Chapter III

Representations of Nation and Culture as Identity in the Fictions of Jhumpa Lahiri

Representation is an act of presentation, demonstration and revelation in a work of art. It can be in spoken or written forms. It is also one of the understood, argued and reasonable mood of expressions or the signs of reasons to express the progress, corelation, alienation and subordination in the visible signs of reasons. The artist consciously or subconsciously does this while analysing the self and the psyche of the characters that represent the interest and fascination of the authors. It is a kind of mental as well as physical construct. It is both a poststructuralist as well as postcolonial concept. Representation can be done at two levels—authorial level and scholarly level. Literally it means representations of nation, culture, nostalgia, psychology, tradition, habits, tendencies and manners at the authorial level by the diaspora writers. The representation of these aspects at the authorial level gives ones’ identity, roots and belongingness through the writers’ narrative imagination. Through creative imagination every writer plays an act of representation. He presents his own psyche, feelings and emotions through the psyche and body of his fictional characters.

In the past twenty years or so, there has been a blossoming of literature by first and second generation Indian immigrant writers, who have won numerous awards and have gained international recognition. This new emerging literature has moved from belonging to a specific culture to having a multicultural focal point ‘here and nowhere and anywhere’. This view is flowed out of contemporary multicultural fiction over the last twenty years or so with its plurality of voices.
Every piece of immigrant literature is preoccupied with the theme of settlers making their home in the bleak, wintry cold, often hostile surroundings. They often face survival in the beautiful yet alienated landscape. The first generation immigrant writers use ‘double vision’ as the legacy of specific and irreversible history. Through their narratives they try to create self-reflexive tendencies, representing their own self at the margins of being and belonging in a new world. Most immigrant writers, out of this situation thus create a ‘double voiced discourse’ (in Bakhtin’s terms). Like the character Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*, the immigrants in their new surroundings alter themselves to fit into the new world.

For the second generation immigrant writers the situation becomes complex because they neither belong to their parents'/ancestral root nor absorbing the present situation. So their belongingness split between spatial and existential emotional need of nation and culture. For them obsession with their rootedness in a nation and culture invite a lot of problems and difficulties. Adopting and adapting in a new social and cultural environment they fail to keep their mind and feeling sacrosanct. The outcome of this interaction between past and present is a transition in negotiation and transformation. This transition produces immigrant writers who are bi-focal and bi-local with complex and multiple belongings. Their voice is multicultural and hence the immigrant writers’ voice from a multicultural society becomes ‘postcolonial paradigm’. Caught between two worlds, they negotiate a new space and being caught between two cultures they negotiate a new space to write down the fractured psyche’s feelings and emotions. Having cultural pluralities, this new voice of the immigrant writers is rich, diverse, and multi-faceted. Therefore the challenge today is to preserve this evolving voice and the plurality of cultures and to have communities which are flexible and respectful of diversity. Through their writings, they try to pen down the
experiences of immigrants’ experiences to look and write ‘back’. The writer through raw socio-cultural pressure, barriers of culture, religion and nationality makes creative writing a survival process. In such cases representation as an act of creative strategy has played an important role in expressing their alienated self. Having nobody around to express their feelings they want to pen down their exiled, alienated emotions in black and white as a relief and to forge an identity through nation and culture.

Nation is a type of political formation. It is an individual country considered together with its social and political structures. The physical border of a nation creates the limit of the nation. It is the physical border of the nation that allows another nation to recognize it as a nation. Nation as a political formation place borders that separate the people within from different people outside. It is a division of a geographical territory marked by international boundaries.

The concept of nation first emerged as a term of domestic political opposition in France during the eighteenth century. Prior to this, the term mainly was referred to a group of people unified by language, region and culture. It first received its modern form during the French Revolution which mobilised people of war and justified war. The idea of the nation was taken up and popularised in Germany where the memory of the past unity and glory was still very much alive. The German historian Herder developed the mould of folk identity including the significance of language for nationalism. From that time on inventing the concept of nation it became possible to establish a specific identity on a variety of selected and cultural properties.

It was through the process of emancipation proclamation and the end of the African slave trade that the concept of nation began to change. The influence of the African diaspora and its people in the United States of America has brought a change
in the concept and meaning of the word nation. The Africans were brought by the white population as enslaved people and the white population started considering them as alien on the basis of the colour of their skin. The identity of the enslaved at that time was then shaped by their skin colour rather than their nation and tribe where they truly originated from. The enslaved people after centuries of sufferings and suppression began to fight for their own fundamental rights. It was in this process of emancipation that nationality began to take on a different meaning. Apart from language and cultural background, the idea of an established government and physical boundaries became mandatory requirements to give a shape to what it meant to be a nation.

Nation establishes the right to self-determination. Each nation has a fundamental right to determine its own future and to be master of its own fate. This claim is part of the common sense of the age, linking beliefs in both freedom and democracy to beliefs about the nation. Every individual ought to be free to determine their own lives. Thus nation should be free from the control of others. The democratic principle, that a people should have the right to determine its own affairs seems to translate easily and directly into the notion that each nation should be sovereign over its own affairs.

The elements of a nation to be a ‘nation’ in its proper means are population, territory, government and sovereignty. The geographical territory of a nation enables its people to feel united among them. People’s ‘sense of place’ has a territorial component. With the passage of time people come to ‘see’ meaning in territory or obtain ‘meaning’ from territory. The landscapes of the territory have powerful symbolic links to a group’s territorial identity. Territory provides both security and opportunity for those who live within its bounds. The nationalist historian Boyd
Shafer said, “...a certain defined, even vaguely, territory or land, whether this be large or small, possessed or coveted. This land is said to belong to the nation, and nationalist, in varying degrees, think of it as their own and are devoted to it” (Shafer 3-4).

Nation refers to a cultural bond to every person that gives a shared identity to a group of people who occupy the same geographical territory. Within that geographical territory people have political autonomy. They possess and share a common heritage, a common history, common ethnic origin, a common mind, a common habit, common ancestors, common characters, common symbols, common language, common culture and a common soul. These commonalities create a bond among people that reach beyond their many differences of opinions and interests and enable them to cooperate with each other. These common traits are associated with nationality. It fosters solidaristic and trusting feelings by creating a common identity. A national identity unites people under one umbrella and provides them with a sustaining form and asks them to function together in the name of the nation. When people define their territory, the territory defines the identity of people who live within it. Within that territory people share some memories; they have some traditions and altogether they have some hopes for the future generation of their nation. Thus people develop a sense of national unity.

Nations are defined in terms of the loyalty of the individual to the country. Loyalty is described in terms of dedication, sacrifice, subordination, love and affection to his own country. Nations are a motherland evoking the obedience and affection that children owe to their parents. A feeling of belongingness to one’s own mother land, a feeling of love for and pride in one’s own country is called nationality. Nationality can be imbibed through the components of national culture like “names,
symbols, language, customs, territories and rituals of national identity” (Smith 24) which is handed down from one generation to other for the formation of nation. National symbols like national flag, national flower, national anthem, national language take on an emotive and semi-sacred characters for the people in which all nations participate. These national symbols help nurture the feeling of ownership which is very much important to nationalist sentiment. By the national symbols people feel that they belong to the same land and on the other hand that the land belongs to them.

Nations shapes us. We can’t choose to discard this aspect of our being. Instead, we need to think about how to combine it with our other values and commitments, to celebrate, “the particularity of [national] culture with the universality of human rights, the social and particular embeddedness of individuals together with their personal autonomy” (Tamir 79). The nation has been described by Benedict Anderson as an “imagined community” (Anderson 6). There is nothing ultimate, definite or fixed about a nation. Nation is thought and created. It is imagined in the sense that individuals who regard themselves as members of a certain nation, somehow know that other members belonging to the community exist; however they do not, and will never know who they are and what they look like. Members of the same community probably will never know each of the other members face to face; however they may have similar interests or identify as part of the nation. They hold in their minds a mental image of their affinity. Therefore the ‘nation’ exists in the minds of the members as an image of their communion. With such imaginary concept the nation becomes an empty space to all its citizens. In such imaginary concept identifications like race, religion, language, culture, history and the land make every individual a part of that nation. It is this notion of the nation as a community that
gives culture and the production of culture its meaning amongst people with a sense of collectiveness. As an ‘imagined community’, the immigrants share a fundamental similarity through belonging to the same nation. Thus the nation is a collection that exists primarily in acts of imagination and thinking, a ‘unity’ that might be more fantasy than reality. People of the nation have different socio-economic and cultural experiences. These experiences differentiate people of one nation from the other. Because of this the features of each nation are different from the other.

It is generally assumed that in order to make a nation, the people of a nation should resemble each other as closely as possible with having one common bond of culture. In this sense nation is primarily an idea. Individuals think that they are part of a greater collective and that they share a ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ (Anderson 7) with many others. Through the imagined communities, nations gather together many individuals who come to imagine their simultaneity with others. Nations tend to gather a variety of people into one collective body, but it is highly unlikely that one person will ever meet all of his or her fellow. They are connected by the same bounded, fixed landscape within which they all simultaneously exist.

The concept of imagined community is very much applicable to a nation where people use different languages, practice different religions, and have different cultural artefacts. The formation of the imagined community takes place from a young age through family stories and historical accounts. It is reinforced through the teachings of the community’s beliefs and values. For the immigrants, the imagined community is called upon to comfort and provide a sense of belonging. It plays an integral part in the formation and maintenance of the identity of the immigrants. In this formation, identity takes on a mythical status-- turning away in many ways from territorial or geographical based descriptions. The shared space or bond created by
culture is what makes the imaginary; a notion of meaning that gives people a sense of communion. Due to a sense of communion, an idea is given to that imaginary space which makes sense within certain cultural parameters. It is imagined and only applies to that culture or community. Thus the nation is a myth and it has a very real hold over the people. Nations, like narratives, “lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye” (Bhabha 1).

Nations are defined in terms of will and culture of people. Stuart Hall emphasizes the role of culture that plays an important role in the construction of nations. Hall describes nations not only as political constructs but also as ‘system of cultural representations’ (Hall 200) by means of which an “imagined community” (Anderson 6 ) may be interpreted. People participate in forming the idea of the nation as it is represented in their national culture. Thus national culture:

is a discourse, a way to construct meanings which influence and organise both our actions and our conceptions of ourselves. National cultures construct identities by creating meanings of “the nation” with which we can identify; these are contained in stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it (Hall 201).

Culture is the product of social action. It is an integrated pattern of thinking, understanding, and communicating that makes up people’s way of life. Social values, norms, symbols, language, facts, beliefs, codes of manners, dress, diet, rituals, and norms of behaviour are the elements of a culture. Through a process of socialization these elements i.e. culture is passed on from one generation to the next. Culture also
means traditional behaviours which have been developed by the human race and successively generated from one generation to another.

Culture also suggests the arts, customs and institutions of a society, state or nation. It helps to distinguish certain people of a society, state or nation from other groups of a society, state or nation. The elements of a culture are retained, discarded or adopted differently at different times and places. But a feeling of oneness, a tug of the roots persists even after several years and sometimes centuries. Culture of a community or a nation can’t be erased. It becomes an identity in the individual’s self and the psyche. The identity of an individual gaining through one’s own culture is related with one’s love for the nation. There is always an emotional sustenance or emotional bond with one’s own native land-- the land where one is born and belong to. One never leaves one’s country behind. Wherever he or she goes, always carry within the image of his or her own culture. Thus culture sustains, favours one and follows one consciously or unconsciously.

Culture is also a human know-how, which is learned in the process of being human and becoming humane. It is associated with groups of people and its content includes a wide range of phenomena including norms, values, shared meanings and patterned ways of behaving. It is what people share. This process of learning and sharing is open-ended, never complete, always in flux. It is an on-going process, a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment. Culture is “the sum of their art, their science, and all their social institutions, including their systems of belief and rituals...cultural values are often expressed through the peoples’ songs, dances, folklores, drawing, sculptor, rites and ceremonies” (Thiong’o 76).
Culture as philosophy defines nation and identity of a person. A person’s national identity is sometimes based on the political boundary of a particular nation or state. A state is one of the most important international actors and the definitions of its borders act as definition of the particular identity of a person. Although a state or a nation is divided geographically by marking international borders, a state may have affinity with another state in terms of cultural habits and behavioural patterns. When people come either from two politically defined states or nation to a multicultural society, they seem to find out a compatriot with the help of their cultural identity and cultural affinity. The overwhelming similarities in their cultural habits and behavioural patterns make their political difference in national identities absurd because culturally they seem to share the same cultural habits.

The issues of nation, culture and class in human movement constitute an inseparable part of the identity of the individual. Identity is the ‘real me’ and the answer to the question ‘who am I?’ is our identity. It is the prime wish of an individual to know about the root of him, from where he belongs to, what he is and what the world view of him. By one’s identity one is able to know what is unique and special about a person. It includes social roles, personal traits and conscious self image. It is generally viewed and expressed in terms of land, language, political system, cultural practices, music etc. Identity may be the result of self-perception ‘how do I see myself?’ or they may be the result of how the others see me. The formation of self-identity is a natural part of growing up:

...it is a commonplace in logic that the concept of identity has to do with sameness. Equally trivial is the observation that anything whatsoever is the same with itself at any given time...if an object is to retain identity; it must remain same with itself over time. A thing with
a plausible sense of identity must endure...to have an identity, a thing must have features that are both relevant and enduring...if this is true of the identity of all objects, it must equally be true for the identity of human persons. To remain constant over time with himself/herself or with others, to possess or share identity, a person must be identical with some of her/his enduring and relevant attributes (Bhargava 4-5).

Social identity informs a person’s identity which is constituted biologically and culturally as a subject. As human beings we are born into a culture and hence identity is culture-specific. In this sense it is socially and culturally constructed. Identity of an individual is consistently affected by its society or through a process of reflection and negotiation that one has to accept. It is always emotionally connected, skin deep as well as soul deep. Identity of a person is deeply personal in the sense that the enquiry of ‘who am I?’ is an unravelling process directed inward from familiar labels like one’s name, sex, and nationality. It is formed through socialisation process and influence of social institutions like family, education system and mass media.

The identity of a person is largely a matter of social construction also. Persons identify with their particular language and with members of their linguistic community. The identity of a person is defined by those set of beliefs which are held firmly. Only such firm set of beliefs find crucial to one’s identity. Such set of beliefs exist as mental representations of which individuals are conscious. The language and cultural beliefs are inscribed in practical ways of life or modes of conduct. Identity is formed in response to social contexts, especially the context of language, culture and historical experiences and memories. The identity of persons is constituted in large measure by the language and vocabulary used by them and prevailing cultural beliefs.
and narratives. In such cases, language and cultural beliefs are not merely mental phenomena but inscribe the modes of conduct.

In a multicultural society, the self is fragmented and is fluid and shifting. In such society the self is shaped by multiple sources and assuming multiple forms. The postmodern condition typically connects the local and the global. The postcolonial tendency to preserve the ‘local’ identities has become increasingly assertive on multicultural contexts like US, England and Canada. Nowadays we notice new or renewed importance attached to place, leading to re-discovery of territorial identities, local traditions and local histories. This tendency stretches towards the creation of an imagined or even invented communities and nationalities. In such situation the question of identity becomes a struggle to establish an identity and an individuality of his own through his own culture.

Culture has an integral part in the formation of an identity of a person. Culture affiliates as well as affects the identity of a person as a way of life, or a way of doing things whether it is in an organisation, a group or within a state. Cultural identity and national identity are interrelated. Culture as an integral part of identity can be defined in a simple way as being how we define ourselves and how others define us.

Culture as an expression of identity concerns the roles that one plays in society as well as his relationship with others. In relationship with society and in playing different roles as social being in the society, we often have multiple identities. On the other hand collective identity or national identity involves shared or inter subjective sets of values, beliefs, etc of which a collective culture is a fundamental part. The relationship between nation and culture helps a lot in determining an
individual’s identity because nation and culture form one’s identity. Nation refers to the cultural bond that gives a sense of shared identity to a group of people who occupy or aspire to occupy the same geographic territory. Thus a nation is a group of people who share common history, culture, language and ethnic origin and possesses its own government. The national identity is based on shared culture, religion, history, language etc. National identity refers to a group of people unified by language, region and cultural background. Today due to migration an individual has citizenship of more than one country, the double citizenship i.e. the citizenship of ‘homeland’ and ‘adopted country’. Yet the person who is born and brought up in a specific country from where his ancestors are, that country is considered his mother country, his homeland. The person is a natural citizen of that country and it is his national identity. National identity refers to both the distinguishing features of the group and to the individual’s sense of it.

Diasporic writing explores the identities formed in multiple places, languages, religions and cultures of ‘homeland’ and ‘hostland’. Hence today in postcolonial diaspora studies, identity issue is much discussed and is a primary concern. Indian diasporic community, due to the mutual process of self-fashioning and increasing acceptance by the adopted country, has acquired a new identity which Homi Bhabha theorised as ‘hybridity’. This hybridised community is ready for an encounter in other culture, and in other nation. But there is always confusion in their mind as they physically and emotionally belong to their native country as well as to the adopted one. In the process of assimilation and acculturation they negotiate the memory of old identity and the concreteness of the new one. They see identity as a process of negotiation and articulation in multicultural society. This process of
identity is a “cut and mix” processes of “cultural diaspora-ization” (qtd. in Loomba 174).

The Indian immigrant writers are the intellectuals, self satisfied in their own particular fields of assessment and perception on immigrant life. They face an opposing tendency of the other cultures in the day to day life like their narrative figures. The culture of the host country becomes an opposing one for them because they begin to realise that the way of life they are familiar with in their homeland is totally different from the way they now face in the host country. In their desire for assimilation they always have pain and anguish, loneliness, loss of identity and isolation. The reminiscences of their motherland and the anguish of leaving behind everything familiar agonizes the minds of the migrants. Although many first generation Indian immigrants, for sometimes nurture the thought of returning to their motherland but they can not because of their growing children, the second generation Indian immigrants accept America as home for them.

The first generation Indian immigrants are always concerned to keep the socio-cultural baggage like religion, language, music, art, dress, cuisine etc intact. But culture is not static. It keeps on changing from one generation to another. So, naturally the first generation Indian immigrants in their conscious efforts try to pass their tradition and cultural baggage to their future generations. But in this cultural transformation, some of the elements of their own culture disappear, some survive, while some elements are assimilated and changed. In such situation the immigrants are bound to feel that they are on the margin of two cultures--of being and belonging. In their attempt to merge with the host culture while preserving their cultural baggage, they develop a double identity. They attempt for assimilation with the host culture but when they fail to do so they have a feeling of depression and frustration.
The prime concern for these immigrant writers in an alien society is always to construct an identity and individuality of their own. The image of being suspended between the two worlds, the individual immigrants suffer from nostalgia, alienation and assimilation. In the writings of diasporic writers like Jhumpa Lahiri the dynamics of migration is managed to erase nations and addresses, nuances of outsidedness, chronicles of dislocation and social unease in a fresh manner. She has brilliantly portrayed the dilemmas of uprooted individuals through her works. As a diaspora writer she expresses her various multicultural experiences as well as representation of nation and culture through her characters.

As a second generation Indian diasporic writer, Lahiri, like her fictional characters, is caught between two worlds and finds herself isolated and insulated. She confesses that she feels emotionally attached to her parents’ homeland and yet hardly feels comfortable in India. But at the same time she can not fully accept America as her homeland because of her parents’, who, after living thirty five years in America, consider India as their motherland. This attitude explains the multicultural characteristics of her stories in her works Interpreter of Maladies, The Namesake and Unaccustomed Earth.

The fictional presentations of Lahiri deal with the trials and tribulations of displaced persons struggling to make life in a multicultural world. Her stories and novels reveal about the awareness of the problems of Indian immigrants and their facing of the problems of adjustment in multicultural American society. Writers like her live on the margins of two cultures. Although she was born in London of Bengali parents and grew up in the United States, she always feels as an outsider because of her familial ties with her motherland. Lahiri as an immigrant to the United States for the last forty five years though claims that she is an American, she can not disclaim
her identity as an Indian or India is not her homeland. Her emotional anchoring and cultural mooring are revealed in her stories and novels. The characters she has created are living persons or multicultural products with Indian and American mix.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s literary progress from Nilanjana Sudeshna to Jhumpa Lahiri makes her like an Indo-American lady Bunyan who in search of a literary progress through English, creative writing and comparative studies searched for a literary confluence in the American socio-cultural melting pot. Lahiri’s first work Interpreter of Maladies, the winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction 2000 brought her reputation and identity all over the English speaking world. At the age of only 32, this collection of nine short stories was an immediate success which fetched her a host of other prizes and awards like the PEN, Hemingway Award, the O. Henry Award for the title story and also the Best American short stories, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Addison M. Metcalf Award, the New Yorker Debut of the year Award, and a Transatlantic review in 1997. She was also a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award in 1999 and was named as one of the best writers under 40 by The New Yorker. Her Third and the Final Continent was published in The New Yorker and got the National Magazine Award for Fiction in May 2000. The New Yorker Times finds in her ‘a wonderful distinctive new voice’ and ‘a writer of uncommon elegance and poise’ and Los Angeles Times Book Review praised her for “delicate yet assured touch, leaving no room for flubbed notes or forced epiphanies.” Her story collection is rightly termed by Newsday as “a stunning literary debut.” Although published for the first time in this collected version, the stories seem “to have sprung full-grown, like Athena, from the head of its creator, with all the force and assurance of art.” Therefore this collection is aptly called “a timeless treatise” (Jha 118). She was also awarded a Guggenheim fellowship in 2002 for the release of her The Namesake.
Lahiri was born in 1967 in London of Indian parents who had emigrated from Calcutta but remained deeply rooted in Indian culture. Lahiri, the daughter of a librarian and a school teacher has visited her parents’ home-city Calcutta several times during which she had felt “every visit was an emotional see-saw across continents and cultures” (Nayak 132-33) where both her parents were born and raised and where a number of her stories are set. She received her B.A. from Barnard College, and M.A. in English, M.A. in Creative Writing, M.A. in Comparative Studies in Literature and the Arts, and a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies from Boston University. She has taught creative writing at Boston University, and the Rhode Island school of Design and has been fellow at the Fine Arts Work Centre in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Although she married a Guatemalan Greek Journalist, their marriage ceremony was held in the traditional Bengali way in Kolkatta.

Before Interpreter of Maladies was published, Lahiri had published a few short stories exploring the process of cultural mixture where there is a sense of both longing and loss. Each one of her protagonists persistently had the feeling of being the other—“not American enough, not Indian enough, straddling fences, stretching identities”. She has also published her stories in The New Yorker as well as published in the Agni, Epoch, The Louisville Review, Harvard Review, Story Quarterly and elsewhere.

Lahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies (1999) and The Namesake (2003) had drawn rave reviews for her “extraordinary talent for empathy without any exoticization of either country and with a gift for inhabiting the emotional space of her characters” (qtd. in Nityanandam 13). The Namesake is written with “uncommon elegance and poise” (blurb) for her ability to exhibit the “same painstaking craftsmanship as Budhist sages apply to the making of a mandala and to chart the
emotional temperature of her characters with tactile precision” (qtd. in Nityanandam 13).

This feeling of exile and displacement is the subject matter of her stories in the *Interpreter of Maladies* - a book of nine stories of first and second generation Indian immigrants. It narrates the issues with identity faced by the diaspora community. The locales of the stories take place in Bengal, Boston and beyond but all the characters struggle with the same feelings of exile and travel between the two worlds. All the nine stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* focus on the inability of characters to communicate with people who are important in their lives. Most of the characters play out at a simultaneous existence in two cultures and beyond.

Jhumpal Lahiri in her fictional works describes intellectual immigrants of India who are driven by educational and economic opportunities offered by America. They have successful careers as lawyers, scientists, academics and doctors, economic stability and achieved all the materialistic happiness for which they immigrated to the US. The first generation immigrants are successful and adapt quite easily to American standards of life. But the experiences of the second generation immigrants are different. The experiences of first generation and second generation generate their concern for identity and culture. The chapter deals with their quest for identity through the consciousness of nation and culture that they have left or adopt in their existential struggle.

In “A Temporary Matter” Sobha and Sukumar are second generation Bengali immigrants in the United States who are alienated from each other in the aftermath of a still born baby. The story has Indian and American background. The birth of their still-born baby disturbs their domestic harmony and Shoba finally decides to separate
herself from Shukumar forever. She is uninterested in the domestic affair, including cooking. Nothing in her life interests her. The story revolves around the difficulties of relationships, communications and a loss of identity which is very clearly seen in every diaspora. The unexpected announcement of power cut for an hour for five days provided them a chance to come closer to each other once again. Unable to think anything in particular about spending an hour in darkness, Shoba turned nostalgic and suggested to say something which they have never told before. Thus the hour of darkness brings the couple close to each other and they spend the hour sharing their secret feelings. This renewed conjugal relationship does not last long as the line is repaired ahead of schedule. The death of their baby becomes a personal injury for her but to Shukumar it has poisoned their conjugal happiness. To him Shoba exists very much as she used to be after the loss took place; but Shoba, nursing her private gloom, stands on the threshold of alienation. Both of them are influenced by the American society in which the conjugal relationship depends on the whims of the couple. In case of Shoba and Shukumar marriage itself turns into a temporary matter. The title “A Temporary Matter” seems a comment on the nature of marriage in the West. In India the institution of marriage is considered as a sacred one and is given much more importance. But in America the concept of marriage and family kinship is losing importance day by day. To the Indian psyche marriage is an “undertaking to cooperate in the procreation and rearing of children” (Gaur 141). Apart from that marriage in Indian culture is thought to be a sacred bond between two souls.

In the story, a complex weaving of two cultures of East and West are juxtaposed. In spite of her Western outlook and education Shoba feels alienated but at the cross-roads she cherishes the traditional Indian values though she can’t get back to India. Similarly tearing the picture of a woman from a book and keeping it for weeks
inside his book, Shukumar feels a sense of guilt. He may not think of coming back to India but he does not establish extra-marital affair in spite of liberal sex prevailing in American society. This transcultural story exhibits the trends of typical postcolonial diaspora where the characters carry different socio-geographical identities with them. The clash of cultural practices, norms, assumptions and the resulting agony and anxiety exhaust and destabilize the characters. But in this context Lahiri suggests that, “it is always not so easy to reconcile the conflicting claims of two different mindsets suffering from the strange disease of modern life especially when the only point of reconciliation in the form of a baby is lost” (Jha and Ravichandran 72). In their exiles Shukumar and Shoba are “are trying to locate space through time. It is only when the electric lights are off that the electricity of their closeness lights on them; their area of darkness is flooded by the flashlights of memory” (Roy 95). Lahiri has very beautifully portrayed the human condition of loneliness in everyday ordinary situations. The insecurity and uncertainty in the relationship as the second generation Indian immigrants reflects their instable life in exile.

The story “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” is narrated through the eyes of a ten years old child named Lilia. She is a second generation Indian immigrant child. The story is an emotionally evocative narration about Bangladeshi immigrant Mr. Pirzada. The nostalgic feeling of an exile through the character Mr. Pirzada is very brilliantly highlighted in this story. Mr. Pirzada always keeps a watch set to the local time in Dacca. The psychology of Mr. Pirzada brilliantly portrays the mindset of an exile in an alien world. Edward Said in Reflections on Exile writes: “For an exile, habit of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual occurring together contrapuntally” (Said 172).
This story throws light on the cultural differences between an Indian family settled in the USA and a Muslim academic who is temporarily in the US to study the foliage of New England. The only link between them is the language and culture. The story is written from the perspective of a second generation Indian immigrant in the USA who naturally has little knowledge on the history, geography and culture of her own mother country like Lahiri herself. Lahiri is caught between two worlds and two cultures. As a second generation Indian immigrant, she feels a sense of distance from her parents’ history and at the same time becomes inquisitive to learn about India. Lilia also has very little memory of the city of Calcutta. For the first generation Indian immigrants like Lilia’s parents, India is always a home and homeland. But to the second generation Indian immigrants like her it means no more than an orange colour space on the map that her mother told her, “resembled a woman wearing a sari with her left arm extended” (IM 26). Lilia, being the second generation Indian immigrant feels as if twice removed from the original homeland because neither she has inherited the cultural baggage of the original home nor tied to an exact place—neither Indian enough nor fully American. For her India is just an ‘imaginary homeland’. She is the resident of a third space where the cultures of India and America meet. Lahiri has modelled Lilia’s parents based on her own parents. From an early age Lahiri notices that all Indian immigrants want to have a number of Indian acquaintances. This must be the same behaviour of her parents she notices there. Lilia’s parents are self-possessed Indian exile with a vision to provide their child a much better comfortable life in the USA than India.

Mr. Pirzada visits Lilia’s home regularly. Like Lahiri herself and for Lilia too, Mr. Pirzada was “the Indian Man” (IM 23) which her father corrects “Not since partition. Our country was divided in 1947” (ibid). As a second generation Indian
immigrant child she is only vaguely aware of her original cultural roots. When her father informs her that after partition of 1947, Mr. Pirzada is no more an Indian, she does not find any cultural gap between her Indian parents and Mr. Pirzada. She says:

It made no sense to me. Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same joke, looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for desert deeped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea (IM 25).

This is more so when she notices that after the news, there are long discussions between her parents and Mr. Pirzada “as if they were a single person, sharing a single meal, a single body, and a single silence and a single fear” (IM 41). Here we find a unique sense of fostering a cultural bond despite apparent differences of birth and breeding. She is confused by Mr. Pirzada’s identity. It disturbs her deeply why Mr. Pirzada, though speaks the same language, is not an Indian. For Lilia on the eve of Bangladesh War in 1971, his identity is itself in confusion. She can noy understand the plurality of identity that India possesses. When she looks at her own identity it becomes a puzzling one for her too. Like a second generation Indian immigrant, she is confused of her own identity as to where she belongs to. Being born and brought up in America she is much more American in her ways especially when she celebrates American festivals like Halloween, Jack-O-Lantern with her American friends and feels more at ease with the white society.

Mr. Pirzada’s national identity is completely different from Lilia’s father, yet his cultural identity is depicted with the Indians i.e. Bengali culture. He is from
Pakistan and a Muslim. But the culture of Bengal binds them. Their representation of culture is subcontinental, transcendental and transnational now. Their cultural affinity is stronger than the differences of religion and country which is responsible for their closeness. Away from home, in a society totally alien to one’s culture and lifestyle, each immigrant attempts to find a compatriot. Geo-politically they belong to two different countries, but emotionally they are bonded and fused to each other for having affinity in cultural identity. The overwhelming similarities in the cultural habits and behavioural patterns make the difference in national identities absurd. Thus every immigrant in a multicultural society is not classified by religion, race or nationality. When we think, “Man can divide the country, state and land surface but not the culture” (Nayak 137) the friendship shared by Lilia’s parents and Mr. Pirzada is based on common practices and beliefs in Bengali culture, which is beyond the politics of religion and national boundaries.

The title story “Interpreter of Maladies” presents a second generation Indian American couple who visit India for the first time with their children. Their guide Mr. Kapasi becomes curious about the couple Mr. Das and Mrs. Das because they are influenced by two different worlds. They appear to be the true Americans except their tanned complexion for which they are “looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did” (IM, 43-44) and speak with an American accent. Like most of the foreigners they had their own presuppositions regarding India as a place of dirt, heat, over burden population with oriental charm. Therefore, Mr. Das satisfied himself by taking pictures of a dirty barefoot man on a bullock cart. Their children also took fun when they saw monkeys and goats out of the zoo for the first time. Both the parents care for their children dearly but the rift in their relationship adversely affects their attitude towards their children. As second generation immigrants they are the product of bi-
cultural ethos and having the characteristics of American culture which they have often bickered. Mrs. Das does not pay any attention to their children. Most of the time she remains painting her nails. Their behaviour towards their children reflects a kind of emotional exile. Therefore Mr. Kapasi feels:

They were all like siblings...Mr. and Mrs. Das behaved like an older brother and sister, not parents. It seemed that they were in charge of the children only for the day; it was hard to believe they were regularly responsible for anything other than themselves (IM 49).

During their journey when Mr. Das was absent Mrs. Das told Mr. Kapasi that one of her three children, Bobby was not born of Mr. Das but of a Punjabi friend of her husband while she made no protest. Since she keeps the fact in secret her suffering has been becoming more from time to time. The secret guilt of a momentary sexual relationship with her husband’s friend becomes a load. She says, “Eight years, Mr. Kapasi, I’ve been in pain for eight years. I was hoping you could help me feel better, say the right thing. Suggest some kind of remedy” (IM 65). This makes Kapasi astonished so much that he could not find a remedy but simply asked her, “Is it really pain you feel, Mrs. Das, or is it guilt?” (IM 66)

Mrs. Das got married at a very young age and has been burdened with a child at a very tender age. Being separated from her own family and friends, she felt continually tired and emotionally alienated. It was her attempt to break free the boredom and wanted to free herself from the hold of matrimony. Her silence during the sexual closeness to another individual could be a means to overcome this situation. But her Indian psych transforms this single momentary pleasuring event into a gigantic burden that she carries within throughout her life. Lahiri says:
It best expresses thematically the predicament at the heart of the book—the dilemma, the difficulty and often the impossibility of communicating emotional pain and affection to other, as well as expressing it to ourselves. In some sense, I view myself as a writer, in so far as I attempt to articulate these emotions as a sort of interpreter as well (Reddy 142).

Through this story Lahiri depicts Indian immigrants’ struggling with their connections to India of their memory. Although their ties to the country differ in degree, her characters interpret their maladies of the heart through their cultural identity. Lahiri presents the family with their woes and agonies.

Miranda in the story “Sexy” is a lonely American woman and seeks pleasure to remove the boredom of isolation. She has an adulterous relationship with a married Bengali man Devajit Mitra, who is of Indian origin. When his wife has left for India for few weeks, he spends most of his time at Miranda’s apartment making love to her. But Miranda’s relationship with Dev begins to lose the passion and warmth after the arrival of Dev’s wife. Dev’s Sunday afternoon sessions of warming up Miranda do not help her recover from her growing loneliness. She offers to look after Rohin for a day, as he is the unhappy and precocious nephew of Indian friend Laxmi. Rohin asks Miranda to put on the slinky cocktail dress that she had once bought with Dev. When she puts on the dress, Rohin, like Dev in Mapparium remarks “you are sexy” (IM 116). Rohin further says, “that’s what my father did...he sat next to someone he didn’t know, someone sexy, and now he loves her instead of my mother” (IM 108). When she forced Rohin to explain the meaning he says, “It means loving someone you don’t know” (IM 107). Miranda feels Rohin’s words under her skin. When Dev had called her sexy, she had felt hot within. But now she feels numb. Miranda now knows fully
that irrespective of her deep love towards Dev, she will never equal to his wife. What attracts Dev towards her is her only beautiful physic. She now realises that Dev, being an Indian, is bound by his tradition and custom not to desert his wife. The experience with Rohin suddenly made Miranda to realise her futile infatuation towards Dev who has been made for his wife only. Rohin’s innocent narration of his parents’ quarrel over his father’s extra-marital affair changes Miranda’s mind and she decides to end the relationship and goes to the place where Dev had kissed her for the first time. Therefore she goes to the church. She sits outside the church and gazes at its giant pillars. She now understands her own mistakes and like the church that is standing on the solid pillars, her mind too becomes stable and stands on the unmovable.

In Dev we see how a person from a third world country is lost in the glamour of a Western country and robbed of his character in exile. Miranda is an American woman and knows nothing about India. In her ignorance she thinks that ‘Bengali’ is a religion. Her only association to India is through the Dixit family- their neighbours whom she came to know when she was a child. The Dixit family was an amusement and strange for the entire white neighbourhood in their community. Once when Miranda went to a party at Dixit’s house, she found everything strange: shoes at the front door and the picture of goddess Kali. Later she feared even to cross their house:

She’d been too frightened even to walk on the same side of the street as the Dixit’s house, which she had to pass twice daily, once to get to the bus stop, and once again to come home. For a while she even held her breath until she reached the next lawn, just as she did when the school bus passed a cemetery (IM 96).
Dev’s Indian wife, on the other hand, is ceremonial, and has love for her husband sanctified by religion and society. She stands for “well-lessoned domesticity and Dev is her belief in honest participation in conjugality. She is suggested as perfect feminine Indian beauty, an image of purity, sacrifice and sanctity in marriage” (Kamara 168).

Laxmi and Miranda both retain to their respected native culture. Laxmi is shocked and upset at the news that her cousin’s husband had fallen in love with a woman. Laxmi with her Indian ideal of fidelity could think of nothing else but “If I were I’d fly straight to London and shoot them both” (IM 97). But juxtaposed with Laxmi’s reaction, Miranda attempts to hold onto Dev even after his wife’s return from India. But Dev seems to be struggling to come to grips with the cultural conflict that he faces. The interaction between cultures is a process of negotiation. Thus, by confrontation with other cultures, the process of reconstructing the self starts. This happens to Dev also. Being an Indian Dev acts more westernised than the western Miranda who comes closer to Indian values of compassion and self-sacrifice. A Bengal born and settled in the USA, Dev first attempts to Indianise her name to Mira, but he himself becomes more western in his outlook on extra-marital affair than her. He does not even experience any qualms cheating his wife when he carries on his relationship with Miranda. On the other hand Miranda is more curious to know about Bengal so that she can get emotionally close to her lover.

Mrs. Sen, a first generation Indian immigrant in “Mrs.Sen’s” is a lonely, disoriented, despairing Bengali housewife of a mathematics Professor in the USA. She spends almost all her time in the university apartment where her husband Mr. Sen, a Professor of mathematics, is all the time busy in his academic engagement. In order to escape from her boredom and loneliness she takes up the job of baby-sitting at her
own house. It is arranged that Eliot, an eleven year old American child comes to her everyday because both of his parents are working. In Mrs.Sen’s apartment Eliot looks at the familiar homely things through an alien eye looking at Indian things as Lahiri herself must have done in her childhood when she had visited the Whites’ family. Eliot notices that Mrs.Sen takes all the trouble for preparing dinner for herself and for her husband that smelled of cumin and other spices. While Mrs. Sen parts her hair and solemnly applies scarlet powder to her forehead, Eliot is wondered, “if she had cut her scalp, or if something had bitten her there” (IM 117). Eliot is amused and surprised at her manners-- the ways she uses blade to cut vegetables instead of a knife while cutting vegetables with a “blade that curved like the prow of a Viking ship” (IM 114), the food she prepares with Indian spices, her way of cutting fish. This shows her Indian culture which is imbibed within her even after staying in an alien country. With this Indian culture she tries to create a home for herself away from thousand miles of her own home, in her own small apartment in America. From these things Eliot learns about Mrs. Sen’s cultural practices like putting vermillion in her parting of the hair as a symbol of being married and other similar things.

Eliot compares her manners which are in sharp contrast to that of his working and sophisticated American mother. He finds that his mother goes out without having lunch, but has her bread, cheese and wine in the evening and orders pizza for dinner. He compares Mrs.Sen with his mother, who invites a man to dinner and spends the night in her bedroom whom he never sees again. Eliot by watching Mrs.Sen every day, starts comparing his mother’s appearance with hers. When he sees his mother in Mrs.Sen’s drawing room he feels her looks very odd “…in her cuffed, beige shorts and her rope-soled shoes, who looked odd…in that room where all things were so carefully covered, her shaved knees and thighs too exposed” (IM, 112-113).
Eliot finds that Mrs. Sen is not happy with her American life. She tells him how the neighbours in India help each other in every festive occasion. Eliot feels that India is a place blessed with warmth of human relationship where the whole neighbourhood shares one’s joy and sorrow. On the other hand Eliot finds his home a lonely one.

Mrs. Sen feels utterly isolated because she had been unwillingly plucked out from her own soil and planted in an alien country where her roots are drying out. Sarah Kerr’s observation on Lahiri’s women is aptly suitable for Mrs. Sen:

As the men went for their advanced degrees in fields like engineering and microbiology and stayed on to take jobs, young women from India flew over to accompany them, sometimes following through on an arranged marriage. Once here, in the early days, the wives had little besides frugal homemaking to occupy the endless hours they spent alone. They suffered terribly at first from loneliness, and from the devastating absence of anything they could recognize from their youth (Kerr n.pag.).

Mrs. Sen does not want to give up her own culture and adopt another culture. She constantly feels that she is an exile. She longs for her own homeland always. Though she lives with her husband in the US, to her home is what she has left behind. It is impossible for her to fit into the new surroundings. She realizes that living in exile means not to belong to that country. She is lonely and incapable of striking up friendship with other persons. Her only companion is Eliot. Checking the mailbox frequently becomes a practice in an alien society. This shows one’s emotional bondage with his native land for which he tries to connect with near and dear ones of his mother country through the letters.
Mrs. Sen worries about Eliot’s relationship with his mother in the Western world who “sat at the table as he ate, drinking more wine and asking how his day was, but eventually she went to the deck to smoke a cigarette, leaving Eliot to wrap up the left-overs” (IM 118). She recollects how in India children take care of their old parents but in American society they do not bother at all about their old parents. Therefore she enquires to Eliot, “Will you put your mother in a nursing home when she is old?”(IM 131)

Mrs. Sen is an eponymous immigrant who is tortured by the pressure of adapting to American ways. She deals with cultural alienation and deeply feels the lack of community feeling in the American culture. She is homesick for the kind of community she had in India. Describing the scene before a wedding ceremony when the neighbourhood women gather to prepare food with blades such as hers, she states, “It is impossible to fall asleep those nights, listening to their chatter...here in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I can’t sometimes sleep in so much silence”(IM 115).

Lahiri portrays Mrs. Sen’s loneliness in a new culture cuts her off from their own traditional, moral culture. In fact “Mrs. Sen’s” is based on her own mother and appears partly autobiographical. Mrs. Sen is the finest example of a solitary alienated immigrant self living in America. She is quite miserable in an alien culture amidst alien people. At every moment she remembers and becomes nostalgic for her dear city Calcutta, the people of Calcutta, fish curry, Bengali fashion and its way of life. She has been living in America for several years but never likes to leave her cultural inheritance. She always wears sari, coral gloss, golden bangles and her drawers are filled with saris. She tries to be an American by never leaving her Bengali self but always appears to be more and more Indian every day. She has no friends in America and her husband has also no time to accompany her to anywhere. Her only friend is
Eliot. In fact she has a psychological upheaval and reactions that an immigrant has to face in an alien world. Mrs. Sen’s experiences are true to every immigrant woman belonging to the first generation. In its narrative structure:

“Mrs. Sen’s” portrays the culture shock of both Mrs. Sen and Eliot. The cultural transplant takes no roots on the new soil. In fact Mrs. Sen makes no effort to forget her India past...Till the end of the story, Mrs. Sen remains poised between the two worlds-- the one she left behind and the one she lives in, with ever widening chasm between the two. Tears and loneliness become the permanent features of her life (Nityanandam 42-43).

Lahiri’s concerns for immigrants’ nostalgia and craving for ‘roots’ dominate in the character of Mrs. Sen. Through Mrs. Sen’s character she sensitises the immigrant feelings in an alien country where the victims enjoy loneliness and alienation.

In “The Blessed House” Sanjeev and Twinkle are two Indian immigrants meet each other four months before their marriage. Twinkle is a second generation Indian immigrant who is not an organised housekeeper “sometimes spat a little when she spoke, or left her undergarments... at the foot of their bed rather than depositing them in the laundry hamper” (IM 142) which irritates the methodical Sanjeev. Her attitude and lifestyle is completely American. She smokes cigarette and occasionally drinks alcohol. She has no interest in her wifely duties and distances herself from household works. As second generation immigrants both Sanjeev and Twinkle do not comprehend the Indian values and customs of being a spouse to each other. Hence they do not have any commitment to each other. In the story:
She was twenty seven and recently abandoned, he had gathered, by an American who had tried and failed to be an actor; Sanjeev was lonely, with an excessively generous income for a single man, and had never been in love. At the urging of their matchmakers, they married in India, amid hundreds of well-wishers whom they barely remembered from his childhood (IM 143).

Both the second generation Indian immigrants, being born and brought up in an alien land, they try to be melted down in the melting pot. “They refused to be marginalised as the ‘other’ and ‘anonymous’ which are, plainly speaking, ‘terms of depersonalization’: instead they hold that they constitute ‘another culture’ and ‘another history’ which comingles with those of the host country” (Das 16). Twinkle has a strong fascination for the Christian paraphernalia that they find in their new home at Connecticut which Twinkle calls treasure hunt. But for Sanjeev they are all disturbing and unsettling because he is very conscious of his own religion and tries desperately to save his cultural identity even in an alien land. As a second generation Indian immigrant Twinkle’s attitude to the statue of Christ and Mother Mary is different from Sanjeev’s because she likes all the images and statues associated with Christianity. Therefore she believes that all these holy statues indicated that the house is blessed. But Sanjeev does not like to display all these things in his new home as they are not Christian by religion. But he has to make a compromise with Twinkle who is rigid to keep the statue in the lawn. Twinkle believes that her house is a blessed one but she can’t understand the importance of mutual understanding and love in a conjugal life which blessed a house more than these holy things. If there is compromise, sacrifice, and adjustment among members of a family then the house remains blessed –this is the thought of Indian culture regarding home. Sanjeev loves
the Indian tradition and culture and is all for Indian food and fondly recollects his student days when he uses to go to an Indian restaurant to order Indian food. He tries to become more culture-centric. But for Twinkle Indian food is a bother.

We get the picture of a gradual initiation and process of acculturation of a Bengali gentleman with an alien society in the story “The Third and the Final Continent”. It is written in the form of memories of past of an unnamed narrator who in search of an identity crosses three continents. Through him we see multiple displacements and troubles faced by a young immigrant who later on successfully assimilated and adapted in the alien world. He is born in Calcutta, has sailed to London from Calcutta for higher study and from London he moves to Boston for a job to join in Dewey Library of MIT, Boston. He has crossed overseas to make his fortune in Europe and America. He is eager to learn and to adjust, to reconcile the differences and makes every effort to make his home in the alien society. Although he remains in the US, he does not let himself lose his Indian identity in an effort to become an American. Before coming to America he takes a trip to Calcutta to attend his arranged marriage. After staying a week in Calcutta and barely getting acquainted with his bride he returns to Boston to join in his new job in the States while her documents for her immigration to America are arranged.

After arriving at Cambridge, he checks into the local YMCA and later rents a room in the house of a hundred and three year old American widow, Mrs. Croft. It is during his short stay as a tenant at old Mrs. Croft’s house that he comes to know about the differences and about the peculiarities of his own identity. When his wife Mala comes from India he leaves Mrs. Croft’s home and moves to a new apartment. Gradually he starts assimilating into the new culture- “I was used to it all by then: used to cornflakes and milk” (IM 190) but his wife confronts cultural shocks. She
keeps on covering her head with her sari, an Indian culture, even when she is all alone at home with her husband. They experience a sense of alienation in an alien world where both are strangers to each other.

One evening while they are walking several blocks down Massachusetts Avenue, he takes her to Mrs. Croft’s home. This shows his emotional bond with the old American lady as an Indian. At her home Mrs. Croft scrutinizes her:

From top to toe with what seemed to be placid disdain. I wondered if Mrs. Croft had ever seen a woman in a sari, with a dot painted on her forehead and bracelets stacked on her wrists. I wondered what she would object to. I wondered if she could see the red dye still vivid on Mala’s feet, but all obscured by the bottom edge of the sari. At last Mrs. Croft declared, with equal measure of disbelief and delight. I know well: “She is a perfect lady! (IM 195).

The narrator had immense respect for her. After knowing more about her life through her sixty eight years old daughter Helen, he admires her strength to live another forty years after her husband’s death and even now having courage to live independently all alone in the house. She was in deep contrast with the narrator’s own mother:

It was widowhood that had driven my own mother insane...My mother refused to adjust to life without him; instead she sank deeper into a world of darkness from which neither I, nor my brother, nor concerned relatives nor psychiatric clinic on Rashibari Avenue could save her (IM 187).

But when he comes across Mrs. Croft’s obituary in a newspaper in fact it was the first death of someone in an alien society that he mourned and became completely a dumb. He feels an emotional vacuum as if he has lost someone related to him.
I came across Mrs. Croft’s obituary. I had not thought of her in several months- by then those six weeks of the summer were already a remote interlude in my past- but when I learned of her death I was stricken, so much so that when Mala looked up from her knitting she found me staring (IM 196).

This emotional bond of taking care of near and dear ones in Indian psyche is seen in Mrs. Sen’s when she asks Eliot, “If I began to scream right now at the top of my lungs, would someone come?” (IM 116). Eliot then replies to her “they might call you...but they might complain that you were making too much noise” (IM 117). In fact, Mrs. Croft is for him the first family before his wife arrives.

Although he remains in the U.S. he does not lose his Indian identity in his effort to become an American. He is neither ready for “linguistic loss” (Nayak 141) nor for the loss of culture. His wife gets the first taste of cultural gap while she is on her way to America. She does not take any meal in the flight from Calcutta to Boston because she is offered oxtail soup on board which has killed her appetite completely throughout the journey. The narrator is old now. Gradually he tries to assimilate with the American culture by preserving his own which usually happens to every immigrant. He assimilates and acculturates with the American soil which makes him feel proud:

We are American citizens now, so that we can collect social security when it is time. Though we visit Calcutta every few years, and bring back more drawstring pajamas and Darjeeling tea, we have decided to grow old here. I work in a small college library. We have a son who attends Harvard University. Mala no longer drapes the end of her sari over her head, or weeps at night for her parents, but occasionally she
weeps for our son. So we drive to Cambridge to visit him, or bring him home for a weekend, so that he can eat rice with us with his hands, and speak in Bengali, things we sometimes worry he will no longer do after we die (IM 197).

Lahiri is a second generation expatriate and is probably aware that “the process of acculturation is easier for them. However, Mala and her husband’s experiences are similar to what Lahiri’s parents must have experienced...gradually the ‘home’ shifted from ‘there’ to ‘here’ and the adopted land becomes the homeland (Nityanandam 55).

Lahiri thus introduces the idea of loss of cultural identification. She presents a couple whose only remaining connection with the country of their origin has a definite death with their own end because the assimilation of their son into American culture leaves no room for their own cultural orientation. His anxiety about his son’s growing proximity with American culture is typical of first generation immigrants. He encourages his son to fulfil his all ambitions by assimilating with the Americans and says:

“If I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he can not conquer. While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly fifty years. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have travelled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination (IM 197-98).

The narrator explores the new continent and manages to carve his personal private room but he can not cut off his bond with his native land. All the time there is a
feeling of being alienated, the fear and anxiety that remain within him despite his best efforts to beat the natives in dress, gestures and postures. The narrator’s son is born in America and hence lives as a naturalized citizen of America. Still he feels that he is an emigrant whose umbilical cord is still rooted in India which is difficult to sever it altogether. But after spending thirty years in the States, the narrator’s Indian moorings often haunt him, as they haunt the author who says, “I am so much more American than they are. In fact, it is still very hard to think of myself as an American (Das 177). The narrator expresses his own fears, but he must accept the change that his son undergoes a process of acculturation, which is the only way of survival for his son.

Lahiri captures the Indian ethos effectively and portrays the lives of servants and marginal figures in the story “A Real Durwan” and “The Treatment of Bibi Haldar”. Both the stories express her vision of India as she defends,

My own experience of India was largely that of a tunnel imposed by the single city we ever visited, by the handful of homes we stayed in, by the fact that I was not allowed to explore this city on my own. Still within this narrow confines, I felt that I had seen enough of life, enough details and drama, to set stories on Indian soil (qtd. in Nayak 136).

All her characters in these two stories speak Bengali which she defends, “Bengali is essentially a spoken language for me, because it occupies such an aural presence in my mind (qtd. in Nayak 179). In the beginning of the story “A Real Durwan” we see Boori ma as a refugee and at the end of the story we see her as a homeless exile. She is an exile not by geographical displacement, but she has lost her identity even in her native milieu. Like Boori Ma, Bibi Haldar in the story “The Treatment of Bibi Haldar” is a victim of untold misery and suffering due to physical illness and mental
state caused by unfulfilled desires and unrealizable dreams. She had a baffling ailment that took her to priests and doctors, palmists and therapists, prophets and fools. The protagonists of these two stories find themselves in exile even in their native milieu. When Bibi’s cousin winds up his business and moves away leaving Bibi alone, she says to herself, “now I am free to discover life as I please” (IM 170) that signifies the desperate efforts of an exile to conceal her sorrow and keep a smiling face.

Her first novel *The Namesake* focuses on the conflict of culture between the first generation Indian immigrants (parents) and the second generation Indian immigrants (their children). They face different problems as the meaning of culture differs for both the generations. The first generation is likely related to their homeland but the second generation forms an image of culture based on the information transmitted by their parents. The novel deals with the search for home for the first generation and the need to belong for the second generation. Brought up as an Indian American, Gogol Ganguli soon feels uncomfortable for his name and thinks to cast off his awkward name in the multicultural society of the United States, just as he longs to leave behind the inherited values of his Bengali parents. So he sets off his own path through life, a path strewn with conflicting loyalties, love and loss. In one of her interviews Lahiri says:

The question of identity is always a difficult one, but especially so for those who grow up in two worlds simultaneously, as is the case for their children. The older I get, the more I am aware that I have somehow inherited a sense of exile from my parents, even though in many ways I am so much more American than they are. In fact, it is still very hard to think of myself as an American...I think that for immigrants, the challenges of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense
of alienation, the knowledge of, and longing for a lost world, are more explicit and distressing than for their children. On the other hand, the problem for the children of immigrants-those with strong ties to their country of origin-is that they feel neither one thing nor the other. This has been my experience in any case (Das 177).

Gogol’s father Ashoke comes to Boston as a doctoral candidate and after marrying Ashima, starts a new life in a cold, grey city in New England. He immigrated for economic gain and for professional progress. He is a self-imposed immigrant. His immigration becomes an interaction between two cultures-- the traditional Indian culture and the modern western American culture. Ashoke is forward thinking and open minded and is ready to enter into or to be a part of American culture, but Ashima, disoriented and homesick, is less taken with late sixties America. She develops ties with other Bengali expatriates by forming lifelong friendships to preserve the old traditional ways in a new country. She feels uprooted and lives in a world of nostalgia. She spends hours in the apartment napping and sulking, reading her parents’ letters and the same five Bengali novels time and again. It becomes difficult for her to cope with multiple stresses of the two different cultures. It is no doubt that motherhood brings to her happiness but at the same time it brings also the threat of bringing up the child all alone in a country where all are strangers to her, “where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare” (TN 5-6).

Ashima has experienced problems due to nostalgia, rootlessness, and alienation in an alien society. She and her husband celebrate the child’s birth alone but realize that her child’s entry into this new will making him alone and deprived of many things in his life. They want to name their first child according to Ashima’s
grandmother’s wish because she has named each of her six great grand children. So they are waiting for Ashima’s grandmother’s letter where she has mentioned one name for a girl, one for a boy which she did not reveal to any members of the family. But unfortunately the letter was missing in the postal void somewhere between India and America.

The first generation Indian immigrants, Ashima and Ashoke accommodate themselves to create space and identity in a foreign country because the sense of uprootedness was disturbing them always in an alien world. Said in *Culture and Imperialism* elaborates the immigrant’s journey from their homeland, “the person who finds his homeland sweet is still tender beginner, he to whom every soil is as he is native one is already strong. But he is perfect to whom the entire world is foreign place” (Said 407). The new immigrants seek advice and suggestion from their own community. The families visit one another’s home on Sunday afternoons. They argue riotously over many things like the whims of Ritwik Ghatak versus those of Satyajit Ray, the CPI (M) versus the Congress Party, North Calcutta versus South Calcutta. They gather together in festivals like *navratras* and *pujas* and they become friends and have emotional attachment only for the reason that they hail from the same geographic region. They celebrate their festivals according to their age-old customs, wearing their best traditional attires and thus try to preserve their culture in a new land. For hours they argue about the politics of America, a country in which none of them have right to vote but they adapt too. Ashoke and Ashima are clumsy, awkward, and desperately out of place. They celebrate all the Bengali festivals and observe all religious rituals and rites. When Gogol was six months old, they invited their friends for Gogol’s rice ceremony. Ashoke wore transparent white Punjabi top over bell-bottom trousers and Ashima wore a silvery sari. Ashoke lives as a university professor
and is accepted by the academic community but at home he is a typical Indian male and is fastidious about his clothing. Both Ashoke and Ashima try hard to hold on their Indianness by making a trip to Kathakali dance performance or a sitar recital at Memorial Hall. They both prefer Bengali food but for their children Ashima prepares American dinner once a week because they think that food and dress are negotiable but they do not want to give up core values such as their cultural and religious traditions which are part of Indian culture.

Gogol finds himself adjusting with two cultures from his childhood. His unusual name serves as a symbol of his own unclear cultural identity, yet giving a pet name along with good name shows a compassionate interest in one’s culture. Bengali children are given two names-- one is a pet name used by family and close friends and a good name that is used by the rest of the society. His struggle for establishing his identity is dual because he thinks that his name does not give him an identity but puts him in a dilemma about his original identity. Moreover, as a child of immigrants, he has to fight constantly with conflicts arising due to his Indian roots. By changing his name to Nikhil, he is having twin sets of personality. Gogol’s parents want him to live, behave and act accordingly to Indian culture but Nikhil is a free liberated person who has left his past behind and has nothing to do with Gogol. By adjusting with two cultures since his childhood he learns not to abandon or attempt to diminish either culture but to mesh the two together.

Gogol’s conflict between his unconscious Bengali cultural life and the conscious adaptation to the American way of life make him sandwiched. Thus his identity is broken and fragmented. He finds that his identity is embellished by both cultures-- the Indian culture and the American culture.
Gogol has a dual existence with both Indian and American cultural values. When he is living two lives—Gogol represents the Indian part in him and Nikhil represents the American culture. He realizes the need of an identity. In other words “migrants straddle two cultures, fall between two stools” (Rushdie 5). Nikhil feels that though he is born and brought up in America yet to Americans he is an Indian and when he comes back to the country of his parents’ origin he is referred to as an NRI. The second generation immigrants like him are destined to be born in a country which does not belong to their parents. Lahiri herself expresses her impression about this in an interview:

I wanted to please my parents and meet their expectations. I also wanted to meet the expectations of my American peers, and the expectations I put on myself to fit into American society. It’s classic case if divided identity, but depending on the degree to which the immigrants in question are willing to assimilate, the conflict is more or less pronounced... As a young child, I felt that the Indian part of me was acknowledged and therefore somehow negated, by my American environment and vice-versa, I felt that I led two separate lives (Das 177-178).

As a second generation immigrant Lahiri can be compared to Sonali or Sonia who has forged an identity as an expatriate Indian and hence does not find necessary to keep shutting between two worlds. As a second generation immigrant they have a clearer identity and are very much closer to hybridity. During their stay in the new country and in interaction with that culture Ashima and Ashoke give up the rigid hold of their past. The hybrid identities are negotiated by them. Thus Ashoke and Ashima’s
acceptance of Maxine in their son’s life, Ashima’s consent for Sonia’s marriage to Ben indicate their changed perspective.

The immigrants want to retain their cultural roots but always try to search for assimilation and acculturation in their new land. They continue to live in a sandwich world. The immigrant community preserves its separate identity by observing its tradition. The question of identity affects the first generation immigrants. But for the second generations they feel no crisis of identity or alienation. The feeling of being homeless strikes the second generation immigrants in a different way. When Gogol’s father tells him that they will stay at Calcutta for eight months he gets scared to stay without his own room, without his records and his stereo and friends. Gogol and Sonia do not feel at home in Calcutta where their parents find solace and comfort. For the second generation immigrants, it is easier for them to flirt more easily between two cultures. The land where they were born and brought up is a home for them.

For Ashima and Ashoke memory and nostalgia play an important role. They cherish all the memories of the homeland and wait very anxiously for the moment of their visit to their own country. Their ease and comfort with their home culture can be perceived by their behaviour. So Lahiri writes:

Gogol and Sonia know these people, but they do not feel close to them as their parents do. Without minutes, before their eyes Ashoke and Ashima slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles wider, revealing a confidence Gogol and Sonia never see on Pemberton road (TN 81-82).
But in contrast when they return to Pemberton road, it brings relief to Gogol and Sonia, because for them India has always been an alien land. For them Boston is home, and trips to Calcutta to visit relatives are voyages to a foreign land. Both Gogol and Sonia have a sense of affinity to India, but it is America that is perceived as home for them. It is America where they are born and educated. Although they are accepted on their own terms here they face a sense of alienation. Their identity crisis, feeling of alienation, feeling of in-betweenness, aloofness and belongingness to nowhere becomes doubly intensified when Gogol in one of his school fieldtrips to the cemetery along with his classmates is assigned a project to rub the surface of the grave stones and find out the names of the dead person. But Gogol was surprised to know that there is no Ganguli there. He felt that being a Hindu and a Bengali “...he himself would be burned, not buried, that his body will occupy no plot of earth, that no stone in this country will bear his name beyond life”(TN 69).

On the other hand, Gogol’s shifting to live with Maxine’s family adopting and accepting her lifestyle and assimilating their cultural values express second generation’s desire for adapting to the host culture. His parent’s reaction towards his relationship with Ruth is typical of all the first generation immigrants because they disapprove and reject all such relationship. When Gogol is vacationing with Maxine he gets the news of his father’s sudden death in Ohio. He flies alone to Ohio, travelling for the first time in a world in which his father does not exist. After his father’s death he longs to talk to his sister and mother and at every opportunity he tries to be with them at their home. It is this Indian background and values which he has inherited from his father make him move closer to his sister and mother. His quest for identity and representation of Indianness is a never ending search because he can not reject the Indian culture and can not even accept the American values completely.
In an interview with Houghton Mifflin Company Lahiri has remarked that “the question of identity is always a difficult one, but especially for those who are culturally displaced as immigrants are who grow up into two world simultaneously” (Das 177).

Gogol discovers the book *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol* which was presented to him by his father on his 14th birthday. For the first time he starts reading the book in his father’s absence who is far from him now. On the opening page he finds his father’s handwriting in red ballpoint ink, “For Gogol Ganguli...The man who have you his name, from the man who gave you your name” (TN 288). He realizes that “the name he had so detested, here hidden and preserved-- was the first thing that his father had given him” (TN 289). He is prepared psychologically to stand on his own feet without ashaming of himself or the way he has lived. He feels that he is a product of both the cultures. He is proud of his own identity and his whereabouts and most importantly he is proud of his name and all that it means. It is only much later in his life he begins to realise his Bengali heritage and Indian values in memory, nostalgia and craving. Now he is ready to understand the importance of his name.

Lahiri’s second novel *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) is a delightful mix of first and second generation Indian Americans who often get married to non-Indians and start families of their own who have come of age in two cultures. Thematically the stories are interrelated and trace the lives of Bengalis who have, for a long time lived in the United States. In this collection, Lahiri weaves eight interconnected stories that take place across the globe—Cambridge, Seattle, Italy, London, Calcutta and Thailand. In this interconnected stories Lahiri portrays diaspora with the notion of multiculturalism. The story “Unaccustomed Earth” narrates the story of three generations represented by three characters namely Ruma, born and brought up in
America to Indian parents as second generation immigrants; her parents as first
generation immigrants to America; her son Akash, a third generation immigrant-- a
product of two or more than two cultures. Ruma’s parents as the first generation
Indian immigrants have their Indian heritage and cultural identity and the story very
beautifully reflects the characters’ struggle to assimilate into the new culture.

Ruma’s father is retired from his pharmaceutical company. He is a recent
widower. He is depicted as a person who is somewhat unhappy with his once
traditional life style. Ruma has little communication with her father. It is because
“The postcards were the first pieces of mail Ruma had received from her father. In her
thirty eight years he’d never had any reason to write to her” (UE 8). After his wife’s
sudden death he finds himself totally independent having no family burden at all. Her
father feels more liberated when the last ties with India are broken after his wife’s
sudden death. Gradually with a sense of enjoyment he immerses in American culture.
He starts travelling around the world by choosing package tours which he did not do
with his family. He becomes a volunteer for a Democratic Party in Pennsylvania
which seems not a problem to him though he is seventy by now. He pays a visit to his
daughter’s new home in the suburbs of Seattle. Here he feels at home as the American
landscape becomes familiar with him now: “his surroundings did not feel foreign to
him as they had when he went to Europe” (UE 28). When she saw her father she was
struck that her father completely resembled an American man in his old age “with
grey hair and fair skin” (ibid). “He was wearing a baseball cap that said POMPEII,
brown cotton pants and a sky blue polo shirt, and a pair of white leather sneakers”
(ibid) who could be resembled to any American man practically from anywhere.
Lahiri here shows the process of amalgamation and acculturation of the first
generation Indian immigrants with the culture of the host country. As a first
generation immigrant he knows his roots but at the same time he is aware that to achieve success he needs to adapt the new culture and its codes which he inevitably does because of the contact with another culture. Thus he is assimilated with the American culture.

When Ruma along with her supportive husband Adam offered her father to stay with them, he is not ready to forgo his freedom and “live in the margins of his daughter’s life, in the shadow of her marriage”(UE 53). Rather he wants to heal his wounds of his wife’s sudden silence forever by finding a new passion towards Mrs. Meenakshi Bagchi, an Indian immigrant woman in the US. In this way we have seen Ruma’s father having been Americanised rather unexpectedly.

Ruma is a representative of the second generation immigrant. She is married to an American against her parents’ will. She chooses to wear Western clothes instead of Indian ones. Her mother left her the two hundred and eighteen saris upon her death but ‘she kept only three, placing them in quilted zippered bag at the back of her closet, telling her mother’s friend to divide up the rest.’(UE 17) She seldom uses her Bengali language now. When an aunt or uncle calls from Calcutta to wish her a Happy Bijoya or Akash a Happy Birthday, she trips over words, mangles tenses. She could have started her bright career as a successful lawyer but she has to move to the suburbs of Seattle from New York for her workaholic husband. In this new place she knows no one and feels very isolated. She finds herself repeating her mother’s life pattern, ‘growing up, her mother’s example-moving to a foreign place for the sack of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a household-had served as a warning, a path to avoid. Yet this was Ruma’s life now’(UE 11). She has decided not to work until the upcoming second baby starts kinder garten.
Ruma had a very good relationship with her mother and always felt more attracted to her than her father. She could relate to her mother very easily whereas with her father there was always a distance. Her mother died unexpectedly on the operating table ‘of heart failure, anesthesia for routine gallstone surgery had triggered anaphylactic shock’ (UE 5). The sudden death of her mother makes Ruma feel traumatic. She is often nostalgic and recalls her childhood. She often remembers her mother who is a traditional woman and holds to many Indian traditions like endurance, patience and hard work. She is an excellent housewife who cooks well and runs the house ‘as if to satisfy a mother-law’s fastidious eye’ (UE 22). For Ruma whenever she comes, her mother is very helpful, taking over the kitchen, singing song to Akash and teaching him Bengali nursery rhymes, throwing loads of laundry into the machine. For Ruma the loss of her mother signifies the loss of a role model in her life and the source of traditional culture to return to.

In this story Lahiri shows how the Indian culture is ingrained in Ruma’s mind. As a second generation immigrant Ruma had little contact with India but it is the presence of her mother in her life and after her death it is the presence of her mother’s memories that lead her to memorise Indian culture and Indian heritage. Though her mother has no practical presence on her now, her influence on Ruma’s life is still very strong. She has followed her mother’s advice to get her son used ‘to the taste of Indian food and made the effort to poach chicken and vegetables with cinnamon and cardamom and cloves’ (UE 23), though he soon developed the taste for macaroni and cheese. She left her job devoting herself totally to her family. When her father asks her why she has not looked for a job in Seattle, she proudly says, “I am working, Baba. Soon I’ll be taking care of two children, just like Ma did” (UE 36).
As a second generation Indian immigrant, born and brought up in America, Ruma has not been caught up with the Indian ways of life as her mother adopted but she is rather struck to it. For her father she is always an American who marries an American and always put on American dresses. But when she moves to Seattle from New York, she has been unable to make friends in this new land as she did in New York. Here in this new land she is a full time housewife doing all the odd jobs with the desire of “having to fill the car with gas, making sure there was air in the tyres” (UE 34). Though she was going familiar with the roads, with the exits and the mountains and the quality of the light, she felt no connection to any of it, or to anyone. She had exchanged only pleasantries with her neighbours-- a retired husband and wife on one side, two gay professors at the University of Washington on the other. There were some women she would talk to as she sat watching Akash in the swimming pool, but at the end of each class they never suggested getting together. It felt unnatural to have to reach out to strangers at this point in her life” (UN 34). In this way her life in the US, as a second generation immigrant, is not different from her mother.

The immigrants are never constantly detached from their native culture. This is very true to the first generation immigrants and even second generation immigrants who can not sever themselves from their parental roots because of their parents’ ties. The second generation immigrants are caught in a dilemma whether to conform to their native culture or adopt the new culture. But in case of the third generation immigrants like Akash, they seem to adopt the new culture very easily without any dilemma in their mind because “they are away from the haze of memory of their native town” (Srinivas 178). When Ruma’s father stays with them he teaches his grandchild to speak Bengali. Akash develops a strong fascination to his grandfather’s
culture by learning to say a few more Bengali words which are completely foreign to him.

In *Unaccustomed Earth* “Hell-Heaven” is narrated by Usha, a young second generation Indian immigrant who can bridge the gap between two cultures. She recalls her family’s experiences with an Indian student Pranab. Pranab is a graduate student at MIT who comes to America for higher studies. Here in this new country he misses his native people and food a lot. He follows Usha and her mother all the way “for the better of an afternoon around the streets of Cambridge” (UE 60) in order to know them because he feels lonely and wants to make some Bengali friends. Then as a friend, he joins Usha’s family dinner regularly “almost every night, occupying the fourth chair at our square Formica kitchen table, and becoming a part of our family in practice as well as in name”(UE 62) . Usha’s mother likes him because he is young and shares a lot of common interest with him. She starts liking his regular visit to her apartment. He brings new lease of life to her. Usha’s father married her mother only as a way of tradition. “He was wedded to his work, his research and he existed in a shell that neither my mother nor I could penetrate” (UE 65). So her mother fills her emotional gap by the constant companionship with Pranab. He is so much a part of the family that:

Whenever we went, any stranger would have naturally assumed that Pranab kaku was my father, that my mother was his wife...in my mind, he was just a family member, a cross between an uncle and a much older brother, for in certain respects my parents sheltered and cared for him in much the same way as they cared for me (UE 66-67).

In fact Pranab kaku’s presence in their life in America “transformed the quiet life in our apartment and transported my mother back to the world she’d left behind in order
to marry my father” (UE 65). But later Pranab marries an American girl named Deborah against his family’s will. He then drifts away from the Indian American community and almost severs the relationship with Usha and her family. When Pranab’s wife gives birth to twin daughters, the little girls “barely looked Bengali and speak only English and were being raised so differently...They were not taken to Calcutta every summer, they did not have parents who were clinging to another way of life and exhorting their children to do the same”(UE 75). They celebrate Thanksgiving and other American holidays other than observe Indian traditional ones. He becomes a totally westernised person. Influenced by Pranab, Usha becomes a rebellious girl who also internalizes American values and ideology.

“A choice of Accommodation” presents the story of a second generation Indian immigrant Amit who marries an American white lady named Megan who is five years elder than him. Amit belongs to an upper class family in India while Megan is from an ordinary working family in America. Amit’s parents belong to a well-to-do family in India and they both “attended boarding schools in India themselves” (UE 96). Like every parents of the immigrant children they also want from Amit to marry a girl from Bengali community. Although Megan is a doctor his parents didn’t like his decision to marry her. Her ordinary background, her plain-looking and the difference between their ages has furthered their disappointment towards Megan. So after he gets married with her, his relationship with his parents deteriorated. Amit said “his parents had not even met her. He was aware of what an insult it was to them. For all their liberal Western ways he knew that they wanted him to marry a Bengali girl, raised and educated as he had been” (UE 112).

Although he married a woman who is five years elder to him, who was not pretty to look at, but he is satisfied with her. As the only child of his parents he feels
very lonely. Therefore, he doesn’t want Maya to be the only child to exist on this world. So he persuaded Megan for the second. He feels very lonely when his parents kept him in a boarding school at a very tender age. This painful loneliness felt by Amit during his school days hovers over him when Megan is away at work and he is at home taking care of his daughters. He even ponders that his daughters are not like him. “Both Maya and Monika had inherited Megan’s coloring, without a trace of Amit’s deeply tan skin and black eyes, so that apart from their vaguely Indian names, they appeared fully Americans” (UE 94).

He is longed for his parents’ support towards him. Because of his marriage his parents have severed their relationship with him. Therefore sometimes he feels depressed towards his family and his wife. At the marriage ceremony of his onetime classmate Pam Borden’ when he is drunk he even tells Felicia, a strange woman, about his dissatisfaction on his marriage. He also reveals to Megan that when he was young he had a crush on Pam. This revelation of his earlier emotion towards a girl helps them to come closer to each other. The story ends with their physical enjoyment that shows the permanency of their conjugal life. It seems “Their effort at finding suitable accommodation highlights an immigrant’s endeavouring to locate his identity in unaccustomed earth” (Awasthi 153).

“Only Goodness” is the story of Sudha and Rahul, a second generation Indian immigrant siblings. Their parents have expected both of them to be academically good. After Rahul’ graduation, their parents thrown a party and boast about how they “successfully raised two children in America” (UE 129). They always put pressure on their children to do academically good by showing examples of other Bengali children who did well in their studies by getting gold medal and full scholarship from the ivy-league universities. They also show their contempt on those
Indian communities who like to sip whisky at party. They never realise that the children of Indian parents have to compete with the American children in every walk of life. When their son Rahul was repeatedly arrested for rash driving and could not complete his education, their parents, particularly their mother, always blamed the American ways of life instead of blaming their son.

Sudha fulfils her parents’ dream but Rahul immersed himself to drink and becomes an alcoholic. Actually it was Sudha who first introduced him to alcohol. Rahul’s deep alcoholism becomes the cause of despair for their parents. In fact they had taken pain to bring them up in American ways. Rahul’s parents didn’t know about his alcoholism, so after his graduation they send him to Cornell for further studies where he fails miserably due to his addiction. This gives his parents much more tension. Sudha as a ‘caretaker sister’ and an elder sibling wants to give a helping hand to Rahul on many occasions. She tries her best to bring him out of addiction, but fails miserably. Ignoring their son’s problem the parents put up the pretence of being proud parents of successful kids among the Indian Bengali communities. But Rahul was a total failure in the eyes of the Indian immigrant community. They didn’t speak of Rahul unless their friends at America would ask any questions relating to him. Occasionally when they did “it was always the same unobjectionably impressive facts about him-- that he was at Cornell, a sophomore now” (UE 144).

On Sudha’s wedding day her mother requested her to stop Rahul from taking alcohol but she openly acknowledges her helplessness by saying “I can’t fix him” (UE 156). She leads a very stressful life in America because she is guilt-ridden for introducing Rahul to alcohol. She wants to leave for London, because it was a new place to her but “she felt an instinctive connection to London, a sense of belonging though she barely knew her way around” (UE 144).
as Sudha, the definition of home is ever elusive because cultural heritage and ethnicities are not binding factors for them as they keep drifting from one place to another in search of better opportunities for their life to fit in the society. As a second generation immigrant, she has the ability to transgress boundaries of customs and religion. The second generation immigrants like Sudha have come of age in two cultures. In fact, they are “muse endlessly over their positions in life and the world that confounds them, unsure if it is their own decisions of fate that has landed them where they are” (Gediya 136).

After a long gap Sudha invited Rahul to her home in London believing in him that he was no more an alcoholic now. One day she leaves her child Neel with Rahul for few hours. After coming back to home she finds her son in a bath tub while Rahul has been unconscious in a room due to alcohol. Roger, her husband does not share Sudha’s sentiments in regard to her brother, so he demands Sudha to ask Rahul to leave their home immediately. After his recovery from the drunken state Sudha drives him out of her home saying him not to see him anymore in future. Thus the story focuses on the immigrants’ sense of loss from different perspectives. They are financially strong and lead a very comfortable life there but they have no mental peace at all.

In “Nobody’s Business” Sangeeta Biswas, a young Bengali woman of thirty prefers her friends to call her Sang. She is good looking, smart and pretty. She is a modern lady with American culture who wants to distances herself from her parents. Therefore, she lives in an apartment with two of her friends Paul and Heather. This young Bengali woman is madly in love with Farouk who likes to be addressed himself as Freddy. She always rejects other young man’s phone calls who are desperate either
to marry her or to fall in love with her. Much to her surprise she rejects all of them and observes that those men are not really interested in her.

Farouk is not a good guy who deliberately makes intimate relationship with any girl that he comes close to. On his regular visit to their apartment Farouk and Sang seem to engage in occasional arguments and shouting each other. Paul harbours a secret crush on her but it was Sang only who madly loves Farouk despite knowing his bad habit. In order to keep their relationship alive, she cooks for Farouk, cleans and irons for him. But he betrays her. Finally, she decides to reject him and walks out of the relationship and also decides to walk out of the country. Towards the end she leaves the country forever to London to stay with her sister.

“Once in a Lifetime” is narrated by Hema to Kaushik in the form of a monologue. Both Hema and Kaushik are second generation Indian immigrants. Hema narrates her own perception on Kaushik, his parents, their habit and culture. Hema’s narrative gives a forecast of the first generation Bengali immigrant in Cambridge, Harvard and MIT. She feels very lonely because she has no identity from where she belongs to. The two immigrant families in the story get to know each other when they are living in an Indian community in Boston. Hema recalls how the two families had met each other for the first time. Loneliness and homesickness are the prime feelings that often bring immigrants families together, especially the first generation immigrants. In an alien country one’s culture, nationality and cultural affinity with others help to create an imagined community. It is because of Hema’s and Kaushik’s mothers’ loneliness that brings them closer together which strengthens their relationships.
Hema’s and Kaushik’s mother met each other in a park where Kaushik’s mother noticed “a Bengali woman in a sari, wearing vermillion in her hair” (UE 224). Looking at the Bengali woman with a sari and vermillion in a park of the alien world she came to help her. At that moment she was feeling dizzy and sat on a bench in the park. Along with her son Kaushik she escorted her to her home to reach safely. From that day onwards they become friends. Their family background was different from each other. Kaushik’s mother “went to a convent school and was the daughter of one of Calcutta’s most prominent lawyers, a pipe-smoking Anglophile and a member of the Saturday club” (UE 225) while Hema’s mother was a daughter of “a clerk in the General Post Office, and she had neither eaten at a table nor sat on a commode before coming to America” (ibid). If they were in India then it would have been a great cultural as well as societal gap. But in America, in a land completely alien to both of them they became close friends and passed their time together after their husbands went to their jobs.

When Hema was born it was Kaushik’s parents who were by the side of her parents. She was fed in Kaushik’s old high chair during her childhood and pushed her along the street in his old pram. Kaushik’s parents achieved success in America earlier than their friends. Hema explains “while my father and the other men were still taking exams, your father had already a Ph.D., and he drove a car, a silver Saab with bucket seats” (UE 224). It was in 1974 that Kaushik’s parents wanted to go back to India and Hema’s parents gave a grand party on that occasion. At that moment she was six years old and Kaushik was nine. Till the first day of 1981, there was no connection between the two families for complete eight years. After eight years Kaushik’s parents again came to settle in America. Lahiri calls them ‘seasoned immigrants’. They come back to America for reasons unknown to any known Indian
community. This time they stay for a long time in Hema’s home until they would find a new house for them. Hema’s mother doesn’t like to have them in her home for such a long period but it is Hema who begins to start liking Kaushik with her juvenile speculation whom she once hated completely. Hema also likes Kaushik’s mother and develops a close link with her.

They start to live together like one family. Kaushik occupies Hema’s room entirely. We have seen that the two families besides being Indian share two cultures. While one family enjoys curry for breakfast, other prefers tea and toast. Saris are worn by Kaushik’s mother while watching ‘Gilligan’s Island’. The one family who are more attached to their original background stays rooted in American soil but the other family who are like Western family moves back to India. Even in India they started living their life as an American family. In Bombay Kaushik’s parents manage to raise him as “a typical American teenager” (UE 238). Hema’s mother wore sari with vermilion on her head while Kaushik’s mother when came from India was “wearing slacks and a tunic, a silk scarf knotted at her neck...with her lipsticks and frosted eyelids” (UE 232) like an American lady. One afternoon Ruma has found Kaushik’s mother in their bathroom where she was sitting cross-legged on the edge of the bathtub and was “smoking a cigarette” (UE 243). This seems that although Dr. Choudhuri and Parul went back to Bombay from America, they didn’t give up the once habit of American culture which they inhabit from their previous stay at America. Looking at Dr. Choudhuri’s life style Hema’s mother were perplexed by the ways in which they had changed and remarked, “Bombay has made them more American than Cambridge had” (UE 235).

During the snow-fall day Hema and Kaushik went to the nearby woods beside their house. There in the woods among the tombstones he said to her about his
mother’s breast cancer spreading through the rest of her body. He revealed her the
cruellest truth of his parents’ coming to America for better treatment for his mother’s
illness. Hema was so shocked to hear this that she began to cry: “At first the tears felt
silently, sliding over my nearly frozen face, but then I started sobbing, becoming ugly
in front of you...mortifying that you were witnessing such a pathetic display” (UE
250). Through Hema’s sorrow and grief, Lahiri very beautifully portrays the deepest
sorrow of a person when one comes to know about a dearest’ silent departure from the
earth forever. Again the title of the story is very symbolic. When Kaushik’s parents on
returning back to America came by the first class, Hema’s mother after hearing their
first class journey exclaimed with an intake of breath. Then Kaushik’s father replied
“Once in a lifetime, right?” (UE 233). From his answer we can assume that they are
coming to America for Parul’s better treatment but who knows whether she gets rid of
that terrified disease or not. That is why his answer “once in a lifetime” is also very
symbolic to Parul’s immature death.

“Year’s End” is from Kaushik’s point of view narrating his own life-story
after his mother’s death. It is a tragic in nature with the death and loss of his mother.
After his mother’s death he was put in a residential school when on a Sunday morning
his father informs him over telephone about his remarriage. He marries a Bengali
widow named Chitra. Her age is quite closer to him rather than to his father. She has
two daughters. His father also informs him that very soon he is coming to America
with his newly married wife and her two daughters. But Kaushik can not accept his
father’s remarriage and two step sisters. He still feels the presence of his mother in
their house and does not want to see another woman in his mother’s place. He is upset
at the changes made in the house by Chitra. His beautiful room which was planned by
his mother before her death is now occupied by his two step-sisters Rupa and Piu. He
feels as if he has been displaced in his own house by the new-comers which he never think of to happen in his life. He feels very lonely as he has nobody around him who thinks for him. When his father brought a Christmas tree and asked him to find the old stand on which Kaushik’s mother would keep the Christmas tree, he does not tolerate it. He feels:

I had no sentimental attachment to the items inside, and yet I didn’t want to see them. The thought of Chitra going through her box, watching her sift through everything, upset me just as it had upset me, throughout the day, to watch her handle the cutlery, the teakettle, at one point to hold the telephone and speak with my father to learn that he was on his way home. When my father had tried to remove the signs of my mother from the house I blamed him for being excessive, but now I blamed him for not having done enough (UE 279).

He starts disliking his father and starts arguing with him when the question of taking a family photograph around the Christmas tree comes. His father gets disappointed with him when Kaushik informs him that he left the camera in his room at school. They are stating facts at each other and arguing “an argument whose depths only he and I could fully comprehend” (UE 280).

At every moment he remembers his mother. He is not interested with anything within the four walls of his house. One day when he has to go for a short ride with his father and Chitra, sitting between Rupa and Piu, he feels:

...the trip felt strangely momentous. For the last two years of my mother’s life, when she was always in and out of the hospital, we had gone nowhere, taken no trips for pleasure apart from those occasional walks along the beach. The last thing in my life that was anything close
to a vacation was the layover in Rome with my parents, on our way back from Bombay (UE 281).

As a teenage boy, he always wants to be amidst his parents’ care and love. But his mother’s absence proves everything futile to him. He only thinks “my presence was proof that my mother had once existed” (UE 282). Kaushik develops a kind of close affinity with his two step-sisters Rupa and Piu. He often takes them on rides. They also like his company. But one day Kaushik bursts out in anger when he finds Rupa and Piu secretly observing the photographs of his mother which are kept by his father in a sealed shoe box after her demise. They also comment on his mother’s. Though he developed a kind of close friendship with them he couldn’t control himself when he heard their comments on his mother’s photographs. He grabs Rupa by her shoulders squeezing too hard and drags Piu away from the box as if their proximity would contaminate the photographs and the box.

After that incident he left his home by leaving his sisters alone in that night. That night his father had gone to a party accompanied by Chitra. The two girls did not want to go with them rather they wanted to stay with Kaushik. But he left them alone in the house driving towards the north without any clear idea about where to go. When he was too tired to drive anymore he took rest in a motel and next morning he came to know from the desk clerk that it was on Penobscot Bay. He gave a call to his father who only said that he could have said good bye before leaving. A few weeks before his college graduation his father called him and informed him that he was selling their house. He now felt that the home which was planned by his mother and which bore so much memories of his mother’s sophisticated life is being shut off from him forever. Kaushik’s longing for a ‘home’ with his near and dear ones, for a ‘space’ where he would feel settled is expressed in his own words to Hema:
I had hated everything I spent under your parents’ roof, but now I thought back to that time with nostalgia. Though we didn’t belong there, it was the last place that I had felt like a home. In pretending that my mother was not sick and being around people who didn’t know, a small part of me had been able to believe that it was true, that she would go on living just as your mother had. The second house was different...the paraphernalia of her illness taking over every corner of every room (UE 291).

The presence of his stepmother and his two step-sisters alienates and distances him from his father. He doesn’t find any sacred meaning of the word ‘home’.

The last story “Going Ashore” is a pathetic one. Kaushik’s mother’s death, his father’s remarriage with a Bengali woman, the two step-sisters who occupied his room and finally his father’s decision to sell their home which was full with his mother’s memories-- are the reasons that compels him to drift away from his family. He becomes an international photo journalist and his works demands him of wandering through Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador. He finally ends up his wandering photo journalist life in Italy before finally taking up a job in Hong Kong as a photo editor for an international newsmagazine.

Hema has by now a Ph. D. and is a professor of Latin. She is in Italy on pretext of visiting libraries at the American Academy arranged by one of her colleagues named Giovanna. She is in Italy not for official purpose instead she wants to pass her time in Giovanna’s empty apartment. This is not her first visit to Italy. Before this she came here with one of her girlfriends. The second time it was with Julian, a married English man with whom she had an intimate relationship. She
wanted to marry him and was confident that “his divorce was a matter of time” (UE 295-296). But when she came to know that Julian would never leave his wife she was agreed to her parents’ decision to marry Navin, a non-Bengali from Calcutta. Their marriage was fixed in Calcutta and she was preparing to leave Italy. She gave her consent to marry Navin not because that she loved him but “after years of uncertainty with Julian...found this very certainty, an attitude to love she had scorned in the past, liberating, with the power to seduce her just as Julian once had. It allowed her to find Navin physically appealing, to like his tranquil brown eyes, his long tan face, the black line of moustache that grounded it”(UE 298). In one of her visits to a museum when she saw the sarcophagus of the bride and groom enclosed in a box of glass, tears came to her eyes because she felt her own marriage with Navin “was something dead...she was about to enter into. And though she knew it had every chance, over the years, of coming to life...she was conscious only of its deadness” (UE 301). She wanted to marry Navin without her love because “I thought it might fix things” (UE 313). After that she ended her relationship with Julian.

Being alone from all these burdens she came to enjoy her time in Italy with all her liberty. She didn’t even permit Giovanna to contract any friends to give her a company. One day it was a call from Edo, Giovanna’s friend who invited Hema to join him and his wife for a lunch. It was on the approaching way to Edo and Paola’s apartment that she met Kaushik after a long time. When they arrived at Edo’s apartment together, other guests assumed them as lovers or as old friends. After that they spent their days in Italy together. They came to see Volterra, “a town found by Etruscans, and it was in that austere, forbidding, solitary place that they spent their remaining days together” (UE 318). Her accidental meeting with Kaushik rekindled her childhood attraction and they began a momentary affair mostly centred on
physical affection before parting ways. On the eve of their departure Kaushik requested her to come with him to Hong Kong. But Hema did not take him on trust as she thought that his job “connects him to strangers...to disappear at any moment...She suspected that even if it were possible to turn back to clock, to never have met Navin and wait to bump into Kaushik in Rome, it would not have made a difference...She refused to go to that miserable place Julian had dragged her to so many times, to hope for a thing that was unchangeable” (UE 318). Hema wanted fixity on her relationship with a boy as a husband and wife but she could not believe him anymore as she thought that “the boy who had not paid attention to her; the man who’d embarked on an affair knowing she could never be his; at the last moment he was asking for more...She was struck by his selfishness, by the fact that he was telling her what to do. Unlike Navin, he was not offering to come to her” (UE 321). He had told her not to marry Navin but he had not asked her to marry him.

She boarded her flight to Calcutta. After getting her seat she found that she had left her gold bangles at the security. This gold bangle was given to her by her grandmother when she was ten which she never bothered to remove. She thought that it would be replaced by tenfold by Navin on the course of their wedding but leaving it behind at Italy she felt “she had left a piece of her body behind” (UE 324).

After her marriage with Navin they both came to Massachusetts to settle there. It was the same Massachusetts that Kaushik’s parents had left before thirty years back. After thirty years in the same place where once she met him, she came to know from her Italian friend Giovanna about the news of a small obituary of Kaushik in The New York Time. She realised the permanent absence of Kaushik from the world forever and “felt it as plainly and implacably as the cells that were gathering and
shaping themselves in my body...burning with new life but mourning your death...left nothing behind” (UE 333).

Kaushik and Hema both are second generation immigrants emerge into the third culture and third language. As a professor of Latin she “knew the ancient language of Rome, its rulers and writers, its history from founding to collapse” (UE 299). She has accumulated enough knowledge on the “ancient words and declensions and syntax that...felt sacred, enabling her to bring a dead world to life” (ibid). Her thesis on Lucretius was published and praised for its merit. At the same time Kaushik was an international photo journalist and can speak Italian fluently. His job demands him permanently to avoid the US, his birth place. He had no link with India either his ancestral country after his mother’s death. As a photographer his origin is irrelevant. He has been in Rome for the last few years speaking Italian fluently. The thought of leaving the city makes him melancholic. And yet in all of Europe and in Rome “he was always regarded as an Indian first’’ (UE 310). When they were both at Volterra, looking at the medieval buildings, Hema felt a sense of indifference among the other people.

The feeling of rootlessness was constant within them. Hema and Kaushik fall back to each other to investigate a sense of homelessness or simultaneously of having home at all places. Hema says “I’ve never belonged to any place” (UE 320) and Kaushik also realised from his childhood that “he was always happiest to be outside” (UE 309). Having travelled so much both Hema and Kaushik learn to make their home anywhere they are. It evidently shows that the place to which one feels the strongest attachment needs not necessarily be the country of one’s birth. It is the place which allows people to feel free, to belong to, and live happily where one strikes new roots in order to thrive or flourish.
The question of identity is always a difficult one especially for those who are culturally displaced. Often they try to identify themselves in a broader society with their own culture and nationality. In such cases food and the way of taking and preparing food also plays a vital role. Food of a community cannot be viewed in isolation. It is a part of one’s culture and identity. If the people refuse to celebrate it then they are neglecting their own roots. For the immigrants who are culturally displaced, food becomes an important part of their identity. When away from home the food of one’s land, the way of preparing it more especially its smell brings a home-like atmosphere even in an alien land. In such situation it provides and induces a sense of belonging to the culturally displaced person. Food becomes a medium, a link through which in an alien land one nurtures the thought of belonging to one’s own motherland. Food is life, love and home to immigrants. In most of Lahiri’s fictions food plays a metaphor to think the Bengali communities in an alien land by forming an ‘imaginary homeland’. Lahir’s description of the preparing and serving it are representations of the dislocation of Indian culture. In “A Temporary Matter” food emerges as a metaphor in the story and it induces a sense of belonging between the couple Shoba and Shukumar.

In the story “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” food is an important part of cultural exchange and bonding between two different immigrants belonging to two different countries. Although Mr. Pirzada hails from Dacca and Lilia’s parents are from India their food and their eating habits establish a bond of affinity among them. The eating habits build up a home-like atmosphere. Lilia marks the way Mr. Pirzada has his meals, “calmly creating a well in his rice to make rooms for a second helping of lentils” (IM 31). Mr. and Mrs. Das in “Interpreter of Maladies” are quite foreigner to look at in their dress and accent but they enjoy all things Indian. Mrs. Das never
forget to carry water bottle with her because she fears that if she and her family consume contaminated water from outside then they would be sick. But she can not resist herself enjoying the *Jhalmuri* in a large cone shaped packet made from newspapers. They also enjoy Indian Pakora which Lahiri defines as “onions and potatoes deep fried in graham-flour batter” (IM 54).

Mrs. Sen in the story “Mrs. Sen”s” is a typical Bengali woman for whom fish is the ultimate food. Fish and any kind of fish item with every meal is a staple food of Bengalis. In the US, Mrs. Sen is a cultural alienation and she becomes happy when fish is in her kitchen. She is always ready to cook fish and wants to serve it to her husband. Regarding her fondness to fish Asha Choubey remarks, “Mrs. Sen’s existence as also her survival in an alien land revolves around and depends upon this food item. When she gets it she is happy, and when it is absent from her kitchen for a long time, she sulks like a child. For Mrs. Sen fish becomes her home, her state, her neighbourhood, her friend and her family. Fish gives her a sense of proximity to her people. The arrival of a tasty halibut gives her pleasure as nothing else does” (Choubey n. pag.).

In “The Third and the Final Continent” the narrator is hailed from Bengal, pursues his higher education in Britain and his job takes him to America. Like Jhumpa Lahiri he travels across continents and retains his original cultural identity. Even in their American kitchen “the smell of steamed rice” (IM 192) gives their apartment a home-like atmosphere as different from others. The eating habit also induces a sense of belonging to the immigrants. Taking food with hands is the habit of Indian people which is considered contemptible and uncultured by the non-Indians. But in the story the second generation Indian immigrant who is the product of Harvard University also inherits the habit of taking food with his hand from his
parents. Indian people find much pleasure in taking food with hands which no spoon or fork provides.

In the novel *The Namesake* Ashima is also found “on a sticky August evening...in the kitchen of a Central Square apartment” (TN 1) “combining Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onions in a bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, then slices of green chilli pepper” in order to resemble it with *Jhalmuri* which is sold “for pennies on Calcutta sidewalks and on railway platforms throughout India” (ibidem).

In the story “Unaccustomed Earth”, Ruma, a second generation Indian immigrant tries to give her child Akash the taste of Indian food. As a second generation Indian immigrant she gets her ancestral root through her parents. But it is she who tries to follow “her mother’s advice to get him used to the taste of Indian food and made the effort to poach chicken and vegetables with chinamon and cardamom and clove” (UE 23). Akash is a third generation immigrant and completely immersed in the new culture. In “Hell-Heaven”, Aparna prepares cutlet and set them properly with red onion salad when Pranab comes to her apartment.

In the last story “Going Ashore” the food that was given to Kaushik at a resort in Thailand reminds him a little of his childhood. He has adopted so many cuisines from those countries where he travelled throughout his adult life. But this food at the Thailand restaurant--“steaming rice, dense brown and yellow curries, whole red and green chillies (UE 325) “caused him to feel strangely sentimental” (ibid).

Thus Lahiri’s writings reflect a conscientious action about what she interpreted in India, its customs, beliefs, culture and in essence its people. Food is
culture, life and identity of a person. The representation of Indian food and the way of preparing and taking food in an alien land works as a medium to form an imaginary people in an alien land. By celebrating this, the immigrants feel much closer to each other to build a cultural affinity.

Jhumpa Lahiri is a diasporic writer who is engaged in negotiating passages between cultures, defining identities and nationality of an immigrant in her fictional world. Her works *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth* have a universal flavour to all the Indian immigrants from the four corners of the world who relate to themselves as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated in an increasingly multicultural world like the US where the Americans do not talk of assimilation, the end product of melting-pot process, but of multicultural society. The themes of her fictions are nationality, tradition, identity, belonging hybridity and multiculturalism through which her immigrant characters represent.

Lahiri’s characters are real, alive, complicated and individual. All her works focus on the character’s inability to communicate with people who are important in their lives. She continues her story by plotting her “...motif of exclusion, loneliness and search for fulfilment” (Mandal 18) as the central issue. Her search for identity reveals multicultural commitment in her works. She portrays her characters from all over the world that tell the lives of Indians in exile. Her characters navigate “between the strict tradition they’ve inherited and the baffling new world they must encounter everyday” (IM 197-98) who always try to make an identity for themselves--a commitment to their lives in the multicultural milieu of Bengal, Boston and beyond. Through her fictions she faithfully portrays the trauma of cultural dislocation and displacement suffered by the millions of exiled Indians who struggle desperately to balance themselves between home and abroad.
Lahiri emphasizes not only the immigrants who leave home to make a new home in the US but also struggle in an endless process of coming and going that creates familial, cultural, linguistic, and economic ties across national borders. Cultural change is a major problem faced by the diasporic community. Culture changes the identity of a person. Identity is a producer as well as a product of culture. It is a construct and is context bound because people wear plural identities, hence there is nothing like unique identity. Similarly culture is a productive space and is a living continuum. Therefore characters-- both the first generation as well as the second generation live in-between, straddling the two worlds, and making their identity transnational or multicultural.

The third generation immigrants like Ruma’s son Akash and Amit’s daughters Maya and Monika are a merger of two genetic streams, American and Indian. They are the perfect synthesis of Indian and American culture. The more the third generation children grew, the less they had seemed to resemble their parents. They speak differently and seem foreign in every way. They are transnational characters.

Quite contrary to her earlier characters in *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*, her characters in *Unaccustomed Earth* undertake journeys across the world, mostly moving through the vast expanse of Europe. These characters cross nations and boundaries and take us through America, Europe and expand to the Eastern countries such as Thailand. The women characters in this collection are all transnational beings--“the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Shukla 12). These characters reveal the human yearning for movement and change as well as the need for an acknowledgement of the past culture and identity. In order to
create a new identity they can not discard their past identity and culture. Their “homes are always provisional; borders crossed and identities are formed, on the move” (Bromley 124).

All the Indian diaspora writers like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Bapsi Sidhwa, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana, Kiran Desai have proved that none of these writers are out of place in their fictional world but often occupying a space in between—confrontation and harmony—in their fictional world. Like Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Lahiri also reiterates her Indianness in fiction. She projects her identity as plural and partial. She has strong emotional ties to her parents’ original homeland but at the same time she has inherited a sense of exile from her parents. As a second generation diaspora, Lahiri is a perfect interpreter of cultural multiplicities, complexities and anxieties. She projects various cultures and traditions including Indian, Americans and beyond in realistic terms of her fictional presentation.

Lahiri’s understanding of both Indian and American value systems and cultural presumptions is apparently visible in her works. All the stories present her trans-continental and trans-cultural experiences of India, England and America. K.T. Sunitha rightly points out, “Indian expatriate writers do not write from the position of a distant foreign community, such as the exiled Black or West Indian novelists, but their writing reflects the perspective of someone caught between two cultures” (Sunitha 270). She is unable to cut off completely from her parent’s original root though she has learnt to live by stretching her imagination beyond. Her characters are sometimes autobiographical and unlike her. They have the multicultural experience in a new world that gathers largely from the cultural clashes rippling outward in diverse directions. Lahiri has done her best to interpret the maladies of her character’s major
issues--the trauma of cultural dislocation, disorientation and displacement suffered by many Indians who try desperately to balance themselves between home and abroad. As an alien, born in London, Lahiri has portrayed her experiences that she has gathered from diasporic community in a multicultural world which again reflects her own and very finely replicates the characters sandwiched between cultures.