

THE UNHAPPY MARRIED LIFE REFLECTED IN JUMPA LAHIRI'S SELECT STORIES
FROM *INTERPRETER OF MALADIES*

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Abstract:

*Various themes are reflected in various forms of Indian English literature. Most of the time problems of urban life are reflected in various forms of Indian English literature. Lack of communication while living in an urban area, is one among the recurring theme occurs in Indian English literature. This lack of communication in married life makes the life of man unhappy. Such unhappy married life is reflected in Jumpa Lahiri's short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*. It depicts the characters who are husband and wife for the society but in reality they are behaving with each other as if they are stranger to each other. The present paper focuses on what makes the married life of Lahiri's characters unhappy.*

Introduction:

Like other forms of literature, short story as a form of literature started with oral tradition. These earlier stories were mainly based on religion and myths. In pre-printing era stories from Mahabharata, Ramayana as well as Puranas were mainly popular and are transmitted orally. But, in 19th century printing press started publishing journals and periodicals.

Modern Indian English short stories have undergone various stages of development. It was the form made popular by these printed journals and periodicals. Readers also started preferring this kind of form because they can read it with little time and can complete it with single sitting. So in this fast spacing world this form became popular within few days. It is very difficult to say when did Indian English short story started exactly because we have many literatures that is collectively called Indian which is not dominated by any single language. It is believed that probably Fakir Mohan Senapati is the first Indian short story writer who wrote *Lachmania* which is supposed to be the first Indian short story written in 1868.

In modern sense Indian English short story is different from old one. A remarkable shift of focus is found in modern Indian short stories. In modern Indian short story there is compact narrative structure, which focuses on particular structure as well as it has unifying threads of incidents and emotions. Instead

of life of king and queen, it started reflecting everyday life and problems of common man. Instead of rural life, urban life and man's struggle to live life in such atmosphere became centre of modern Indian English short stories.

Many Indian writers have greatly contributed to this form of literature and yet it has remained popular throughout the ages. Some of them are R. K. Narayan, Munshi Premchand, Mrinal Pandey, Jumpa Lahiri, Ruskin Bond, Khushwant Singh etc. All these writers have explored themes like urban life, alienation, identity crisis, cultural conflict as well as man-woman relationship. The present research paper focuses on Jumpa Lahiri and unhappy married life reflected in her debut short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*.

Jumpa Lahiri:

Jumpa Lahiri is one among all these contemporary writers who began her career with short story writing. Born in 1967, London, she is a daughter of immigrant Bengali family. She took various degrees from various streams of education. She completed her M. A. in English from Boston University, an M. F. A. in Creative Writing, an M. A. in Comparative Land Ph. D. in Renaissance Studies. She started her career as a journalist then she turned towards professorship.

Jumpa started her literary career by writing a short story collection named *Interpreter of Maladies*. It is a collection nine stories and it is published in 1999. It has won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and Hemingway Foundation/PEN award in 2000. It was also chosen as best debut of the year by The New Yorker's.

Jumpa Lahiri as a Short Story Writer:

Most of her fiction is autobiographical. She does not make difference between process of writing novel and process of writing short story. She tries to depict her experiences as well the events happening in the life of people around her like parents, friends, relatives, acquaintance and others in her fiction. Most of her characters suffer from anxiety and bias. Their psychology as well their behaviour is described with minute details.

Interpreter of Maladies:

Various themes are reflected in this collection of short story. The main themes from some of them are experiences of immigrants, complicated married life, absence of communication and parent-child relationships, religion and traditions as well as environment and nature. Many stories of Lahiri are based on marriage especially arranged marriage. Present research paper throws light on the theme of unhappy

married life and it is limited to mainly three short stories namely *A Temporary Matter*, *The Blessed House*, and *The Interpreter of Maladies*. In all these three short stories have theme of unhappy married life:

Her debut short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* was finally released in 1999. The stories address sensitive dilemmas in the lives of Indians or Indian immigrants, with themes such as marital difficulties, the bereavement over a stillborn child, and the disconnection between first and second generation United States immigrants. (web)

A Temporary Matter:

A Temporary Matter is the first story of *Interpreter of Maladies* set in Boston. It is a story about the married couple Shobha and Shukumar. They lost their baby due to miscarriage and it makes their happy life unhappy. This misfortune creates distance in their relationship. Shobha talks very rarely with Shukumar. Whenever they used to talk to each other they realise that their relation has not remained that much loving and strong after the miscarriage. They realised that they are no longer happy with each other. Shukumar clearly says that he does not want to pretend that he is happy. They think that they will be happy by departing from each other. The theme can be focused:

Love and marriage are complicated in *Interpreter of Maladies*. A marriage is the beginning of a new joint life for two people. In these stories, a marriage is an occasion of joy but also of secrets, silences, and mysteries. . . . Shukumar and Shoba are radically altered by the death of their child, and the toll is taken on their marriage. They are no longer the same people as when they met. Love is found in unexpected places and can shift in the wake of experience. (web)

Absence of communication has made their life complicated. They are no longer together. Even in one house they are living on different storeys. They are taking dinner in different parts of house:

Tonight with no lights, they would have to eat together. For months now they'd served themselves from the stove, and he'd taken his plate into his study, letting the meal grow cold on his desk before shoving it into his mouth without pause, while Shoba took her plate to the living room and watched game shows, or proofread files with her arsenal of coloured pencils at hand. (8)

So *A Temporary Matter* presents revolution of financially independent woman and loveless marriage. It appears that their relation has remained fruitless. It has become complicated. The couple is living in one house like strangers. Their marriage has turned into a temporary matter.

Interpreter of Maladies:

The Interpreter of Maladies is another story in which complex marriage relations are shown by Jumpa Lahiri. It is a longest story in this short story collection. It is a story of Mr and Mrs Das, an Indian American couple who visited India to see Konark temple. When the story begins Mr and Mrs Das argue about who will take their daughter to the washroom. Mrs Das has to take her to the washroom. This shows their failed marital relationship. Mr Kapsi is their tourist guide. While travelling Mrs. Das confesses to Mr Kapsi that one of their child named Bobby is not of their but she has kept relation with her husband's friend. Her relation with a stranger shows that she is not satisfied with her marriage emotionally. It is surprising for readers that Mrs. Das who knows Mr. Kapsi from some hours reveals such a great secret:

. . . a woman not yet thirty, who loved neither her husband nor her children, who had already fallen out of love with life. Her confession depressed him. (66)

All these things reveal that she is not happy with her husband. So she tells the secret to Mr. Kapsi so that he will be able to suggest any remedy but he does not suggest any remedy.

Being lived in two cultures, American culture makes Mrs. Das to take her affair lightly but Indian culture keeps it haunting. Her extramarital affair is a result of her cultural up rootedness and cultural differences.

The Blessed House:

The Blessed House also reveals the same theme. The story is based on compromise and sacrifice. It reveals the adjustments of young immigrant couple, Sanjeev, a Hindu husband and his wife Twinkle, a Christian. Sanjeev does not like Twinkle's fascination for Christmas. Their relationship become complicated due to adjustments and arranged marriage. Twinkle's attraction for western things becomes reason of his disturbances. They knew each other for just four months but after getting married it becomes difficult for them to adjust with each other. Sanjeev and Twinkle are two different personalities that force them in situation which is the common theme of Jumpa Lahiri. Here lack of communication leads characters to loneliness and Sanjeev leads towards loneliness.

This Blessed House is another exploration of love and marriage and the effects of communication. Sanjeev and Twinkle are newlyweds who have known each other for only a short time. Though their marriage is not an arranged one in the traditional sense, they are matched by their parents and wed after only a brief, long-distance courtship. It is this long-distance aspect to their relationship that both helps and hurts the marriage. Twinkle and Sanjeev do not know each other that well and both fail to live up to the other's expectations

of what a husband or wife should be. Marriage in Interpreter of Maladies is often fraught with loneliness. Here, the communication breakdown that happens between the couple exacerbates Sanjeev's loneliness. (web)

Different religious background in which both of them born and brought up is also cause of their unhappy married life. Sanjeev does not like the weeping Jesus poster.

Conclusion:

So throughout all these three stories unhappy married life is depicted effectively by Jumpa Lahiri. Family life is a recurring theme of her fiction. But these families are not happy but they are just people living with each other. Lack of communication between them leads them to isolation alienation, separation and conflict. Her characters like Sanjeev and Shobha have remained lonely though they have spent much time together with their family. They are just leading their life together just because they are married but such strained relationship cannot make anyone happy. So Lahiri's characters in these short stories are no longer happy. Mainly she tries to explore married life which is remained as a burden on their mind. It reveals how husband, wife children are confined in a relation which is not that much happy.

Primary Sources:

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