

# Familial Bond in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Temporary Matter*

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## Abstract

Family is a bond of life chain which possesses love and concern to one another. It is with this bond the sufferings of lots of twists and turns get revealed. Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian diasporic writer. In her work, she speaks about the dynamics of relationship, loneliness, loss and grief, connection, honesty. *A Temporary Matter* is taken from her interpreter of maladies. In this short story she speaks about the connection, honesty, loss, grief, and moving on. The central characters are Shoba and Shukumar. The other major characters in this story are Shoba's Mother, Mr. Bradford and Mrs. Bradford. Shukumar and Shoba are a lovely couple. The protagonist is Shoba as she sustains a strong character. As life reverses they do not talk with each other after their child death. They receive a notice from their electric company that their power will be disconnected for the next five days from 8:00 to 9:00 P.M in order to repair the destruction caused due to snowstorm. During the period of power disconnect, Shoba and Shukumar sits together in a candle light and they share their secrets which remains disclosed for years. On the fifth day Shoba intimates her plans of moving to another house while Shukumar conveys the truth that he stood in the labour ward during her delivery time. This turns to be the greatest twist at last.

**Keywords:** Reveal, Loss, Family Problems, Struggles, Emotion and Feeling, Wishes, Connection, Grief, Moving On, Power Outage.

Nilanjana Sudeshna Jhumpa Lahiri, a renowned American author known for her short stories, novels and essays in English reflects Jhumpa Lahiri's 21st Century author moves to America at her age of three. From her childhood she made frequent trips to India to visit her relatives. She exposes her unique qualities of learning people and their minds to uphold relationships in a family.

"A Temporary Matter" is published in 1998 and it is indeed the first story of Jhumpa Lahiri and it occupies a part of publication in Lahiri's debut collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). The story takes place over a period of five days, commencing from 19 March, at the Suburban Boston home of a married couple, Shukumar and Shoba. In this short story she discusses the sufferings of Shoba and her emotional feelings towards her dead child. Here Shukumar and Shoba get separate due to their child's death. During the period of power outage Shoba and Shukumar sit and eat together. At an instant Shoba enquires Shukumar "We can play a game" for which Shukumar agrees and at the end he reveals the temporary matter which stood as a hidden secret for a long time after which they both burst into tears.

Ahuja Sandeep in his article he discusses “The crisis relationship: A Thematic Study of Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Temporary Matter*”. In his article he says that before the labor pain Shukumar and Shoba are in a good relationship. Shoba and Shukumar do not talk with each other after loosing their child. Before the tragedy they both were in good terms. After the sad demise of their child they both do not talk with each other. They get a chance to know each other only only during the power outage. At the end they both get united. Sharma Jaya and Sathe Prachi in their article discuss “The brighter perspective of darkness: A Temporary Matter”. They say that Shukumar and Shoba are in the darkness. Their life is compared to darkness because of their child death. They both sit together in the dark and they both discuss the confidential matter. At the end of the day Shoba and Shukumar reveals the truth. After knowing the truth from Shukumar, Shoba switches off the light. Their story commences in the darkness and ends with the same. Shri.Yogesh S. Kashikar in his article speaks about “Different hues of Human Relationships in Jhumpa Lahiri’s: A Temporary Matter”. In his article he depicts the modern life relationship between husband and wife. Their day to day struggles after their baby death. He says that trust is very important. Finally his article makes us to understand that trust and communication makes the best bond between relationships. Shri.Yogesh S. Kashikar in another article speaks about “Individual and Family Strife in Jhumpa Lahiri’s ‘A Temporary Matter’- Tracing the roots in Feminism”. In this article he speaks about the Feminism and Feminist Literary Criticism. He speaks about the particular struggle of female characters in *A Temporary Matter*.

Shobaa woman of thirty three and Shukumara of man thirty five years lives together at Suburban Boston. Shoba is very sincere in her work. She keeps her home very clean and she goes for a daily work. She is a Proof-reader by profession while Shukumar is a lazy person who is an academic student. Before three weeks of her labour date Shukumar needs to attend the conference in Baltimore. With less interest Shukumar agrees to attend the conference as per Shoba’s advice. She insisted him to attend it as it will be useful for his job in the upcoming years. Before her labor they both love each other and took great

care of each other. Shukumar finally agrees to go to the conference. While Shukumar is in the conference he receives a call that Shoba gets admitted in a nearby hospital with a labour pain. Shukumar rushes to the hospital but to his disappointment he receives the news of the death of their new born.

After Shoba returns from the hospital Shoba’s mother takes a good care of her. Shoba’s mother does all the work and supports her daughter to get rid of her earlier misfortunes. Shoba’s mother is from Arizona and she stays with her for two months after her delivery. At last Shoba’s mother is turns to be a dream character. After the death of her child Shoba hesitates to stay at home as she dislikes to converse with her husband. She works for long hours and returns home late. Shoba’s life changes miserable as she misses to keep her home clean. Shukumar becomes very lazy and he even forgets to brush his teeth. He shows less interest in his projects and becomes inactive with day to day activities.

The situation changes when the electricity department announces a power cut for the consecutive next five days to repair the lines that had gone down due to the snowstorm. The notice informed them that it is a temporary matter: for five days their electricity will be cut for one hour, beginning at the 8:00P.M to 9:00P.M. A line had gone for the last snowstorm, and the repairmen are going to take advantage of the milder evening to set it right.” (Lahiri Pp 1)

On 19 March, they receive a mail that there is a power outage for the next five days due to snowstorm. Shoba reads the mail very loudly. Shukumar prepares the dinner removing a candle from the kitchen draw and reminds Shoba that it is bought at the time of her birthday celebration. Shukumar recollects the past memories of Shoba’s fifth month pregnancy. Shoba reaches home earlier and refresh herself and as the power gets shutdown and they both sit together and they had a dinner after a long time. Shoba gets ready to play a game which she is used to, during her childhood days. She used to play it with her friends during usual power cuts. Shoba urges Shukumar to join her for the same game now.

Shukumar is unaware of the game as he stays in India for less time. They start to play the game. The game is to reveal the hidden secret matter. As they are in dark, Shoba prefers to sit with Shukumar

otherwise, she would reach home late, watch television, finish her dinner and go to bed early. But, now there is no way to usual routine, so they sit together and eat their dinner and they start to play the game. Shukumar is very happy because he always wish to speak with his wife. Shoba and Shukumar reveal a secret which they did not discuss earlier. Shukumar uses this wise opportunity at its best and reveals a secret which he ought to tell her for years after the death of their son. And on that day he plans to prepare the dinner and he goes to market and gets the wine, candle, and the vegetables required for preparing the dinner. He happily enters the kitchen and finds it unclean.

Very soon they receive a mail that the electric work is complete. Shukumar becomes very sad as their happiness ends. Shukumar reads the mail loudly and Shoba adds that not to worry as they can play the game today too. Shukumar gets excited. Shoba returns to home early and she refreshes soon and she comes to the dine. Shukumar prepares the dinner and took a wine and candle. And as he approaches near Shoba, she said that "She saw a new house for rent and she is moving to the home." (Lahiri Pp 21). It shows her depression and her sufferings due to her child's death. Shukumar becomes sad and he reveals that 'he was in a labor ward and he took the baby in his hand and he do the funeral to the child and he know the what the child is. Their baby is a boy.' Shukumar describes the baby's appearance "his skin is more red than brown. His hair is in black. His weight is almost five pounds. His fingers are like you when you are in night." (Lahiri Pp 22) When Shukumar reveals the "Temporary Matter" Shoba becomes very much upset. When the power is back Shoba switches off the light and they both sit in the dark. It shows their suffering, loss of their child. During power outage the old couple Mr. and Mrs. Bardford goes for a walk on the road. Their love like Shoba and Shukumar's will never fade.

In conclusion, Shoba, the protagonist standstill in the minds of the readers. Even though she is in struggle, she is very strong. Shukumar shows his love and care to Shoba unendingly. Shukumar never reveals the secret that he stood near her in the labor ward during her labour and he performed the funeral for their baby. This is because both find themselves

physically and psychologically isolated from other people, unable to express their emotions. Shoba and Shukumar do not communicate with each other for a long time. The couple Shoba and Shukumar faces the endless tragedy with their stillborn baby. And at last their love towards each other unites them.

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