

Relationships and failure in interpreter of maladies



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Jhumpa Lahiri's labyrinthine anthology, 'Interpreter of Maladies' is an exposé of the plight of Indians and Indian-Americans and their interactions with each other, society and their milieu. The complexity of her tales is attributed to Lahiri's efforts in forming meticulous character profiles, enhanced by the distinguished approaches her protagonists employ to deal with their afflicted "maladies". In hindsight, it appears that failure to overcome these adversities correlate with an absence of strong relations, but Lahiri also highlights that this is not always the case; even the strongest of relationships can fail to overcome some obstacles in life. In addition, she depicts that resilient connections do assist, but are not essential for attaining success. Boori Ma's despondent fate can be attributed to her lack of strong relationships in "Calcutta". Ever since she was 'separated from her husband and four daughters', she participates in few, loose associations with the 'residents' of the dilapidated apartment building she serviced as 'a real durwan', standing 'guard between them and the outside world.' Her detachment from fellow residents is accentuated by the fact that on the 'certain' occasions when she was invited into their homes, she knew 'not to sit on furniture' and instead, she crouched 'in doorways and hallways', disregarded even as a guest. This meagre exhibition of hospitality and appreciation is not unconditional like it would be in genuine affiliations, as they 'toss [...her] out' the first time she fails to execute her supposedly voluntary duty and instantaneously 'begin their search' to replace her. Despite being a relatively closely acquainted beneficiary of sympathy and kindness from the Dalals who promise her 'a new bed, quilts, a pillow [and] a blanket', they ultimately fail to defend her at a time when she needs them most, and consequently she is left alone. Similarly, 'twenty-two' year old

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Miranda and temporary lover Dev's ephemeral, fruitless relationship and their failure to attain an 'everlasting...love' is associated with the unstable factors it was constructed on from its inception: lust, lies and superficiality. The latter is delineated in their initial meeting location at 'Filene's', a cosmetic's department whose ultimate purpose is to beautify, and is trailed by Dev's description of Miranda as 'sexy', which means 'loving someone you don't know'. Miranda then understands that she is nothing but a "mistress" as Dev only loves her on the surface, thus consolidating Lahiri's proposition that failure is a result of weak affairs. Mala and her husband's successful assimilation into America can be attributed to the strength of their marriage. They seek 'solace in each other's arms' and have one another to confide in. 'It was Mala who consoled' her husband when he discovered 'Mrs' Croft's obituary' in 'the Globe one evening, demonstrating their ardent display of support to overcome the "maladies" that befall them in life. Similarly, the strength of the bond between formerly gratified couple, Shoba and Shukumar enables them to eventually conquer the overwhelming grief that distanced them ever since their 'baby was born dead'. Shukumar recalls that his wife "kept [his] long fingers linked with hers [...] at the party" she had surprised him with, symbolising their former unity. Lahiri suggests that they can rediscover this love through joint activities, evident by her inclusion of imagery of 'melting snow' outside that reflects the detachment between Shoba and Shukumar thawing as a result of sharing meals, communicating and confessing 'secrets'. Shukumar's final admission - that 'he'd arrived early enough to see their baby [boy] and to hold him'—defies Shoba's assumption of his absence and conceivable source of resentment towards him and they thus they weep "together for the things

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they now” know, which represents their reunion empowered by the stability of their marriage. Although this is a much more emotionally satisfying ending, it is ambiguous and Lahiri does not guarantee that they do reunite, conversely insinuating that Shoba will still leave and their marriage is in fact ‘ a temporary matter’. They have ‘ both been through enough’ and have transgressed a time where Shukumar ‘ still loved’ his wife. The fact that he is ‘ relieved’ by her decision proves that their prospective separation would be a mutual favour for them both, indicating that even sturdy relationships can fail to overcome some hurdles in life. Shoba’s desire to be “ alone” infers that being stuck in her marriage is just pulling her back in life. After the tragic birth of a stillborn baby, ‘ thirty-three [year old Shoba...] was strong, on her feet again’, as opposed to Shukumar who would ‘ pull himself out of bed’ when ‘ it was nearly lunchtime’, implying that Shukumar’s inability to move on is encumbering Shoba’s endeavour to fully heal and live a happy life. Moreover, Bibi Haldar is the epitome of relinquishment; both of her parents die, her cousin and his wife abandon her, other “ relations” return the letter explaining her predicament ‘ unopened, address unknown’ and she suffices on loosely bound ties with her community, who ultimately ‘ left her alone’ a majority of the time. Like Shoba, Bibi does not allow her losses discourage her and all of her “ privations” make her accomplishments even more astounding: ‘ she raised a boy and ran a business in the storage room’. The source of her plight, her baffling “ ailment” is ultimately “ cured” by the end. Thus, at pinnacle moments, Lahiri conveys a message of hope to those experiencing loneliness and isolation by reinforcing that strong relationships are not required for success and it does in fact lie in the strength of an individual. Lahiri’s intricate composition of short stories collectively

addresses a wide audience by analysing myriad relationships amid her characters, as well as the “maladies” that they encounter. Miscarriage to surmount these afflictions is explicitly linked to a lack of strong relations, but sometimes even resilient affiliations are inadequate. Lahiri counteracts this bleak tenor by speaking with positivity to anyone thrust into physical or emotional exile through presenting the strength of an individual in their pursuit and achievement of success.