

## SOCIAL MARGINALIZATION AND FEMALE IDENTITY IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S "THE TREATMENT OF BIBI HALDAR"

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**Annotation.** This thesis explores the themes of social marginalization and female identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar." It analyzes how societal expectations shape the perception of women who do not conform to traditional roles. The study focuses on Bibi Haldar as a marginalized figure whose identity is constructed and controlled by her community. The research argues that Lahiri critiques rigid social norms and highlights the possibility of identity formation beyond societal limitations. The transformation of Bibi Haldar represents resistance to imposed definitions and reveals the complexity of female identity in a restrictive cultural environment.

**Keywords:** Social marginalization, female identity, Jhumpa Lahiri, diaspora literature, gender roles, cultural expectations, identity formation.

In contemporary American literature, the theme of immigrant experience often intersects with issues of identity, belonging, and cultural conflict. Jhumpa Lahiri explores these complexities through psychological and socially grounded narratives. Her short story "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar" presents a depiction of a woman excluded from society due to her inability to conform to expected gender roles. Bibi Haldar's marginalization begins with her illness, which becomes the central reason for her exclusion. The community perceives her as abnormal and burdensome. Instead of understanding her condition, people focus on controlling and isolating her. In Bibi's cultural context, a woman's identity is closely tied to marriage and domestic responsibilities. Since Bibi cannot fulfill these roles, she is considered incomplete. Lahiri critiques this perspective by showing how restrictive gender expectations limit identity. Bibi's transformation challenges societal assumptions. Her identity evolves outside social control, suggesting that identity is not fixed but dynamic and shaped through unexpected experiences.

Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar" offers a profound examination of how social structures shape and often distort individual identity, particularly in the case of women who fail to conform to established norms. Through Bibi's experience, the narrative demonstrates that marginalization is not simply a result of personal difference, but a consequence of rigid societal expectations and collective attitudes. Her exclusion reveals how easily communities deny agency and dignity to those who exist outside conventional roles. Furthermore, the story highlights the extent to which female identity is constructed within limiting frameworks such as marriage, domesticity, and social usefulness. Bibi's inability to fulfill these expectations leads to her dehumanization, emphasizing the narrow definitions through which women are often evaluated. Lahiri critiques this system by exposing its failure to accommodate complexity and individuality. At the same time, Bibi's transformation challenges these imposed limitations and suggests that identity is not static or externally assigned, but dynamic and capable of emerging through unexpected circumstances. Her development

represents a form of resistance, not through direct confrontation, but through an alternative process of self-realization that exists beyond social approval. Ultimately, the story underscores the inadequacy of societal judgment in defining human worth. It calls for a reconsideration of how identity is understood and valued, advocating for a more inclusive perspective that recognizes difference as a natural and essential aspect of human experience. In this way, Lahiri not only portrays marginalization but also redefines it as a space from which new forms of identity can emerge.

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