

## Dismantling. Linguistic Obstacles in Jumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies

**S.Vanithamani, Dr. M.Rajaram, Dr.S.Alexander**

Ph.D. Part Time Research Scholar Department of English  
Government Arts College Karur -5 (Affiliated to Bharathidasan  
University, Trichy) Tamilnadu, India

Assistant Professor Department of English M. V. Muthiah Government  
Arts College for Women Dindigul, Tamilnadu, India

Associate Professor and Head Department of English Govt. Arts  
College Karur, Tamilnadu, India

**Corresponding author: S.Vanithamani**

Ph.D. Part Time Research Scholar Department of English  
Government Arts College Karur -5 (Affiliated to Bharathidasan  
University, Trichy) Tamilnadu, India

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## Abstract

Modern Indian English literature is famous for the emergence of a wide range of authors, Jhumpa Lahiri included, who highlight crucial aspects of our society and personal life from a feminised perspective. Because of this, she has won several significant honours and accolades. She uses multiple perspectives and tactics, such as victimhood, activism, and egotism. Her short story "Interpreter of Maladies " is being analysed here to demonstrate how its Indian protagonists, far from home, go to great lengths to adapt, learn to deal with issues of cultural identity and communication barriers, and ultimately survive thanks to their inherently Indian attitude. There is a certain elegance to how Jhumpa Lahiri constructs the nine stories that make up Interpreter of Maladies. Her subject choice is superb, her observation skills are extraordinary, and her writing is polished and effortless. Her stories, whether they take place in Bengal or Boston, are delicately understated, tinged with humour, and universally eloquent in their ability to relate to anybody who has ever felt the longings of exile or the emotional ambiguity of the outsider.

Keywords: Struggle, Survival, Diaspora, Isolation, Loneliness, Ambiguity

## 1. Introduction

*Interpreter of Maladies* is a collection of nine short stories by Jhumpa Lahiri that focuses on the experiences of Indian immigrants to the United States, both in the first and second generations. Dr Sharada Iyer claims that the themes of Jhumpa Lahiri's extraordinary work are shaped by correctly diagnosed and misdiagnosed illnesses, fleeting issues, ever-changing relationships, sudden blessings and calamities, and the strength to persevere through them all. For her first published work, Lahiri won the Pulitzer Prize for her debut collection of short tales, in which she speaks on the universal struggle that defines life. In this specific case of the Indian experience, the author acts as the interpreter. Characters are very different from one another, even though they share many of the same problems in life and come from similar cultural backgrounds. The universality of the human race, combined with the difficulties and misunderstandings that people experience in communicating with one another, interact to generate a topic through the use of sage symbols.

The obstacles to communication are the central topic of *Interpreter of Maladies*. The ailments that affect the individuals in the stories make communication imperative. As Shuchen rightly points out, common threads run throughout the nine stories, including exile, dislocation, loneliness, complex relationships, and difficulties communicating. The novel's central theme is the difficulty of communicating, especially among those who share a common language. The protagonists in Lahiri's writings regularly struggle to communicate, often straddling cultural divides between the United States and India. Communication is the cornerstone of our species.

There are several representations of communication in *Interpreter of Maladies*. Every persona has its distinct way of speaking. The loss of their kid seems to be weighing heavily on the couple's relationship in the book's title story, contributing significantly to the decline of their marriage. Because of their inability to communicate effectively, the husband and wife began to prefer sleeping on separate floors, even though they lived together, except the occasional night when the wife would remark something like, "Do not work too hard" (A Temporary Matter-8). The habit took over their lives as they struggled to cope with the loss of their child and other unresolved difficulties. Lahiri claims that Since "he worried that playing a record in his own home may be impolite," he reflected on the fact that "he no longer looked forward to weekends when she sat for hours on the couch with her coloured pencils and her files." (Short-Term Business, Parts 4-5) When the two of them touched one another before bed, Shukumar thought about how long it had been since she had looked at him and smiled or spoken his name.

Fortunately, the frequent power outages allow them to talk things out. Critical communication secrets are shared between critical communicators. The spouse, Shukumar, lights the candles and casually talks about the meal's excellence. He looked forward to talking to his wife, but Shobha continued the lighthearted discussion. Every night, for fun, they would play a game that required them to share sensitive details about themselves. The game was an excellent method for the couple to learn more about one another, and it led to the devastating revelation that Shukumar had been present during their baby's death and had hugged him close before he was cremated. They realised how the loss of their baby had negatively impacted both of them until they started talking to one another. In When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine, the author once again stresses the importance of

communication. The story is set against the backdrop of the Eastern Front's fight for independence and the Pakistani civil war. Mr. Pirzada, a professor of botany, formerly of the Dacca home on three floors, is now there for research. He spent some time in the United States. He never ceased writing to his seven daughters or mailing them comic books back in his country.

Narrator: "Mr. Pirzada sent letters to his wife every week and comic books to each of his seven daughters, but the mail service in Dacca had collapsed along with practically everything else, and he had not heard from them in more than six months." (IM 24) Mr Pirzada became even closer with Lilia and her family when he came over for dinner to catch up on the news from Pakistan's eastern front. Over time, a strong bond formed between the two of them. Mr Pirzada and Lilia became close friends despite their differing nationalities and the ongoing war between India and Pakistan. The title story of this book powerfully portrays dormancy and the want for human interaction. Mr. Kapasi, a tour guide and interpreter at a doctor's office, was introduced to the Das family, an Indian American second-generation family, by Mr. Kapasi. From their initial conversation, Mr. Kapasi can deduce that the couple is at an impasse in their loveless marriage due to a lack of communication. Conflict, apathy, and long periods of silence were all present, just as he remembered them from his marriage (IM 24). He reflects on how his marriage struggled after the death of their child. His wife detested her job because she thought the doctor was to blame for losing their kid. In addition, his wife constantly misunderstood his responsibilities as an interpreter.

Their marriage suffered from a significant lack of intimacy. There was no sexual tension in their physical contact with one another. He saw the same routine in that matching set. The affection Mr. Kapasi develops for Mrs. Das is an attempt to replace this emptiness. Yet now he is afraid of the quiet: "Usually he hurried back to Puri by a shortcut, eager to return home, clean his feet and hands with sandalwood soap, and enjoy the evening newspaper and a cup of tea that his wife would offer him in peace. He had accustomed himself to that silence, but now it plagued him. (IM 60)

Due to their inability to communicate, Mr. Kapasi and the Das couple could not develop meaningful friendships. Is it pain or guilt that you're feeling? Mr. Kapasi asks Mrs. Das pointedly." (IM 66). In doing so, he shows his sadistic nature and expresses his repressed wrath. If he had talked to his wife and taken the time to fix the difficulties, he would be much happier now. Mr Das and Mrs Das do not spend much time together because he's reading a book while she hides behind her vanity and sunglasses. Mrs Das initiated an extramarital affair after her marriage breakdown, which ultimately proved fatal to her integrity. I feel guilty looking at my children and Raj, who is always terrible; she recognises edges in her talk with Mr Kapasi. I have this unquenchable urge to discard things. At one point, I wanted to throw out the window everything I owned, including the kids and the TV. Is it not detrimental to your health, in your opinion? (IM 65).

Trust and understanding are the cornerstones of a successful relationship, and Lahiri argues that these can only be established via open dialogue and the resolution of conflicts. In *A Temporary Matter*, we see how telling each other the truth helped Shukumar and Shoba get past their grief and regain their marital love. When Mr. and Mrs. Das were unable to keep the peace in their marriage, Mrs. Das's extreme despair led to the end of their marriage. Ultimately, they were only apart for a short time.

Their Methods of Expression Differ The interpreter, Mr. Kapasi, expresses himself verbally. Mrs Das and Mr Das connect visually: Mrs Das through her beauty and dress and Mr Das through his photography. Several characters also mentioned written language and gestures. These different channels of interaction prevented the development of a consistent mode of communication, ultimately determined to be bodily.

At first, the Das family's travels through India seem rather typical. When the Das family is examined, there is evident a rift between the parents. They weren't having a conversation, but they were bickering like children every once in a while. They never showed any evidence of romantic interest in one another. The tour revolves mainly around the conversation between Mrs. Das and her interpreter, Mr. Kapasi. It's clear from their discussion that they're using both modes of communication. Mrs. Das relied heavily on her usage of, while Mr. Kapasi relied more on his spoken words to establish his role as an interpreter. She wears a close-fitting top with a strawberry-shaped calico applique on the breast and red and white checkered pants that end above her knees (IM 851). Her slip-on shoes have a square wooden heel. She also uses the rearview mirror to converse with Mr. Kapasi while driving. "She turned around, and her eyes met Mr. Kapasi's" (854). Mrs Das appreciated the clear explanation provided via this medium.

With these two methods, she attempts to woo Mr. Kapasi. Mrs. Das's entire persona appears to be a well-thought-out message delivery system. Her outfit's crimson colour and strawberry appliqué give her an air of femininity. Mr. Das has a unique way of expressing himself. The communicator in question is not Mr. Sense but the visual communicator. Mr. He takes a camera and a guidebook with him on his trips, and he often consults the latter, even "reading from his book" (AM 857), when giving directions. The guidebook may represent Mr. Das's interpretation of Mr. Kapasi. Mr Das took a lot of pictures during the tour. At one point, they have a slight pause in everyday conversation. When Mr Das's wife saw his shoes, she asked, "Why did you have to wear those terrible shoes?" when he felt like snapping a photo. "Mr. Das remarked. They will not include you in any pictures, she said. (AM 860). When Mrs Das speaks her mind in her way rather than adapting to Mr Das's mannerisms, he gets angry and assumes she does not want to be in the shot. There is more at play here than merely a failure to communicate and a divergence in preferred methods of expression. Therefore, it is essential to the story's resolution that the characters find a way to communicate with one another.

Mr. Kapasi and the monkeys can talk to each other differently. Mr. Kapasi's choice of words is not helpful and further alienates his audience. Mr. Das planned on continuing their communication by other means, such as letters and photographs, but Mrs. Das flirted with Mr. Kapasi instead. Unfortunately, this friendly relationship did not last for very long. Mrs Das confides in Mr Kapasi something she "has not been able to express" till now. In general" (AM 862). Mrs Das's subsequent separation from her husband and proximity to Mr Kapasi only served to exacerbate the situation. As an added note, Mrs Das would instead use the word "express" rather than "tell" or "say," as she does not consider these to be her primary modes of communication.

Communication breakdowns occur frequently and tragically in *Interpreter of Maladies*. Mr. Kapasi, or the *Interpreter of Maladies* as Mrs. Das calls him, lost his ability to communicate with his wife and drink tea with her at night, resulting in a loveless marriage. He has lost the ability to converse in several languages he mastered in his youth, including English, which he fears he does not speak as

well as his children. Mr and Mrs Das cannot communicate since Mrs Das hides behind her sunglasses and Mr Das has his nose in a book. The children either ignore their parents or Mr Kapasi when he tries to explain the monkeys to them. These ill-fated attempts at interaction give rise to ludicrous feelings. The Kapasi is locked in an unhappy union. The Dases' animosity toward one another is on the whole show. The children of the Das family have no control over their parents or anyone else. Moreover, even if they could talk openly, Mr Kapasi and Mrs Das cannot maintain the friendship they could have both wished for. Towards the story's finale, when Mrs Das forgets Mr Kapasi's address, it symbolises the end of their capacity to contact one another and the potential beginning of losing all connections between them. Abuse of the Means of Transmission

When reading Jhumpa Lahiri's short story, "*Interpreter of Maladies*," the reader is prompted to reflect on the difficulties of adult communication in the face of such obstacles as isolation, guilt, distance, and miscommunication. Mr Kapasi is in a miserable marriage despite his dual careers as a tour guide and a sickness interpreter. Mr. and Mrs. Das and their children have no contact with one another.

This inability to open up to one another has fatal consequences for the story's relationships. The loss of his little son has a profound effect on his life. He has to deal with the grief of losing his kid and the resentment of his wife, who blames the doctor he works with for her son's death. Because he must work in this position, his wife removes herself from Mr Kapasi and makes him feel like a failure. She does not even listen when he talks to her. After their breakup, he's looking for new, meaningful relationships. Lahiri's novel demonstrates the universal value of interpersonal interaction across cultures. Humanity needs to exchange its messages to feel whole.

The older women in *A Real Durwan* are victims of the horrific mass exodus of Bangladeshis from their homeland, as shown in the short story. Boori Ma's life took an unexpected turn soon after Bengal's partition. Part of the narrative is the interactions between the citizens of the society and the exiles. Boori Ma, the stairwell sweeper, claims to have been affluent in the past, but the residents of her building never believe her. Her neighbours call her "Bechareh, who creates tales to express her grief over the loss of her family" (IM 72). Ironically, this culture shuts out people with low incomes and people experiencing homelessness. The host society constantly judges them harshly, and despite her best efforts being appreciated and being treated with respect, she is still ejected from the premises.

Jhumpa Lahiri delicately describes Rohin, a seven-year-old child, in the story *Sexy*, about the suffering of betrayal and its profound impact. Also, it reveals a great deal of the characters' private exchanges. All of the characters in the novel have conversations with one another. However, those involving Laxmi and Miranda, Miranda and Dev, Rohin and Miranda, and Laxmi's cousin and her husband are particularly effectively conveyed. Laxmi frequently speaks to Miranda about the tension in her cousin's marriage to the man who eloped with another lady after forgetting about the sacredness of their union. She becomes enraged as a result and constantly chastises him.

Rohin, a cousin of Laxmi, hires Miranda to watch his children. She learns from her days with him about the suffering a wife goes through and the betrayal of his parents. After witnessing his mother's grief, Rohin refers to Miranda as "sexy," meaning the word to mean "loving someone you don't know," which leaves Miranda speechless. She finds it puzzling to observe how an adulterous relationship destroys the harmony among a family's members. She could detect its severe effects

on the young boy's psyche, which were painful and caused him to lose his innocence. She decides at last to end her relationship with Dev. Miranda decides to change the course of her life due to Rohin and Miranda's communication, which is so potent and energising.

The interaction between Mrs Sen and an eleven-year-old kid named Eliot in the short novel *Mrs Sen* effectively conveys the suffering of exile. The wife of a Bengali mathematics professor working in America accepts the position of Eliot's caregiver. The one thing her husband believes will enrich her life in America, learning to drive, she refuses to do since she misses everything about her home. However, fresh fish and letters from her homeland are the only consolations Mrs Sen's superior consolation attitude toward Mr Sen makes this delight short-lived—the likelihood of a happy man with his wife. Eliot's narration effectively expresses the distance between the diminished chance of a happy marriage: "They drove in quiet, following the same routes that Eliot and his mother used to return to the beach house each evening. However, the voyage appeared foreign and went longer than usual in the backseat of Mr and Mrs Sen's vehicle". (IM 126).

There was no warmth or friendship between the couple. As a result, Mrs Sen's nostalgic portrayal of her native country dominates Eliot's conversation with her. Mr and Mrs Sen's communication asks for improved engagement and an understanding of one another's emotions. *The Blessed Home*, another extremely intriguing story in the book, emphasises the value of efficient communication between newlyweds Sanjeev and Twinkle while addressing certain hus undertones. In truth, *The Blessed Home* is neither blessed nor a place to call home. When residents respect one another's feelings and coexist peacefully, a house is said to be a home, which is not valid with the story's protagonist pair, Sanjeev and Twinkle.

However, their poor communication could make things easier for them. Growing pains interfere with their move-in process after only four months of dating. Sanjeev finds Twinkle's happy possession of the Christian imagery left behind by former renters annoying. As her name suggests, Twinkle is free-spirited and meticulous, whereas Sanjeev is naturally organised and self-conscious. Sanjeev's inability to express the seemingly insignificant points of contention regarding neatness and order causes them to leave lasting memories in his mind. As a result, only excellent communication and understanding on both sides could preserve the lives of this young married couple with disparate personalities. From the ladies' perspective in *Bibi's Hamlet*, *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar* is told. Bibi is suffering from an unidentified sickness for which marriage is considered the only treatment. Her relative Haldar and his wife reject her marriage-obsessed fanaticism because they see her as a ruined good. Her only chance is to listen in on the talk between Bibi and the neighbourhood. They listen to her difficulties with empathy and work to improve things, to improve things lodes. Her cousin and his wife significantly worsened her life. The story's narrators, who are local women, occasionally comfort Bibi and listen to her outbursts.

They constantly provide her helpful suggestions to draw in potential grooms as sincere well-wishers. Instead of starting rumours about her or defaming her after they learned she was pregnant, they assisted her in raising the child. The narrative fervently defends the Hindu culture of neighbourly assistance. The gruesome image of an agreeable Indian woman who is tortured is shown by Bibi's silence over the crimes committed against her by her cousin and his wife. Her position would have been different if she had spoken out against her captors and publicly criticised their choice not to arrange for her to get married. She has violent outbursts because of a mental illness brought on by

her unreleased anger. She is pretty apprehensive about disclosing the identity of the man who embarrassed her and the reason for her pregnancy. So, Bibi's tale is unmistakably a pitiful account of the deplorable condition of women in Indian society.

Additionally, it emphasises how vital communication is to empower the socially excluded. The conclusion of Lahiri's stories, the difficulties of arranged marriages and the immigrant experience, are expertly captured from the perspective of the first-person narrative. The narrator recounts the first six weeks of his life in America in 1969, balancing a new job, a new wife, and a new country. While awaiting his wife's green card, the narrator lives in the spare room of an old lady. His kindness sticks to Mrs Croft. The narrator acclimates to his new life, cherishing Cambridge and his new beginning. However, he is nearly indifferent to the arrival of his wife, Mala. At first, they are strangers. When he takes Mala to meet Mrs Croft, a moment of intimacy and understanding between them bridges their divide. The narrator then speaks from the present and marvels at his life's journey.

Their friendships with other Bengali people helped them feel at home in their new environment, and their conversations with their son motivated him to get through challenging circumstances. In analysing the short story *Interpreter of Maladies* mentioned above, Lahiri emphasises the importance of communication for communities and individuals. She writes extensively about communication and the lack of it. Some characters suffer from misunderstandings or unspoken emotions, which harm their well-being.

In essence, *A Temporary Matter* best illustrates how concealment damages a marriage. Lost in their sorrow, Shukumar and Shoba stop talking to one another. Blackouts provide people with the opportunity to reveal secrets they have never told. They can no longer maintain the delusion that their marriage is still strong because they are always truthful. By disclosing Bobby's conception secret to Mr Kapasi, Mrs Das tries to relieve some of her stress. She can only be cleared of her guilt by Mrs Das, however. She cannot express to anybody other than a stranger her lack of love for her family; therefore, by the end of the story, nothing has changed in their marriage. Twinkle and Sanjeev have opposing worldviews, which initially causes conflict between the newlyweds.

## 2. Conclusion

As a result, Lahiri uses communication as a significant theme in *Interpreter of Maladies*, emphasising how important it is for happy relationships. The characters' ailments in her stories result from their broken or inadequate communication and silence. All of the stories highlight the importance of communication for individuals and society, especially for immigrants who experience emotional isolation and cultural displacement. She used the short story *Interpreter of Maladies* to symbolise her existence and that of other Indian immigrants. Whether it be the relationships between husband and wife or the feeling of being in exile, silence, and marginalisation of the oppressed society, all of the stories highlight. The author gives the reader a choice for the ending in *Interpreter of Maladies*, which is beautiful because it sparks a conversation in their subconscious. She freely grants interpretive freedom by meticulously positioning each narrative to allow the readers to receive a balanced portrayal of the society she feels required and happy to describe.

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