

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background of the Research

Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian-American author whose works mostly take the issue of cultural assimilation experienced by Indian immigrants in the United States of America. Cultural assimilation as seen in Lahiri's stories is a process that commonly happens to people who come to or settle in a new place. Those people go through the process of assimilation as the way to mingle with the people in the new place. It is because Lahiri is the one who experiences it, thus she tries to describe to the readers what assimilation is based on her own perspective through her works. Realistic genre of the stories also supports the issue.

Because of the works, Jhumpa Lahiri has now become one of Indian-American most outstanding female authors since her first work, the compilation of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies*, was published in 1999. It was the time Lahiri debuted her work and awarded the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. She continues writing and her first novel, entitled *The Namesake*, was published in 2003. It was also adapted into a film by Mira Nair in 2007. In 2008, her second short stories compilation *Unaccustomed Earth* was published and became *The New York Times* best seller. She kept writing until the latest work, *The Lowland*, was published in 2013. It is not different from her other works, this novel was also shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and became a finalist for the National Book Award for fiction. Based on those achievements, Jhumpa Lahiri is considered as a great female author in literary world.

Unaccustomed Earth is Lahiri's collection of short stories which talks about cultural assimilation. It consists of two parts; the first part contains five short stories that tell a numbers of families who live in the US. The stories are "Unaccustomed Earth", "Hell-Heaven", "A Choice of Accommodations", "Only Goodness" and "Nobody's Business". The second part tells about two families' life in one story which is told through three different points of view entitled "Hema and Kaushik" by subtitling "Once in a Lifetime", "Year's End" and "Going Ashore". In the stories, Lahiri tries to tell her experiences as a child of Indian immigrant parents who live in America. Her parents came and settled in America when Lahiri was young and it makes her grew up in a confusing situation and dilemma because of living in two cultures. So, she expresses the experiences in her books.

Based on Lahiri's short stories in *Unaccustomed Earth*, from eight titles of short stories in the book, the writer finds the issue of dilemmatic cultural assimilation is strongly presented particularly in five stories, which are: 1) "Unaccustomed Earth"; 2) "Hell-Heaven"; 3) "A Choice of Accommodations"; 4) "Only Goodness"; and 5) "Nobody's Business" because those stories show the interactions between two cultures -India and America- that affect the cultural assimilation. Therefore those stories are chosen as the object of analysis in this research.

Furthermore, the stories make the writer hypothesizes that assimilation is a process that they must go through when they live in America. They should acculturate with the present culture to build a good relation with people around

them and survive to live in the place where the culture is. Also, the writer believes that Lahiri tries to show the importance of assimilation for the Indian immigrants as the characters in the five stories through the narrative pattern of each story.

Narrative patterns of the story describe the problems in the story step by step. Based on Todorov, narrative is a sum up of words and sentences in order and sequences (1973). Language is ordered words by words, sentences by sentences and then to be a narrative with meaning inside. Short stories in Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* may have similar issue to be delivered, but the narrative structure of each story can also be similar or may be different. By using Todorov's theory, the writer tests the hypothesis by breaking down the narrative to be propositions and sequences to examine its narrative structure and semantic aspect, so that Lahiri's idea about cultural assimilation can be revealed.

1.2 The Identification of Problems

Five short stories in *Unaccustomed Earth*; "Unaccustomed Earth", "Hell-Heaven", "A Choice of Accommodations", "Only Goodness" and "Nobody's Business" shows the readers the problem and difficulties faced by the main characters, who are the first and second generation of Indian immigrants when living in the United States. Since the issue in the five stories is identical, the writer believes that Lahiri is actually presenting her own perspective about problem of being immigrants. The writer also believes that the analysis of narrative patterns can show how the elements of fiction play their role in each story to bring Lahiri's ideas about living as Indian diaspora in the US.

1.3 The Scope of the Research

This research focuses on analyzing five out of eight short stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* that the writer believes to strongly present the issue of cultural assimilation. The titles of the stories are “Unaccustomed Earth”, “Hell-Heaven”, “A Choice of Accommodations”, “Only Goodness” and “Nobody’s Business”. The writer investigates the narrative structures of the short stories by dismantling the narrative pattern of each short story into the smallest narrative unit. Then the research finds how narrative pattern of each short story delivers the similar issue. The discussion covers the narrative pattern of those short stories based on Todorov’s theory including the similarities or the contrasts between the patterns of five sequences in delivering the issue of cultural assimilation. The patterns of sequences are: equilibrium¹, force¹, disequilibrium, force², equilibrium². In other words, this research will include all the intrinsic elements of the stories.

1.4 Research Questions

The focus of this research is to observe the narrative pattern of Jhumpa Lahiri’s short stories collection *Unaccustomed Earth* in delivering Lahiri’s ideas about cultural assimilation. The questions that the writer investigates are:

1. What are the propositions, sequences, and semantic aspects of the five select short stories by Jhumpa Lahiri based on Todorov’s theory of narrative pattern?
2. Based on the narrative structure, what are Jhumpa Lahiri’s ideas about cultural assimilation?

1.5 The Objectives of the Research

In general, the research aims to enrich the literary research on narrative structure. Specifically, it is aimed to break down the five short stories' narrative pattern based on Tzvetan Todorov's theory of narrative structure. The research focuses on the narrative structures of the five short stories; "Unaccustomed Earth", "A Choice of Accommodations", "Hell-Heaven", "Only Goodness" and "Nobody's Business". The result of analysis of the narrative patterns brings us to Lahiri's ideas about the issue of cultural assimilation.

1.6 The Review of Related Studies

To conduct the research, the writer has found several researches that relate to the same object but in different approach and a research with same approach in different object. The researchers have different purposes with this research. In this research, the writer focuses on the narrative structures of short stories in Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* deliver a story about Indian Immigrant families in facing cultural assimilation while they are living in new place, the United State of America, with its cultures. The research is conducted by using Todorov's theory of narrative structure to analyze the works. Meanwhile, the previous studies apply postcolonial and archetypal psychology criticism.

Priya K. writes an article in *A Journal of English Studies*, Volume 7, 2013, entitled *Cultural Dislocation and Disoriented Relations in Jhumpa Lahiri's "Unaccustomed Earth"*. In analyzing, Priya K uses postcolonial studies. She describes the second generations' dilemma of living in two different cultures. They experience "disoriented relationship because of their hyphenated existence.

Parents who instruct them to stick on to Indian culture simultaneously exhort them to chase the American dream of success” (Priya K 25). From her research, she finds out that Lahiri succeed in telling how “[h]er characters shed their Indian identity and face struggle to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western culture and they are defined by their indifference, sorrow, identity crisis and alienation from their family and homeland” (Priya K 25). Thus, the article supports the writer’s hypothesis about the theme of cultural assimilation which is built in Lahiri’s short stories.

On the other hand, Lahiri’s *Unaccustomed Earth* is also discussed in a dissertation by PhD students in Faculty of Humanities *Technischen University Dortmund*; Ramona-Alice Bran entitled *Immigration: ‘A Lifelong Pregnancy’? An Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri’s Fiction*. In the dissertation, she analyzes all Lahiri’s fictions; *Interpreters of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, *Unaccustomed Earth*, and *The Lowland*. She discusses *Unaccustomed Earth* in chapter three of the dissertation by subtitling it “Transplanted Identities in *Unaccustomed Earth*”. In the chapter, she shows “how some representatives of the second generation put down strong roots in foreign, unaccustomed earth” (Ramona and Alice Bran 215). She finds out that the second generations’ transplanted identities are built difficultly. They are “torn between attachment to their parents and a desire to form their own family and follow their own path, independent from their parents’ values and expectations” (Ramona-Alice Bran 294). On the other side, the first generations who decide by themselves to come to a new place can easily “assimilate in order to achieve [their] ‘happiness’” (Ramona-Alice Barn 2015), as the reasons for

doing immigration. Yet at the end, both the first and second generations do the transplantation of their identity. Since the analysis uses the same approach as article before in analyzing Lahiri's works, it makes the writer believes that mostly people find about cultural assimilation issue in Lahiri's work by looking at it as postcolonial studies.

Quite different with two previous studies above, Neela Bhattacharya SAXENA who also discusses Lahiri's short stories in her article entitled *Peopling an Unaccustomed Earth with a New Generation: Jhumpa Lahiri's Supreme Fictional Journey into Human Conditions*. She investigates what she calls as 'Gynocentric matrix' which is established in Lahiri's works. She uses James Hilman's polytheistic archetypal psychology, called 'soul's code' and Wallace Stavens' notion of Supreme Fiction to help her analysis. After analyzing the stories, she finds out that "the reading of Lahiri's works touching upon a 'Gynocentric matrix' shows emergent possibilities of regeneration because in this non-linear and Kairos moment, time of the phallus has no dominant power" (SAXENA 2012). This article is interesting since it uses new term of archetypal criticism and discusses new topic; gynocentric matrix. Though this analysis is different from two others analysis, but still this research relates the short stories to the extrinsic elements in discussing the cultures among characters. So, the writer considers making an analysis of the intrinsic elements of the stories.

Moreover, to help the writer in applying narrative pattern analysis, a thesis by Akbar Cipto who has applied it to Edgar Allan Poe's works is found. He is a student of English Department; Andalas University who did an analysis of Poe's

short stories in his thesis, entitled *Poe's Typical Murder Narrative Structures as Seen in Hop Frog, The Masque of the Red Death, The Black Cat and The Tell-Tale Heart*. His thesis focuses on the narrative structures of Poe's selected murder short stories. In analyzing the stories, he breaks down the text into minimal unit of the structure and concludes the typical murder that found in the stories. From the research, he finds that the four Edgar Allan Poe's short stories have two different murder narrative structures. The first one call as open murder narrative structure and another is close murder narrative structure. The research applies narrative structure analysis to find such kind of stories pattern by using Todorov's theory of narrative pattern. It makes the writer interested to apply the theory to Lahiri's short stories. After comprehend reading of Todorov's theory, the writer believes that actually the theory not only investigate the structure of narrative but also explain the theme of the story through the structure.

1.7 The Theoretical Framework

Structuralism is a study about the objectivity of a text that develops the systematic analysis of literary work. Although structuralism tend to focus on the text only and does not pay attention to its extrinsic elements, but it also does not stick on the traditional categorizes like plot, characters, setting, theme and others intrinsic elements that analyzed by formalist. Structuralisms study the text as a system of language that constructs meaning in it. As Graham Allen says in his book "[n]arratives are a kind of discourse, discourse here being understood as the broad categories of linguistic representation in societies: narrative, poetry, intellectual/philosophical prose" (56).

Structuralisms call a text as a narrative structure that many developed in theories of narrative. One of theories comes from Tzvetan Todorov who has developed the idea of narratology from Vladimir Propp, A.J. Greimas and others. He believes that a narrative has a configuration of some language aspects inside; syntactically and semantically. Signs in the text relate each other to its words, events, and characters to provide a meaning in a text. According to Todorov's theory, "analyzing literary text is parted into three parts: verbal aspect, syntactic aspect, and semantic aspect of the text" (Todorov 12). In this research, the writer only applies two aspects, syntactic and semantic aspect.

Todorov says that semantic aspect is an aspect which people believe it is an important aspect to be analyzed. There are two problems of semantic aspect in analyzing a text; how the texts offer the meaning (formal problem) and what the meaning is (substantial problem). Formal problem focuses on the linguistics semantic which analyze the connotation meaning in the text. Meanwhile, substantial problem focuses on finding the truthful of the text. (Todorov 13-15)

Furthermore, the syntactic aspects of text consist of the structure of text and the syntactic of narrative. For structure of text, thematic elements are organized based on its importance: whether it is ordered chronologically or not. They are called as logical structure and temporal and spatial structure. Meanwhile, the syntactic of narrative will investigate the smallest unit of the narrative. There are three units; the smallest one is sentences, then sequences and the big one is text.

By using Todorov's method, the text is broken into the three units of narrative structure. First, the text is broken down in sentences, called proposition. The sentences consist of actants and predicate. Actants are the variable elements often represented by X, Y, or Z that refers to people name or attribute that stick to it. Second, the propositions are gathered into some groups which is called as sequences; based on its relation logically, time, room, repetition, opposition, etc. The last one, all groups of propositions are analyzed as a unity that is read by the reader as whole text. Each text has its pattern to arrange the sequences. They can be arranged by embedding, by linking, by alternation or by a mixture of these.

Selden, Widdowson and Brooker's book also explains that "A group of propositions forms a sequence. The basic sequence is made up of five propositions which describe a certain state which is disturbed and then re-established albeit in altered form" (70). Those methods will help to combine the texts and get the semantic aspect in the stories. The similarities and the difference in each story may be seen through each structure of its propositions and sequences. The group of propositions are tied in five generalizes propositions that are determined into five 'temporary situations' in the story. The five temporary situations are designed become:

- Equilibrium¹ → a stable condition in the beginning of the story (E.g Peace)
- Force¹ → troubles come (Enemy invades)
- Disequilibrium → an unstable condition (War)
- Force² → power to solve the troubles appear (Enemy is defeated)
- Equilibrium² → another stable condition (Peace on new terms)

There are many ways in arranging a story. It can “by embedding (story within a story, digression, etc.), by linking (a string of sequences), or by alternation (interlacing of sequences), or by a mixture of these” (Selden 70). Those five sequences are the way Todorov generalizes syntax of the narrative.

1.8 The Methods of Literary Research

The main method that is used to conduct this research is a qualitative method that produces descriptive data. Purpose of the method is to comprehend the social perspective about the phenomenon pointed in the research. Based on the method, there are three steps to conduct the research; collecting data, analyzing data and presenting data.

To collect data and all information, this research uses library research that supports the analysis. The data consist of two parts; the primary data and secondary data. The primary data is the five selected short stories in Jhumpa Lahiri’s second short stories compilation *Unaccustomed Earth*. The secondary data is all information related to the topic such as journals, articles and books that support the research.

Furthermore, in analyzing data, the proposition and sequence theory from Tzvetan Todorov is used. Then, it is conducted by using descriptive analysis. Specifically, the writer does some steps below:

1. Reducing the selected short stories into the smallest narrative structures unit.
2. Generalizing the smallest narrative unit to main propositions in sequences.

3. Investigating the sequences of each short story and describing the similarities and contrast between narrative patterns of the three short stories.
4. Concluding the result of analysis about the narrative structure of short stories.

The last method is presenting result of the research. The result will be presented and explained descriptively. In brief, this research is done in descriptive-analysis way.

