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### Interpretation of *Interpreter of Maladies*

The *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri analyzes different facets of marriage and relationships. Lahiri herself was raised in Rhode Island, and her identity reflects in her Indian-American characters. Weaving in her Bengali background, she creates a narrative of two Indian couples with drastically different backgrounds, but similar personal issues in order to create a parallel between the two. Using Kapasi's point of view, Lahiri uses symbolism and dialogue to explore family, communication, and cultural identity.

Because this short story is set in third person limit, the feelings of the characters are mostly seen through their actions or thoughts of Mr. Kapasi. For example, when Mr. Kapasi starts thinking of his future with Mrs. Das after she compliments him, "In this time she would reveal the disappointment of her marriage, and he his." This thought was particularly disturbing because it depicted how weak and fragile his own relationship was; a single compliment from an attractive woman was enough to him to question infidelity. For third person limited to Mr. Kapasi, even the locations that he drives the Das family to has significance. When he is lusting after Mrs. Das at the Konarak, the specific description is "...countless friezes of entwined naked bodies, making love in various positions, women clinging to the necks of men, their knees wrapped eternally around their lovers' thighs. Meanwhile at the hills at Udayagiri and Khandagiri, where Mr. Kapasi realizes that his relationship was nothing more than a short lived infatuation, the hills almost seemed barabie with "...dozens of monkeys were seated on stones, as well as on the branches of the trees."

The drastic difference in the descriptions of the locations show Mr. Kapasi's feelings rather than telling. It almost describes a journey where a 'hero' falls in love with a girl but at the same time goes through a process of self realization. To understand other characters such as Mrs. Das, her actions speak louder than words. When she wouldn't even offer her own children and husband her snacks, it is surprising when she, without any qualms, offers Mr. Kapasi some. "She reached into her straw bag in search of something, then pulled out a packet of puffed rice. "Want some?" Because the story's third person is limited to Mr. Kapasi, the reader is unsure of what Mrs. Das truly feels about him until this moment. While Mr. Kapasi's feelings are clear since the beginning through his thoughts, Mrs. Das's is demonstrated through her actions. This point of view is intentional to Mr. Kapasi because it enables readers to see the parallelism between Mrs. Das and Mr. Kapasi's personal issues. It makes the themes such as family even more pronounced. Furthermore, because it is an outsider looking into Mrs. Das's situation, it makes this common problem among marriages more humanized.

The use of dialogue enables the readers to see the different types of relationships that the characters have with each. For example, through Mrs. Das's story about her son's biological father, it demonstrates her willingness to share all of her darkest secrets while also detailing her lack of communication with Mr. Das. Furthermore, she treats him differently than her own family, "Tell us more about your job, Mr. Kapasi" versus "Why do you do this, Raj, just to save a few stupid rupees. What are you saving us, fifty cents?" It accurately describes not only the family dynamic of the Das family and Mr. Kapasi, but also their feelings toward one another. This is important so that Lahiri can highlight certain components of the various character relationships, such as infidelity.

Lahiri's uses symbolism to address her characters' dilemmas. The sunglasses that Mrs. Das wears inside and outside symbolises her desire to be absent from quality family time. Her purpose of wearing sunglasses inside the car is not to protect her eyes from the sun, but to repel conversation from others by seeming unapproachable. This is highlighted by Mr. Kapasi's observation, "For the first time, her eyes met Mr. Kapasi's in the rearview mirror: pale, a bit small, their gaze fixed but drowsy." Thus, Mrs. Das's sunglasses is a perfect symbol for her relationship to her family. This is supported by Tina and Mrs. Das's interaction; From telling Tina to "Leave me alone" when she asked Mrs. Das for some nail polish to Tina calling her Mina instead of Mom, it is clear that they treat each other more like siblings rather than mother and child. To represent Lahiri's cultural identity that is similar to her characters, she dresses the Das family like foreign tourists, "The family looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did..." Despite their prominent Indian features, this superficial layer is nothing compared to their upbringing of being immersed in American culture. Furthermore, due to Mrs. Das and Mr. Das's parents desire for them to get married, it almost severed the opportunity of an organic potential relationship, "After marrying so young she was overwhelmed by it all, having a child so quickly...Raj never looked cross or barfled, or plump as she had become after the first baby" This contributes to the theme of family and how much the parents' relationship can affect the overall family dynamic, including their relationship to their three children. To add a layer of deepness, Mr. Kapasi's title as interpreter of maladies actually represents something deeper in the story. Because Mrs. Das confesses to Mr. Kapasi about all of her problems, it is clear that she wants him to diagnose her sickness, why she feels the way she is feeling. The title symbolises broken relationships. Because his job reminds his wife of their child who passed away, Mr. Kapasi is not very intimate with his wife. Furthermore, his diagnosis of Mrs. Das's case study, guilt, breaks their relationship. It

makes him realise that his wishes are no longer there, shown by letting the slip of paper with his address float away. This contributes to the journey that Mr. Kapasi endures as referenced in the previous paragraph.

Overall, the *Interpreter of Maladies* is, in fact, not a unique story. Lahiri depicts a common problem among many marriages whose couples were not mature enough for this life long commitment or for other personal issues. Thus, breeding the problems depicted in her short story. Her use of symbolism, dialogue, and parallelism enable the audience to examine specific aspects of a relationship such as trust, communication, and cultural influence. It opens the readers up to more than just a typical marriage going through a tough time by introducing affairs, a love triangle, and an eventual diagnosis of what needs to be done in order to treat a broken relationship.

#### Work Cited

Lahiri, Jhumpa. "Interpreter of Maladies"Fourth Estate, 2014. [PDF Document]. Retrieved from HKIS Schoology site.