



By Jhumpa Lahiri

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1. Indicate the details that tell us that the narrator was not very financially comfortable during his stay in London.

Answer: The following details depict a very uncomfortable picture of life, faced by financial crisis: The author travelled in a third class cabin. The author talks about 'struggling' to earn a livelihood and establishing oneself abroad. The author were three or four friends residing together and sharing a wash-room which was icy cold. The author, along with his friends, took turns cooking pots of curry which they ate with their hands on a table covered with newspapers. His rugged life could well be understood by instances such as watching cricket at Lord's or listening to Mukesh. Habits such as walking barefoot, smoking, drinking tea and strolling around on weekends show that he wasn't all set in his life. The word 'penniless' quite describes the financial crunch which he faced while he was studying at LSE.

2. How did the narrator adjust to the ways of life first in London and then in Cambridge, U.S.A.?

Answer: The narrator has seen various shifts in his life. Firstly, during his bachelorhood, he adjusted a great deal surviving under very absurd and unfavourable conditions. He started working in a library to meet his expenses while he was attending lectures at the LSE. He adjusted his accommodation with other people like him, sharing food, toilet, etc. He led a reckless life eating with hands, soaking dirty dishes in the tub, lounging barefoot, doing things only expected from aimless and lethargic people. Next came a phase in his life when he got married and found a permanent job in America. He shifted because he was given a full-time job in the processing department of the library at MIT. This, however, did not mean that he had started living lavishly. His budget remained just the same it was when he was a student. The aspect that changed drastically was the pace of life in America. Every person was in a hurry to get to the top. Even in his new accommodation, he adjusted to various noises such as flashing sirens, fleet of buses rumbling along all night, distracting and suffocating him. Life wasn't as peaceful and calm as he had expected with no "glittering ocean to thrill" him or no "breeze to cool" his face. His change in schedule can be reflected at various incidents such as buying milk, etc. His life at the YMCA building turned to be stifling and intolerable with the inconvenient living conditions and unbearable noise because of which he had disturbed sleep.

3. What do you understand of the character of Mrs Croft from the story?

Answer: Mrs. Croft, as seen in the beginning of the chapter, is very commanding with an authoritative tone in his voice. She could be interpreted as a hypocrite when she asked the author as to whether he was a Harvard or a Tech, depending on which she would be renting out her flat. She was very firm when it came to following instructions. She was a very orthodox lady whose ideals were very strong and needed to be followed without any questions. However, with passage of time, more of her character was revealed. She just

seemed hard from outside but was a soft person from within. She was an old lady who was a little bit forgetful. She was strict when it came to not allowing any lady visitors at her place although the author didn't fail to mention that he was a married man. With passage of time, her character moulded which appealed and made the author develop an affection for her. She was grateful and kind as per the demand of the situation. Mrs. Croft also seemed vulnerable at times, especially, after the author came to know that she was one hundred and three years old. Overall, there are various shades of light which can be thrown while drawing her character sketch.

4. What kind of a relationship did Mrs. Croft share with her daughter Helen?

Answer: The relationship of Mrs. Croft's with that of her daughter did not seem to be that of love and affection. They shared a very practical life based on strong reasons and logic. She seemed to be a matter of fact person who didn't believe in getting emotional on stuff. She carried on her responsibilities for her mother as a mere schedule. Care and empathy was what lacked in her. She knew what were her mother's weaknesses. This is clear when she says: 'She slips sometimes.' The gap in between their generations was visible when they differed on women wearing miniskirts on the streets. Helen was quite indifferently calm of the fact that Mrs. Croft was three years older than a century and needed constant assistance, supervision and above all, love.

5. How does the narrator bring out the contrast between the Indian way of life and American society? Do you think his wife Mala adjusted comfortably to the new way of life?

Answer: Indian life and American life have a very obvious line of difference. The author found it quite difficult to adjust to the American lifestyle.

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Talking about the Text

1. Living abroad is challenging in many ways.

Answer: Few of the various things which needs to be taken into consideration when one shifts to abroad to settle are:

- Identity crisis is one among the various very important concerns because of which shifting to abroad becomes very difficult. One is always treated as a second-hand citizen. People of that particular nation, may it be France, England or Australia would never accept Asian people residing there. The feeling of diaspora and multiculturalism exists throughout even if one attains the citizenship abroad and settles there forever.
- Violence on many levels could harm an individual on a physical as well as psychological level. The recent case of Indian students being bullied, beaten up and even killed in Australia could be taken into consideration while talking about violence. The difference in ethnicity strikes people of other nations a lot. There are very few nations who are as hospitable as India who believe in the concept of accepting guests as Gods just like the Sanskrit sloka which says: Athithi Devo Bhava.
- Stability in life is struck a huge blow. People live on very uncertain grounds. Issues such as recession could hit the economy anytime. Alternative to income are usually neither found nor provided to such people who immigrate from other nations.
- The difference in climate, cuisine and standard of living holds prior importance too. People usually face a financial crunch

because of the huge gap between the money they earn and the type of life they want to live. Education, health, etc are also very expensive which might make people feel unsuitable and ,thus, unwelcome in a country.

- The law and order system differs from one nation to another. It is very difficult to cope up with the changes so soon. Thus, even when someone gets caught up with some issue, people find it hard to find a solution.

2. The Indian family system offers more security to the aged than what is found in the West.

Answer: In India, the very basic family values which are followed are respecting elders, taking care of parents at old age, respecting our Guru or spiritual teacher, contributing towards the society and mankind as a whole selflessly and passing on our cultural, spiritual and ancient heritage to our children. It is very well known and a very age-old fact of Indians to take care of their parents in old age. Senior citizen homes and assisted living concept has just begun. They are still more prominent and often practised abroad and not in India. In India, it is still considered a taboo and hasn't yet become a conventional to send our aged parents or relatives to Old Age Homes. Taking care of parents in their old age is a basic duty of a child – and, as believed in India, he or she gets lot of 'sukarma' points for doing so, and substantial negative karma for not doing so.

The elderly in India are generally obeyed, revered, considered to be fountains of knowledge and wisdom, and treated with respect and dignity by family and community members unlike the way aged people are treated in abroad. Old age is a time when a person is expected to relax, enjoy solitude, retirement, pray, enjoy spending time with the grandchildren, and not worry about running the household or about finances because the oldest son is now in charge of the finances and family matters, and the oldest daughter-in-law is generally running the household. In most instances, the elderly care for their grandchildren and assist with cooking and household chores. Even grown up children continue to consult their parents on most of the important aspects of life.

3. The eccentricities of the old are often endearing.

Answer: Various eccentricities of aged people might sometimes seem to be quite endearing. Their forgetfulness evokes laughter. The innocence with which they speak their mind out causes amusement in the family. Their urge for various things such as chocolate, etc. grows similar to that of children. They tend to disobey whatever they are told not to do. This comes out to be a subtle source of amusement in the family. These eccentricities might seem annoying at times, however, one should not be disturbed by it. They are the sources of endearment. One should embrace these habits and lifestyle with grace and smile on his lips.

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