

Exploring the Communication Conflict within Relationships in Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies

Asma Muzafar, Dr. S.S.Thakur, Research scholar, Professor of English, S.A.B.V, Govt. Arts and Commerce Collge, Indore, Department of English, Devi Ahilya, University Indore, M.P, India

Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most acclaimed diasporic writers writing about the dilemmas of Indian-American immigrants. Lahiri very beautifully portrays the predicament of the first and second generation Indian American in the U.S. In her notable work *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri focuses on communication as one of the universal themes throughout the book. The stories demonstrate the truth that communication is the key to the success or failure of relationship. While there are instances when communication is effectively employed and therefore enabled the characters to build the strong and intimate connections, there are examples where communication was superficial or ineffectual, leading to unstable, limited relationships.

Jhumpa Lahiri illustrates the importance of communication within relationships by allowing readers to experience the consequences and advantages that have developed as a result throughout the short stories. We recognise the necessity to communicate with our loved ones vicariously through the lives of several characters. Lahiri threads the need to talk to and to connect with people into her story by showing that no matter where people are from they need the human contact.

Lahiri builds her characters around the immigrant experience and the cultural divide between America and India. At the same time she paints with sympathy and understanding, indelible characters who experience the pain and suffering of ordinary people.

Keywords: immigrant, communication, experience, characters, relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Interpreter of Maladies is a collection of short stories by Jhumpa Lahiri that experiences of both first and second generation Indian immigrants in the United States. The writings of Lahiri clearly explains how the Indian characters in a far-off land, away from their motherland takes pain to adapt themselves in a foreign land and learns how to tackle the issues of cultural identity and communication barriers within relationships and thereby succeed in surviving through their Indian attitude which is naturally built in them. There is a magic in the way Lahiri created her nine stories in the *Interpreter of Maladies*. Her choice of subject is exemplary. Her keenness of observation is impressive and the outstanding thing in her work is style. Her short story whether set in Boston or Bengal, sublimely understate the stories spiced with humour and subtle detail and speak with universal eloquence to anyone who have ever felt the yearnings of exile or the emotional confusion of the outsider.

Diaspora writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, V.S.Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai etc who have chosen to write about the issues of diaspora concentrated on depicting the immigrant crisis of identity, racial and cultural divergence, alienation, communication gap, family conflicts and the loss of sense of belongingness and it shows that the history of immigration is the history of feeling uprooted and lost in a different time and space its after effects. It seems that there is trading going on between the immigrants and their sacrifices. Lahiri's writings tell us the stories of such old and new generations and their struggle and dilemmas as well. Lahiri is always appreciated for portraying the complexities of human relationships. Like many immigrants, Lahiri herself is a second generation immigrant who feels just as how much at home in her parent's homeland as she does in her own, yet she felt she belonged nowhere when she was young. The psychological dislocation that immigrants often suffer can cause their children to feel a similiar sense of alienation. Although Lahiri's parents ultimately adjusted living in America, they must have frequently longed for their native land giving Lahiri the opportunity to observe, at first hand, the often painful adjustment of immigrants to live in an adopted country. Her narratives weave together not only the stories of immigrants, but also those of their children, who feel that they belong neither in one place nor another. Being an immigrant herself, Lahiri deeply felt the importance of family bonds which tie people to their homelands. She has undergone truma of failing to find her identity in a world she could never have a sense of belongingness and so tries to fail back upon the treasured memories of homeland.

COMMUNICATION WITHIN RELATIONSHIPS

The theme of communication in *Interpreter of Maladies* is illustrated in various ways. Every character communicates in their own personal ways. The first story is all about marital discord or definitely lack of communication in a marriage. As D.H. Lawrence says "the great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and women". In the title story of the book *A Temporary Matter* the couple seems to struggle to come to terms with the loss of their child that causes the major disharmony in their marital life and remains a major cause for the break down in their relationship. The communication gap between them reached to that extent that they both started to sleep on separate floors though living in the same house and behave like they both donot know each other. They in the same house act like strangers. The wife, shoba sometimes speaks a couple of sentences like "donot work too hard" (*A Temporary Matter*-8) and would eventually sleep. Due to the unspoken matters between them and the sorrow of the lost child persuaded monotony to rule over in their lives. Shukumar and Shoba didnt find a particular time to reconcile their issues. But fortunately the frequent powercuts give them an oppurtunity to fix up their matters. This was the time when they start to confess their secrets and becomes the major form of communication between them. Shukumar was the first to start the conversation between them. He clears all the confusion of Shoba related to her lost child. The other form of communication that started between the couple is the game that they started to play. During the game period they started to share all the secrets to each other. The game broke the ice between the couple and took them closer to each other.

The relationship between Mr. Pirzada, Lilia, and her parents that we see becomes very intimate as Pirzada regularly visits to Lilia's home for dinner and meanwhile they discuss the updates of the eastern frontier of Pakistan. This story of Jhumpa Lahiri clearly shows the importance of communication among humanity. The story is set in a backdrop of the civil war of Pakistan and the fight of the Eastern front for autonomy. Mr. Pirzada, a professor of botany, who is in Boston for research, lived in three storied home in Dhaka. Even though he spent few years in America he continued to write letters and sent comic books to seven daughters back home

The need for communication is passionately revealed in the title story of the book *Interpreter of Maladies*. Mr. Kapasi, who is a tour guide, met the Das family, a second generation Indian American family as an interpreter. Kapasi in his initial conversation with Das couple realizes that they lacked communication and are living a loveless marriage that reminds of his own sufferings with his wife. Mr Kapasi recollects how his married life went through a bad situation when they lost their child. His wife didnot allow him to work with the same doctor who was responsible for their child's death. Due to this reason their marriage life completely becomes barren. There was no and sensuality left in their relationship. Kapasi could realize same tedium in Das couple. In order to break this loneliness, Kapasi infatuates Mr's Das, but suddenly he fears silence.

The lives of both couples are filled with distress and sadness. The absence of communication in their marital lives made them idle to bring forth any useful social relations. Kapasi is always thinking about his relationship with his wife. Kapasi regrets that if had communicated and solved problems with her at right time, he would have been leading a joyful life. Similarly, Mr.s Das who hides behind her sunglasses and vanities and his husband Mr. Das who all the time is engaging in books and taking pictures prove that they donot a share a good husband wife relation. Due to unbreaking bond between them Mr.s Das get involved in an illicit relationship. But now this guilt is almost killing her inside. She opens her secrets before Kapasi and was very much scared of her children, that how they react over her mistakes but she wants to confess before everyone. Das couple's sufferings never come to end because thay lack communicating to each other.

Lahiri is of the view that a harmonious relationship is rooted upon mutual understanding and trusts that can only be made with mutual interaction and doing away with the differences rather than silence and camouflaging with the issues. It can be said that in *A Temporary Matter*, Shoba and Shukumar however overcome their grief and were ready to talk whenever they find chances and regain their marital bliss which become only possible when they share their thoughts and secrets. But what we saw in Das couple, thay lack mutual understanding and harmony in their relationship.

A DIFFERENCE IN THE WAY OF COMMUNICATION

The way of communicating among the characters of Lahiri, whether it is Kapasi, Mr. Das, or Mr.s that we connect in the title story of *Interpreter of Maladies* is clearly different from another. We see Kapasi communicates through spoken language, Mr. Das through his books and photographs, and Mr.s Das communicates through her appearance and way of living. At the opening of the story we

find Das family shows a vapid situation. When looking deep into their family relations as a whole it is noticed something is missing between the Das couple. The two at many times behave like children and did not talk politely to each other. They never show any kind of emotion and love to each other.

It is obvious to say that communication breaks down repeatedly in *Interpreter of Maladies* often with heart-breaking outcomes. Mr Kapasi lost his ability to communicate with his wife and drink his tea in silence at night. He felt lonely and leading to a loveless marriage. Kapasi also lost his ability to communicate in some of the languages he has already learnt as a younger man. Mr. and Mrs Das rarely communicate with each other because of their language barrier but because of the lack of mutual understanding and their behavior. Their children become uncontrolled over their parents.

Through the story *Interpreter of Maladies* we understand the difficulty of communication between adults, couples, and parents and also come to know that how these characters have to face the fight, isolation, guilt, separation and misunderstanding. Mr. Kapasi who plays a double role as the tour guide and the *Interpreter of Maladies* is trapped in a failure marriage. There is no more bonding left between Mr. and Mrs Das's marital relationships. Kapasi's life is shaken at the moment at the moment when he comes to know about the death of his young son by the same doctor where he was doing his second job. His wife separates herself from Mr. Kapasi and not even talk to him.. Mr Kapasi is feeling all alone and is search of harmonious relationship and through Kapasi's character we understand that an individual can't live a happy life lonely. He needs company of others and to connect with them. Lahiri here also signifies the importance of communication and mutual understanding. Her stories clearly convey the message that people all over the world need human correspondence.

'A Real Durwan' is another story of collection that reflects the plight of old woman, Boori ma, a victim who suffered a lot since her banishment to Calcutta after partition. Boori ma is the character whose life got completely changed after partition. The society and the banished citizens witnessed an emotional description of the communication. Boori ma tries to convince the people that she was a wealthy woman before partition, who lived in her three-storied house with her four daughters. But the people do not believe her. Every person in the locality calls her Bechari, as he always mourn over the loss of her family. The residents of the building laugh at her and treated her like an object which many times aroused her pain that we witness in these words: "Believe me, don't believe me. My life is composed of such griefs you cannot even dream them." (*A Real Durwan* 74) Lahiri here gives the message of kinship of society which never accepts the uprooted and oppressed people. They are always in the eyes of host society. Boori ma was accused of robbery, though she didn't commit the crime, this story reflects the gap between rich and poor. We see Boori ma doing all her work but never got appreciated for the same.

Jhumpa Lahiri in her next story titled 'Sexy' presents about the pain of disloyalty and its effects on

Rohin' a seven year old boy. We witness many intimate conversations between the characters. Extra-marital affair is highlighted in the story and its repercussions completely shatters the harmony of its members. Miranda, who is in love with Dev never, confesses her love to her only friend Laxami. But Laxami communicates with Miranda usually about her cousin's tensed relationship with her husband who left her. Miranda was surprising to see the impact of extra-marital on a young boy. She becomes baby-sitter for Rohin. Her feelings for Dev start fading day by day. She while living with him realizes the grief of a wife. She become so attached to Rohin that she takes the step to leave Dev and live a life without love. Her relationship with Rohin is very pure and she determines to take off a different direction in her life.

Mr's sen, another story strongly communicates the agony of exile through the conversation of Mr.s Sen and Eliot, an eleven year old boy. Mr.s Sen is a wife of Bengali professor of Mathematics and works as a caretaker of Eliot. She never does any kind of work in her own house. The only thing she do is to fine fresh fishes and collect letters of her native land. Her husband becomes so rude over her activities, and the happiness of Mr.s Sen remains no longer with her. We didnot find any effective communication between Mr. and Mr.s Sen. They almost lacked love and commune in their relationship.

'This Blessed House' is a story by Jhumpa Lahiri that follows a short period in two characters. The story highlights the significance of effective communication between the Sanjeev and Twinkle, a newly wed couple. The blessed house where they reside is no longer a blessed house because the member's donot live a peaceful and harmonious life. They never show any kind of respect to each other which is important in a marital relationship. Their issues related marriage become worse day by day. Twinkle's cheerful possession with Christian portraits left by last principles annoys Sanjeev. They are totally opposite to each other and their communication makes their relationship even worse. Their ideas are completely different. Sajeev is self-conscious while Twinkle is independent and finicky. The one option left in their lives is mutual understanding.

The Treatment of Bibi Haldar is an interesting story about a thirty year old lady, who is suffering from a mysterious illness. Itis believed that the only cure to her illness is only marriage. She is completely ignored by her cousin, Haldar and his wife. They donot pay any attention towards her disease.and threaten her not to develop any sort of emotion in herself. She only has communication with the neighbourhood women who consoles her everytime and listens her grief. This story cleary asserts the Indian culture of helping-hand neighbourhood. Bibi is the character who tolerates the atrocities committed on her by her cousin and his wife. If she on the right time could come on front and raise voice against them then situation would have been better for him. Thus, Bibi's story clearly is a pathetic description of the deplorable postion of women in the Indian society. It also reflects the urge for communication in the marginalized society in order to empower them.

The final story "The Third and the final continent" clearly captures the images of immigrant experiences and problems of arrange marriages. The narrator narrates the first six weeks of his life

in America in 1964. He recounts how he manages a new job, a new wife, and new friends in America. The communication with his son also inspires him to overcome different situations.

CONCLUSION

This research paper gives an overall view of breaking down of communication in *Interpreter of Maladies*. Lahiri in all the stories clearly points out that communication is important both for an individual and society. Her writing is about effective communication between an individual and society. We see in all the above mentioned stories the people who develop miscommunication and don't express their feelings are completely a failure person. In short, we discussed in *A Temporary Matter*, the communicating with one another can save a relationship. When Shukumar and Shoba talked and solve their problems, then only they got a chance of developing their relationship. Twinkle and Sanjeev were different two personalities and they both possess variant outlooks on life which broke their relationship initially.

In every story the characters's of *maladies* are the result of their ineffective communication. Whether, it is husband wife relation or the feeling of living a banished life, silence and marginalisation of the oppressed society. Lahiri's every story stresses the theme of communication for the individuals as well as the society. She emphasizes the power of communication for the immigrants who suffer cultural displacement and emotional isolation. She writes the short story *Interpreter of Maladies* as a symbol of her own existence along with other Indian Immigrants. I remember here Brada William's quote "a sense of exile and the potential for and frequent denial of human communication can be found in all of Lahir's short stories."

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