If woman has always functioned “within” the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to its opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this “within,” to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; and make it hers. . . .

(Cixous 878)

Keeping this statement of Hélène Cixous in mind, I have made an attempt in this chapter to study the ‘globalised identity’ issues of the three cross-cultural authors–Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri and the displaced female characters in their works. A careful analysis of their works through the lens of postcolonial/postmodern feminism reveals a feminine voice trying to subvert the repressions of gender, history, race and culture, and reinventing a new identity free from their double/triple edged marginal status. The dissonance of the various forms of oppressions and awareness of the subaltern to challenge the oppositional presumptions of race/gender/class/colour are some of the key features of ‘dialogism’. Hence, in this chapter, I have reframed the Bakhtinian notion of “the dialogic” to refer to those marginalized
female subjects whose utterances are ‘double-voiced’, their own but also replete with an ‘otherness’.

Feminism is a complex subject which is appropriately described by Nye as a “tangled and forbidding web” (Nye 1). It may be classified into various categories like liberal feminism, Marxist or socialist feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, psychoanalytical feminism, postmodern or poststructuralist feminism, and so on. But the basic aim of the various feminists is to achieve emancipation and equality for women.

Many feminist theorists like Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Jane Flax, Seyla Benhabib, Rosi Braidotti, Moira Gatens, Linda Nicholson, Susan Hekman, Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Patricia Waugh, Linda Alcoff, Chris Weedon and Annie Leclerc deal with the postmodernist thought because some characteristics of feminism like its ability–to challenge cross-cultural gender identities, to open up new fluidity of boundaries, and to recognize the cultural heterogeneity–seem to attract it to postmodernism. The question of ‘difference’ is successfully dealt by the postmodernist or poststructuralist feminisms because these feminisms “consider not only differences between men and women, or differences between women themselves, but also difference within and constitutive of the female subject or a difference ‘within woman’” (Freedman 88). Hence the cross-cultural focus of postmodernist or poststructuralist feminism aptly deals with the dual marginalization of
women–one culture oriented and the other, gender oriented. It replaces the unitary notion of female identity with the plural and complex concept of social identity subject to the categories of class, race and ethnicity. Gender theorist Carol Gilligan, in her book *In a Different Voice* (1982), claims that women see themselves as dependent on others for their identity rather than considering themselves autonomous as men. Gilligan’s view, therefore, justifies that the impact of cultural displacement is greater on women than men. Women require more time and courage to reinvent themselves in a new environment, because identity for them is not just a new ‘self’ but a ‘self’ connected to new ‘others’. They need to step out of what Minnie Bruce Pratt calls “the narrow circle of the self” and challenge their gendered and cultural exclusion.

Contemporary feminism is a diverse and pluralistic enterprise influenced by history, reason, culture, tradition, gender and so forth. Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson favour the contemporary postmodern feminist theory because it deals with “complexly constructed conceptions, . . . treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation” (Bordo 139). Therefore, postmodernism is the most adequate approach to deal with the multiple axis of identity. This approach is used in this chapter to study those women’s intercultural positionality that are displaced and are facing the inherent question of belonging. Multiplicity, ambivalence, inauthenticity are the
characteristics of culturally sandwiched women, whose sense of marginalization, search for roots and attempts at self-definition are perennial. In my attempt to study the double marginalization of women, I’ve tried “to get beyond, not only the number one—the number that determines unity of body or of self—but also to get beyond the number two, which determines difference, antagonism and exchange . . .” (Suleiman 24). These two ‘numbers’ refer to the multiple voices arising out of a mixture of genders and cultures. An effort has been made to study the displaced female voice trying to locate its center through a never-ending dialogue of ‘self’ with ‘other’.

The migrant women authors and their characters, undertaken in this research, strive to transcend the prohibitive barriers of race/class/colour/religion to dialogize their desire for reinvention and to voice their ‘otherness’. The writings of the three authors are ‘double-voiced’ or dialogic as they contain not only their own (authorial) voice, but also the voices of the characters and the collective voice of the migrant women in general who address the dominant patriarchal/cultural discourse. As Bakhtin believes, “no utterance exists alone”, similarly, these works are dialogic in nature as “Each and every word,” in them “expresses ‘one’ in relation to the ‘other’” (Bakhtin and Volosinov 86). Dialogism places the displaced women afresh in a multi-cultural setting. Rather than repressing the voice of the subaltern it brings forth the ‘addressivity’ that finally
causes the deconstruction of binaries such as self/other, male/female, white/non-white.

Supporting Bakhtin’s notion of ‘double voiced discourse’, Showalter writes:

The concept of a woman’s text in the wild is a playful abstraction: in the reality to which we must address ourselves as critics, women’s writing is a ‘double voiced discourse’ that always embodies the social, literary and cultural heritage of both the muted and the dominant.

(263)

Showalter criticizes those forms of feminisms which seek to place women’s writings outside the dominant patriarchal discourse. Because she believes that it is through dialogue, ‘addressivity’ and comparison with the dominant discourse, that such women writers achieve their literary identity. Similarly, women when placed physically, not literarily, in a dialogic situation against patriarchal/cultural hegemony, gain a new sense of self and try to recreate a new identity. Marginal women have an inevitably fractured identity. They are seen as the ‘other’ by the dominant male as well as the dominant culture.

The works of Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri fit well within Bakhtin’s description of the ‘polyphonic novel’ because the multiple voices of the authors as well as the characters
within these novels see themselves and their identity construction in a
dialogic relation with the ‘others’.

Such female characters, finding their own identities
constructed by the language of others, can be linked to
the feminist reader. Both female character and feminist
reader question the monological discourse dominant in
society and articulated by specific characters, and this
move from a position Showalter calls ‘mutedness’ to an
exposure of resistant, un-official, alternative discourses
and subject positions. In so doing, character and reader
release the dialogic play of languages previously
repressed. The effect is to expose not only the fact that
the self, in Bakhtin’s terms, is always a product of the
discourse of an other, but also to display the dialogic
nature of identity itself. (Allen 161)

Bakhtin’s ‘dialogism’ in this research emphasizes the double-
voiced nature of marginalized female subjects who are not only
socially and sexually ‘othered’ but also the protagonists of their own
search for identity or a new ‘self’. As a result, they are capable of
producing in themselves a synthesis of ‘self’ and ‘other’.

The cross-border dialogue leads to the dual marginalization of
women—one, culture-based and the other, gender-based—as they
become the victims of “racist gaze” and “male gaze” (Rai 205). By
interpreting W. E. B. Du Bois’ concept of ‘double consciousness’ in the
feminist aspect, it can be argued that, as a consequence of double consciousness, women have to respond to both the male-gaze and to the male-dominated culture. As mentioned earlier, this dual marginalization of women is a postmodern/poststructural approach of feminism. Chris Weedon further argues that:

post-structuralist feminism, on the other hand,
committed as it is to the principle of difference and
deferral, never fixes meaning once and for all. For post-
structuralism femininity and masculinity are constantly
in process and subjectivity, which most discourses seek
to fix, is constantly subject to dispersal. (99)

Thus, the cross-cultural dialogue between feminism and masculinity is post-structural in approach as this dialogic event never culminates and is a constant site of discourse, struggle and potential change, constantly vying for power and trying to subvert the dominant voice.

While discussing the culture-based marginalization, we must keep Benedict Anderson’s view in mind that a woman symbolizes ‘home’ and ‘family’ upon which nationalism depends. Thus, a merger of woman and nationality transforms the woman to a stable signifier of tradition and nationality. Having been classified as a metaphor or sign for her nation, the woman, by not transplanting a part of her native land and tradition in the alien space, would jeopardize her cultural identity. Unable to strike roots completely in the adopted world, she remains suspended in ambivalence. The cross-cultural
discourse pushes the displaced women into a position of temporality, where ‘other’ places, ‘other’ times, and the past continue to creep in and take over the present. Such diasporic women, who create a hole in the present to peep into the past, are called ‘expatriates’. Expatriation, as defined by Christine Gomez, is “a complex state of mind and emotion, which includes a wistful longing for the past. . . . The expatriate builds a cocoon around herself/himself as a refuse from cultural dilemmas and from the experienced hostility or unfriendliness in the new country” (“The On-Going Quest” 72).

The expatriates tend to take refuge in multiculturalism. Without refusing the dominant culture, they continue to cling to their ethnic culture. “Multiculturalism refers to the development of immigrant populations into ethnic communities that remain distinguishable from the majority population with regard to language, culture and social behaviour” (Koser 24). It is by sticking to their originality that, even beyond miles, they are able to maintain the nostalgic ties with their nationality and ethnic identity. According to Charles Taylor, culture is a word that is strongly associated with an individual’s sense of identity and belonging. Since expatriates cannot allow their ethnic identity to wither away completely, the alternative path for them is to juxtapose the essential characteristics of the ethnic and dominant cultures for their survival. The expatriate women retain some traits of their original culture and blend them well with the adopted culture to maintain their distinct cultural identities.
Some ecofeminists like Vandana Shiva associate women with nature and emotions. Natural forces are seen as feminine as they represent the power of fertility. This relationship further intensifies women’s bond with their native land and results in the nostalgic yearning of the expatriates. While supporting the view that gender and notion are constructed by each other, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias point out that:

Women are participants in ethnic and national process in a number of specific ways: as biological reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic or national groups; as key actors in the transmissions of the community’s values; as markers of ethnic or national distinctiveness; and as active participants in national struggles. (qtd. in Freedman 85)

Therefore, women symbolize the ethnic and national identity, and it becomes a specific role of women to propagate and nurture their cultural norms. Thus, the views of the various feminists discussed above justify the multicultural, nostalgic and expatriate nature of the culturally marginalized women.

The gender-based marginalization implies that such women, reduced to ‘other’ by a patriarchal society, try to recreate their identities in a ‘Third Space’ in which they carve their own niche. Following the increasing trend of globalization, the displaced women
feel the need to assimilate by negating the oppositions of race, class, culture or sex.

Simone de Beauvoir has made a famous assertion in *The Second Sex* (1981):

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (295)

It means that birth only generates biological difference between a male and a female, but the assignment of roles to men and women is a social construct. This statement of Beauvoir is further supported by Oakley, as for her “sex is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia. . . . ‘Gender’, however is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’” (16). Thus, women are under a continued social or patriarchal oppression irrespective of any historical origin.

Many feminist social theorists like Nancy Chodorow, Ann Ferguson, Nancy Folbre, Nancy Hartsock and Catharine Mackinnon are of the opinion that female activity and their sense of ‘self’ is associated, irrespective of the boundaries. According to Nancy Chodorow, “this deep self differs significantly for men and for women
but is roughly similar among women, on the one hand, and among men on the other hand, both across cultures and within cultures, across lines of class, race and ethnicity” (qtd. in Nicholson 30). If femininity or masculinity can be inherent in us, then it is not surprising that patriarchal domination is also basic and ever existent in our society. Therefore, women’s subordination or marginalization is inevitable. But when women cross the national boundaries, they enter into a cultural and patriarchal discourse. This dialogue instils in them an urge to re-define their roles free of any patriarchal subversion. They become immigrants, free of the expatriates’ dusty identity, moving ahead to take refuge in cultural acclimatization. Immigration does not imply severing the deep connections in the past. It is an assimilatory phase where the subject is able to accept and love the new home without conflict and ambivalence.

Assimilation is a process in which migrants give up their distinctive linguistic, cultural and social characteristics and merge so well with the dominant culture that they become almost indistinguishable. Anglo-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill coined the term “melting-pot” to refer to the process of assimilation. According to him, when the immigrants came to the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, they were encouraged to consider themselves as Americans. In this process of assimilation or the action of the melting-pot, they gradually abandoned their culture of origin until they gained a completely new American identity, sharing a single common culture
with the majority population. It is this process of assimilation that is now gaining ground in the cross-cultural arena of the ‘globalised world’. Breaking out of an expatriate shell, the displaced women try to subvert any dominant discourse and instead, enter into a dialogic relation with the new cultural and patriarchal norms. This helps them to disguise a new identity that cannot be distinguished from the hegemonic identity.

In Imaginary Homelands, Rushdie writes,

the Indian writer who writes from outside India . . . is obliged to deal with broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost . . . [and he] will create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (Rushdie 10-11)

Though, three of the authors undertaken in this research write from outside India, yet their immigrant experiences are quite different and so are their creations. They touch upon various strands of diaspora in their fictions which are influenced by their imaginations as well as experiences. This chapter touches upon the significant effects of migration on the three novelists and the female characters in their works. The dual marginalisation is visible in the works as well as the lives of these three female authors.

Anita Desai was born on 24 June, 1937 in Mussorie (India) as Anita Mazumdar, the daughter of D. N. Mazumdar, a Bengali
businessman, and Toni Nime, a German. Having experienced a mixed cultural upbringing, the cross-cultural confrontation is inherent in Anita Desai. Her own German half of the parental heritage is in the background of her novel *Baumgartner’s Bombay* (1988).

Desai was a student at Queen Mary’s Higher Secondary School in Delhi and received her B.A. in English Literature in 1957 from Miranda House, Delhi University. In the following year, she tied the nuptial knot with Ashvin Desai and they raised four children. Desai has been a member of the Advisory Board for English at the National Academy of Letters in Delhi. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London, of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York, and of Girton College at the University of Cambridge, England. In 1993, she became a Creative Writing teacher at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, where she is now the John E. Burchard Professor of Writing. She now lives in the United States and successfully manages to divide her time between India, Boston, Massachusetts and Cambridge, England.

Having lived a multicultural life:

Anita Desai confesses that while she ‘feels about India as an Indian’, she thinks about it ‘as an outsider’. Desai probably derived this point of view from her German mother, whom she aptly describes as carrying ‘a European core in her which protested against certain Indian things, which always maintained its independence
and its separateness’. Her oeuvre has explored the lives of outsiders within Indian society and more recently, also within the West. Her fiction has covered themes such as women’s oppression and quest for a fulfilling identity, family relationship and contrasts, the crumbling of traditions and anti-semitism. The Eurocentric and social biases that are sometimes detected in her fiction, therefore, may be more productively read as the result of author’s focus on uprooted and marginalized identities.

(Prono)

Desai has incorporated her cross-cultural experiences in those of her works that are based on the East-West encounter. These works have grown out of Desai’s past images. According to T. S. Eliot, “The poet’s mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, which remain there until all particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together” (298). Similarly, Desai has united the fragments of her memories and expressed them comprehensively through the experiences of culturally uprooted characters of her works.

Desai has spent a major portion of her time abroad. Her prolonged stay in England and the United States has added a complexity to her view of culture. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is one of the first novels of Desai which belongs to her diasporic phase. Her other works that focus on aspects of cultural affiliation and alienation are
Baumgartner’s Bombay, Fasting, Feasting, Journey to Ithaca and The Zigzag Way. All these works of Desai problematize different issues of acculturation.

The society has trapped the true self of women by imposing an idealized role upon them and by creating the feminine principle in nature. Desai has liberated her women protagonists from these patriarchal limits or social constraints. In all works of Desai, women are shown to “devise means of de-emphasizing some aspects of her role, . . . so that she may widen her identity” (Nandy 42-43). Anita Desai is specially noted for the insightful depiction of the inner life of the female characters. Several of Desai’s novels and short stories explore the alienation of middle-class women. In this chapter I’ve made an in-depth analysis of those works of Desai which treat the themes of identity and self-discovery of doubly marginalized women.

Some later works of Anita Desai record the dilemma faced by the displaced individuals in the cross-cultural set up. Anita Desai is adept at representing the innermost psyche of her female protagonists who are “alienated from their surroundings as a consequence of their failure or unwillingness to adjust with the reality. They often differ in their opinion from others and embark on a long voyage of contemplation in order to find the meaning of their existence” (Gopal 7). These women either enter into a conflict or reconcile with the adopted culture. This chapter makes an in-depth analysis of the life of two major female characters, Mother and Sophie, in Desai’s Journey to
Ithaca, who represent the contradictory roles of an immigrant and an expatriate, respectively.

The word ‘journey’ in the title Journey to Ithaca represents a quest motif—a search for identity. It delineates Matteo’s quest for spirituality; and Mother’s and Sophie’s quest for identity. Keeping the feminist aspect in mind, my focus in this novel is on the female characters and their confrontation with the alien culture and the patriarchal oppressive environment that Anita Desai’s feminism surfaces. The novel’s prologue discloses the early life of Matteo, whereas the epilogue deals with Matteo’s marriage with Sophie and his journey to India.

This chapter mainly deals with the epilogue as it foregrounds the displaced women—Mother and Sophie’s dialogic relation with the adopted culture.

Dialogism is the only form of resistance in recasting gender and positioning women afresh in history. Rather than homogenizing the voices of the subaltern, ‘dialogism’ throws into sharp relief their heterogeneity and explores the interrelation of the different forms of oppression that may determine what may seem a ‘single’ subjectivity.

(Sengupta 68)

Mother and Sophie redefine their identities through ‘dialogism’ as it helps the subaltern to come to terms with their environs through
‘addressivity’ and ‘speaking across’. But their endeavour to reinvent their identities diverges into multiculturalism and assimilation.

Desai’s *Journey to Ithaca* is a narrative that portrays the cross-cultural complexities of belonging and identity. Through the diasporic experiences of Laila (later called Mother) and Sophie, Desai depicts the subordinate cultural identities conferring their differences with the dominant cultural identities at the cultural border zone. Laila’s and Sophie’s journey through Egypt, Paris, Venice, New York and India gives rise to the multiplicity of voices arising out of the mixture of cultures (i.e. many centres and many peripheries), and the displaced voice trying to locate its centre through a never ending dialogue of ‘self’ with ‘other’. This constant dialogue justifies Bakhtin’s notion that nothing exists independently and we all live lives of “simultaneity” i.e. there can be no ‘self’ without the ‘other’.

Desai interweaves the two parallel stories of Laila and Sophie, and through their characters displays the contrary impacts of cultural interaction on the displaced subjects.

Sophie and her husband, Matteo’s, journey to the East (India) begins in 1975, when they leave Italy (their homeland) “dressed in identical blue jeans and T-shirts and sports shoes carrying identical rucksacks on their backs, as did so many of their generation in Europe” (*JI* 30), “to find India, to understand India and the mystery that is at the heart of India” (*JI* 57). This desire for the mystical East has been instilled in Matteo through his introduction to Herman
Hesse's book *The Journey to the East* by his private tutor Fabian. This dialogical encounter with the alien culture has varying impacts on them. Matteo is able to re-configure his identity and develop a sense of belonging as he once says, “The past is over, Sophie over, over, over–not to be repeated. Don’t repeat it” (*JI* 43). Sophie, on the other hand, starts her journey to India like any other Western adventurer to enjoy the exotic East. But her curiosity is soon marred by the compulsion with which she has to follow Matteo from one ashram to another. She is a typical of Desai’s protagonists who are Socio-psychic rebels, recalcitrant selves, who find it difficult to compromise with the milieu. The self frantically endeavours to escape but in the process enters another world equally disturbing and disheartening. Thus, it lies cloistered in a world, where there is a perpetual and persistent struggle between the physical [the present] and the psychic [the past]. . . . (Swain 107-108)

She fails to converse with the voices of the adopted culture and is unable to locate a centre or re-root herself in the real India which is so different from the imaginary land of myths, mountains and saints that she had always wanted to explore. Through characters like, Sophie, Anita Desai has succeeded in “incorporating psychic aspect of her female characters who have suffered privations and humiliations, neglect and silence, aloofness and alienation” (George 163).
For Sophie “Matteo has vanished into the heart of the world that remained shut to her. She had not thought she wished to enter it, but Matteo’s disappearance was so profound that her uneasiness grew” (JI 126). Since Sophie is unable to break away from her ethnicity, she continues to cling to her West-oriented approach to life. She “even smoked a cigarette furtively behind a hut. . . . Feeling both guilty and grateful to be excluded” (JI 53-54). The smoking of cigarette ‘furtively’ is symbolic of Sophie’s attempt at preserving her identity. Like an expatriate she does not want to develop any association and reconciliation with the adopted culture. The dilemma of her identity is visible in her cries “I want to go home” (JI 89), and her questions to Matteo: “Couldn’t we stay in our own country? To die there?” (JI 57).

Being a woman, Sophie wants to be a representative of her nationality, hence, she willingly alienates herself and denies understanding the language of the other ashram dwellers. “The pai dogs that barked in the village and in other villages, . . . were more comprehensible to her: she listened to their dialogues with greater understanding and sympathy” (JI 53). This interpretation of the animal sounds, and willing ignorance to understand the language and the regional pronunciation of the ashram members is indicative of Sophie’s expatriate nature. “Sophie and Matteo, whose marriage had been quickened by the prospect of this journey had very soon undergone the bitterness–frustration–trauma that followed all these India bound travellers of their times like inalienable shadows” (Kundu
Sophie with her typical Eurocentric vision of India proves to be a misfit in the new cultural milieu. Unable to cope with the taxing experiences her “pilgrimage through India became suffused with the rich and aromatic haze of marijuana” (JI 55). She goes to Goa and joins a band of European ragged mendicants. This failed attempt at self-definition, coaxes Sophie to rejoin Matteo and his sojourn in the ashrams. Though Matteo soon finds his guru in Mother, but Sophie still remains alone and is unable to anchor her new ‘self’.

The shift in identity due to the cross-border discourse also involves nostalgic longing. Sophie has “only one tape to listen to on her cassette player of the Brandenburg Concertos. She would sit on the floor with it beside her, playing it over and over, . . . as if she were wrapping herself in it, winding herself into a world separate from his [Matteo’s]” (JI 126). This is an evidence of the plight of culturally displaced subjects. Bakhtin’s example of a ‘two-faced Janus’ vividly portrays the multicultural identity of Sophie, that continues to hinge between her earlier and latter self: “An act of our actual experiencing is like a two-faced Janus. It looks in two opposite directions: it looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and at the never-repeatable uniqueness of actual lived and experienced life . . . .” (Bakhtin 2). This constant looking back emerges in Sophie a multicultural trait and a desire to cease her husband’s complete assimilation with the adopted culture.
Sophie’s due need to break Matteo out of the spell of Mother (originally Laila) and to pull him out of an illusionary enigma for which Matteo has surrendered his life, forces her into ceaseless efforts to discover the past of Mother, “to travel back, back in time, although not her own time but the Mother’s” (JI 155). In doing so, Sophie visits a number of places, beginning with Egypt, Venice, New York and finally India—which have been the abode of Mother at various points of her life. This crossing of multiple boundaries giving rise to ‘dialogization’, is a cultural connotation of the Bakhtinian principle of multiple voices in a novel. But even after entering into a dialogic relation with different cultures she is unable to strike roots in any of the adopted lands.

Sophie’s search introduces us to the multifaceted character of Laila (the Mother), born in Egypt. Her continuous journey through Paris, Venice and New York metamorphoses her into Lila-Rani-Lila Devi. By culminating her journey in India, she finally adopts the role of Mother. This transition of Laila into Mother showcases the ‘open’, ‘unfinished’ and ‘dialogic’ nature of the ‘self’. The transcontinental journey of Laila, giving rise to many centres and many peripheries, emphasizes the ‘never finalized interactivity’ of dialogism.

Laila, an Egyptian Muslim girl, daughter of Alma and Hamid rebels against the traditional code of Muslim religion. Laila’s gesture of unpinning her Egyptian kerchief and leaving it floating through the sea breeze is symbolic of her freedom from cultural moorings. She
severs all links with her home or past and moves forth in search of her spiritual existence. She is lured into the new direction of spiritualism, in her early youth, after her encounter with the hagdeh in Cairo, who prophesies her future “eastward to find a temple, . . . the temple of the Mother Goddess of the World” (JI 176-177). These words continue to haunt her subconscious throughout her odyssey till she finally reaches India, re-identifies herself as Mother and finds her true, eternal home. She assures her devotees by saying: “the only purpose of our existence here [is] to experience fully, to be fully” (JI 100) i.e. to fully acculturate ourselves to the adopted land. The entire journey of Laila delineates her assimilatory characteristics. Her resistance to cultural/patriarchal oppression is visible in Anita Desai’s observation: “I don’t think anybody’s exile from society can solve any problem, . . . problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain one’s individuality rather than suffering from a lack of society and a lack of belonging . . .” (qtd. in Jain 15).

Like a true immigrant, Laila does not like to conform to the conventions of her ethnic society but rather acculturates herself to the various cultures she passes through. The multicultural experiences of Laila introduce her to various social and religious cultures (Egyptian, European, American and Indian) that she disregards completely. But one that has a lasting impact on her mind and soul is the Oriental (more specifically–Indian) culture that she first comes across “through heaps of books (in a Paris Bookshop) all with titles referring to l’Orient
or l’Inde” (JI 195), and a strange dark metal statue in the same shop that struck a dancer’s pose.

To Laila, the dancer Krishna, she meets in Paris, seems to be symbolic of Lord Krishna.

It seemed to her that he, the dancer was also the figure she had first seen in a volume of paintings in Madame Lacan’s bookshop. He was also God. She had studied in the books. . . . He was also the country and the art and the religion that had become her obsession. . . . (JI 219)

By joining Krishna Ji’s dancing troupe, she paves a way for herself to come to India. It is in India that Laila, a spiritual quester, achieves an identity for which she revolted against all cultural and patriarchal norms.

On her journey to the Himalayas, she meets her Master (Guru Prem Krishna), with whom she lives as a body being one with the soul. It is here that she achieves her spiritual emancipation. After the Master’s death she heads the ashram as Mother, by breaking all the patriarchal codes. At this stage, she finally reaches the last rung of the ladder of her quest, and attains bliss, enlightenment and most importantly her transformation from Laila to the Mother.

Laila being a fluid identity is able to re-build her ‘self’ in the maze of cultural dialogics. It is evident from the aforementioned experiences of Laila that the shift in time/space always leads to the transformation of ‘self’ into ‘other’.
N. R. Gopal observes that Anita Desai has created two kinds of characters who can be described as “Aye-Sayers and Nay-Sayers” (47). Anita Desai herself has said in an interview: “There are those who can handle situations and those who can’t” (Rao 7). Desai’s Journey to Ithaca introduces both ‘Aye-Sayers’ as well as ‘Nay-Sayers’. ‘Aye-sayers’ refers to Laila (Mother) who willingly absorbs the new culture or social set up and is a thorough immigrant. ‘Nay-sayers’ refers to Sophie, who, like an expatriate continues to yearn for her past and is unwilling to plant her roots into a new social setup.

Bharati Mukherjee, born in a Bengali Brahmin family of Calcutta, moved to England with her family at the age of nine and lived in London for three years. Therefore, she experienced the cross-cultural milieu at a very early stage in her life. After returning to India in 1951, Mukherjee completed her B.A. (Honours) in English at the University of Calcutta in 1959, and took her M.A. Degree in English from the University of Baroda in 1961. Soon she went to the United States and joined the Creative Writing Programme at the University of Iowa. She obtained a Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature in 1969. It was during these years at Iowa that Mukherjee met Clark Blaise, the Canadian Novelist, Professor and Journalist and married him in 1963. In 1966, the couple moved to Canada and lived there for almost fourteen years. During this span of time, Mukherjee viewed herself as a victim of cultural and racial marginalization. She considered herself an expatriate in Canada and accepts that “Many
including myself left (Canada) unable to keep our twin halves together” (Mukherjee, “An Invisible Woman” 37).

Unable to assimilate, she moved to America with her husband in 1980, and is presently working as a Professor of English at the University of California. This decision marked a dramatic turning point in Mukherjee’s sensibility. “The transformation as writer and as resident of the new world, occurred with the act of immigration to the U.S.A., . . . for me it is a movement away from the aloofness of expatriation, to the exuberance of immigration” (Mukherjee, Darkness 2-3). Mukherjee’s shift from multiculturalism in Canada to assimilation in America marks the contrast in expatriate and immigrant experiences which are visible in almost the entire oeuvre of Mukherjee.

Bharati Mukherjee’s Desirable Daughters fits well within the parameters of Bromley’s comment about various diasporic fictions being “written from the affective experience of social marginality, from a disjunctive, fragmented, displaced agency, and from the perspective of the edge” (Bromley 1). The novel is by, and concerns itself with, those who are facing the enigma of cultural encounter. Mukherjee has shown two sisters, Padma and Tara, undergoing absolutely oppositional experiences of cultural acclimatization. Padma’s expatriate voice shows a resistance to absorption in the alien culture, whereas Tara’s immigrant voice, similar to that of Mukherjee, shows a desire to merge with the adopted culture.
Padma’s “clinging to a version of India and to Indian ways and Indian friends and Indian clothes and food and a ‘charming’ accent” (DD 134) is an evidence that she has formed a cocoon around herself, to prevent the American culture from penetrating it. According to Avtar Brah: “Not all diasporas inscribe homing desire through a wish to return to a place of ‘origin’” (193). Padma is one such example who stayed on in America, but formed a little Indian community by colliding with the diasporic subjects, and reassembling and reconfiguring her memories of those encounters.

In the nearly twenty-five years that she has been in the U.S., she has become more Indian than when she left Calcutta. She is a ‘multi-cultural performing artist’ for local schools and community centres, staging mythological evenings, with readings, slide shows, recitations and musical accompaniments. (DD 94)

Padma seems to have collected the rags, patches and scraps of her Calcutta days and weaved them into the texture of the future without severing the nostalgic anchoring in the past. She fits perfectly in the expatriate mould. “Change is corruption; she seemed to be saying, Take what America can give, but don’t let it tarnish you in any way” (DD 134).

Tara, on the other hand, depicts an immigrant or hybrid identity, who, in order to avoid being viewed as ‘the other’ escapes the ghetto existence and adapts to the patterns of dominant culture.
Through hybridity she recreates a new self. In the cultural scenario, hybridity either refers to the fusion of two or more cultures or dialogical encounter between the cultures giving rise to a hybrid/hyphenated identity occupying a ‘third space’. The displaced voice of Tara indulges in a constant dialogue between ‘self’ and ‘other’. This constant dialogue justifies Bakhtin’s notion that nothing exists independently, i.e. there can be no ‘self’ without the ‘other’.

Once in America, Tara turns her back to the Indian patriarchal norms and traditions. Tara “as a good Hindu wife-to-be, could not utter any of his [her husband’s] names to his face, . . . after crossing the dark waters to California I called him Bishu, then Bish, and he didn’t flinch” (DD 23). In contradiction to her husband’s wish, she sends her son Rabi to an arts school. She divorces her husband after a decade of their marriage “because the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled. I wanted to drive, but where would I go? I wanted to work, but would people think that Bish Chatterjee couldn’t support his wife?” (DD 82). A suffocating life coaxes Tara to start living with Andy, her Hungarian Buddhist lover, who she thinks “has been a better father than Bish” (DD 162). She also begins to work as a kindergarten teacher.

Padma considers Tara to be a ‘self-engrossed American’ who has brought shame to the Bhattacharjee family. Whereas, Tara considers Padma’s clinging to a version of India as a “cowardly way of coping with a new country” (DD 134). The cultural dislocation of Padma and
Tara has brought a shift in their identities. Padma, “whose every utterance was couched in hatred for those times and for the family and for the city, is trying to lead a traditional Bengali life in New Jersey,” and Tara who loved her family and culture has “walked away from the struggle to preserve it. In San Francisco, I (she) barely knew any Indians.” (DD 181).

Tara who is firmly established in San Francisco with an ex-husband, a teenage son and a Hungarian Buddhist lover, admits while re-visioning her past:

I was brave I stood up for myself and my son. If we’re unhappy, we’re expected to suck it up for the kids’ sake or our reputations. We worry that our parents will think, even when they’re halfway around the world and we’re middle-aged adults. It’s never for ourselves. (DD 162)

But in the New World, Tara learns to live for herself and succeeds in building resistance to the cultural/patriarchal oppressions. She successfully overcomes the lack of belonging and relocates herself in a new home.

Having closely scrutinized the oppositional diasporic experiences of Padma and Tara, we are in a position to justify the culture-based and gender-based marginalization of these characters, respectively. Culturally displaced, Padma, considers it her duty to preserve and propagate her ethnic values even in an alien land. Whereas, Tara, the victim of gender-based marginalization, wants to
break out of the patriarchal bounds and step into a new identity free of the traditional limits.

Cultural conflict in all its multiplicity forms the crux of Mukherjee’s creative accomplishments. Her works mostly represent the movement from expatriation to immigration, which coincides with her own movement from Canada to U.S.A. Mukherjee’s existence, like most of her diasporic characters, is a dialogic event, which is the result of ‘addressivity’ and ‘speaking across’ i.e. she has to constantly respond to the utterances from the various worlds that she passes through. Tara in Desirable Daughters closely resembles Mukherjee as far as her adaptation or assimilation is concerned. Like Tara’s ‘fluid identity’, Mukherjee’s diasporic experience is vividly portrayed in her statement: “I see my ‘immigrant’ story replicated in a dozen American cities, . . .I see most of these as stories of broken identities and discarded languages, and the will to bond oneself to a new community against the ever-present fear of failure and betrayal” (Mukherjee, Darkness 3).

The second work of Mukherjee viewed through the cross-cultural lens is her short-stories collection Darkness, which is a store of multiple expatriate and immigrant experiences of culturally sandwiched women. Through the women protagonists of her short stories, some of them being her own portraits, she unravels the multicultural and assimilatory experiences of the migrants.
Considering V. S. Naipaul to be a model, Mukherjee has based some of the stories on the expatriate experience:

Like V. S. Naipaul, in whom I imagined a model, I tried to explore state-of-the-art expatriation. Like Naipaul, I used a mordant and self-protective irony in describing my character’s pain. Irony promised both detachment from, and superiority over, those well-bred post-colonials much like myself, adrift in the new world, wondering if they would ever belong. (Mukherjee, *Darkness 2*)

Story describing the painful experiences of expatriates is “The World According to Hsu” in which Ratna is caught up with the fear of moving to Toronto with her Canadian husband Graeme. She thinks, “In Toronto, she was not Canadian, not even Indian. She was something called, after the imported idiom of London, a Paki. And for Pakis, Toronto was hell” (“The World According to Hsu” 41). Though, Ratna’s expatriation is only mental and not experienced, yet it leaves a deep scar on her psyche. The racist experiences of other Indians in Toronto continue to haunt the thoughts of Ratna. Even before settling in Toronto, the fear of discrimination is so deeply embedded in her mind that she is willing to live as a foreigner on that small island off the coast of Africa rather than live as an ‘outsider’ in Toronto for the rest of her life. She wants to continue to guard her ethnic identity rather than allowing the alien culture to smother it. She enjoys the multicultural set up of that island: “feeling for the moment at home in
that collection of Indians and Europeans babbling in English and remembered dialects. No matter where she lived, she would never feel so at home again” (“The World According to Hsu” 56). Ratna’s fears are similar to Mukherjee’s own experiences that resulted in her departure from Canada.

According to Christine Gomez, Mukherjee’s mention of the article ‘The World According to Hsu’ by Kenneth J. Hsu in this story is only to propagate the idea that, “There is perhaps a longing for the world according to Hsu, a one world free from cultural collisions, dilemmas and separation” (“From Expatriation to Immigration” 136). Therefore, the very title of the story suggests a desire for a world free of racism and cultural conflicts, where everyone can feel secure and free.

The other story by Mukherjee that foregrounds the expatriate experience of Doctor Miss Supariwala is “Isolated Incidents”. These incidents are viewed through a native Canadian, Ann Vane, whose job is to file complaints from immigrants against problems related to Human Rights. These problems are considered by the native Canadians to be some ‘isolated incidents’ not needing much emphasis. This story is another evidence of Mukherjee’s grievances against the racist set up in Canada.

Doctor Miss Supariwala is a stern, stocky woman of forty-three, with doctorates from Western Ontario and Bombay, who claimed to have been passed over at job interviews in
favour of lesser candidates. She was a Canadian citizen, she'd published numerous articles, she'd won a few research grants. No one could fault her promptness, her discipline, her preparedness. (“Isolated Incidents” 78)

But certain racist Canadian interviewers object saying that, “students would not relate easily to her, some might complain of her accent, her methodological stiffness, her lack of humor” (“Isolated Incidents” 79).

Therefore, Miss Supariwala’s rejection in favour of lesser candidates is a clear evidence of cultural marginalization. Ann Vane is surprised that “in spite of everything, the Supariwalas wanted to stay on” (“Isolated Incidents” 79). This shows that despite all hardships, expatriates continue to cling to the alienated identity in despair with only a dim hope of attaining a multicultural identity one day.

Through these discriminatory incidents of Canada, Mukherjee has put forth her own expatriate experiences. She states that:

Such a complex position induces diasporic women to write their lives. Their literature is generally charged with intense anxiety of dislocation and adaptation. In their endeavour of self-expression, they make fictions out of their lives and as a result, their novels become autobiographical. (qtd. in Mund 110)

Therefore, Mukherjee is one such displaced author whose works are mostly an attempt at self-definition.
Women are the worst victims of cultural collisions, as they fall prey not only to cultural marginalization but also to multiple patriarchies. But in the postmodern context, the ideas of nationalism and patriotism have altered significantly and in place of the ‘homing desire’, a possibility of ‘fluid identities’ is created. As a result, women break out of the patriarchal limits, and reject any ‘hyphenation’ of identity to celebrate a liberated identity. For them, crossing the border is a mark of liberation from all oppressions.

Leela Lahiri in “Hindus” is one such creation of Mukherjee that reveals an immigrant’s fluid identity. In the very first month in America she dropped the ‘h’ in her old name “Leelah” to Americanise it to Leela. Being a Bengali Brahmin, she marries an American named Derek, by breaking ‘the caste etiquette’. Within a short span of two years she has “tried to treat the city [New York] not as an island of dark immigrants but as a vast sea in which new Americans like myself [herself] could disappear and resurface at will” (“Hindus” 136). Her tendency to follow her will assists her rebirth in a new world. Though she is well aware of her Indian origins, yet she proudly declares, “I am an American Citizen” (“Hindus” 133). Therefore, Leela is one such hybrid identity that doesn’t allow any cultural or patriarchal hurdles in her path of relocation. Awareness of her roots doesn’t compel her to live between the two worlds: the imaginary and the real. Indianness is only a metaphor for her not an identity.
Another story “Angela” is about the immigrant experience of an orphan girl from Dhakka by the same name as the title of the story. Angela is now adopted by the Brandons in the U.S.A. She has a bitter past and her memories of Dhakka are submerged in war-time atrocities. By forgetting her brutal past, she wants to assimilate into the American future. Comparing her past with the present, Angela ruminates:

I am Angela the Angel. Angela was Sister Stella’s name for me. The name I was born with is lost to me, the past is lost to me. I must have seen a lot of wickedness when I was six, but I can’t remember any of it. The rapes, the dogs chewing on dead bodies, the soldiers. Nothing.

(“Angela” 13)

Angela is one character who fits well in the category of immigrants and justifies Spivak’s statement that “the putative centre welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin in order to better exclude the margin” (107). As a result, Angela negates her marginal status by considering herself a part of the Iowan family. Shedding off of her Bangladeshi name and adoption of an American name is an evidence of her complete assimilation into the American culture and lifestyle. She has even learned to enjoy a Sunday pork roast as “pigs aren’t filthy creatures here as they are back home” (“Angela” 14). Angela has no passion or longing for her brutal past. The cutting off of her nipples at the age of six, the legless kids, dogs gorging on dying infant flesh,
and soldiers with bayonets are some ruthless memories that have created a rebel in Angela. She rebels by not allowing her past to impinge upon her present. This rebellion produced an immigrant in her that is always hopeful of a better future.

Nafeesa and Vinita are two more character portrayals of Mukherjee in Darkness who are not only culturally displaced but are also the victims of gender-based marginalization. They accompany their husbands overseas with an eagerness to start life afresh. Despite crossing miles, they cannot get rid of the traditional patriarchal norms, and have to continue their phoney existence like Indian wives within the four walls of their American homes. This subjugation instils in them a feeling of revolt and a desire to step into the new-world by breaking out of the old-world beliefs. They subvert the patriarchal rules by committing adultery in the absence of their husbands. Though their action is not appreciable yet it gives them a sense of violence and freedom that always remained subdued by their ethnic values. Therefore, expression of the hidden sexual fantasies is their way of subverting the patriarchal authority.

Nafeesa Hafeez is the narrator and heroine of the story “The Lady from Lucknow”. She marries Iqbal who works for IBM and follows him to Atlanta, Georgia. Being the wife of an ambitious workaholic, she feels ignored and realizes that her passionate yearnings remain unfulfilled. To live her American dream, she starts loving a sixty-five year old white man, James Beamish, who makes her
feel “beautiful, exotic, responsive” (“The Lady from Lucknow” 25). “Her liaison with Beamish is not only an attempt to express her independence and individuality, but it also gives her an illusion that by carrying on an illicit affair she is somehow identifying herself with America” (Kumar 71).

Throughout the narrative, Nafeesa continues to contrast the Islamic and American cultures and wonders, if Lucknow or Rawalpindi could provide her the same romantic or sexual fulfillment that America has. She is amazed at the calm and indifferent reaction of Kate Beamish on discovering Nafeesa in bed with her husband. This coaxes Nafeesa to contrast it with the incident in Lucknow where a Muslim teenage girl named Husseina was beaten up by her father after intercepting a love note for her from a Hindu boy. The comparison of severe Islamic law in Lucknow with the American liberalism is one thing that encourages Nafeesa to put on the garb of an immigrant.

Vinita in “Visitors” is an Indian girl who marries Sailem Kumar and takes “an Air India flight to citizenship in the New World” (“Visitors” 162). Sailem is chasing “the American dream” and in his desire to become “too American” (“Visitors” 165) he has isolated his wife completely. According to Khalid Koser, women who migrate to marry; as domestic labourers, . . . are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and social isolation, . . . making it more difficult for them to
establish the language skills and social networks required to integrate in their new society. (122)

Vinita is one such woman who wants to step out of her claustrophobic surroundings and assimilate with the adopted culture.

She wants to shun her sham four-walled Indian existence and enter the world of America that is familiar to her through soap operas she watches on television while her husband is away at work. These shows encourage her to “make up one’s own rules” (“Visitors” 167). She continues to imagine herself “on the television screen, in the roles of afternoon wives taken in passion” (“Visitors” 171), until one afternoon a young Indian student named Rajiv Khanna visits her. Breaking all the traditional limits of an Indian wife, she allows Rajiv to take some liberty with her. For her, Rajiv acts as a gateway to the American world of freedom, individuality and passion.

Thus, we may conclude that all the works of Mukherjee discussed in this chapter clearly demarcate the multicultural and assimilatory traits through the expatriate and immigrant experiences of the doubly-marginalised female characters.

Jhumpa Lahiri is a post-colonial diasporic woman writer. Being the second generation immigrant herself, “She faces a greater problem—with a fixity in space hardly possible, and an identity which seems elusive, with attempts to transcend marginalization by bridging the gap between the centre and margin” (Nityanandam 11). Hence,
Lahiri’s works constantly explore the question of identity of these “transitional beings” or “liminal personae” (Turner 95), who are constantly juggling their past and present to re-identify themselves in the new land.

Jhumpa Lahiri has a Bengali parentage, but she is born in London and brought up in South Kingston, Rhode Island. Therefore, her identity is a product of three countries–India, England and America. Her real name is Nilanjana Sudeshna, but her teachers at school preferred to call her by the nick name–Jhumpa. Jhumpa Lahiri has incorporated this pet name/good name distinction in her novel The Namesake. “I’m like Gogol in that my pet name inadvertently became my goodname” (“Conversation with Lahiri”).

After doing B.A. in English Literature from Bernard College in 1989, she received multiple degrees from Boston University: M.A. (English, Creative Writing and Comparative Literature) and Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies. In 2001, she married Alberto Vourvoulias Bush, an American Journalist. She now lives in Brooklyn with her husband and two children and is the Vice-President of the PEN American Centre. Like Bharati Mukherjee, Lahiri’s cross-cultural marriage is an evidence of traditional/patriarchal subversion and an attempt to assimilate with the host culture.

Unlike Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee, Lahiri has a second hand experience of Indian traditions and culture. “I didn’t grow up there . . . we were clutching at a world that was never fully with us”.
Whatever she gained of the Indian ethnicity is through her parents and her frequent visits to India. She herself confesses in an interview “That the ink hasn’t dried yet on our lives” (Patel 80). It is Jhumpa’s own cross-cultural experience spread over three continents that drew her to write about the first as well as the second generation immigrants:

When I first started writing I was not conscious that my subject was the Indian-American experience. What drew me to my craft was the desire to force the two worlds I occupied to mingle on the page as I was not brave enough, or mature enough to allow in life. (Dempsey)

This statement of Lahiri justifies that her works are dialogic or ‘double-voiced’ in nature as they contain the voices of the characters as well as the author who address the dominant cultural/patriarchal voice.

Lahiri’s latest collection of short stories Unaccustomed Earth primarily deals with the generation gap, exposing the oppositional experiences of the first and the second generation immigrants. But in this chapter, I’ve kept my focus limited to the effects of translocation on the older generation. The cross-cultural impact leads to the contrasting experiences of expatriation and immigration as clearly depicted in the title story of this book “Unaccustomed Earth” through the characters of Ruma’s mother and Mrs. Bagchi (also called Meenakshi), respectively. Both Ruma’s mother and Mrs. Bagchi are
first generation immigrants, but their attempts at acculturation are quite contrary. While Ruma’s mother is a preserver of her past and in Rohinton Mistry’s term, is constantly “yearning backward”, Mrs. Bagchi is ‘looking forward’ and seems to “perceive and adopt new angles at which to enter [this] reality” (Das 16).

Ruma’s memories introduce us to her late mother who was an expatriate by nature. She died of heart failure as anaesthesia triggered the anaphylactic shock during her gallstone surgery. Throughout her stay in America, she clings to her ex-status. She longs for the regular trips to India. She “had lived for these journeys” (“Unaccustomed Earth” 8). Being the propagator of her traditions and nationality, Ruma’s mother sincerely performs her duties as a wife and mother, and tries to extend her culture, ethics, religion and language to her children. “Her mother would complain, having to keep dinner waiting until nine at night. ‘Go ahead and eat,’ Ruma would say, but her mother, trained all her life to serve her husband first, would never consider such a things” (“Unaccustomed Earth” 16). Even in America, she continues to dress “in her brightly coloured saris, her dime-sized maroon bindi, her jewels” (“Unaccustomed Earth” 11). She wants her children to learn Bengali. She “had been strict so much so that Ruma had never spoken to her in English” (“Unaccustomed Earth” 12). Being an outsider and a victim of culture-based marginalization, she is on the “cusp created by the intersection of two cultures, which one identifies as the space of the exile” (Kanaganayakam 205).
continues to occupy this in-between space, quite distant from the present and clogged in the past. Swamped in her old culture she takes shelter in a multi-cultural existence. She manages to keep the Indian habits and lifestyle surviving in America:

In addition to tomatoes and eggplant and zucchini, her father had grown expert over the years at cultivating the things her mother liked to cook with–bitter melon and chilli peppers and delicate strains of spinach. Oblivious to her mother’s needs in other ways, he had toiled in unfriendly soil, coaxing such things from the ground. (“Unaccustomed Earth” 16)

She feels outrageous at Ruma’s decision to marry an American. She “had done everything in her power to talk Ruma out of marrying Adam, saying that he would divorce her, that in the end he would want an American girl” (“Unaccustomed Earth” 26). This decision of Ruma jeopardizes her mother’s Indian identity and values; as a result, she continues to warn Ruma against it: “You are ashamed of yourself, of being Indian, that is the bottomline” (“Unaccustomed Earth” 26). Thus, in Ruma’s mother we witness a marginal character who cannot accept her ethnic values being degenerated by the future generations who are overpowered by the new culture. She befits the words of G.S. Sharat Chandra: “I leaped from one life to another, and in between I left nothing but a vacuum. Only imagination and memory, when I need them, act as my bridge. . . . We remain at large, distant and
clothed by our separate worlds” (7). Therefore, Ruma remains an émigré and never becomes an immigrant like Mrs. Bagchi.

Mrs. Bagchi marries a boy she loved, but after two years of marriage he gets killed in a scooter accident. At twenty-six, she moves to America to decline her parents’ decision of her remarriage. Being the victim of gender-based marginalization, she breaks all traditional bounds by adopting American lifestyle and subverts the patriarchal restrictions by deciding to remain single the rest of her life. She lives all alone and teaches at Stony brook University. In “over thirty years she had gone back to Calcutta only to attend her parents’ funerals” (“Unaccustomed Earth” 8-9). “She wore Western clothing, cardigans and black pull-on slacks and styled her thick dark hair in a bun” (“Unaccustomed Earth” 9). Therefore, her immigrant character is contrary to Ruma’s mother’s who yearned for those trips to India and continued to dress in a saree. Mrs. Bagchi has completely assimilated with the American culture by negating the insider-outsider conflict. She enters into a dialogic relation with the native culture/people and moves away from the periphery towards the centre. For Mrs. Bagchi identity is an invention, “which is never complete, always in process, and always continued within, not outside, representation” (Hall 222).

Breaking the Indian patriarchal code of a woman being an obedient daughter, a sincere wife and a responsible mother, Mrs. Bagchi lives a life free of any such limitations. Though, she still loves her late husband and denies sharing her home with another man, yet
The three stories in Part-II of the collection *Unaccustomed Earth* are interlinked as they depict the adventures of two childhood friends Hema and Kaushik, who later turn into erotic companions and then end up being just two diasporic people in America. The first story “Once in a Lifetime” is projected from Hema’s perspective, the second “Year’s End” from Kaushik’s perspective and the last one “Going Ashore” from the perspective of an authorial third person. The first and the second stories thoroughly foreground the oppositional multicultural and assimilatory experiences of displaced women.

“Once in a Lifetime” is a story that introduces us to Hema’s mother, Shibani and Kaushik’s mother, Parul (Mrs. Chowdhary) who depict the expatriate and immigrant traits, respectively. We learn through Hema that Kaushik’s and her mother came from two contrasting worlds in India—one upper crust, the other middle class. Though, Kaushik and his family return to America after a gap of certain years, yet they haven’t shed away their Anglophilic tastes or American consciousness. It seems that:
Bombay had made them more American than Cambridge had. . . . There were remarks concerning your [Kaushik’s] mother’s short hair, her slacks the Johnie Walker, she and your [Kaushik’s] father continued to drink after the meal was finished. . . . (“Once in a Lifetime” 235)

On the other hand, despite having stayed for a longer time in America than Parul, Shibani is trying to create ‘home’ in a place that is far removed in time and space. Like Rushdie, she creates an ‘imaginary homeland’ where: “home becomes primarily a mental construct built from the incomplete odds and ends of memory that survive from the past. It exists in a fractured, discontinuous relation with the present” (McLeod 211). Her efforts to preserve her past are clearly visible in the Indian atmosphere she has struggled to maintain in the four walls of her home through language, food, dress code and traditions. This ‘Indianness’ begins to appear magnified when the Americanised Choudhuris come to stay in their house. They seem to be “leading antipodal lives under the same roof” (“Once in a Lifetime” 236). Shibani dressed the Indian style. “She herself never wore a skirt–she considered it indecent” (“Once in a Lifetime” 231). She “considered the idea of a child sleeping alone a cruel American practice and therefore did not encourage it, . . . she told me [Hema] that she had slept in the same bed as her parents until the day she was married and that this was perfectly normal” (“Once in a Lifetime”
She makes Hema sleep on a cot in their room till the summer before she starts middle school.

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, a woman is considered to be a metaphor or sign for her nationality and tradition. Therefore, Shibani realizes her liability to propagate her ethnicity and culture to her children. Hence, she continues to weave the fragments of her past into the texture of her American life, so as to relive her Indian experiences and have a multicultural existence.

Parul, on the other hand, lived an immigrant’s life. “Even in Bombay we [she] managed to raise a typical American teenager” (“Once in a Lifetime” 238). Hema interprets this acculturation by suggesting that, “They [Kaushik’s parents] enjoyed the change of pace, having mysteriously acquired the taste for things like steak and baked potatoes, while my parents had not” (“Once in a Lifetime” 246). Hema, being a second generation immigrant, develops a bond with Parul. Their attempts at assimilation act as an adhesive that strengthens this bond between them. Like second generation immigrants Parul wants to step out of her “double consciousness” (Gilroy 1), as for her identity is an invention.

The first time Hema meets Parul, Parul is “wearing slacks and a tunic, a silk scarf knotted at her neck . . .” (“Once in a Lifetime” 232). Parul breaks the Indian patriarchal code of conduct by wearing Western clothes, smoking and drinking. Hema observes that, “by six o’clock the bottle of Johnie Walker was on the coffee table . . .” (“Once
in a Lifetime” 237) every evening to be relished by the Choudhuris. Thus, we see that Parul adopts Americanisation as a shelter against her cultural as well as gendered marginalization.

The second story of Part-II, “Year’s End”, is narrated by Kaushik. The story begins with Kaushik’s father (Mr. Choudhuri) finding refuge in a second marriage after he loses his first wife, Parul, to cancer. Mr. Choudhuri marries Chitra who lost her spouse two years back to encephalitis, and is a schoolteacher in Calcutta. Chitra is thirty-five years old, nearly twenty years younger than Mr. Choudhuri. She has two daughters–her elder daughter, Rupa, is ten years old and the younger one, Piu, is seven years old. My focus in this story is on these three displaced female characters, who on account of the matrimonial alliance, have to leave Calcutta and move to Massachusetts. These characters pass through multicultural or assimilatory phases during their identity crisis.

Throughout the narrative, Chitra’s expatriate sensibility is being compared with Parul’s immigrant nature:

She [Parul] had never allowed a cloth to cover the table, but one was there now, something with an Indian print that could just as easily have been a bedspread and didn’t fully reach either end. In the centre, instead of the generous cluster of fresh fruit or flowers my mother [Parul] would have arranged, there was a stainless-steel plate holding an ordinary salt shaker and two jars of
pickles, hot mango and sweet lime, their lids missing, their labels stained, spoons stuck into their oils. (“Year’s End” 259)

These minute changes brought about by Chitra in Mr. Choudhary’s house are indicative of Chitra’s steady attempts at asserting her ‘self’ in the American ambience. She continues to dress in a Bengali saree, declines to learn English, and is unwilling to drive. This attitude is suggestive of her inclination towards Indian values and traditions. “She wore vermilion in her hair, a traditional practice my mother [Parul] had shunned, the powdery red stain the strongest element of her appearance” (“Year’s End” 260). Like a devoted Indian wife and mother “Chitra hovered over my father [Mr. Choudhuri] and me [Kaushik] and the girls, eating privately after we were done . . .” (“Year’s End” 268). Although Chitra’s life is split between the past and the present, yet she tries to regenerate her past by creating and preserving the Indian atmosphere in her American home. Chitra is one of those expatriates who are

neither capable to cast off their inherited cultural legacy
nor are they able to encapsulate themselves in a new socio-cultural environment. As a result of which they experience a contra-acculturation and hybridization in their attempt to syncretise the two. They take refuge in their native culture as an antidote or a moral/spiritual
resource to checkmate their ‘decentred consciousness.’

(Das 132)

Through every little detail, we can assess the extent to which Chitra values her ethnicity and wants to transmit it further to her daughters and husband. According to Mr. Choudhuri “she’s a bit old-fashioned” (“Year’s End” 264). But, it is Chitra who, instead of Americanising herself, has been successful in diminishing the Western influence on Mr. Choudhuri. He gives up alcohol; and by the end of the story he is willing to sell their house suggesting that

he and Chitra and the girls were moving to a more

traditional one in a less isolates suburb of Boston. There were other Bengalis nearby and an Indian grocery in the town, things that were more important to Chitra than the proximity of the ocean and Modernist architecture had been for my mother [Parul]. (“Year’s End” 292)

Therefore, we observe that it is not Chitra whose identity is degenerated, but Mr. Choudhuri’s, who is reverting back to his roots under the influence of Chitra. She succeeds in altering Mr. Choudhuri’s life from an independent immigrant into a multicultural ghetto existence.

Piu and Rupa, on the other hand, are on a cross-cultural borderland where the border is “a crucial if ambiguous site of vital reconstruction, a position replete with contradictions and difficulty, but regenerative promise” (Hai 380). In Kaushik, they find a guide who
can lead them through the cross-cultural maze and help them discover a new ‘self’. Their enthusiasm and experimentation coaxes Kaushik to believe that their brightly coloured clothes and other “incongruous Indian things,” like their identity, “would soon be rejected . . .” (“Year’s End” 261) by them and replaced with American things and an assimilated, hybrid ‘self’. Kaushik begins to see a replica of his own cross-cultural experience in the lives of Piu and Rupa, who are eagerly waiting to merge into the shadow of the adopted culture that would soon eclipse their old identity and regenerate a new amalgamated identity.

By the time Kaushik graduates, Piu and Rupa’s accents have already turned American, and their new lives seem to be impenetrable to the old, rejected beliefs. They do not easily succumb to the melting-pot culture created around them by their mother, Chitra. Having emigrated at a very tender age, they are more vulnerable to the impact of the adopted culture than Chitra, who cannot associate with the alien culture and considers it her duty to retain as well as transmit her ethnic values to the adopted land.

Lahiri’s recent collection of short-stories *Unaccustomed Earth* is a masterpiece as it brings out the contrary diasporic experiences of cross-cultural women in a very subtle manner. Lahiri has skilfully portrayed the varying impacts of displacement on the immigrants as well as the expatriates. The various characters discussed in this
chapter fit perfectly into the two moulds of multiculturalism and assimilation.

In this chapter, the various works of Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri are treated through the postmodern, feminist and dialogic approaches. In sum, the in-depth study of these works reveals the writers’ move beyond the binaries of self/other, male/female, past/present towards exposing the tale of alienated and uprooted women whose attempts at re-identification have further been classified into multiculturalism and assimilation.
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