



Maladies Interculturally Unperceived: A Psychological Analysis of “Interpreter of Maladies” by Jhumpa Lahiri

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ABSTRACT

This is a psychological analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story “Interpreter of Maladies”. Jhumpa Lahiri, although born and bred in the West, writes her short stories with an Asian, especially Indian, touch. Her “Interpreter of Maladies” relates an experience a US-born Asian young woman assimilated to Western culture has with a mature English-speaking Asian man engaged in tourism. They both fail to perceive the chronic issues of family life as particular to each other. Mina and Mr Kapasi are both in the same plight as frustrated spouses in their respective arranged marriages. But they cannot be explicit to each other because of cultural barriers. So, their maladies remain unperceived by each other under the influence of their cultural orientations. Mina considers Mr Kapasi a prospective counsellor, but Mr Kapasi considers her a prospective mistress. Ultimately, their considerations prove baseless, when they are both supposed to work out a solution together for an ailing problem.

INTRODUCTION

With a focus on readers of English literature for academic purposes, the analysis is conducted with a trajectory led by a series of psychologically formulated subtopics 1) Two Uninvolved Parents; 2) A Semiosis of Americanisation; 3) Reflections of Parental Negligence; 4) Curiosity Misinterpreted; 5) Conception of Self-Esteem; 6) Self-Indulgence in Moral Intoxication; 7) Temptations Stimulated; 8) Penance for Amour; 9) Temptations Frozen; 10) Confession Seeking No Absolution; 11) Unprofessionalism Exposed; and 12) Remedy in Isolation. The incidents are all interpreted in a vein of psychology related to family and human relationships. As every detail of the short story is covered in the analysis the paper serves the requirement of a reference work.

TWO UNINVOLVED PARENTS

The short story covers basically an encounter between an Indian resident and a foreign-born family of his compatriots. Mr Raj Das and Mrs Mina Das from New Brunswick (Raj and Mina from hereon), New Jersey in the US, both born to Indian parents based in the US, are getting ready with their children Tina, Ronny, and Bobby to go to see the Sun Temple at Konarak during their biennial visit to their parents in India. Raj is a middle school science teacher and Mina is a housewife. Mr Kapasi meets them as their chauffeur.

When they are about to leave their hotel, a dispute occurs between Raj and Mina over the parental responsibility of taking their little daughter Tina to the washroom. Finally, Raj refuses to comply with it on the grounds that he gave her a

bath the night before and Mina relents. Yet Mina does not hold her as a mother does while accompanying Tina to the washroom. Mr Kapasi gets shocked by the whole scenario. According to the premise developed by Cherry (2023) on uninvolved parenting, Raj and Mina are both uninvolved parents who had been in one way or another neglected by their own parents. That is established by Mina in her confession to Mr Kapasi that, when she and her husband were college students, their parents left them upstairs unattended, and had their own chat downstairs for hours. So, the element of neglect and indifference passes from one generation to the next in an Indian family milieu harmonised with an American social environment.

A SEMIOSIS OF AMERICANIZATION

Still, in their late twenties, Raj and Mina carry themselves as two Americans and so do their children. Lahiri presents their whereabouts as perceived by their English-speaking chauffeur Mr Kapasi who is accustomed to driving foreign tourists. “The family looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did, the children in stiff, brightly coloured clothing and caps with translucent visors” and have “their teeth covered in a network of flashing silver wires” (Lahiri, 1999) Tina holds “to her chest a doll with yellow hair” (Lahiri, 1999) Mina wears “a red-and-white-checked skirt that stopped above her knees, slip-on shoes with a square wooden heel, and a close-fitting blouse styled like a man’s undershirt. The blouse [is] decorated at chest level with a calico appliqué in the shape of a strawberry”; her “frosty pink fingernails are painted to match her lips”; her “legs ... shaved and largely bare”;



her hair "shorn only a little longer than her husband's, and parted far to one side" (Lahiri, 1999). She wears "large dark brown sunglasses with a pinkish tint to them," and carries "a big straw bag, almost as big as her torso, shaped like a bowl, with a water bottle poking out of it" (Lahiri, 1999) Raj has "a sapphire blue visor", and is "dressed in shorts, sneakers, and a T-shirt" and has a camera "slung around his neck, with an impressive telephoto lens and numerous buttons and markings" (Lahiri, 1999) Raj is used to shaking hands with people rather than pressing the palms together as the Indians do while greeting somebody and to referring to his wife by her first name when speaking with their children. His question to Mr Kapasi whether he gets bored by visiting the same place everyday suggests his interest in dynamicity like most Americans. Lahiri indicates that their accents remind Mr Kapasi of the conversations he has heard in some American television programmes. From these details, it is surmised that they have absorbed the influence of the type of assimilation their ancestors, who are immigrants in the US, have undergone in the spirit of Americanisation (See Miggins, Saverino, and OSU). Lahiri thus narrates how their dress codes, manners, speech, and behaviour alienate them from the Indian social environment they move around exciting not only the primitive-looking shirtless men in the street but also their English-speaking chauffeur Mr Kapasi who is used to Western tourists. More than anything their negligence as parents attract others' attention to them wherever they visit.

REFLECTIONS OF PARENTAL NEGLIGENCE

The children's impertinent behaviour reflects their parents' negligence and indifference to them. On seeing a goat "tied to a stake in the ground" Ronny clammers out of his seat in the car and runs to him. He does not mind his father's warning but rushes on, wanting to give the goat a piece of gum. Raj does not intervene there but only advises him not to allow his brother Bobby to do anything foolish. So, they engage in risky activities without listening to their parents. Inside the car, Tina plays with the door lock on her side, clicking it forward and backwards with some effort but Mina does not try to stop her. A little later, Tina and Ronny start snapping bright green gum, and Bobby starts shrieking at the sight of monkeys. Mina just keeps stuffing herself with puffed rice without attending to them at all while Raj is engrossed in his tourist book on India or operating his camera. The pandemonium inside the car is simply a reflection of parental negligence.

Without any guidance, encouragement, or advice from their parents, children may be confused about how they should approach life. They may see life as this big, scary thing they have to face independently. They don't have anyone to effectively teach them how to deal with challenges. (Estee, 2022)

When the monkeys show up on the road and interrupt the driving and the children get excited and keep screaming also, Mina is busy varnishing her nails and Raj trying to take

photographs of them. She does not hear Tina's repeated plea to polish her nails as well. When Bobby wants to know why there is right-hand driving in India while there is left-hand driving in the US, Ronny insults him by calling him a dummy. Raj tells him not to do so but does not get him to apologise to Bobby for the insult.

Sibling abuse is a symptom of a dysfunctional family in an environment of family stressors, such as marital conflict, financial stress, family disorganization and chaos, and lack of resources (Lancer, 2019)

Mina's complaint about the heat, her allegation against Raj for not hiring an air-conditioned car, and her indignant criticism of Raj's frugality seem to provide an obnoxious model for the children to follow in their communication. She does all that in front of the children. Raj seems to find solace in capturing with his camera images like the barefoot bullock cart driver in a dirty turban rather than in the company of his family. Lahiri remarks that the entire family behave like a bunch of siblings, highlighting the immaturity of Raj and Mina. She provides thorough coverage of what goes on with them as a disorganised family.

CURIOSITY MISINTERPRETED AS INSINUATION

Raj's curiosity about Mr Kapasi's job leads to a narration of his career history. He relates that his tour guide job is a weekend arrangement and that he has a regular job on weekdays as an interpreter at a doctor's office. As a Gujarati speaker in the multilingual community of India, he elicits from the Gujarati-speaking patients coming over there, what they want to say to the doctor, and explains it to the doctor in Hindi. "Interesting. I've never heard of anything like that" (Lahiri, 1999) Raj's remark is common to everybody. "But so romantic," Mina's unanticipated and dreamily made comment suggests its personal appeal to her. Raj's question "What's so romantic about it?" receives a very vague answer from her "I don't know. Something." The adjustment of her pinkish brown sunglasses like a tiara, the fixed but drowsy gaze at Mr Kapasi in the eyes, and the indulgent offer of a piece of chewing gum to him, all that she makes in response to his self-introduction, suggest her liking to talk to the man in private. At this moment, the sweet thick liquid that the piece of gum fills his mouth with suggests his physical and mental preparation for a romantic adventure. Her curiosity to know about Mr Kapasi's job does not appear to have a clear focus. Therefore, he misinterprets her "munching on some puffed rice and licking the mustard oil from the corners of her mouth" with "her head tilted in a patch of sun and ... her eyes" closed, as a series of erotic gestures she makes for him to grasp in the rearview mirror in terms of the inner workings of her mind. She openly claims "to picture what happens" in his job and he secretly tries to "picture what happens" in her mind.

Many subconsciously still feel the need to be polite and perhaps even meek in their verbal communications due to the roles that women traditionally held in society.

However, their body language will often tell the tale of how they are feeling, even if they happen to feel the opposite of what they're expressing with their words. (BetterHelp)

Lahiri artfully conveys Mr Kapasi's misinterpretation of Mina's facial expressions as some gestures made for him to follow in the rearview mirror. He considers the movement of her lips while munching and relishing the puffed rice stuffed in her mouth erotically insinuating.

CONCEPTION OF SELF-ESTEEM

Mr Kapasi relates to the Dases a few cases he has reported to the doctor. He describes how he got the doctor to prescribe treatment for a non-smoking patient who complained about throat irritation, a "young woman who had complained of a sensation of raindrops in her spine, and a gentleman whose birthmark had begun to sprout hairs. Throughout his narrations, Mina" listened attentively, stroking her hair with a small plastic brush that resembled an oval bed of nails, asking more questions, for yet another example" (Lahiri, 1999). He manages thereby to convince the Dases of his indispensability to the doctor in the patient diagnoses at his clinic. Based on what they hear from him, they consider that the patients would be more dependent on Mr Kapasi than the doctor. He feels uncomfortable to admit it at first. But when they explain why they presume so, Mr Kapasi feels compelled to accept their position. Lahiri thus depicts the boost he received in his ego in the company of the Dases. The feedback Mr Kapasi receives from the Dases makes him value his strengths, accomplishments, and assets and positively reinforces his own behaviour. "Self-esteem is initially acquired through two main sources: how others treated us, and what others told us about ourselves" (CAPS, Michigan University).

Since their judgement, he begins to assess the gravity of his responsibility lying in the interpretations of the patient complaints he provided to the doctor. Thus, in terms of refreshing Mr Kapasi's recollections, Lahiri presents a short biographical sketch of him. He is a self-educated man. Aspiring to become "an interpreter for diplomats and dignitaries, resolving conflicts between people and nations, settling disputes of which he alone could understand both sides" (Lahiri, 1999) he works with a large collection of dictionaries, taking down notes and making etymologies in notebooks, to learn some foreign languages such as English, French, Russian, Portuguese, and Italian, and some local languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Orissi, and Gujarati. But he cannot continue to do so as his parents settle his marriage. He becomes an English teacher in a grammar school to make a living. When his first son turns seven years, he contracts typhoid fever, and Mr Kapasi is compelled to work as an interpreter, to pay the increasingly exorbitant medical bills. When the boy dies, his wife becomes sad. Just to console her with more household amenities he continues his interpreter job. Knowing his situation, the doctor, who has by now become well-acquainted with him, offers to pay him double

his salary if he joins his practice as his interpreter. In the course of time, he has forgotten all that he learnt in terms of the numerous foreign languages he used to learn and now retains only a fair command of English. That is also because of his sporadic engagement in tourism. However, the doctor likes him because he dresses well. After all, from Mina's compliment that his job is "romantic", he receives a tremendous boost in his self-esteem, which he never experienced with his wife before, who always looks down upon him as 'the doctor's assistant'.

SELF-INDULGENCE IN MORAL INTOXICATION

Slightly intoxicated by Mina's remark "romantic", on his role as the interpreter of maladies to a doctor, Mr Kapasi mentally gets away from his professional obligations as the chauffeur to a family hired for a day. In his subconscious, comparing with his relationship with his wife, he indulges himself in probing into the private lives of Raj and Mina and calculating whether "they are a bad match". He observes "the bickering, the indifference, the protracted silences" that prevail between Raj and Mina as symptoms of his own relationship with his wife. While feeling grateful for being dressed smartly for the occasion, he keeps gazing at Mina throughout the drive. Together with Mina's lips active with the puffed rice in her mouth, "the strawberry between her breasts, and the golden-brown hollow in her throat" tempt him like the forbidden fruit (Genesis:3:6). After his adventures with patients, when Raj gets back to his tour book and the children keep watching the monkeys on the roadside, he continues for about a half hour to talk to Mina as if in a private conversation. The result is his gradual dependence on her company. His vulnerability is obvious in his disappointment when he does not find space under the umbrella where the family get seated at the roadside restaurant. The consolation Mr Kapasi draws from Mina's invitation for him to join them under the umbrella implies his dependence on her. He is elated by Raj's proposition for Mina to get close to Mr Kapasi while posing for a photograph. His restlessness emerges in his inhalation of the scent of Mina's skin and his worries about her perception of his perspiration smell. He tends to get more and more self-conscious and vigilant about every detail of his own behaviour as well as what goes on in the surroundings. In his intoxication, he considers Mina's request for his address as a great achievement. Lahiri symbolises this with the two lovers embracing each other on the piece of paper Mina offers him to write his address on. After handing over the address, Mr Kapasi builds castles in the air about a romantic relationship with Mina. "As his mind raced, Mr Kapasi experienced a mild and pleasant shock." Lahiri conveys the toxic impact he receives from her simple gestures. "The promise that he would hear from Mina" confirms that all circumstances and actions, however right or wrong they can be, are all finally, favourable to him. Nevertheless, Mina's careless insertion of the piece of paper in her bag disappoints him. It is speculated that all that hassle could be spared if Mr Kapasi remained upright as the one-day chauffeur to the family.

"When there is restraint of the sense faculties, ... virtuous behaviour possesses its proximate cause" (Holm, 2020)

Lack of mindfulness betrayed thus in Mr Kapasi's behaviour suggests his moral deterioration in a mood of intoxication.

TEMPTATIONS STIMULATED

The Sun Temple at Koranak which is the Dases' agreed destination for the day is meant to intensify Mr Kapasi's attachment to Mina, while explicitly stimulating his temptations for her.

The temple, made of sandstone, was a massive pyramid-like structure in the shape of a chariot. It was dedicated to the great master of life, the sun, which struck three sides of the edifice as it made its journey each day across the sky. Twenty-four giant wheels were carved on the north and south sides of the plinth. The whole thing was drawn by a team of seven horses, speeding as if through the heavens (Lahiri, 1999)

From ancient times, appreciation of art has been a way of getting people closer to each other through a process of catharsis. More than the historical facts such as its dating to the period between A.D. 1243 and 1255, its sponsor King Narasimhadeva the First, and its purpose to commemorate his victory against the Muslim army, the great sculptures and carvings provide a venue for people to demonstrate their sensitivity as humans.

Along with gaining a sense of control over emotions, we can make art to gain a feeling of catharsis, or an aha moment in the processing of our emotions, which offers us some clarity and distance from the situation (Manning-Schaffel, 2021)

Mr Kapasi finds there an opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge, taste, precision, sensitivity, and sensuality as well as his temptation for Mina.

What he referred to, were the 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. In addition to these were assorted scenes from daily life, of hunting and trading, of deer being killed with bows and arrows and marching warriors holding swords in their hands (Lahiri, 1999)

Mr Kapasi's pleasure over the carvings' mesmeric appeal to Mina is augmented by her contemplative relaxation with the naked lovers in erotic positions, the elephants, and the topless female musicians. From one carving to another, they move and each one of them instils in them a mystic sensation. The spectacular statues infiltrate the deep domains of their minds. Mr Kapasi, although he has been a frequent visitor of the place for a long time, as never before, finds them so provocative because of his inclination to Mina. His eyes feast on the topless female figures and recalls that his wife has never allowed him to feel her breasts during their

lovmaking. He takes Mina too as one of the statues and enjoys watching her haunches. Conscious of the rest of the Das family around, however much he likes to be alone with her, Mr Kapasi feels nervous to walk beside Mina. Finally, he stops at the last statue of the Sun God wearing an expression of fatigue one would have after a day of hard work. Under the tension generated by his own desire, he gets startled when he finds her standing beside him. Having enquired from him about the statue of Astachala-Surya identified as "the setting sun," she comments that it is "Neat". Hoping that Mina has perceived the beauty and power of Surya, he starts dreaming about how he would communicate with her in the future starting with postal correspondence and culminating in a physical embrace.

"When he pictured her so many thousands of miles away, he plummeted, so much so that he had an overwhelming urge to wrap his arms around her, to freeze with her, even for an instant, in an embrace witnessed by his favourite Surya" (Lahiri, 1999)

On learning from her that the Dases are supposed to fly back to the US in ten days, he calculates that it would take approximately six weeks for a letter from her accompanying his photo with her to reach him. A man in his forties, Mr Kapasi behaves like a juvenile after getting affected by his infatuation with Mina. Lahiri reveals thus how the temple of Koranak with all its nudities stimulates Mr Kapasi's temptations as a clandestine lover while he is in the company of Mina.

PENANCE FOR AMOUR

The behaviour the Dases, including Mina, maintain on their return to the car appears quite normal. Mr Kapasi is free to take leave of them on dropping them at the hotel. Yet, overpowered by his temptations for Mina, Mr Kapasi proposes the trip to the hills at Udayagiri and Khandagiri as a pretext to prolong his involvement with them. There lie several monastic dwellings, "hewn out of the ground, facing one another across a defile," to shelter Jain monks. It is the children who support Mr Kapasi's proposition while Raj and Mina both shrug. Almost "delirious with relief", Mr Kapasi tries to figure out what he would do and say to Mina to attract her attention. To Kapasi's advantage, Mina refuses to join the family on their trip to the hills, because of her leg pains. The other issue is that she fears the monkeys. The dominant presence of restless monkeys all over the place provides a contrast to "the 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" (Lahiri, 1999) in the Koranak temple. Nudity is exposed in both places but in two contrasting fashions - sublime and grotesque. Feeling guilty to see the children being disturbed by those agile monkeys, whose moods are scary and unpredictable, Mr Kapasi wants to join them.

TEMPTATIONS FROZEN

When the rest of the family is away, Mr Kapasi mistakenly

encounters serendipity. Mina wants him to stay in the car. She gets out of the back seat and slips in beside Mr Kapasi. The voluntary risk of being suspected by others as a woman of sexual misconduct, she takes by sitting by him implies a decision she makes after her silent observation of him for over some hours.

"I'll join them ... There is much to explain about the caves."

"No. Stay a minute, ... Raj has his dumb book anyway." (Lahiri, 1999)

The exchanges between them suggest that Mina has so much confidence in Mr Kapasi, which is generally considered a crucial pre-requisite for a clandestine relationship between two separately married people. In the meantime, the game that goes on between Bobby and a monkey provides a way for a strictly confidential conversation between Mr Kapasi and Mina.

"A brave little boy ..."

"It's not so surprising ..."

"No?"

"He's not his."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Raj's. He's not Raj's son." (Lahiri, 1999)

On learning the secret behind Bobby, Mr Kapasi applies lotus-oil balm on his forehead, evades Mina's eyes, and maintains silence as Raj does.

"Are you surprised?"

"It's not the type of thing one assumes..."

"No, of course not. And no one knows, of course. No one at all. I've kept it a secret for eight whole years. ... But now I've told you." (Lahiri, 1999)

The psychosomatic discomfiture he sustains in reaction to her disclosure is conveyed in his nodding, feeling suddenly parched in his throat, having a temperature, and getting benumbed in his forehead. His symptoms suggest that he does not have an iota of guts even to ask Mina for a sip of water. The hidden information about Bobby's biological father freezes Mr Kapasi together with his temptations for Mina. The traditional culture in which he has been brought up vehemently rejects this type of situation. Accommodating Mr Kapasi as an amateur psychological counsellor, Mina unfolds to him a secret that she has been hiding for eight years. But it proves useless due to the parochial conditioning he has undergone in his conservative society.

CONFESSION SEEKING NO ABSOLUTION

Crippled by the notion that Bobby is an illegitimate child born to Mina, Mr Kapasi is no more enthusiastic to follow her. His refusal of the puffed rice she offers signifies the end of his interest in her. Nevertheless, she relates her story regardless of the effect it would have on Mr Kapasi. Looking back, she

realizes that the opportunities she and Raj had as college students, to make love to each other every weekend should be an arrangement their parents deliberately made together. Every weekend, leaving them alone upstairs, the parents together used to have tea downstairs. She regrets that her early entanglement with him deprived her of making any trustworthy friends who could help her in tricky situations. She is sad that she became a tired mother early in life and lost all her school friends as she had no time to be with them. In a way, she is thankful that Raj has just continued all these years his routine practices as a schoolteacher without any revulsion against the physical changes she underwent due to childbearing. While leading her life in isolation as the mother of two children, she is compelled to keep in the house a Panjabi man for a week, who is known to her as a friend of Raj. On his last day, when the situation looks favourable for him, the man excitedly makes love to her but "with an expertise she had never known". She recalls his powerful impact on her through the details that "Bobby was conceived in the afternoon, on a sofa littered with rubber teething toys ... while Ronny cried to be freed from his playpen" (Lahiri, 1999) She continues that the Panjabi man has got married thereafter and remains a friend of the Dases. Then she concludes, "He did not know that he was Bobby's father. He never would" (Lahiri, 1999) She knows that there is no room for absolution, but she enjoys the catharsis of regaining her innocence amidst all the circumstances in question. However, she expects Mr Kapasi to assess her vulnerability and help her clear her conscience as a victim of circumstances. Yet his dumbness shatters her hope for absolution.

UNPROFESSIONALISM EXPOSED

When Mina's story is over, Mr Kapasi wants to know the reason why she related it to him. Introducing herself as a woman of twenty-eight years, first, she asks him not to call her "Mrs Das". There she presumes that Mr Kapasi may have children of her age and treats him as a parent. Then only Mr Kapasi realizes that for so long his dreams and plans formulated on his temptations for Mina are all part of a myth. His disappointment is conveyed in his bluntness. "I don't understand," he sounds irrelevant. She is only earnest in her request for a decent piece of advice from a mature person:

"Don't you see? For eight years I haven't been able to express this to anybody, not to friends, certainly not to Raj. He doesn't even suspect it. He thinks I'm still in love with him. Well, don't you have anything to say?"

"About what?"

"About what I've just told you. About my secret, and about how terrible it makes me feel. I feel terrible looking at my children, and at Raj, always terrible. I have terrible urges, Mr. Kapasi, to throw things away. One day I had the urge to throw everything I own out the window, the television, the children, everything. Don't you think it's unhealthy?"

He was silent.

"Mr. Kapasi, don't you have anything to say? I thought that was your job." (Lahiri, 1999)

She reveals all that to Raj because she has considered him to have some paramedical expertise as an interpreter of maladies. She thinks she can have a remedy from him for her depression and hysterics precipitated by her guilty conscience about infidelity. She expects from him a practicable psychological solution. But Mr Kapasi is not clever enough to formulate one. Enthralled by her physique, he has been all the time nursing dreams of getting entangled with her romantically. The whole conversation proves Mr Kapasi to be a shallow man without even an iota of pragmatics.

To escape from his obligation to Mina, Mr Kapasi distorts the fact about his regular job as an interpreter of maladies. This implies that he is liable to use both of his jobs interchangeably to his advantage.

"My job is to give tours, Mina."

"Not that. Your other job. As an interpreter."

"But we do not face a language barrier. What need is there for an interpreter?"

"That's not what I mean. I would never have told you otherwise. Don't you realize what it means for me to tell you?"

"What does it mean?"

"It means that I'm tired of feeling so terrible all the time. Eight years, Mr. Kapasi, I've been in pain eight years. I was hoping you could help me feel better, say the right thing. Suggest some kind of remedy." (Lahiri, 1999)

Lahiri cleverly indicates here that, on her part, she is not infatuated with Mr Kapasi at all but only wants a solution to the ailing issue of her apathy about her family. In the real sense what happened between the Panjabi man and her is that he capitalised on her vulnerable state and exploited her sexually at a moment when she was left alone at home only with two little kids. The man was not her guest either. Being a friend of Raj, he was allowed to stay in the house despite her objection. Mina's innocence is obvious as it did not happen with her initiative. However, "Mr Kapasi felt insulted that Mrs Das should ask him to interpret her common, trivial little secret." His reaction reveals that he is not professional enough to give an effective and viable solution in such a deeply psychological matter. In a nutshell, she wants a remedy for the trauma that tortures her when she sees her illegitimate child Bobby as the result of her victimization. In a conventional way, going by the generally misinterpreted old maxim "honesty is the best policy" (Grammarist), Mr Kapasi thinks of advising her to confess her guilt to Raj but without forecasting what the result would be. He decides to act as a mediator in any discussion that arises in such a process and begins with the most obvious question, to get to the heart of the matter. So, he asks, "Is it really pain you feel, Mrs Das, or is it guilt?". But she does not wait for him to finish. That means

she has already understood his unprofessionalism and lack of pragmatic knowledge to give her an intelligent piece of advice. Her silent reaction to his non-committal behaviour challenges his manhood. A semiotic portrait of youthful flamboyancy versus senile impotency emerges through their confrontation where the glittering "mustard oil thick on her frosty pink lips" contrasts with his "receding hair that had gone completely silver". Thus, Mr Kapasi is reduced to nobody before the helpless Mina suffering from trauma as an innocent young wife.

REMEDY IN ISOLATION

The monkeys dominating her path seem to influence her imagination about men in her world, including Mr Kapasi. She walks to her family in a defiant spirit of independence. When the entire family is together, all five members pose for a photograph to be taken by Mr Kapasi. "What's wrong with all of you?" The question Raj asks Mina when he notices Bobby missing has a strong implication concerning her mood. The unconcerned parenting Raj and Mina have resorted to all the time, seems to have resulted in the pathetic condition of Bobby being stranded among a group of excited monkeys.

"Mr Kapasi, ... Do something, for God's sake, do something!" (Lahiri, 1999)

Mina's appeal to Mr Kapasi conveys to him a special message as he is the only one in the crowd who knows the real identity of Bobby. Once he has rescued the boy from the evil monkeys, the entire family care for him. Mina's complaint about the place contains a powerful innuendo to reach Mr Kapasi vertically. "God, let's get out of here ... This place gives me the creeps." Although it is not explicitly stated, Lahiri makes it clear that Mr Kapasi is partly responsible for the hassle the poor boy has suffered. The accident with the monkeys hurting Bobby further changes the prospects for Mr Kapasi to have a relationship with Mina. Lahiri symbolically demonstrates the end of their connection that happens only in the notice of Mr Kapasi.

When she whipped out the hairbrush, the slip of paper with Mr Kapasi's address on it fluttered away in the wind. No one, but Mr. Kapasi noticed. He watched as it rose, carried higher and higher by the breeze, into the trees where the monkeys now sat, solemnly observing the scene below. Mr. Kapasi observed it too, knowing that this was the picture of the Das family he would preserve forever in his mind. (Lahiri, 1999)

Ultimately, the whole relationship ends up being a memory recorded in the recesses of Mr Kapasi's mind.

The closure is apt from another perspective too. Mr Kapasi feels the verbal contact with Mrs Das and her readiness to accept him as a kind of mental and moral interpreter gives him a touch of mental dignity which his life and wife denied him. But the wind that carries off the address annals it. (Goonetilleke, 2023)

The interpretation of the conclusion of the short story that Goonetilleke (2023) provides perfectly sums up the entire story in a couple of sentences and projects the irony behind what the wind does to the whole affair. From what happens throughout their interaction, it is surmised that both Mr Kapasi and Mina carry various maladies within themselves. That may apply to the entire human population in the world. The fickleness of life defined by all such issues is well depicted by the flight the strip of paper with Mr Kapasi's address makes.

CONCLUSION

All the above incidental analyses appear as parts of a single thread of argument running along a trajectory to establish that ultimately Mina is compelled to work on her problem by herself. Mina seems to have gathered the courage to face life as it is with the realisation that her sexual involvement with the Panjabi man did not transpire with her own initiative. She did not cooperate with him either. She only remained passive during his physical manipulation of her. Divulging it to Raj would not solve any problem but only sow antagonism between the Panjabi man's family and hers. Therefore, Mina's only way out of the problem is to clear her conscience by retaining the catharsis she achieved while confessing to Mr Kapasi her entanglement with the Panjabi man to regain her innocence. Lahiri exposes a common problem of insecurity women face in the company of men of loose morals.

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