

Complex Transnational Relationships: A Study of Jhumpa Lahiri's "Sexy"

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Jhumpa Lahiri's short story "Sexy" is seen as contemplation on postcolonial desire when it was published first as a part of her acclaimed debut collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* in 1999. It is a parable for the creation of a modern subjectivity in the aspect of complex transnational relations. Miranda who comes from a lower middle class American society and just passed out from an undergraduate school lacks experience of life. She wants to work in a place where she can work without any expertise as she lacks any experience. Due to her lack of attachment to her work, she becomes an outsider even in her society when she moves to cosmopolitan society of Boston. Though she is in relationship with a married Indian man Dev but she is underprivileged even after being in her own country. Though she loves an Indian man but she feels outsider with those Indian colleagues of hers. She feels stranger among those around us who were Indian though she herself feels attached to an Indian. The complex structure of this short story also shows that though Asians show attraction towards west but at the same time they keep feeling of ambiguity for the west at the same time. The same thing happens to westerns as well and Miranda is the perfect example of it. This story tells that it is within these modern, non-traditional (whether from an American or an Indian/Bengali perspective) spaces that people from different social backgrounds come together and re-think what constitutes a "home."

"Sexy" is a story which portrays how men view women. This is the one story in the collection that is narrated from the standpoint of an American. In this story, the narrator Miranda is pondering the path of her affair with a married man from Bengal. She meets a married man one day in a departmental store and falls in love with him. For Miranda, romantic relationship is novel experience and that is why her views on relationships are not well defined. But she gives her heart to Dev, a Bengali man in their first meeting. Like usual, Dev's careless attitude enamored her instead of making her careful.

There is a sub-story where Miranda's colleague, Laxmi tells Miranda about her cousin whose husband cheated and left her for another lady. Irony is that Miranda instead of empathizing with cousin, feels that such relationships are complicated because she herself doing something same. She herself loves a married man Devajit Mitra (shortened as Dev). She feels that those who fall in love especially after marriage have to face difficult choices. She remains in the illusion that Dev loves her and they spend great times together. Miranda had not been in any serious relationships and was attracted by Dev, in spite of him being married. He finds Dev's company entertaining and enjoys his attention. She is glad that Dev is able to understand her loneliness and makes time for her:

He said he admired her for moving to Boston, where she knew no one, instead of remaining in Michigan, where she'd grown up and gone to college. When Miranda told him it was nothing to admire, that she'd moved to Boston precisely for that reason, he shook his head. "I know what it's like to be lonely," he said, suddenly serious, and at that moment Miranda felt that he understood her. (*IM 89*)

They start spending time together whenever possible. On one such occasion when they meet, Dev always compliments her 'You're sexy.' Miranda gets very conscious of her sexuality with this simple statement of Dev and tries more to attract Dev by buying more alluring outfits. But it is always disappointing for her when these clothes do not seem to have any effect on Dev. The realization of reality of relationship with Dev comes when Laxmi brings over her nephew Rohin who unintentionally explains the context in which 'sexy' word Indian men use. He tells her that to call someone sexy, "means loving someone you don't know" (*IM 107*). Miranda understands that 'sexy' was not a term for her beauty by Dev but rather a term which Indian men use to describe the illicit pleasure they get from an affair outside their marriages.

The story highlights beautifully the idea that how different backgrounds can have different connotations of the same word. Miranda realizes that she has been used and objectified. She realizes that her worth for Dev is only in her small body that she owns. She understands that how an Indian man whose culture and convention doesn't allow him to break off his marriage was looking merely for a distraction in her. Then, she also gets the point that it is Dev's American exposure lures him for extramarital relations. Dev too when realizes that the way he sees Miranda is opposite of how she thinks of it, he decides to end the relationship.

It cannot be denied that there is mutual attraction between the two of them. It is the immigrant other of Dev which allows him for the affair not the native self. Though an immigrant, he was aware of his culture and also the consequences of his affair. We also find Miranda to be interested in Bengali culture because of her attraction for Dev.

"It is the goddess Kali," Mrs. Dixit explained brightly, shifting the dowel slightly in order to straighten the image. Mrs. Dixit's hands were painted with henna, an intricate pattern of zigzags and stars. "Come please, time for cake." Miranda, then nine years old, had been too frightened to eat the cake.... 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. (*IM 96*)

As a child, Miranda used to feel afraid by the picture of Goddess Kali and was not inclined to know the Indian culture. Her attraction towards Dev made her interested in the culture and she seeks to know more of it. When she comes to know the meaning of the word, "sexy" in the Indian context, she is shocked and comes to her senses about the relationship which she was nurturing. This short story explains that how relationships in spite of being in the same country but with different cultures get affected. The inability to understand each-others' cultures well, Dev and Miranda starts having different emotions for each other. Miranda takes the relation as love but Dev only took it only as a fling. He had never thought of leaving his wife for Miranda. At the same time, Miranda's Colleague Laxmi feels hatred for the American as due to some American woman Laxmi's cousin was

suffering. Thus we see that how relationships become web of complexity in transnational situation for the natives and immigrants.

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