
EMANCIPATION OF 'THE OTHER' IN FINDING ONE-SELF: A READING OF JHUMPA LAHIRI'S "SEXY"

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Abstract: Our society is, by and large, patriarchal. In this patriarchal society, women have certain constraints and are expected to play various conventional roles. Their wishes and objectives are not generally given a proper consideration. In such a condition, individuality of women is so hard a concept for men to take. We talk so much about women's development, freedom and equality. But the question whether women are given equal status with men does not find a solid or convincing answer. Talking about freedom and equality of women on one side, and on the other, subjugating them, is a condition commonly prevailing in all strata of society. Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashata, in his article titled "Man's world", rightly points out: feudal patriarchal norms are so firmly entrenched in Indian society that any assertive and independent creation of space by women is violently resisted....Feminists believe that this subconscious sense of displacement has made even modernist men uncomfortable as they themselves are born into traditional Indian families that are fed on ideas that differentiate sexes by patriarchal virtues. (26)

Keywords: Emancipation, Feminism, Patriarchy, Self-identity.

Introduction: The principle of dualism that governs the categories of 'self' and 'other' has exercised a pivotal function in the narratives of domination. Endeavors to defend and retain one's territory have necessitated the articulation of spatiality too in two irreducible modes, namely the center and the margins. The center- space invariably belongs to the dominant discourses and voices, while the outer other space is virtually a non-space as regarded from the vantage of the center. By being denominated the 'margins,' is the status of a space- proper denied to it, but also the very possibility of its having an absolute value in itself is negated. Wherever individuals and groups are thus spatially graded and categorized, oppression tends to be. Caste, class, racial and gender structures have thus come to inscribe separate fenced-in spaces-instating some at the center. And relegating others beyond the margins.

Naturally the course of this particular write-up it is supposed to trace the question of the other, but women's identity in world literatures and narratives reaches something beyond that. It then becomes an influence on a regional culture, and later a part of the fabric of global community. It moves from local to regional to global.'

Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Sexy' is a short story wherein "'Sexy' intercuts notions about extramarital affairs that comes to reveal what the term sexy means." (Breslin). It is taken from the collection of Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Interpreter Of Maladies' which is a "the story from which the title of the

collection is lifted - is about an Indian-American family vacationing in India and their tour guide who also happens to be a clinical interpreter - a medical transcriber, perhaps?" (Monique)

"Sexy is about a young woman who becomes the paramour of an older, married man - and realizing

her self-worth, thanks to a young boy who picks the proper adjective to call her." (Monique) The story begins in the introduction to the characters, Miranda, an American, and Laxmi, her co-worker, an Indian. Laxmi's cousin calls her informing that her husband left her for another woman on an airplane. The depression felt by Laxmi's cousin causes a neglect for the son, Rohin which alerts Laxmi. Miranda resorts to talking with Dev and explains some stuff about Bengali culture. The story traces back to the meeting of Miranda and Dev on a make-up counter in a department store. Miranda tries her best to get nearer to Dev and they were able to meet outside the store. Every night, Dev is staying at Miranda's apartment and they engaged in a conversation about life and Miranda rendered Dev as the first man ever to show maturity to her. Dev shows Miranda around Boston, and eventually in the mapparium. This is the place where Miranda firstly hears that she is "sexy." Miranda rushes to the department store to buy things that would surely surprise Dev. Miranda imagines her scene with Dev that would be like a very romantic moment with him, but Dev's wife returns and appears to Miranda in gym clothes, dismaying Miranda. Miranda then tries to learn of the Bengali culture, language, and food.

Rohin comes to Miranda's apartment one day and eventually goes to her closet. Rohin finds a silver dress on the floor and asks Miranda to wear it because she'll look "sexy." Rohin explains that sexy means, "loving someone you don't know." After this happened, Miranda went numb and reminisces what happened in the mapparium. After this incident, she began ignoring anything from that concerns Dev, even going to the point of totally ignoring Dev already asking him not to come to the apartment anymore.

“Sexy” resembles to the - contemporary works from immigrant second generation authors, such as Amy Tan and Sandra Cisneros, because it focuses on an ethnic sub-culture within America. However, ““Sexy” differs from those less recent works because it shows Indian-American culture from the perspective of a somewhat ignorant and naïve young woman. More importantly, “Sexy” distinguishes itself from other second generational works because it underlines the idea of an increasingly globalized world and its impact on individuals.”(Am)

Throughout the story there is a disparity of South Asian Identity is reflected where words in different cultural and geographical backgrounds “where a word or any manifestation of language seems to have different notions per culture or group”, says Lumine. The context meaning of the word “Sexy” in India is seen in to amalgamate with the contexts of the US culture and word meanings. Therefore because of the problem of language, Miranda and Dev wasn’t able to understand one another. Miranda took the sexy as a compliment while Dev gave Miranda a sexy remark because he loves Miranda for the sake of surficial value.

Followed by this there is “there is the issue of race where it inflicts exoticism or it reimagines a brand new perspective on the beauty of other race. Interracial relationships of course present differences in race and skin color and how two people of different races are enticed by the exotic culture of beauty. Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Sexy* provides an intersecting issue of sexuality and race that cages Miranda into an assimilation to the Indian culture and how Miranda is centered on the Asian-American setting—that, an American tries to be an Asian” (Lumine).

Contributing views on the same lines Vinita Reddy says to be an infusion,—“of Indian female beauty with affective capacities that reassemble the semantic

messages of exoticism, commodification, gendered nationalism, and transnational mobility that underwrite Indian female beauty’s attachments to an elite cosmopolitanism at the end of the twentieth century” in Lahiri’s ‘*Sexy*’, here Lahiri mobilizes Indian feminine beauty’s affects in order to illuminate and critique late-capitalist globalization, migration, and travel as they shape narratives of citizenship and belonging.

Through the essay there is also an exploration of “the process of transition and formation of new cultural identities, blatantly engages itself with notions of “hybridity” and “liminality” and examines the way, if any, through which Lahiri gives voice to the subaltern experience.” (Bahmanpour) paving way to Gayatri Spivak’s contribution of ‘*Can the Subaltern Speak?*’, of tracing the identity of the subaltern and giving voice to their atrocities.

In the conclusion it can also be traced to be mapping the text into the Asian- American identities wherein there is reflection of assimilation and linguistic issue, Interpreted by Lumine as the “Asian-Americans are problematic when it comes to language because its power is the ability to communicate with the Americans properly. Without its mastery, one will have a difficulty in determining the implied notions about language. Assimilation is of course is one of the adaptive concepts the Asian-American is bound to represent in Asian-American texts. The concept of assimilation presents the notion of incorporating the self into other culture, adapting to it, and undergoing to the special stage of the Self-Americanization.”

From mere a text of narratives of Infidelity, to tracing it’s identities of Self- Americanization Lahiri’s short story *Sexy*, make an assertion on all the fronts and reflects, contributing to the issues and ideologies making the realm of world literatures and narratives.

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