
Difficult Relationships in Fences and in a Temporary Matter

Introduction

Although works of literature can be written in different time periods, they can have numerous similarities and differences. In August Wilson's play *Fences*, a woman named Rose struggles in her marriage after she finds out her husband cheated on her. Similarly, in Jhumpa Lahiri's "A Temporary Matter", Shoba wishes to end her relationship with her husband after the loss of their child. Though, both Rose and Shoba are in difficult relationships they chose to handle their situations differently. Unfortunately, Rose has no choice but to stay with Troy because she needs him to provide for their son. While, Shoba chooses to leave her husband because she can support herself on her own and doesn't need to rely on him. Although, Rose and Shoba are both wives, Shoba decides to leave while Rose doesn't, demonstrating women can feel trapped in their marriages and handle the situation differently depending on the time period.

Dependence on Men and Freedom to Decide for Themselves

Initially, in the play *Fences* Rose loves her husband Troy, but ultimately ends up resenting him because of his bad decisions. Throughout the play, Troy speaks explicitly about Rose to his friend Bono. At one point, he tells him "...Don't you come by my house Monday morning talking about time to go to work... 'cause I'm still gonna be stroking!" (Wilson, 1065). This statement implies that Troy will be having sex with Rose and he doesn't want Bono to interrupt. Each time Troy says something like this it makes Rose uncomfortable which is not something that a husband should do in a healthy relationship. Additionally, Troy cheats on Rose with a woman named Alberta and gets her pregnant. Unfortunately, when she dies in childbirth Rose agrees to help Troy take care of his daughter. She tells Troy that "From right now... this child got a mother. But you a womanless man" (Wilson 1099).

It goes to show that even though Troy and Rose are no longer together romantically, he has confined her in the marriage to a point where she cannot leave because she feels an obligation to his child. Rose expresses that she feels because she's been married to Troy all these years, he has kept her from pursuing her own dreams and she has had limited opportunities because of their marriage. Also, because the play takes place in the 1950's it is likely that Rose would not be able to support herself or her son because women were heavily reliant on men to provide for them during that time period.

Moreover, in "A Temporary Matter" Shoba is unhappy in her marriage because she doesn't feel the same connection with her husband after the loss of their child. This story takes place in modern times as opposed to *Fences*, hence why Shoba has her own career and her husband Shukumar stays home because he is in graduate school. When they speak their conversations are short and devoid of any meaning, as they don't know what to say to one another. Shoba blames Shukumar for not being there when their child passed away because he was at a business conference when she gave birth. The narrator states, "Instead he thought of how he and Shoba had become experts at avoiding each other in their three-bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible" (Lahiri 2).

Shoba and Shukumar don't enjoy being around each other anymore and Shoba focuses herself on her work instead of interacting with her husband because of the anger she feels toward him. There is a power outage that occurs at night and brings Shoba and Shukumar together and they feel more comfortable to converse with the lights turned off. They talk about how they first meet and seem to rekindle their romance until Shoba reveals that she is moving out. When their baby was born Shoba asked the doctor not to reveal the gender, knowing this Shukumar says to Shoba, "Our baby was a boy. His skin was more red than brown. He weighed almost five pounds. His fingers were curled shut, just like yours in the night" (Lahiri 10). Shukumar says this to hurt Shoba on purpose which further shows they are not in a good relationship. Shoba's decision to leave Shukumar shows that women in the present day now have more freedom to do what they please and are able to support themselves on their own without needing to rely on their husbands.

Women's Opportunities

Furthermore, the fact that both Rose and Shoba deal with their marriages differently shows how women have acquired more opportunities throughout the years. *Fences* takes place in the late 1950's, at a time when women would be able to get jobs, but it was still new for them to be in the workforce. Rose may have been afraid to get a job or felt that being a housewife was her responsibility. Troy has been able to give her a good life thus far, so she may have thought why not continue to stay with him. When Rose speaks to Cory about his father she says "I took on his life as mine and mixed up the pieces so that you couldn't hardly tell which was which anymore. It was my choice. It was my life and I didn't have to live it like that" (Wilson 1109). In this quote, Rose explains that she had to adjust her life to be with Troy and that it was her choice. Then she says that it was "...what life offered me in the way of being a woman" (Wilson 1109). This shows that as a woman Rose was limited in her opportunities and when she met Troy she settled down because she didn't know if she would ever have another chance at a good life.

In contrast, "A Temporary Matter" takes place in the 90's, at a time when women had more freedoms than they did in the 60's and were more independent. In the story, Shoba has her own career and supports her husband, which is the opposite of Rose and Troy in *Fences*. The narrator says "She had money saved up for a security deposit. The apartment was on Beacon Hill... She had signed the lease that night before coming home" (Lahiri 10). This quote proves that women in Shoba's time had more freedoms than they did in the 60's and could choose to leave their husbands if they wanted to, exhibiting how far women's rights have come.

Conclusion

Lastly, even though Rose and Shoba are in similar situations they make different decisions on how to handle their predicaments. Rose suffers because her husband chooses to be unfaithful to her despite the fact that they have been married for eighteen years and share a son. Nevertheless, she chooses to stay with him because he provides for her and she is helping him raise his daughter. On the other hand, Shoba feels unhappy in her marriage and no longer loves her husband after they can no longer bond following the loss of their child. Shoba decides to move into an apartment and live on her own because she no longer wants to be with her husband. The difference between Shoba's bravery to move forward with her life and Rose's decision to stay expresses how women handle situations differently depending on what is

accepted at the time.

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