



Portrayal of Love and Romance: a Comparative Analysis of Lahiri's *Interpreter of Melodies* and Sidhwa's *Their Language of Love*

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the portrayal of love and its expression in Lahiri and Sidhwa's short stories and attempts to determine the voice and agency of female expression of love. Love and its expression have been the privilege of male in the narratives emerging from South Asia, and female generally had been unexpressive and maintained silence. But the women of the modern times wish to give agency to their thought and so the fictional narratives from Indo-Pak subcontinent are currently giving voice to the women. This problematizes the socio-political and cultural norms and their working in South Asian societies which necessitates to explore the current narratives. The writers intend to read the selected chunks of short stories by Lahiri and Sidhwa under the lens of postcolonial feminist theory. The stories *Interpreter of Melodies* (1999), *Their Language of Love* (2013) by these two writers respectively convey a dominant view of women's agency of love with the significant impact on social and literary scene. The most probable outcome of research is that the women in 20th century Indo-Pak subcontinent are finding their voice not only represented but are being listened through the narratives from South Asia.

Keywords: agency, voice, fictional narratives. postcolonial feminist theory

Introduction

There is Love all around us. Unfortunately, not everyone recognizes this fact, owing primarily to a lack of understanding of what love is. Love, according to some, is the emotion exchanged between two people that involves a profound connection and intimacy. Once they hear the word they think "romance" instantly. Psychologists today, on the other hand, strongly disagree. After all, love is linked to conduct and attitude, and because it is an emotion at its core, it can be subjectively seen and systematically examined. That is the term given to the concept of love. Love is a powerful, essential, and necessary component that occurs by coincidence. People, on the other hand, would rather be liked than loved. It's not that they think love isn't important. They're looking forward to it because they've seen various films on happy and sad love stories.



Fromm (1965) says that in the Victorian era, love was meant to result in marriage, despite the fact that some past generations considered “Romantic” love to be fashionable in the Western world. Many people seek romantic love that will lead to marriage. This new concept of freedom in love must have elevated the object's importance in respect to the relevance of fiction. Unrestricted affection is another component.

The expression and voice of love is gender specific in many writings, which means that men may have a different way of expressing love while women may not express or if at all may speak it out in very different way as compared to that of men. But in recent writings of the 21st century, it seems that women are bold and feel free to express their love. In twenty first century, female bold and free to express her love. She knows the way to make her place in every relation and to achieve fulfillment and satisfaction. Sidhwa in *Breaking it up* (2013) and Lahiri *Interpreter of Love* (1999), are the stories about married couples. In Sidhwa’s short story, Feroza and David’s love story, the collection's greatest tale, is written simply and without frills of vocabulary. This is pure Sidhwa storytelling at its finest. Zareen arrives in the United States to visit her daughter Feroza. Feroza shares a home with two women and a man named David, whom she wishes to marry. Feroza's mother will neither allow or condone Feroza's plans to marry outside the Parsi community. The techniques she uses to break them up might be the beginnings of a new genre of anti-romantic comedy. But there's nothing amusing about severing a love connection or eliminating the source of that love in either side. Zareen succeeds in the end, but at the expense of something she is only now beginning to comprehend.

On the other hand, Lahiri’s short story presents a tourist couple, parents of two kids, Mrs. Das exposes her body to her tour guide when she knows his lusty nature. This story picturize the element of lust intermixed with love. Jhumpa Lahiri (1967) is an American novelist who has written short stories, novels, and essays in English and, more recently, Italian. *Interpreter of Maladies*, her first collection of short stories, earned the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the PEN/Hemingway Award in 1999. For "years," Lahiri's early short tales were rejected by publishers. *Interpreter of Maladies* her first collection of short stories, was eventually published in 1999. *Interpreter of melodies* (1999) is the collection of short stories, but I have chosen only title story. It is around marriage and love between Indian American couple visiting their country of heritage of India. Mr. and Mrs. Das are both American-born Indians who were raised in the United States by Indian immigrants. They had known each other since they were



young and were high school sweethearts. They were once together and married while they were both in their early twenties. A successful marriage is the polar opposite of Mr. and Mrs. Das's marriage, as depicted in the short tale. Even on the simplest of issues, the two are constantly arguing. But the relation of love and trust always maintain their relation although they have communication gap, as Mrs. Das shares her affair and about the birth of Bobby. But it is merely a connection and bond of love and understanding that leads their relation to a successful relation.

Literature Review

Fromm (1956) explains in his book *The Art of Loving* (1956) that love is an orientation that refers to all and not to one, but does not imply the idea that there are no differences between the different types of love that depend on the kind of object that is loved. Aydin makes a connection in *Concept of Love in Oscar Wilde's short stories* (2014) to the religion-based concept of love, except the sacrificial one, another idea indicated is divine love, which is one of the most important current discussions in moral philosophy (p.9). On the contradictory is devastatingly confirming the notion that in almost every class society free love has lowered the morality of community to stretch which is truly upset. And it is fruitlessly the people undertook in it, attempt to it in different names as free love. But especially different researches show to prove the view that sexual desire is evaluated as a result of free and also true love, in that case only sex can establish the passion of merged when they are accepted of the emotional level of fulfillment separately. Surprisingly, in the twentieth century, romantic love categorized as necessary intense form the most common idea for crude sincerity between men and women. Aydin gives definition of love in *Concept of Love in Oscar Wilde's short stories* (2014) that love is agitated is the love which is one-sided, or true love or not. There are many reasons to satisfy people that why true love is actually one-sided. The first reason is God's love that is one-sided. Second reason is human's choice to someone does not mean that they will return that love back. In this case human race must not be afraid to love. They accept that their love may be absolutely one-sided. True love is love which cures, lasts, converts and leads great happiness (p.11). Although self-obsessed and egoistic person has no place in definition of real and true love. True love is natural but not instant.



In Pakistani Anglophone literature, love and romance are mainly addressed through the lens of marriage. The majority of romance stories convey the picture of a woman in a traditional relationship which is marriage, who needs a male to ensure a happy, safe, and satisfied life. According to Catherine Roach (2010), this shows “a pretty limited, traditional, and patriarchal picture of women's life possibilities” (p. 04). Love for women is a whole devotion of body and spirit, a total union with a greater master, the spouse. For a man, it is simply a part of his existence, a fleeting mood that adds value to his personality. Friedman (2003), speaking of the emotional intertwining and mutual dependability of a couple in romantic love, explains how this can lead to a state of significantly reduced autonomy; this is more detrimental for women than men due to the social context guided by norms and traditional cultural values.

The fact that romantic love has “become a core feeling and life, a primary feeling of sociality” explains its extraordinary relevance in our lives. It not only gives us a sense of worth and a cause for being, but it also allows us to reach personal fulfillment. However, when viewed through the lens of a specific society's sociocultural surroundings, romantic love may not appear to be as instructive and beneficial. Indeed, as Grossi and West write, romantic love has been credited with the power to corrode, and occasionally destroy, the social institutions that have traditionally determined and ordered human closeness. Karandashev (2017) *Romantic Love in Cultural Contexts* (2017) by Karandashev is one of the field's most illustrious interdisciplinary contributions. But mainly he elaborated that romantic love appears to be a hazy idea that is frequently substituted with passionate love and sexual desire as synonyms in literature. They have a lot in common, but they are all unique. They must be distinguished when it comes to the subject of romantic love's cross-cultural universality.

This study explains how love and grief are closely linked and have a profound impact on the lives of diverse male and female characters. However, the male perspective on love and romance is elevated, making romantic emotions a male priority, whereas female manifestations of love and romance are either absent or repressed.

Theoretical Framework

The theorists like, Mohanty, Young and Spivak have allocated silence to the female in Indo-Pak subcontinent because of they being doubly colonized subjects of the formerly colonized



states. The women in postcolonial societies are not only marginalized because of postcolonial impact on such societies but also their being women. This allocates them mostly a silent position, especially in the matter of expression of love. This subalternity derives them of the voice to represent themselves. But however, the postcolonial narratives of the 20th century from Indo-Pak subcontinent have been found revisiting their subaltern nature as per concepts of Modern orient proposed by Edward Saeed. To be more specific, male characters such as Mr. Kapasi and Nav are often shown to understand and respond to love urges from a passionate view whereas women such as Mrs. Das and Roshni remain limited to the compassionate expressions of love. However, this is not to claim that this division is fixed in terms of gender. On the contrary, quite interestingly, both Nav and Mr. Kapasi are also shown to change from passionate, demanding, dominating to compassionate, subservient and self - effacing lovers during the course of the short story. It is precisely this shift and the ease with which male figures are able to use and modify love urges for their benefits that makes love and romance a complicated and challenging situation for women within patriarchal societies, both within and outside the bond of marriage. In the marriage or in other relationship where male is dominated and demanding figure, female is silence agent specially in Asian writings. In Lahiri's short story Mr. Kapasi feels attracted towards Mrs. Das, even he tries his best to convey his message about his feelings, as he wrote a piece of paper for her and set his car's back-view mirror to see her. Mrs. Das never shows her intentions but she focuses on his discussions and even she did not bother her husband while he was talking. In Sidhwa's short story, Feroza is presented very confident and bold because she expresses her feelings openly about her boyfriend, but on some points she does not express. In literature, women silence is common, not only in Lahiri and Sidhwa's work but almost in entire literature women are silent on various occasions, no matter how confident, bold and independent they are!

Data Analysis

This part of paper deals with the analysis of short stories, one of Sidhwa's short story *Their Language of Love* (2012) and the other one is Lahiri's short story *Interpreter of Melodies* (1999) have been read under the lens of Karandashev's statement "Passionate love is commonly associated with the terms 'arousal', 'desire', 'passion', and 'infatuation'. Compassionate love is associated with, 'love', 'affection', 'liking', 'attraction', and 'caring'" (6), to elaborate the Asian female's silence to express her love, this silence to express is based



on elite class vs lower class, educated vs uneducated. Love is core of stories that writers use to fuel or develop their stories. This research attempts to find whether the voice and silence of women portrayal of love in Pakistan is available and if yes, what is its extent.

“Mrs. Das, for her part, had flexed one side of her mouth, smiling dutifully at Mr. Kapasi, without displaying any interest in him” (Lahiri, 1999, p. 29).

Women expressions are always ambiguous as a woman does not express herself easily. In literature, female is not allowed to express her feelings or love. In Lahiri’s writing female are not so expressive and they usually keep quiet. In the above line, this is clearly mentioned that Mrs. Das has no interest in Mr. Kapasi, as she merely gives a small smile to him. Male is always very passionate in his desires and expressions but female avoids to do so. In the very start of the story Mr. Kapasi observes Mrs. Das very keenly and he feels attracted towards her. As Lahiri elaborates in the opening lines that “In the rearview mirror, Mr. Kapasi watched as Mrs. Das emerged slowly from his bulky white Ambassador, dragging her shaved, largely bare legs across the back seat” (Lahiri, 1999, p.29).

Love is a combination of different sets of emotion, beliefs and behavior linked with strong feelings of warmth, affection, respect and protectiveness for another person. In literature every poet, scientists and writers have their own perspective. Love and lust both have different definitions. Eros type of love that only focus on passionate love, these types of love only want too physical. Mr. Kapasi is attracted towards Mrs. Das foreign dress, outer look and physical appearance, even he stares at her with his rearview mirror. Mr. Kapasi, observed her dress very fanatically by saying that “She wore a red-and-white checked skirt that stopped above her knee, slip-on shoes with square wooden heel, and a close-fitting blouse styled like a man’s undershirt” (Lahiri, 1999, p. 30).

These lines reflect Mr. Kapasi’s lusty nature, and passionate love that only is said to be more fundamental and filled with sexual overtones. Passionate love is fit on males as they easily express their feelings and their expressions rather than females. Female expressions are ambiguous, as they often express their feelings. But mostly maintain silence in most of the situations. But when female speaks up, they speak openly, especially the educated and elite class females are elaborate their feelings very easily. As one point Mrs. Das breaking her extended silence says, “But so romantic” (Lahiri, 1999, p.32). Romantic word astonishes Mr. Das because Mrs. Das uses this word on Mr. Kapasi’s another job as interpreter. Romantic



word is not suitable in this situation but she uses this word, Mrs. Das also enjoys this company because she knows that Mr. Kapasi has been keeping an eye on her. She feels comfort in the presence of Mr. Kapasi. This shows compassionate love of female that is the Agape type of love, which is caring, attraction and liking. Mr. Kapasi is attracted towards Mrs. Das at first sight and frequently tries to talk with her, try to stare at her by the car view mirror. On the other hand, Mrs. Das also has some soft corner for Mr. Kapasi after knowing about his second job of interpreter of patients, Mrs. Das too feels up to some extent, attracted to Mr. Kapasi because we can see that “For the first time, her eyes met Mr. Kapasi’s in the rearview mirror: pale, a bit small, their gaze fixed but drowsy” (Lahiri, 1999, p.32).

Lahiri elaborates, Mr. Kapasi is the only one who clicks her mind’s comfort and, so, she decided to tell her extra marital affair with Mr. Das’s friend and conceiving Ronny. She says, “He is not his. I beg your pardon. Raj’s. He is not Raj’s son” (Lahiri, 1999, 37-38).

Mrs. Das, actually wanted a trustworthy listener, to tell him about her past. On the other hand, Mr. Kapasi falls in love and expects a lot, but after listening her truth about past Mr. Kapasi shocked and cannot say anything. Mrs. Das also feeling very relaxed after revealing her truth. Expression of love and feelings builds relations while Mr. and Mrs. Das, both are not communicative with each other, even after love marriage but lack of communication is making any relation dry and lifeless. Passionate and compassionate love both are presented in this story.

As Lahiri (1999) presents female silence to speech, Sidhwa (2013) also present female expression of love openly without any hesitation. Society and atmosphere also impact on personality a lot, as Sidhwa’s (2013) character Feroza changes herself according to American culture and freedom. This story is short part of the Sidhwa’s novel *The American Brat* (1993), where Feroza is in America and fall in love with David, she informs her parents very clearly that she wants to marry with David. As Sidhwa explains, “Please, please, don’t be angry, and please try to make Grandmother understand.... I love you all so much _ I won’t be able to bear it if you don’t accept David” (Sidhwa. 2013, P.30).

In these lines Feroza openly announces her love by her letter. She knew that her grandmother always makes her decisions. Here she expresses her love for her family and for her beloved. Asian literature it seems very clearly women usually maintain her silence, but educated and non-educated, atmosphere and culture difference, make a different picture of women. Feroza was shy and reserved girl when she’s in Pakistan but she changes her attitude



as she takes stand for herself. She clearly announces her love and about her chosen partner for marriage, David. Feroza lives in United State from two years almost and she absorb new set of values and new way of thinking, that definitely disturbed her mother who flew Pakistan to United States, just because of Feroza's announcement about David. Feroza conveys her new thoughts and give new convictions to her mother by saying, "You will have to look things in different way, Mum. It's different culture" (Sidhwa, 2013, p.36).

Feroza adopted new culture and in above mentioned line she forces her mother to think in new ways of society, Feroza loves David and wants to marry him but her family rules are different and they will not allow to marry her. In her past zone, when she was in Pakistan, Feroza was silent and shy, even she forbids her mother for various things. But in America she becomes more confident and bolder enough to make her decisions by herself. Women's journey from silence to speech depends upon her atmosphere, education and class. Elite class women can take step for their rights as well as educated women can take. In the past time, like before twentieth century female's thoughts were oppressive and bound, they made a specific cage around them and they just put themselves in that cage, no matter that cage is of thoughts or behavior. As Sidhwa mentions here about love, and shows Zareen's point of view about love who is pretend to be modern and well- educated, but she is bound in her specific thinking. "Love? love? Love comes after marriage! And only if you marry the right man! Don't think you can be happy by making us all unhappy" (Sidhwa, 2013, p.37).

These lines show Zareen thinking about love, although it is mother concern for her child but it is also elaborating the female silence to express feelings that fix in her instinct. But now women express her feelings openly, and try to fulfill her wishes. Usually, it seems that when females take step and start speaking for their wishes, mostly considered them rebel. Specially, when girls express their feelings and love, society does not accept their choices, same is the case with Zareen, she called Feroza, "You've become American Brat!" (Sidhwa, 2013, p.37).

This is bitter picture of society when girls or females take stand for themselves; there are a lot of people like Zareen who call women brat. Female, at least move to express their love and feelings and to quite silent. Women now presents in literature as agentive, no matter they are on happy with it or not. As Zareen wants to take Feroza back to Pakistan but Feroza insists to marry with David. Although Feroza shows resistance and Zareen's disappointment



take her to departure from America, on the other hand Feroza's ambiguous and confuse expressions shows her inner feeling on Zareen's departure. As Sidhwa mention, "Standing forlornly by him Feroza looked insecure and uprooted. As Zareen waved and smiled, an ache caught her heart and the stiff muscles in her face trembled" (Sidhwa, 2013, p. 54).

These lines show Feroza's situation who stuck between her mother and love, at the end she chooses her love but she too some extent feels repentance. In above line, 'insecurity' word indicates her love for her mother and family, but David's love stops her. Feroza's resistance makes her decision strong that is in favors of David. Sidhwa's heroines follows a distinct pattern of resistance and resilience, beginning with conforming to established norms and traditions, then developing resistance to them and employing every available means of resistance to emerge as strong women. Same is with Feroza, who follows her rules strictly while she was in Pakistan but when she starts lives in America her way of living and behavior going to change. Her journey from resilience to resistance leads her to ambivalence situation, where she wants to go to her family just to assure them that she has a right decision, as Sidhwa says, "She needed desperately to be with them _ to be assured she had done the right thing" (Sidhwa, 2013, p. 55). Feroza wants to assure her family that she is right and she will happy with David after marriage, but she feels lost at the airport. She feels bounce back; she tries to stop her tears.

Findings

This study is about, passionate and compassionate love that is associated with affection, care and liking. Sidhwa (2013) and Lahiri (1999) wrap up their characters as they always play vital role in their fictions. I have read a few chunks of short stories *Breaking it up* (2013), and *Interpreter of Love* (1999), to explain about women silence to expression about love, under the lens of Karandashev's statement "Passionate love is commonly associated with the terms 'arousal', 'desire', 'passion', and 'infatuation'. Compassionate love is associated with, 'love', 'affection', 'liking', 'attraction', and 'caring'" (p. 6). According to this statement love is about two types, along with types it is also found that women express their love but mostly hesitate. Love is combination of different sets of emotion, beliefs and behavior linked with strong feelings of warmth, affection, respect and protectiveness for another person. Literature has its own perspective; their point of views is different about love and life. Women expressions are ambiguous, they always hide feelings and love. Usually, educated and elite class females are



bold and confident, but lower class and uneducated females mostly keep silent and do not share their feelings. It seems that culture, education, tradition and class matter a lot in silence to expression of women that an elite class and educated woman can speak more clearly and confidently more than lower class and uneducated women, but, with the education and class, atmosphere also matters regarding expression of feelings of love.

Firstly, Lahiri's story *Interpreter of Love* (1999) describes the silence of female to express her love. Mrs. Das and Mr. Das normally not too expressive with each other even in the entire story, talk with each other very rarely. Mrs. Das feel free to talk with Mr. Kapasi, the interpreter, because of his side profession of interpreter of maladies. Mrs. Das tells him each and every thing about past and even about secret about her son. Mr. Kapasi falls in love with Mrs. Das and expects a lot, but after knowing about her past truth Mr. Kapasi remains shocked and cannot say anything. But on the other hand, Mrs. Das feeling relaxed after revealing her truth because she needs someone who listens her about her guilt and says nothing on that, so she expresses herself before Mr. Kapasi and feels free. Mr. and Mrs. Das, both are not much communicative with each other, although they have love marriage but lack of communication leads their relationship to that state where Mrs. Das needs someone for her catharsis.

Secondly, Sidhwa's short story *Breaking it up* (2013), derived from Sidhwa's novel *An American Brat* (1993), is also about love between unmarried couple Feroza and David. Feroza who is very shy and introvert girl becomes very bold and confident after change in geographical atmosphere. Feroza writes a letter to her parents to accept David, because she wants to marry him. This letter proves that female now can express their feeling very openly and clearly. Even Feroza forces her mother to adopt new culture and tradition where a male and female can marry according to their wish. In this story it is clearly mentioned that in the past time like, twentieth century female felt oppressive and bound, they felt themselves in a cage of silence, but now they can speak whatever they want. Women's journey from silence to speech depends upon her class and education, it seems that well-educated and elite class women can take step for them, for their rights and betterment, and can express about her liking easily like Feroza. This study shows the journey of women's silence to speech, and that education and class matter a lot in this matter.

Conclusion



This study answers the question whether women portrayals reflect the voice or silence of love in Pakistan fiction, and if yes, to what extent. There are two kinds of love, and it appears that women express their love in one of these two ways. Love is a collection of sentiments, beliefs, and behaviours that are linked to deep feelings of warmth, affection, respect, and protectiveness for another person. Silence to express depends on social class, and on being educated or illiterate. Love is at the heart of stories, and writers utilize it to drive or grow them. In postcolonial short fiction from Indo-Pak subcontinent (Sidhwa and Lahiri), each woman character has her unique point of view on love and life. Women's expressions are enigmatic, and they always conceal their emotions and affection. But educated and upper-class women often appear brave and confident, but lower-class and uneducated women often keep silent and remain unable to express their sentiments. It seems that culture, education, tradition and class matter a lot in silence to expression of women and that an elite class and educated woman can speak more clearly and confidently than a woman from lower and uneducated class, while geography of women's habitation also matters regarding a woman's expression of her feelings.

Lahiri's short story *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) describes a female's quietness in expressing her love and emotions. Mrs. Das and Mr. Das aren't usually expressive with each other, and they only speak to each other a few times throughout the novel. Mrs. Das feels free to speak with Mr. Kapasi, the interpreter, because of his side job as an interpreter. Mrs. Das tells him everything about her past, including her son. Mr. Kapasi falls in love with Mrs. Das and expects a lot from her, but when he learns about her past, he is stunned and speechless. Mrs. Das, on the other hand, feels relieved after disclosing her truth since she needs someone to listen to her about her wrongdoing and not say anything. So, she expresses herself in front of Mr. Kapasi and feels free. Mr. and Mrs. Das do not speak with each other, despite the fact that they have a love marriage. Their lack of communication has brought their relationship to the point where Mrs. Das requires someone to help her with her catharsis.

On the other hand, Sidhwa's short story *Breaking it up* (2013) is a well-known narrative about unmarried pair Feroza and David. This story is based on Sidhwa's novel *An American Brat* (1993), in which Feroza, who is shy and reserved, becomes assertive and confident following a change in environment. Feroza writes her parents a letter requesting that they should accept David since she wishes to marry him; this letter demonstrates that women can



now express their feelings openly and plainly While residing in free and liberal Western culture. Feroza even forces her mother to accept a new culture and tradition in which a male and female can marry as they like. Woman is capable to take step for herself, for her ease, for her happiness but class, education and circumstances play a significant role. Women's journey from silence to speech is taking shapes now but mostly in elite class educated women which is expected to further trickle down with the passage of time.

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