

Complexities in Marriage in Transnational World: A study of Jhumpa Lahiri's short story "Temporary Matter"

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Abstract

Marriage in a traditional set up remains different to what it can be in a place which is other than one's native land. When one moves from one's native land, they carry the baggage of their past identity which combines culture, tradition, habits and other things related to one's lifestyle. But when they move to another nation, it becomes complex for them to cop-up with the society there. When one goes to another nation to raise one's financial status, it becomes easy for him/her to compromise with anything which comes in between. Gradually, they gel themselves up there with the environment, be it relationship of marriage or any other relation. But these things are easy for the second generation immigrant to be that fine with the life in migrated country but when it comes to those who have seen half of their lives in their native land, for them it is tough to adjust that easily. The short-story "Temporary Matter" by Jhumpa Lahiri was published in the collection *Interpreter of Maladies*. This short-story brings out that how a tragic event brings catastrophe in a marriage.

Keywords: transnational, world, complexities, marriage, complex etc

Marriage in a traditional set up remains different to what it can be in a place which is other than one's native land. When one moves from one's native land, they carry the baggage of their past identity which combines culture, tradition, habits and other things related to one's lifestyle. But when they move to another nation, it becomes complex for them to cop-up with the society there. When one goes to another nation to raise one's financial status, it becomes easy for him/her to compromise with anything which comes in between. Gradually, they gel themselves up there with the environment, be it relationship of marriage or any other relation. But these things are easy for the second generation immigrant to be that fine with the life in migrated country but when it comes to those who have seen half of their lives in their native land, for them it is tough to adjust that easily. The short-story "Temporary Matter" by Jhumpa Lahiri was published in the collection *Interpreter of Maladies*. This short-story brings out that how a tragic event brings catastrophe in a marriage.

"A Temporary Matter" finds out that how second generation immigrants do have choice to take and leave things from their cultural heritage while keeping their

identity as Americans. Shobha and Shukumar, a second generation couple, find each other interesting when they both don't understand the formal style of Bengali poets in a recital event in US. Unconsciously, both of them have dropped their south Asian cultural aspect in the process of forming an identity in America. The way they decorate the room for their baby is same as the Americans do though at the same time, they also plan to go to for rice ceremony of the their child, which is associated to their native culture.

Shoba is very practical and methodical type. She plans ahead and works hard to do according to her plans, providing for an emergency and keeping notes about the recipes that she cooks for her husband. Unlike most pregnant women, she bids adieu to her husband at the airport so that he can attend a conference. He is not there with her when the miscarriage occurs and she loses her baby. The guilt affects them both. Shoba pushes head first into her work. She is an editor/proof-reader who corrects errors with color coded pencils and the specificity of this job makes her husband envy her. Shukumar, her husband, stops going to work and rots at home unlike his workaholic wife after the miscarriage, where she avoids contact with any memories of the baby, particularly avoiding the room that they had decorated for the baby. Shu kumar goes as far as to make it his study room. He retreats from every attempt at connection that his wife makes while silently resigning to a life where things will never be the same again.

The couple feels peace with each other because of their similar situation. They both are second generation Indians without any roots in their native country. They try to create new shared identity for themselves and also leave any need for a cultural support either from native or host land. Though all this indifference is just a mere pretence and unconsciously they have prepared a space for both the cultures. Their western lifestyle is visible in potted ivy plant, the mason jars, the microwave and the hanging lantern and it is the pickles, spices and Rogan Josh in their kitchen that form their connection to their native land. Association to the things from both the cultures makes them transnational who have prepared a third space and learn to adjust with both.

The temporary power cuts they experience in consequent days provide them the space they shared long back. After the miscarriage, they both have somehow managed to disassociate from each other for unknown reasons. Even though they share the same pain and guilt, they are not able to reconcile and comfort each other. It is during the power cuts they have their dinners together and make some small talks, which each of them find supporting. Shobha who has visited Bengal many times with her parents remembers India and tells Shukumar about the similarity in power-cut in India and US. She says:

“It’s like India,” Shoba said...

“Sometimes the current disappears for hours at a stretch. I once had to attend an entire rice ceremony in the dark. The baby just cried and cried. It must have been so hot.” (IM11)

What we see in the story that the Americanized Bengali couple find themselves in alienation at this point of tragedy. They have isolated themselves from their American friends as well as Indians and attend very less parties after the tragedy. Writer talks about the psychological condition Shukumar when she tells us, “He couldn’t recall the last time they’d been photographed. They had stopped attending parties, went nowhere together” (IM15). The tragedy curbs their need for socialisation and they bury themselves in their own world which is contrary to what happens in India.

The ending of the story is very organic and entirely consistent with their characters. Shoba reveals that she is thinking of moving into a different apartment to get some space where she can concentrate on her work. Shukumar feels relieved on hearing this though it is not expected from a husband with Indian roots. We see that the

Indian marriage calls for extraordinary adjustments, changes and sacrifices, in order to keep the bond stronger but it is not so in the marriage of Shobha and Shukumar. This is also important to know that the kind of married life they share is contrary to what it is there in India. Shukumar used to cook and manage the whole household comfortably which clearly shows that they are immersed in the culture they were living in. As immigrants in a foreign land, they find it hard to deal with the tragedy together.

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