

The Quietude Attribute & Resilience Hallmarked in 'A Temporary Matter' by Jhumpa Lahiri

Dr. RITU SHEPHERD

Associate Professor, Nehru College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore

Ms. SUSMI MARIAM VARGHESE

Assistant Professor, Nehru College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore

Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri, the diasporic American author of Indian descent known for her short stories, novels, and essays in English and in Italian has been felicitated by number of literary honours for her impeccable work. Short story *A Temporary Matter* carries the Indian freshness of sensibility and impressive forms that have been instrumental in helping her readers to experience quietude and resilience. She has explored the cultural, personal isolation and identities in her characters and plot. The psychological trauma in the patriarchal notion of marriage has been well depicted. The radical change in the family system does not even have a pinprick of old traditions but portrays the contemporary functional couple who fights their dissimilitude in their life style. The metaphor silence has allegorically made an impingement. The relationship shared by them was at the pinnacle of collapsing with no spark of reuniting but on introspection, which has been a trait to be followed and emphasised by Pablo Neruda in his poem "*Keeping Quiet*" can be correlated here to make the study more impressive, where the couple from both the ends made the whole difference in working out on their relationship which was on a dead platform. Life and situations aren't shut doors, but healing can always be hoped, to make life livable and congenial.

A panoptic gaze on the American –Indian short story writer who has filled the nuances with freshness that holds the warm, pleasant and chill air that surrounds anyone who lives on this earth. Different collections of her stories have brought in credo to her by being awarded Pulitzer Prize, the PEN /Hemingway award, and the New Yorker Debut of the year.

The succinct style of Jhumpa Lahiri characterizes her narrative techniques and unravels the manner through which she exercises her vision that dichotomizes the human, male as the subject and female as the object. She has frequently emasculated two images of the human race in her short story 'A Temporary Matter' and has allegorically stated the title of the story shooting troubles of marriage and however the couple Shoba and her husband Shukumar share a single roof. Marriage for them was just like any other couple who are happy to tie their knot for a lifelong commitment that did not last for a long time. The frozen winter sets in to chill the beautiful relation shared by the man and woman after she gives birth to a still- born baby. The marital strife has the cold and harsh

realities of family life reflecting alienation and loneliness that slithers down under the pressure of individual as well as family needs.

A Temporary Matter is a delicate look at the dissolution of relationships and the danger of new knowledge. Lahiri's writing here is careful, clear, understated, resulting in a powerful combination of storytelling and insight.' (Chakrabarti, Chakrabarti 3) It portrays the coldness of relationship between an immigrant couple Shoba and Shukumar, in the USA. They lost their spark in their marital bond due to Shoba's miscarriage and the death of their stillborn child radically changed their mindset to be together. They experience the intensity of grief to the extent of isolation and loneliness.

Shukumar, being 35 year old PhD scholar, he came to a stage where he couldn't focus in completing his thesis. Shoba, being a professional, indulged herself in more and more work and came home late. She was lost all very systematic and calculative before.

Shukumar takes initiative to cook food and he hides his feelings never discloses it to her. He neglects himself

and his feeling for Shoba aggravates day by day but none of them dare to talk about their state or tried to coalesce with their sweet nostalgic days. They avoid each other and no longer look forward to relive the weekends when they once enjoyed together. They even avoided friends, parties and Christmas celebration. 'He thought of how long it has been since she looked into his eyes and smiled, or whispered his name on those rare occasions they still reached for each other's bodies before sleeping.' (Lahiri10).

The rue and reticence to talk again worsens their discord. It looks the couple has had a glance of 'Keeping Quiet' as unknowingly they have followed the poet Pablo Neruda by counting till twelve and making all the movements of machineries and languages halt and give time and thought to what has happened between the two of them. Shukumar was holding to the memories and waiting for it to be fresh again to have a new life whereas we see the character Shoba who let loose all the string of positivity and finds way-out of the kinship by renting a new apartment to seclude herself from old to make it new.

Pablo Neruda, the Nobel Prize winner poet wrote most of his works in Spanish and was later translated in English. He felt the psychological need of a person which breaks the barrier of negativity in the emptiness of his world. He introduces the beautiful concept of introspection where he appeals us to stop all activities and forces us not to talk in any language, it is symbolic where he uses the tool of *silence* to denote that language creates disputes and problems for others. Instead of searching inside, they look for solutions outside, where he ends up *harming the whales in the sea and his hands while collecting salt*. Likewise we can relate Shoba's attitude against him where she was collecting work and indulging in it, so much that she forgot that she was harming herself as well as the relationship she was committed to.

The verses "those who prepare green war...doing nothing," can be well seen in the character of Shukumar who could act as the man of the house, showing all his male chauvinism and make house unlivable but went well with being off, from types of wars and hold on to the love they once shared.

The different metaphors exploited by the author Lahiri, draws a prominent understanding of the theme behind her

work, just like the use of *binary system* that depicts zero and one i.e., husband and wife relationship. The *power cut* creates a chance to look for a companion. The temporary cut in power supply also helps us to draw in depth conclusions like the darkness in their life. The *burning of the candle* shows the exhausting of their life in order to keep it lit. We see that the melting of the wax shows they still had softness towards each other and they didn't mind themselves to consume till the very end.

Here the lexicography of *quietude and resilience* has given the readers to understand the two characters and the plot of the story. As the oxford dictionary states that quietude is *a state of stillness, calmness in person or place*. We can feel it in the inner self and outer self of the characters and as they are dormant in their actions as well as feelings the quietude of place can also be felt as, before Shoba was all engaged in house and made it lively by her creativity and involvement in the house.

To create a state of equilibrium between the psychology and philosophy of the characters we can say that introspect and retrospect help only to evaluate our present, past and future. We need to be inactive, even though we are thought to be dead by the onlookers but within ourselves we are adding piece by piece to make the full picture of any relationships. We acquire mutual understanding, a feeling of togetherness, a contentment and fulfillment only through a little quietness and silence.

Resilience means the *ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape, and also the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties*. The word resilience can be understood and experienced in the end of the story where both in quietude unknowingly have united and started sharing gradually all what they have stopped for a period of time as if they counted twelve. And after that we see to count back down twelve where the process of retrospection happens. Though the story is told by the male protagonist we can understand the female perspective and sentiments very well in between the lines and draw out what is not told to us in the slice of life. The cheese and butter on the slice is topped with many toppings and sometimes the garnish of pepper enhances the flavour.

References and Citations

1. Chakrabarti, Basudeb, and Angana Chakrabarti. "A Comparative Study of Jhumpa Lahiri's A Temporary

- Matter And Shubodj Ghosh's. Jatugriha." Literature Resource Center. Gale, Jan.2002. Web.20 Mar.2011
2. Norvell, Candyce. "Critical Essay on A Temporary Matter". Literature Resource Center. Gale, 2004. Web. 20 Mar. 2011.
3. Mishra Saurabh article on "Man-Woman Relationships: A bicultural Syntax in the Short Stories of Jhumpa Lahiri" ISSN: 0974-892X Vol.1 Issue 1 January,2007
4. Naik Shamrao "Love, Marriage and Sexual Relations: Man–Woman Relationship in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake "Research Spectrum: Vol.3, Issue 2, August,2012
5. <https://onbeing.org/blog/pablo-nerudas-keeping-quiet-2/>
6. <http://www.cbseguy.com/keeping-quiet-pablo-neruda-explanation/>
7. <https://books.google.co.in/books?isbn=1480812943>
8. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Introspection>