

**INTERPRETER OF MALADIES: A REFLECTION OF PAIN,
LONELINESS AND SUFFERING**

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Abstract

One of the most excellent creation of Jhumpa Lahiri is Interpreter of Maladies and it have received praise from every single reader. While on one hand, Jhumpa Lahiri have focused on the themes of multiculturalism, alienation, migration, communication gap, broken marriages; on the other hand she has drawn a vivid picture of pain, loneliness and suffering. This work flashes the light on the themes of pain, loneliness and suffering in all the nine stories. From her very first story i.e. “Temporary Matters” to the last story i.e. “The Third and the Final Continent”, the characters are found suffering and are gloomed with pain.

“She has talent- magical, sly, cumulative- that most writers would kill for.”
-The Guardian

The first writer of Indian origin, to bag the coveted Pulitzer Prize was Jhumpa Lahiri, for her collection of stories in ‘Interpreter of Maladies’. The stories give us a glimpse of a world of migration, illegal immigration, hybridity and many more. All her nine stories share the theme of loneliness, rootlessness and loss of identity. An unique theme and the artistic way of presenting the stories, before the readers: has made the book different from all other books; sharing same theme. Her stories are reflection of pain, loneliness and suffering.

In Jhumpa Lahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies, the characters are found adjusting with the environment every day. The characters of the stories are the displaced immigrants and second generation Indian American, who are tossed between the Indian- American traditions. In fact it will be appropriate to say that what Jhumpa Lahiri has talked about, is found in background study of Lahiri’s life. She was herself devoid of Indian culture and so she says-

“I am lucky that I’m between two worlds... I don’t really know what a distinct South Asian identity means. I don’t think about that when I write, I just try to bring a person to life.”

Lahiri’s each and every story is blended with some unique taste and hence the stories like “Mrs Sen”, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, “Interpreter of Maladies” has the sense of longingness. The major characters are the victims of isolation which results in suffering. They

remain isolated from their homeland, children, parents, and from their loved ones. Though all the stories have different endings, they all are tied with one string of pain sorrow, emotions, loneliness and affliction.

In the story “Temporary Matter” where Shukumar tried to find love in the relationship, in other story “Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, he was searching for the news of his family. Jhumpa Lahiri’s construction of stories is such, that going through the stories none feels any sort of artificiality. She says-

“I always say that I feel that I’ve inherited a sense of loss from my parents because it was so palpable all the whole time I was growing up, the sense of what my parents had sacrificed in moving to the United states, and in so many ways, and yet at the same time, remaining here and building a life here and all that entailed.”

In the very first story entitled “A Temporary Matter”, Shoba and Shukumar presented the harsh reality of life. This story presents Shoba as a financially independent woman but she struggles in an unbearable and loveless marriage. Though both started their life with a happy note but with the death of their first baby, things changed and a sense of despair gloomed their lives. Both Shoba and Shukumar who took the oath of staying beside one another in any circumstances, finds the excuse of avoiding each other. It will be appropriate to say that with the death of their new born baby, a chasm was created between the two. Pains, sorrow, lack of communication are the most prominent theme here as both of them suffer.

Second story of the book “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” is about a Bangladeshi man, who is presented as a true picture of a person staying abroad, leaving his family in his homeland. Mr. Pirzada was staying in U.S and his family was in Pakistan. Mr. Pirzada is found all through the story showing his concern for his family and gets tensed and worried. Lilia, the ten year old girl was also able to recognise the pain of separation of Mr. Pirzada. The way how he waits to watch the news and look at his hand watch, showing time of Dhaka, disclose his pain which he always felt for his family. Though the story ends with a happy note as Mr. Pirzada was reunited with his family; but it is also clearly visible in the story that how the pain of separation gloomed Mr. Pirzada. So it is needless to say that Lahiri’s second story also shares the theme of pain, loneliness and lack of communication.

The title story, “Interpreter of Maladies” is about interpretation of maladies. Raj and Mina Das; an Indian-American couple, come to visit India and they hire a tourist guide named Mr. Kapasi. Mr. Kapasi was the man who interpreted disease to the doctor. Mina Das finds this job romantic and there begins romanticism for him. Her romanticism was reaching the height in such momentum that Mina reveals her long kept secret to Mr. Kapasi; with a hope that Kapasi would suggest some remedy for it. Mina being left alone with her baby falls in love with her husband’s friend as an escapism to her loneliness. She finds her marriage a bad match. In this story Jhumpa Lahiri has tried to flash light on matrimonial problems. In fact communication gap, broken marriages, escapism are the main themes of Lahiri.

“Real Durwan” is a story about Boori Maa, who was forced to migrate from Pakistan to India. She was in charge of a stairwell in a building in Calcutta; and with this service of Durwan she was able to earn her livelihood. But there was a time when she had amazing wealth with her, so many slaves worked in her house and she was cherishing her life. Suddenly things changed and she was compelled to leave her house for life. Her words seemed unbelievable to the

residents of the building and to their eyes she was only a Durwan. Boori Maa was living with a pain in her heart, as once who kept slaves was now herself treated as a slave. But that was not enough for her. One day the building keys were stolen whose charge was with Boori Maa. She was doubted of having a link with thief and was thrown out of the building with the title 'thief'. So, identity crisis, pain, affliction is what found in the story.

Fifth story, "Sexy" centres round a young American-Indian girl named Miranda. She falls in love with a Bengali man named Dev and she with all her effort tries to cope up with the Bengali culture. To colour herself with the Bengali culture she watches Bengali movies and tries to learn Bengali language. But with all these she was trying to force herself to the culture. Though the story possesses all the characteristics of Lahiri's writing, the plot of the story is different from other stories. In this story only physical attraction exists between Miranda and Dev. Here Lahiri portrays Dev as a man who leaves his family for a girl whom he met during a journey. This story deals with love, physical attraction besides pain and loneliness. Like other stories alienation, culture, tradition, marital problems are dominant in this story.

Next story, "Mrs Sens" is about a Bengali housewife Mrs. Sen, who staying abroad tries to make her house a mini India. Though her husband was an university Professor, he was forced to stay to the University. So, Mrs Sen remained alone all through the day. So, loneliness and alienation occupied her. Though she was physically present in US, but her mind was in India. Living all alone she finds her life most irritating and disgusting. Lahiri has also coloured the story in the same colour like all other stories.

"Blessed House" is a story about of a young couple, named Sanjeev and Twinkle who belonged from different religions. In USA, they move into a new house and there Twinkle engaged herself in finding Christian things. But Sanjeev never liked the idea of finding such Christian things by Twinkle and there aroused a clash of idea between the two. Sanjeev says, "We are not Christians" and by this he wanted Miranda to remind that she was not Christian anymore. In other words Jhumpa Lahiri wanted to portray the problems and complications of arranged marriages. Difference in ideas took them apart and that led them to suffer.

The penultimate story, "The Treatment of Bibi Halder" is a story of a woman named Bibi who was suffering from an incurable disease. This story flashes light to that section of society who never stands beside a human being who has no one of her own. But in this story Bibi have been presented as a woman having strong will. She had a strong belief that if she will get married, her disease will get cured. Throughout the story the picture of her pain and suffering is found, but at last she gets pregnant and she found a new meaning of her life with the arrival of the new one in her life. The story ends with a happy note when she gives birth to her child. Isolation, pain, lack of communication are prominent in this story but still the story gets a new turn with Bibi getting a new taste of life.

Last but not the least story of the book "Interpreter of Maladies" is "The Third and the Final Continent". This story bears a different taste from others and is unique for its structure. The narrator's mother was so shocked with the death of her husband that though she was physically alive, she was mentally dead. The narrator also found Mrs. Craft same as her mother. The narrator, who was tenant to Mrs. Craft changed his idea about identity loss, which he felt living in a foreign country. She was of the idea that, there is the need to stay alive and to face the world; even if someone has to transform his identity. The very words of Mrs Craft was realized by the narrator when her wife Mala tried to colour herself with the foreign culture. The narrator

remarks-“*Mala no longer drapes the end of her sari over her head, or weeps at night for her parents, but occasionally she weeps for her son.*” She feels pain for her son which results in suffering.

The beauty of Interpreter of Maladies lies in the artistic presentation of the situations and the characters as portrayed by Jhumpa Lahiri. She with her excellence has applied the themes like pain, suffering identity loss, migration etc to the stories; which has turned the stories into an unique creation. So to the readers, “Interpreter of Maladies” appears as a reflection of pain, loneliness and suffering.

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Bio note:- Suparna Banerjee is a creative writer. She has her keen interest in writing research papers, stories, essays and poems. Though she is a good observer, she likes to pen down her observation in the forms of stories and poems. She has been writing since 2013. She has completed her Masters in English from Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha and was a rank holder in her Bachelors from the same University. Her poem entitled “Life is a Pleasure, Life is a Game” was her latest publication. Presently she is working on a research paper and also she is ready to publish her poems and stories. Now Suparna Banerjee lives with her parents in Kharagpur, West Bengal.