

# Comparison and contrasts essay

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



## Short Summaries

In *Interpreter of Maladies*, Jhumpa Lahiri provides a collection of short stories about Indian people going through various life experiences. Specifically, Lahiri offers two short stories, “A Temporary Matter” and “This Blessed House”, which show the reader Indian people experiencing with different aspects of married life, i. e., to combat with grief, importance of communicating with each other and significance of compromise over certain issues that led to happy, contented life.

“A temporary matter” is a story of young Indian married couple Shobha and Shukumar. They were living a happy married life just before the still birth of their son, after which both of them delved into immense grief and started avoiding each other. Although both of them love and care for each other, there was no longer sexual married life existed. Then an electricity short fall was announced for an hour each day, during which they decided to tell each other something that was unknown to other one. In this way they again became closer by revealing their secrets each day, and the fifth night even when the electricity was present, Shobha told her husband that she had decided to live separately, and for this purpose she had selected the place too. It was very shocking for Shukumar, but he collected all his strengths to announce on Shobha that their born-dead child was a boy, with red skin and black hair. This made a devastating impact on Shobha and then both of them wept together, on that sorrow that has made them apart, and now brought them closer again.

“This Blessed House” is about a newly married Indian couple Twinkle and Sanjeev, who barely know each other. They started their life in a new house

that belonged to fervent Christians previously. Twinkle found a number of Biblical things from the house and insisted to display them all over, while Sanjeev was not in the favor. However as a married couple, they compromised many a times and regarded each other's willingness. They conducted a housewarming party in which these biblical showings were appreciated by their acquaintances, although Sanjeev was very conscious about his impression of being a Christian. In the end, Twinkle and the guests found a huge statue of Jesus Christ in the upper story of the house, which Sanjeev hated from his inside, but again making a compromise, he carried it downstairs and displayed on the mantle. The story is about compliances in early period of marriage.

## **Overview of Husbands**

The husbands in these stories are very interesting to explore. Shukumar and Sanjeev are two different characters of almost the same age-group. Sanjeev is an established engineer in Connecticut, while Shukumar is still in the process of making contacts and even decided to abandon his lectureship until he completes his research project. Sanjeev has known little about marriage and its compromises, while Shukumar has been through three years of marriage. He did little to console his grieved wife and did not pay enough attention to his studies too. Sanjeev, on the other hand, tries to compromise for his childish wife and even accepted things which he dislikes. Although Shukumar knows exactly what his wife wanted about the things and the house prior to the loss of their child, he neglected all of those misfits and keep going with the same. The little he used to do for his wife was cooking, as she arrives in the evening. But the most important contrast

between the personalities of both husbands was that Sanjeev was confused about whether he loves his wife or not, while Shukumar knew that they both love each other and the neglected life they were living was like a hell for him. The characters are presented in this way by Lahiri as she wanted to explain how grieves of life must be combated and how failed relationships can be revived through communication. The importance of compromise in marriage is beautifully highlighted with the character of Sanjeev.

## **Thorough Analysis of Male Characters**

### Shukumar

As the theme of “ A temporary matter” is based upon grief and loss of loved one, most importantly loss of a good relationship, that is exactly what the character of Shukumar depicts. Although it seems that his wife Shobha has been the more sensitive one, by completely avoiding her husband, her house and finally announcing that she is separating, Shukumar’s feelings towards his born-dead child and his wife are of significant importance. One feature Shukumar possesses is that he is a silent observer and an excellent re-caller, but he truly lacks in terms of expressing emotions. An example where this can most clearly be seen in the story is when he observes the condition of his house, the kitchen, food and grocery items, even he observes how once Shobha was extremely careful with her belongings, and now she is equally uninterested. He recalls fairly how once their house was full of food items and other households which Shobha want to stack for future and urgent usage. This example demonstrates my point because all these memories make a deep effect over his personality too, as he doesn’t find himself with appropriate words to console himself or Shobha over the death of their child

and he finds himself helpless. Shukumar was a loving husband and would be a loving father too, as “ he imagined himself gripping the wheel, as Shoba turned around to hand the children juice boxes.” But his fate turned the tables entirely, and his ideas of parenthood get faded and eventually gone. This is significant to the story because his lack of expressions did not find him a time to sit together with his wife, to remind her that he is the same loving husband for her and that he does not want a neglected life like this. As much as his wife was avoiding him and the house, so as was he himself. Although he was enough strong-headed to hold his dead son into his arms for some moments and not telling Shobha about all this, yet he cannot find an appropriate way of communicating with his own wife. This makes their ways more and more apart, and they were so distant to each other that they don't have to say something to each other even for an hour. Shobha's game of telling a secret each day also helped Shukumar to breach the communication gap and to reveal secrets, by which he get enough strength to tell Shobha about the thing she hated most the sex of their child and the moments of holding his dead body.

Shukumar represents that community of males who do not like to express themselves, even in the hour of need. Lahiri presented this character in this way so as to make the impact of story more intense till the end when Shukumar's intentions of avoiding his wife finally give up. He was disappointed by his wife's decision of leaving house and it sickened him so much that he hurt her back, thinking it to be the last try to retreat from her decision, which eventually worked. If Shukumar had done things differently or tried to change them in the first place, the situation would not get as

much worse and the tragedy of death would not give birth to tragedy of separation.

## **Sanjeev**

Sanjeev's character is described as an average- heighted, handsome, successful young man who has achieved success in very few years of his career, but he marries a woman whom he barely knows for some months. The cultural backgrounds are of stark contrast. Twinkle, his wife is born and brought up in US, so she is unaware of traditional regional customs of India and do not fit on Sanjeev's idea of having a wife who must be expert in cooking Indian food. On the other hand, Sanjeev himself has been born and brought up in Calcutta, and then moved to US for higher studies and job. He was so much busy in making career that he did not put any attention to get married, and whom he marries then was really opposite to him, with more differences than similarities. Although Sanjeev is shown to be highly successful in his job, as described " At thirty-three he had a secretary of his own and a dozen people working under his supervision", yet it seems that his decision making is not as good in other affairs of life too. Marrying a woman in a swift hurry and then realizing that she is not his type is not a wise decision of him.

This is significant to the story because what else can he do after marrying such a free-spirited woman who least bothers his preferences? A compromise and submission is the best solution in this regard, which Sanjeev started in the first place upon some of smaller mistakes by Twinkle, such as " She placed the statue on the mantel which he observed still needed to be dusted", and become firm upon it till the end of the story. Because Sanjeev

is an organized man himself, he notices many those things which need Twinkle's attention. The story depicts that Sanjeev is a practical man and he does not like scattered, unready things, while Twinkle is opposite to him. Even then he noticed many such things, he did not say them to her, and try to make as much compromise as possible only from his side. Lahiri uses this approach to explain the importance of compromise in married life, but at the same time it provides a lesson that not anyone particular from the couple would only make compromises. If Sanjeev had done things differently, by clearly saying what he thinks such as when Twinkle get bored of her routine, he should say " You could unpack some boxes. You could sweep the attic. You could retouch the paint on the bathroom windowsill". In this way the situation could be different, as Twinkle may realize her responsibilities towards house and try to manage things in the way Sanjeev likes them. It is clear that Sanjeev lacks in communication because things were not going as he wanted; well organized.

Considering these personality differences, Sanjeev re-thinks why he married Twinkle, or do he really loves her? This can most clearly be seen in the story when it was narrated that " He did not know if he loved her", and he was unaware of his own feelings for her. Here again, Sanjeev proved that his decisions are questionable and he must not be provided the command of the house, as Twinkle was already doing, making him compromising over every other situation. This moment shows the reader that Sanjeev finally come to accept his poor fate, he decided to compromise for life. " She would never put the bust in her study, he knew. For the rest of their days together she would keep it on the center of their mantel", just as he knows this he know

his ultimate submission, the only things he does not know was his Indian, Masculine power, the abilities of decision making and running life as a Lord of the House. What he did ever was to organize life by organizing things, and this was all he could learn from life. Sanjeev did not know how to make other people compromise, or how to make them organized, and that is why he fall into complete submission to his wife.

### **Similarities and Contrasts**

It is interesting that Lahiri decided to make Shukumar and Sanjeev so similar is their attribute of lack of communication with their life partners. How they want their lives, their houses and their wives for them; both of them were completely unable to say, and this was the main reason they have made their own lives against their will and compliance. Shukumar has made the distances bigger by avoiding Shobha, and Sanjeev gave a complete free hand to Twinkle without pointing a single mistake and negligence of her. As for Shukumar, he knew that Shobha was a caring house wife and what she is doing now is just to avoid those mis-happenings that came their way. But Sanjeev and Twinkle were newly married and he must tell Twinkle about his preferences, likes and dis-likes. If he wanted an organized life then he must spoke out with Twinkle on this issue, rather than offering a complete submission to her again and again. Lack of communication brought Shukumar's life to a brink of end, and it was exactly that propelled Sanjeev to live a compromised life. In writing the two characters this way, Lahiri tried to show the need and importance of communication in a married life, whether it is a new one or not. Timely communication makes life easier, and particularly it is an essential element of married life. Lack of communication



only leads to unwanted compromises from one of the partners only. In both stories, wives are presented as strong-headed and decision makers, but as Shukumar knows Shobha for some years, he knew how to make her happy or sad or irritating, while Sanjeev was unaware of Twinkle's free-will nature and he let her do what she wanted. In the end that is how the stories took shape and reached to a conclusion; in which Shukumar find a way for him by effective communication, while Sanjeev just made a compromise over himself.

Lahiri decided to make Shukumar and Sanjeev so different as their personality contrasts can be easily observed. Shukumar is presented as an ordinary lecturer, who even abandons his job for his research purpose as he was in the sixth year of college at the age of thirty-five. On the contrary, Sanjeev is an established engineer when he is just thirty-three, soon going to be promoted as vice-president. These contrasts have the obvious effects of personality appearance; Shukumar never bothered about how he looks or how he dresses, and sometimes he even forget to brush his teeth. While Sanjeev is tidy, neat, organized, and even care for his average height for which he wanted to increase just an inch, so that he could look more handsome and appealing. Sanjeev was in the market since he has done his engineering, while Shukumar has yet to be entered and hunt for a good job after completing his studies. That is why Sanjeev had a number of acquaintances but Shukumar had a small circle of friends. In writing the two characters this way, Lahiri want to emphasize upon the insignificance of appearance in succeeding married life. The characters are presented in this way to show that whether Shukumar was not as much good looking or caring

for his appearance, his wife loved him and they both have made a happy life, just before the death of their child. Sanjeev on the other hand; cared as much of his appearance, his house's appearance as he could, but he cannot make a good decision of choosing his life partner and then completely submitting himself for her. A well established career does not guaranty a happy married life too, that is what can be learnt from Sanjeev's story. Hence Lahiri made her point clear by portraying these two characters in such different ways, and by putting these two stories into a same book "Interpreter of Maladies". Both of these stories reflect the problems of married couples, and excerpt certain lessons for the readers, which could be helpful for them too while dealing with people, particularly in their own marriages.

## **Works Cited**

Lahiri, Jhumpa. A temporary matter, Interpreter of Maladies: Stories. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999. Print. Web. April 03, 2013

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