



**At the Margins of Society: *The Lies that build a Marriage*
by Suchen Christine Lim**

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Abstract

This essay will look at the short story collection by Singaporean writer Suchen Christine Lim; *The Lies that build a marriage*. The stories in the collection highlights the lives of people who are at the margins of Singaporean society. They are virtually forgotten by the government, the wider society and the mainstream media. These people live at the borderline of a relatively stable cultural and/or territorial area. There is a clear sign of an incomplete assimilation of two divergent cultures and as a result of this incompleteness these individuals are not fully integrated into any of the existing realities. Suchen Christine Lim's life as an artist is closely related to the creative writing scene in Singapore especially, within the period that these short stories were published. The essay will illuminate the relationship between the state of Singapore and the *Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ)* community in the city state. Lim was conscious of the government censorship of certain aspects of Singaporean life and society. Thus, Lim who sees herself as a chronicler of her society is acutely aware of her formidable task of recording issues that are regarded as socially taboo.

Keywords: *Censorship, Gay, Human Rights Abuse, LGBTQ, Penal Code, Sexual Identity*

Introduction

The word "marginality" is derived from the word "marginal". It refers to a condition of relating to, or situated at the edge or margin of something. It also

means "not of central importance; limited in extent, significance, or stature. It can also be said to mean something that is occupying the

borderline of a relatively stable territorial or cultural area. Characterized by the incorporation of habits and values from two divergent cultures and by incomplete assimilation in either. Finally, the word could mean “excluded from or existing outside the mainstream of society, group, or a school of thought”. (Merriam-Webster online Dictionary)

The focus of this essay will be to provide a contextual definition of the word “marginality” in close relation to the short stories written by Suchen Christine Lim in her collection – *The Lies That Build a Marriage*. In trying to do this the analysis will provide first, a brief background to Suchen Christine Lim's life and then a synopsis of the creative writing scene in Singapore. The essay will also talk about the relationship between the state of Singapore and the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, and queer (*LGBTQ*) community in the city state. A close assessment of five stories from the collection will be done. Finally, the essay will be concluded.

A Brief Background on the life of Suchen Christine Lim

Lim was born in Ipoh, Malaysia on 15 July 1948 (age 74 years) where she lived until she was fifteen years old. She is a third generation descendant of Chinese immigrants in Malaysia. Her grandparents came from Tangshan, China and settled in Malaysia. Lim attended the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (*CHIJ*) in Penang and Kedah. In 1963 she continued her education at *CHIJ* in Katong, Singapore when her family moved there. She later attended the University of Singapore where she did a BA (Honours) degree in English. She also holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Linguistics. She has written many books among which are four novels: *Ricebowl* (1984), *Gift from the Gods* (1990), *Fistful of Colours* (1993), *A Bit of Earth* (2001), *The River's Song* (2014), *The Man Who Wore His Wife's Sarong: Stories of the Unsung, Unsaid and Uncelebrated in Singapore* (2017). Her collection of short stories- *The Lies That Build a Marriage: Stories of the Unsung, Unsaid and Uncelebrated in Singapore* was published in 2007. She had also written a non-fiction book- *Stories of the Overseas Chinese*. Lim had also written many children's books. Christine Lim had adopted Singapore as her home despite the fact that she was born in Malaysia.

Creative Writing in Singapore

The history of creative writing in Singapore could be traced long before the island City State got independence and its eventual merger and separation from Malaysia. Between 1897 and 1907 short stories written by “comprador-class intellectuals of Chinese, Eurasian and European descent” were published in the Straits Chinese

Magazine. (Awadalla and March-Russel 49). This continued in the 1930s through to the Japanese occupation of the 1940s. The themes of these short stories was Malayan Nationalism. Short story writing continued after the separation in 1965 from Malaysia. Prominent among early writers in this genre are Catherine Lim, Philip Jeyaretnam, and Claire Tham. Unlike in Malaysia where the English language was side-lined and its literature regarded as secondary to Malay literature; Singapore came up with “national policies where the English language is concerned, vis-a vis the national aims and cultural needs of its people.”(Chin *Asian Englishes* 15). Creative writing thus, benefited immensely from the far-sighted decisions of Singapore's post-independence leaders. As a result of this there was a blossoming of creative writing right from the 1970s to the new millennium. Writers such as Suchen Christine Lim benefited from the City State's pragmatic maintenance of the English language at a pivotal level in the country's national affairs. However, the issue of self-censorship became a part of the creative endeavours of writers from Singapore. Within Singapore there are “censorship apparatuses” (Chin *SEA Journal* 13) which writers “has learnt to treat with caution the subjects forbidden ... namely race and religion-due to the historicized national memory of the 1964 ethnic clashes in Singapore” (Chin *SEA Journal* 13). In essence therefore, Chin maintained that: “Singaporean writers have been affected by the climate of caution, having on the whole, mastered the strategies of self-censorship by avoiding where possible the socially- tabooed and politically-enforced subjects of race, religion, and even government itself.”(Chin *SEA Journal* 13). But despite government censorship which leads to self-censorship from writers, Lim can see herself “as a chronicler of her society-the one who records and bears witness” (Eustace *ariel* 139). The stifling of the writer and the danger he/she faces in contemporary societies such as Singapore is very clear to Lim. “Depending on the country and its government and one's moment in history, this task of recording and bearing witness can be formidable and vital task. Writers have been imprisoned or exiled for doing just that in many countries.” (Quayum *JCL* 151).

Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) people and the government of Singapore.

Singapore is a highly developed City State. It has one of the highest standards of living next to Japan in Asia. It has however, been accused by Western nations of human rights abuses. Singapore's leaders have consistently, maintained that what the West views as Human Rights usually directly contradicts the norms and values of Asia. But because of its strategic economic alliance with these Western nations,

Singapore is treading carefully on some of these critical issues. Gay people are not openly and consistently persecuted but their activities are considered “illegal in Singapore, carefully monitored and contained.”(Offord *Social Semiotics* 301). Offord further said: “Singapore outlaws homosexuality, specifically male to male sex. Section 377 of the Penal Code states that 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature' is punishable with 'ten years to life imprisonment'. Section 377a prohibits 'gross indecency' between males, in public or private, with a maximum of 2 years' imprisonment” (Offord *Social Semiotics* 304). The Penal Code in Singapore had effectively spelt out the penalty for engaging in homosexual or lesbian acts. It is thus, a criminal act. This label has socially stigmatized both the act and the people engaging in them. Inevitably, gay men and lesbians live in perpetual fear and as a result they try to hide from the society their true orientation and identity: “a homosexual person in Singapore lives in secrecy about his/her identity and in fear lest that identity is revealed. The social climate for a gay person is thus extremely problematic. Like many cultures where homosexuality is stigmatized and feared, explicit sexual behaviour or sexual identity that is perceived to be gay is rarely an option to be taken. Instead, sexual identity is negotiated within society by deception and stealth. Visibility of sexual behaviour or identity in Singapore can lead to a variety of risks, ranging from imprisonment, public humiliation and caning to losing employment, losing career advancement and/or other forms of discrimination.” (Offord *Social Semiotics* 305).

The life of a gay person in Singapore is thus, at the fringes of mainstream society. It is a restricted life that is full of danger and difficult to operate. Loong, (2012) posited that: “Historically, the Singapore homosexual community exists in the margins of society. Homosexuality constitutes a subaltern lifestyle that exists in a state of perpetual uncertainty given the state's tendency to clamp down on homosexual activities for its own agenda”.

The Lies That Build a Marriage: An Appraisal of Five Short Stories

The core issues in *Lies That Build a Marriage* are those things that Singaporean mainstream society accord little attention or rather do not openly talk about. The society prefers to look aside. It ignores the reality of the existence of these things. And because the society chose to behave as if they do not exist, these issues are given little space in the wider society. Government sanctions against these issues are done in conformity with the norms and values of the state and the cultural milieu of the communities that forms the city state. The Penal Code section 377 and 377a criminalizes any form of same sex relationships where 'carnal intercourse

against the order of nature' is involved. The secret life of this 'other' segment of society tends to exact deep emotional responses from those who feel an understanding of these critical issues. The stories would want to set readers to begin a critical evaluation and a sort of reassessment of what these marginalized members of the society could be passing through. The issue of being gay is something the people in all societies are aware exists. However, one should keep that knowledge under wraps. Do not speak about it. Do not flaunt it. Pretend it does not exist. Since, it is generally, seen as a departure from the norm, it must be suppressed. There is a kind of collective 'avoidance' according to Lim. Among the mainstream members of the community there are also certain things that go against their collective traditional or cultural and religious beliefs. There are cases of teen-age pregnancy and abortion. Traditional values and norms and religious teachings forbid such acts. The guilty party is ostracised from the mainstream society. A victim of a harsh judgement. A marginal life will begin for the person(s). For those individuals who live at the fringes of society without a voice Lim believes the creative writer has a role: "The writer's focus provides readers with new insides into their society. To express the unexpressed. To say the unsaid. To give voice to those with no voice. If, by doing so, it leads to change, then, well, the writer is an agent of change." (Quayum *JCL* 151).

The Morning After

The first story in the collection looks at two important themes. These themes are those of *possessiveness and homosexuality*. In the story we see Cheng Locks' mother as a very protective overly possessive. She controls her son in all areas of his life. He has virtually, no life of his own. At the age of forty he was still unmarried and staying with his mother. She was not happy that at age forty-one he had finally met the woman he wanted to marry. The woman is an unmarried mother of two sons. These two are symptomatic of relationships that are problematic in a cultural sense. The mother is unwilling to allow the son to set out on his own. She still views him as the little boy that has to be taken care of. In the second part of the story we read about how the son has been hiding the fact that he was gay. He has finally decided to come out and openly admit it to his family-his mother and brother. But the mother was afraid of the society and what it would do to her son. What he had revealed is better kept a secret.

The son said: 'mum I don't want to live a lie. I want to live in the open. In the light. Not hiding in the dark.' "Brave words from a nineteen year old. But I was afraid for him. From the outside we are a tolerant, multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-

lingual, multi-everything society. But inside there's a hard kernel. Like an apricot. We can be most unforgiving. What if the army finds out? He hasn't completed his national service yet. What if the Singapore Public service Commission finds out and takes his scholarship away? It will break his heart. What if...? What if...? I started to pray.”(Lim 13)

The question is: Why is the son hiding the fact that he is gay for such a long time? And why is the mother afraid of this new knowledge? The answer lies in the religiously, socially conservative Singaporean society. The mother knew that being gay is a criminal offence in Singapore. By coming out into the open; the son had decided to leave his marginal existence. He wanted to be in the mainstream despite the consequences. The thought has passed through the mind of the mother several times that her son could have been gay. But that thought was pushed aside. It was the sort of assumption that mothers would normally reject due to the fact that they are psychologically controlled by existing norms and values of a society that do not allow even a contemplation of this sort of thing. In her thoughts she cast her mind back through the years. Her relationship with her kids have been normal, 'accepted type'. They talked about issues that are within the 'normally accepted range'. Nothing as radical as talking about sex or even 'straight' and 'non-straight' sexual orientation. To a large extent this could be a result of the societal orientation. So we have two pictures in this story of clear manifestation of conformity and non-conformity. The two sons – one gay, the other wanting to get married to a woman with two sons probably, from a previous relationship. Both sons have gone against traditional norms. They are non-conformist in their attitudes towards sex and marriage. Both mothers were shocked by this non-conformist attitude. They were shaken out of their conformist, conservative attitude. It was truly a major seismic movement-in relationships and in attitudes.

My Two Mothers

The second story by Lim deals with two important themes that have a direct bearing on contemporary Singaporean life. These two themes are: *Lesbianism* and *Adoption*. The story highlighted the life two elderly Chinese women – Yee Ku and Loke Ku. These two women has an adopted daughter called Kwai Chee or Pearl. The two mothers of Kwai Chee as they are called by the author are *amah jieh* or traditional Chinese domestic servants. Kwai Chee was ashamed of being with her two mothers. Other school children would come to school with their parents – they had a father and a mother.

“My two mothers were old enough to be my grandmas. They were

already in their sixties when I was fourteen. I can't remember when I started feeling shame. It probably began when I was six on my first day at school in 1958. The other children had a father and a mother. And I? I had Yee Ku and Loke Ku.” (Lim 19).

Even as a child Kwai Chee understood that there is something amiss in the relationship between her two mothers. As a child she is able to see that a family should consist of a male father and a female mother. Other children in her school enjoy this sort of relationship. She learnt about their past. They were traditional Chinese domestic servants – *amah jie*. They belonged to a secret order – the seven sisters – they vowed never to marry. They came to work as domestic servants in Singapore. They adopted Kwai Chee. Her young mind yearned to call to call them mother but she cannot, she has to call them aunt. This is quite confusing to the young girl. In order to conform to the expectations of the society, Kwai Chee had to invent a story about her two 'aunts'. One of them became a grandmother, and the other one became a 'live-in' maid for a family. But when she comes home she sleeps together with her grandmother on the same bed. However, deep down Kwai Chee is not comfortable. She knew it was a lie. As a result she lives an isolated life with her two 'aunts'. She does not invite young people like her to her home not because of their poverty:

“More because I felt my family was not normal. I had two mothers instead of one. Mothers I had to call Aunt. Mothers who unmarried domestics are living together. And in the secret chamber of my secretive heart, I suspected them of being something more. I couldn't say what it was as a child. It had the faint smell of wrongdoing. Of something that people frowned upon. How did such an idea enter my head when no one had actually said any anything to me? Had I picked up things as a child from the whispers among the neighbours downstairs? From the way they looked at me? Or was it from things that one of my secondary teachers said, like girls should not hold hands or worse? I don't know. I don't know.” (Lim 21).

Kwai Chee's isolation began when she started comparing her family with other families. Although, her 'aunts' did not get down to telling her the nature of their relationship the society by virtue of its own family standards started encroaching into her sub-conscious. She started questioning why two adult women are living

together. Snippets of conversation got to her and whispers of people close by. No one was quite direct with her. She became tortured with this knowledge and unknowledge.

Nothing is clear, only assumptions and conjectures. Her certainty was however, in the palpable feeling that what is happening in her home could be wrong. Kwai Chee and her 'aunts' were virtually excluded from the community. Their existence was outside the mainstream society. This peripheral existence became more evident when Kwai Chee met Joyce Lee and Julie Nazareth. These two were also from a similar home to her own. Her relationship can only be nurtured within the context of a similar condition. Lim is highlighting the fact that due to the lesbianism of the two women they had been isolated from the rest of the community. The community silently avoid them because they have already been 'judged' and found guilty' of going against the moral code of the established order. Even their adopted daughter has become a victim of this isolation and thus, she can only relate with her 'kind of people'. Lesbianism like homosexuality is a criminal offence in Singapore and carries a prison sentence. The *LGBTQ* individuals have been discriminated through a strong government censorship of their sexual orientation. They are thus, marginalized. They are not seen to have any significance within the society:

“Over tea, scones and jam and bubor cha, cha, the conversation somehow got round to family and what a government minister had said in the newspapers. ‘That Mr. Chang Soo Beng in the Prime Minister’s office. He defines a family as one man, one woman and their children, Miss Lee told us. ‘...Of course not, silly!’ Julie scoffed. ‘According to Mr. Chan a family is one man, his wife and their children!’ ‘Jeepers, such a broad definition! That should include everybody in Singapore! What about us, mum? There was a pause. Then Miss Nazareth said, ‘some families are born; some families are made.’ ‘But ours’, Miss Lee looked at Joyce and Julie, ‘is especially cooked. We selected our ingredients.’ (Lim 23).

The excerpts above shows the government’s uncompromising attitude towards same-sex unions. Indeed, any other form apart from the government’s definition constitutes a rejection of established norms, values and traditions in Singaporean society. But for a same-sex couple like Miss Lee and Miss Nazareth 'some families are made and the components or 'ingredients' for such a relationship is selected by the participant. After the death of her two mothers kwai Chee went to the USA

where she met Kathleen and Laura. The two are a same sex couple having two daughters. But unlike in Singapore where such type of couples live in isolation and at the margins of mainstream society; Kwai Chee was surprised to learn that this couple have been living side-by-side and within the mainstream society. They are not only tolerated but, people are willing to help them to raise a family of their own:

“The girls are half-sisters. They share the same biological father’. I looked from one to the other. ‘A very good friend of ours’, Laura said, ‘donated his sperm to us.’ ‘You’re pulling my leg’. ‘No, we’re not’, Laura smiled. ‘He even signed an agreement to give up his rights to the girls. I wanted to be a mum real bad. Kathy and I, we wanted a family. We asked Carl. He’s our best friend. Oh, he’s married. Got his own kids. He agreed to help us.” (Lim 25).

When Kwai Chee heard this incredible story something was set loose deep within her. The inhibitions and shame that her Singaporean society made her to bottle up against her two loving and dedicated mothers, simply melted away. She was able to appreciate the love and commitment with which her two mothers had shown each other for fifty years living together in a same sex union. That although, the government view their relationship as illegal and the society has rejected them and yet despite their fringe existence; theirs was a more respectable union than most mainstream marriages.

Usha and My Third Child

The core issues raised in the short story “Usha and My Third Child” are the themes of teen-age pregnancy and abortion. Lim is of the view that these are fundamental issues in societies such as that of Singapore. The main character in the story Usha, became pregnant at the age of seventeen. When her boyfriend became aware that she was pregnant he abandoned her because his family according to him would not accept the situation. On her part, Usha's family were devastated. Usha had to leave home and she came to live in a church crisis centre. Her mother abandoned her during the first three months of her pregnancy.

“Sh-she said I shamed her. She got to h-h-hide from our re-relatives.’ When Usha tried to communicate with her family she could not get any positive response. “I phoned ho-home every day. But my...my mother cr-cr- cried and cried. Scolded and

scolded. Talk-talked so long. (Lim 33).

Victims of teen-aged pregnancy are usually, abandoned and rejected by the society and also by those who are closest to them. They are denied love and as a result they live a depressed and a marginalized existence. Teen aged girls such as Usha take virtually all the blame for a situation that involves two individuals. In the case of Usha the parents and other relatives made a U-turn in their attitude when after her scan, they learnt it will be a boy.

“Since they'd found out the sex of the baby, Usha's parents had changed their minds. They'd stopped lamenting that she'd brought shame to the family by not going for an abortion. Now they were pressing her not to give the baby up for adoption. Her parents wanted to take the baby home “(Lim 37).

The above excerpt introduces another element in the attitudinal pattern of a conservative patriarchal society. In this kind of society preferences are usually in favour of male children. Despite the 'shame' that Usha brought to them; her parents and relatives are willing to accept her son. It is also noteworthy that Usha's father who had three daughters wanted to give the unborn son his name. It is quite important to note that the rejection that teen aged single mothers suffer is both physical and psychological. Relatives may be willing to accept a male illegitimate child but not necessarily, the mother. She will still suffer discrimination and stigmatization. In another ironical twist, while Usha was willing to accept full responsibility for a new baby with all the uncertainties and danger that such a decision could bring; her Counsellor, Mrs. Vivienne Chua, although married, fully employed was not willing and ready to have a third child at the age of forty-seven. She aborted the unborn the unborn child. In essence therefore, both Usha and her Counsellor, Mrs. Vivienne Chua are victims. They will continue to live a secret life that is full of doubts, pain, and psychological trauma.

The Lies That Build a Marriage

There are four identifiable themes in Lim's main short story “The Lies That Build a Marriage” of the collection under study. These core issues are those of *Prostitution, Marriage, Infidelity, and Social Class*. In focussing on these critical issues Lim is putting a searchlight on areas in Singaporean society and indeed, in all societies of the world where little attention is given. The mainstream society usually ignore this side of human existence. Victims of prostitution, complexities

of marriage, infidelity and moral decadence, social class abuse, are usually left to suffer consequences where in most cases they are not guilty of. Lim in this story is trying to highlight these social malaise. She is also showing the reader that characters such as Miss Pak Mei should not be judged based on their actions, but the society that produces the situation they are in. Miss Pak Mei is the central character in this story. She was described simply as a dance hostess at the Golden Swallow Cabaret. I think this title is merely a euphemism for what she actually does, that is prostitution. She became a lodger in the home of our child-narrator. Very early in the story the reader is given a glimpse into the life of Miss Pak Mei. Many men take turns to visit her. There is Mr Khoo, an antique dealer who visits her:

“Mr Khoo was an antique dealer who owned a shop in Orchard Road. He was a devout Catholic. Went to Mass every Sunday with his family. But he also visited Mei every Saturday after dropping off his wife and daughters at the Novena Church Service in Thomson Road.” (Lim 48).

Her activities with Mr Khoo, a married man was actively supported by the narrator's mother who is gaining financial reward. The only person who was not happy with these surreptitious visits was Fay Chay – the household *amah* or domestic help:

“He can't buy me with his dollars. I'm not so easily fooled' she muttered in the kitchen. 'The old fox! Very clever to hide things from his wife, lucky he's not a Buddhist. Thinks he can use money to pay for cheating on her. The Lord Buddha wouldn't hear of it'” (Lim 49).

This underscores the issue of infidelity in marriage. Mr Khoo is cheating on his wife by visiting Miss Pak Mei while at the same time pretending to be a good Catholic. Miss Mei's bedroom is a picture of her professional life:

“Mei's room was cool and perfumed. Thick maroon velvet curtains were kept drawn to keep out the sun during the day. Musk, rose and all sorts of mysterious scents emanated from the bottles lining her dressing table. There were jars of creams and lotions, boxes of powder, rouge and eye shadow, and lipsticks and hairbrushes.” (Lim 50).

Linked closely with Miss Mei's professional life was the carefully hidden family secret of unfaithfulness and betrayal which was revealed at the end of the story.

"...I found Mother standing near my father's casket, gazing down at his body. When she saw me she said, 'There lies a rake.' 'Ma!' I was shocked. 'I wouldn't say it if it wasn't true. Ask him. I'm saying it in front of him.' 'Ma.' He was a rake. I'm not lying or slandering him. What didn't I suffer as his wife? I even had to bring one of his women to live with us.' ...'Was it Pak Mei?' I asked her gently. 'Who else? I knew what they were up to behind my back.'" (Lim 83).

But despite her secret life of sex and corruption, Miss Pak Mei eventually, fell in love with one of her customers. As a result of this, she stopped sleeping with other men. Deep down, Miss Mei desperately, wanted to marry and abandon the shady and secret life of a prostitute. She wanted to marry Mr Wong and become fully integrated into mainstream respectable society. Unfortunately, her past and her social status put a wedge between her and Mr Wong. His mother refused to approve of the marriage because she was a nobody and uneducated. The marriage took place but not in the way Miss Mei wanted it to be. In an interview Suchen Christine Lim was asked why her women characters are incredibly strong in many ways; is it because they are looking for legitimacy? Most especially, Pak Mei in "The Lies That Build a Marriage". Lim answered thus:

"I think you have read it quite accurately, this tension in women who were born into the margins, like Pak Mei. And so part of her desire would be to be in the mainstream as the wife of somebody, as the mother of somebody. There are a lot of public rituals of acknowledgement, you know, like the ten-course- dinner wedding banquet. But when one is denied that...? Then the strong woman tries to seek other means of getting there. And that's why, in the end, Pak Mei paid for her own trousseau, the white wedding gown and all that. And that's the modern part of her. You know this tension between the old and new. She's not modern enough to say "Heck with it! I don't need this." And at the same time she is modern enough to determine that if she cannot get it through traditional means, through her mother-in-law, for example, she can do it herself. But she is still trapped within that system. And I see a lot of Singaporean women, really Asian women, doing

that.”(Eustace Ariel 146)

Christmas at Singapore Casket

The core issue that Lim treated in this short story is about *divorce and separation*. Marley or Mah-li O'Connor separated with his wife leaving her with two young children. As a single mother she was left entirely alone to cater for the two children. Even though, it was her savings that was initially used for opening Mah-li O'Connor's company; during the divorce case the judge did not give her any part of the business. After the divorce he took another wife. Singaporean women in this type of situation live a marginal existence especially, in terms of the struggles they have to pass through in order to take care of themselves and their children. It was quite ironic that when Mah-li O'Connor died it was the abandoned first wife and the children who were at the funeral parlour for the burial arrangement. It was also noteworthy that even in death the ex-husband and father to her children did not bother to spare any thought for her or the children. Again, Lim in this story is drawing attention to the heartlessness of the Singaporean society and its laws towards women who have been used and abandoned by men.

Conclusion

In this collection of short stories Lim highlighted a very critical social problem in Singapore. She was concerned about people who have been forced to live a life of secrecy, pain, stigma and discrimination. She is of the opinion that such people are basically, forced into this kind of existence due to certain actions or inactions of government or the traditional and cultural practices of the people. The *unsung, unsaid, and uncelebrated* are the people who live outside the mainstream society due to either their personal choices or some fundamental circumstances that may be beyond them. In Singapore for instance, the Penal Code sections 377 and 377a which had criminalized homosexual and lesbian activities has effectively, forced the LGBTQ persons into a marginalized existence. In the short stories, Lim highlighted characters who became victims either because of their sexual preferences or because circumstances forced them into becoming what they became. Usha is an example of a social problem that tradition and religious beliefs have failed to handle properly. In most cultures a teen aged girl who becomes pregnant is virtually on her own. She carries the burden alone. Family and community tend to abandon her. Lim is emphasizing that these are issues that needed to be explored and corrected not to be ignored. Another critical issue that Lim is drawing attention to are single mothers who either through divorce, death

of a husband, or the husband had abdicated his responsibility; have been left quite alone to manage their children alone. These type of women are forced by terrible circumstances to live a marginal existence. The society do not speak out in their defence. Lim also underscores the difficulty that these people face in their attempt at integration into the mainstream society. Pak Mei desperately wanted to get married and live a normal and respectable life. When she fell in love with Mr Wong she stopped her promiscuous life. But, Mr Wong's mother could not accept her because she did not meet the social class criteria. So, these collection of short stories are a clarion call for a long overdue change in attitude towards those who have been marginalized and thus, forced to live a life of seclusion due to stigmatization and discrimination.

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