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**‘DIASPORA: STEREOTYPING AND ADULTERY’ IN JHUMPA LAHIRI’S SHORT STORY ‘SEXY’ FROM THE COLLECTION *THE INTERPRETER OF MALADIES***

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People presume:

The grass is greener on the other side of the lawn,  
But finer things in life cannot be found doing fraud.  
Calamities are bound to happen,  
And will always end with disappointment.

The world always assumes what is right for it, till it keeps itself content; and delegating the same thoughts Jhumpa Lahiri has written this story “Sexy” which was included in her short story collection *The Interpreter of Maladies*, revolving around the lives of Indian immigrants. The story re-establishes the idea of stereotypical colonial presumption regarding the East, and the caricature of the characters in the story does present the aforesaid presumptions, as the characters engage themselves in adultery without giving any thoughts to the consequences.

The story indefinitely states the convulsions of the main protagonist, a white American woman, Miranda who at the beginning of the story feels content of being a married Indian man’s (Dev) mistress, but as she observes her Indian co-worker console her heart-broken cousin whose husband had left her for a white woman, nostalgia surrounds her of her own depiction of the Indians she had met in her childhood, the stereotypical thoughts of the community where she grew, and her inner remorse of committing adultery with a married man.

The Western fetishisation of Indian men has been depicted through the lusty character, Dev, an Indian husband, who utilizes the Western notion to his advantage by committing adultery with, Miranda, and cheating on his wife; and more shockingly the notion again finds its way through a small boy,

Rohin, who emphasises that his father had left them for a woman like, Miranda. The Indian women, Laxmi’s cousin, depicted in the story represent the stereotype of a woman being the weaker gender; and at the same time Miranda’s actions at the beginning of the story depict the stereotype of American women being flighty and flirty, but her false notions of sexually exotic India were provoked by all the characters she had encountered in her life, namely, Dev, Laxmi, Rohin.

As all the stories of Jhumpa Lahiri, the story revolves around Indian Bengali immigrants. The story starts with, the protagonist, Miranda, an American woman who shares an apartment with her married co-worker and best friend who is an Indian Bengali immigrant, Laxmi, and her husband. Miranda’s closeness to her friend’s Indian heritage gives her all the more reasons to have an affair with Dev.

Laxmi, is presumably happy with her marriage and represents, a classically, another stereotype of Indians being proud of their culture as she keeps a photo of herself and her husband, seated on a white stone bench in front of Taj Mahal.

Miranda, is having an affair with, Dev, a married Indian Bengali immigrant who assumes his adulterous life with her, usually, prefers to define himself in terms of physical boundaries as opposed to the feelings of ethnic group, and also prefers to keep his relationship

with, Miranda, physical than emotional, as we observe in the story:

*When she asks him about the political map ("one of the cities had a box around it, intended to attract the reader's eye") he tells her the political history of his home country is "nothing [she'll] ever need to worry about."*

- Sexy, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (84)

Lahiri's depiction of their relationship is extramarital and guiltless for their actions. Every time after their intimate adulterous moments, Dev, leaves for his own house and family, leaves, Miranda, to think over their relationship and her role as his mistress:

*While Dev was at the airport, Miranda went to Feline's basement to buy herself things a mistress should have.*

- Sexy, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (92)

Lahiri delves deep into the memories of, Miranda, as a child and her miniature experiences with her Indian neighbour, the Dixits, and through her depicts the hackneyed and critical mindset of the American's towards Indians:

*...the only Indians whom Miranda had known were a family in the neighbourhood...named the Dixits. The father complained that Mr. Dixit did not fertilize his lawn properly.... The mothers never invited Mrs. Dixit to join them around the Armstrongs' swimming pool...Dixit children standing to one side, the other children would say "The Dixits dig shit," under their breath, and then burst into laughter.*

- Sexy, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (95)

Lahiri also elaborates upon one of Miranda's close encounter with the Indian family and her childhood phobia, and clichéd thinking about India as an adult:

*"It is the goddess Kali," Mrs. Dixit explained brightly....Miranda, then nine years old, had been too frightened to eat the cake. For months...too frightened even to walk on the same side of the street...For a while she even held her breath until she reached the next lawn...It shamed her now. Now, when she and*

*Dev made love, Miranda closed her eyes and saw deserts and elephants, and marble pavilions floating on lakes beneath a full moon.*

- Sexy, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (96)

But Miranda's dreams come to a halt when she is faced with reality through her flatmate, Laxmi, who tells her about her cousin's devastated marriage because her husband was having an extramarital affair and was leaving his wife for an American woman.

*...After nine years of marriage, Laxmi told Miranda, her cousin's husband had fallen in love with another woman. He called his wife, and told her he'd had a conversation that had changed his life, and that he needed time to figure things out...*

- Sexy, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (83)

Lahiri depicts the weakness of a dependent Indian woman with a child, as Laxmi's heartbroken cousin comes to stay with her for a few days before she could leave for India and at the same time initiates the twist in the tale through, Miranda's encounter with, Rohin, Laxmi's cousin's son which fills, Miranda, with guilt.

*He turned a fresh page in his sketch pad.... "You draw."....She selected a blue crayon. "What should I draw?"....He asked her to draw things in the living room...This way I can memorize it."... "Memorize what?"... "Our day together."... "Why do you want to memorize it?"... "Because we're never going to see each other, ever again."...The precision of the phrase startled her...*

- Sexy, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (104)

Miranda's psychological torment does not end here, as Lahiri represents the mindset of a young child who had witnessed his parents' separation had suddenly gone through a drastic change in his understanding of emotions and relationships. At the same time, Lahiri depicts the birth of his stereotypical thinking about American women; and also one concept accepted by all Man, the enchanted and exoticness of things foreign:

...he emerged, his hair dishevelled, holding the silver cocktail dress....Rohin looked at the dress and then at Miranda's body. "Put it on."... "You're sexy," he declared...."What did you say?"..."What does it mean?".....He cupped his hands around his mouth, and then he whispered, "It means loving someone you don't know."....Miranda felt Rohin's words under her skin...she felt numb.

- Sexy, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (105-107)

The revelation brings a great change within Miranda as she finally feels guilty and understands the gravity of her actions of having an affair with a married Man, and that their relationship had no future. Thus, as we reach the finale of the story, Miranda, ends her relationship with, Dev.

Hence, Lahiri through her story of Indian immigrants and resident American characters conveys the various conventions of stereotypes accepted by people, and the way adultery

presumes its place in such an environment and its aftermath.

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