Chapter 3

Weavers of Domesticity on Alien Fabric: A Thematic Analysis of Manju Kapur's and Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction
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WEAVERS OF DOMESTICITY ON ALIEN FABRIC: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF MANJU KAPUR’S AND JHUMPA LAHIRI’S FICTION

Jhumpha Lahiri and Manju Kapur are women writers, hence there is a characteristic similarity seen in their fictions when evaluated from the point of view of thematic treatment. Being women writers, they have focused on some of the common issues pertaining to the life of women, especially Indian women. Some of the most dominant themes found in their fictions include marriage, family relationships, mother-daughter relationship, husband-wife relationship, separation, and extramarital relationship.

Marriage is one of the most prominent themes in the fictions of Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri. Various shades of relationship get projected, evaluated and experienced in this institution called marriage. There are characters who marry because of social pressure, there are some that feel suffocated within the bonds of marriage and eventually break free of it and there are those characters who adjust somehow or the other and make their relationship work. In India the institution of marriage is not just the union of two individuals but it is something more, the union of two families, the relatives and the society in general. If the rituals performed during the
marriage are appraised, one realizes that marriage, in India, is divine. India has the history of ‘Swayamvara’ as well as arranged marriages. In the past, marriages also did the task of uniting two kingdoms. Till today, marriage has been an institution which is respected in India and the status of being a married woman has its own privileges. If the ‘feel’ of marriage in India or as in some of the Asian countries, is compared to that of the west, it gives altogether a different aura and appeal. In foreign countries, an individual is more important whereas, in India, more importance is given to the family. This concept of marriage being a family event has its positive and negative aspects as is with the other case round. Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri have observed and evaluated this ritual from their own touchstone of sense and sensibility. Both of them are of Indian origin. Manju Kapur, born, brought up, educated, professionally settled, stays in India whereas Jhumpa Lahiri is educated and settled abroad; hence, the later can be labelled as a diaspora writer. Dealing with the theme of marriage, both have keenly noticed and critically analyzed the psyche of women. Whether India or abroad, marriage brings subtle changes into a woman’s life and thus calls for profound adjustments. The degree of adjustments change, like, in India, a woman may suffer but strives to keep her marriage intact whereas a woman with western background, being more individualistic, may keep the promise of marriage to some extent but, at some point of her life, may also take a
decision of choosing her own way of life, even though it would mean breaking up the marriage. The impact of the Western civilization and culture owing to globalization and fast mobilization has negatively touched the very sanctity of marriage especially in the Asian countries and India is not an exception. As a result, the divorce rate in this country seems to be augmenting with the changing times. As contemporary literature holds mirror to Nature, these themes of man and woman relationship where marriage is a bond of hearts and not merely a stop gap arrangement to satisfy natural physical urges, draw quick attention of these writers. Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri focus their themes on the most important issue of marriage and try to examine and explore the sensitivity of human hearts. Manju Kapur has very delicately dealt with this issue in her latest novel *Custody*. In other novels too, she creates a miniature of typical Indian families with varied shades of experiences and incidents in the lives of her characters. Similarly, Jhumpa Lahiri offers to the readers the conventional Bengali characters, their diasporic experiences, their food habits, their life abroad and above all the cultural dilemmas that her characters suffer from. However, Jhumpa Lahiri’s approach towards the theme of marriage is different. Jhumpa Lahiri’s characters belonging to the first generation immigrants are closer to their roots; hence they value the sanctity of conjugal bondage but the generation either born and brought up or brought
up there are liberal, open and adventurous. When it comes to expression, old values are secondary as their approach towards life is more individualistic and independent.

Marriage is an institution that binds people in relationship, as husband and wife, as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, as sister-in-law and so on. Bond of marriage cannot be evaluated without the feel and depth of relationship. Hence, when the tie of marriage is to be valued, the changing equations in relationship are also to be examined. John Stuart Mill in his *The Subjection of Women*, refers to an ideal relationship in marriage:

What marriage may be in the case of two persons of cultivated faculties, identical in opinion and purposes, between whom exists the best kind of equality, similarity of powers and capacities with reciprocal superiority over them- so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development...I maintain with the proudest conviction that this, and this only, is the ideal of marriage. (Mill.235)

Examining the theme of ‘Marriage’ in Manju Kapur’s novels, it is noticed that for her, marrying off her female characters is of utmost importance. Indian cultural traits can provide different reasons for her such an approach to her characters: social, religious or even status to save the family from external criticism for not getting married ‘at the right time’. Manju Kapur’s fiction highlights the very crux of the problem. How a mother reacts to the matter of marriage is a very common issue in the
families where there are daughters of marriageable age. The ensuing instances project how the girls are assessed with detached passion when it comes to their marriage. Kasturi, mother of Virmati, feels, “it is the duty of every girl to get married”. (DD.15). Astha’s mother in Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman*, also has something similar to share. She tells Astha-

> When you are married our responsibilities will be over. Do you Know the Shastras say if parents die without getting their daughter married, they will be condemned to perpetual rebirth. (MW.01).

Nina’s mother in Manju Kapur’s *the immigrant*, also wants a husband for her educated daughter.

> The major topic of conversation in the last eight years had been Nina’s marriage-who, whom, where, how?...From where could fresh possibilities be unearthed on the eve of her thirtieth birthday? The lack of these, reflected in her mother’s dull, mournful eyes, was what she was going home to. (TI.03).

Sona and Rupa of Manju Kapur’s *Home* also get married into a rich business family and a middle class family respectively. Also in her latest novel *Custody*, the mother of beautiful Shagun is worried about the marriage of her daughter and instructs her: “Do what you like after you marry.” (H.11). ‘Mothers’ in all her novels are eager to get their daughters married, as for them, it is their responsibility and that is what is expected in Indian culture and society.
To Indian parents, marriage of a daughter is not a matter of ceremonial celebration, but a practice rooted in traditional ritual, more of a moral and social responsibility. They feel relieved, mentally as well as morally. This discrimination is deeply rooted in their psyche wherein, despite having self-sufficient potential, a woman is considered a weaker self (sex). Society overshadows a woman’s capabilities by adhering to a singular philosophy, ‘Man for war and Woman for hearth’. Marriage in a way is compensation to what she does not possess, that is power to assert and rule. Manju kapur, a well versed lady herself, is also conscious of this undercurrent; hence, the female characters are allowed to breathe in the cliched domestic atmosphere and live the life within traditionally conservative confines. ‘Marriage’ to all these characters, therefore, has different meanings.

Virmati, of Difficult Daughters, is influenced by her educated, independent and glamorous cousin Shakuntala Penji whom Kasturi, Virmati’s mother, calls a Mem. Once while taking an evening walk, Shakuntala tells Virmati:

These people don’t really understand Viru, how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else. (DD.17)
At the backdrop of love nurturing between Virmati and Professor Harish, Manju Kapur has purposefully created the tension felt during the pre-partition Amritsar and Lahore. Virmati is initially inspired by her cousin sister Shakuntala to study further. After she falls in love with the married professor, her reason for continuing studies is to break away from her home and the people who desperately want her to get married. For Virmati, her education is a plus point to attract the married Professor who had failed miserably in educating his wife. Professor Harish encourages Virmati for further studies which she does against the will of her family. Like an Indian woman, Virmati too wants Harish not only as a lover but also as a husband. Whenever Virmati mentions marriage, Harish takes a back seat and her frustration and inner urge bursts out:

I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family’s name, am locked up inside my house, get sent o Lahore because no one knows what to do with me. Here I am in the position of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace… and why? Because I am an idiot….Now you want to prolong the situation. Why don’t we get married? You say your family makes no difference but still you want to continue this way. Be honest with me. I can bear anything but this continuous irresolution. Swarna is right men do take advantage of women!( DD.149)

A woman has to play different roles in different situations. Virmati, as a young aspirant, perhaps, also a social rebel, invites conflict with the family and even the social taboos. But the same woman faces dilemma
when initially her dreams of getting Prof. Harish as her husband get jolts. She waits for years before Harish is forced to marry her after she undergoes a trauma of aborting her child with him. She decides to go to Shantiniketan but a poet friend of Harish intervenes and gets them married. When she eventually marries Harish, it is not the joy that a girl may have experienced but it is a sigh of relief:

The poet’s parents did the kanya daan, the seven pheras were taken, the couple pronounced man and wife. As Virmati rubbed her eyes, watering from the smoke, she knew, rather than felt, that the burden of the past five years had lifted. (DD.202)

For Virmati of *Difficult Daughters*, marriage seemed to be the ultimate goal of her existence. Swarnalata, her roommate often tells her:

Marriage is not the only thing in life, Viru. The war- the satyagraha movement- because of these things, women are coming out of their homes. Taking jobs, fighting, going to jail. Wake up from your stale dream. (DD.151).

Swarnalata provides a very good example of an independent woman whereas Virmati is ruled by her heart and gives in to becoming the second wife of the professor. Living with the professor’s family is a difficult task for this difficult daugher. Seeing the sorrow of Ganga, the first wife of the professor, she feels guilty of getting married to such a person who has done injustice to his first wife. She realizes that her status was that of a ‘pariah’ in the house eventhough she is accepted by the
professor, she is never accepted by his family and is always cursed as the person who has done wrong to Ganga and her children. It was for her love that she suffers so much of insult. Adjustment, not only in the space that she got in her house, but adjustment even with the food that she was used to have was her fate. She stopped having anything that the professor did not eat. Virmati’s plight is an example that projects the predicament of most married women in this country. The extent to which she has to adjust has no limits. Harish, as a husband, is supportive and encourages Virmati to go to Lahore for doing her M.A. Living at Harish’s house with his family that includes his first wife and her children is like a tug of war to keep Harish by her side. It is her education that always has an upper hand when compared to Ganga. Harish wants an educated companion and not just a homemaker and that is what he finds in Virmati. Virmati’s dilemma is that she has been used by the Professor to fulfill his own needs and wishes. If Virmati had not been adamant about the marriage, perhaps, Harish would have loved her secretly, not giving their relationship any name. What one wonders at is the fact that, in spite of her education, Virmati is not able to go and look beyond this institution of marriage. Even though she gets a chance to move away from Harish, she is not able to do so as her heart dictates her. This mistake is not committed by her daughter Ida, who has an unsuccessful marriage and
has no children but is more independent in nature than her mother. The novel begins with Ida’s statement “The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother.” (DD.1). Virmati was a difficult daughter for Kasturi, however, Ida was even more so for Virmati. ‘Difficult’ is not all about moulding an individual according to the wishes of family and society. It is going against the norms of either family or society or both that is to be ‘difficult’ for everyone.

*The Immigrant*, another novel by Manju Kapur, is a story of Nina, a professor, who marries Ananda, a dentist in Halifax, Canada. Ananda, comes all the way from Halifax to get an Indian bride, Nina. On one of the outings before marriage when they go out for dinner, the novelist becomes Nina’s mouthpiece:

> But she hadn’t felt the spark of instant attraction. Was that so necessary in marriage? He was decent, considerate, thoughtful, everything his letters had suggested. Perhaps, given time, he would grow on her. Together they would walk the path of slowly growing respect, mutual dependence, create the habits that tied people like a tree and a vine. (TI.71)

Even though Nina does not find that spark in him, she is pursued by her mother and her friend to marry Ananda being told that her future lies in going abroad with Ananda. Manju Kapur justifies Nina’s departure by giving us a brief history of diaspora:
In the nineteenth century they departed from their northern homes in boatlands, voyaging to Australia, Asia, and the Americas. They left behind countries that had offered neither men nor security, left behind hopeless futures and lonely presents. In the women of the homeland, the waiting men saw helpers, family makers and standard bearers. In the twentieth century it was the Asian woman’s turn. The immigrant man needed a bride who would surround him with familiar traditions, habits, attitudes, whose reward was the prosperity of the west and a freedom often not available to her at home. (TI.79).

Special attraction for the NRIs has been the weakest and unjustifiable obsession for the parents to create a hallowed picture of the diaspora life for their daughters. Manju Kapur very consciously underlines the intention of such boys who aspire to get a suitable girl from India ‘who would surround him with familiar traditions’ and, as a reward, the girl will get to taste the prosperity of the West and freedom that she is not used to in her motherland. She also reinforces the plight of such married girls by using the most appropriate epithet ‘like a tree and vine’ where vine just like creeper has to depend on the individuality and firmness of a tree. Nina’s future is decided on such hazy hopes and fancied convictions. So Nina also decides to cross the seas to marry a person who lives on an unseen land. For Nina’s mother, her duty is over by marrying off her daughter abroad. Nina lands on the new land with dreams of a family but they are shattered soon. Ananda is incapable of satisfying her sexually, so she is not able to conceive. Not only that, whenever she comes up with any suggestions regarding the treatment for his problem of
premature ejaculation, Ananda becomes hostile. She realizes that Ananda was aware of his problem and so, “this might be why he had come home to look for a bride. Was this the kind of man he was? Passing off shoddy goods to the innocent east? She did want to know this answer.”(TI.186).

The husband wife relationship has to have sharing and when it is not so, there are cracks. Ananda goes for a therapy but without Nina and that hurts her more. In order to distract herself from her problems, she joins a course of library science where she meets Anton. Both of them are drawn towards each other and her relationship with Anton makes her feel relieved:

For the first time she had a sense of her own self, entirely separate from other people, autonomous, independent. So strange that sex did not make her feel guilty, not beyond the initial shock. Easy, she was amazed it was that easy.(TI.264).

In this new place, away from her homeland, she feels liberated “Her life was her own; she didn’t owe anybody any explanations”(TI.273). For Nina, marriage to Ananda was the bedrock of her life in Canada and she realized it well. She tries to get satisfaction through her extramarital affair with Anton but she soon gets disillusioned as she realizes that Anton was simply using her. Nina’s library course makes her independent and after
her mother’s death back in India, she feels free to take decisions of her life as it would affect nobody,

What was there to bring her to India again?….With no mother to disappoint, nobody’s expectations to meet, the bonds of her marriage assumed a different feel. Her life was now completely her own responsibility, she could blame no one, turn to no one. She felt adult and bereft at the same time. (TI326).

Marriage becomes a burden when, Nina, on returning from India, finds out that Ananda also has cheated her-

So the marriage was based on more than one person’s lies. Discovering this made it worse. Her transgressions had been against faithful husband, her constant understanding that any exposure would cause ruin and grief. (TI.328)

She decides to move away from Ananda and while she takes such an important decision of her life, she is facilitated by the fact that she is not in India—“the things that might have made separation in India difficult for Nina were hers to command in Canada” (TI.333). Nina refreshes as an independent person who takes the responsibility of her own life and that too on a foreign land. It is her education and her job that help her to be an independent person. Virginia Woolf, a champion of feminism, advocated in favour of economic independence of women. Education certainly helps women to come out of their cocoons and make a room of their own. Nina can be cited as one of such lucky women who have the courage to be on
their own. But the pertinent question, here, is - could she have taken this decision of separation if she were in India, where the influence of society and family is sometimes suffocating for a woman?

Similarly, Manju Kapur’s another novel- ‘A married woman’ also deals with the theme of marriage. Astha, disappointed in love, is married to Hemant an MBA from USA. Life seems to be at its best in the beginning. On their honeymoon, Hemant discovers that Astha loves to pen down things and he appreciates her “You certainly have good imagination, you put things well” (MW.42). This little appreciation tickles her and makes Astha feel that she is the luckiest person. She thinks: “Her husband was going to encourage her writing. Maybe she could become poetess as well as painter. Her life was opening up before her in golden vistas.”(MW.42).

Asthा, once back from honeymoon, engages herself into becoming a good daughter-in-law and wife. Astha, the writer, takes a backseat for a while in performing the domestic choirs. Hemant and his family welcome Anuradha, their daughter. Astha, therefore, begins to feel that theirs is a complete family but Hemant unfolds his plans about future at which Astha is surprised when Hemant says “I want to have my son soon; I want to be as much a part of his life as Papaji is of mine.”(MW.61) He continues “Of Course we will have a son, and if we don’t we needn’t stop at two.”(MW.61) Astha always thought that Hemant was educated abroad
and so such things didn’t matter to him much but she was greatly mistaken. Hemant, like a typical Indian male, defends himself saying, “I was so pleased Anu was a girl. But that doesn’t mean we should not try for a boy. I am the only son.” (MW.61). When Astha conceives again, even her mother wants that it has to be a boy this time. She tells Astha “God willing it will be a boy. I have asked swamiji’s advice as to what offerings to make.” She also tells Astha the reality about Indian society and its double standards that her daughter is not able to understand, “You are such an innocent. What people say and what they do are two different things. Besides why is Hemant working so hard? For whom, if not his son? (MW.67). Astha understands this stark reality only after a few years of marriage. These realities about her existence as only a wife, a daughter-in- law and a mother kill Astha as an individual. This dying part of hers and the changing attitude of Hemant make her realize as she puts it -something happens in between her daughter Anuradha and Himanshu’s birth-

Between Anuradha’s birth and Himanshu’s, Hemant changed from being an all-American father to being an all-Indian one’ and Astha changes from ‘being a woman who only wanted love to a woman who valued independence. Besides there was the pleasure of interacting with minds instead of needs. (MW.70,72)
This change, gives rise to conflict and dissatisfaction in their married life.

This is because the way Hemant changed, Astha too did so—

but between her marriage and the birth of her children, she too had changed from being a woman who only wanted love, to a woman who valued independence. Besides there was the pleasure of interacting with minds instead of needs. (MW.72)

Despite having a family, her loneliness is glaringly seen in one of the poems that she has written titled “Changes”-

The eventual release from pain
In the tearing relentless separation
From those in habit loved
Can come so slowly
It seems there will never be a day
Of final peace and tranquility
Who promised me, that if I
Did gaze upon reality
Accept it, embrace it, befriend it
I would never suffer again
But no matter how many times
I have the doorways of my soul
To let the chill light in
The darkness grows silently
To hide me in the break of the day. (MW.80-81).
When Hemant goes through Astha’s poems, his comments project the gaudiness of male dominance and a hidden sense of sarcasm: “Good heavens, Az, they are all about cages and birds, and mice, and suffering in situations that are not even clear. There is not one happy poem here.” (MW.81).

Hemant is right in reading the emotions displayed in the poems. Astha’s suffocation in the marriage is what the poems point out at and also her perpetual headaches hint at the same feelings. The death of her father and the distance that her mother makes from Astha by going to the Ashram so that she may not be a burden on her daughter also puzzles Astha. Being the only child and not being able to take care of her mother makes her feel guilty. Her mother refuses to live with her even though she is lonely as, “It is Hemant’s house” (MW.87). Her helplessness and the realization of her invisibleness in the house when it comes to take decisions, makes her unhappy and disappointed. When she learns that the books, that were so dear to her father, were disposed off without her consent and she was not even consulted, she bursts out,

Then who am I? The tenant? We could have found room, we could have built bookshelves, done something, we could have at least discussed it”... “But together her husband and her mother had deprived her of the dearest part of her father, and continued before her eyes to be obvious of their crimes. (MW.87).
The underlined sentence of a woman’s life is that she does not have to question, but she just has to follow. By now Astha understands,

She had a good life, but it was good because nothing was questioned. This boat could not be rocked. She should paint that on a canvas and put it up on the wall, and stare at it day and night….Hands that had grasped money, and felt it pass through their fingers were the ones capable of rocking the boats. Hers were not. (MW.99-100).

She is disillusioned by her so called happy married life and finds the superfluity of relationships. Hemant, though a good husband as far as taking the responsibilities of the house are concerned, does not respect Astha’s opinions and often belittles her. Astha meets Aijaz, who comes to her school for the street drama rehearsals and she is drawn towards him. What she likes in him is the respect and appreciation that he gives her for her talent which she never receives at home from her husband. Aijaz is killed in an unfortunate incident while performing a play on the issue of Babri Masjid- Ram Janmabhoomi. The demise of Aijaz gives impetus to the cause Astha was looking for. This is the turning point of her life as, from a caring wife, obedient daughter in law and loving mother, she becomes an activist, a painter and a person who is illtempered as she demands her own space in the house.

Constantly reminded of the space nobody thought enough of her to give, she became very bad tempered during interruptions. Finally she steeled herself; she shut the door, and if disturbed too often locked it. In this way a certain uneasy privacy was granted her. (MW.157)
Hemant is very much annoyed at whatever she does and the more he objects, the more Astha turns determined to do whatever she wants to do. Her mother-in-law objects, her husband opposes but she does not give up what she thinks of her state:

Her mind refused to rest, roaming restlessly among the things that made up her life, her home, the children, husband, painting, the Sampradayakta Mukti Manch. Was it too much for a woman to handle; was her mother-in-law right? But why? Her children were well taken care of, she had trustworthy servants, she had someone who cooked better than she. She had left her teaching. And yet she was chained. (MW.190).

In one of such protests, she meets Peepalika, Aijaz’s widow, and is drawn towards her. Both find solace in each other. Both of them have one thing in common- their loneliness. Here, Manju Kapur deals with two important issues: marriage that has become suffocating for Astha as she has no space for herself in it and a homosexual relationship brewing between Astha and Peepalika Khan. Even though the relationship between Astha and Peepalika seems to be quite advanced, it does not take Astha anywhere. It only seems to be a venture into the world of freedom for some time but she is back with the family as Peepalika leaves for higher studies. However, the loss of the ‘life’ is what she feels without Peepalika:

Mechanically she changed, brushed her teeth, put cream on, got into her side of the bed, pulled the sheet up, and turning to the very edge
lay absolutely still. Motion of any kind was painful for her. Her mind, heart and body felt numb. It continued like this for days. She felt stretched thin, thin across the globe. (MW.307)

Asthā tries to find freedom through her relationship with Peepalika but does not go a long way and has to return her ‘home’. The attempt to be free at least discovers the painter as well as the activist in her.

Manju Kapur’s novel *Home* is also a story about marriage of two sisters-Sona and Rupa. Sona is married to the eldest son of Banwari Lal, a cloth merchant and Rupa is married to a scantily paid government servant. This is not only a story of the rich and the poor sister, but it is a story about how marriages can change equations with the people within and outside family. *Home* is also a story about Nisha, Sona’s daughter, who is not allowed to marry the person she loves as he belongs to a lower caste. Soon she develops eczema and it becomes difficult for the family to find a bridegroom for her. Frustrated with her life, she starts teaching in a school and later on, like her aunt Rupa, becomes a business woman and starts her own ready-made clothes creations called Nisha Creations. She becomes a success in business but that is not what her family wants her to be. Their ultimate wish is to see her married so she finally gives in. She is married to a widower who lives with his mother. The business woman Nisha, becomes a wife and a mother of twins and there comes an end to her
business and begins a long journey of motherhood. Her marriage takes away from her a dream of becoming a successful businesswoman. In the case of Nisha, it is the motherhood that makes a difference in her life and she is herself surprised that her business takes a back seat when she becomes pregnant:

Nisha didn’t say that Pooja’s Creations was probably occupying the space of a baby. Strange how distant she felt from it. Her workshop was a dream away; with the baby kicking inside her, she felt no regret, no sadness, only a faint nostalgia mediated through the immensity of her belly. (H.334).

Nisha is told by her Masi, “You know, beti, you can always restart a business. You have shown a flair for it. But this time with your baby, this will not come again”(H.333). For a woman, it seems that to have a place in this society, marriage and subsequent motherhood is inevitable. A woman is expected and demanded to sacrifice at every juncture of life. Nisha, in order to be a good ‘bahu’ and a good mother sacrifices her dream project. Even with so many sacrifices, it is expected from a woman to remain satisfied,

Ten months after Nisha’s marriage, twins were born. One girl, one boy. Her duty was over- God had been kind, however hard it was to believe…the mother in law sitting next to her held the fragile boy in the lap. Just like the grandfather, she murmured…the more robust girl lay balanced on her mother’s knees, eyes shut, cradle cap stuck to her scalp. Nisha clutched her daughter tightly to her breast. Her milk began to spurt and stain her blouse. She quickly adjusted her palla and
looked up. Surrounding her were friends, relatives, husband, babies.
All mine she thought, all mine.(H.335-336).

Manju Kapur’s latest novel *Custody* deals with marriage, a bitter divorce and the helplessness and sufferings of the children. The author states: “Raman and Shagun’s marriage had been arranged along standard lines, she the beauty, he the one with the brilliant prospects.”(C.14).

The marriage of beauty and brain seemed to be a wonderful one. *Custody* deals with the beauty of Shagun who is married off at a rather early age and becomes a mother within a year.

Being pregnant plunged her into the centre of all attention. She didn’t throw up once, her skin glowed, her hair shone, her husband called her Madonna, her mother said she was fruitful like the earth, her in-laws looked proud and fed her almonds and ghee whenever they could get near her. The birth of a boy added to her glory. She had gotten over the duties of heir producing smoothly. (C.15)

When she reaches her thirties, she again gets pregnant. Being of independent nature, she never wants to be bound again, “It’s not that. I will be thirty. Arjun is just becoming independent; I don’t want to start all over again. Always tied to a child, is that what you want?”(C.17).

Shagun was a happy person in eleven years of her marriage as “she had been brought up to marry, to be a wife, mother and daughter in law. She had never questioned this destiny, it was the one pursued by everyone she
knew.”(C.26). Things look fine till she meets Ashok Khanna who happens to be Raman’s boss. He makes her realize how beautiful she is and that she was wasting her time just being a wife and a mother. With her husband going out of station most of the time, she comes closer to Ashok and their relationship grows to the extent that Shagun is ready to leave Raman to find happiness with Ashok. Her mother senses something fishy in her daughter’s life and questions her:

What kind of person will take you away from your husband, such a good man?....Shagu, I couldn’t sleep all night. What will happen to you? To the children?And Raman? His family is everything for him….Mama, stop going on. It is hard enough as it is. Am I to stay married to Raman because you love him so much?.(C.37-38)

The growing distance between him and his wife Shagun is strongly felt by Raman who starts suspecting his wife: “He found himself phoning home at odd hours, asking the servants more questions than necessary. As he began to find out how much she vanished even after her children returned from school, he accosted her.”(C.45). He employs detectives to find out what it was with her wife that had changed her and to his surprise and shock he finds that his own boss is involved with his wife. Shagun’s mother tries to save her daughter’s marriage. It is for the children that Shagun is still in that house. The conflict going on within her makes it
worse for her. On one hand she has children and on the other the happiness she has been looking for:

It was her children who dragged her back to the reality of the past twelve years, standing like sentinels in the way of what her whole thing craved a life with Ashok Khanna. She owed it to them to try and save her marriage. But the effort was too much; she couldn’t make it in a sustained way. These days she appeared schizophrenic: one minute madly concerned with her children’s well being, the next abstracted, the next excessively attentive to Raman, the next absorbed in her private life. (C.78)

In order to signify the stress, struggle and subdued moods of her women characters, Manju Kapur portrays them with problems of headaches which are very common with her women characters. Headaches in some way manifest torture, suffering and conflicts going on in the minds of her women characters. Whether it is Astha or Nina or Virmati or Shagun or Nisha, all have headaches when they have conflicts in their mind. Headaches are the outer signs of the inner turmoil. Ashok is a person who has spent most of his life abroad and is of very independent nature. He wants to marry Shagun, but she at first resists saying, “How will they (children) like it when they grow up and realize their mother is a divorcee?”(C.81). Ashok gets very angry to such statements and tells her,

What is there to realize? This is why I hate this fucking place. This obsession with what others think. By the time your children grow up
the whole world will have changed. Certainly this benighted country. Things are changing fast as it is. Ten years ago you couldn’t get a coke, a pizza or burger here. Things are moving fast as it is...Traditional versus modern values, individual versus society...I just want to take you away from here. This narrow social set-up is all you know- that’s why you are afraid. But it will all be fine, fine...we only have one life to live and everybody wants to live it the best they can.(C.81)

Shagun’s motherhood is like chains to her as she tells Ashok “If only I were not a mother, how easy it would be. To leave him, to live with you, just be happy” (C.84). For Shagun, motherhood was holding her back from marrying Ashok and on the other hand Ishita, whose married life was going on well, got ruined because she was not able to conceive. Ishita had an arranged marriage and “From the day of her wedding she had thought of this family as hers, reveling in the togetherness, sharing and companionship. Now instead of love all around her, there would be rejection.”(C.61). When she is not able to carry even after her treatment, the whole family hates her. “It didn’t take long for the loving atmosphere around Ishita to grow so thin that it became hard for her to breathe.”(C.66). Suryakant, her husband, stopped even having any talks with her and “last night, he moved into his parents’ bedroom. She felt degraded, a non-person, certainly a non-woman. He was determined there should be nothing left between them.”(C.69). Ishita had set down her roots in the house and now she was uprooted from that house for having
blocked fallopian tubes. Not being able to conceive was a sin and so she was divorced. These two parallel stories of Shagun and Raman, Ishita and Suryakant have one reason in common and that is motherhood. For Shagun, motherhood is a chain binding her and for Ishita, not being a mother is a curse. Ishita gets five lakh rupees for her divorce and Shagun enters into a dirty case of the custody of her children. Raman tries to persuade her not to destroy her home and assures that he would forgive her, “It’s not your life alone. Think of the children. By now this plea was beginning to sound like cracked record. Think of children, the children, the children. She didn’t want to think of them.”(C.95). Raman suffers a cardiac arrest and Shagun’s mother advises her, “beta should anything happen to Raman it will be upon your head….The house rests upon us women. In your children’s happiness, your husband’s happiness lies your own. Anything else is just temporary.”(C.99). Ashok comments, “The great Indian family, which rested on the sacrifices of its women.”(C.99).

Finally Shagun leaves Raman in search of the fulfillment that she urged for. It is the children who suffer. They are suddenly left without mother. When Raman refuses to give her divorce, she kidnaps the children from her house. Children are used as instruments to get freedom. They are the shuttlecocks who shuffle between the mother and the father. Ishita comes into Raman’s life and their abandonment is the common ground between
them. Ishita, a woman who cannot give birth, takes charge of Roohi and fights for her custody till the end. It is the love that she gives Roohi that she gets her custody. The author tells us:

Meanwhile she was carrying the most precious part of the marriage with her. She stretched out a hand and clutched her daughters fist firmly in it…She had won this first, most difficult round.(C.396).

Manju Kapur’s focus has always been on family and the happenings within it. She places a lot of importance to the family as she tells in one of her interviews taken by Boikanyo Refilwe,

I place affair amount of emphasis on the family because I look at the family as the nucleus of our life. This is where you have your children, where they develop values. And they eventually grow up and go out into the world with those values. (Interview)

*Custody* portrays a perfect marriage becoming worst and childhood messing up in court cases.

In the novels of Manju Kapur, marriage is more or less an adjustment done in order to fulfill the wishes of the family and the expectations of the society, except for Nina, and Shagun who break through the bondages of marriage and come out as independent ‘anchors’ responsible for their own lives. “You had to be your own anchor”. (TI.328). For Manju Kapur’s characters, especially the women characters, marriage is a necessity to make one’s life complete and find their ‘home’ whereas for
Jhumpa Lahiri marriage is an institution where people get in to be happy, and if they are not, by some reason or the other, her characters behave more independently and take decisions of their life.

Jhumpa Lahiri deals with the issue of marriage with the first and second generation immigrants. While the first generation immigrants are still adjusting to their new surroundings in a foreign land, their marriage is more or less an adjustment in the new world. For Ashima, in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake*, it is an arranged marriage and as her duty to follow her husband, she follows Ashok to Cambridge where he has come to pursue his studies as a doctoral candidate in electrical engineering at MIT. She comes from a conservative Bengali family as Lahiri narrates,

> It was only after the bethrotal that she’d learned his name. One week later the invitations were printed, and two weeks after that she was adorned and adjusted by countless aunts, countless cousins hovering around her. These were her last moments as Ashima Bhaduri, before becoming Ashima Ganguli….Eight thousand miles away in Cambridge, she has come to know him, hoping to please with the unrationed, remarkably unblemished sugar, flour, rice and salt she had written about to her mother in the very first letter home. (TN.9-10)

Marriage in India is not an individual affair. Through Ashima, Lahiri introduces us to one of the aspects, still practiced in some parts of India, the selection of the bride or the groom by the elders of the family. Individual selection is not given importance. Ashima marries a man
whom she does not know and following him to Cambridge is a kind of double dislocation for her. Adjusting to the new married life and also to the new surrounding simultaneously proves to be a big task for her as she always feels nostalgic about her home in Calcutta. It is only after the birth of her children that her time is engaged in taking them around and catering to their needs. The sense of loss that Ashima suffers is not experienced by her children and even by Ashok, as he is the person who had, in a way, escaped his death in India and in order to run away from that place had come to Cambridge. Even here, he feels claustrophobic many a times when he remembers his narrow escape from death. For Ashima, it is the people, the place that turn her nostalgic about her past and for Ashok it is the escape that he is not able to forget about his past. For Ashima, marriage means adjusting to her husband and taking care of his house and children. While the male characters get busy with their jobs or studies, it is the women who suffer the loneliness, rootlessness and alienation on account of dislocation from their country. Many women characters try to assimilate into the new surroundings but there are some who suffer the trauma of dislocation and a sense of exile throughout their life. It is their children who assimilate and adapt the new world more easily. Ashima’s marriage and her motherhood in a foreign country make her more uncomfortable,
But nothing feels normal to Ashima. For the past eighteen months, ever since she’s arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all. It’s not so much the pain, which she knows, somehow, she will survive. It is the consequence: motherhood in a foreign land… But she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare. (TN.6)

For Mrs. Sen, the female protagonist of a short story “Mrs Sen’s” from Jhumpa Lahiri’s collection of short stories Interpreter of Maladies also, being with her husband is the cause of her being abroad. She tells Eliot, whom she is babysitting; “Here in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence.” (IM.115). She lives in her glorious past and is obsessed with purchasing fresh fish from the market. Mrs. Sen tries to come along with the requirements of living in a new land by learning how to drive but she fails miserably. Mr. and Mrs. Sen’s conservative behavior as a husband and wife is well observed by Eliot. While taking a photograph, he observes:

Eliot looked through the tiny window in the camera and waited for Mr. and Mrs. Sen to move closer together, but they didn’t. They didn’t hold their hands or put their arms around each other’s waists. Both smiled with their mouths closed, squinting into the wind, Mrs. Sen’s red sari leaping like flames under her coat. (IM.130)

It shows the difference in culture that is observed even by a child. There is a kind of shyness that is observed in the relationship which is a contrast with the openness in showing and expressing love in public on a foreign
land. Eliot compares Mrs. Sen with his mother who is single and has relationship with a man in her office as Eliot remembers, “One night a few months ago when she had invited a man from her office to dinner- a man who’d spent the night in the mother’s bedroom, but whom Eliot never saw again.” (IM.123). The interaction between Eliot and Mrs. Sen is more than what he has with his mother. When he is with his mother,

the first thing she did when they were back at the beach house was pour herself a glass of wine and eat bread and cheese, sometimes so much of it that she wasn’t hungry for the pizza they normally ordered for dinner. She sat at the table as he ate, drinking more wine and asking how his day was, but eventually she went to deck to smoke a cigarette, leaving Eliot to wrap up the left over. (IM.118)

Mrs. Sen feels sorry for Eliot, as it is not so in India. She tells him,

You must miss her. When I think of you, only a boy, separated from your mother for so much of the day, I am ashamed. When I was your age I was without knowing that one day I would be so far. You are wiser than that, Eliot. You already taste the way things must be. (IM.123)

Mrs Sen is very much amused by the way a child can be so independent in this foreign land. The cultural difference comes out not only in the behavior of the couples but also the way in which a child is brought up in India. Mrs. Sen’s marriage has dislocated her from her motherland and, like many Indians, she also feels nostalgic about her life in Calcutta. Her failure to learn driving is in a way a sign of not being able to assimilate in the new country. She lives in her mini India, which is her house, and does
not have to do much with the outer world. There are instances in the story that indicate that the American people try to make it easy for her to assimilate; for instance the man at the fish market specially calls her for fish and the policeman does not insult her when she meets with an accident. It is Mrs. Sen who does not want to come out of her Indian cover that she wraps around her.

A traditional attitude towards marriage is once again seen in Jhumpa Lahiri’s story *The Third and Final Continent* from her collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies*. The narrator’s wife is introduced by the narrator,

My wife’s name is Mala. The marriage had been arranged by older brother and his wife. I regarded the proposition with neither objection nor enthusiasm. It was a duty expected of me, as it was expected of everyman… I was told that she could cook, knit, embroider, sketch landscapes, and recite poems by Tagore, but these talents could not make up for the fact that she did not possess a fair complexion, and so a string of men had rejected her to her face. She was twenty-seven, an age when her parents had begun to fear that she would never marry, and so they were willing to ship their only child halfway across the world in order to save her from spinsterhood. (IM.181)

The cause of dislocation for women in Jhumpa Lahiri is mostly marriage. Mala also has no choice but to follow her husband abroad. One thing that is common for both of them is their being away from their homeland and that is what brings them near. Sharing the same past is one of the common things that bring people together on a foreign land.
Like me, Mala had travelled far from home, not knowing where she was going, or what she would find, for no reason other than to be my wife. As strange as it seemed, I knew in my heart that one day her death would affect me, and stranger still, that mine would affect her. (IM.195).

Being an ‘ardhangini’ she is the person who not only faces the dislocation by following her husband but also suffers the pangs of separation from her near and dear ones. This kind of loneliness is felt by the first generation immigrants as they take some time to mingle with the host society. Sometimes it becomes really difficult as the cultures are different and they face dilemmas at each juncture of their life abroad.

The marital relationship is most delicately handled in the short story “A Temporary Matter” from her collection of short stories Interpreter of Maladies. It is a story about Shukumar and Shobha, an Indian couple living abroad. The tragic premature death of their child induces silence in their life. They stop communicating with each other. The author observes,

They weren’t like this before. Now he had to struggle to say something that interested her, something that made her look up from her plate, on from her proofreading files. Eventually he gave up trying to amuse her. He learned not to mind silences. (IM.12)

In an article, Noella Brada Williams states the reasons for the silence and indifference of this couple:
The sheer number of these small failures to provide care helps to define the depths of Shobha and Shukumar’s common yet isolated experience of grief for their lost child as well as their waning care and love for each other. (Williams.457).

The temporary power cut in their area is the reason for breaking this silence. It is the darkness, where they face and open up with each other. This story, in particular, deals with the emotions and the feeling of loss, both Shukumar and Shobha suffer. Despite being husband and wife, they fail to face each other in the broad daylight but the temporary cut in the power supply brings them together and it is the darkness that helps them eventually. Suffering has affected both, Shukumar and Shobha, but instead of sharing their sorrow, they stop communicating and that worsens the situation. Shukumar is hurt when Shobha declares that she has rented a room for herself and wants to be away from him. In order to retort back, Sukumar discloses the mystery about the child which he had kept a secret,

Our baby was a boy, His skin was more red than brown. He had black hair on his head. He weighed almost five pounds. His fingers were curled shut, just like yours in the night. (IM.22).

The suffering that is common with both of them, the death of their child, brings them together to the catharsis: “Shobha had turned the lights off. She came back to the table and sat down, and after a moment Shukumar joined her. They wept for the things they now knew.” (IM.22).
Jhumpa Lahiri deals with issues of extramarital relationships and disturbed marriages. In her short story “Interpreter of Maladies” from her collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies*, P. Rajender Karmarkar views the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Das as, “decline in marital relations effected by mechanical and computer literate mad rush…echoing the social realism of American life” (Karmarkar.92). Mr. Kapasi, the guide, observes Mr and Mrs Das-

He wondered if Mr. and Mrs Das were a bad match, just as he and his wife were. Perhaps they, too, had little common apart from three children and a decade of their lives. The signs he recognized from his own marriage were there- the bickering, the indifference, the protracted silences. (IM.53).

Mr. kapasi proves right in his observation when Mrs. Das opens up the secret of her life “He is not Raj’s son” and asks him if he is surprised with this revelation. This is certainly a shock for Mr. Kapasi because of the difference in the culture does not allow him to take it easily. He certainly is not able to digest the one afternoon stand with her husband’s Punjabi friend. She asks for the remedy of her malady “And no one knows, of course. No one at all. I have kept it a secret for eight whole years. But now I have told you.” (IM.62). This secret makes Mrs. Das feel miserable and she tells Mr. Kapasi that-

I feel terrible looking at my children, and at Raj always terrible. I have terrible urges, Mr. Kapasi, to throw things away. One day I had the
urge to throw everything I own out the window, the television, the children, everything. Don’t you think its unhealthy? (IM.65).

Mrs Das has the symptoms of hysteria which are the manifestations of repressed psychic traumas. According to the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, expressing these traumas results into catharsis. Mrs. Das’s marriage has lost its charm because of this secret and she feels guilty all the time. Parting with the secret, in a way, relieves Mrs. Das of the burden and she joins her family and that is when Mr. Kapasi notices, “This was the picture of the Das family he would preserve forever in his mind.” (IM.69) Ashutosh Dubey rightly observes “Interpreter of Maladies is more about the need for understanding, communication and faltering marriage than about the encounter between an Indian and Indian Americans.” (Dubey. 25).

Marriage and extramarital affairs is the theme of the short story “Sexy” from her collection of short stories Interpreter of Maladies. Laxmi, Miranda’s friend, narrates her cousin’s affair with a white lady. In fact Miranda herself is involved with a Bengali called Dev. While Laxmi, because of her Indian culture, strongly reacts to this infidelity of her cousin’s husband; for Miranda, an affair is a normal thing. Dev calls Miranda ‘sexy’ and the same word is used by Rohin, Laxmi’s cousin’s son whom she is baby sitting while his mother and Laxmi have gone out.
When Miranda asks him what it means, he replies, “It means loving someone you don’t know….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.107-108).

Realizing that she was also spoiling somebody’s marriage and that Dev was simply using her while his wife was away, she stops seeing him. She decides to put an end to their relationship,

She would see him one more Sunday, she decided, perhaps two. Then she would tell him the things she had known all along: that it wasn’t fair to her, or to his wife, that they both deserved better, that there was no point in dragging it on. (IM.110).

The whole change that occurs in her attitude is perhaps due to her Indian friend Laxmi and her views of extramarital affair. Even though she belongs to a different culture, a woman within her wins at last over her passion for Dev.

Jhumpa Lahiri deals with many aspects of marriage and one of her stories presents marriage as a remedy. In her story, “The Treatment of Bibi Haldar” from her short story collection The Interpreter of Maladies, talking of Bibi’s ailment she says,

Bibi Haldar suffered from an ailment that baffled family, friends, priests, palmists, spinsters, gem therapists, prophets, and fools. In
efforts to cure her, concerned members of our town brought her holy water from seven holy rivers.(IM.158).

Bibi Haldar like all other women wants to get married and have a child. She envies all the married women around her. “Is it wrong to envy you, all brides and mothers, busy with lives and cares? Wrong to want to shade my eyes, scent my hair? To raise a child and teach him sweet from sour, good from bad?”(IM.160). Because of her ailment, it is very difficult for Bibi to find a person to marry her. The whole story revolves around the marriage of Bibi Haldar. An advertisement is given in the newspaper to calm her; however, when nobody turns up, she is disappointed and suffers from fits. When her cousin and his wife leave her she retreats in a prolonged silence. One fine morning the neighbours notice that someone has vomited and it is none else but Bibi Haldar. To their surprise she is four months pregnant. She not only gives birth to the baby boy but also starts her cousin’s business again to support herself and her child. The neighbours ask her about the person who has done wrong to her but she does not reveal anything. What is more important in her case is that “She was, to the best of our knowledge, cured.”(IM.172). For Bibi Haldar, it is the motherhood that cures her.

A marriage of compromise is what we have in Jhumpa Lahiri’s story, *The Blessed House.*
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 he barely remembered from his childhood.(IM.143).

After marriage he does not know whether he loves Twinkle, his wife. He wonders,

He was getting nowhere with her, with this woman whom he had known for only four months and whom he had married, this woman with whom he now shared his life. He thought with a flicker of regret of the snapshots his mother used to send him from Calcutta of prospective brides.(IM.146).

The expectations from marriage were different for both of them and this is what disturbs Sanjeev. There is a kind of an attitude problem seen as what is important for Sanjeev is very trivial for Twinkle and what interests her is what he hates.

Unlike the other things they had found, this contained dignity, solemnity, beauty even. But to his surprise these qualities made him hate it all the more. Most of all he hated it because he knew that Twinkle loved it. (IM.157).

Even though Sanjeev dislikes many things about Twinkle, he does not protest and in a way accepts the eccentricities of his wife, though, grudgingly.
Unaccustomed Earth another short story collection by Lahiri too reflects life of the two cultures. Once again it is a collection that deals with the lives of Bengalies who live in America. The collection is divided into two parts. Part one deals with five different stories and part two deals with a single story that is divided into three parts. In the first story “Unaccustomed Earth” Ruma is married to Adam, an American. Ruma’s mother, ten years ago, “had done everything in her power to talk Ruma out of marrying Adam, saying that he would divorce her, that in the end he would want an American girl”.(UE.26).

Nothing of that sort had happened and now she was expecting her second child with Adam. Like her mother, she also had moved to a foreign place for the sake of marriage. One thing she notices about herself is that she was becoming like her mother. She remarks,

There were mornings she wished she could simply get dressed and walk out of door, like Adam. She didn’t understand how her mother had done it. Growing up, her mother’s example- moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a household- had served a warning, a path to avoid. Yet this was Ruma’s life now.(UE.11).

Ruma’s life revolves around taking care of her half American son Akash and her father, who after her mother’s death is her responsibility. Not much is there about the marital life of Ruma but what is to be noticed is the change that her marriage brings in the life of her mother. Her mother
who initially rejects Adam, accepts him with the course of time as her son and communicates with him. Accepting an American son-in-law is a kind of assimilation in the host country.

Her mother would chat with Adam on the phone, even when Ruma was not at home, e-mailing him from time to time, carrying on a game of scrubble with him over the Internet. When her parents visited, her mother would always bring a picnic cooler filled with homemade mishiti, elaborate, syrupy cream filled concoctions which Ruma had never learned to make, and Adam loved. (UE.26).

Her mother had accepted Adam as a replacement of her son Romi who had moved abroad and maintained only distant ties with them. Marriage to Adam is in a way a kind of acceptance of the host country and it is also an interaction of the cultures which are so different from each other. Adam, as husband, is a hardworking person who works to run the house to provide for the needs of the family. Adam as a representative of the host culture is very flexible which can be seen in his love for the Indian food and his respect for Ruma’s feelings for her father. He is also open to accept Ruma’s father staying with them. Adam personifies the openness of the host country which has its arms stretched to accept whoever comes to her.

Lahiri’s second story “Hell-Heaven” from the collection of short stories Unaccustomed Earth deals with a traditional marriage and a silent love
that is never expressed. Usha, the narrator, tells us about her parent’s marriage,

My father was a lover of silence and solitude. He had married my mother to placate his parents; they were willing to accept his desertion as long as he had a wife. He was wedded to his work, his research and he existed in a shell that neither my mother nor I could penetrate.(UE.65).

With no love in the marriage, Usha’s mother, as she recalls fell in love with Pranab Kaku who was-

totally dependent on her, needing her for those months in a way my father never did in the whole history of their marriage. He brought to my mother the first and, I suspect, the only pure happiness she ever felt. I don’t think even my birth made her as happy. I was the evidence of her marriage to my father, an assumed consequence of the life she had been raised to lead. But Pranab Kaku was different. He was the totally unanticipated pleasure of her life.(UE.67)

Usha, a grown up now, understands her mother better. Her mother’s love for Pranab Kaku and his marriage to an American girl Deborah that left her in shatters is what she now remembers. Jhumpa Lahiri, through Usha, deals with the traditional marriage of her mother that never gave her happiness. Usha now understands her mother’s jealousy for Deborah and remembers how her mother “was waiting for the affair to end, for Deborah to break up Pranab Kaku’s heart and for him to return to us scarred and penitent”(UE.70). She also talked about the change that had
taken place in Pranab Kaku because of Deborah, “He used to be so different. I don’t understand how a person can change so suddenly. It’s just hell-heaven, the difference.”(UE.68-69). A marriage without companionship and resultant loneliness is dealt very discreetly in this story. The two marriages are placed in contrast: Usha’s parent’s marriage is a typical conservative one and that of Pranab kaku and Deborah has more openess and love in it.

“A Choice of Accomodations” a story from the collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* is a story of Amit and his American wife Megan. They fell in love and as Amit recalls before one of the guests at Pam’s wedding,

> We eloped eight years ago. City Hall. It had seemed like the right thing to do at the time- instead of asking his parents to fly in from Lausanne, and Megan’s parents to go to the expense, and figuring out how to make everybody happy. He was twenty nine, Megan thirty four. It had been exhilarating- the joy of getting married combined with the fact that it would be in secret, without planning, without involvement from anyone else. 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 they wanted him to marry a Bengali girl, raised and educated as he had been.(UE.113)

Megan is a doctor and her job expects more from her. This story deals with the married life of a working couple who cannot afford to spend enough time with each other. Amit feels miserable at times even though
he knows that Megan is working hard for him and his daughters. The vanished love is what he confesses and tells one of his friends

Wasn’t it terrible that after all the work one put into finding a person to spend one’s life with, after making a family with that person, even in spite of missing that person, as Amit missed Megan night after night, that solitude was what one relished most, the only thing that even in fleeting, diminished doses, kept one sane?(UE.115).

Bringing up both the daughters and the professions they pursue takes away most of their time which makes their marriage life full of boredom. Visiting a new place for one of the friend’s marriage, in a way renews their relationship.

The theme of marriage, love and relationships is at the center of Jhumpa Lahiri’s latest novel The Lowland which was also shortlisted for The Man Booker Prize. It is a story of two seemingly inseparable brothers and a woman who ends up marrying both. The Naxalite movement is not only at the background but it also proves to be a catalyst in most of the actions in the novel. Udayan elopes with Gauri, his friend’s sister, and marries her. Udayan mentions in his letter to his brother Subhash, who is in the US, about his marriage with Gauri and the reason for marrying her-

Her name is Gauri and she is finishing a degree in Philosophy at Presidency. A girl from North Calcutta, Cornwallis Street. Both her parents are dead, she lives with her brother, a friend of mine- and some relatives. She prefers books to jewels and saris. She believes as I do. Like Chairman Mao, I reject the idea of an arranged marriage. It is one
thing, I admit, that I admire about the West. And so I have married her. (TL. 46)

Udayan’s marriage with Gauri upsets his parents and even though they are allowed to stay in the house with them, they never accept Gauri as their daughter-in-law. Udayan’s marriage with Gauri has the strong base of love and companionship. Even though it lasts for not more than two years, as Udayan is killed, he remains with Gauri in her memories throughout her life. After hearing of Udayan’s death, Subhash returns to his parents and finds out that Gauri is a neglected person in the house and nobody even bothers to talk to her even though she is expecting a child. In order to bring her out of this insulting situation, Subhash proposes to marry Gauri and father his brother’s child.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Lowland stands distinct from the other works studied here as far as the theme of marriage is concerned. Contrary to the patterns of marriage and family seen in her other works, The Lowland has altogether a different piece of surprise to offer. Gauri, a girl of modest Bengali background, has lost her parents during her early adolescence. Her marriage with Udayan is seen as a bold step on her part towards acquiring stability in social life and strength in personal life. With her husband’s support, she manages to counter the odds staked against her by the inlaws. The new found confidence of Gauri is a mere reflection of the
adventurous escapades of her husband Udayan who is secretly involved in the Naxalite movement. Instead of being a typical couple, they remain companions in the sense that she supports Udayan by acting as his informer. Soon after tasting the early fruits of marriage, she finds herself at the crossroads of life again when Udayan is killed in a close tip-off in which unfortunately she too was indirectly involved. During her early phase of pregnancy, she encounters a morbid and ghastly reality of life when, along with other members of the family, she too saw Udayan being killed in the Lowland in the most gruesome encounter at the hands of anti Naxal government forces. The Lowland wherein Udayan was killed continues to haunt and surround her throughout the novel in the sense that all her notes of life are suddenly placed at the low pitch. The death of Udayan proves to be more fatal to her as it is indeed a pitfall for her in the lowland of life. Gauri’s marriage with Udayan has little acceptance with Udayan’s family so her desire of being loved by parental care and concern remains unaccomplished; the fact that later on adversely governs her while dealing with individuals in her personal life. In her attempt to resurrect herself from the quagmire of the lowland that has buried Udayan, she does get a second life when Subhash, Udayan’s elder brother, returns India to pay homage to his slain younger brother. Contrary to the expectations of his parents, he takes a formidable step in
his decision to rescue the life of Gauri, a soon-to-be-mother, by offering her to marry him. This is how Gauri’s new journey begins from the Lowland to the new land. Among the women characters studied here, she stands apart as she marries two real brothers one after the other, first the younger one and then the elder one; which is quite contrary to the Indian tradition of a woman marrying a younger sibling of her husband in case of death of the husband. Gauri’s character is unique in another sense also as unlike other married women in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Manju Kapur, despite two marriages; she seems to have a little faith and almost no interest in her married life, especially the second one. As far as the theme of marriage is concerned, she seems to be really a complex character. It cannot be easily ascertained whether she married Subhash merely for the sake of the child she was carrying of Udayan at the time of marrying the former. However the reading of her character during the later part of the novel reveals that she used her marriage with Subhash only as a platform to build a highland as against the lowland that almost eliminated every single hope in her life. Despite Subhash’s kindness, care and even love for Gauri’s daughter Bela, she could not live up to the expectations of Subhash, a suitable life partner. In her case, societal pressure, family traditions, orthodoxy of the in-laws or patriarchal tyranny hardly existed or never mattered; still she failed to make the most
of her married life with Subhash. Not only that Gauri could not become a happily involved partner in her marriage with Subhash, she did not even have second thoughts while forsaking her duty as the mother of Bela. It is in this way that Gauri can be best remembered not necessarily as a woman of substance but as a woman of contradictions, a woman of rebel against something that even she herself knows not for sure.

The theme of marriage is the nucleus around which move different issues related to marriage, the foundation of man-woman relationship. Life is just like a kaleidoscope where each turn changes the pattern. The issues of life on the kaleidoscope do not change, it is the handling of this device that shows what one would like to see or experience. For both Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri, marriage in a woman’s life is not only a need but also a direction towards a new goal. Manju Kapur allows her female characters to live the life within the cultural restrains prescribed by Indian Society. At times some of her characters break the barriers and feel a new wave but the result with most of them is inner conflict. The change they acquire through their feel of independence turns out to be a temporary phase. As Manju Kapur is aware of this conflict between tradition and the ‘new wave’, she hints at the change and foresees cultural dilemma. On the other hand, Jhumpa Lahiri’s world plays a trumpet of liberty, assertion, space. Conflict or no conflict- woman must
have her say, her mission, certainly not at the cost of her will. While Jhumpa Lahiri through her characters talks about and searches happiness in the relationships, Manju Kapur’s characters search security and a place called ‘home’ in the relationships. The families taken as examples, the situations they are put in and the cultural dualities they are facing open a new era of diaspora world which is gradually overshadowing the past of their lives.

Along with the theme of marriage, Jhumpa Lahiri and Manju Kapur, deal with the themes related to the diasporic experiences of her characters. These themes include alienation, rootlessness and belonging, loneliness, issues of identity, dislocation, relocations and assimilation into the host culture. Through her first generation immigrants and second generation immigrants, she brings out the problems of adaptation and adjustments in the host culture. Her novels, *The Namesake, The Lowland* and her collection of short stories *The Unaccustomed Earth* and *The Interpreter of Maladies* present the life experiences of the immigrants. The first generation immigrants exhibit the poetics of exile, alienation, loss resulting in trauma and nostalgia for their homeland. The second generation immigrants are the promoters of reaffirmation and assimilation and the third generation immigrants are the most confused ones about their identity as well as to their state of belonging.
Her novels and stories present the experiences of the first generation, the second generation and the third generation immigrants. In the case of the first generation immigrants, being away from their homeland, they suffer from the sense of exile. Edward Said in his essay, *Reflections on Exile*, talks about the expatriates’ experiences of being away from their nation. In order to explain the poetics of exile, he first talks about nationalism. He begins his essay with the concept of nationalism and its connection with exile:

> We come to nationalism and its essential association with exile. Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages. (Said.285).

Ashima and Ashoke Ganguly (The Namesake), Mr. and Mrs Sen (“Mrs.Sen’s”), Pranab Kaku and Usha’s parents (“Hell Heaven”), Ruma’s parents (“Unaccustomed Earth’’), Hema and Kaushik’s parents (“Hema and Kaushik”), these are the immigrants who have migrated for one reason or the other. The male characters come to the new land for pursuing their studies or for some jobs. The female characters follow them being married to them. The new land is more challenging for the female expatriates, as they suffer the trauma of being away and disconnected from their family and relatives. Beena Agarwal in the
introduction of her book, *Women Writers and Indian Diaspora*, comments on the female experience as an immigrant:

Culture ideologies are gender specific and women’s predicament in a state of cultural geographical shift generates a complex pattern of feminine mystique. The distinction arises out of three components:

(a) The realization of inferiority as a woman,

(b) Realization of insecurity for their inaccessibility to western cultural values and

(c) The strong bonding with national cultural identity coupled with the exceptional sensibility for personal relationship. (Agarwal.3)

Due to the geographical shift of locations, these women who immigrate with their husbands, suffer not only the insecurity in the culture that is alien to them but also are caught between the two worlds that gives rise to a kind of suffocation resulting from their inability for adaptation in the new world. Their limitations with the language, food habits and lack of known surroundings make them more vulnerable to the feelings of alienation and exile. This sense of exile and nostalgia for the homeland is very well exhibited by the writer through Ashima, in her novel *The Namesake*, during her pregnancy on a foreign land.

The food she craves for and even though she prepares a humble approximation of the snack sold for pennies on Calcutta side walks and on railway platforms throughout India, spilling from newspaper cones. Even now that there is barely any space inside her, it is the only thing she craves. Tasting from a cupped palm, she frowns; as usual there is something missing. (TN.1)
This ‘something missing’ is the taste that she gets only in India. Pregnant and not with the family is something that pains her. The sense of ‘not belonging’ to where she is at present and vise versa, gives rise to the poetics of exile. She feels uncomfortable in the new surroundings and feels nostalgic about her mother’s house in Calcutta. The wristwatch tied on her wrist, given to her by her parents, takes her back to Calcutta where she visualizes her parents and her brother in the house. The pain of the pregnancy is doubled being in the foreign land. She keeps by her side the tattered copy of Desh magazine as “the printed pages of Bengali type, slightly rough to the touch, are a perpetual comfort to her.” (TN.6). In this place where there is nothing familiar to her, this magazine and its language is what is known to her and that is what soothes her. Mrs. Sen also suffers from the sense of exile and nostalgia for her homeland. Her craze for acquiring fresh fish as they used to in Calcutta, her obsession with the blade that she has brought all the way from Calcutta and the only topic that she has to talk to Eliot being her motherland, shows that she does not want to come out of her memories and accept her new status of an immigrant. Jhumpa lahiri, through Ashima, Mrs. Sen, Usha’s mother has penned down the feelings of loneliness and the sense of loss these women suffer. These people are at once away from their homeland,
community, language, culture and customs and this creates a sense of exile in them. These Bengali women feel alienated on the foreign land and crave for some company wherein people share the same language and culture. In order to dilute this sense of loss, these people form Bengali groups where they celebrate their festivals and feel at home. Edward Said rightly comments “and just beyond the frontier between ‘us’ and the ‘outsiders’ is the perilous territory of not belonging” (Said.286). With the first generation immigrants, this sense of ‘not belonging’ and the differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is very obviously felt and they take some time to assimilate with the non-native and assert their hybrid identity. These people try to connect with their roots by making visits to their native place whenever possible. Visits to the homeland with their children introduce them to their own nation and culture. But this is in fractions, so it gives rise to confusing identities. The second generation, on one hand tries to assimilate into the host culture and on the other hand they are made aware of their Indian roots. It takes time for them to live as ‘dual identities’ or ‘fluid identities’. Jhumpa Lahiri is not only a promoter of poetics of assimilation and adaptation but also takes pride in her Indian identity and sensibility. Her stories and characters exhibit the sense of exile and alienation but at the same time make efforts of adjustment in the new world. Ashima, towards the end of the novel, is a changed
person, taking pride in her dual identity. Mrs. Sen also tries accommodating herself in the new culture. Most of her stories present cultural conflicts but they are not as acute and destructive as presented by Bharati Mukherjee in her novel *Wife* wherein Dimple is torn between her dual role of a western woman of independence and that of a submissive Indian wife. The conflict between the multicultural society of America and the Indian culture and sensibility reach to such a point where she loses control over herself and in one of such bouts she kills her husband. Such extremes are not found in Jhumpa Lahiri. While the first generation immigrants take some time to accommodate themselves into the ‘twilight existence’, the second generation also struggles for their identity as they are confused between their ‘Americanised Indian’ and ‘Indianised American’ identities. Their confused identity is the result of the divided sense of belonging. *The Namesake* (novel), “Unaccustomed Earth”(story), “Hema and Kaushik”(story), “Interpreter of Maladies”(story) , “Only Goodness”(story), “Mr. Pirzada came to Dine”(story) are stories depicting the second generation characters who are confused between their Indian and American identity.

Gogol in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* has a confused childhood. His birth leads to the confusion as to what name to be written in his birth certificate. When he is enrolled in the school, his parents try to explain
the principal that Gogol is not his real name but his nickname. However, the principal does not understand this and enrolls Gogol not as Nikhil. Gogol, when grows up, realizes that the name ‘Gogol’ is neither Indian nor American but Russian, named after the famous Russian writer who happens to be his father’s favourite author. The question of his identity with such a confusing name becomes grave once he attains youth. When Gogol goes for his graduation, he decides to change his name to Nikhil but ends up becoming Nick for his American friends and is still called as Gogol at home by his parents. As a second generation immigrant, Gogol is not only confused about his name but also with the two different cultures that he lives with. Ashima, his mother, tries to make him acquainted with the Bengali culture and traditions on one hand and, on the other hand try to make him well equipped to assimilate in the host country-

She teaches him to memorize a four-line children’s poem by Tagore, and the names of the deities adorning the ten-handed Goddess Durga during pujo: Saraswati with her swan and Kartik with his peacock to her left, Lakshmi with her owl and Ganesh with his mouse to her right. Every afternoon Ashima sleeps, but before nodding off she switches the television to Channel 2, and tells Gogol to watch Sesame Street and The Electric Company, in order to keep up with the English uses at nursery school. (TN.54).

Not only such instances, but also the short visits to the homeland result in the confusing identities of the second generation as they neither have the
They are tossed between these two identities and it takes some time for them to accept the fact that they are a part of both the cultures and that they exist as ‘fluid identities’ which not only survive but also assimilate with the host culture and at the same time taking pride in their ethnic identity also. Jhumpa Lahiri, through characters like Gogol in *The Namesake*, Ruma and Romi in *The Unaccustomed Earth*, Usha in the story “Hell-Heaven” in the collection of stories *Unaccustomed Earth*, Hema and Kaushik in the story “Hema and Kaushik” from the collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies*, Sudha and Rahul in the story “Only Goodness”, Sangeeta Biswas in the story “Nobody’s Business” in the collection of stories *Unaccustomed Earth* presents all those second generation immigrants who are neither complete Americans nor complete Indians. Having parents from chaste Bengali culture, these children are pressurized by their parents not only to perform well outside their house but also are expected to follow certain cultural traits within their house. This difference in culture outside and inside their house leads them towards being ‘confused identities’. It is only when they grow up, they realize that they are the people who represent a part of both the cultures and that they can survive not becoming rigid but ‘fluid’ identities.
Manju Kapur in her novel *The Immigrant* also deals with the rootlessness that Ananda and Nina suffer on the foreign land. While Ananda, a dentist, struggles to find a place for himself in the American society, it is Nina who suffers double displacement. A self made person that she is, after marriage she has to sacrifice not only the company of her mother but also her hard earned status of an economically independent person to a lonely and dependent person on the foreign land. *The Immigrant* is a tale of Nina’s journey from being a dependent on the foreign land emotionally and economically to becoming independent emotionally as well as economically. Initially Nina also suffers from the sense of alienation. However, her education and own decision to follow Ananda to America after marriage help her settle down quickly in adjusting to the ways of American lifestyle. For Nina, America means freedom from the confined Indian society. Jhumpa Lahiri’s Ashima in *The Namesake* and Manju Kapur’s Nina in *The Immigrant* even though migrate to a foreign land in the seventies, the sense of alienation with a tinge of exile is felt by Ashima; whereas Nina suffers alienation but is more adaptive to the the new world. The difference in their experience may be due to the fact that it is compulsion on part of Ashima to follow Ashok to the foreign land whereas Nina herself chooses an NRI and follows him abroad. The sense of exile is not so acute with the present immigrants as the means of
transportation and communication have increased and they can visit and communicate with their near and dear ones any time they want.

Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri, both well conversant with intricacies and problems of human psyche, especially the phenomenology of Indian women, understand, examine, explore and deal with different relationships very sensitively. All the relationships dealt with in their fiction have been assessed very well. Apart from the husband-wife relationship, both these writers have explored relationships within or outside the family, with or without emotional bonding. In the Indian society, where family is the brick of the society, relationships are not only bonds but they are emotions connecting people. In all her novels, apart from the husband-wife relationship, the mother-daughter relationship is brought out well. Mothers, in all her novels are the mouthpieces of the patriarchal system of India. The relationships are not at all smooth ones; they are something at once full of love and at the same time full of anger. It is an intricate relationship with many love-hate layers of feelings.

Manju kapur’s first novel *Difficult Daughters*, deals with the three generations of daughters and mothers. Kasturi, as a daughter becomes a homemaker as she is taught that marriage is her destiny and she follows the tradition without questioning it but her daughter, Virmati becomes the
difficult daughter as she goes against the family to fulfill her dream of marrying the person she loves, the Professor and the third generation daughter that is Virmati’s daughter Ida, who turns out to be a very independent individual not confirming to the social norms being divorced and is also childless. She becomes a difficult daughter for Virmati. Daughters do not want to be like mothers as they do not want to suffer the way their mothers did. While Kasturi always pesters her daughter to suit the society and traditions, Virmati, who is herself an educated woman, also wants her daughter to be a successful woman in the Indian society by marrying, giving birth to children and having a secured place called home. The novel begins with Ida, daughter of Virmati, confessing “The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother” (DD.1) and at the end of the novel, having known about her mother’s past, reconciles with her as she states, “This book weaves a connection between my mother and me, each word a brick in a mansion I made with my head and my heart. Now live in it, mama, and leave me be. Do not haunt me any more.” (DD.280). Among Manju Kapur’s fictional characters, mothers want their daughters to be married and confirm to the responsibilities of being women. Astha’s mother, in Manju Kapur’s second novel wants her daughter to be a happily married woman and a mother. Astha’s mother decides to live in the Ashram as she does not want to be a burden on her
daughter after her husband’s death. She is a typical mother who does not disturb her daughter’s married life and always advises Astha to take care of her husband and his family. She annoys Astha by giving all the financial powers to her son-in-law and not to her daughter. The way she distances herself from Astha, leaves Astha without a single person in whom she could confide. Her mother’s letters from the ashram teach Astha to accept life as a Prasad of the Lord. She preaches Astha and writes,

In ourselves alone is peace. Even when we know how difficult it is to change ourselves, still we expect others to change, and are unhappy when our expectations are not met. Remember that it will help with your headaches also. (MW.83).

Asthा’s mother stuns her with such letters and she wonders “What was happening to her mother, a helpless widow, with her child too caught in the web of daily life to go and free her parent from another web.”(MW.84). Astha feels helpless as a daughter for not being able to take care of her mother in her old age. She wants her mother to stay with her but she denies staying in a married daughter’s house. On one of her visits to the Ashram to meet her mother, Astha realizes that her mother has come far away and it is she who needs to be rescued and not her mother. In Manju Kapur’s novel Home Sona, mother of Nisha, makes her daughter to fast for a good husband. What worries her is that her
daughter is a mangli and it would be difficult for her to get a husband hence she tells Nisha when she argues about the fast “How are you going to get married, madam, if you do not make sacrifices?...What kind of wife are you going to make if you can’t bear to fast one day a year for your husband?”(H.92). This is what Sona has learnt from her mother and the same she wants her daughter to follow. Nisha’s argumentative attitude is what Sona doesn’t like. Therefore, there are endless arguments on whatever Sona asks Nisha to do and follow. All her efforts to teach Nisha the traditions of the Banwarilal family go in vain. Nisha’s affair, her independent attitude and her venture into the ready-made garment business, makes Sona desperate to find a groom for Nisha. Even though her mother does not like Nisha being so much independent, she is not able to object openly as Nisha has her father’s support. The father-daughter relationship is that of understanding and love. In the joint family of Banwarilal, there is a shift of power from one woman to the other. Sona, who once had all the power, loses it to her daughter-in-law Pooja. The power play between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law is very well expressed in Home. One of the reviews of the novel in Business Standard quoted at the back of the jacket cover of the text states,

High quality fiction.. the inconstancy of human beings and their relationships; of our self-delusions, our manipulating of situations to suit our own viewpoints, the instinct for gossip mongering and
groupism, and how the joint family system provides the perfect settings for the playing out these qualities.

The fourth novel *The Immigrant* can be said to be divided into two parts, one is the mother-daughter relationship and the other is the husband-wife relationship. Nina’s mother is also a typical Indian mother who wants a husband and home for her educated daughter. In the first three novels, the mother-daughter relationship is not a smooth one but in the fourth and the fifth novel, the mother-daughters are more like friends sharing, caring and supporting each other. After Nina’s father’s death, the mother and daughter were left with no choice but to move to grand parents’ house in Lucknow. Nina and her mother struggled and suffered for years before Nina got a job and settled in Delhi.

The grandmother resented her daughter-in-law’s existence, Nina resented her mother’s meekness, the mother put up with everything because Nina’s security depended on her patience. Nina obsessively imagined the day when the two of them would leave this small town hell….Seven years and six months to find this room in Jangpura Extension, and bring her mother to live with her. In Delhi Nina hoped her mother would lead a fuller life; in Delhi her mother imagined a husband could be found who would give her darling the home she deserved. (TI.5,6).

The room in Jhangpura is the ‘room of their own’ where both women try to live without the support of any man. But the quest for a home for her daughter is yet to be fulfilled and Nina’s mother becomes desperate to
find a suitable groom for her daughter so that her responsibilities are over.

Both of them were fated to lead lives devoid of men. The mother had fallen through the bad karma of marrying a prince who would die young. The only thing she had to look forward to was her daughter’s marriage, after which she would suffer more loneliness. At least the mother had hope. She had nothing. (TI.7,8).

The separation of a mother from her daughter was certainly painful. They had been each others support after her father’s death. Nina could see her mother’s sorrow, “Every glance at the sad pathetic face, pinched cheeks, badly dyed hair, eyes blinking behind spectacles marred her happiness. She had been her mother’s life since her father’s death, now that life was going 10,000 miles away.” (TI.102). Nina’s marriage to an NRI, leaves her mother lonely. The distance seems to be a curse when Nina hears about her mother’s death. Nina thinks of her mother’s last moments,

She was sure her mother’s last thoughts had been of her. Had she felt alone, frightened? She had been found dead by her old friend, the landlady….Around and around her heart these images circled, that hand reaching for a glass of water, those feet groping for their slippers, the glass slipping and breaking, the arm brushing against the jug as the body sank back on bed. (TI.321).

Nina’s mother had promised her to visit Nina’s house once she became pregnant but that does not happen and her death leaves Nina’s dream of
ideal future of her mother, daughter and the grandchild together in Halifax, shattered. She feels helpless for not being able to do anything for her mother. Her mother’s death leaves Nina with nobody in the world to answer to and Nina gets the courage to take her decision of separating from Ananda. *Custody*, the latest novel by Manju Kapur, is also about marriage and relationships. The mother-daughter relationship is much developed throughout the novel. Shagun’s mother plays a great role in the happiness of her daughter. Even though she does not approve of many things that her daughter does, it is her love for her daughter that forces her to submit to the wishes of her daughter. Shagun’s husband Raman too has a good relationship with his mother-in-law. It is Shagun’s mother who senses something wrong going on in her daughter’s life. Shagun could read all the questions in her mother’s eyes, “Their eyes were like those of a lynx, their gaze tried to pierce your being, their interference in your life knew no limits”(C.34). When her daughter decides to leave Raman for Ashok, her mother feels sorry for Raman. She is not able to comprehend her daughter’s actions but as a mother is always with her. Shagun is a stubborn daughter and is ready to fulfill her wishes at any cost. During the whole dirty process of divorce between Shagun and Raman, her mother is as Shagun says, “How convenient it was to have her mother as a postbox.”(C.239). Her mother becomes a
postbox to drop and pick up the children from her house. Mrs. Sabharval, Shagun’s mother, becomes a mere observer of whatever happens in her daughter’s life and her grandchildren’s lives. She is not a strong lady and is not able to force Shagun in not taking divorce. Shagun communicates with her mother through letters and this is how she comes to know about her daughter’s happiness as well as loneliness that she feels being abroad. Another disturbing relationship is that of the father-son relationship. The growing distance between Raman and his son Arjun during the case of custody is very well drawn by Manju Kapur. Arjun, who has the looks of his mother, and is a grown up child, adjusts somehow to the situation he is in, his mother having a new husband who is not his father and his father having a new wife, who is not his mother. In both the houses that he visits, he has to face one individual who is a stranger in his life. Raman observes the changes that take place in Arjun’s behavior and attitude,

Each time he saw him Raman felt startled at the changes, the totally natural changes. And each time he worried at the rate the boy was growing, and the little time he had with him before he became a man with his character fixed. As he struggled to reach out to his son, he felt an impenetrability that disturbed him. The earlier sullenness had gone, but slowly a stranger was taking his place. (C.369).

With a disturbing relationship between father and son, Manju Kapur also puts before us relationship between two mothers and a daughter. One is
the biological mother and the other is the mother who brings her up. Roohi, Shagun’s daughter who is a small child when the case of custody begins, is loved and brought up by Ishita, Raman’s second wife. Ishita’s love for the child Roohi is what wins her the custody of the child. Ishita, who is medically unfit to become a mother, becomes the real mother of Roohi. With her love and care, she brings the child out of the trauma of separation from her mother, Shagun. Roohi fulfills Ishita’s craving for motherhood and in return she brings up Roohi as her real daughter. Comparing Shagun and Ishita, Shagun is a practical individual, who wants the custody of the children but not at the cost of her happiness with Ashoke. She is able to get the custody of Arjun but loses Roohi to Ishita as the little child recognizes Ishita as her mother in the court. *Custody* not only deals with broken relationships but it also proposes some new relationships. The Indian Society does not encourage individualism and even today, the family is the center of one’s life. Within the family, culture and tradition teach us to give respect and importance to social intercourse. Manju Kapur writes about these wonderful relationships that are built with time. Relationships do not remain the same all the time. It is human nature to be affected by forces and feelings of jealousy, greed, happiness, sorrow, money, power and so many other things that turn out to be responsible for breaking or making relationships.
Jhumpa Lahiri’s stories also revolve round the pivotal of relationships. She discovers the nuances of relationships in the new place and new country where her characters have immigrated. Jhumpa Lahiri’s “Unaccustomed Earth” from her collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* is a narrative that discusses, more prominently, the father-daughter and mother-daughter relationship. Ruma, expecting her second child, is visited by her father for a week. This is for the first time after her mother’s death that they spend so many days together. Ruma observes that her father has become more independent and on the other hand, she in absence of her mother has become more protective of her father. Every evening she talks to her father and keeps tracks of his journeys. The interdependency of the two is well brought out. With her father around, she remembers her mother who would have been more helpful to her in this new house. Settled in Seattle with her husband Adam and her half American son Akash, she is expecting her second child. Her father learns to manage life without his wife and tries not being a burden on his daughter. This narrative deals with one of his visits to Ruma’s new house and his bonding with his grandson and his daughter. While Ruma’s father seems to be living his life the way he wants to, which perhaps he would have never done if his wife were alive, Ruma fears that her father would become her responsibility and his continuous presence in her house is
what she simply cannot imagine. Her father’s visit to her place turns all her fears otherwise. The way her father manages to build a special relationship with her half American son Akash, she realizes that it is not her father who needs her but it is the other way round. Akash’s bonding with his grandfather is in a way suggestive of his bonding with the original roots. Teaching his grandson words of Bengali is in a way an attempt to sow the seeds of the original roots on the unaccustomed earth and thereby making Akash a ‘hybrid’ or ‘fluid’ identity.

Jhumpa Lahi’s story “Interpreter of Maladies” deals with a relationship that perhaps is like that of a doctor and patient. Mrs. Das, an NRI who has come with her husband and children to India, develops a special kind of relationship with Mr. Kapasi, the guide, who in turn also develops a liking for Mrs. Das and even dreams of being her lover. From the very beginning of their trip to the Sun Temple, Mr. Kapasi observes the lack of a healthy relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Das. Their indifferent attitude towards their children point out the lack of vitality in their relationship. The husband and wife not only lack communication but are also busy with their own selves. Mr. Das is bent upon the book and Mrs. Das is busy either painting her nails or eating puffed rice. On one hand Mrs. Das shows no interest in her husband or children and on the other hand she becomes very much interested in Mr. Kapasi’s job of
interpreting and translating the diseases of the patients to the doctor. Mrs. Das points out to him that his is a very crucial job as “In a way [patients are] more dependent on you than the doctor….It’s a big responsibility” (IM.51). Thinking that Mr. Kapasi has the solution to all the remedies, she, all of a sudden reveals before him the secret of her life and also asks him for the remedy. Mr. Kapasi’s observation that something was wrong in the family proves right when Mrs. Das tells him that Bobby was fathered by Mr. Das’s Punjabi friend. This revelation of the secret that she had burdened herself with for eight long years is at once made known to a person who is just like a stranger. With the revelation of secret, the dream world of Mr. Kapasi is shattered to pieces and he realises that Mrs. Das was not drawn towards him with any romantic ideas but that she looked upon him as an elderly person in whom she could confide her secret and perhaps get the solution. The romantic relationship that Mr. Kapasi had dreamt about breaks and he is not only taken aback but is also unable to provide any remedy. Whatever relationship had developed between the two of them is snapped when “She(Mrs. Das) opened her mouth to say something, but as glared at Mr. Kapasi some certain knowledge seemed to pass before her eyes, and she stopped” and Mr. Kapasi feels “that he was not even important enough to be properly insulted”(IM.66). The relationship of understanding turns bitter at the end
for both- Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das because of the disappointment they receive from each other, Mr. Kapasi’s world of fantasy shatters to pieces and similarly Mrs. Das’s hope of getting a remedy for her problem also shatters. Another story of Jhumpa Lahiri that deals with a special kind of relationship is “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” from the collection of stories Interpreter of Maladies. This story deals with a need based relationship, the need to be in the company of the known and the similar on the foreign land. Narrated by Lilia, a ten year old girl then, it is a story of sharing the feelings of grief and joy together and the sense of belonging felt due to the same language and the similar lifestyle and habits. Mr. Pirzada, who has received a scholarship from the Pakistan Government to study the foliage in the New England, is invited by Lilia’s parents who are always in search of compatriots. It is not only with Lilia’s parents that Mr. Pirzada develops a bond, but it is with Lilia that he develops a special bond. Lilia’s observations of Mr. Pirzada, her thoughts about the grief he is passing through due to war back home and the insecurity over the safety of his family that he is passing through, builds a kind of concern for Mr. Pirzada. A child of ten years only, she prays for the wellbeing of Mr. Pirzada’s family in a unique manner,

I prayed that Mr. Pirzada’s family was safe and sound. I had never prayed for anything before, had never been taught or told to, but I decided, given the circumstances, that it was something I should do.
That night when I went to the bathroom I only pretended to brush my teeth, for I feared that I would somehow rinse the prayer out as well. (IM.32).

On one hand Jhumpa Lahiri builds special bonds on the foreign land and on the other hand she also deals with the broken relationships and the pain involved when such a thing happens. One of her stories titled “Nobody’s Business”, which was selected as one of the *Best American Short Stories* in the year 2002, is a story that deals with the relationships of this modern world which are very short and temporary. Paul involves himself with the affair of his roommate Sangeeta Biswas or Sang as she is called by her friends, and learns the lesson of not getting involved with anybody’s business. A characteristic American attitude towards relationships is portrayed through the characters of Paul, Sang, Farouke and Derride. The temporary nature of the relationships, even that of love, is expressed in this story. Bharati Mukherjee also has commented on the temporariness of everything in America. Paul lands up in trouble by answering a phone call which is for Sang. While he tries to pull out Sang from her relationship with Farokhe, when he comes to know that he is also involved with a lady called Derida, he is misunderstood by Sang who thinks that he is trying to interfere with her life and that it was not his business. What makes this story one of the Best American stories is
that it symbolizes independence and the individuality that is the priority of the Americans.

*The Lowland*, the latest novel by Jhumpa Lahiri, is a family saga of the bond of affection between two brothers Subhash and Udayana.

Subhash was thirteen, older by fifteen months. But he had no sense of himself without Udayana. From his earliest memories, at every point, his brother was there. (TL.6).

At the start of the novel, the two brothers are seen living in the sixties in Tollygunge of an archetypal Bengali family in the proverbial sense that says blood is thicker than water. Made for each other, the elder brother Subhash and the younger brother Udayana lead a life of peace and harmony till their dreams are deferred. When Udayana chooses to be an active part of the Naxal Movement, it sends tremors to the house of Mitra’s, particularly Subhash who receives the first signals of the distance that creeps into the life of two brothers. Udayan’s involvement into the Naxal Movement only widens the behavioural rift between two brothers; however, Subhash seems to be torn apart between his selfless love for Udayan and the qualities and limitations of his own character that prevent him from sharing his brother’s cause. As Jhumpa Lahiri writes,
Since childhood Subhash had been cautious. His mother never had to run after him. He kept her company, watching as she cooked at the coal stove, or embroidered saris and blouse pieces commissioned by a ladies’ tailor in the neighbourhood….While Subhash stayed in clear view, Udayan was disappearing: even in their two-room house, when he was a boy, he hid compulsively, under the bed, behind the doors, in the crate where winter quilts were stored.(TL.9)

As the eldest child of the Mitra family, he cannot break away from the traditions of the family in terms of selecting either a life partner of his own choice or even a risky profession the way Udayan does. At this juncture in the novel, Jhumpa Lahiri touches upon the ways of traditional Indian society and its ideologies wherein the elder son is always expected to tow in the line of the lineage of family and the younger one does the rebel act choosing his own ways and means of living. Perhaps it is Udayan’s involvement in the Naxalite movement that triggers off a passion for new life on his own terms on the part of Subhash who takes a wiser and safer step to go to the US in order to bring back some prosperity and more stability to the Mitra family who feel quite perturbed with the threateningly dangerous ways in which Udayan is involved in the Naxal affairs. Udayan’s tryst with the Naxal movement is also an outcome of cultural dilemma because the native societies of Bengal were not equipoised with the fundamental rights. It is in this sense that, apart from being cultural dilemma, Udayan’s dilemma also covers the social, political, economic and ethnic disparities prevalent in the eastern part of
India in the sixties. His ways and means might be questionable but his intentions to fight for fundamental human rights cannot be overlooked for all the ardent and zealous efforts he takes up during the course of his actions even if it means putting his life at stake. His dilemma gives leverage to a series of turbulences in the Mitra family. Every action of Udayan fails to find favour with his family. His aggressive fervor and liking for the Naxalites, his marriage with Gauri and his getting killed – everything unsettles the fine balance in the Mitra family. Thus it is Udayana who has greater impact in deciding personal relationships among almost all characters of this novel. Atleast for the first half of the novel, it is Udayana who physically leads and governs the flow of story; and it is also him who metaphorically rules the later half of the novel affecting the lives of Gauri, Subhash and Bela. Under such circumstances, Subhash is pushed into margins of self proclivity. He chooses the path of wisdom and ideology rather than fierceful actions that may further damage the prospects of the Mitra family. He continues to love and admire Udayana but maintains safer distance from him by leading a diasporic life in the US. After going abroad, Subhash maintains epistolary relationship with his younger Udayana who keeps him informed about his turbulent Naxalite activities back home. In the novel, both brothers exist in stark contrast with each other. The author provides
sufficient room for both of them to grow in their own desirable manners; however in so doing, the breath and the length of the Mitra family is stretched beyond the limits of an ordinary Bengali family. Obedient and traditionally polished Subhash as well as reckless and outgoing Udayana – both of them fail to rise up to the expectations of their parents. Both of them fail to provide any heir or successor to the Mitra family. Not only that both brothers fall short of parental expectations as they fail to continue with the family traditions of the Mitras. Consequently, in the novel, we are surprised not to find any cordial relationship among the members of the Mitra family despite being a complete family. However, reminding us of the relationship between Ram and Laxman in the epic of Ramayana, Subhash plays the role not only as the loving, caring and supporting elder brother, but also of a responsible care taker of his younger brother Udayana. This fact is substantiated by Subhash’s decision to marry Gauri so as to give the family title of the Mitra’s to the would be born child of Udayana who was killed before the birth of the child. Thus The Lowland depicts an admixture of human relationships with both high notes and low notes.

Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri, as Indian women fiction writers, have succeeded in portraying multifaceted domesticity with which their female characters rise and grow in India and they show formidable will and
courage when it comes to their settlement abroad. Most women characters in the fictions discussed in this chapter display willingness to change, adjust and accommodate themselves despite odds at personal, social and even ideological levels. The degree and amount of their sufferings and the happiness quotient at which they live are never proportionately balanced. However through such an imbalance between the priorities and the circumstances, a harmony of a new order is established, especially in the order of a new world that they embrace upon. The works studied here are candid, honest and creative testimonials of the domestic life of the Indian women who call for our admiration on account of the duties they perform at various levels against the mounting expectations of traditions, culture and even their own individuality. The friction caused in their life is the resultant effect of clashes among paradoxiacal factors of the tyranny of patriarchal hierarchy, social roles, individual talent and personal ambitions. Despite being staked against such overwhelming odds, the women of Jhumpa Lahiri and Manju Kapur dare to be themselves. The silverlinings amidst the dark clouds are viewed in their perseverance and constant striving to overcome the obstacles so as to restore their life according to their will and desires. Their journey from crossroads to the desired destinations is discussed in the next chapter which elaborates upon their trymph over the
atrocities of time, place and patriarchal tyranny in order to discover ‘the self’ that seems to have been pushed into the margins of societal roles and predefined cultural practices.