintain in exile ... we are the 'other,' an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an exodus. Silence and discretion veil the hurt, slow the body searches, soothe the sting of loss" (Said, 1986: 16).

Therefore, what worsens the sufferings of exile is that migrant people often keep silent to avoid feeling embarrassed in front of other migrants. They pretend to be happy with the new situation and admire the changes provided by the new community. Thus, silence hampers the process of identity realization and widens the gap between their fellow countryman and the indigenous ones.

The new diasporic generation born into the foreign culture assimilated easier than their predecessors, but they still suffer a sense of otherness. Hiral Macwan (2014) states: "Increasing acceptance into the host society does not indicate that the diaspora characters can feel at home" (Macwan, 2014: 46).

Darkness acts as a liberating tool for the couple and they reject their American silver-haired neighbors to join them for a browsing walk. This rejection and their sequential confessions imply that they are willing to solve their complications. For Shoba and Shukumar, the exchange of confessions is a means not only to improve their divided selves but also to appreciate their individuality, their Indian mode of behavior, and non-American identities.

Shoba and Shukumar utilize the opportunity to exchange their ideas of those aspects of the Indian culture that they could not tolerate and to explain their dissatisfaction with the dominant culture that tries to homogenize the other.

The blackout finishes and it is the moment of truth. While Shukumar is fascinated with his inherited identity, he tends to "keep the lights off." But Shoba declares: "I want you to see my face when I tell you this" (Lahiri, 1999: 22).

Shoba's behavior reminds the readers that "it is the construction of identity that constitutes freedom, because human beings are what they make of themselves, even if they are subjects of repressive discourses" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 112)

Fanon states, "It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world" (as cited in Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 112). Shoba's resistance to arranged marriages and patriarchal Indian culture that has shaped her womanhood does not suggest betrayal but the confident statement of her individuality and identity.

Lahiri's diasporic characters must confront different gender stereotypes in the foreign land. Generation gaps, cultural clashes, and sexual roles are among the major themes explored by Lahiri in *Interpreter of Maladies*. In "A Temporary Matter", we come to know that Sukumar's mother "had fallen apart when his father died, abandoning the house and moving back to Calcutta" (6). But, it is Shukumar instead of his wife Shoba, who seems to "fall apart" at the termination of their marriage.

7. Conclusion

Delineating the subtleties and complexities of Butler's theories is not an easy task. However, her major concepts and theories have been applied to the selected story of Jhumpa Lahiri. It should be noted that feminism is not a straightforward and unified concept but a complex one that loosely connects the body of criticism which are apparently related to each other.

The selected story, "A Temporary Matter", is formative as a feminist novel, and certainly as a 'Buterlian' text. It reveals that Lahiri knows the 'maladies' of her female characters and puts her emphasis on the individuals' need to express their real feelings and engage with the world around them. Otherwise, they may get trapped in the alien world. Traditional notions of identity as a fixed concept are not capable of explaining the experiences of diasporic subjects and the manner they turn into a multi-dimensional person. The study of diasporic characters in "A Temporary Matter", clarifies the elusiveness of the concept of the boundary between cultures, since their existence is bound with fluidity and interplay. However, this situation is challenging and diasporic. Currently, the researchers try to explore and examine other dimensions to this in-between condition. Lahiri recognizes the unique position of these subjects and highlights the idea that diasporic individuals are able to negotiate differences and move beyond the limitations of existence.

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