

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian-American writer. She was born in London in 1967, her parent was emigrated from India to England and then moved to America, and Lahiri was raised in Rhode Island. Lahiri's collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, was published in 1999. Among its numerous awards are the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, the PEN/Hemingway Award, and The New Yorker Best Debut of the Year Award. *The Lowland* was published in 2013 and listed in the 2013 Man Booker Prize. Jhumpa Lahiri's books, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Lowland* shows the changes in the gender roles represents by the characters from the books which portrays the traditional roles and modern roles of males and females in society.

Critically read Lahiri's works, readers would see that in two of Lahiri's works, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Lowland*, there are changes in the roles of the male and female characters. They change from traditional type of men and women to modern ones. The writer believes, this roles development shows the changes in the author's views of men and women's status in society. As a second generation immigrant, the writer assumes that Lahiri wants to show that women can also become independent and defies any traditional roles of women.

Gender roles are rules which determined the behavior and attitudes of men and women in society based on their gender. Gender roles created by patriarchal society which describe men as the superior and women as the inferior. This rules

that bind men and women roles in society created negative effect in society. Men use these gender roles as tool to abuse and oppress women. This is shown by Lahiri in her books *The Interpreter of Maladies*, but in *The Lowland* Lahiri tries to show the changes of gender roles which made women can become more independent and break from the patriarchal society culture. Western woman author such as Virginia Woolf, Kate Millet and Alice Walker have started making a modern female character who defy the traditional role of women many decades ago. So, why does Lahiri just do it at this time? The writer assumes that Lahiri wants to show her new perspective on women that women can also decide their own choice and not always be oppressed by the patriarchal system. Looking into Lahiri's background, her parents still hold firm into the Indian culture which apply patriarchal system. In patriarchal system, women always act as the passive one, they cannot express their voice in society. By comparing the two stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Lowland*, the writer intends to exhibit that the author wants to rebel against patriarchal values and shows the process of maturity in viewing gender roles in society.

The writer chooses the two most popular Jhumpa Lahiri's books, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Lowland*. *Interpreter of Maladies* is a collection of nine short stories which was firstly published in 1999. In this book, Lahiri shows the struggle of the Indians and Indian Americans both men and women about their identity and their roles in society. As an immigrant they have to adapt to a new culture but in doing so they have to suffer some consequences. Meanwhile the second book, *The Lowland*, is a novel published in 2013 and long-listed for the 2013 Man Booker Prize. The story is about two brothers who grow up in Calcutta.

Born just fifteen months apart, Subhash and Udayan Mitra are inseparable brothers. One is often mistaken for the other. But they have different personalities that can lead them to different future. Subhash is more emotional, he chooses the safest path to not follow his brother and continuing his education to America and Udayan with his rebellious personality decided to join the communist movement. Later after Udayan's death, Subhash decides to bring Udayan's wife, Gauri, to America. Then the story is following the struggle of Subhash and Gauri's life in America.

This research is conducted to analyze Lahiri's way of presenting gender roles in both books. There are three reasons why the writer chooses gender roles development as the topic of the research. The first reason is Lahiri's different ways of representing male and female's roles in *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Lowland*. Before the publishing of *The Lowland*, Lahiri is known for always portray men and women's roles in society in traditional way. The female characters in *Interpreter of Maladies* is presented based on traditional rules, such as becoming a good mother, not being able to express their voices toward society, and always be under male oppression. Meanwhile, the male characters become the dominant, active and the strong ones. In this books, Lahiri do not shows any changes in the roles of male and female. Every characters are static from the beginning until the end of the story. But in *The Lowland*, which was published in 2013, Lahiri bravely creates male and female characters that defy all the values of traditional gender roles. The male and female character in Lahiri's *The Lowland* represents the modern side of male and female. The female character represents the modern woman; she freely expresses her sexual orientation, she dares enough

to leave her family and live alone in order to pursue her dream to have higher education. Meanwhile, the male character which represents the modern man becomes more emotional and possesses a role of a mother. Lahiri depicts that these changes in Subhash and Gauri happens after they are outside of their own origin. This representation of male and female roles in modern society is really interesting, especially for an author such as Lahiri who comes from a patriarchal family.

The second reason is the view of patriarchal values itself. As we know nowadays there are woman authors who create a modern woman as their female character. This kind of writing can affect the readers on how to view women's roles in society and to oppose the patriarchal stereotypes of women. The patriarchal system sees women as the weakest gender and this system ends up with oppression toward women. However, showing that women can also be like men helps in opposing the patriarchal system and gives women a chance to express themselves freely.

The third reason is the author's perspective in viewing gender roles in society. Jhumpa Lahiri grew up in a family that values Indian culture highly. The writer assumes that this is what affects her in her previous writing. She always makes the male and female characters in her stories play their traditional roles based on patriarchal value. But in 2013, she bravely presents male and female characters that defy the Indian cultural value. This is how Lahiri shows her maturity in viewing the men and women's roles in her story by creating modern male and female characters. The writer believes that Lahiri wants to show that becoming a modern man and woman is not a bad choice. Based on the

explanation above, the writer entitles this research *Comparison of Gender Roles in Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies and The Lowland*.

1.2 The Identification of Problem

The changes of men and women's roles from traditional to modern one as seen in *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Lowland*, The writer argues, show Lahiri's maturity in viewing gender roles in society. Lahiri used to portray traditional men and women in *Interpreter of Maladies* then creates modern man and woman in *The Lowland*, which is the opposite of Lahiri's cultural background. Lahiri comes from Indian family which is bound by the patriarchal system as the base of gender roles in society. However, she bravely shows a new side of man and woman in her characters in *The Lowland*. She brings out the independent side of woman and the emotional side of man; she shows the value of motherhood in man, who defies any traditional roles of men and women from the patriarchal system. Both novels mentioned above, in my opinion, show two different stances about gender roles, *Interpreter of Maladies* shows traditional gender roles and problems in Indian patriarchal society, while *The Lowland* presents modern gender roles where women try to become independent in order to achieve their dreams.

1.3 The Scope of the Research

This research is limited to analyze the changes of gender roles in both novels; *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Lowland* through the male and female characters in the novels. The writer looks into some interviews with Lahiri to find out the reason of the development of the characters. Therefore, it could be

concluded that this research covers the intrinsic and extrinsic study of the novels. The intrinsic elements analyzed here are the characters, plot, and theme. While the extrinsic elements involved is the author's background which affects her view about gender roles' role in society. There are several questions that this research is going to answer:

1. How are the gender roles present in *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Lowland* ?
2. What does it indicate about Lahiri's perspective about traditional and modern gender roles ?

1.4 The Objective of the Research

The aim of this research is to expose Lahiri's way of presenting gender roles in her two novels *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Lowland* and to examine the implicit meaning behind the changes of gender roles she has created. Lahiri seems to create a different side of women in her female character in *The Lowland*. It is very much different from her female characters in *Interpreter of Maladies*, where Lahiri shows women who only value their roles as traditional women. By conducting this research, the writer wants to prove that Lahiri supports the idea of Showalter which argues that women's culture are the aspects that affect the writing and by using patriarchal binary thought from Cixous, the writer prove that women can try to achieve equality in society. In general it is to prove that there is a significant change of gender roles presented in both novels.

1.5 Review of Related Studies

Before doing the analysis, the writer has done library research in order to find out what other researchers have written about Jhumpa Lahiri's works or the works on gender roles. The writers finds out the most debates about gender roles on Jhumpa Lahiri's works are focuses on how women tried to decide their identity and face the struggle of being women in patriarchal society, then the different views of identity between first and second generation immigrant and how western feminist idea cannot be fully used in eastern countries.

The first study from P.V.Vinitha and Dr.K.Usha Rani entitled "A Study Of Women Characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novels" (2016). In this article, they argue that Lahiri through her protagonist shows that the women are the victims of gender discrimination as a girl child, wife and mother from male as well as from their female counterpart. They are trapped between tradition and modernity. The woman has been asked to put up all sorts of repressions and suppressions in the name of family honor and for the good name of the children. Women's sexuality, her experience of pain, pleasure, love or sorrow, desire or respect were matters which were routinely ignored" (2016). This research focuses on the oppression or mistreatment towards women, where in Lahiri's works we can also find some example of women who tries to become more active and shows more of their strong side to fight for their freedom. This research does not discuss the women situation in Lahiri's works that is why the writer decides to shows the development of roles in Lahiri's work through my research.

The second study is from M. Thirunavukkarasu and Dr.D.Shanmugam PhD entitled “Portrayal of Indian Women in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Unaccustomed Earth*” (2016). In this article, they argue that *Unaccustomed Earth*:

“Primarily deals with the generation gap, exposing the oppositional experiences of the first and the second generation immigrants. Lahiri has portrayed efficiently and effectively the problems of immigrants in the migrated country, even after having found a place to settle in. She projects the difficulties faced by an Indian wife in a foreign culture. Living in the foreign land, Lahiri’s female characters preserved their selves and try to establish their own identities as an Indian woman.” (2016).

This article shows that the first and second generation of immigrant has different views about their culture. This is helpful to the writer, because Lahiri is from the second generation immigrant which lives in America. This article gives the idea on how a second generation immigrant will try to defy their original culture after experiencing the new culture where they live, because the new culture where they live gives a better treatment or chance for women.

The third study is from Bahareh Bahmanpour entitled *Female Subjects and Negotiating Identities in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies* (2010). In her paper, she explains how woman is portrayed in *Interpreter of Maladies*. “ The female character in the story shows that there is no one single way of representing the diasporic trauma involved in negotiating female identities either as female immigrants or female natives. Lahiri’s female character negotiates their unstable identities through their own different means and individual voice. ” (2010). The

female characters in *Interpreter of Maladies* whether it is the first generation or the second generation immigrant, always have to face an identity problem. But Lahiri through the story shows that all the female character make their own choice in solving their identity problem and do not only follow what the male characters wants them to do even though women have a lower status in society. This research does not discuss enough about the problems of women in the stories. It is only focuses on the identity problem and overlook the problem of oppression towards women which happens because of the cultural background of the characters comes from.

The fourth study from Dr. N. Priyadarshini entitled *Feminism, Womanhood And Motherhood In The Works Of Jhumpa Lahiri* (2016). In her article, she explains that “The works of Jhumpa Lahiri analyze the experiences, shocks and surprises which are encountered by Indian women immigrants and are marked by an undercurrent of pathos in all the shades of the three key aspects of Indian diasporic womanism : feminism, womanhood and motherhood ” (2016). She analyzes each story and explain what kind of feminism, womanhood and motherhood that shown by the female characters in three of Lahiri’s works : *Interpreter of Maladies, Namesake and The Unaccustomed Earth*. This research shows a good perspective in understanding the problem that the female immigrants in Lahiri’s work have to face whether it is isolation, adaptation, marginalization, gender inequality and patriarchal dominance.

The last study is from Ahdieh Akbari and Mahrokh Alipanahlou entitled *Eastern Women in Jhumpa Lahiri's Treatment of Bibi Haldar, Mrs. Sen's, and A Real Durwan* (2015). In their article, they stated that “The Indian female

characters of Lahiri's short stories do not support Western feminist's theories. They contradict these theories and show the new rules and needs of the third world women.” In analyzing the stories the researchers use Gayatri Spivak's critique of Western feminism. The conclusion of their research is shown “how cultural and social differences make a vast gap between Western and the third world women's needs and lives. ” (2015). The research shows the differences between western and eastern cultures in looking at the need of women through the characters. The writer agree with this research which illustrates that the feminist ideas that exist in western countries is hard to be applied in the eastern countries because of the different in culture and ideology. Feminism still can be used in eastern countries especially to the third world countries but with some adjustment that can be accepted by society.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

In this research, the writer applies Gynocriticism by Elaine Showalter. The definition of Gynocriticism as Raman Selden states in his book that Gynocriticism is a critic “which concentrates on the specificity of women’s writing, on recuperating a tradition of women authors, and on examining in detail women’s own culture” (*Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* : 122). In the book *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* by Wilfred L Guerin et al (1966), it is explained that Showalter identified three phases of modern women’s literary development. “ The *feminine* phase (1840-80), during which women writers imitated the dominant male traditions; the *feminist* phase (1880-1920) when women advocate for their rights; and the *female* phase (1920-present), when dependency upon opposition-that is, on uncovering misogyny in male texts-is

replaced by the rediscovery of women's texts and women" (2005: 224). Showalter also argues that women's writing is influenced by some factors. She divides it into four models : women's writing and woman's body, women's writing and women's language, women's writing and women's psyche, women's writing and women's culture. From this we can say that biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural aspect can influence women in writing and trying to write like man.

To give more support to the analysis of this research, the writer applies patriarchal binary thought by Helene Cixous. In her book, *Critical Theory Today. A user-friendly guide* (1999), Tyson explains that Patriarchal Binary Thought looks into the roles of men and women in many societies based on patriarchal system. Patriarchal system always defines women in the inferior position and man in the superior one. We can see it from the table :

Man	Woman
+	-
Activity	Passivity
Head	Emotion
Intelligible	Sensitive
Educated	Uneducated
Sun	Moon
Father	Mother
Logos	Pathos

From the table above, Cixous differentiates man and woman into two sides, which classifies them into active/passive, sun/moon etc. By looking into the patriarchal system, man is always the positive one and woman is the negative. This thought is the reason that oppression and silence happen to woman. That is why Cixous, by creating this binary opposition is trying to challenge this kind of thought by showing that woman can also become the dominant or superior one. The writer will use this theory in analyzing the two novels. Using this binary opposition, the writer will show the changes of male and female roles from traditional to the modern roles in Lahiri's works *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Lowland*.

As the topic of the research talks about the men and women's roles, the writer need to discuss about men and women's roles in general. Men and Women's roles refers to the traditional gender roles which was created by the patriarchal society system. Lois Tyson explains in her book *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide (1999)* that traditional gender roles comes from the patriarchal society system which always considers men to be more superior than women. The women's roles in society are only to act as the inferior or the weaker one. For example, in a family the men always become the head of the family and have total domination in making decision, meanwhile the women just have to be a good mother without having a job and do not have the right to give opinion in making the decision. Additionally, they also have to obey the men's decision. Things such as become a good mother, uneducated, dominate by men or do not have right on giving opinion are the traditional stereotypes of women in the patriarchal society.

1.7 Research Methods

In collecting the data for this research, the writer applies library research method by reading several related books to support this analysis. The primary data will be *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri. The other is the secondary data, which is obtained and collected from books, articles, modules, journals, or essays which support the research and also data that are browsed from the internet to find other relevant sources.

Analyzing the data is the second step of this research method. The writer identifies issues and problems from primary data and then elaborates it to the secondary data which act as the base parallel to analyze. After comparing the data, elaborating and criticizing it will be last part of the second step. The third step is presenting the result of analysis by using descriptive method.

