Chapter 4

Traversal through Myriad

Crossroads of Self,

Society and Culture
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TRAVERSE THROUGH THE MYRIAD CROSSROADS OF THE SELF, SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism* aptly says:

Culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought, as Matthew Arnold puts it in the 1860’s. Arnold believed that Culture palliates, if it does not altogether neutralize, the ravages of a modern, aggressive, mercantile and brutalizing urban experience. In time culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, almost always with some degree of Xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity. (Said. Xiii)

This differentiating of ‘us’ from ‘them’ and the in-between space wherein a migrant tries to become ‘like them’ by assimilating with the host culture triggers off the dilemma. The new diaspora reaches out to the First World for better life and tries to assimilate with its people and culture. The emotional life of the diaspora is shaped by the conflicts between different cultural backgrounds that they represent and interact with. Karan Singh, in a ‘Preface’ to *India and Australia: History, Culture and Society* writes about ‘multiple identities’:

Multiculturalism is now becoming an important point around the world. The old concept of ‘one nation, one culture’ is beginning to erode, and we find that multiculturalism, which means multi-ethnicity, multi-linguistic situations, multi-religious situations, cultural traditions that differ, all these are beginning to assume increased importance. How we deal with multiculturalism in our own country is one of the
areas we need to explore, because we in India ourselves are essentially a pluralistic society. (Singh.xi)

Multiculturalism is the word of the day. It is no more a negative term denoting something that is not pure but it is a progressive term used for ‘hybridity’. Talking about diaspora and the multiculturalism, multiethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-religious situations that it represents, the diaspora studies become all the more interesting and challenging as it deals with not only the geographic dislocations but also with how people cope up in the new land and what they do to assimilate in the host land and what cultural dilemmas they suffer from. Many writers have dealt with such diasporic experiences and Jhumpa Lahiri is one of them. Jhumpa herself is a second generation immigrant in America and her love for her Bengali roots is unquestioned. Her fiction deals with the Indian immigrants, especially educated Bengalis, who try to make their identity on the foreign soil with their ethnic culture and values. The first generation immigrants, in her fiction seem to be in the state of exile but the second generation immigrants accept the host culture more naturally than their parents. It is adjustment and the question of survival for the first generation immigrants but for their children it is a question of establishing their roots on the new soil and even growing there. The ‘hybrid identity’ with its ‘in-between’ existence and the resulting cultural dilemmas is the area of search and research.
Jhumpa lahirī’s novel *The Namesake* is a perfect example of the diasporic experiences of the first and the second generation immigrants. The story moves from Calcutta to New York and Cambridge. It is a search of ‘home’ away from ‘home’. Julie Myerson, in one of the reviews of *The Namesake* in *Guardian* writes:

> Fantastically readable, warm and profound...This is a novel that explores the concepts of cultural identity, of rootlessness, of tradition and familial expectation but never succumbs to the clichés those themes so often entail. Instead lahirī turns it into something both larger and simpler: the story of a man and his family, of his life and hopes, loves and sorrows. She has a talent- magical, sly, cumulative- that most writers would kill for. (Review given on the jacket cover of the book).

Lahirī explores the diasporic experiences of two generations of one of the Bengali families migrated from Calcutta to America. Through Ashima, the female protagonist of *The Namesake*, Lahiri projects her own love and emotional bonding with her rich cultural heritage and her pride of national identity. In one of her interviews taken by Vibhuti Patel, she confesses:

> I spent much time in Calcutta as a child- idle but rich time- often at home with my grandmother. I read books, I began to write and record things. It enabled me to experience solitude ironically because there were so many people, I could seal myself off psychologically. It was a place where I began to think imaginatively. Calcutta nourished my mind, my eye as a writer and my interest in seeing things from different points of view. There’s a legacy and tradition *there* that we just don’t have *here*. The ink hasn’t dried yet on our lives here. (Interview).
Jhumpa lahiri’s homelessness and the sense of exile is evidently felt by Ashima,

For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy- a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life only to discover that that previous life vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same combination of pity and respect. (TN.49, 50)

While her husband Ashok is busy with his studies and career, it is Ashima who is left with the haunting memories of Calcutta and homeland. The revelation of her pregnancy intensifies her anxiety and insecurity as an immigrant. Motherhood becomes a burden and is evident from Ashima’s confession during her labour pain:

It’s not so much the pain she knows, somehow she will survive. It’s the consequences- motherhood in foreign land… That it was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loves, had made it more miraculous still. 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 to be tentative and spare.(TN.06)

More than physical pain, the pangs of not being with the relatives are more acute. This loneliness and feeling of isolation does not subside with time. Even at the age of forty eight, when her husband, Ashok, goes out
of Boston for nine months on a research project, she realizes her lonely existence on a foreign land. She admits:

At forty eight, she has come to experience the solitude that her husband and son and daughter have already known and which they claim not to mind. It’s not such a big deal, her children tell her, ‘everyone should live on their own at some point’. But Ashima feels too old to learn such skill.(TN.161)

The difference in male and female responses to cultural displacement is apparent. While for Ashok this dislocation is liberating as he has come with his dreams and becomes busy pursuing them, Ashima is left alone with the haunting memories of her homeland. Sunita Agarwal rightly states the difference between the male and female immigrants:

the dichotomy between private and public sphere is almost tormenting to these women immigrants who have to suffer double dependence. It becomes difficult for them to cope with multiple stresses of the two different cultures.(Agarwal.30.)

It is not that Ashima and Ashok live in the state of ‘exile’ for their life time but with the birth of their children, they try to accept more of the host society, even though it is a slow process, it happens.

There are ways in which Ashok and Ashima give in. Though Ashima continues to wear nothing but saris and sandals from Bata, Ashoke, accustomed to wearing tailor-made pants and shirts all his life, learns to but readymade. He trades in fountain pens for ball points, Wilkinson blades and his boar-bristled shaving brush for Bic razors bought six to a pack….In the supermarket they let Gogol fill the cart with items that he and Sonia, but not they, consume: individual
wrapped slices of cheese, mayonnaise, tuna fish, hot dogs... At his insistence, she concedes and makes him an American dinner once a week as a treat, Shake ‘n Bake chicken or Hamburger Helper prepared with ground lamb. (TN.65).

Seeing their children grow up in a way that is foreign and alien to them, the Ganguli’s are worried about their children becoming completely American and so they try to pass on, if not all, some part of the Benagali culture to their children by taking them to the gatherings wherein all the Bengalis talk about Calcutta- their native place, the Bengali food, the houses they lived in and by doing so, the Gangulis try to introduce the culture of their homeland to their children and make them realize that they belong not only ‘here’ but also ‘there’. Almost in all her stories, Jhumpa Lahiri has placed great importance on the sense of belonging. Indians abroad see to it that their children do not forget the roots of their origin. In order to ensure this they try to keep the native language ‘live’ in the house. Speaking and knowing the same language gives them a sense that they know some part of their original homeland. The Gangulis, make a point of driving into Cambridge with the children when Apu Triology plays at the Orsen Welles, or when there is a Kathakali dance performance or a sitar recital at Memorial Hall. When Gogol is in the third grade, they send him to Bengali language and culture lessons every other Saturday, held in the home of one of their friends. For when Ashima and Ashoke close their eyes it never fails to unsettle them, that their children sound just like Americans, expertly conversing in a language that still at times confounds them, in accents they are accustomed not to trust. (TN.65).
Even though Gogol hates it, he has to sacrifice his drawing class and attend Bengali language classes. The first generation already knows what their roots are but the second generation is always in a state of dilemma about their identity and existence on the foreign land. Growing up in the host country, they acquire most of its traits but still they are known as Indians and not Americans. Labelled as Indians but not having first hand experience of India makes their situation worst. The question that haunts them is – Where do we belong? This quest for belonging and their dual identity puts them in a situation that they cannot run away from. Always going back to the roots in form of visits to Calcutta is a way of knowing the roots for the second generation. When Gogol is ten years old,

he has been to Calcutta three more times, twice in summer and once during Durga Pujo… He remembers to his astonishment of seeing six pages full of Gangulis, three columns to a page, in Calcutta telephone directory. He’d wanted to rip out the page as souvenir…on taxi rides through the city, going to visit the various homes of his relatives, his father had pointed out the name elsewhere, on the awnings of confectioners, and stationers and opticians. (TN.67)

Knowing that Gangulis belong to Calcutta, and that he is one of the few Bengalis living in America, he becomes restless. He is able to identify himself with the American culture where he is born and grows up but is not able to identify himself with the Gangulis living in Calcutta. One of the incidents in his life makes him aware that his roots are somewhere
else and not here where he lives. On one of the project works the class goes to the graveyard and he knows that he is different from his fellow students.

The children begin to scamper between rows of the dead, over leathery leaves, looking for their own names, a handful triumphant when they are able to claim a grave they are related to. ‘Smith!’ they holler. ‘Collins!’ ‘Wood!’ Gogol is old enough to know that there is no Ganguli here. He is old enough to know that he himself will be burned, not buried, that his body will occupy no plot of earth, that no stone in this country will bear his name beyond life. (TN.69)

Taking the children to graveyard for a project is an idea that horrifies Ashima and she instantly compares, “Only in America are the children taken to cemeteries in the name of art… In Calcutta the burning ghats are most forbidden of places, she tells Gogol.” (TN.70). Ashima hates it and Google loves it. He does not have any inhibitions and in fact is attached to them.

For reasons he cannot explain or necessarily understand, these ancient puritan spirits, these very first immigrants to America, these bearers of unthinkable, obsolete names, have spoken to him, so much so that in spite of his mother’s disgust he refuses to throw the rubbings away. (TN.71).

His love for the host country, and his realization that he does not belong completely to America, and that, a part of him belongs to India, creates the identity crises. It is not only Ashima, a first generation immigrant, but
her son Gogol, his wife Moushmi and her daughter Sonia – the second generation immigrants who also face the identity crises as they are also not able to bring that ‘wholeness’ or ‘completeness’ in their being. This identity crisis is the crisis of most of the immigrants, “Gogol is constituted as an epitome of an American-Indian hybrid who vacillates between his Indian Identity and American nationality". (Chhabra.1).

For Ashima, visits to Calcutta are rejuvenating but for her children – Gogol and Sonia, these visits are filled with the feeling of strangeness towards the place of their origin. During their visit to Calcutta, they find it difficult to adjust with the people and places there, and on returning, again, they take some time till the smuggled mangoes are eaten away and once again their refrigerator and the cupboards are filled up with familiar labels: Skippy, Hood, Bumble Bee etc. This transit from American culture to Indian and then again from Indian to American, confuses them. “Though they are at home, they are disconcerted by the space, by the uncompromising silence that surrounds them. They still feel somehow in transit, still disconnected from their lives”(TN.87).

The nostalgia and emotional bonding for homeland is natural in the first generation immigrants but, with the second generation immigrants, the issue of identity crisis becomes more acute as they are neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’. A feeling of rootlessness creeps in them as they do not have the
first hand experience of the culture and the glorious past of the country that their parents talk about. Even though they are miles away from their soil they feel that a part of their identity is constituted from that soil. They are able to become neither complete Americans nor complete Indians. Their situation is like ‘trishanku’- neither earth nor heaven, but hanging undecidedly somewhere in between the two. Commenting on her experience as a child of immigrant parents, Jhumpa Lahiri confesses, as put by Anju Bhatt in her article “Immigrant Experience in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*”,

I wanted to please my parents and meet their expectations. I also wanted to meet the expectations of my American peers, and the expectations I put on myself to fit into an American society. It’s a classic case of divided identity. (Bhatt.40)

Gogol is the best example of confused identity. In one of the conferences on the Indian novels written in English, he goes to meet his distant cousin and there he listens to the panelists who are discussing the word ‘marginality’ and the position of the ABCDs in a foreign country. Gogol gathers from the discussion that ABCDs means “American- born confused desi –which means him”(TN.118). For the first generation immigrants, the word *desh* means ‘our country’ or ‘my country’, but for Gogol it is not so,
He knows that *deshi*, a generic word for ‘countryman’, means ‘Indians’, knows that his parents and all their friends refer to India simply as *desh*. But Gogol never thinks of India as *desh*. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India. (TN.118).

For Gogol the greatest confusion of his life was his name which was neither American nor Indian but Russian. As his father loved the author Gogol, he had given his son this name. For Gogol it becomes all the more difficult as, “Living with a pet name and a good name, in a place where such distinctions donot exist -surely that was the emblematic of the greatest confusions of all.” (TN.118).

Gogol wants to go to study Architecture at Yale with a new name and so, changes his name to Nikhil, telling the presiding judge that he hates his name and thereby wants to change it. Studying Architecture is a reaction against the wishes of his father who wants Gogol to join MIT like him. Confused with his identity and thinking that changing his name would change his world, he proves to be wrong. He acts in order to react against the culture that his parents love. After going to Yale, he visits his parents less, dates American girls, smokes cigarettes and marijuana, attends parties and loses his virginity to a girl he cannot remember. He tries to erase his past and does not want to do anything Indian. His behavior is a shock to his Indian parents as Indian culture does not permit such behaviour. Gogol meets Maxine, his American girl friend, and her family
and observes the difference in their family and his family. Maxine’s family easily accepts Gogol:

From the very beginning he feels effortlessly incorporated into their lives. It is a different brand of hospitality from what he is used to; for though the Ratliffs are generous, they are people who don’t go out of their way to accommodate others, assured in his case correctly, that their life will appeal to them (TN.136).

He loves Maxine for her openness which is a characteristic of the American culture. He observes that there is no inhibition and no embarrassment while she talks about her past boy friends. He remarks about Maxine,

She has the gift of accepting her life as he comes to know her, he realizes that she has never wished she were anyone other than herself, raised in any other place, in any other way. This in his opinion is the biggest difference between them…There is none of the exasperation he feels with his own parents. No sense of obligation. Unlike his parents, they force her to do nothing, and yet she lives faithfully, happily, at their side. (TN.138)

Though Gogol gets accepted in Maxine’s family it is difficult for Ashima and Ashoke to accept her, an American. Ashima is not able to see Maxine as her daughter-in-law when she comes to meet them,

She had been startled that Maxine had addressed her as Ashima, and her husband Ashoke. And yet Gogol had been dating her for over a year now. By now Ashima knows that Gogol spends his nights with Maxine, sleeping under the same roof as her parents, a thing Ashima refuses to admit to her Bengali friends…She knows the relationship is something she must be willing to accept….that eventually parents had to stop assuming that their children would return faithfully for the holidays. (TN.166)
Once again Gogol has to confront his past from which he tries to run away and negate. Gogol wants to lead an independent life but he is always confused as his parents want him to follow the Indian culture and tradition. His dilemma follows him through school, college and even in his relations with American girls. It is not until the significance of the name ‘Gogol’ opens up before him, when his father unfolds his own tryst with death and how he was saved by the pages of the book by Nicholi Gogol the Russian writer that he comes to terms with the name.

There was the disappearance of the name Gogol’s great grandmother had chosen for him, lost in the mail somewhere between Calcutta and Cambridge. This had led, in turn, to the accident of his being named Gogol, defining and distressing him for so many years. He had tried to correct that randomness, that error. And yet it had not been possible to reinvent himself fully, to break from that mismatched name. (TN.286,287)

He realizes that he simply cannot do away with his name, his parents and his Indian heritage. It is this identity and culture that has shaped him as an individual and he starts respecting his past. This acceptance brings a kind of peace within him. The conflict within himself about his identity gets over. There is a complete change observed in Gogol when his father dies. The death of his father makes him aware of his responsibilities towards his mother and his sister Sonia. He even ends up his relationship with Maxine. In order to please his mother, he meets Moushmi, a Bengali
girl, marries her for his mother’s sake but divorces her eventually, as she has an affair. Gogol from the beginning till the end of the novel is seen fighting with his name and identity. After the revelation about his name by his father, he grows closer to him and accepts his past and culture that he inherits from his parents. Not only Gogol comes to terms with his dual identity and dual culture that he inherits, but his mother Ashima also gets assimilated in the host culture. She feels guilty that Gogol’s marriage with Moushmi does not work but there is much acceptance of the facts of life,

Fortunately they have not considered it their duty to stay married, as the Bengalis of Ashima and Ashoke’s generation do. They are not willing to accept, to adjust, to settle for something less than their ideal happiness. That pressure has given way, in the case of the subsequent generation, to American common sense(TN.276)

Ashima decides to sell off her family home and spend six months in America and six moths in Calcutta. The last party she throws at her house reminds her of her husband and the way her life has been shaped before her.

She has learned to do things on her own, and though she still wears saris, still puts her long hair in a bun, she is not the same Ashima who had once lived in Calcutta. She will return to India with an American passport. In her wallet will remain her Massachusetts driving licence, her social security card.(TN.276)
The way she used to miss Calcutta when she came to America,

She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband. Though his ashes have been scattered into the Ganges, it is here, in this house and in this town that he will continue to dwell in her mind.(TN.279)

Ashima accepts her dual identity: one Indian and the other American. Accepting the host culture and not resisting it is the only solution to grow on the new land. If a plant, uprooted and planted elsewhere, does not accept the new soil, it dies. In order to grow on a foreign land and to assimilate with the culture, the migrant has to be more open to interact with the host country. It is not a one way process, the host country and that too a country like America has always welcomed people from almost all parts of the world. Accepting, adapting, changing, assimilating and molding are the key words for the immigrants to succeed in the new country. Jhumpa Lahiri’s characters suffer the trauma of ‘dislocation.’ Though they eventually and partially give in to the host culture, they also keep the pride of the national heritage and culture. All her first generation immigrants take pride in their native culture. They have the emotional bond with their homeland. For Lahiri, Aruti Nayar writes :

Lahiri negotiates the dilemma of cultural spaces lying across continents a master touch… endowed with a distinct universal appeal… between and across two traditions, one inherited and left behind and other encountered but not necessarily assimilated.(Nayar.3)
By the end of the novel Ashima, who is ‘between and across two traditions’, her daughter Sonia who marries Ben, an American, and Gogol himself, accept that they are the representatives of two cultures and that it is their responsibility to portray both the cultures in a proper way. They are the ‘hybrid’ people who live with their dilemmas as described in the ‘negotiating borders’ of Bhabha. Poornima concludes her article on the “Changing Patterns of Human Relationships in Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake”,

the salvation in the diaspora’s disquiet journey in an alien land lies in adopting the assimilationist approach, in unearthing the realities of American way of life while maintaining bonds with his homeland to replenish his emotional bankrupcy that has come to be his lot.(Poornima.Concluding lines)

Similarly, Jhumpa Lahiri’s collection of stories, Interpreter of Maladies, the winner of the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Fiction 2000, and The Unaccustomed Earth deals with diverse experiences of the Indians living in US and UK. The cultural dilemmas faced by the characters on their visits to their native land or when the characters deal with the host culture which is different from the culture and traditions they follow at home even in the foreign country, are beautifully explored by the writer. As in her novel, The Namesake, the characters face a kind of exile in the beginning, also are nostalgic about their past life in the homeland but
there is continuous effort on their part to assimilate with the culture and tradition of the host country. There is a lot of difference in the old diaspora and the new diaspora. The old one suffered exile as they were not able to visit their homeland frequently but the new diaspora makes it a point to come back to their roots in the forms of visits to their native places so that their children also come in touch with their original homeland. In a way this is an attempt by the NRI’s to introduce their homeland to their children so that they do not remain alien to it. Nandini Sahu rightly observes of Jhumpa Lahiri’s stories, “through Lahiri’s stories, we learn bits and pieces about Indian life in diaspora and how Indians fit into their lives in America.(Sahu.171)

Jhumpa Lahiri’s stories deal with the dilemmas faced by both the generations striving to survive on the foreign land. These dilemmas are highlighted though human relationships. The story ‘Only Goodness’ from the collection Unaccustomed Earth shows how the independence of the American Society can spoil you. Sudha and Rahul, brother and sister have the taste of independence which is restricted in the Indian culture and eventually their life gets shaped by it.

Sudha had waited until college to disobey her parents. Before than she had lived according to their expectations, her persona scholarly, her social life limited to other demure girls in the class, if only to ensure that one day she would be set free. Out of sight in Philadelphia she studied diligently, double majoring in Economics and math, but on
weekends she learned to let loose, going to parties and allowing boys into her bed. She began drinking, something that her parents did not do. They were prudish about alcohol to the point of seeming Puritanical, frowning upon the members of their Bengali circle—the men that was to say—who liked to sip whiskey at gatherings. (UE.129)

Sudha, an obedient daughter follows her parents’ wishes at home but once she is out she becomes an American. This is the dual life that she lives, one that of an Indian for her parents and an American life for herself. While Sudha does not believe in the idea of excess, Rahul outrightly becomes an American and in a way fulfils Sudha’s dream, “Sudha had slipped through the cracks, but she was determined that her little brother should leave his mark as a child in America.” (UE.136). Sudha, being the elder one initially, shares the nostalgia for the motherland and the sense of alienation with her parents: “While Sudha regarded her parent’s separation from India as an ailment that ebbed and flowed like a cancer, Rahul was impermeable to that aspect of their life as well. “No one dragged them here”, he would say. “Baba left India to get rich, and Ma married him because she had nothing to do.” (UE.138).

There is a kind of carelessness in Rahul’s attitude towards everything, so his parents think that he owes it to the liberal America. Rahul puts the family in shame by getting low grades and this is too much for this educated Bengali family to endure.
Other Bengalis gossiped about him and prayed their own children would not ruin their lives in the same way. And so he became what all parents feared, a blot, a failure, someone who was not contributing to the grand circle of accomplishments Bengali children were making across the country, as surgeons or attorneys or scientists, or writing articles for the front page of *The New York Times.* (UE.151).

Sudha meets Roger who is fourteen years older and was married once, and decides to marry him and brings him to meet her parents. Surprisingly, her parents accept Roger for his qualifications. To the parent’s surprise and shock, Rahul brings an American woman named Elena, whom he loves and who is older to him and also has a daughter. This comes as a cultural shock to his parents, and one can feel the affliction in the father-son dialogue: “You are only a boy. You have no career, no goal, no path in life. You are in no position to be getting married. And this woman is practically old enough to be your mother.” Rahul who hates to be stopped from doing what he wants to retorts back, “You are a snob. You are nothing but a pathetic old snob” (UE.155).

Rahul and Sudha portray different attitudes towards life. Sudha is a more balanced person as she manages to balance between the Indian way of life at home and the free American life outside; whereas Rahul is not able to do so. He does not repent for any of his wrongs nor is ever ashamed of his acts. He is thoughtless of his parent’s sufferings caused by him. The
Indian parents and the Americanized children is the major issue creating the dilemma. Furthermore, there is a pressure to perform in the new land and that pressure comes, not from the people of the host country but from immigrants who belong to the same ethnic group. When Rahul washes dishes in a restaurant, it is a shame for the parents as they always fear that someone would recognize Rahul which may tarnish their image. Their attitude towards life is so deep rooted that despite their sufficiently long stay there, they fail to reorient themselves in the new ‘culture’ and that is what the reader is made aware of.

Jhumpa Lahiri deals with Bengali intellectuals who have immigrated from their country for one reason or the other and while the first generation immigrants still come back to India either to get married with an Indian girl or to meet their relatives, the second generation immigrants struggle somewhere between the country of their birth and the country where they originally come from-where they have their so called roots. This situation gives rise to a kind of confusion in their life as they cannot call themselves completely Indian or completely American. Hence, their visits to India in their childhood with their parents do not offer pleasant memories to them. Ruma the protagonist of the story “Unaccustomed Earth” exemplifies it on recollecting her visit to Calcutta:
No matter how they went, those trips to India were always epic, and he still recalled the anxiety they provoked in him, having to pack so much luggage and getting it all to the airport, keeping documents in order and ferrying his family safely so many thousand of miles. But his wife had lived for these journeys, and until both his parents died, a part of him lived for them, too. And so they had gone in spite of the expense, in spite of the sadness and shame he felt each time he returned to Calcutta, in spite of the fact that the older his children grew, the less they wanted to go (UE.8).

These forced visits to India with their parents, perhaps, make the second generation immigrants alien to their roots. “Unaccustomed Earth” is a story that deals with Ruma’s fear that her father would become her responsibility after her mother’s death. Her Indian sensibility tells her that she has to take care of her father while her American life and situation is such that she is unwilling to accept this responsibility and she is torn between the two:

that her father would become a responsibility, an added demand, continuously present in a way she was no longer used to. It would mean an end to the family she’d created on her own: herself and Adam and Akash, and the second child that would come in January, conceived just before the move. She could’t imagine tending her father as her mother had, serving the meals her mother used to prepare. Still not offering a place in her home made her feel worse. It was a dilemma Adam didn’t understand (UE.7).

The situation turns the other way round as it is not her father who needs help but it is Ruma herself who needs her father to take care of Akash
and connect him to their Bengali roots. Ruma had tried to teach Akash Bengali but she could not be strict like her mother,

Her own Bengali was slipping from her. Her mother had been strict, so much so that Ruma had never spoken to her in English. But her father didn’t mind. On rare occasions Ruma used Bengali any more, when an aunt or uncle called from Calcutta to wish her a Happy Bijoya or Akash a Happy Birthday, she tripped over words, mangled tenses. And yet it was the language she had spoken exclusively in the first years of her life. (UE.12)

Ruma fails to connect her son Akash with the Bengali roots. It is Ruma’s father who tries to do it by playing with him and teaching him Bengali words. It is the biological connection as Ruma observes:

Oddly, it was his grandson, who was only half Bengali to begin with, who did not even have a Bengali surname, with whom he felt a direct biological connection, a sense of himself reconstituted in another. (UE.54)

Her father proves to be a helping hand for her and takes care of Akash as perhaps her mother would have done if she were alive. Akash changes a lot in the company of Dadu. Taking care of Akash and nurturing plants in Ruma’s house is a sign of assimilation with the new soil. The dilemma of Ruma lies in her being an Indian daughter and an Indian woman wrapped up in the foreign clothes. It is Ruma herself who needs her father and not the other way round. With her father around her, she feels secure as she feels connected to her roots. Married to Adam who does not
share a common past and common culture, she suffers from isolation and
cultural alienation. Her guilt of marrying an American against her parents
wishes and her state of dilemma surfaces even after so many years of
marriage, as she shows Dadu her house.

Showing it to her father, she felt self conscious of her successful life
with Adam and at the same time, she felt quite slap of rejection,
gathering from his continued silence, that none of it impressed
him.(UE.16).

Ruma’s father, it seems, has been successful in assimilating with the host
culture as, after his wife’s death, to Ruma’s surprise, he has found a
companion in Mrs. Bagchi, a Bengali and a widow. Perhaps it is their
common culture that brings them together on a foreign land. The
knowledge that her father loves a woman other than her mother disturbs
her. Even though Ruma is brought up in a foreign country, she is not able
to digest the fact that her father has found a companion in Mrs Bagchi.
For her, as she observes, her father had become more American than
Indian. He wants to live the rest of his life not as a dependent on Ruma
but on his own terms. Jhumpa Lahiri, in this story, deals not only with the
relationships and the changing equations on the foreign land but also with
the problems involved in bringing up the children in a foreign land single
handedly without any family support. In India, the children are looked
after and loved by the grandparents. There are many instances that can be
mentioned here where the parents of the Indian immigrants pay special
visits to their children either when their children are expecting or to take care of their grand children. Grand parents can prove to be connecting links between the original roots and the new land. Telling stories to their grand children living abroad can certainly make them aware of the rich cultural heritage of India and make them not only love the country but also make them aware that a part of their identity belongs to the country of their origin.

Amit, in the short story “A Choice of Accommodations” from the collection of short stories Unaccustomed Earth, is married to Megan an American and when he looks at his daughters he is disturbed as:

His daughters looked nothing like him, nothing like his family, and in spite of the distance Amit felt from his parents, this fact bothered him, that his mother and father had passed down nothing, physically, to his children. Both Maya and Monika had inherited Megan’s coloring, without a trace of Amit’s deeply tan skin and black eyes, so that apart from their vaguely Indian names they appeared fully American. ‘Are they yours?’ people sometimes asked when he was alone with them, in stores, or at the playground in the park.(UE.95).

The girls not looking like him or not inheriting his looks, makes him feel miserable. Except for their names nothing is Indian about them. He has not been able to pass on to them anything Indian, not event the looks.

“Mrs. Sen’s” is a story that out and out deals with the poetics of exile. Edward Said in his Reflections on Exile admits:
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 doing so, it fends off exile, fights to present its ravages. Indeed the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel’s dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other. (Said. 285)

*Mrs. Sen’s*, a short story from Jhumpa Lahiri’s collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* presents a first generation immigrant Mrs. Sen who suffers the trauma of dislocation not only geographical but also emotional, psychological and cultural. She is a typical Hindu Bengali woman dislocated from her native place Calcutta because of her marriage to Mr. Sen, a Professor. The feeling of loss and the haunting memories of the homeland pervades through out the story. It is with Eliot, an eleven year old boy, whom Mrs. Sen baby sits at home, that most of her conversations take place. The contrast in the two cultures is presented keeping Eliot as an observer of both the cultures- the Indian culture at Mrs Sen’s house and the American culture at his place. Eliot is a patient listener to Mrs Sen, who suffers from the haunting memories of the native land and her life there. The mention of the word ‘India’-

seemed to release something in her. She neatened the border of her sari where it rose diagonally across her chest. She, too, looked around the room, as if she noticed in the lampshades, in the teapot, in the shadows frozen on the carpet, something the rest of them could not.-Everything is there. (IM. 113)
India is not only a geographical location for the Indians but it also signifies a culture, a tradition and an emotion of love and pride in the values of the country. Dislocated, Mrs. Sen feels robbed of all her valuable possessions. Eliot is very much interested in talking to her about India and observing Mrs. Sen cut vegetables and other things with the blade that she has brought all the way from India. She tells Eliot –

on a large celebration of any kind, my mother sends out word in the evening for all neighborhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetable through the night.(IM.115).

She misses those loud noises as she tells Eliot, “Here in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence.”(IM.115). Being a woman, her helplessness in following her husband can be clearly seen. Every time she mentions the word ‘home’, Eliot now understands that it refers to India and not America where she lives now. She observes the difference in the attitudes of the people in day to day life in India which is so much in contrast with that of America. She tells Eliot,

At home that is all you have to do. Not everybody has a telephone. But just raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole neighbourhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with the arrangements.(IM.116).
The togetherness and the sharing in the everyday life is what she misses here. The warmth in the relations that Eliot finds with Mrs. Sen, he misses with his mother, “Yet it was his mother, Eliot had thought, in her cuffed beige shorts and her rope soled shoes, who looked odd”. (IM.145).

Eliot loves his stay at Mrs. Sen and he rightly observes the two things that makes her happy,

One was the arrival of a letter from her family. It was her custom to check her mailbox after driving practice….Weeks passed at Mrs.Sen’s before he found a blue aerogram, grainy to the touch, crammed with stamps showing a bald man at the spinning wheel, and blackened by postmarks.(IM.121).

Eliot observed the happiness felt by Mrs. Sen reading the familiar language takes her back to her past. Missing everyone in India was apparent on her face. The second thing that made her happy was fish from seaside. She tells Eliot’s mother,

In Calcutta people ate fish first thing in the morning, last thing before bed, as a snack after school if they were lucky. They ate the tail, the eggs, even the head. It was available in any market, at any hour, from dawn till midnight. All you have to do is leave the house and walk a bit, and there you are.(IM.124).

Her attachment to everything that is related to her country brings her joy and at the same time a feeling of sadness being far away from the near and dear ones. She suffers the loneliness and alienation being uprooted and robbed from everything familiar to her. She makes her effort to
adjust in the new world by learning to drive but fails and at last withdraws herself from making efforts to assimilate in the host country. The difference in culture is also brought out in their concern for Eliot. He is treated differently by both the women. While Mrs. Sen is more caring, his mother is not attached emotionally with her son. Mrs. Sen is surprised that a boy of eleven years can be expected to be so responsible and independent. She finds a lot of difference in the rearing of children in both the countries. In India, parents are more caring and protective about their children while in America parents treat them as independent individuals who are supposed to be on their own. The differences are validated through characters like Eliot, Mrs. Sen and Eliot’s mother. The individualistic approach towards life in America as against the community life in India, the silence that is preferred in America as against the noise created due to gatherings in India, are the contrasts that place a person like Mrs. Sen in a state of dilemma and they suffer indefinite exile not assimilating or accepting the culture of the host country that seems to be estranged to them.

“The Third and Final Continent” one of the stories from Interpreter of Maladies is a story of the Bengali narrator who is born in India, studies in England and works in America. A person, who has tasted three cultures. Having been to three continents, still the narrator and his wife Mala,
retain their original cultural identity. Respecting his cultural identity and at the same time adapting to the host culture is the key of his successful life abroad. Meeting Mrs. Croft, who is more than hundred years old, he remembers his mother who unlike Mrs. Croft, could not survive the death of her husband.

I had never known a person who had lived for over a century. That this person was a widow who lived alone mortified me further still. It was widowhood that had drawn my mother insane…. My mother refused to adjust to life without him; instead she sank deeper into a world of darkness from which neither I, nor my brother, nor concerned relatives, nor psychiatric clinics or Rashbihari Avenue could save her.(IM.187).

The narrator and his wife have become ‘Americans’ having the social security card, he still cherishes his visits to Calcutta and bringing drawstring payjamas and Darjeeling tea and when his wife weeps for their son,

We drive to Cambridge to visit him, or bring him home for weekend, so that he can eat rice with us with his hands, and speak in Bengali, things we sometimes worry he will no longer do after we die.(IM.197).

Enjoying eating with hands is characteristic of being an Indian. It is the similar habit that they share and it is one of the many things that makes them alike, belonging to the same culture. Summing up his experiences as an immigrant, the narrator states,
I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have travelled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination. (IM.198).

“When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine”, a story from Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies*, introduces Lilia’s family who are proud to be in America, away from standing in the rationing lines. Her mother comments, “Imagine having to place her in a decent school. Imagine having her read during power failures by the light of kerosene lamps. Imagine the pressures, the tutors, the constant exams”(IM27). Lilia’s mother is happy that they are not in India where there are riots, curfews and no safety of life. Even though they are happy being abroad, they search for companionship of people speaking their language on the foreign and that is how they find out the number of Mr. Pirzada who lives in the same campus. Mr. Pirzada becomes a regular visitor, rather a family member who shares meals with Lilia’s family. It is a story about the relationships developed on a foreign land. There, the family does not mind his being a Pakistani. They help him during the days of war sharing his grief as Lilia remembers,

What I remember of those twelve days of war was that my father no longer asked me to watch news with them… my mother spread a sheet
and blankets on the couch so that Mr. Pirzada could sleep there, and high pitched voices hollering in the middle of the night when my parents called our relatives in Calcutta to learn more details about the situation. Most of all I remember the three of them operating during that time as if they were a single person, sharing a single meal, a single body, a single silence, and a single fear. (IM.41)

The similar language they spoke, the similar food they relished and the similar habit they shared like walking bare foot in the room or eating with hands. These habits bind them together. They share the same past and the same culture and that is the binding force in the foreign country.

Kaushik and Hema, the characters from the triology of stories “Hema and Kaushik” in the collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* by Lahiri, have their lives filled with the rootlessness and follow the American culture of having relationships for temporary pleasure. Both, known to each other from the childhood, share the same feeling of loss.

Kaushik is a person who likes to live life like a gypsy,

> From childhood he realized now, he was always happy to be outside, away from the private detritus of life. That was the first thing he’d loved about taking pictures- it had gotten him out of his house. (UE.309).

He wants to run away from his home, from his roots but as he says,

> He had so little to do with India. He had not gone back since the year his mother died, had never gone there for work. As a photographer, his origins were irrelevant. And yet, in Rome, in all Europe, he was always regarded as Indian first. (UE.310)
Like Gogol of *The Namesake*, he, too, suffers from the dilemma of belonging. Hema also confesses before Kaushik, “I have never belonged to any place that way.” (UE.320). Both negate their roots of origin and suffer from the void and loss in their lives.

However, the case of Gauri in her latest novel *The Lowland* is peculiarly curious as there is no rooting into Indianness or Indian native values seen in her. For her, India at its best means her marriage with Udayana, an individual of dubious identity whom she loved the most in her life and at its worst India connects to the Lowland that, along with her, witnessed the merciless killing of Udayana. It is this bloody and depressing image of the lowland that continues to paint her life in the US with the darker shades of ambivalence, dissatisfaction, ambiguity and indecisiveness. Although she makes a few bold choices, they cannot make out for the loss that she continues to suffer in her domestic life as a woman. At times it becomes difficult to trace out hidden motives behind her obvious actions since she behaves quite contrary to the image of a married Indian woman and also a mother of a girl child. Throughout the novel it is unclear whether her quest for identity is at all accomplished. The imminent cause for her unhappiness and dissatisfaction can be traced out in Udayan’s untimely and unholy exit from her life. However she has her chances to
make a square deal of life out of the opportunities that she gets beginning with her marriage with Subhash. Contrary to many male characters of the other works studied here, Subhash proves to be her savior in more than one sense since he commits himself to be a perfect father of Gauri’s daughter Bela. Her decision to quit Subhash’s house and even her daughter Bela speaks of her detachment with the native Bengali traditions pertaining to the role of a wife and a mother. However it can be understood that she leaves the house for higher education, professional status and self reliance. There is no obvious societal pressure seen in any of her actions but it is self inflicted trauma of Udayan’s death that makes her whimsically divided within the boundaries that she decides for her life. There is a little sense of rebel when she walks out of her marriage with Subhash and more a sense of repulsion and reaction against the life of her wish which remained a broken dream in the Lowland of her homeland. However it is only a dream differed that is achieved by her in the US because the ways and means of life as chosen by her costs her the cosy comforts, peace and harmony of a steady domestic life completed with a family of her own. There is no sense of alienation found in her character as far as her homeland is concerned; rather she is alienated from her daughter, her deceased husband Udayana and perhaps, though distantly, her second husband Subhash. In this sense Gauri is a typical
case of self inflicted identity born out of stern decisions and stoic approach towards a life that is quite uncommonly lived at least as per the standards of a traditional Indian society. *The Lowland* presents a series of chain reactions as Gauri’s decisions are reactionary; her daughter Bela’s life in contrast is far more balanced to the extent that we find her reversing the reactionary pattern of her mother so as to bring her life back to normalcy. In stark contrast to Gauri’s attitude towards life in the US, Bela visits her ancestral home unmindful of the horrors of ‘the lowland’. Perhaps Bela has advantage in the historicity of the events that shaped or deshaped the life of her mother. As a born American non native Indian, Bela finds not solace but happiness under the loving shelter of her father Subhash. She too does not face any identity crisis on the basis of alienation or cultural dilemma as for her the American society is her only culture wherein she guards her self identity though practicing the values of American society by going for the single motherhood. Surprisingly she refuses to fall prey to the reactionary frame of mind like her mother and consciously maintains emotional as well as intellectual distance from her. There is no single instance in the novel when she craves for any intimacy with Gauri; nor does she shed any tears over the fact that her mother has abandoned her. From the view point of native Indian traditions, Bela succeeds in becoming a woman of substance and virtues as she willfully
manages the responsibilities of a single mother and also respects her non-
biological father Subhash with whom she continues to live as his real
daughter. It is in this sense that Bela beautifully does the balancing act
between the reminiscent ‘lowland’ and the resurgent ‘homeland’, as for
her the Rhode Island is indeed her real home. Though not the central
character of the novel, she has the ability to hold the centre of the life so
that things do not fall apart which actually happens in the life of her
mother who is subject to self chosen anarchy. The character of Bela does
the same balancing act for Subhash also since the wounded family pride
of the Mitra’s on account of Udayan’s involvement in the Naxalite
movement and Gauri’s seemingly irrational escapades, is surely reverted
to acceptable point of restoration. It is Bela who represents emancipation
of women in a natural course devoid of reactions, repulsions, regrets and
compromises. Without sacrificing her fundamental rights, first as an
individual and then as a woman she achieves freedom that does not lead
to any discord with Subhash even after having known the fact that he was
her uncle and not her biological father. This shows a great deal of
maturity on her part as an American Indian who balances and enjoys the
best of both worlds. There are no instances leading us to think that Bela
suffers from either alienation or cultural dilemma on account of being a
child of Indian origin.
Similarly, Manju Kapur’s novel *The immigrant* deals with much the same cultural dilemmas faced by the characters while accommodating themselves in the culture of the host country. Ananda, after the death of his parents and at the insistence of his maternal uncle, a dentist in Halifax, immigrates to Canada as,

In India he would be constantly reminded of his loss, whereas if he wanted to make a fresh start, this was a country filled with opportunities…his situation had changed so much that he already had the mindset of an immigrant, departing with no desire to return.(TI.17,18).

Ananda, who is mentally prepared to settle on a foreign land, has to face difficulties in adjusting to the culture of the new land. Welcoming Ananda to Halifax, his uncle, married to American, talks about the reasons for people leaving India to find success elsewhere, “Why do you think there is such a brain drain in India? India does not value its minds-unlike here. Otherwise you think we are not patriots? But there even the simple tasks of the daily life can bleed you dry.”(TI.18).

For Ananda, his uncle is a success story on a foreign land and he too wishes to follow his steps. Learning to accommodate himself in the new culture, where everybody has to be independent doing own work, cleaning bathrooms, preparing lunch, coffee, doing laundry and all such work that he has never done before is indeed difficult for him. There is a
cultural shock that he suffers as; in place of the warmth of the relations back home he finds coldness in all the dealings with him. He feels lonely at his uncle’s house,

He was alone, all alone, with relatives who did not wake with the fall of his feet on the floor, the blood that joined them diluted with the waters of the ocean. The glossy magazine house felt cold and alien. Tears gathered and fell silently as he sat huddled on the soft, yellow silk love –seat shivering with grief and cold in his new payjamas. (TI.20).

In India much importance is given to relatives and guests who visit the house and all the people in the house try to accommodate and make the person feel comfortable. But it is not so in the foreign country. People there, are busy with their own lives and have no time to entertain anybody else. Nobody in the house helps Ananda but instead they gave him rules to survive in this new cold country.

The tightness in Ananda’s chest increased. Not even one day had passed and they were giving him rules to live by- presupposing he was ignorant, good for nothing free loader. All his life he had been praised for being a good boy. He had assumed responsibility, performed well in exams, done his duty by his parents, met every expectation placed on his shoulders. Carefully he put on a pleasant expression to mask his humiliation. (TI.20).

The hypocritical attitude of his uncle towards his country of origin astonishes Ananda. His uncle no more visits India as-
The whole country is crawling from with disease, filth, flies and beggars. The children were horrified. How can they be proud of their ancient heritage if they see nothing of it? Very disappointing—and from what I hear the country is practically a dictatorship. One should take the best of one’s country and leave. (TI.26).

Anand’s uncle, who speaks low of his own country and does not want to visit it any more, still wants his half American children be aware of their national heritage and culture. They celebrate ‘hybrid’ Diwali and Holi with other Bengalis over there. The need to make the children aware about the Indian customs, is the reason for forming groups like India Club where people belonging to the same culture, wearing same costumes, relishing same traditional food gather and have the feel of mini India abroad. While being with their ethnic group, these people, for some time, forget the rootlessness and alienation that they suffer abroad. Ananda’s uncle is a fraud according to Ananda as he does not want to share the shortcomings of his country but wants to encash the rich traditional and cultural heritage of India. The cultural dilemma faced by Dr. Sharma, Ananda’s uncle, is very clear when he specifically clarifies the reason for forming groups like the India Club.

Twenty years ago there was no India club. I am one of the founding members. I realized that if I forgot everything of mine, then who was I? When the children came, it became even more important to keep in touch. Nancy thinks like I do, after all there is something so graceful about our rituals. She loves the opportunity to wear a sari. Then at Christmas we all go to the church, that is fair, don’t you think? (TI.28).
Dr. Sharma, like Amit from Jhumpa Lahir’s story A Choice of Accommodations, Ruma from Unaccustomed Earth, Gogol’s parents from The Namesake, wants his children to know that they are part of a rich cultural heritage and must take pride in it. The reason for introducing their children to their roots is that they do not want to be lost in the world. It is their identity crises that brings them back to their culture where they find their roots. All these characters have assimilated in the host culture and at the same time they have maintained their identity as Indians. They are all ‘fluid identities’ as Bharati Mukherjee, one of the Indian women diaspora writers, in the introduction of the collection of her short stories Darkness states that her identity as an Indian is not to be seen “as fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration but as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated.” (Mukherjee.iv).

Staying with his uncle makes Ananda realize many striking characteristics of the American culture that is a contrast with the culture he is brought up in. One of the many things that he realizes is the importance of privacy. Americans have individualistic attitude and they do not like anybody dictating them. In America, an individual comes first whereas in India the family and its values come first. Much importance is
given to the likes and dislikes of the loved ones. Ananda is shut up in a room and he feels claustrophobic:

By now Ananda knew that privacy was an important issue in this culture and though he felt wounded, he said nothing. His uncle wanted to shut him up in a cage… The room had a window near the top of the ceiling that looked onto the skimpy grass of the back lawn. It was this alone that prevented Ananda from dying of Claustrophobia(TI.29).

Looking through Ananda’s eyes, he is left alone to himself but looking through American’s eyes, they are doing a big favour by letting Ananda stay in their house without taking any rent from him. When his cousin Nancy comments, Ananda realizes that he has to be thankful to the family “You are lucky to live rent free. There are many students who pay highly for accommodation in this area”.(TI.29) They expect Ananda to show gratitude whereas Ananda feels unwanted and lonely in that house. The concept of family according to Dr. Sharma, as he tells Ananda, “Family here means different things beta. We help you be independent. We do not want to cripple you.”(TI.30). This is a bitter pill coated in sugar as Ananda is told in a nice way that he has to be on his own. Being on his own means that he must have money. This is another lesson that he learns from the new place. All the while he assures himself, “Starting life deeply in debt was the way things were done here, don’t worry, don’t worry you are going to be qualified dentist.”(TI.35). Taking all these
formalities in stride, he succeeds in becoming a dentist and starts a clinic jointly with Gary, his Canadian friend. Among other things that he learns from Canada, he also tries to put his hands on relationships with a white girl called Sue but fails miserably and, that is when, he finds that he has some sexual problem. Meanwhile his sister finds a bride for him in Delhi named Nina, a professor at the Miranda House. Ananda’s sister begs him to give it a try when she writes to him:

Her voice is low, her colour fair, she has a straight nose, large eyes, sharp Punjabi features. Height medium. Her circumstances will make her grateful and loving. They are certainly not well off…. Give this a try I beg you. Even though you have taken citizenship at heart you are an Indian, with Indian values. Why else you have not been able to settle down?(TL.56).

Nina and Ananda correspond with letters and finally Ananda decides to come to Delhi to finalize his marriage with Nina. *The Immigrant* is a story about two immigrants, Nina and Ananda with their diverse experiences and observations. Ananda marries Nina in Delhi and after all the formalities she joins him in Halifax. Ananda, who is settled professionally, is not able to settle in his personal life because of his problem of premature ejaculation. Nina, not only suffers the dislocation geographically and emotionally but also suffers dissatisfaction in marriage. For Nina, marrying Ananda is going away from her mother who is alone in life and when she follows Ananda to Canada, she cannot
stop her tears: “This was her true vida- to her home, her friend, her job, her mother, everything.” (TI.103) Her first realization of being out of place is the waiting lounge, “The departure lounge filled with confident well dressed people, looking as though they owned the world. For the first time in her life Nina felt out of place. Wrong clothes, shoes, handbag, bag.” (TI.106). She also undergoes humiliation for being a non white. She is interrogated about her marriage and is asked to produce the marriage proofs. She accuses Ananda of such an insult, :“This is not your country. You are deceived and you have deceived me…I am the wrong colour, I come from the wrong place… made to feel like an illegal alien.” (TI.108). She not only curses Ananda for being responsible for her humiliation but also curses herself for having married an NRI. Her first introduction with the new country was not a pleasant one but still she was at home with Ananda:

That night, in bed, Nina was more prepared for the brevity of their sexual encounter. It was easier to not compare Ananda with his predecessor in a different country. ’Welcome home, darling,’ And that was the main point, wasn’t it? Not her orgasms, but the fact that she was home. (TI.121).

This is her real home, where her husband is. And in this home, she waits for Ananda to come back from the clinic and that is when she utters the first words of the day. Manju Kapur summarizes the experience of being the wife of an immigrant:
The immigrant who comes as a wife has a more difficult time. If work exists for her, it is in the future, and after much finding of the feet. At present all she is, is a wife, and a wife is alone for many, many hours. There will come a day when even books are powerful to distract. When the house and its conveniences can no longer completely charm or compensate. Then she realizes that she is the immigrant for life.(TI.124).

Nina tries to handle her loneliness by roaming about in the malls and gorging on chips and sweets. The pleniness of everything is what attracts the immigrant in the beginning but eventually loneliness presides. The cultural dilemmas that Ananda had once suffered are now Nina’s. Ananda has on hand his study and work but Nina is left lonely. “Till Nina came to Canada she hadn’t known what lonely meant. At home one was never really alone.”(TI.161). Nina not only suffers loneliness but also finds it difficult to cope up with Ananda’s problem of premature ejaculation. She wants a child but is unable to conceive—“That was exactly why she wanted a child, to settle down, to give her days focus in this new country. What was she to do with her time, it wasn’t as though she had a life.”(TI.169).

Talking to Ananda about his physical problem makes the matter worse. What annoys Nina is Ananda’s indifference to his problem as well as his unwillingness to face it. Nina feels rootless and branchless ‘like a body floating upon the cold surface of this particular piece of earth.’(TI.178).
Her search for happiness in marriage takes her nowhere and she feels, “Happy. The whole planet would be better off not searching for something so ephemeral.” (TI.179). Nina’s affair with Anton is liberating for her. After having sex with Anton she feels that she has become a less Indian and in a kind of reaction she also starts eating meat.

Her meat eating was the result of fragmentation and distress, not a desire for convenience...Feeling less Indian had its advantages. There were more possibilities in the world she could be open to. Her body was her own- and that included her digestive system and her vagina. (TI.271).

After her mother’s death, Nina has nobody in the world to look up to. The fact that she is not in India is the cause of her liberation. When she comes back from India after her mother’s death, she finds out that Ananda has also cheated her. Nina comes to terms with the reality of life in Canada that one has to be one’s own anchor. Manju Kapur, (in the last page of the novel) handles the diasporic experience explicitly:

The sense of community was there, warming but temporary—everything temporary. Perhaps that was the ultimate immigrant experience. Not that any one thing was steady enough to attach yourself to for the rest of your life, but that you found different ways to belong, ways not necessarily lasting, but the ones that made your journey less lonely for a while. When something failed it was a signal to move on. For an immigrant there was no going back. The continent was full of people escaping unhappy pasts. She too was heading towards fresh territories, a different set of circumstances, a floating resident of the western world. When one was reinventing oneself, any where could be home. Pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a
Both, Nina and Ananda, belonging to middle class background back in India, find freedom in the new country. This is a country that does not believe in chains of any kind, so both feel liberated and free to act in a way that pleases them. Nina suffers the moral turpitude in the beginning but then adapts to the new life and so is the case with Ananda. Canada teaches them many lessons of life and they become the ‘floating residents’ of the west. Floating residents are the people who assimilate, adapt and mould themselves in the host culture.

Jhumpa Lahiri in her novels *The Namesake, The Lowland* and her two collections of short stories namely *Unaccustomed Earth* and *Interpreter of Maladies* and Manju Kapur in her novel *The Immigrant* deals with the diasporic experiences and the cultural dilemmas suffered by the characters who try to pursue their dreams in the foreign land. Most of the characters of both the novelists become ‘fluid identities’ or ‘floating identities’ that assimilate with the host culture. Jhumpa Lahiri’s characters are typical Bengali characters trying to find their own space in the new land. Even though jhumpa Lahiri is a second generation immigrant herself, she loves her Bengali culture and through typical Bengali characters like Ashima and Mrs. Sen, presents the difficulties
these kind of immigrants face while accommodating themselves in the
host culture. Manju Kapur rightly remarks in her novel *The immigrant*:

> Certain Indians become immigrants slowly. They are not among those
> who have fled persecution, destitution, famine, slavery and death
> threats, nor among those for whom the doors of their country slam shut
> the minute they leave its borders. (TI.122,123).

There are immigrants like Nina, Ananda, Ashok, Mr. Sen, Dr. Sharma
and others who are educated and still find it difficult to adapt initially on
the foreign terrains but as Manju Kapur remarks:

> These immigrants are always in two minds. Outwardly they adjust
> well. Educated and English speaking, they allow misleading
> assumptions about a heart that is divided. In the new country they
> work lengthy hours to gain entrance into the system, into society, into
> establishing a healthy bank account. Years pass like this, ungrudged
> years because they can see their all sustaining dream of a better life
> coming true. …trips to the home country bring a disillusion and
> bitterness that the immigrant has forgotten how to cope with. Is this
> how it is here? So corrupt, merit stifled, such malfunctioning of every
> civic amenity, where your last ounce of energy is spent in merely
> keeping the wheels of daily life oiled and running. For men this logic
> works well. In fact the years it takes to qualify for citizenship are
> needed to adapt, bit by bit day by day…Get rid of the schism, become
> enough like them to be comfortable, merge and mingle. From East to
> West, over and over. Forget the smells, sights, sounds you are used to,
> forget them or you will not survive. There is new stuff around, make it
> your own, you have to. (TI.123).

Forget the past and open up for the new life is the key to success in the
West. One has to be open to the new things in life or else there is
stagnation. To succeed, a migrant has to adapt and move with the
requirements of the host country. Change, or you will not be accepted and always remain alien in the new land. All the immigrants change for good but even if they become Sang from Sangeeta Biswas (“Nobody’s Business”, Unaccustomed Earth) or Nick from Nikhil (The Namesake), whatever they do, they cannot do away with the Indianness within. These hybrid characters accept the host culture and at the same time respect and take pride in the Indian heritage and culture. There are immigrants, as Manju Kapur mentions, who, on their visits back to India complain about the system in India but they forget that they are also a part of it and cannot deny that. Many NRIs have realized that they should not be selfish to take care of their own progress but their country of origin also has to progress. Considering this they have started investing in India and also donate a lot of money for the betterment of the society.

It is not that only the immigrants suffer from the cultural dilemmas and other problems related to adaptations. Such dilemmas can be traced out in the Indian situation also, especially female characters, who have to struggle to make their place in the society. These women already have their place in the society but only as a mother, a daughter, a wife, a sister, a daughter-in-law, and a sister-in-law; these relations are in connection to the men in the family. The impact of patriarchy in India is a very dominant and decisive factor in the status of women in the society. The
question is about her individuality and her own value, not in relation to anybody but her own self. In the Indian society, where the family comes first and the decisions are in respect to the society, there is a little space left for women to have their own say. A woman, who is educated and has her own mind, faces many dilemmas. These dilemmas cause conflicts – the inner and the outer. A woman being more sensitive and caring suffers more from the inner dilemmas. The society that Manju Kapur presents is a conservative one where the head of the family- a male decides the future of the daughters. The daughters pass through great conflicts- the inner ones and the outer ones in order to carve a niche for themselves, going against all the norms of the society and following their mind and heart. The dilemmas in the Indian context, mean the conflicts that arise between the individual and society. Manju Kapur, through her female characters presents this inner conflict, showing her expertise in the psychology of a woman and what it takes to go against the family and society.

Manju Kapur’s first novel Difficult Daughters deals with the female protagonist’s struggle for love and her passion to establish herself as an intellectual in the society. Virmati is born in Amritsar into an austere and high minded household. She is the eldest daughter of Kasturi and Suraj Prakash. Kasturi has eleven children, so Virmati has to mother all of
them. She takes care of the household work and the needs of her brothers and sisters and in doing so, she loses the joys of her own childhood.

Manju Kapur says,

By the time Virmati was ten, she was attuned to signs of her mother’s pregnancies as Kasturi herself. She would redden with shame over her aunt Lajwanti’s comment about the litter that was being bred on the other side of the angan wall (DD.6).

Having all the burden of the children on her little shoulders, she sometimes yearns for affection but is pushed away by her mother saying “You are the eldest. If you don’t see to things who will?” (DD.7). Virmati, suffers from an impelled need to be loved as a daughter and not as a care taker of her siblings. This need to be loved tosses her into the arms of Professor Harish who sublets a portion of Virmati’s house, and is also a married man. Harish turns to Virmati for companionship that he doesn’t find in his wife Ganga who is uneducated. Virmati’s education earns her Harish along with other problems that follow. It is Virmat’s cousin sister Shakuntala Penhenji who sows the seeds of education and independence in her. Virmati also decides to taste the vine of freedom and wants to go for further studies but for her parents, her education is practically over. They fix her marriage with an engineer but Prof. Harish asks Virmati to be firm and deny the marriage. This being impossible to be talked about in the house, she tries to drown herself at Tarashika but is
saved by the servants of her grandfather, Lala Diwanchand. When asked about the reason for such a step, she tells her family that she does not want to marry and eventually her younger sister, Indumati, is married off to the engineer. Virmati is sent to Lahore for further studies at the RBSL college. Her room mate, Swarnalata, an independent person, also mesmerizes her like her cousin sister Shakuntala. Virmati longs to be independent but she is chased by Prof. Harish who visits Lahore to meet her. At first she resists but eventually gives up. At Sayeed Hussain’s house, where both meet, Virmati asks Harish to marry her and make it clear to the society that they love each other. Recognition of her love in the society is what Virmati wants. Harish gives her various excuses for not taking such decision. Virmati in fact enjoys her studies and many a times thinks that she must keep herself away from Harish and her thoughts of love and marriage as there was more in life to do. When she observes Swarnlata, participating in the freedom struggle she wishes: “This is what is going on around me. This is the life I should be involved in. Not useless love and doubtful marriage.”(DD.134).

She also wishes to participate in the political happenings but realizes that she is not a free bird. Previously she was caged in the customs and traditions of the family and here, in Lahore, where she has come to be free, she feels caged by love for Harish. She thinks:
Am I free, thought Virmati. I came here to be free, but I am not like these women. They are using their minds, organizing, participating in conferences, politically active, while my time is spent being in love. Wasting it… how come I never have a moment for anything else? Swarna does. And she even has a ‘friend’, who lives in the city. Thank God Hari lives in Amritsar. Otherwise I would be completely engulfed. But isn’t that what I want? What will happen when we marry? (DD.142).

Virmati’s dilemma is whether to follow her mind or her heart. Whether, to become an independent individual, or, to become Hari’s second wife to get his love. Torn in between these two strong wishes, she is not able to decide her future. This inner conflict does not allow her to be at peace with self as her problems mount when she comes to know that she is pregnant. When she goes back to her home for preparation of her final exams, she wants to meet Harish and tell him about her state but she finds out that Harish and his family has gone to their village. She comes back to Lahore and after appearing for the exams, with the help of Swarnalata she undergoes an abortion. She determines to forget the whole issue,

That was all she wanted to do. Forget. Forget. Forget, forget. She felt a deep emptiness inside her, which she construed as yearning for the Professor. Oh, how she longed to meet him, to throw herself on his chest, babble out her story, feel his love and sympathy, his regret that he wasn’t there pouring over her in a great tidal wave that would cleanse her of all guilt and sorrow! (DD.173).
When she meets Harish after her abortion, she does not blame him as that would not undo the act of abortion. She, however, feels depressed and alone. On her way back after meeting Harish, she thinks:

> Now he hardly needed letters to attach her to him. She was his for life, whether he ever married or not. Her body was marked by him, she could never look elsewhere, never entertain another choice.(DD.177).

On one hand she is tormented by her love for Harish and on the other hand her education and her degree have changed her enormously. Her BT course had left her restless and dissatisfied, hungry to work, and anxious to broaden her horizons. That she had had a taste of freedom in Lahore, it was hard to come back to the old life when she was not the old person any more. With her B.T. degree, she becomes the headmistress of the girl school and once again she breathes the air of freedom,

> She stood in her tiny garden and looked across the valley, turned her head and looked towards the school of which she was headmistress, and sensed her singleness and her power. She was twenty three and the youngest amongst her staff. Her qualifications, B.A. and B.T. from Lahore, were so impressive that the Maharani had dispensed with the unusual interview prior to the appointment.(DD.183).

Virmati’s problem is that of a person who is at times ruled by her heart and sometimes ruled by the mind. She, on one hand enjoys her power as a headmistress and on the other hand misses Harish. She corresponds with him through letters. Thus, the job supposed to be the first step
towards a bright career turns into a waiting period for her. This is a
golden opportunity she gets to start a new life on her own, but she is
unable to do it. She does not have the strength to cut off herself from
Harish and this indecisiveness ruins her. Harish visits her twice in
Sultanpur and becomes the cause of the problem. Whenever Virmati
mentions marriage, Harish does not take it seriously. He is more worried
about his own reputation and not about the problems Virmati is going
through:

You think it’s so easy for me!, She turned on him. It isn’t! people
wondering all the time. Why I am not married. What should I say?
That my lover is a coward? That he is waiting for permission from his
family to bring home a second wife?....The professor flushed. How
dare she insult him like this? He knew men whose second marriages
had been condemned socially, resulting in nothing but humiliation and
misery to everybody.(DD.193,194).

One month after the professor’s visit, she gets the result of her love and
that is she is asked to resign and leave. Once again it is Harish who
causes troubles for her. Virmati, leaves the place. As she cannot go back
to Amritsar, she chooses to go to Shantiniketan and live a life of
dedication and forge her identity over there. But the poet friend of Harish
who comes to her rescue calls Harish to Calcutta and becomes the cause
of the marriage of Harish and Virmati. Marriage with Harish does not
end her problems; she is his second wife and is not accepted by the
family. Her own family cut relations with her and cursed her for
dblackening the name of the family. Virmati engages herself in keeping
Harish happy but at the back of her mind she always feels that it would
have been better had she not married Harish. With so many people upset
by her marriage, she is not able to be at peace with herself. Vandita
Mishra, in *The Pioneer* comments,

> Kapur never permits Virmati any assertion of power of freedom. Because even as she breaks free from old prisons, she is locked into
newer ones. Her relationship with the professor, for instance…. Even
years of studying and working alone do not give her the confidence to
strike independent roots and grow…Eventually, marriage to the man
of her choice is no triumph either. (*The Pioneer*. New Delhi: 1 August,
1998.)

Virmati tries to be an independent person but her love for Harish does not
let her go far. Virmati portrays the cultural conflicts and dilemmas a
woman suffers to make her own identity in the male dominated Indian
society. In her love for Harish, she is the looser. She loses a place in the
maternal home; marrying Harish she becomes the second wife, so has
limited space in his family and home; even though she is educated, she is
not able to come out with her separate identity as an individual. Harish on
the other hand has the best of both worlds; Ganga his first wife as a
servant to take care of his household, children and his old mother and
Virmati, and educated, beautiful wife as a companion for his intellect. It
is the Professor who guides the life of Virmati at large. Virmati aspires to
be like her cousin Shakuntala Pehenji and her friend Swarnalata who work for greater cause, and who portray the ‘new woman’, but she fails in doing so. It is not that opportunities do not knock at her door, but blinded in love, she misses them. While attaining her goal, the Professor’s love, she has to struggle much and becomes a difficult daughter for her mother. Ida, Virmati’s daughter, who unfolds this story of her mother to the readers, is also a difficult daughter for Virmati. She has come out to be more independent than her mother. She has the courage to separate from her husband and has no children of her own and is independent of any societal norms. Nothing binds her. She does not compromise like her mother. It seems that all those daughters who try to break through the patriarchal constructs of the society are labeled as the difficult daughters. The independent thinking resulting from the education and the intolerant society is the cause of all their inner conflicts, struggles and dilemmas. Ruby Milhoutra rightly observes,

It is only Virmati who is the difficult daughter in prosperous merchant family of Lala Diwanchand. While in the generation of Kasturi, woman’s role was confined to childbearing and kitchen work, the generation of Virmati…breaks away from the tradition bound limits of Indian women. (Milhoutra.164)
Astha, the female protagonist of Manju Kapur’s second novel *A Married Woman*, an educated, upper middle class woman, the only daughter of her parents is brought up as Manju Kapur says:

Astha was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear. One slip might find her alone, vulnerable and unprotected. The infinite ways in which she could be harmed were not specified. But Astha absorbed them through her skin, and even after was drawn to the safe and secure. (MW.1).

Like other parents, her parents also want to get her married to a suitable person. Astha marries Hemant who has received western education and seems to have liberal views regarding the independence of the women. But, with the birth of her two children, Hemant changes completely. He becomes a typical Indian husband who wants Astha to take care of his house and parents. Astha finds herself bound by the domestic duties of a wife, a mother and a daughter-in-law. Hemant becomes busy in his business and has little time to be with his wife. Astha starts teaching in a school where she meets Aijaz, who with his charismatic personality attracts Astha. Though Astha has everything that a woman can ask from her marriage- a responsible husband, in-laws and her children, a perfect family picture in Indian context, but still she feels incomplete as an individual.

Well, Astha was a woman, and she was sick of sacrifice. She didn’t want to be pushed around in the name of the family. She was fed up
This incompleteness is perhaps because she is no more able to express through her paintings and poems. All her time is taken up by the domestic chores. Her tensions surface as migraines. The suffocation she feels is expressed in her poems that she writes sometimes but her art is not acknowledged by her husband or other members of the family. This is the reason why she is drawn towards Aijaz. He encourages her to write and paint. Aijaz is murdered brutally while performing a play related to the Babri Masjid and Ram Janmabhoomi. The death of Aijaz gives a cause to Astha’s life. She paints and writes and also faces problems in the house for taking part in gatherings having political motives. Her paintings get sold and she even gets ten thousand rupees, feels rich but her feeling lasts for a moment only. It is Hemant, who does not care to ask Astha how she wants to spend her own money but instead plans a tour with that money without asking her. Astha’s going out for gatherings is not taken well by the family. Hemant comments when she gets ready to go to the demonstration outside the Rastrapati Bhavan :“You seem to forget that your place as a decent family woman is in the home, and not on streets. You also forget that this is New Years Eve and we are going out.”(MW.172)
Meeting Peepalika, Aijaz’s widow, makes her more independent. Both these women, being lonely, find solace in each other and they have a powerful physical relationship that proves to be a threat to her conventional family. Astha suffers from the dilemma of whether to stay with the tradition and security of her married life or to make a statement of independence by accepting the unconventional and unaccepted relationship in the Indian society. Once again it is the individual as against the norms of the society. She wished to be like pipee, alone and free but then she checks herself as she is a mother and her life belongs to her children. When she thinks as being Hemant’s wife, she feels:

She was a wife too, but not much was required there. A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth were the necessary prerequisites of Hemant’s wife. (MW.231)

There is no sharing and caring in her married life. Her relationship with Pipee makes her realize how selfish Hemant is regarding their relationship.

Now sexually involved with another, she realized how many facets in the relationship between her husband and herself reflected power rather than love. Hemant had managed to ignore her because ultimately he filled his own landscape. (MW.233)

Finding love in Pipee, she remains happy and that is what disturbs Hemant. Astha no more has those headaches. Even though Astha tries to reach out for her happiness, she is a mother and so cannot break free
completely from her home. She searches the ‘wholeness’ in relationships but does not find it. She tells about Pipee’s role in her life: “I live my life in fragments, she is the one fragment that makes the rest bearable. But a fragment however potent is a fragment.” (MW.264).

Asthा thinks about her life and finds herself torn between love and her home.

When she was with Hemant she felt like a woman of straw, her inner life dead, with a man who noticed nothing, with whom for that very reason it was soothing to be with. Her body was his, when they made love it was Pipee’s face Astha saw, her hands she felt. She accepted the misery of this dislocation as her due for being a faithless wife. (MW.287)

Asthа suffers the misery of living two lives, one at home and the other with Pipee. Religious tensions that are portrayed minutely in the novel are a mirror to Astha’s frustrations. As the communal violence was destroying the peace, her marriage was harming her by oppressing her own way of life. Her future, like the fate of the mosque, remains uncertain as Pipelika goes abroad for further studies, leaving Astha to suffer the inner conflicts and it also tosses her back to the family. That is her destiny, the destiny of an Indian woman, her conventional home.

Clara Nubile rightly comments on the status of women in India:

In modern India the situation is still far from an ideal, liberated, democratic model. Indian women keep on struggling against the
Manju Kapur’s third novel *Home* deals with the protagonist Nisha’s quest for identity and survival. Anupama Chowdhury rightly comments, “Home reveals a disturbing home truth that joint families both can destroy and preserve our maturity, individuality and mental progress.” (Chowdhury, Vol.XLV). In the Indian system of joint families, the head of the family is a patriarch and there is little space for the women and daughters of the family to think or decide anything related to their lives. Refusing to reconcile with the patriarchal society, Nisha, tries to establish her own individual identity. A woman, stamped as the weaker sex is denied social security, justice and economic liberation. Nisha emerges to be a new woman, who tries to liberate herself through education and economic freedom. She raises her voice against the injustice done to her. While her brothers get the established business of their father, it is Nisha who becomes an entrepreneur and starts her own business and proves to be a promising business woman. The novel gives us an account of three generations of the Banwarilal family. The first Lala Banwari Lal, the second generation his two sons and a daughter and the third generation is that of his grand children, Nisha, Raju, Ajay, Vijay and Vicky. Banwari Lal, the head of the family, runs sari business in
Delhi in the Karol Baugh area and his sons Yeshpal and Pyarelal also join him in the same family business when they become mature. Yeshpal marries Sona and Pyarelal marries Sushila. After many years of marriage, Sona gives birth to Nisha, her daughter and afterwards Raju, her son. Lala Banwarilal’s daughter dies, or is perhaps murdered by her husband and the responsibility of her son Vicky comes on Banwarilal family. Nisha, Yashpal’s daughter is a ‘Mangli’, that is a difficult daughter for her parents as it becomes difficult to find a groom for her. Nisha grows up to be the new woman, an assertive, confident and independent girl by nature. Her ‘masi’, Rupa, who is childless, and her husband take special interest in Nisha’s education and Nisha looks up to her ‘masi’, who has her own small business of preparing papads and pickles and sells them, as her ideal. She also wants to be independent economically. At home, as a child, Nisha suffers Vicky’s physical tortures that disturb Nisha mentally and she loses appetite and does not talk to anybody. Smelling something wrong, she is sent to Rupa’s house to come out of the trauma. Rupa and her husband are like parents to her. They are the people who encourage her to study. Nisha’s life is built between the two homes, one that of her parents and the second that of her ‘masi’ Rupa. While at her parents’ home, she is taught to be a good wife and is asked by her mother to keep all kinds of fasts in order to get good husband. At one of the
‘Karva chauth vrats’, Nisha questions the story behind that ‘vrat’ and is scolded by her mother: “That girl should have followed her elders and not eaten by herself. After all no one else was eating, were they? She was trying to be independent, and you can see the consequences.” (H.94). Nisha, independent in her thoughts, does not take everything for granted. She questions everything and tries to find the answer. At her parents’ home, Nisha is engaged in activities of becoming a good wife but when she is at her aunt’s home, it is completely different. Her aunt is upset with her sister, as, when the girl should be busy with her studies; her mother engages in all such nonsense and distracts her in her studies. When Nisha comes back to her parents’ home, her mother makes her work in the kitchen and does not spare her from any of the pujas done at home.

Sona was making up for negligent upbringing. Nisha needed to be grounded in the tradition that would make her a wife worth having. The art of service and domesticity should shine in her daughter so brightly that she would overcome her negative karma to be a beacon in her married home. (H 128).

Nisha’s mother wants her to be a wonderful wife, but she is destined for something else. Nisha scores 70 percent in the Xth class whereas her brother could score only 45 percent. Education comes to Nisha as a gift in her waiting period of finding a boy who suits a ‘mangli’ girl like her.

Nisha was a mangli. A mangli, destined to marry unfortunately, destined for misery, unless a similar manglik could be found, with a
similar fate and horoscope. To do this would take time, and during that time- perhaps an education? (H.139)

It is not that Nisha is allowed to study as she wishes to do so, but it is because the family has no other better option. Nisha is favoured by her aunt as she tells her sister Sona about the importance of educating girls:

If anything happens in the girl’s later life, she is not completely dependent. It would be a shame to not educate her further. Let her do English Honours, not too much work, reading story books. (H.139, 140).

Her aunt succeeds in pursuing her sister for Nisha’s further studies and she is sent to Durga Bai Girls College for her Honours Degree. Here she meets Pratibha, an ambitious girl, who joins the NCC as she wants to do a government job in police. She is also a new woman who aspires to be independent. On the bus stop, Nisha gets familiar with Suresh, a student of Khalsa College of Engineering and falls in love with him. Socially, he belongs to a lower class, still Nisha, a modern girl, who does not believe in the caste system, wants to marry him. The affair becomes known to the family as a letter from Nisha’s college complaining about less attendance reaches home. Her mother scolds her of betraying their trust,
Nisha faces many questions from her parents and her brother Raju calls Suresh a crude fucker and also comments on Nisha that she is no more trustworthy. She retorts back, “Who are you to decide whether I am trustworthy?(H.198). Nisha comes out as a strong woman fighting for her cause. She thinks that her brother should not poke his nose in her matters. Suresh, on the other hand conveys to the family that he does not want dowry, does not care about Nisha’s mangli status, and he simply wants Nisha. The family gets angry all the more “A Paswan telling them he didn’t mind if their daughter was a mangli! Education has turned the boy’s head.”(H.199). Nisha is also a mouthpiece of the modern ideas as she tells her mother “Who cares about caste these days? What you really want is to sell me in the market, Sell me and be done with it. What are you waiting for?”(H.199). Nisha wants to break free from the age old customs of dowry and the discriminations of caste and creed. Her love for Suresh depicts her as a woman trying to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the upper class and the lower class. She wants to take the decision of her life by finding her own life partner. Nisha’s modern thoughts are not accepted in her conservative family. She is made a prisoner in her own house and is not allowed to go to the college. With
the help of her aunt and uncle, she meets Suresh and finds that he is a worthless person who does not have the courage to marry her against her parent’s wishes. She feels that “Raju was right: Suresh was a chutia, a total fucker. If he loved her he had no right to decide her future on his own.”(H.214). Suresh vanishes from her life, as her family wishes, and now she is at the mercy of her parents and their wishes. The only thing that is discussed in the house is her marriage but they fail to get a broom for her. Feeling annoyed at meeting so many people, she wants to do some course so that she becomes busy with it. She does not want to sit at home waiting for proposals. With Nisha’s marriage not working out, her brother Raju is married to Pooja, a daughter of a wealthy businessman. Seeing the married couple engrossed in themselves, she feels lonely and lost. It is Pooja who becomes the center of attraction with her modern ways of living. Nisha wants to go out of the house and work as her brothers do but she is not allowed to do business as it is not proper for the women to sit in the shop. She pleads her father, “There must be something I too can do”(H.267). Her mental state is reflected in her itches of the skin. When she is tense, her skin itches more making dark patches on her. Seeing her daughter suffer mentally, her father suggests her to join a play school where she can be busy with the kids. But this is not what she wants to do. Nisha, a businessman’s daughter, wants to try
her hands on the business of readymade garments and she talks about her plans to her father.

I want to make salwar suits. … Please Papaji, I will do anything you say, please, please. If it doesn’t succeed I will go back to teaching. I promise. Only give me a year…Give me a chance to show you what I can do. (H.287, 288).

With much criticism from her mother’s side, she starts business with the twenty five thousand given to her by her father on condition to be returned back. Yeshpal, is a person who has faith in his daughter and gives her a chance not differentiating between his son and daughter. ‘Nisha Creations’ is a success within a year and Nisha’s hard work pays off. Nisha establishes her name in business and even earns good profits. Her father is very happy with her success as a businesswoman. With success comes confidence and she is the in charge and the decision maker and no body is allowed to interfere in it. Marriage also paves its way. She is married to a widower who lives with his mother. In her meeting with Arvind, she makes it clear that she will continue her business even after her marriage. She tells him, “I work..I cannot give it up” (H.301, 302). Nisha clears her priorities before Arvind as she does not want to be a mere sexual object after her marriage. She wants to be free to do what she likes. Nisha asserts her identity as a woman of substance. She does not want to be caged in the four walls of the home like many other women. She has her own space, her own identity that she does not want to loose
in marriage as marriage for her is not worth it. Nisha is married off to Arvind in a registered marriage, again a modern thought. But a new cage awaits Nisha, a cage called ‘home’ where she has to be a responsible wife, a responsible daughter-in-law. It turns out that Arvind is only interested in taking care of his mother and that is why he has married. Clara Nubile’s remark in *The Danger of Gender* is quite relevant: “Being a woman in modern India means to be entrapped into the inescapable cage of ‘being a woman-wife-mother’…. ” (Nubile. 12).Nisha gets busy taking care of her mother in law and neither Arvind nor his mother enquire about her business.

In the next few days Nisha figured out what compromising half the female population in the house entailed. Her mother-in-law claimed her attention morning, noon, and night, in the kitchen, in the bedroom, in drawing rooms, theirs and others, as visitor and visitee. She received and gave attention, care, concern, and food, with little time left over for anything else.(H.322).

Once again Nisha’s fate is decided by her body. Within one month of her marriage she conceives and it seems impossible to run the business. She decides to sublet her business to Pooja on the condition of not using the name of Nisha Creations. Rupa masi assures her that with a caliber and a will like her she can start afresh any time after her child’s birth. At present it was her child that needed all the attention. “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). Nisha gives birth
to twins – a boy and a girl. Nisha, the business woman enjoys being a mother and being loved and, cared for by the members of her family in her home. Examining Nisha in an Indian context, she, as an individual, creates her own identity and creates her own space in her home and society. Manju Kapur respects Indian culture and traditions and gives much importance to family. It is an achievement on the part of Nisha who not only becomes economically free but also becomes a successful wife, a mother and a daughter-in-law. She proves to be at par with her brothers in her business but she ultimately succumbs to the requirements of her home and gives up her dream project to become a mother, which is perhaps a more important status in the Indian society.

Manju Kapur’s latest novel *Custody* is also set up in India. There are two female protagonists Shagun and Ishita. Shagun, who is stunningly beautiful, is married to Raman, an intellectual. It is a marriage of beauty and intellect. Everything is fine for few years of marriage. It is when Raman becomes extremely busy with his work and is mostly on tours, Shagun feels lonely and tired of taking care of two children single handedly. Shagun meets Ashok, Raman’s boss and he signs Shagun as a model for his company’s product. Finding a new identity and appreciation that she never has from her husband, she falls in love with the broad minded and intellectual Ashok. Manju kapur portrays Shagun
as a person who, despite being a mother and a wife, does not confine herself to her home, but rather goes for her own happiness. Shagun has her fears regarding the society and what her children will think of her when they grow up, but Ashok brushes them aside telling her:

By the time your children grow up the whole world will have changed….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.(C.81).

Shagun decides to leave her husband and children. When Raman denies her divorce, she decides to fight for the custody of her children. Children are used by both the parents as objects to fight for. Ishita, on the other hand is another woman who gets divorced by her husband as she is not able to conceive. She comes close to Raman and fights for the custody of Raman’s little daughter and is successful in doing so. Shagun represents a modern woman, who goes for her happiness at any cost. Ishita on the other hand is a person who comes out to be more loving and caring. Even though Shagun gets what she wants and settles with Ashok Khanna in the US, her letters to her mother are self revelations. In one of her letters she writes to her mother,

Perhaps I was foolish to believe, but he did promise to keep me happy for ever. Not that I have reproached him with anything. Our life together would not have been possible if I had regretted my past. Still. What happened to that promise? I guess when you are in love, you
experience some momentary delusion, then the glow fades and things look ordinary again. Of course, I adore my life here, but sometimes I feel its foundations are fragile. Sorry to unburden myself like this, Mama. In New York there are a few people I can tell such problems to. (C.373).

Shagun’s letter conveys her loneliness and the fading love in her life. She misses her children but is unable to talk about it with Ashok. Shagun’s life is torn between her aspirations of love and a high society life and her love for her children. She is the new woman who is selfish about her own happiness, and loses her daughter Roohi’s custody to Ishita. It is Shagun’s loss and Ishita’s gain as children recognize love and care that Roohi gets from Ishita and not her biological mother Shagun. It is rightly remarked at the back of the jacket of the book,

Custody is a captivating story of love and loss. Gently satirical, it is told with quiet restraint, honesty and clear-sightedness, once again confirming Manju Kapur’s reputation as the greatest chronicler of the modern Indian family.

Custody proves to be a book that is torn between the old and the new perceptions of life. The question it raises is whether, in being modern, we are harming the base of the Indian society that is the love and respect for the family.

Indian women, their position, priorities and predicaments get judicious revelation through different facets of a woman in the form of distinct
individuals projected by Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri in their female protagonists. All of them, if focused in the centre, reverberate the age long suppressed instinct to echo their self. They not only deserve the rightful space in the framework of our social structure but they must also be allowed to express their hidden aspirations. In the name of liberty, self reliance and unyielding approach, much has been exposed to an extent that one is made to realize how diaspora has affected the culture as well as the social structure of age long Indian minds. No one can deny that the Indian patriarchal structure could retain its significant role for ages together due to its unifying norms, social values and moral resoluteness despite having some serious pretexts. One cannot have a beautiful, appealing and durable social pattern unless there is timely pruning and removal of weeds. Undoubtedly, in this age of globalization and fast mobilization, the foreign elements have polluted the sanctity of Indian social touchstones, but the patronage of the elders still commands its say. Manju Kapur is conscious of the characteristic Indianness hence she hesitantly allows her female character to have their esteemed space, not as a revolt but as the need of the time. Their aspirations are suggestive as to make the male dominance feel ‘judge not that thy be not judged’. The hue and cry, exploitation in the name of false moral values and the male instinct to nip in the bud the indomitable feeling of ‘softer sex’, is not
new in literature. When Thomas Hardy wrote *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* with a sub title *A Pure Woman*, the orthodox Victorian British populace wanted the book to be banned. The same fate was met by Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* where Jude had extramarital relations with Sue despite being married to Arabella. Sue represented in her for the first time in British Literature – A New Woman, a woman who revolted and resisted the contemporary wild criticism. But as time passed, books like *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* by D.H.Lawrence got its place in the society as a new wave in the changing phase in the social outlook, understanding of values and liberalization in perspective.

The same approach one can read in between the lines while assessing the influence of diaspora in the characters of Jhumpa Lahiri, who being more familiar with the western culture, holds mirror to their Nature more closely. The dilemma is always a mental creation, as Milton says, “It is the mind that makes “Hell of Heaven, or Heaven Hell”. If one accepts it as the need of time, as it happens with the second generation of the immigrants, there is no guilt felt. The cultural dilemma is always with the first generation of the immigrants as they still try to ride on two horses simultaneously. In Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri, the cultural dilemma is explored deeply with a mark of objective sensitivity. They are, being women writers, very keen observers of the ups and downs in the lives of
the female characters in the Indian social male dominated pattern and the Western scenario where the older concepts and conceits get minimized and ‘women literature’ has the upper hand. The dilemma, whether it is cultural or personal, is mostly an indicator of ‘change’.

Both these writers have given more importance to the ‘issues’ rather than the attitude of the characters. Within the social set up, men and women are merely agents to create or recreate action or reaction elaborating the basic issue, man-woman relationship conditioned by set values, the values in the Indian background or the diasporic world. It is the clash between the meanings applied to the values that the dilemma emerges. Jhumpa Lahiri with a flawless drift of expressions focuses on the clashing ideologies of two cultures where the immigrant is seldom free from the state of embarrassment and on the other hand Manju Kapur feels quite comfortable in handling the issues in the lives of Indian women, though in different situations and in different age groups. She feels the crux of the problem and through her very realistic approach continues to remain familiar and involved in her creation. The attempt to examine the writing of Manju Kapur and Jhumpa Lahiri has kept Alexander Pope’s words in mind:

A Perfect Judge will read each work of Wit

With the same spirit that its author writ:
Survey the WHOLE, nor seek slight faults to find
Where nature moves and rapture warms the mind. (Pope.117)