

**Feminist Writings**  
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**A Temporary Matter - Part 2**

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Feminist Writings where we will begin with a new text today which will be a Jhumpa Lahiri's short story A Temporary Matter. Okay.

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tour for expectant parents. Her placenta had weakened and she'd had a cesarean, though not quickly enough. The doctor explained that these things happen. He smiled in the kindest way it was possible to smile at people known only professionally. Shoba would be back on her feet in a few weeks. There was nothing to indicate that she would not be able to have children in the future.

These days Shoba was always gone by the time Shukumar woke up. He would open his eyes and see the long black hairs she shed on her pillow and think of her, dressed, sipping her third cup of coffee already, in her office downtown, where she searched for typographical errors in textbooks and marked them, in a code she had once explained to him, with an assortment of colored pencils. She would do the same for his dissertation, she promised, when it was ready. He envied her the specificity of her task, so unlike the elusive nature of his. He was a mediocre student who had a facility for absorbing details without curiosity. Until September he had been diligent if not dedicated, summarizing chapters, outlining arguments on pads of yellow lined paper. But now he would lie in their bed until he grew bored, gazing at his side of the closet which Shoba always left partly open, at the row of the tweed jackets and corduroy trousers he would not have to choose from to teach his classes that semester. After the baby died it was too late to withdraw from his teaching duties. But his adviser had arranged things so that he had the spring semester to himself. Shukumar was in his sixth year of graduate school. "That and the summer should give you a good push," his adviser had said. "You should be able to wrap things up by next September."



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Now we are cut back into the present. So, we are given and this is again a very fine artistry but in different kinds, different points of time. So you know we are given the past, we are given the past which determine the present in terms of the loss, in terms of the human tragedy they experience. And now we are cut back into the present and we are told that by the time Shukumar wakes up these days Shobha has gone, sipping her third cup of coffee in her office.

And what does she do in the office; she searches for typographic errors in textbooks and marks, the typographical errors. So she does copy editing presumably in an advertisement

firm, presumably in a publishing firm we do not quite know for sure at this point of time but this is what we have been told.

In a very micro kind of description that she points out typographic errors in textbooks and marks them in a code that she had once explained to them with an assortment of colored pencils. She would do the same for his dissertation, she promised, when it was ready. So she said she would copy edit dissertation when it is ready and mark all the typographical errors. He envied her the specificity of her task, so unlike the elusive nature of his.

So in this description that his dissertation has PhD or doctoral thesis it will obviously be more abstract is obviously more philosophical academic, it has this academic abstraction about it compared to contrast to that Shobha's minute attention to details is very very envious to him. I mean he envies her, the skill that she has for specificity in terms of pointing out, in terms of mapping out the typographical errors here and there.

He was a mediocre student who had a facility for absorbing details without curiosity. So we are given again a background in terms of his propensity as a student, in terms of his inclination as a student. So we are told that he was a mediocre student but he could absorb lot of details, he used to absorb lots of data without curiosity, without imagination. Until September he had been diligent if not dedicated, summarizing chapters, outlining arguments on pads of yellow lined paper.

So now we told that he was more or less collected information at that point of time, that information was obviously informing his thesis. But now he would lie in their bed until he grew bored, gazing at his side of the closet which Shobha always left partly open, at the row of the tweed jackets and corduroy trousers he would not have to choose from to teach his classes that semester.

So we are also told that he is not teaching this semester and at the row of corduroy trousers and tweed jackets just left there unchanged, untouched because you know he is not using them, because he is not teaching that semester. After the baby died it was too late to withdraw from his teaching duties. But his adviser had arranged things so that he had the spring semester to himself. Shukumar was in his sixth year of graduate school. "That and the summer should give you a good push," his adviser had said. "You should be able to wrap things up by next September."

So you know that was the condition that he had at that point of time because he was obviously lost the baby and there was deep human tragedy and he it was too late at that point of time to pull-out of the teaching responsibilities next semester but his advisor had arranged for this somehow and advised him to take a break and told him that summer next year should give you a push and by next September you should be able to wrap things up in terms of submitting your dissertation.

So you know this is a story about two very different individuals, individuals of very different skills, who are partners of each other and we find that what Shukumar is going through now is an inertia, is a limbo state where it is completely unproductive where he can't function properly and why he is always absent minded, why he is always lethargic and he cannot bring himself to work, he can't bring himself to function, he lies in his bed all day staring at the ceiling and not doing anything apart from the banal duties of the house, apart from cooking and doing little household chores. Half of those chores he does nothing he does not step of the house, he does not collect mails, he does not buy grocery, does not buy wine. So he gets more and more withdrawn into this state of limbo nothingness that he finds himself in post such high loss.

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But nothing was pushing Shukumar. 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. He thought of how he no longer looked forward to weekends, when she sat for hours on the sofa with her colored pencils and her files, so that he feared that putting on a record in his own house might be rude. He thought of how long it had been since she looked into his eyes and smiled, or whispered his name on those rare occasions they still reached for each other's bodies before sleeping.

In the beginning he had believed that it would pass, that he and Shoba would get through it all somehow. She was only thirty-three. She was strong, on her feet again. But it wasn't a consolation. It was often nearly lunchtime when Shukumar would finally pull himself out of bed and head downstairs to the coffeepot, pouring out the extra bit Shoba left for him, along with an empty mug, on the countertop.

Shukumar gathered onion skins in his hands and let them drop into the garbage pail, on top of the ribbons of fat he'd trimmed from the lamb. He ran the water in the sink, soaking the knife and the cutting board, and rubbed a lemon half along his fingertips to get rid of the garlic smell, a trick he'd learned from Shoba. It was seven thirty. Through the window he saw the sky, like soft black pitch. Uneven banks of snow still lined the sidewalks, though it was warm enough for people to walk about without hats or gloves. Nearly three feet fallen in the last storm, so that for a week people had to walk single file, in narrow trenches. For a week it was Shukumar's excuse for not leaving the house. But now the trenches were widening, and water seeped steadily into grates in the pavement.

"The lamb won't be done by eight," Shukumar said. "We may have to eat in the dark."



And we're given more detailed descriptions in terms of what he is doing and we're told that, 'But nothing was pushing Shukumar. Instead he thought of how he and Shobha had become experts at avoiding each other in their three-bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible.' So you know a lot of time they spent not talking to each other

these days a lot of time they spend avoiding each other these days in the three bedroom house.

And they spend time at separate floors if possible. This is the point in the story where we began to gather description of the crises of communication that these two people have. They keep talking their self they don't have to speak to each other in a proper way. So they keep talking about peripheral things, they keep talking about things surrounding them but very rarely if any time at all they talk to each other in a way they have a proper conversation and proper dialogue.

Okay. So, he thought of how he no longer looked forward to weekends, when she sat for hours on the sofa with her colored pencils and her files, so that he feared that putting on a record on his own house might be rude. He thought of how long it had been since she looked into his eyes and smiled, or whispered his name on those rare occasions they still reached for each other's bodies before sleeping.

So that kind of intimacy is lost that, kind of intimacy of looking into each other and reaching out to each other before sleeping, that kind of intimacy is veining out, is petering out as it were post the child loss, post the trauma of child loss. Post the tragedy, post the absence so that absent child and the story becomes very very conspicuous presence in a very spectral because that informs the absence which happened subsequently.

That informs the crises of communication that happened subsequently, that informs, they collapse of communication as it were between these two people who used to love each other very intensely at one point of time. In the beginning he had believed that it would pass, that he and Shobha would get through it all somehow.

You know in the beginning there was some hope that they will get through somehow, she was only thirty-three. She was strong on her feet again. But it was not a consolation. It was often nearly lunchtime when Shukumar would finally pull himself out of bed and head downstairs to the coffeepot, pouring out the extra bit Shobha left for him, along with an empty mug, on the countertop.

So, again we are told, the spatial temporal thing is very important over here because we are told that it will be almost lunch time when Shukumar would pull himself out of bed, head downstairs with a coffee pot and pour himself a coffee. The whole sense of time is very

different because Shobha by the time would be in her office, having worked half a day Shukumar would just wake up barely crawl downstairs and have a cup of coffee which Shobha left for him in the morning on the counter top, with an empty mug on the counter top.

So you know he obviously has a very different kind of lifestyle here compared to Shobha and that difference is obviously something to do with her inertia of not functioning the inertia not accepting the fact that they have lost a child and that makes him more and more withdrawn where Shobha on the other hand looks for an excuse to work, to step out of the house and just completely absorb herself away into all kinds of external work activities just that she doesn't have to think about this loss and just so that they don't need to have a proper communication at all.

So that they can just keep talking about peripheral things, unimportant things but that's importance in the story, that is the reason why the peripheral unimportant conversations, the peripheral unimportant objects becomes important because they actually becomes pointers, the things that are not set, objects that are not mentioned and like any great storyteller what Lahiri really excels in terms of telling you things which are not been said right and telling you and showing you objects which are not been shown.

So, like all great storytellers, like all great writers of short story what is not said, what is not mention, what is not spelt up becomes exponentially more important than what is spelt out. Okay and that is something which happens at a very human intimate level at Lahiri's fiction.

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Okay. Shukumar gathered onion skins in his hands and let them drop into the garbage pail, on top of the ribbons of fat he'd trimmed from the lamb. He ran the water in the sink, soaking the knife and the cutting board, and rubbed a lemon half along his fingertips to get rid of the garlic smell, a trick he'd learned from Shobha, so we are given a very detailed description of how he is cooking a lamb curry. It was seven thirty in the evening.

Through the window he saw the sky, like a soft black pitch. Uneven banks of snow still lined the sidewalks, though it was warm enough for people to walk about without hats or gloves. So this is March this is the end of winter but there is still some remnant of snow in a distance. So people are walking without gloves or hats. It's warming up but then there is still some snow happening.

So you know this is the time which is also quite liminal in quality between some summer and winter March that liminality is important for us in the story because last part of the story is about liminality, it is about transitions, it is about moving from one register to another register, it is moving from one kind of sign system to another sign system between from happiness to absence, from winter to summer.

And you know this transition from a very wintry code bare landscape into a more summery landscape that transition is important in the story because that is a liminality that is been mentioned in a very detailed description over here. Nearly three feet had fallen in the last storm, so that for a week people had to walk single file, in a narrow trenches.

So again the word 'trench' is important because that is a law in metaphor. But the snow had just happened so thickly that people had to walk in one line in a very narrow trench. For a week that was Shukumar's excuse for not leaving the house. But now the trenches were widening, and water drained steadily into grates in the pavement.

So you know that was a very excuse that Shukumar not to leave the house, he just stayed in the house for ever because there was very heavy snow outside and the trenches which were made where people just walk in a single file, like soldiers marching in a very claustrophobic trenches. But that is long since gone and then Shukumar obviously is still doesn't want to leave the house for obvious reason.

Okay and then he tells "The lamb won't be done by eight," Shukumar said. "We may have to eat in the dark." Right so you know it would be power cut from 8 o'clock and he tells Shobha

that I am still cooking a lamb and it won't be done by 8 so we might have to light candles and this is what Shobha suggest.

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"We can light candles," Shoba suggested. She unclipped her hair, coiled neatly at her nape during the days, and pried the sneakers from her feet without untying them. "I'm going to shower before the lights go," she said, heading for the staircase. "I'll be down."

Shukumar moved her satchel and her sneakers to the side of the fridge. She wasn't this way before. She used to put her coat on a hanger, her sneakers in the closet, and she paid bills as soon as they came. But now she treated the house as if it were a hotel. The fact that the yellow chintz armchair in the living room clashed with the blue-and-maroon Turkish carpet no longer bothered her. On the enclosed porch at the back of the house, a crisp white bag still sat on the wicker chaise, filled with lace she had once planned to turn into curtains.

While Shoba showered, Shukumar went into the downstairs bathroom and found a new toothbrush in its box beneath the sink. The cheap, stiff bristles hurt his gums, and he spit some blood into the basin. The spare brush was one of many stored in a metal basket. Shoba had bought them once when they were on sale, in the event that a visitor decided, at the last minute, to spend the night.



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So these two people are forced to have a candle light dinner like lovers, like romantic people but then we're told that this is actually and that is a very excel way of writing a story because that completely inverts and problematizes the stereotypical typical signifiers of love, romance, fulfilment etc. So the candle light dinner over here becomes a compulsion to these two people at this point of time and that is obviously something that is been hinted at over and over again in the story and then she tells him I am going to take a shower before the light go she said heading for the staircase. "I'll be down". I will just come down the moment I am done.

Shukumar moved her satchel and her sneakers to the side of the fridge. She wasn't this way before. And then we are told again how the transitions happen how he has become a different person post the child loss etc. so she was not this way before. She used to put her coat on a hanger, her sneakers in the closet, and she paid bills as soon as they came. So she was a very meticulous careful person, she put exactly the coat on the hanger where it is supposed to go, sneakers would be in her closet and she paid all the bills on time.

So she paid a lot of attention to details earlier "But now she treated the house as if it were a hotel." and that's again a very very important word hotel. So what is the difference between a house and the hotel. A hotel is a temporary matter, a hotel is a liminal place, a hotel is where people come and go, a hotel is where people don't live they stay for a period of time and then go away.

And that transition, that difference between home and a hotel is something very is very symbolic in quality and that is something we are told about Shobha that she treats his house as if it were a hotel and she is about to leave at some point of time and that is a hint which is given to us right away with just one word hotel. And this is what we call literature, the economy of expression so with very few words with almost minimalist word we are told so much, we are given so much information that, it's not so much information there is so much interpretation.

We have interpretative information, we are told that this is something which may happen we might have anticipating certain thing with just one word hotel. Right so treated her house as if it were a hotel. The fact that the yellow chintz armchair in the living room clashed with the blue-and-maroon Turkish carpet no longer bothered her. So initially before that she was so bothered about the compatibility of colors so the like of it. But right now the yellow armed chair and the blue and maroon Turkish carpet they did not match at all in terms of color combination but it didn't bother her anymore.

On the enclosed porch at the back of the house, a crisp white bag still sat on the wicker chaise, filled with lace she had once planned to turn into curtains. So again things left undone, things left half finished, things which are incompatible and these descriptions become very important because these have become pointers to psychological condition of these two people, the fact that certain things are been left undone, certain things are left unfinished, interrupted just like the unborn child, the dead child.



It was supposed to be a fulfilling experience but then it turned out to be a frustrating tragedy, a great tragedy, a great interruption which has marked them with a loss forever. There is a sense of permanence about it. While Shobha showered, Shukumar went into the downstairs bathroom and found a new toothbrush in its box beneath the sink. The cheap, stiff bristles hurt his gums, and he spit some blood into the basin. The spare brush was one of many stored in a metal basket. Shobha had bought them once when they were on sale, in the event that a visitor decided, at the last minute, to spend the night.

Now again look at this symbolic significance of this particular episode, these are brushes which were meant for visitors, these are brushes which Shobha had bought in bulk just so if a visitor came for dinner or stayed back or had to stay back, at the last second there will be some toothbrushes for them. Now Shukumar who presumably is the owner of the house presumably lives in this house he is using the toothbrushes which are meant for visitors.

Now if you connect that to the idea of Shobha treating her house like a hotel, then they two make a connection and we have a sense that both these people realise that this is not something which can be a permanent home for them anymore, this is something which might end, this (()) (16:12) might end at any point of time, this stay might end at any point of time, they are not living here anymore, they are staying here.

And like any stay, you know they feel like visitors they might just go at some point of time okay. So this is again very symbolic little bit about using a visitor's toothbrush is very very important and it is very meticulously curated before us as readers. Not that we are told we have been given the symbolic significance of those episodes in a very beautiful graphic way. Okay.

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It was typical of her. She was the type to prepare for surprises, good and bad. If she found a skirt or a purse she liked she bought two. She kept the bonuses from her job in a separate bank account in her name. It hadn't bothered him. His own mother had fallen to pieces when his father died, abandoning the house he grew up in and moving back to Calcutta, leaving Shukumar to settle it all. He liked that Shoba was different. It astonished him, her capacity to think ahead. When she used to do the shopping, the pantry was always stocked with extra bottles of olive and corn oil, depending on whether they were cooking Italian or Indian. There were endless boxes of pasta in all shapes and colors, zippered sacks of basmati rice, whole sides of lambs and goats from the Muslim butchers at Haymarket, chopped up and frozen in endless plastic bags. Every other Saturday they would through the maze of stalls Shukumar eventually knew by heart. He watched in disbelief as she bought more food, trailing behind her with canvas bags as she pushed through the crowd, arguing under the morning sun with boys too young to shave but already missing teeth, who twisted up brown paper bags of artichokes, plums, gingerroot, and yams, and dropped them on their scales, and tossed them to Shoba one by one. She didn't mind being jostled, even when she was pregnant. She was tall, and broad-shouldered, with hips that her obstetrician assured her were made for childbearing. During the drive back home, as the car curved along the Charles, they invariably marveled at how much food they'd bought.

It never went to waste. When friends dropped by, Shoba would throw together meals that appeared to have taken half a day to prepare, from things she had frozen and bottled, not cheap things in tins but peppery sauces that had marinated herself with rosemary, and chutneys that she cooked on Sundays, stirring boiling pots of tomatoes and prunes. Her labeled mason jars lined the shelves of the kitchen, in endless sealed pyramids. Shukumar had agreed, to last for their grandchildren to taste. They'd eaten it all by now. Shukumar had been preparing their supplies steadily, preparing meals for the two of them, measuring out cupfuls of rice, meat day after day. He combed through her cookbooks every afternoon, following her pet



It was typical of her, so again we are told that this is what Shobha was like when she used to be happy, when she used to be her true self before she lost the child. It was typical of her. She was the type to prepare for surprises, good and bad. So she wanted to prepare for everything, she wanted to be instead of preparedness at all times. If she found a skirt or a purse, she liked she bought two. She kept the bonuses from her job in a separate bank account in her name. It didn't bother him. It hadn't bothered him. His own mother had fallen to pieces when his father died, abandoning the house he grew up in and moving back to Calcutta, leaving Shukumar to settle it all. He liked that Shoba was different

So, again if we look at this inter generational difference that has been described over here is very very interesting because we are told that Shukumar's mother was completely, she just collapsed, she just completely got disintegrated existentially when his father died and abandoning the house that he grew up and she went back to Calcutta leaving Shukumar to settle everything you know in terms of legal affairs in terms of ancestor properties etc.

And he liked it very much that Shobha was very different Shobha was more autonomous, more independent, she took care of things and she was perfectly capable of doing things on her own. It astonished him, her capacity to think ahead. When she used to do the shopping, the pantry was always stocked with extra bottles of olive and corn oil, depending on whether they were cooking Italian or Indian.

So again look at the very careful attention to detail that Shobha had at one point of time so there was Olive Oil and Corn Oil. Olive obviously was for Italian cuisine and Corn oil was for Indian cuisine and fridge is always stocked with different kinds of oil. Just they never ran out of the ingredients when they are making a meal for themselves. There were endless boxes of pasta in all shapes and colors, zippered sacks of basmati rice, whole sides of lambs and goats from the Muslim butchers at Haymarket, chopped up and frozen in endless plastic bags. Every other Saturday they wound through the maze of stalls Shukumar eventually knew by heart.

So you know there was a very busy domestic happiness that has been described over here in great detail. So they would just go ground buy things from the butchers and the Haymarket, they would just walk through all the store and maze of stalls Shukumar eventually knew every store by heart, every store owner by heart because he would just keep visiting it every now and then. He watched in disbelief as she bought more food, trailing behind her with canvas bags as she pushed through the crowd, arguing under the morning sun with boys too young to shave but already missing teeth, who twisted up brown paper bags of artichokes, plums, gingerroot, and yams, and dropped them on their scales, and tossed them to Shoba one by one.

So she would bargain and debate with them in terms of quality in terms of price he would just be this very happy standby person, just stand by and watch. And carry everything in a big basket that they would used to shop. She didn't mind being jostled, even when she was pregnant. She was tall, and broad-shouldered, with hips that her obstetrician assured her were made for childbearing. During the drive back home, as the car curved along the Charles, they invariably marvelled at how much food they had bought.

So what we see is there is an image of a recurring image of over abundance, recurring image of fulfilment of having being super saturated with food and all things which are functional, which are necessary for running the house, but it becomes more than necessary they buy excess food as an image of excess, as an image of over abundance, image of happiness, image of fertility. The fertility image comes at the end obviously with the obstetrician talking but how Shobha is perfectly suitable for child bearing.

So that all connects together in a very organic way fertility, abundance, felicity, happiness, fulfilment etc. and then we are told during drive back home as the car curve along the Charles

they invariably marvelled how much food they had bought. So they are surprised in terms of how much food they had bought in terms of being happy about it.

And if you compare in contrast this image of felicity, happiness, fulfilment, abundance to the image that is now of you know bare, minimalist, almost nothing, bare fridge with just a calendar attached to it the contrast is dramatic the contrast is complete. It is sort of clinical in term how things are changed since the child lost, since the death of the child. And we are also told immediately in terms of all the food that they bought it never went to waste.

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So you know this whole idea of making pickles and different kinds of marinated things and labelled in mason jars endlessly it's becoming seals pyramids you know it became an image that they agreed that would last their grandchildren in terms of the pickles that are made. And this again becomes very very the food description becomes very very interesting because what this marinated pickles, what this marinated combination suggest is that these last for a lot of time. These will last for a lifetime, this will last for generation, these are all preservatives.

And the whole idea of making food which will last them for generations it gives me a sense of trying thing over time. Even after they go away this will last, this will stay on and this will be used by our grandchildren so the food becomes marker of time over here. The food becomes marker of posterity and marker of perpetuity and marker of permanence and mark of intergenerational temporality.

And that becomes an image of happiness for them, that becomes a knowledge of happiness for them that they gonna have a child and that child will have more children and it will just be intergenerational but the food this food that they are preparing at the moment in terms of having this boxes and tins which will make a pyramid will last for not just lifetime but also intergenerationally for her grandchildren. So it's important to see how food becomes marker of memory and posterity and perpetuity over here.

They'd eaten it all by now. Shukumar had been going through their supplies steadily, preparing meals for the two of them, measuring out cupfuls of rice, defrosting bags of meat day after day. He combed through her cookbooks every afternoon, following her pencilled instructions to use two teaspoons of ground coriander seeds instead of one, or red lentils instead of yellow. Each of the recipes was dated, telling the first time they had eaten the dish together. So again temporality becomes very important thing and whole combination the whole dialogue between food and time becomes very very important, food being a marker of time. You know each time they consume a certain dish they write it down the time, the date on the calendar.

April 2, cauliflower with fennel. January 14, chicken with almonds and sultanas. He had no memory of eating those meals, and yet there they were, recorded in her neat proofreader's hand. Shukumar enjoyed cooking now. It was the one thing that made him feel productive. If it weren't for him, he knew, Shoba would eat a bowl of cereal for her dinner.

So the whole idea of being productive relies or rest on cooking over here and you know productive obviously has an academic metaphor attached to it. It you are productive academy that means you are publishing, means you are producing conference papers, that means you are doing things which tick boxes in terms of productivity but that has long since stopped. Shukumar realizes that the only thing which makes him feel productive is cooking meals in a kitchen and then we are told that if it had not been for him cooking fresh meals every single day Shobha would eat a bowl of cereals for dinner.

And the whole image of someone eating a bowl of cereal for dinner obviously suggest that there is no kitchen, there is no fresh food, there is no warmly cooked food. And that also connects to the idea of losing the home. The home going away, the absence of home, the depletion of home and that connects back to the metaphor of hotel the metaphor of toothbrush meant for visitors etc. so all these things connect in a very organic intimate way. The landscape of the story as we see. Okay.

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meat day after day. He combed through her cookbooks every afternoon, following her penciled instructions to use two teaspoons of ground coriander seeds instead of one, or red lentils instead of yellow. Each of the recipes was dated, telling the first time they had eaten the dish together. April 2, cauliflower with fennel. January 14, chicken with almonds and sultanas. He had no memory of eating those meals, and yet there they were, recorded in her neat proofreader's hand. Shukumar enjoyed cooking now. It was the one thing that made him feel productive. If it weren't for him, he knew, Shoba would eat a bowl of cereal for her dinner.

Tonight, with no lights, they would have to eat together. For months now they'd served themselves from the stove, and he'd taken his plate into his study, letting the meal grow cold on his desk before shoving it into his mouth without pause, while Shoba took her plate to the living room and watched game shows, or proofread files with her arsenal of colored pencils at hand.

At some point in the evening she visited him. When he heard her approach he would put away his novel and begin typing sentences. She would rest her hands on his shoulders and stare with him into the blue glow of the computer screen. "Don't work too hard," she would say after a minute or two, and head off to bed. It was the



Tonight, with no lights, they would have to eat together, so again look at the word the most operative word over here is 'have', they would have to eat together so because there was no light they can't sit in separate compartments, in separate rooms and have their own food. They are compelled to come together light the candle and eat together for first time after many many months perhaps.

For months now they'd served themselves from the stove, and he'd taken his plate into his study, letting the meal grow cold on his desk before shoving it into his mouth without pause, while Shoba took her plate to the living room and watched game shows, or proofread files with her arsenal of colored pencils at hand. Right and this alienation becomes very dramatic and very clearly mapped out in great details. We're told that previously for months now they have served themselves from the pot in the kitchen and eat separately.

And look at the manner of eating, the difference in the manner of eating that becomes interesting because Shukumar would take plate to study and let the meal grow cold. And then

just eat it mechanically without pausing, just shoving down into his mouth without pause. But Shobha would take her plate in the living room, watch a game show, continue to work and ate the meal. So there is a complete disconnect which is there between the two people is very carefully delineated over here and very very intimate details.

At some point in the story, at some point in the day, in the evening she visited him. When he heard her approach he would put away his novel and begin typing sentences. This obviously is a very very delicate but very symbolic literal short sentence that she would visit him at some point. Now, why would you need to visit someone if you are living in the same house. The word visit obviously has a lot of things packed into it. She would visit him from a distance, you can only visit someone from a distance.

So, when I say I will go and visit someone that means I am living somewhere else. And that person lives somewhere else. So, I will go and travel and meet the person right. So, that obviously indicates, that implies distance between us already. Now, when you say two people living in the same house and one person visits another person that means there is a lot of mental distance which is there between the two people so the whole idea of visiting becomes very important and it's very suggestive as well.

When he heard her approach, he had put away his novel and begin typing sentences. So, he would mostly read novel, so he would mostly consume novels in a very mechanical way and not be productive and not work on his dissertation but when he heard her approach, when he heard her footsteps he put the novel away and starts typing sentences pretending to work on a dissertation. She would rest her hands on his shoulders and stare with him into the blue glow of the computer screen. "Don't work too hard," she would say after a minute or two, and head off to bed.

So we find this as beautiful in terms of the description that Lahiri is giving, the wife obviously melancholic, having lost her child, getting more and more alienated from her husband and husband not been able to work, not been able to be productive academically just reading novels mechanically, eating food mechanically and just the moment when the wife comes in he pretends to work and then she comes puts her hands on his shoulders and says "Don't work too hard," and then heads off and goes to sleep.

So there is a complete crises of communication between the people who love each other, people who have experienced a tragedy together, great tragedy of loss and absence together.

And that kind of an experiential condition is described in great details with perfect symbolic signifiers in the story. And then we are told, "It was the one time in the day she sought him out, and yet he had come to dread it. So this is the only time of the day when Shobha would come and reach out to Shukumar, come and touch him may be before going to sleep and yet we are told that he had come to dread it.

He is fearful all the time. He doesn't like the time at all because he constantly fears of being found out that he is not working. He knew it was something she forced herself to do. I mean he was perfectly aware of the fact that this was something mechanical. This is something that she is doing out of compulsion that she is sort... it is like a routine to her visiting Shukumar before going out to sleep, forcing herself to do it.

She would look around the walls of the room, which they had decorated together last summer with a border of marching ducks and rabbits playing trumpets and drums. By the end of August there was a cherry crib under the window, a white changing table with mint-green knobs, and a rocking chair with checkered cushions. Shukumar had disassembled it all before bringing Shoba back from the hospital, scraping off the rabbits and ducks with a spatula. For some reason the room did not haunt him the way it haunted Shoba. In January, when he stopped working at his carrel in the library, he set up his desk there deliberately, partly because the room soothed him, and partly because it was a place Shoba avoided.

So again the relationship between space and embodiment becomes important, we saw that Yellow Wallpaper as well how you know how space produces claustrophobia, which then produces certain gendered embodied identities and experientiality and we have a similar situation over here, there was a nursery that they had built together as prospected parents, as parent who are expecting a child and then obviously when the child died he had come back home and taken it and disassembled everything and this room had haunted Shobha but it did not haunt him in the same way and he setup his study over here and stopped working in the library.

And one of the reasons he did is because he knew that this was the place which Shobha avoided. So they wanted to avoid each other, they wanted to avoid having direct communication, having a consistent organic communication. Everything else becomes peripheral in quality, everything else becomes sort of tangential in quality, there is no directness that is there. So this constant avoiding of each other becomes a very important part



of the story, part of the narrative, part of the experience that they are having at the same time together.

So, the whole idea of bearing a loss together, the whole idea of experiencing a loss together and then moving away from each other becomes very much a part of the narrative and we see how the symbolic signifiers in the descriptions the details, the objects, the marker, the tangible markers everything else around become pointers to this crises of communication, the space, the rooms, the wallpaper, the furniture, the children's nursery again an unfinished business like the unfinished pillows which were described previously, unfinished interrupted not done, half done. So all these become very very important in the story and they all become pointers to the human condition of unfinishedness, interruptedness. Right so these become very very important at different points of time.

Okay. So we will stop at this point today and we will continue with this story in the next lecture but what is important for us to understand is when you look at the relationship between gender, the body, the corporeality discursivity in the story, it all becomes very very important and all becomes very very carefully curated in Lahiri's fiction. And that is something we will continue to explore in the lectures to come. Thank you for your attention.