

Peeping into Extraordinary Emotions in Munro, Lessing, and Lahiri

Geetika Patni

Department of English, Swami Keshvanand Institute of Technology, Management & Gramothan, Jaipur-302017 (INDIA)

Email: geetika.patni@skit.ac.in

Received 10.12.2025 received in revised form 14.05.2025, accepted 14.05.2025

DOI: 10.47904/IJSKIT.15.1.2025.98-102

Abstract- Through the essay, the use of selective observations in the writing of Alice Munro, Doris Lessing and Jhumpa Lahiri, as a lens of an ordinary everyday events leading to exciting emotional and psychological journeys are analysed. These authors vary in cultural background and thematic interests, yet all three are masters at going deep into the emotional undercurrents just beneath the surface of everyday life. Munro often places her stories within small-town Canada, where the kinds of interactions most of us experience daily and the most prosaic of moments yield insight into memory, regret and identity. Lessing, generally speaking, more openly political, also deals in the quotidian — in conversations, family gatherings or banal social encounters — to probe larger elements of alienation, trauma and existential disquiet. Writing in the context of the Indian diaspora, Lahiri, too, explores the lives of immigrants in the West, and how moments such as preparing a meal or reading a letter are often the most evocative. For writers such as Munro, Lessing, and Lahiri, ordinary events become an agent for depth and intensity, and they share an ability to transform the mundane into the universally moving. These authors try to bring situational and behavioral aspects of daily existence into the broader psychological and social frameworks, elicit the shared emotions of loss, yearning, guilt, or recognition of change. Yet it is their vision of the power and depth of emotional life that surely brings significance and lasting and enduring influence for years.

Keywords— Emotional, Psychological, Mundane

1. INTRODUCTION

In fiction, the simplest of interactions invariably contain multitudes of complexity and emotions. Authors such as Alice Munro, Doris Lessing and Jhumpa Lahiri have the knack of embedding transcendent emotions in mundane activities. In their works, they make clear how routine exchanges and ignored specifics, as well as insignificant endeavors, can act as wires tapped to deeper emotional realities. Munro, Lessing, and Lahiri are all among the few able to give pompous description everyday to the level of high emotion, with the mundane giving a

reflection into the human condition. Whether it's having dinner, discussing the past or catching a fleeting glance, these authors show how the most unexciting moments can have immense psychological importance.

2. ALICE MUNRO: UNCOVERS THE HIDDEN EMOTIONAL TURBULENCE

Alice Munro had the ability to capture the complexity of human emotions through day-to-day situations, especially in the seemingly quiet lives of her characters. Munro's characters are found often dealing with fathom deep internal struggles that are reflected in the simplest of events. In her story *Runaway*, Munro presents a young woman, Carla, who is entrapped in an emotionally tyrannical marriage. Carla's decision to consider running away from her husband is not driven by only spectacular event, but by an upsurge of small, usual moments that reveal her internal commotion. The ordinary act of feeding the goats becomes a moment loaded with emotional worth. She said: *"She thought of how she had fallen into the habit of doing things quickly, efficiently, as if that were a substitute for thought, or, more accurately, a substitute for feeling."*

Through such boring routines, Munro conveys Carla's emotional deadness and sense of being trapped into a poisonous marriage. This simple task—tending to the animals—mirrors Carla's concealed emotions. Her emotional seclusion is underscored by the intricacy of Munro's language, in which routine activities serve as stand-ins for unsaid internal turmoil. Similarly, in *The Bear Came Over the Mountain*, Munro examines the emotional profundity in a marriage stressed by time and memory loss. The story centers on Fiona, who is slipping into dementia, and her husband Grant, who must become reconciled to with her poor health. The silent act of visiting Fiona in a care facility showcases Grant's contradictory feelings of remorse, love, and loss. These lines best illustrate:

"He had never thought of himself as a man who could love helplessly. He had believed he was above such abandon."

Here, the ordinary act of visiting a loved one becomes a minute of deep emotional exposure. Munro's use of the ordinary—mundane visits, quiet conversations, and simple reflections—allows her to look into the complexities of love, memory, and lament.

3. ALIENATION AND BANALTY THROUGH THE ROUTINE IN DORIS'S CHARACTERS

It is typical for Doris Lessing to find the extraordinary in the banal, the emotional and the psychological alien in the mundane. Her characters, especially women, are often ensnared by societal expectations and the banality of everyday life hiding deeper existential crises.

In *Room Nineteen*, Lessing features Susan, a middle-aged woman whose life is dictated by her domestic roles as wife and mother. The progression of quotidian events—cooking, cleaning, socializing with her family—to Susan's eventual emotional collapse is the story's main focus. Her choice to rent a room to be by herself, away from her family, appears to be a simple, even slightly a trivial act.

Yet, it symbolizes her keen desire to find an escape from the suffocating monotony of her life. Its said: *"The trouble was, she had everything. She had nothing to complain of, physically. Yet there was this emptiness."*

The main character Susan ultimately withdraws into solitude as a result of this worthlessness, which is concealed by the monotony of her routine life. An apparently unimportant event—renting a room—becomes an amazing emotional release from the conventional roles that have come to define her being. Susan's tiny, routine choices—leaving the house, sitting in her rented room, and reflecting on her life—are used by Lessing to illustrate the deep emotional emptiness she experiences. Lessing depicts the slow breakdown of Mary and her husband Dick's relationship in *The Grass is Singing* through their routine exchanges. Years of built-up emotional distance are revealed by the simple act of conversing. These lines very well reflect:

"She was suddenly filled with a sense of desolation that left her chilled. It seemed as if she had lived all her life in the midst of this quiet, hopeless silence."

The silence between them, which is an ordinary feature of their routine life, becomes symbolic of a larger emotional emptiness. Her storytelling about simple and day to day life discloses a deep emotional estrangement which has become a significant aspect of her narration.

4. JHUMPA LAHIRI: THE EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE OF CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT

The main focus of Jhumpa Lahiri's works signifies the alienation of immigrants due to cultural displacement and loss of self identity on foreign land. Her representation of characters is so unique that struggle between two worlds—one rooted in their own cultural heritage and the other in their adopted land and Lahiri employs these small moments of communication to reveal their emotional fight. In the title story of *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri beautifully describes a family on a sightseeing visit in India, with Mr. Kapasi, the tour guide, to be in service as an interpreter of both language and emotion to them. The apparently simple episode of Mrs. Das confessing to Mr. Kapasi the guide about her extramarital affair, the most secret moment of her life reflecting a moment of profound emotional significance. Below mentioned lines reflects:

"For eight years I have kept the secret... It's not fair," she said in a whisper, more to herself than to Mr. Kapasi.

This conversation happens to take place during an ordinary car ride which reveals Mrs. Das's profound feelings of remorse and emotional seclusion. These simple moments of two people conversing in a car—contradicts the extraordinary emotions at play. This is how Lahiri over and over again uses such quiet, ordinary dealings to reflect the intricacy of emotional lives of her characters, principally those caught between the cultures. In *A Temporary Matter*, a married couple's nightly routine of eating dinner in the dark due to a power outage becomes a space where long-buried emotions are exhumed. What begins as a simple meal turns into a confession of remorse and hurt of losing their child which is rightly mentioned in these lines:

"He waited to hear her admit the thing he longed, and longed not, to hear. That she missed their baby, that she wanted another, that she was sorry."

The ordinary event of sharing a meal turns out to be the vehicle for a deep emotional release, as the couple's conversation exposes the fractures in their bond. This is how her work infuses a lot of emotional weight of emotions due to deep loss of identity, which is the underlining characteristic of her work.

Munro, Lessing, and Lahiri use understated and ordinary moments to explore the inner landscapes of their characters, revealing profusing emotions of love, alienation, guilt, and longing. The emotional power of their stories lies in searching for extraordinary in ordinary that underscores the universal nature of human experience—reminding their readers that the most profound emotions often burry beneath the surface of everyday mundane life.

5. ALICE MUNRO: ORDINARY LIVES WITH SUBTLETIES OF MEMORY AND REGRET.

Alice Munro's short stories often revolve around the characters that lead seemingly ordinary lives, yet experience deep emotional shifts through the course of everyday events. In *Runaway*, one of Munro's most notable stories, the character Carla faces the quiet termination of her marriage. The story's supremacy lies in Munro's ability to portray Carla's emotional confusion not through unconcealed disagreement, but through the minute and almost petty details of daily life. For example, Munro describes Carla's morning routines and her interactions with her husband in a separate tone, but these unexciting details are burdened with deeper emotional repercussion. As Carla is inclined to the house and the animals, Munro wrote, "*she thought of how she had fallen into the habit of doing things quickly, efficiently, as if that were a substitute for thought*" (Munro, *Runaway*). Through such ordinary actions, Munro suggests Carla's internalization of her emotional restlessness and sense of entrapment. Munro also masterfully employs setting and imagery to parallel emotional status. The seemingly tranquil rural landscape of *Runaway* becomes, in Carla's mind, domineering and separating. The ordinary event of Carla mull over whether to run off from her husband becomes the fulcrum for thoughtful emotional clash—love, fear, freedom, and guilt smash together in these quiet, implicit moments. Munro's ability to call to mind deep emotion through such simple, day-to-day activities is the key to her narrative style.

6. EMOTIONAL ALIENATION AND EXISTENTIAL CRISIS IN DORIS LESSING'S STORY

When compared to Munro and Lahiri, Doris Lessing is often more overtly political, she in the same way employs usual events to explore deep psychological and emotional themes. In *To Room Nineteen*, Lessing makes a deep pursuit into the emotional breakdown of Susan, a woman who appears to have the perfect middle-class life. The story revolves around a wife's decision to rent a room where she can search for her own space, seems ordinary at first momentary look. Yet, this act of her becomes a symbol of Susan's intensified alienation from her family and society, as well as her lack of expectation with the roles she has been forced to play as a wife and mother. The simple, boring routines of her life—preparing meals, attending to her children needs, getting into polite conversation with her husband—disguises an inner void. As Susan returns to her life, she recognizes that "*everything in her life seemed so*

appropriate and necessary and yet, how strange it was that she felt so little" (Lessing, *To Room Nineteen*).

Lessing's use of unexciting details to construct an emotional representation of Susan's emergency is highly effective. The recurrence of these small, boring actions begins to choke Susan, stressing her sense of detention within the roles approved by society. Lessing masterfully points up how such everyday events, when viewed through the lens of emotional displeasure, can accrue and eventually lead to a psychosomatic smash. Susan's decision to retreat into a rented room may seem ordinary, but it provides as the zenith of years of unspoken disturbance, revealing the complication of human emotions.

7. CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT AND EMOTIONAL DISCONNECTION IN LAHIRI

In *Interpreter of Maladies*, Jhumpa Lahiri discovers the emotional detachment that often accompanies the immigrant experience. Her characters recurrently navigate the anxiety between their Indian heritage and their lives in another land, and Lahiri uses simple, routine moments to bring to mind deep thoughts of isolation, loss of identity, and yearning. In the title story, a family vacation to India becomes the backdrop for a subtle yet profound emotional exchange between the protagonist, Mrs. Das, and her tour guide, Mr. Kapasi. Lahiri describes the ordinary event of a car ride, during which Mrs. Das reveals her long-held guilt over an affair. What begins as casual conversation transforms into an intimate confession, and in this moment, the emotional weight of her ordinary life is revealed: "*It's not fair,*" Mrs. Das finally said in a whisper, more to herself than to Mr. Kapasi. "*It wasn't fair*" (Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*).

Lahiri's stories frequently show how seemingly insignificant moments, such as a conversation or a glance, are charged with emotional complexity. The ordinary events in Lahiri's stories often reveal the characters' internal struggles with identity, guilt, and belonging. By using these small moments as the catalysts for emotional depth, Lahiri's stories reflect the quiet but powerful emotions that shape the immigrant experience.

8. REFLECTIONS AND CRITICISM:

Margaret Atwood described Munro as having "*a Chekhovian gift for depicting life in all its mundanity and profundity.*" Atwood praised her ability to portray ordinary people caught in extraordinary emotional situations.

James Wood, writing in *The New Yorker*, admired Munro's "*capacity to chart the flow of everyday life and the shocks, epiphanies, and enduring mysteries that lie beneath it.*" He remarked on how she captures the way small, seemingly inconsequential moments often have profound impacts on her characters' lives.

Harold Bloom referred to her as one of the greatest living writers, stressing how she captures "*the arc of a person's life in a few swift strokes.*" He has shown her subtle expertise and the sense of inevitability and irony that is infused in her stories. Critics often point out Munro's ability to squeeze vast emotional and psychological landscapes into short stories, creating a profound resonance with readers. Her stories often revolve around female characters, steering emotional and personal crises in the everyday, making her work not just relevant, but eternal.

Doris Lessing, a Nobel Laureate, is notable for her audacious explorations of gender, politics and psychology. Her works, particularly *The Golden Notebook* and *The Grass is Singing*, have been recognized for their feminist perspectives, their psychological insight, and their criticism of societal norms.

The New York Times described her as "*one of the most important post-war writers,*" who is deeply engaged with political and social issues being psychological development in her works. Lessing's writings are mostly revolutionary in its dismantling of societal and personal convention.

Margaret Drabble, in *The Guardian*, commented that Lessing "*never feared difficult questions about human nature, society, and self.*" Drabble celebrated Lessing's courageous confrontation and deep probe into topics such as mental illness, personal liberation, and the human psyche.

Michael Gorra, in *The New York Review of Books*, mentioned that Lessing's fiction "*encompassed wide political, social, and historical horizons,*" yet it was her "*psychological acuteness and her exploration of personal autonomy*" that made her works overwhelmingly compelling.

Critics have always admired Lessing for her exploration of themes like colonialism, mental illness, and feminism. Her works often focus on women in search of liberation from limiting societal norms or the constraints of their own minds. She is seen as a pioneering figure in feminist literature, with a legacy of pushing the boundaries of both appearance and content.

Jhumpa Lahiri

Jhumpa Lahiri's writing has been admired for its lyrical prose, its most sensitive depiction of immigrant experiences, and its ability to capture the feelings of displacement, identity, and belonging. Lahiri's exploration of the Indian-American

experience has resonated deeply with both critics and readers, earning her numerous accolades.

Michiko Kakutani, writing for *The New York Times*, called Lahiri's debut collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*, a "*gorgeously rendered work of art,*" highlighting her ability to portray the subtle shades of relationships, predominantly within the immigrant experience. Kakutani give emphasis to the understated but emotionally powerful quality of Lahiri's prose.

Pankaj Mishra, in *The New York Review of Books*, noted Lahiri's "*extraordinary delicacy*" in exploring the dislocations of immigrant life. He praised her for capturing the "*melancholy, yearning, and nostalgia*" that often accompany the immigrant experience.

The Washington Post praised Lahiri for "*depicting the quiet, ordinary moments of life with a precision that reveals their emotional and psychological depths.*" The intricacy and moderation in her writing, critics agree, give her stories a kind of quiet power.

Critics emphasize how Lahiri captures the "*in-between*" nature of immigrant life—the emotional convolution of cultural displacement and the yearning for both past and future. Her works, deeply reflective and emotionally reverberating, provide a window into the lives of characters who wrestle with their identities in a alien land.

9. CONCLUSION

Alice Munro, Doris Lessing, and Jhumpa Lahiri, though writing in different cultural contexts, share a profound ability to use ordinary events as a means of exploring amazing emotions. Whether it's a wife's silent observation, a woman's retreat into isolation, or an immigrant's struggle with cultural identity, these authors reveal that the most profound human emotions often emerge from becoming quiet, everyday moments of life. Through a close reading of Munro's *Runaway*, Lessing's *To Room Nineteen*, and Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, we examined how these authors make use of ordinary experiences to explore extraordinary themes of isolation, regret, identity, and emotional revolution. Through their nuanced exposition of ordinary events, Munro, Lessing, and Lahiri alter the mundane into a lens through which readers can explore intricate psychological and emotional landscapes. Their work reminds us that the extraordinary lies not in the exaggeration, but in the intimate and often overlooked details of day-to-day life. Alice Munro, Doris Lessing, and Jhumpa Lahiri suggest universal emotions of loss, longing, guilt, and personal transformation in their works through a subtle yet profound portrayal of human experience. These authors are expert at taking intimate, ordinary

moments from their characters' lives and using them to reveal deeper, more complex emotional landscapes. By focusing on the interior worlds of their characters, they tap into emotions that resound universally across cultures and time.

10. REFERENCES

- [1] Bhattacharya, M. (n.d.). Consciously of a multiple outsider: Studying the Indian diasporic identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* with reference to two short stories.
- [2] Bloom, H. (Ed.). (2009). *Alice Munro*. Infobase Publishing.
- [3] Brada-Williams, N. (2004). Reading Jhumpa Lahiri's "Interpreter of Maladies" as a short story cycle. *Melus*, 29(3), 451-464.
- [4] Bran, R.-A. (2014). Immigration: 'a lifelong pregnancy'? An analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction [Doctoral dissertation, Universitätsbibliothek Dortmund]. Universitätsbibliothek Dortmund.
- [5] Fediakova, A. (n.d.). Jhumpa Lahiri's A Temporary Matter and Kazuo Ishiguro's Family Supper: Importance and Role of Food. *HRADEC KRÁLOVÉ JOURNAL OF ANGLOPHONE STUDIES*, 22.
- [6] Fried, B. (2024). "The Most Sympathetic Reader You Can Imagine": William Maxwell's New Yorker and the Midcentury Short Story. *Post45*: Peer Reviewed.
- [7] Gipe, N. (2005). Review of *Interpreter of Maladies*.
- [8] Gorra, M. (2016). Bodies of evidence: Anatomy and womanhood in the scrupulous economy of Eimear McBride. *TLS. Times Literary Supplement*, (5920), 24-26.
- [9] Kakutani, M. (2024). *The great wave: The era of radical disruption and the rise of the outsider*. Crown.
- [10] Kara, M. (2014). A third world feminist approach to femaleness as inferior to maleness in Doris Lessing's *The grass is singing* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous conditions* [Master's thesis, Middle East Technical University]. Middle East Technical University.
- [11] Lahiri, J. (1999). *Interpreter of maladies: Stories*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- [12] LONE, P. A. (n.d.). *Feminine Psyche and Sensibility: A Critical Study of the Select Novels of Doris Lessing*.
- [13] Pourgharib, B., & Pourya Asl, M. (2022). Cultural Translation, Hybrid Identity, and Third Space in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 30(4).
- [14] Shojania, M. G. (1995). Descartes' doubting daughters: The care of the self in the fiction of Atwood, Laurence, and Munro.
- [15] Singer, S. (2015). Feminist Commitment to Left-Wing Realism in *The Golden Notebook*. Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook After Fifty*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 73-95.
- [16] Spruce, H., & English, M. A. (2015). * In the End We'll All Become Stories': Old Age in the Late Short Stories of Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood* [Doctoral dissertation, Leeds Beckett University]. Leeds Beckett University.