Desire and Domestic Disquiet: Exploring Emotional Instability and Familial Fragmentation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the conflict between unwanted emotional attachment and familial responsibility in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* by using the Family Systems Theory. The stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* portray family life as emotionally connected with everyone. Unwanted desires eventually disrupt the domestic harmony. Using Murray Bowen's concept of the family as an emotional unit, this study connects that unwanted desire impacts not only the person, but also the entire family system. This captures contemporary issues like detachment between family members. When personal emotional desires contradict with moral responsibility and cultural standards it results in emotional detachment and fragmentation. Lack of free communication and generational misunderstanding confuse familial relationships. Finally, *Unaccustomed Earth* explores how conflict between desire and obligation disrupts family members' well-being and transforms the emotional structure of the modern diasporic family.

Keywords: Desire, Fragmentation, Disquiet, Emotional Instability and Moral Responsibility.

Introduction

Emotional attachment, accountability, and moral dedication are the foundations of a family. Elders are main figures to serve as standard figures in family structure, and their decisions have an impact on the entire family. The balance of the family system is confused when members become tied in undesirable emotional wants. One of the most important modern Indian American authors, Jhumpa Lahiri, is well-known for her personal home relationships, generational conflict, and diasporic identity. *Unaccustomed Earth*, published in 2008, is a collection of interconnected short stories that explore the changing dynamics of Bengali American lifestyles. The work expresses the conflict between individual desire and familial responsibilities in diasporic domestic house.

Family Connection

In *Unaccustomed Earth*, family connections are based on emotional attachment, interdependence, and mutual responsibilities. Lahiri depicts family as an emotionally interconnected system supported by love, care, affection, and moral values. Even when they are separated geographically or psychologically, parents and children remain connected through emotional ties. Acts of nurturing, silent sacrifice, and protective concern reveal how affection works beneath the surface of limited communication. According to Family Systems Theory, and specifically Murray Bowen's view of the family as an emotional unit, each member's emotional condition effects the overall stability of the home. “Each time, she kept the printout of his flight information behind a magnet on the door of the refrigerator, and on the days he was scheduled to fly she watched the news, to make sure there hadn’t been a plane crash anywhere in the world,” (Lahiri 3). It demonstrates the depth of Ruma's emotional bond between her and her father. Ruma communicates her affection indirectly by seeing his flight information and monitoring the news, indicating the affection.

The emotional in-depth line, “Be happy, love Baba” (Lahiri 4), explains the depth of parental affection that moves throughout *Unaccustomed Earth*. The term "Baba" promotes intimacy and cultural identity, concreting the relationship between parent and child in a family. “After her mother’s death it was Ruma who assumed the duty of speaking to her father every evening, asking how his day had gone,” (Lahiri 4). It reveals the change in emotional responsibility within the family. With her mother's death, Ruma consciously assumes the role of emotional support for her father. Her daily calls reflect care, affection, and responsibility.

Lahiri emphasizes how love within the family is shared through action. “Her father lived alone now, made his own meals. She could not picture his surroundings when they spoke on the phone,” (Lahiri 7). It expresses Ruma's worries and concern for her widowed father. His lonely existence reveals the difficulties. She could not bear how her father was going to manage things alone. The line, “Perfect, Adam said, when Ruma told him about her father’s visit (Lahiri 6),” reveals a sense of attachment and support. Ruma's feeling of happiness and emotional bond to her father is reflected in the phrase "You are always welcome here, Baba, (Lahiri 4)".

Emotional Instability:

The American Psychological Association describes emotion as a mixed reaction pattern, and it has physiological factors that the individual uses to deal with a personally relevant problem or event. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, emotional instability starts from the struggle to manage personal fulfillment with familial expectations. Following the death of his wife, Ruma's father establishes a romantic relationship with Mrs. Bagchi while traveling. He hides this relationship from his daughter. "The calls were less frequent now, normally once a week on Sunday afternoons” (Lahiri 4). Ruma had taken the initiative to speak with him every day after her mother died. It shows the affection. After the relationship between Bagchi, he

decreased his time to speak with his daughter. “They started eating together, sitting next to one another on the bus. Because of their common appearance and language, people mistook them for husband and wife,” (Lahiri 4).

It shows the growing relationship between Ruma's father and Mrs. Bagchi. His silence shows an internal tension between personal longing and paternal responsibilities.

The line "He enjoyed Mrs. Bagchi's company… “ (Lahiri 9) expresses the father's emotional happiness following years of married monotony and loneliness. Following his wife's death, he learns to enjoy friendship without commitment or home responsibility. “But after Italy he’d begun thinking of her, looking forward to receiving her e-mails, checking his computer five or six times a day,” (Lahiri 9).

It reveals the father's growing emotional commitment to Mrs. Bagchi. His frequent checks of message shows desire. This behaviour shows unwanted emotional disturbance as he feels that he must be a good role model for his family.

Reconfiguration of Emotional Bonds:

Murray Bowen (1913–1990) was an American psychiatrist and a pioneer of family therapy. He created Family Systems Theory, which sees the family as an emotional unit in which each member's behaviour influences the overall system. “The family is an emotional unit and the individual cannot be understood in isolation from it.” (Bowen 188)**.** Murray Bowen established Family Systems Theory, which views the family as an integrated emotional unit rather than a collection of independent people. According to Bowen, when one family member experiences emotional change, the entire system is affected.

Familial Fragmentation

Ruma wants her father to become more involved in her family, particularly as a grandfather to her kid, following the death of his wife. Within traditional family norms, an elderly parent plays a supportive role, providing companionship, counsel, and active participation in family life. But he refuses and he expects his own desires to be satisfied. “Maybe you could do that,’ she suggested… ‘I have a trip scheduled. I’ve already bought the ticket,” (Lahiri 37-38). It depicts an important moment of emotional conflict between Ruma and her father. Ruma's remark reveals that he may extend his stay with her family. “I know it would be a big move,’ Ruma continued. ‘But it would be good for you. For all of us.’ By now she was crying,” (Lahiri 38). It represents the emotional connection which is needed to stabilize the family. This portrays how attachment between the family members supports the family and detachment affects the family.

Conclusion

In *Unaccustomed Earth*, Jhumpa Lahiri presents the family as an important emotional structure shaped by responsibility, cultural values, and personal longing. Through a Bowenian Family Systems perspective, the narrative expresses how unwanted emotional choices influence the entire familial system. Ruma’s deep sense of commitments contrasts with her father’s gradual movement towards his independence. His companionship with Mrs. Bagchi represents unwanted emotional connection. His secrecy creates fragmentation within the family system. For readers, the story explains a profound moral reflection on responsibility and cultural values. The text also gives social awareness by portraying how unwanted emotional desires disturbs the eco system of an entire family.

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