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## NEW INTERPRETATION OF GENDER RELATIONS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S “HELL-HEAVEN”

### НОВЕ ПОТРАКТУВАННЯ ГЕНДЕРНИХ ВІДНОСИН В ОПОВІДАННІ Д. ЛАГІРІ «ЗЕМЛЯ-НЕБО»

**Abstract.** The article deals with the analysis of gender relations (gender roles changes) in Jhumpa Lahiri's writing. The article's **aim** is to explore the peculiarities and new interpretation of gender relations in the context of the transculture paradigm in Jhumpa Lahiri's writing (her story “Hell-Heaven” is the research object).

It is indicated that often the writer focuses on second-generation immigrants and on their symbolic “struggle” with the new cultural environment. There is a striking difference between the experiences of diasporic men and women in Lahiri's writing; moreover these experiences are always gendered. But we see completely different migration experience with women. Very often they leave their home country just to accompany their husbands, following the practice of arranged marriage.

Special attention is focused on women of color (in our case American-Bengali women). Many of Lahiri's women characters explore their independence through their traditional gender roles, rooted in Indian culture. Lahiri's short story “Hell-Heaven” (from her second collection “Unaccustomed Earth”, 2008) is a vivid example of gender roles changes.

Aparna follows her gender role; being a domesticated mother, she is economically dependent on her husband. It is mentioned that in Lahiri's writing female characters are made to suffer and being alone in their but still “foreign” American apartments. Like most female immigrants Aparna lives away from her homeland and she is in symbolic “cage” within the traditional (social and maternal) roles with no opportunity of breaking out. Aparna's existence is very limited: it is both by her gender as well as by the tense relationship with her husband. At the end of the story we find a ring mode (or Vysotska's “here and there” piston mode) – Usha has the same situation as her mother once had. There is a significant transition here: Aparna can share her own experience which is mirrored in Usha's life. At least the woman realizes her multiple identity (she is an Indian woman and also she is an immigrant woman) which leads to restoring her relationships with her husband and her daughter in her own way.

**Keywords:** woman, gender roles, identity, immigrant, Indian culture.

**Анотація.** Статтю присвячено аналізу гендерних відносин (зміни гендерних ролей) у творчості Джумпи Лагірі. **Мета** статті – дослідити особливості та нове потрактування гендерних відносин у контексті транскультурної парадигми у творчості Джумпи Лагірі (оповідання «Земля-Небо» є об'єктом дослідження).

Зазначено, що автор дуже часто акцентує увагу на іммігрантах другого покоління та на їх символічній «боротьбі» з новим культурним середовищем. У творчості Лагірі простежується

разюча різниця між досвідом імміграції чоловіків і жінок, до того ж цей досвід завжди має гендерний характер. Але ми бачимо зовсім інший жіночий досвід міграції. Дуже часто вони залишають рідну країну лише для того, щоб супроводжувати чоловіків, дотримуючись традиції шлюбу за домовленістю.

Особлива увага приділяється жінкам-іммігранткам (у нашому випадку американсько-бенгальським жінкам). Багато жіночих персонажів Лагірі досліджують свою незалежність через традиційні гендерні ролі, закладені в індійській культурі. Оповідання «Земля-Небо» (з її другої збірки оповідань «Незвична земля», 2008) є яскравим прикладом зміни гендерних ролей.

Апарна дотримується своєї гендерної ролі; будучи одомашненою матір'ю, вона залежить від чоловіка економічно. Зазначено, що у творчості Д. Лагірі жіночі персонажі змушені страждати і залишатися на самоті у своїх, але досі «чужих» американських квартирах. Як і більшість іммігранток, Апарна живе далеко від своєї батьківщини, і перебуває в символічній «клітці» разом з традиційними (соціальними і материнськими) ролями без можливості вирватися. Життя Апарни дуже обмежене: це обумовлено як її статтю, так і напруженими стосунками з чоловіком. Наприкінці оповідання знаходимо кільцевий режим (або поршневий режим Висоцької «туди-сюди») – у Уші така ж ситуація, як колись у її матері. Тут є значний перехід: Апарна може поділитися власним досвідом, який відображається в житті Уші. Принаймні жінка усвідомлює свою множинну ідентичність (вона індійка та жінка-іммігрантка), що по-своєму веде до відновлення стосунків з чоловіком та донькою.

**Ключові слова:** жінка, гендерні ролі, ідентичність, іммігрант, індійська культура.

**Problem formulation.** The study of gender is important in the modern literature discourse. There is a striking difference between the experiences of diasporic men and women in Jhumpa Lahiri's writing (an American author of Bengali origin). Moreover these experiences are always gendered.

The features of Indian women's adaptation to the new culture are seen not only in overcoming the language barrier, but are traced in everyday life and in relations with men. Women have completely different adaptation experiences. The problem of gender relations is traced to the identity crisis of the Indian woman in America, who balances between cultures and lives in two worlds: wants to be American and at the same time tries not forget her "desh" (literally "homeland" in Bengali).

In Lahiri's writing, female images play an important role in the plot-compositional construction, act as their ideological center, and are an expression of the author's ideal; these images have an important semantic and emotional load. Lahiri successfully feels the natural features of women's style. Her works are valuable primarily because they skillfully reproduce the female immigrant world's view, the features of female character, language, thinking, imagination are reflected psychologically convincingly.

It should be mentioned that gender mobility is not due to political influence; women often follow their husbands in search of a better life, in order to achieve financial independence. J. Clifford expressed an interesting opinion in this context, noting that a “good journey” (heroic, educational, scientific, adventure, chivalrous) befits men. Women are kept from serious travel. And if they go to distant lands, it is mainly for the company or, as an exception, [they] are forced to accept, imitate or secretly protest against the rules and experiences that belong to men” (Clifford, 1997: 32).

The article’s **aim** is to explore the peculiarities and new interpretation of gender relations in the context of the transculture paradigm in Jhumpa Lahiri’s writing (her story “Hell-Heaven” is the research object).

**Research materials and methods.** The analysis of the article is based on Jhumpa Lahiri’s writing (an American writer of Bengali origin). The story “Hell-Heaven” from “Unaccustomed Earth” (2008) collection is taken into consideration.

It should be mentioned that all stories in the collection are thematically different but they are united by a situation of Indian immigrants’ assimilation to a foreign country which is also close to the author. The lives of Asian-American characters who have mixed identities is at the centre. This is author’s second collection, which won the first place in “100 best books of 2008” nomination, and also received the Frank O’Connor International Award (2008).

In the article we used the following **research methods**: historical and typological (determining the specifics of themes, motifs, images, story features of the writer’s works), hermeneutic (interpretation of various aspects of the literary text), narratological analysis (specifics’ analysis of J. Lahiri’s narrative manner).

**Research analysis.** Gender problem in Jhumpa Lahiri’s writing was studied by T. Arianto (Indoctrination Against Women in “The Lowland” by Jhumpa Lahiri), S. Chattopadhyay (Crossing Border in search of “Home”: Gender and Empowerment in Jhumpa Lahiri’s “The Namesake”), S. Dar (The Portrayal of Women as Rebels in the Literary Works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee), S. Mehta (Exploring Gender in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora), D. Shanmugam (Portrayal of Indian Women in

Jhumpa Lahiri's "Unaccustomed Earth"), E. Vojdani and V. Rahiminezhad (Gender and Social Issues in Persian translation: A Case Study of Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Namesake") and others.

**Main material.** The differences between the adaptation of men and women to the new cultural environment are clearly seen in Jhumpa Lahiri's writing. We may find this in almost every her work where Indian men portrayed to find their "raison-d'être" (life meaning). Their aim is a constant search for the American dream, as most of them migrate for academic and economic purposes.

But we see completely different migration experience with women. Very often they leave their home country just to accompany their husbands, following the practice of arranged marriage. It should be indicated that the positive characterization of a Bengali woman as an exemplary mother and wife who follows home traditions, lives in humility as opposed to a frivolous American one (for whom marriage is something unnecessary and temporary) is dominated in Lahiri's writing. Although in some stories, "Hell-Heaven" in particular, we notice a certain transformation of gender roles. This is especially about Aparna, the narrator's mother, who is opposed to the traditional image of a Bengali woman and does not fully fulfill her maternal role (instead of her daughter, she performs this role towards another person).

From the very beginning Usha, the story's narrator, tells about her mother's romantic connection towards family's friend Pranab. The reader notices Aparna to be a stereotypical Indian immigrant mother and housewife, living in Boston during the late 70s with her scientist husband and her seven-year-old daughter.

We see that Aparna's existence is very limited: it is both by her gender as well as by the tense relationship with her husband. Like many other Bengali women, she has had an arranged marriage but in real the couple shares very few common interests. Most of the day she spends in the house cooking and cleaning, and her only form of entertainment involves roaming Cambridge and Massachusetts streets with her daughter, and "looking at discounted house ware" (Lahiri, 2008: 46).

During one of these daily walks they meet Pranab Chakraborty, a charismatic Indian graduate student from MIT. Pranab Kaku (or Uncle Pranab as Usha later calls

him) becomes involved in Aparna's family by "occupying (every night) the fourth chair at our square Formica kitchen table and becoming a part of our family in practice as well as in name" (Lahiri, 2008: 47).

We notice Aparna's gender roles transformations with Pranab's arrival: being a docile immigrant woman who is unable to cope with new culture, her identity and motherhood, Aparna takes the dominant role. Pranab's visits literally inspire her and that is why she behaves selfishly, and sometimes exceeds the symbolic allowed "border".

Usha notices her mother's maternal role towards Pranab: like a mother she cares of him, as he "had not had a proper Bengali meal in three months". That is why he is invited to "a second dinner" as well. Also Usha informs that Pranab "was from a wealthy family in Calcutta and had never had to do so much as to pour a glass of water." But now being in another country he had to deal with daily domestic tasks. His incompetence makes him almost ready to go back home, save for Aparna's intervention.

The woman realizes the necessity of maternal care to help him "to survive". One day she even will perform his mother's role when Pranab will ask about marriage blessing. Aparna is convinced that Pranab's chosen American Deborah does not love him at all. When Usha once asks if she should name Deborah according to tradition (just like Pranab – kaku, that is, uncle, Deborah should be kakima – aunt), the mother only opens her eyes wide, assuring her daughter that in a week Pranab will get tired of Deborah and they will disperse.

The heroine repeatedly emphasizes her dissatisfaction with the American woman. Now Usha knows that it is indecent for a woman not to braid her hair and show it to everyone. Even Pranab is negatively affected by Deborah, although Aparna does not have any facts to confirm this, only her own metaphor in English: "when they were out of earshot my mother would talk to the other Bengali women. "He used to be so different. I don't understand how a person can change so suddenly. It's just hell-heaven, the difference", she would say, always using the English words for her self-concocted, backward metaphor" (Lahiri, 2008: 51).

Female minor characters (Bengali women who are invited to one of “their” parties, whose names are unknown, as well as their number, because they are presented in plural form) appear in a negative context of a Bengali woman. This is clearly seen in the episode when women allow themselves to gossip and criticize the stupid (as they think) Deborah’s manners, her disgusting taste in clothes and especially her obscene behavior: “Sometimes they ended up feeding each other, allowing their fingers to linger in each other’s mouth, causing my parents to look down at their plates and wait for the moment to pass. At larger gatherings, they kissed and held hands in front of everyone” (Lahiri, 2008: 51).

The author uses such negatively colored vocabulary to fully show the Bengali matrons’ dissatisfaction with the American woman, who remains not “other” but “foreign” forever. In fact, Aparna and her Bengali friends see only what they want to see: Deborah “stole” Pranab and ruined his life (although after many years of living together, it was Pranab who left Deborah with the children). Aparna lives by illusions, and still hopes that Pranab’s affair with Deborah is temporary, and one day the grief-stricken Pranab will reappear in her kitchen, and she will comfort him again by performing her pseudo-mother role. However, at that time their feelings with Deborah were too passionate.

We do not mean that Aparna has illicit relationship with Pranab. Like most immigrant housewives she is economically dependent on her husband and result in she is more circumscribed. Being a real Bengali woman, Aparna cannot receive Pranab alone in the house (although he is their family member) without her daughter or anyone else present at home. Pranab came only when Usha had returned from school. “It would have been inappropriate for my mother to receive him in the apartment alone; this was something that went without saying” (Lahiri, 2008: 48). Moreover, such an act would be condemned by “her” people, as it is considered as “inappropriate” and as an unwritten rule to be followed by everyone.

Aparna followed “her” traditions, and was a typical Bengali immigrant wife: she spoke Bengali and taught her daughter to speak it, cooked Indian food, which they often eat the next day (which is not typical for Americans).

We have to mention that Aparna prepares Indian dishes with a special care. Her symbolic “alienation” is manifested not in the absence of American friends, but rather in the “incomprehensible” habits of Americans: Thanksgiving was associated with consuming large amounts of tasteless food and with a reason not to go to work; and to finish cooking when the guests had already arrived was considered a bad manner. Mother’s life seemed extremely boring to Usha: her mother never worked, and her life purpose was to serve her daughter and husband, who did not praise her for her delicious food and never used kind words addressing her. In real her husband was “married” to his work and to his research. He existed in his own world, understood by him only (neither his wife nor daughter had “access” there). Even any non-work-related conversation was a real challenge for Shymail, and he didn’t want to waste his precious time talking nonsense.

It is clear, that in Lahiri’s writing the culinary phenomenon is realized through Indian women, for whom cooking “their” dishes is life meaning. The host or the oldest of present is the first to start eating. We notice a similar motif in “Hema and Kaushik” (by the way, from the same collection): “Chitra hovered over my father and me and the girls, eating privately after we were done, the way our maids would in Bombay” (Lahiri, 2008: 183). In this way (by silence) Chitra follows “her” cultural code, because like the food concept, silence determines Asian woman’s identity.

In this context “food is directly connected with gender issues. Eating habits and the way of cooking determine a woman’s identity as well as her difference. Food emphasizes woman’s cultural affiliation: in Lahiri’s writing it is shown that food serves as sacred ritual and art for Indians, in contrast to the American habit of hunger satisfying with semi-finished products” (Yalovenko, 2021: 98).

However, the life and amenities of an American apartment will never replace “her” space. That is why Aparna feels inner “loneliness”, and this is clearly seen in her behavior: “I would return from school and find my mother with her purse in her lap and her trench coat on, desperate to escape the apartment where she had spent the day alone” (Lahiri, 2008: 48).

We see a similar motif in other Lahiri's stories, in particular in "Mrs. Sen's" (from "Interpreter of Maladies" collection, 1999), where the main character Mrs. Sen (like Aparna) is in a confined space of her comfortable but in real "foreign" apartment. Mrs. Sen exists beyond time and just getting used to American life: "Here, in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence" (Lahiri, 1999: 128).

Like the other female characters, who are also a thousand miles from their homes, Aparna hated her immigration life, but it's better than living under the same roof with her mother-in-law (she still shudders at the thought that her husband could choose strict his parents' home, not America). "Even in her bleakest hours of homesickness she was grateful that my father had at least spared her a life in the stern house of her in-laws, where she would have had to keep her head covered with the end of her sari at all times and use an outhouse that was nothing but a raised platform with a hole, and where, in the rooms, there was not a single painting hanging on the walls" (Lahiri, 2008: 49).

Usha notices that only Pranab's visits really make her mother happy: "I did not know, back then, that Pranab Kaku's visits were what my mother looked forward to all day, that she changed into a new sari and combed her hair in anticipation of his arrival, and that she planned, days in advance, the snacks she would serve him with such nonchalance" (Lahiri, 2008: 48).

After Pranab became a frequent visitor at their house, Aparna really "comes to life" in the kitchen, and in this context we notice her transformation from a quiet domestic woman: "Now I would find her in the kitchen, rolling out dough for luchis, which she normally made only on Sundays for my father and me, or putting up new curtains she'd bought at Woolworth's ... I did not know, back then that Pranab Kaku's visits were what my mother looked forward to all day" (Lahiri, 2008: 48). Although the woman realizes all Pranab's visits to be temporary (he finds his love Deborah), Aparna re-thinks her gender role of housewife: it is not forced and passive any more, now this role has a significant meaning.

Performing her pseudo-mother role towards Pranab, Aparna came up with a new menu every day (which she never did for her husband and daughter), and spent several



hours cooking special meals. Unlike her husband, who never commented on her passively prepared meals, Pranab repeatedly thanked her for an incredibly delicious lunch or dinner. At that time, the woman was living only to hear the coveted “Boudi!” outside the door, and if for some reason Pranab did not come, her mood was spoiled for the whole day.

Again we notice gender role change in Aparna’s image. We mean her realization that she has “crossed” the allowed line as any illicit relationship goes beyond the normative ones of a wife and a mother: “It is clear to me now that my mother was in love with him ... [although] she knew that she could never have him for herself and I suppose it was her attempt to keep him in the family” (Lahiri, 2008: 50). Aparna is aware of one-sided relationship which never would be accepted (by her daughter, husband, parents and the whole “her” community).

We see Aparna’s pseudo-maternal gender role as she performs acts of romantic love that are strictly forbidden by “her” society: “Within a few weeks, Pranab Kaku had brought his reel-to-reel over to our apartment, and he played for my mother medley after medley of songs from the Hindi films of their youth. They were cheerful songs of courtship, which transformed the quiet life in our apartment and transported my mother back to the world she’d left behind in order to marry my father... She and Pranab Kaku would argue passionately about these matters, raising their voices in playful combat, confronting each other in a way she and my father never did” (Lahiri, 2008: 49). This is her potential wish to be free from limited womanhood (being financially dependent immigrant woman who obeys her husband and spends the whole day in cooking and cleaning).

Aparna and Pranab could talk for hours. Although they grew up almost neighbors (they both lived on neighboring streets), they had a lot in common: music, movies, poetry, even political preferences. Now it is Pranab who takes on the new gender role and becomes conditional Usha’s father and Aparna’s husband. Compared to Aparna’s always busy husband, they have spent a lot of time together that even an outside spectator may consider them a real family.

Unlike her husband who often listened to his wife but did not hear her, Pranab was really interested in Aparna's stories. "She and Pranab Kaku would try to recall which scene in which movie the songs were from, who the actors were and what they were wearing. My mother would describe Raj Kapoor and Nargis singing under umbrellas in the rain, or Dev Anand strumming a guitar on the beach in Goa. She and Pranab Kaku would argue passionately about these matters, raising their voices in playful combat, confronting each other in a way she and my father never did" (Lahiri, 2008: 49).

Aparna's conditional transformation is noticed even when she calls Pranab by name, which she never did towards her husband: "Because he played the part of a younger brother, she felt free to call him Pranab" (Lahiri, 2008: 49).

The story shows a portrait of an ideal (but not real) Bengali family: frequent picnics, swimming in the pool, shared photos of the three (Pranab liked to take photos). Again we notice gender roles changes: "Wherever we went, any stranger would have naturally assumed that Pranab Kaku was my father, that my mother was his wife" (Lahiri, 2008: 50). They have "all the things she and my father (Aparna's husband) did not have in common: a love of music, film, leftist politics, poetry," and as the narrator points out, "I don't think even my birth made her as happy [as Pranab]" (Lahiri, 2008: 50).

From the very beginning we see Aparna in her emotional apathy, she is "locked" in her house and the only time she leaves the house is when Usha comes back from school. In this case we completely agree with S. Raj, who notes the following about women: "physically they are in America, but mentally in South Asia. They deal with loneliness and dislocation, cultural displacement, a sense of identity and belonging to Indian and American cultures, taking into account the small details" (Raj, 2016: 460).

But thanks to Pranab, Aparna changes her attitude towards her home as well: it is a place where she can meet him with delicious meal (we have to point out that she cooks special dishes not to follow her traditions (as Ashima from "The Namesake"), but in order to please Pranab). The home now becomes the place to regain lost perspective and give life new meaning. It also gives her some therapeutic effect.

Also there are some paralinguistic elements in the story, including kinesics as a science of sign language, sign movements, and silence as an equally important element of non-verbal communication (but in this case we do not mean silence as Japan “chinmoku” concept, Asian cultural code). All these paralinguistic elements are extremely significant, because they show a true attitude to the situation – Aparna does not want to “let” her Pranab go.

At Pranab’s request to write a letter to his parents with official approval of his intentions to marry Deborah (Pranab realizes that he “betrays” his traditions, because he marries in a non-traditional Indian way), Aparna agreed reluctantly: “My mother nodded her assent, but the following day I saw the teacup Pranab Kaku had used all this time as an ashtray in the kitchen garbage can, in pieces, and three Band-Aids taped to my mother's hand” (Lahiri, 2008: 53). Since then, Arapna subconsciously gets rid of everything that reminds her of Pranab. By her actions, she expresses disagreement, and hopes that this marriage, like everything in America, is a temporary matter.

For some time Aparna holds her typical status, but later her excursions with Pranab mean the so-called transgression beyond her (in some way repressed) home space into the public sphere where she is not hidden / tied up in her status of a mother or a servile housewife only. It is not at home but in public where once she “prepared a picnic of hard-boiled eggs and cucumber sandwiches and talked fondly (to Pranab) about the winter picnics of her youth” (Lahiri, 2008: 50). In such moments Aparna reconstructs her own identity, she goes beyond the limits she used to within her own house.

It should be mentioned, that in Lahiri’s writings both traditional and non-traditional gender roles are shown. This “configuration of gender roles for both male and female characters become an intertwined, continuous process” (Marques, 2013: 6). When the person is surrounded by his own culture, it is easier and more necessary to follow traditional gender roles, but many of Lahiri’s characters are literary transplanted (like potato in “Unaccustomed Earth”) into a new alien culture where traditional gender roles are not necessarily the norm. Of course, there is inevitable culture conflict, and sometimes characters may reject stereotypical rules of male and female.

We see that Aparna has not passive maternal role as it was from the very beginning. Aparna's actions as a mother were typical as for all mothers in Calcutta as they were predicated on conduct rules. But significant (and not good) changes take place in Aparna's character, namely in her attitude towards Deborah. Her rejection and dissatisfaction is clearly seen during Pranab's marriage where "she (Aparna) kept speaking in Bengali, complaining about the formality of the proceedings, and the fact that Pranab Kaku, wearing a tuxedo, barely said a word to us because he was too busy leaning over the shoulders of his new American-in-laws" (Lahiri, 2008: 54).

During this special day for Pranab Aparna shows her feelings but in her native language (this practice she used to have at home only). In this case her actions in public sphere are not so positive. In public Aparna also highlights her maternal status (but in negative aspect) when she does not allow Usha to dance and enjoy Pranab's wedding. She thought Usha had had plenty of fun already that is why it was high time to put on the coat and leave the party.

We may speak about Aparna's new model of behavior, now she is an active maternal person who seems realizes she has a daughter and forbids her "to attend the dances that were held the last Friday of every month in the school cafeteria, and it was an unspoken law that I was not allowed to date" (Lahiri, 2008: 56).

It seems that only now Aparna does not follow her pseudo-maternal status and replaces Pranab's space by Usha. She fills her lack of maternal relations by her daughter, but at the same time her motherhood model is in a direct contrast with Deborah's maternal attitude. Usha feels that "anyone would have said that Deborah would make an excellent mother, one day. But my mother refused to acknowledge such a thing" (Lahiri, 2008: 52).

It is worth emphasizing that Aparna does not perform her maternal role even when she tries to get pregnant once again: "She was pregnant for the fifth time since my birth and was so sick and exhausted and fearful of losing another baby that she slept most of the day. After ten weeks, she miscarried once again and was advised by her doctor to stop trying" (Lahiri, 2008: 52).

M. Trinh emphasizes that “if a woman is not forced to leave home by economic hardship, her mobility is limited. Transcultural, specifically class and gender movements have been almost inaccessible to women for centuries, so every woman who has travelled has become an outcast for her family, society, gender ” (Trinh, 1994: 15). In “Hell-Heaven” Aparna accepts new life’s realities, but she is still alone: she realizes that there is no more return home, as there are no real friends, and her husband is constantly busy at work.

At least she realizes her multiple identity (she is an Indian woman and she is an immigrant woman as well) which leads to restoring her relationships with her husband and her daughter in her own way. Usha admits that “over the years, when I visited, I noticed warmth between my parents that had not been there before, a quiet teasing solidarity, a concern when one of them fell ill. My mother and I had also made peace; she had accepted the fact that I was not only her daughter but a child of America as well” (Lahiri, 2008: 60).

Usha realizes that her mother welcomes her boyfriends into their home; she accepted the fact her adult daughter dated American men and even sleep with them not to be married. “After years of being idle she decided, when she turned fifty, to get a degree in library science at a nearby university” (Lahiri, 2008: 60).

At the end of the story we find a ring mode (or Vysotska’s “back and forth” piston mode) (Vysotska, 2010: 280) – Usha has the same situation as her mother once had: “My own heart was broken by a man I’d hoped to marry” (Lahiri, 2008: 61). There is a significant transition here: Aparna can share her own experience which is mirrored in Usha’s life.

**Conclusions.** Woman’s image has a significant place in fiction. It has cultural roots and reveals the mentality peculiarities of Bengali culture; it is an essential factor in understanding the socio-cultural characteristics of the Indian nation. Fiction not only helps to penetrate into the national, psychological, universal essence of female images, they are important in themselves: they show the history, culture, social relations, as well as everyday problems of an ordinary “little” man. In many of her works Lahiri refers to

the female image. Fidelity, caring mother and wife are the traits that characterize women's images in Indian literature.

Have analyzed Lahiri's "Hell-Heaven" we came to the following conclusions. Aparna "fights" for space and place in the new cultural environment, but still she stays limited within the cultural norms. Unlike her husband, who settled well in America and was successful in his career, Aparna still does not feel completely at home (even after many years in America).

The author shows the heroine mainly through internally lonely, offended and unhappy woman who lacks the opportunity to express herself as individual (except in the family). Lacking the choice and self-realization, she remains lonely in American apartment that is still foreign to her. That is why the woman finds refuge in the past (she follows her home traditions) but does not avoid the present (has relations with Pranab), and result in she continue to be in the symbolic "cage" of her American apartment.

In this story (as in almost every Lahiri's work) the author addresses the family problem and shows that the main female vocation to be an exemplary wife, mother, daughter is not inferior to the public purpose. Lahiri's female characters, namely Aparna, are ordinary women who seek to find their place in life and happiness in the family, as family plays an important role in an Indian woman's life.

Aparna and other women in Lahiri's stories are symbolic "repositories" of their multiple identities: they follow their roles of mothers, career women, immigrant wives, daughters, and even illicit lovers. Usually they reject typical classification imposed to women, appeal on difference and at the same time destabilize traditional signifiers of feminine identity, giving way to their multiple ones.

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