



Hybridity in Jhumpa Lahiri's a Temporary Matter

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal hybridity and liminality in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story entitled *A Temporary Matter*. The story tells about an Indian couple who have lived in the United States of America. The way they live combines western culture and eastern culture. As migratory society they also practice the culture of the country they live in. It becomes problems to analyze in this study. This study is a qualitative research with a postcolonial approach. The theory used in this research is postcolonialism theory by Homi K. Bhabha. It applied a descriptive qualitative method. The methods applied in this study include data collection methods and data analysis methods. The data obtained were taken from the text of the short story *A Temporary Matter*. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) discusses hybridity in society during the post-colonial era and is applied to diaspora literature. Hybridity is related to human culture and identity. Culture and identity are formed dynamically, they experience development, progress, and decline according to conditions and circumstances. Diaspora literature is produced from the writings of people living outside the country and/or writings that contain diaspora experiences. In the process of hybridity, there is a gap between the two cultures. The gap is called liminality in which there is repression of the (colonial) past that is not revealed. One of the writers included into the category of diaspora writers is Jhumpa Lahiri. The results of the study are the hybridity experienced by the two main characters in the way they wear, they cook, and they speak, and the liminality is found in religion, cultural ritual, and food they consume. This mixture is seen in the food, clothing, and language they use. They applied Indian culture and western culture in their live.

Keywords: culture; ethnicity; hybridity; liminality

Introduction

Racial and ethnic diversity is found in migratory societies. They meet the natives that make up the majority. The meeting had a good or bad impact. Of course, the migratory societies leave their homeland. They can also be called diaspora.

The term diaspora derived from the Greek word which means disperse or spread. This term had a negative meaning in the 5th century representing the exile experienced by the Jews (Sitepu, 2017). Now, the definition is changing. The definition does not only represent forced, but also voluntary displacement of population. There are many reasons why they leave a country. The distribution of the population with certain ethnicities can be found in several countries in the world. They can be in the western or eastern parts of the world. These developments create a new culture that may combine several cultures (Shai, 2019).

The combination of cultures is often depicted in literary works. One type of literature to describe this condition is diaspora literature. It is a narrative that tells about the experiences of the characters when they live in another country. The narrative can be written by migrants or not. However, the writers who are not part of the diaspora have diaspora awareness or sensitivity in their writing (Pokharel, 2020). On the other hand, migrant writers who share their travel experiences in narrative, their works can be categorized as diaspora literature (Sitepu, 2017). The author tells about cultural discussions such as assimilation, discrimination, culture shock, or hybridity.

Cultural issues dominate diaspora literature. They describe problems with other ethnicities or cultures they have adopted and their life experiences outside their homeland. One of the works of diaspora literature is a short story by a female writer Jhumpa Lahiri entitled *A Temporary Matter*. The short story describes the marital conflict experienced by a young couple; Shukumar and Shoba which contain hybridity and liminality in the lives of these characters.

The characters of *A Temporary Matter* experience mixed cultures when interacting with people from other ethnicities and living outside their homeland. This is in line with Huddart's statement that hybridity can be said to be a mixture of cultures (Huddart, 2006). In that mixture, there is a threshold that fills it called liminality. As descendants of India they still hold on to ancestral traditions, meanwhile they practice the new culture they encountered in the United States. Discussing cultural hybridity is always related to postcolonialism which tries to reveal repressed memories in the colonial era.

Colonization had socio-economic and political impacts on both sides; colonizers and the colonized. This impact was felt until the colonial period ended. This period can be called the postcolonial period. The descendants of the colonized are still feeling the effects.

The term postcolonialism refers to the period after colonialism. The term was later used not only to refer to the 'post-colonial' historical period but also in ideological orientation, or mental images (constructions) of colonial and colonial ways. In the field of theory, post-colonialism is an analytical tool to challenge ongoing

colonialist practices or new forms of colonialism that result to a life full of racism, unequal power relations, subaltern culture, as well as awareness and ideas related to hybridity, and mimicry (Taum, 2017).

Hybridity is one of the concepts in post-colonialism theory introduced by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* in 1994. Bhabha's concept of post-colonialism emphasizes that both colonizers and colonized cannot be separated from each other. Colonial relations were structured by various and contradictory forms of belief. According to Bhabha, between the colonizer and the colonized, there is a space between, a liminal space that allows both of them to interact (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007). Bhabha's concept of liminality is used to avoid binary contradictions; colonizers and the colonized. Between the two there is a loose space for resistance. For Bhabha, the dividing line between the two cultures is never fixed and beyond any recognizable boundaries and goals.

Hybridity is a way for colonized people to fight against colonial rule because power is not as secure as it seems. To fight against the colonial power, the colonized people applied a mixture of cultures. Hybridity in Bhabha's view is a cross-cultural or cross-cultural cross between a dominant culture and a hegemonic culture. In another sense, hybridity can also be interpreted as resistance to the dominant culture. If drawn into the era of globalization as it is today, hybridization in culture is a form of resistance to the dominant culture which in the sense comes from Western civilization. Hybridization which is a necessity in the midst of Western cultural hegemony has also given birth to cultural consumerism (Sukarwo, 2017)(Kraidy, 2013).

Hybridity and liminality are widely discussed in literary research, both indigeneous literature and diaspora literature. Indigeneous literature shows the impact of colonialization in culture in the post-colonial era that is still being felt. This is found in a literary work entitled *Kirti Njungjung Drajat*. Hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence are found in Javanese culture affected by Western culture or colonial culture (Alfiah, 2020). In addition, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* diaspora literature also contains cultural problems for its characters. Hybridity and mimicry are prominent problems in the novel. *White Teeth* characters use hybridity and mimicry to camouflage in their daily lives (Amrulloh, 2014).

Hybridity and liminality found in one of diaspora literature by Jhumpa Lahiri,

A Temporary Matter in this study. Hybridity happened caused by migration to western country. It cannot be avoided by migratory societies. Moreover, in the hybridity the characters practice, it contains liminality that creates rooms for them whether the practice moves to western culture or eastern culture. It stays at that stage because they come from Indian (eastern country) that still do the cultural and religion rituals in the life, but they live in the United States of America (western country).

Two cultures interact can result hybridity. The mix culture causes one culture weakens and the other one dominates. This condition reflects the positive and negative effects of hybridity. People tend to leave the old culture and adopt the new one in running the life. Although, the old one will not disappear completely. The person may still hold or conduct old cultural actions.

Liminality means threshold which put a person in between state and space. It can be described as a line which marks ends and begins. This condition often experienced by people who live outside the motherland. They have not left the original culture and have not adopted the other culture yet. Liminal space can be meant as in between location of cultural actions (Chakraborty, 2016).

This study has research questions relating to the culture of migratory society. First, what hybridity do the main characters experience? Second, what are the liminalities of the culture they practice? In line with the research questions, the study has two objectives; (1) to find out the hybridity experienced by the two main character, and (2) to reveal the liminalities of the culture they practice.

Method

This study includes qualitative research that does not require numerical data (Kothari, 2004). This study emphasizes analyzing hybridity and liminality in the short story text entitled A Temporary Matter by Jhumpa Lahiri. The data taken in this study is the utterances of the characters and the narrator in the short story.

To conduct this research, several procedures are needed. First, reading the short story by applying close reading and taking notes are conducted. It was done more than two times reading. After reading the text, the researchers identified the utterances in the short story text based on the hybridity and liminality of Bhabaha to obtain data. The identification was conducted by giving highlight in each sentence and paragraph categorized hybridity and liminality. After that, the researchers analyzed the data by applying the concept of Bhabha; hybridity and liminality. Next, the researchers perform an analysis which is divided into two steps. The first step is to analyze the hybridity in culture experienced by the main characters. The second step analyzed the process liminality experienced by the main characters. Lastly, the researchers interpret the data.

Results and Discussion

Hybridity in Jhumpa Lahiri's A Temporary Matter

The short story *A Temporary Matter* takes on the theme of family problems. The family problem comes from the culture adopted. It tells about a family from a diaspora community who lives far from their home country. The problem happens between husband and wife relationship. The cultural issues raised focus on two cultures, western culture and eastern culture.

The short story *A Temporary Matter* found a cross between western and eastern cultures. Eastern culture shown comes from India, the origin of the two main characters in the story. Meanwhile, European culture represents western culture adopted by the two main characters. Although the short story takes place in a city in the United States of America, Jhumpa Lahiri does not mention the culture originating from the United States. People from all around the world come to the United States to inhabit it. The original culture of the United States is difficult to trace, and the culture of the Indian tribes that are the indigenous people of the American continent. Setting of place of this short story reflects multiculturalism in the country. People from around the world come to gather to achieve their goals.

Hybridity in the short story *A Temporary Matter* is found in the dress, the food, and the mindset. The two main characters, Shoba and Shukumar, have lived in the United States for a long time, so they are very close to modernization. The modernization looks from the dress. The taste of their food has changed, although they still adopt the culture of their ancestors. They interact with people from different cultures and change their way of thinking. They are no longer purely applying the Indian way of thinking. Modernization, association, and education influence the way of thinking of the two main characters.

Clothes includes one of cultural product that a society owns. It may differ one culture to others. We call it traditional clothes. The dress of the main character Shoba is different from that of Indian women that mostly wear saris. Shoba reflects as having a modern appearance and looking different from most Indian women. The following quote said,

'She wore a navy blue poplin raincoat over gray sweatpants and white sneakers, looking, at thirty-three, like the type of woman she'd once claimed she would never resemble.' She just got out of the gym (Lahiri, 1999).

Clothing is a form of cross-culture easily adapted by other cultures. How to dress that resembles a hegemonic society is a way to be accepted in that society. The way she wears dress, she still looks Indian. The skin and face could not be covered by the makeup. There is a change in clothes Shoba wears. She wears different clothes from Indian women.

Food becomes the thing that people usually recognize one culture. Each society has its own traditional food that they give to the people since they were children. As Indian descendants, Shoba and Shukumar have the main food they consume every day. Since Shoba and Shukumar live in the United States of America, they eat any kinds of food. Food consumed by husband and wife, Shoba and Shukumar, comes from a cross between western and eastern cultures. Shoba and Shukumar also eat European food. It looks from the food supplies they have. Shoba used to do the shopping, and she always stocked extra bottles of olive oil and corn oil, depending on whether they were cooking Italian or Indian. In addition to consuming Indian food, the couple also eats food from Italy. The supply of oil used is olive oil or corn oil. Italian food uses olive oil, and corn oil is for Indian food. Two different types of oil also show that they consume foods that come from different cultures. From the food consumption, the couple apply hybridity. Two cultural products from the two different cultures are mixed in their cooking. Cooking and food can be said as parts of culture.

In addition to the type of oil consumed, they also provide pasta. The main food of Indians is rice. But, the couple do not only eat rice, they also eat pasta, the main food of Italians. There were countless boxes of pasta in all shapes and colors, zippered sacks of basmati rice, whole sides of lambs and goats from the Muslim butchers at Haymarket, chopped up and frozen in countless plastic bags. The citation shows that they are crossing cultures in food. They consume pasta as well as Indian food. Consuming pasta for the Indian couple depict their life journey that they interact to other culture, Italian culture. As Indian descendants, rice is the main food for Shoba and Shukumar, but living in other country makes them adapt to consume pasta. Shoba and Shukumar depicted consume lambs and goat, they do not eat meat, because cow is respected as the holy animal. To fulfill their protein need, they consume lambs, goat, and chicken.

Food is one of the cultural products that can unite two different cultures. The food is also often adjusted to the tongue that consumes it. Foods that undergo taste adjustments are in great demand by people from other cultures. Food often reflects hybridity of two different culture. People adopt what other culture has to improve and enrich their food supply.

The way people think changes. The changes occur because of the influence of interaction, education, and experience. This change looks in Shoba's way of thinking different from that of the Indian woman represented by Shukumar's mother. Shoba

reflects an independent woman, able to prepare for her future without depending on a man or her husband. Shoba's mindset doesn't exist by itself. She can prepare for his future because she has a job, and she can manage her finances. She was the type to prepare for surprises, good and bad. In addition, she is not dependent on her husband. Of course, she provides sufficient food because she has an income. She kept the bonuses from her job in a separate bank account in her name. Her financial and household management did not adopt the mindset of her parents. She pays attention to the surrounding environment that comes from various cultures. Although she has independent mindset, Shoba still practices what Indian women do to serve the husband and manage the house. Shoba conducts her life in the mixed practices; modern and traditional ways.

Shukumar's way of thinking is different from that of Indian men who live in his home country. Shukumar adopted the American culture when a disaster hit them. He wants to replace Shoba's role as a wife who takes care of household matters. Previously, Shukumar had never cooked and taken care of the house. However, his son's death changed him to do just that. All this time, he had been paying attention to what Shoba did, and he was trying to implement them. Of course, he had to do it himself. Living in the United States or any other country must be willing to do everything by yourself, without the help of relatives. Shukumar still has the role as the head of the family. Indian tradition put men as the dominant subject that do not interfere household. This short story depicts one of Indian men who has lived in the United States of America for years doing domestic jobs in the house. This condition does not mean that Shukumar

Liminality in Jhumpa Lahiri's A Temporary Matter

Cross-culture occurs because there is a gap between the two cultures. The gap is a pause to jump to the next or new culture. The gap is called liminality. It is difficult to predict its movement.

Jhumpa Lahiri's A Temporary Matter reveals a lot of cross-culturalism in which there is liminality. It is difficult to predict the liminality. The movement either goes toward a new culture or to one of the cultures contained in the cross. Religion, cultural rituals, and food in A Temporary Matter carry liminality.

The religion adhered by the people of India is Hinduism. However, in their development, they interact with other religious adherents. Moreover, when they live in another country, namely as a diaspora community, these Indian descendants interact and socialize with other religious believers, for example, Christians. Here is a gap between the two religions, Hinduism and Christianity, in the two main characters of *A Temporary Matter*. They do not celebrate Christmas, but they appreciate the Christmas ritual of their friends by receiving Christmas gifts. A friend had sent the calendar in the mail as a Christmas gift, even though Shoba and Shargaar hadn't celebrated Christmas that year (Lahiri, 1999). The sentence implies that Shoba and Shukumar have not had the opportunity to celebrate Christmas. Although they still respect the ritual. It could make it possible for Shoba and Shukumar to celebrate Christmas next. Interacting and socializing with Christian friends opens an opportunity for Shoba and Shukumar to move away from the beliefs held by their ancestors. Interacting with other religion adherents describes liminality for Shoba and Shukumar.

Regarding the religion of the two main characters, they still do Hindu religious rituals in their homes. Shoba's mother still practices the rituals by posting photos and other attributes to pray for Shoba and Shukumar's child who died. She set up a small shrine, a framed picture of a lavender-faced goddess, and a plate of marigold petals, on the bedside table in the guest room, and men twice a day for healthy grandchildren in the future (Lahiri, 1999). Shoba's mother prayed twice a day when she lived with them. Shoba's mother still holds her identity as Indian with her religion as Hinduism. She also does not insist her daughter's belief that is not reflected in Shoba's religion practices. The couple also gave their mother space to keep practicing her faith. Lahiri does not depict the couple's religion rituals. The citation above shows that the couple does not pray when they are in grief. Religion adherents will pray and return to God if they were in bad conditions. Shoba and Shukumar run their life as usual when their baby dies. They look mourned that influences their relationship as husband and wife.

The two events found in *A Temporary Matter* related to religion show liminality between Christmas celebrations and Hindu prayer rituals. The two events do not describe the exact position of the couple. They are in the middle of it. The cultural ritual of the rice ceremony is one of the findings of the liminality that occurs in the culture adopted by Shoba and Shukumar. They are immigrants living in the United States closely related to modernization, where they do not encounter cultural rituals around them. When Shoba became pregnant, they imagined that they would hold a rice ceremony for their child when they were six or seven months old. The celebration of the rice ceremony ritual becomes liminality because they are in two cultures; modern and traditional. They still maintain tradition but are in the middle of modernization. It is possible for them to leave their cultural traditions for modernization or continue the traditions in the midst of modernization. The short story describes the condition of Shoba that did not celebrate the rice ceremony because the child he was carrying had died.

"It's like India," Shoba said, watching him tend his makeshift candelabra. "Sometimes the current disappears for hours at a stretch. I once had to attend an entire rice ceremony in the dark. The baby just cried and cried. It must have been so hot." Their baby had never cried, Shukumar considered. Their baby would never have a rice ceremony, even though Shoba had already made the guest list, and decided on which of her three brothers she was going to ask to feed the child its first taste of solid food, at six months if it was a boy, seven if it was a girl. (Lahiri, 1999)

Shoba's condition is on the verge of being between tradition and modernization. The death of the child makes her sad. The role of the surrounding environment will affect their desire to switch to hegemonic or western culture or to maintain their eastern culture. Shoba's imagination to do rice ceremony as one hinduism ritual shows that Shoba respects to Hinduism tradition, although they do not practice other tradition or rituals regularly. Their position in diaspora community is difficult to practice it.

Interaction with people from other cultures uses language that both parties can understand. An immigrant must be able to adapt to the linguistic environment of the surrounding community. Diaspora communities adjust to using the language in which they live. They speak English when they live in the United States of America or use the language of countries in Europe if they live in Europe. Shoba and Shukumar use English in their daily lives and when they interact with other people outside the home.

The use of English in daily activities led to a decrease in the use of their mother tongue. Shukumar does not understand Bengali poetry. Shukumar was bored listening to the reading of the poem. He was not used to hearing the poem. He never lived or stopped in India. He thought back to their first meeting, four years earlier at a lecture hall in Cambridge, where a group of Bengali poets were giving a recital. They'd ended up side by side, on folding wooden chairs. Shukumar was soon bored; he was unable to decipher the literary diction, and couldn't join the rest of the audience as they sighed and nodded solemnly after certain phrases (Lahiri, 1999). Language and literature are two cultural products that show the existence of a culture. The two elements interrelated; literature of a tribe is transformed using the language. Although, it could be translated using other language to help understand the content.

In this event, there was a shift in the cultural movement of Shukumar from Indian culture to western culture. Shukumar looks bored listening to Bengali poetry because he has started to turn to English literature. The citation shows the gap between Indian (Bengali) and English literature. Shukumar is still trying to get to know the culture of his ancestors, even though he has difficulty understanding it.

Shukumar's mastery of Indian literature seems to be lacking. He tends to be disinterested in Indian literature, even though he is from India. He was an American guy, a maniac. He knew Urdu and Sanskrit. I couldn't remember if the verse we had to identify as an example of a ghazal or not. I looked at his answer and copied it down." It had happened over fifteen years ago. Shukumar considers people outside India who know the Indian language to be maniacs (Lahiri, 1999). The description of Shukumar's condition shows a tendency to shift from eastern culture to western culture. Shukumar tends to spend his time in the western culture which affects the introduction of Indian literature lacking in him. Liminality in language and literature happens when Shukumar tries to understand the Bengali language and the literature. He knows he is an Indian descendant, but he does not know the literature and language well.

Conclusion

A Temporary Matter, written by Jhumpa Lahiri, is a diaspora literature that takes place in a city in the United States of America. It depicts a cross-culture or so-called hybridity and cultural liminality of the eastern culture (India) and the western culture (Europe).

The two main characters, Shoba and Shukumar experience cultural hybridity or cross-cultural experience. They experience hybridity in terms of clothing, food, and language. They adopted the results of western culture. They cannot leave it because they have to live by interacting and socializing with people from other cultural tribes. They get influence from the majority, the hegemonic western party.

The two main characters experience cultural liminality, or a cultural gap occurs. The cultural gap causes a movement or shift that can lead either to eastern culture or western culture. Liminality in the short story happens in religion or belief, cultural rituals, and literature.

The short story *A Temporary Matter* describes the cultural problems of the diaspora. Cultural issues are a minor theme of the short story, but the major one is a family problem.

Cultural issues are social problems that society often encounters. Cultural issues include inter-tribal conflicts to cross-culture between two or more cultures. Cross-culture can result in a shift in the cultural identity of individuals. It happens because of the intense influence of the hegemonic culture.

Diaspora communities experience the problems mentioned above. They can maintain their home culture by continuously interacting and socializing with individuals from their home country. From this interaction and socialization, they can preserve the cultural products of their country of origin. Diaspora communities

can hold the traditional fashion, food, arts, and culture in other countries.

Suggestions

There are some suggestions for further research. They are as follows;

- The findings of this study can be explored more by other researchers that relate to cultural problems.
- The object of the study can be analyzed by applying other literary theories.
- This object of the study also contains the female character's problem that can be analyzed by other researchers.

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