CHAPTER-III

THE MATRIX OF MULTICULTURAL CONCERN

Because they don't grow it in Lancashire, you know ... Where does it come from? Ceylon-Sri Lanka, India. That is the outside history that is inside the history of the English. There is no English history without that other history ... People like me [says Hall] who came to England in the 1950s [from the Caribbean] have been there for centuries ... I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantations that rotted generations of English children's teeth. There are thousands of others besides me that are ... the cup of tea itself (Hall, 1991, pp. 48-9).

Hall in the quoted excerpt seems to focus on the very essence of multiculturalism, i.e. the proper way of responding to cultural and religious diversity. Only toleration of group differences is not adequate for achieving social equality for the members of minority groups; recognition and positive accommodation of group differences are required through group-differentiated rights. Some group-differentiated rights are held by individual members of minority groups, as in the case of individuals who are granted exemptions from generally applicable laws in virtue of their religious beliefs or individuals who seek language accommodations in schools or in voting. Other group-differentiated rights are held by the group qua group rather by its members severally; such rights are properly called group rights, as in the case of indigenous groups and minority nations, who claim the right of self-determination. In the latter respect, multiculturalism is closely allied with nationalism.

Multiculturalism is closely associated with “identity politics,” “the politics of difference,” and “the politics of recognition,” all of which share a commitment to
revaluing disrespected identities and changing dominant patterns of representation and communication that marginalize certain groups. Multiculturalism is also a matter of economic interests and political power; it demands remedies to economic and political disadvantages that people suffer as a result of their minority status.

Multiculturalists take for granted that it is “culture” and “cultural groups” that are to be recognized and accommodated. Yet multicultural claims include a wide range of claims involving religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, and race. Culture is a notoriously overbroad concept, and all of these categories have been subsumed by or equated with the concept of culture. Language and religion are at the heart of many claims for cultural accommodation by immigrants. The key claim made by minority nations is for self-government rights. Race has a more limited role in multicultural discourse. Antiracism and multiculturalism are distinct but related ideas: the former highlights “victimization and resistance” whereas the latter highlights “cultural life, cultural expression, achievements, and the like” (Blum 14). Claims for recognition in the context of multicultural education are demands not just for recognition of aspects of a group's actual culture (e.g. African American art and literature) but also for the history of group subordination and its concomitant experience.

A culture is shaped in relation to itself and also by its relation to others, and their internal and external pluralities presuppose and reinforce each other. A culture cannot appreciate the value of others unless it appreciates the plurality within it; the converse is just as true. Closed cultures cannot and do not wish or need to talk to each other. Since each defines its identity in terms of its differences from others or what it is not, it feels
threatened by them and seeks to safeguard its integrity by resisting their influences and even avoiding all contacts with them. A culture cannot be at ease with differences outside it unless it is at ease with its own internal differences. A dialogue between cultures requires that each should be willing to open itself up to the influence of and learn from others, and this presupposes that it is self-critical and willing and able to engage in a dialogue with itself.

What I might call a multiculturalist perspective is composed of the creative interplay of three important and complementary insights—namely the cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural plurality, and the plural and multicultural constitution of each culture. This is well conveyed in the statement of Hall cited in the beginning of this chapter. When we view the world from its vantage point, our attitudes to ourselves and others undergo profound changes. All claims that a particular institution or way of thinking or living is perfect, the best, or necessitated by human nature itself appear incoherent and even bizarre, for it goes against our well-considered conviction that all ways of thought and life are inherently limited and cannot embody the full range of the richness, complexity and grandeur of human existence.

It is possible to understand the move from national to transnational in literary and cultural studies by looking at recent changes in the field of multiculturalism. The concept of liberal multiculturalism that continues to define much of the academy today can be traced to the late 1960s and the early 1970s when proponents of cultural pluralism challenged the melting pot hypothesis. They claimed that, instead of melting into an undifferentiated nation, social groups maintained distinct ethnic identities to form a
nation of nations. Although the promoters of “liberal multiculturalism” were themselves driven by the idealism fueling the civil liberties movements of the sixties and seventies, the concept ultimately floundered on an essentialised notion of difference that approximated the idea of cultural relativism or pluralism. This concept of multiculturalism did not critically engage with issues of power and equity within and between different minority groups or between different ethnic groups and the dominant Caucasian culture. More recently, there have been demands for a critical multiculturalism\(^6\) which refuses any kind of monolithic identity and embraces a more international model of cultural studies than the dominant Anglo-American version. In other words a critical multiculturalism focuses on the way multiple social positions are generated, stabilized, and displaced, and how culture must be read as a complex sign.

Multiculturalism suggests the coexistence of a number of different cultures. It does not recommend homogenization and conformity directly, nor does it encourage overtly different ethnic, religious, lingual or racial constituents of a particular society to denigrate or alienate each other to such an extent that the fragile balance of such a society is damaged or destroyed permanently. It lies at a transitional point between two hemispheres – East and West – and two segments of the world hierarchy – Third and First – or, the Indian subcontinents and the USA which may be found in most of the fictional worlds of Jhumpa Lahiri. India with her concept of unity in diversity and the USA as the melting pot of cultures and races coexist in her fiction.

In varying degrees, Lahiri explores ‘Indianness’ in all her stories, wherever they are set. Born to Bengali parents in London and raised in Rhode island, she is British by
birth, American by citizenship, and Indian by origin. Because of her multicultural upbringing, critics have many a time raised doubts regarding her culture-specific categorization, i.e., whether she is American or Asian-American or a diasporic post-colonial writer. No doubt she herself resists any such singular categorization, but in a very witty online essay “To Heaven Without Dying” she writes,

Once made public: both my book and myself were immediately and copiously categorized. Take, for instance, the various ways I am described: as an American author, as an Indian American author, as a British born author, as an Anglo-Indian author, as an NRI (non-resident Indian) author, as an ABCD author (ABCD stands for American born confused “desi” – “desi” meaning Indian – and is an acronym coined by Indian nationals to describe culturally challenged second generation Indian raised in the U.S.). According to Indian academics, I’ve written something known as “diaspora Fiction”: in the U.S., it is “immigrant fiction”. … The fact that I am described in two ways or twenty is of no consequence: as it turns out, each of those label is accurate. I’ve always lived under the pressure to be bilingual, bicultural, at ease on either side of the Lahiri family map. (quoted in Anupama Chowdhury 15)

Significantly, in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri, the readers are constantly invited to cross over from India to the USA along with the characters. Against a panoramic background of journeys she blends typically Indian incidents with the American ones which present a study of two contrasting cultural patterns. In Interpreter of Maladies, out of nine stories, six are set in America having a multicultural ambience. Regarding response to the multicultural realities, there are marked differences between the first generation and the second generation migrants. The first generation migrants like Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s parents in “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, Mr. and Mrs. Sen in “Mrs. Sen’s” are not comfortable with their multicultural milieu and endeavour to adhere
to their original Indian culture which hampers their interaction with the host culture. The cultural interaction is imperative to achieve prosperity and pleasure if one is placed in an alien land. But this is sometimes kept at bay for fear of losing one’s own original identity. In such circumstances the practice of liberal multiculturalism stands in good stead. Moreover, a lot depends on the individual decision/desire to interact/assimilate with others. Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s father are more obsessed with what happens in their homeland; they discussed the development of Indo-Pak War for the liberation of East-Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The fear of Lilia’s father and Mr. Pirzada is quite obvious in the following lines when Lilia goes to participate in Halloween,

“Don’t go into any of the houses you don’t know”, my father warned. Mr. Pirzada knit his brows together. “Is there any danger?” “No, no,” my mother assured him. “All the children will be out. It’s a tradition.” “Perhaps I should accompany them?” Mr. Pirzada suggested. He looked suddenly tired and small, standing there in his splayed, stockinged feet, and his eyes contained a panic… (38)

Similar kind of fear can be sensed in case of Mrs. Sen in the story “Mrs. Sen’s” as she fears that nobody will come if she screams at the top of her voice from her apartment for help, and recalls that in India life is not so secluded. However, such feeling of fear and seclusion is not felt among the second generation migrants. They voluntarily endeavour to adjust and assimilate in their multicultural surroundings. Their life and living styles go with their American counterparts. Be it Shoba and Sukumar of “A Temporary Matter”, Mr. and Mrs. Das of “An Interpreter of Maladies”, Twinkle and Sanjeev of “This Blessed House”, everyone has got multicultural touch right from their costume to character. However, they also exhibit their Indianness, particularly in their most personal moment.
Lahiri’s depiction of Indian culture is not overstated or imperious which is evident from her *Interpreter of Maladies*. While she writes judiciously about the residents of India and America, she makes her most momentous endowment to contemporary American literature by capturing the flimsy balance between cultural choices and personal predilection of second generation South Asian Americans. Particularly, she expounds the necessary detachment between the originating culture of immigrant parents and the daily lives of their American born/raised children, an aspect of the second generation experience. In the story, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, she uses the viewpoint of a ten-year-old daughter of Indian émigré to accentuate the psychosomatic as well as the objective remoteness of the second generation from their parents’ land and culture. In the background of 1971 Bangladesh political turmoil, the story depicts the evening visits of Mr. Pirzada, a Bangladeshi (then Pakistani) scholar studying in the States, to Lilia’s home. Lilia’s parents, living in a small university town in New England, had haunted his acquaintance,

In search of compatriots, they used to trail their fingers, at the start of each new semester, through the columns of the university directory, circling surnames familiar to their part of the world. It was in this manner that they discovered Mr. Pirzada, and phoned him, and invited him to our home. (23)

As this method of making new acquaintances accentuates the cultural similarities of “South Asians” as a group, it is not astonishing that Lilia is confounded about Mr. Pirzada’s nationality. She refers to him as “the Indian man” and corrected by her father about the differences between Indians and Pakistanis. Due to her distance from her parents’ cultural root, she is not aware of the important historical and cultural precedents. She muses,
It made no sense to me. Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laugh at the same jokes, looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering the room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for desert dipped austere biscuits in successive cups of tea. Nevertheless my father insisted that I understand the difference. (25)

Lilia’s schooling in America does not grant her an understanding of world history and ethnicity, or any knowledge of her own South Asian inheritance. Her father is disappointed by her lack of information and questions what she learns at school. Lahiri exhibits her anxiety through the character of Lilia’s father, the significance of appreciating the unity in diversity within the larger cultural group of South Asian people, a characteristic of her cultural heritage that Lilia has not yet adopted, living in a diaspora culture. However, unlike Lilia’s father, her mother dismisses Lilia’s need to know everything South Asian, saying “We live here now, she was born here” (26). She accepts the necessary detachment of the second generation from their cultural heritage, as they are actively forming their identities as American. Lahiri’s depiction of the physical and psychological distance of the second generation from their roots owes a lot to her intercultural/multicultural experience.

Significantly, Lahiri uses children as a catalyst for giving intercultural or multicultural message. She draws on children in a number of stories to provide the readers with a more snooping insight, may be because she feels that her grown up characters might allocate into cultural dissimilarity and adjustment. In “Mrs. Sen’s”, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”, and “Sexy”, Lahiri’s child is an onlooker, uncontaminated by the effects of the much discussed cultural bias, and brings maladies of
the native and immigrant groups to the scene with an ingenuousness. In these stories, different aspects of North American culture are revealed as hardly complete, the segregation between Hindu and Muslim South Asian as highly counterfeit, and extramarital affairs between men and women of different cultural backdrop as having been en-rout for individual attractiveness and sensuality.

The story “Mrs. Sen’s”, which is about an immigrant woman who takes care of an eleven–year-old American boy in her residence after school, allows Lahiri to reflect her total consciousness of the immigrant world in concurrence to the essentials of an American childhood. The protagonist of “Mrs. Sen’s” is born in India and still dresses in saris, applies vermillion on her forehead, and engages in recollection as a way to redemption. She represents those Indian immigrants who find themselves marooned in a country and a culture that is not their own but which anticipates conventionality from them. Mrs. Sen’s firm denial and disinclination to learn driving seems to be a psychic contrivance of her conflict with the new world. While driving, looking at the traffic, her English falters and she, with a sense of incomprehension, says to Eliot, “Everyone, this people, too much in their world”. Paradoxically, this is true of Mrs. Sen also as she contemplatively declares, “Everything is there” (she speaks of India) and her tragedy lies in the fact that she herself is no longer there. She yearns for her home and feels a deep sense of alienation and culture shock and lives in a kind of past-present situation. According to Bhabha, this past-present “becomes the part of necessity not the nostalgia of living” (10). Moreover, “Mrs. Sen’s” unfolds another aspect where in spite of diverse cultures there is a perfect communion. When Eliot accompanies his mother to Mrs. Sen’s house, he immediately sees and feels the cultural differences,
Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Sen wore shoes . . . She wore a shimmering white sari patterned with orange paisleys, more suitable for an evening affair than for that quite, faintly drizzling August afternoon. (112)

Though different, Mrs. Sen does not seem to be the “other” to Eliot but,

…it was his mother, Eliot had thought, in her cuffed, beige shorts and her rope-soled shoes, who looked odd. Her cropped hair, a shade similar to her shorts, seemed to lank and sensible, and in the room where all things were so carefully covered, her shaved knees and thighs too exposed. (112-113)

Mrs. Sen and Eliot develop a healthy companionship and she expresses her joy and loneliness and shares her Indian memories with great enthusiasm. She explains to him that by home she means Calcutta, not the room in which they are sitting, and informs him about the different Bengali traditions. Eliot is free from the ‘exoticist’ gaze and this facilitates the cross cultural interaction. Eliot’s response to his mother’s arrival each day to pick him up couches the comfort level he feels with Mrs. Sen even though he recognizes that her customs are different and rooted in India. However, after the car accident of Mrs. Sen, this communion comes to halt as Eliot’s mother takes him away. Nevertheless, this leaves a message that in multicultural ambience meaningful communion can be possible only if there is genuine understanding, love and sympathy.

“Sexy” is the story which centres around a young Midwestern woman involved in an affair with a married Bengali man, Dev. The story, though speaks of Indian and Indian American characters, the protagonist is neither. In fact, it deals with a sort of exchange of the cultural gaze between Dev and Miranda where each returns the same “othering”, exoticist gaze to other. When Miranda sees Dev for the first time, she observes “The man was tanned, with black hair that was visible on his knuckles” (86).
Later, she compares him with Dixits, the only Indian family living in her neighbourhood during her childhood. The abuses hurled on this immigrant family (Dog-shit) by the Americans show the humiliation that Indians sometimes face in that country because they are marginalized there. To Miranda, India is always a land of ethnicity, the “other”. Even during her lovemaking with Dev, she “closed her eyes and saw deserts and elephant, and marble pavilions floating on lakes beneath a full moon” (96). She tries to know more about India perhaps because it inculcates in her a sense of curiosity a means of more passionate involvement with Dev. She walks all the way to Central Square, to an Indian restaurant, and orders a plate of “tandoori chicken”. As she eats she “tries to memorize phrases printed at the bottom of the menu, for things like ‘delicious’, and ‘water’ and ‘check, please’” (96). She also learns the Bengali alphabet at the foreign language section of a nearby bookstore, even going “so far as to try to transcribe the Indian part of her name, “Mira into her Filofax” (97). Like Miranda’s appreciation for him, Dev’s attraction for her is based on her being different from the woman of her own community, of belonging to a different culture. He acknowledges that she is the “first woman I’ve known with legs this long” (89). Dev’s appreciation of her is superficial without any real desire to get to know her (not externally but psychologically). At Mapparium, he asks her to stand at the opposite end of the bridge from him and whispers to her, “You’re sexy” (91). However, her relationship with another Indian, Rohin, is completely free from this exoticising. When she stands before the little boy after putting on the dress of his choice, he calls her “sexy” (exactly the same words that Dev tells her) and later reveals to her innocently that it means “loving someone you do not know” (107). This forms the climax of the story and Miranda realizes the reciprocal colonization between her and Dev; he is
with her for her white skin and long legs, both of which are unfamiliar or “other” to his experience, and she is with him for his Indianness and his difference. Hence circumstances of cultural diversity or to say multicultural ambience forms the crux of this story.

The story “An Interpreter of Maladies” paints a sharp contrast between American and Indian society using the Indian setting. Mr. Kapasi notes that the Das family “looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did, the children in stiff, brightly covered clothing and caps with translucent visors’ (44). In addition to his tour book, Mr. Das “had a sapphire blue visor, and was dressed in shorts, sneakers, and a T-shirt. The camera slung round his neck, with an impressive telephoto lens and numerous buttons and markings, was the only complicated thing he wore.” (44). Mrs. Das’s “shaved, largely bare legs” (43) and her attire gives her a typical “foreign” appearance. Even the cultural difference is perceptible in the ways they behave with each other. The family, in spite of their Bengali lineage and home at Asansol, fails to understand Bengali or Hindi. The family has totally adopted the American culture and Mr. Das “with an air of confidence” in response to Mr. Kapasi’s question about their origins boasts that both he and his wife were “born and raised” in America (45). Except eating “jhalmuri” and “pakoras” they show no assimilation of the Indian culture. Mr. Kapasi closely observed the family throughout the tour, and finally feels that the family “looking like Indians” does not belong in or to India. Its connection to India is by heritage only, neither by language nor by customs and tradition, or cultural practices.
It is observed that Lahiri gives an accurate portrayal of the cultural crossover in short stories of “Interpreter of Maladies”. The same cultural crossover runs through her novel *The Namesake* in which she strives to incarcerate the experiences and cultural impasse of 30 year struggle of the Ganguly family, for their amalgamation and absorption into an alien culture. Significantly, she concentrates on the concealed deposit of the consciousness and the internal confusion of the characters who find themselves ensnared in two cultures. The world in *The Namesake* is also purely multicultural like the world of *Interpreter of Maladies*. Here, again we witness differences between the perspective of first and second generation migrants towards their multicultural ambience. Ashoke and Ashima try hard to protect their children from being influenced by the American culture surrounding them all the time. Consequently, they make occasional visits to India with a view to keep in touch with their own people. But their children, Gogol and Sonia, the second generation American born migrants do not see any point in their such visit and feel awkward to see that their parents call India their home. Gogol thinks himself to be American and does not look forward to occasional visits to Calcutta or the annual pujo held at one of the local community halls where “they were required to throw marigold petals at a cardboard effigy of a goddess and eat bland vegetarian food” (64). To him it was never as interesting and lively as Christmas. His relation with Americans like Ruth, Maxine, Gerald, Lydia and others and his acceptance despite being Indian shows the multicultural concern in the novel. The multicultural impact on the life of characters in this novel can be seen at two levels, first from the point of view of the parents, Ashima and Ashoke, and second from that of the children Gogol and Sonia, the American born second generation Indian Americans.
The first generation migrants undergo a lot of hardship while interacting with the new alien culture and prefer to adhere to their root culture. In order to safeguard their culture the first generation migrants educate their children in the native language, literature and history and guide them about their religious customs, traditions, beliefs, food habits, and social mannerisms. Moreover, they also train them in the ways of the new land and its common traditions. In *The Namesake*, Ashima teaches Gogol to memorize a poem by Tagore and the names of gods embellishing the ten headed Durga. At the same time, every afternoon, before going to sleep, Ashima switches on the television and makes Gogol watch “Sesame street” and “The Electric Company” in order to make him accustomed to American way of speaking English.

Though immigrants struggle to adhere to their custom, they willy-nilly absorb the social and cultural behaviour of the host land. Initially, Ashoke does not like the celebration of Christmas and Thanksgiving, but, as Gogol recalls, “it was for him, for Sonia, that his parents had gone to the trouble of learning these customs” (286). Their own children are more Americanized than what they wish them to be. The children too, brushed up to be bilingual, envisage the cultural tight spots and dislocation. Though they sit in Pujas and other religious ceremonies, Gogol and Sonia, like the children of other Bengali families savour American food more than the Bengali dishes. The parents cannot compromise with their children’s wishes. The Gangulys have to integrate the American culture for the sake of their children,

They learn to roast turkeys … at thanksgiving, to nail a wreath to their door in December, to wrap woollen scarves around snowman, to colour boiled eggs violet and pink at Easter for the sake of Gogol and Sonia … they celebrate with
progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ, an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati. (64)

However, Americanized Indian offspring very often collide with their parents when their life style goes absolutely contradictory to their Indian parents’ outlook. When Gogol dates with his girlfriend Ruth, his parents are a bit panicky, because they know many Bengalis in the US who have married American women, but their marriages have led to divorce. It is almost an accepted fact in the US that the first marriage generally fails in a year’s time and the second marriage consistently gets on. Ruth is living with her father and step mother, her mother might have taken another man. For the American it is a way of life, but if such a thing happens to the Indians living abroad, they do get concerned. Even dating is not a serious affair between the Americanized Indian children. Gogol dates American women more than once. His living together with Maxine disturbs Ashima and she refuses to admit it before her Bengali friends. She ponders to which course her life has been moving. Having been deprived of the companionship of her own parents under the excuse of moving to the States, “her children’s independence, their need to keep distance from her, is something she will never understand” (166). When her children do not come back home even for holidays, she thinks, “she has given birth to vagabonds” (167). Only an archetypal middle class mother knows how hurting it is to learn that her children acquire American ways, which are totally contradictory to her social and religious values and observations. Ashima feels the gulf in her heart when Gogol declares,

I am going to spend a couple of weeks in Newhampshire. Oh. Why do you want to go there, of all places? What’s the difference between Newhampshire and here? … I’m going with a girl I’m seeing. Her parents have a place there. (145)
Though she says nothing for a while, he knows what her mother is thinking, that he is willing to go on vacation with someone else’s parents but not see his own. Ashima’s situation is inevitable for diasporas, particularly for first generation thanks to the multicultural attitude of their children and in particular distaste for their root culture.

Moreover, reverence for Indian and Indian culture is well expressed by the American characters like Maxine and her parents. No doubt their knowledge of India is gathered from books and magazines. Such reverence for India and Indian culture occur in Gogol after the death of his father. The death of his father is a turning point of his life. Now he understands the significance of every cultural act and rituals performed by his father and the pain associated with it. Consequently, he starts recognizing himself to be Indian despite his seeming Americanization; he appears Indian in private and American in public – a truly multicultural identity.

Significantly, Jhumpa Lahiri’s works present a confluence of the Indian and the Western culture coming to terms with each other through her narratives. The complicated Indian nature and culture is presented with all its vitality in her narration in both Indian and American contexts. The West could be seen as presented with a sense of sentimentality by Lahiri. This is apparent in the epilogue to her short stories Unaccustomed Earth in which she suggests that there is a need for a change in the perspective of diaspora towards host culture. The adoption and acculturation can solve many problems of diaspora. The alien soil is not just a way for the materialistic progress, it can also nurture them mentally and they can find kinship and beauty in unexpected places as well.
Moreover, Lahiri adopts female point of view to present the life and characters in her stories. In *Unaccustomed Earth* and other stories where the female protagonists, including the author’s first person narrative voice, Ruma, Boudi, Sudha, Sang, Hema, and Chitra present the blend of India and the West from their experiences. Significantly, the book casts light on the problems of second generation diaspora after their assimilation in the host culture. The different cultural perspective towards life creates chasm in their relationship with their parents and other relatives. Moreover, sometimes there is a desire to bridge the gaps and to arrive at certain compromises. Such act of assimilation and acculturation has given birth to a hybrid culture (or multicultural set up) where new hopes, new cultures, new identities have emerged out of this cultural interaction.

In *Unaccustomed Earth* most of the marriages are mixed or intercultural. In these marriages two persons of historical, social and cultural backgrounds share their experiences with each other and out of these shared experiences emerged a ‘third space’. These marriages between Indian Bengali man/woman and American woman/man create a ‘hybrid culture’ a new form of culture where both of them negotiate at various fronts of life. These Bengali migrants are second generation diasporas and so have no adjustment problems with the food and dress code as most of them have already incorporated and adopted many of these cultural icons of the host country. Language is also not a hindrance between them. But their relationship with parents and siblings renews their cultural affiliations to the native country. In the title story Ruma and Adam enjoy the bliss of their intercultural marriage, but the visit of her father disturbs her as regard to her filial duty and individual liberty. In fact, the story presents double perspective. The father views the whole situation from his viewpoint, while daughter has a different attitude and
outlook for their relationship. Her upbringing in a new social and cultural set up, her education, her marriage to an American, all influence the formation of her identity and a role. She visualizes the whole situation from a different perspective. Her father’s scheduled visit to her place after her mother’s death puts her in dilemma whether she should ask him to stay with them like a responsible daughter as this means a responsibility, an added demand, apart from an end to the family she has created her own. On the other hand, if she does not ask him to stay with her that would make her feel guilty. She finds herself in a discrepant situation having constant confrontation between the native culture and the host country culture. If she locates herself in an American culture, then it is an individual freedom, but if she follows Indian culture, then her conscience does not allow her to do so. The father and daughter have never deep bonding as their relation is marked by differences in opinion. Moreover, her mother also had not liked some act of Ruma. When Ruma had married Adam, her mother commented, “You are ashamed of yourself, of being Indian, of being Indian that is the bottom line”. (26)

No doubt, Ruma asks her father to move in with her family, but her decision was conditioned by her vested interest as in her father’s company she finds her son Aakash more cultured, civilized, calmer, and cooler. He had developed a liking for Bengali food and language. Ruma’s decision and behavior indicate an inherent desire and willingness of diaspora to accept the ethos of interculturalism. They want to teach their children the social and cultural values of both the countries. Their desire to negotiate at various social, historical and cultural spheres is the outcome of the globalization. Ruma’s father strive to create a garden of various flowers in Ruma’s house at Seattle,
... her father pushed the shovel into the ground, hacking away at grass with a soft, forceful sound, wearing his baseball cap to protect his head from the sun. He worked steadily, pausing briefly at midday to a peanut butter and jelly sandwich with Akash ... The next morning her father drove back to the nursery to get more things: a bale of peat moss, bags of mulch and composted manure. This time, in addition to the gardening supplies, he brought back an inflatable kiddie pool, in the form of a crocodile spouting water from its head ... (43)

His act reinforces the theme of the entire book and indicates a possibility of diasporic people’s establishment in global multicultural world. In fact his appearance and attitude at such old age gives an impression that he can be the citizen of anywhere, and establish a garden in any land he wishes to.

In Unaccustomed Earth, particularly in the second segment “Hema and Kaushik”, Lahiri moves from multiculturalism to transculturalism. Since they move from one country to another country, they acquire a touch of different cultures in assimilating manner. In fact, they adopt different cultural point of view depending on their location.

Margaret Wilson’s Daughters of India is basically a novel of missionary expedition in India, and much of the action has been unfurled through the experiences of the female protagonist Davida Baillie. It is through her experience in dealing with the converted Christians of Aiyenianwalla that much of the multicultural/multilingual elements have been disclosed. Multilingualism has been noticed in the very beginning of the novel, “she (Miss Bhose) has been talking Hindustani, as usual, and Davida, as usual, had been answering in English” (10). Multiculturalism in this novel is found in its very nascent stage; in fact it is cultural conflict, rather than cultural amalgamation, though effort is made to achieve it through religious conversion.
Significantly, *Daughters of India* casts light on the intercultural conflict of British Raj in India. In a way, this conflict was the design of the colonial government itself to serve its vested interest. In the novel, we witness diametrically two opposite faces of white morality in diaspora. The colonial white whose sole intention is to perpetuate Indian colonialism and the white missionary whose sole intention is to spread the light of Christianity over the dark world of Pariahs. No doubt, the colonial white had its own way of spreading the light of European Enlightenment among the Indian, but again with a vested interest of creating a group of educated Indian to serve them as revealed in the Minute of Macaulay\(^7\). Consequently, the colonial white could approach only the chosen Indians whereas the missionary white encompassed the entire Indians in its sweep of scheme. The difference between the approach and attitude of Davida and the police officer in the novel is a testimony to it. Interestingly, Davida being an American missionary feels herself to be quite different from the colonial white and speaks against the imperialist atrocities meted out to the Indians.

However, what is unfortunately painful for Davida is that she is also taken as imperialist white because of her physical similarity with the latter. In multicultural context, discrimination or differentiation on the basis of body colour is inevitable irrespective of time and space. This is so because the complexion of the body immediately creates a chasm in the cultural interaction. For any migrants, the colour of body is the first hindrance in their social assimilation which is further aggravated by the lack of knowledge about the custom, language, and landscape of the place. Consequently, they live a very restricted life or to speak technically a ‘ghettoed life’. The missionaries or the British imperialist as reflected in the novel have their specific area of living aloof
from the locals because of unanticipated threat from strangers/locals. Violence to migrants is quite expected in a host land. This violence is often caused by mistrust, fear and particularly by sense of insecurity. One day when John Ramsey, the colleague of Davida visits a village with the pastor, Jalal and does not return overnight, Jalal’s wife Begum gets worried and reveals the fear and the imminent danger of unknown to Davida,

You don’t know these people, this land. Violence, horror, under every smile, there is here! Why are they so mysterious about it? I ’ve made inquiries about. They left Patilpura about five, I’ve found out. And look here. They sent word by a messenger to the syce to bring the trap to Patilpura, and when they meet it right out in the road, not near any village, and my husband was being carried on a bed because he couldn’t walk even … (67)

Begum finds it difficult to understand the reason behind the physical assault on her husband, Jalal, and pressurizes Davida to ask John Ramsey. The reply of Davida to the demand of Begum casts light on the difference of cultural mannerism.

You don’t understand Begum. I can’t go to the Sahib and ask him what he chooses not to tell. It isn’t our foreign way. You know he would do everything for the pastor that is possible. And I won’t interfere. I just won’t. (68)

The cultural mannerism also leads to cultural conflict. Manners are not easy to acquire and discard. The manners of diaspora, particularly their body language and social values immediately set them apart from their local counterparts, for instance, Davida is immediately figured out among the downtrodden Pariahs women. In a multicultural set up, cultural assimilation and cultural confrontation go hand in hand. However, cultural confrontation is witnessed among the first generation migrants due to their inherent desire to adhere to the social values of their homeland.
An outstanding example of multiculturalism is witnessed in Wilson’s story “A Woman of Resource” included in *Tales of a Polygamous City*. The Pardah party hosted by the narrator is arranged keeping in mind the requirement of the locals. Every care is taken to synchronize the culturally conditioned etiquettes of the invitees,

The doctor and I were arranging groups of chair on the carpet spread on the tennis-court, an hour before the time appointed for the party, when the ladies from the home of the inspector arrived. Once inside the curtain across the door of the high screen we had erected, they began to lay aside their *burquas*. A burqua, benighted reader, is yards and yards of white long cloth gathered into a little embroidered cap that fits the head, falling like a great full cape over the whole body of the ground. It has two thick little lace medallions in front of the eyes. Hidden in such a garment, no woman can be distinguished from another. Alighting from their carriages at the gates, our guests were monotonous ghosts of blank discretion. Seeing them unveiled inside the screen, one could understand that such beauty would be dangerous to the over-susceptible gaze of the public. (46)

The way Wilson presents the description of the party, robes of the guests, and their manner reflects the keen observation and understanding of multicultural ambience. Her description of Inspector’s wife and her attire authenticates her genuine interest in the local,

After removing her outer veils, the inspector’s wife came toward us, ahead of the others, wearing a white veil of something as thin and sheer as linen lawn, bordered in emerald green and gold an inch wide, the corner falling almost to her feet in the back; a very loose and full skirt – like garment called *kurta*, which came to her knees, cut at the neck like a kimono blouse, made of almond – colored silk embroidered at the wrists and neck in pink and gold; and shining white, very full divided- skirt-like garments which fit snugly at the ankles. These *suttens*, foreigners for want of a better word, disgustingly called trousers. Really they resembled trousers as much as my white net frock did. On her feet she wore
little sandals with great soft red silk pompons. Gold showed through her veil at her throat and her ears. On her wrists were solid gold bracelets an inch thick. (46)

However, it is interesting to note that Wilson in very subtle, supple and impartial way reflects on the social institution of the contemporary India. Polygamy, particularly male, was the common code of conduct of the 19th century India, particularly in Muslim community. However, wives had their equal dignity and status. Wilson’s description of the young co-wife of the Inspector’s wife is a testimony to it:

Her (Inspector’s wife) co-wife wore a sea-green chiffon veil with a six inch border woven in real gold; a thin white lawn kurta, embroidered all over by hand in white, fastened in front by three gold studs on a jewel chain; suttens of green and blue changeable taffeta, with appliquéd gold polka-dots an inch in diameter; white satin French slippers. She had a band of flexible gold across her smooth black hair, and pink roses and jasmine flowers in her earrings; gold bracelets at her wrists. She was somewhat fairer than most of our guests, as far as a European. The lines from her eyebrows to her brown eyes and down on her blushed cheeks were the lines of a water lily. (46-47)

Significantly, to the Pardah Party, women from different community were invited. The arrival of Hindu ladies from the Dwan’s home to the Pardah Party, and their description by the narrator, which is different from the description of the Inspector’s wife, reveals Wilson’s awareness of the multicultural society of India.

… four Hindu ladies from the Dwan’s home came in. The one to whom I spoke first was thin and fair, with a face too insolent to be beautiful. She wore three veils of chiffon, one above the other. The under one was rosy pink, the second one faintly salmon-colored, and the outer one mauve. This mystery of color fell about her head and shoulders with a charm which is not to be described to those who have not seen it. Her kurta was white silk, and her very full ungored skirt was changeable blue and pink taffeta faced with mauve, … Her sister wore an
emerald green silk skirt with Benaras design in gold at foot and a half deep, a turquoise-blue silk kurta, a leaf green little velvet vest, and a *point d'esprit veil*. Her sister-in-law wore a full skirt of changeable orange and almond color, with a border of fine green, black, and pale blue lines, a cream-colored kurta, a black velvet vest, and a veil of flame-colored chiffon. The forth woman of that party wore a mulberry-colored skirt with a silver border, a white kurta, and a veil the color of the outer leaves of a Marechal Niel rose.

The above description reveals the true picture of India; no doubt it is a bit exoticized. The description of the colour of Indian ladies and their equally colourful dress makes the narrative a cultural gaze of the west. In fact, East or India is more of an enigmatic, exotic sight where many cultures, ethnic colours interact. Such interaction, no doubt, sometimes creates tension, but in a festive mood the Indians appear in their total aura forgetting the tension of the cultural differences which seems to be enigmatically exotic to the western voyeuristic narrator.

Unity in diversity is what well characterizes the Indian culture, and it is the same values that scatter across the world with the scattering of the Indian population. In Lahiri’s story, ‘When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine’, the Hindu Muslim cultural interaction is well conveyed through the relation between Mr. Pirzada (a Pakistani scholar) and the narrator’s family. The young narrator is somewhat confounded on finding that both her parents and Mr. Pirzada speak the same language, practice the same mannerism and prefer the same meal, yet they belong to two different nations. Culture is not subject to any territorial demarcation. Nation and nationality is a political phenomenon which keeps on changing with the changes of politics and principles. Culture is beyond politics and national boundary. What constitute a culture is a time tested composite institutions of society like family, kinship, religious institution, faith and festivity. If people appear to be
similar in these entire aspects irrespective of their colour, caste, creed, nationality, they belong to the same culture. In fact, the foremost identity of men can be cultural and linguistic identity, and it is this identity that most of diasporas struggle to maintain while living away from home.

As mentioned above, in Margaret Wilson we find the first stage of multiculturalism, that is, cultural and linguistic interaction. She strives to present the multicultural colour of India without any tinge of cultural confrontation. No doubt, the hostility due to different culture is witnessed in the works of Wilson, the political situation and religious activities of the time are more responsible for it. In fact, Wilson designs a narrative in which India gets manifested in all its colour and social reality. Unlike Wilson, in Lahiri’s works the multicultural violence and hostility is presented with a view to assert one’s own cultural identity. Interestingly, within the broader cultural set up, discrimination is also practiced on the basis of sub-cultural differences. In Lahiri’s story ‘A Real Darwan’ the protagonist, Boorima, is an aged Bangladeshi national and a victim of political strife. In broader perspective there is no difference between the Bengali culture of India and Bangladesh, still she is discriminated and not accepted by the Bengalis of India as local.

After going through multicultural elements in both Lahiri and Wilson, it seems that, in deeper perspective their concern is identical and whatever differences that one can notice are that of degrees and not of kinds. Significantly Wilson deals with the very genesis of multicultural milieu, that is, diversity of language and religion as witnessed in her *Daughters of India* and stories included in *Tales of a Polygamous City*. In Jhumpa
Lahiri, the multilingual set up is intensified at international level to expose the very human tendency to be different while being placed in context of diverse human cultures and domestic affairs. Her *Interpreter of Maladies*, in a way seems to convey this concern of hers as she rightly sub-titled it as stories of “Bengal, Boston, and Beyond”. These three words sum up the very essence of Lahiri’s multiculturalism, that is, human beings are destined to be born in one place, brought up in another and beget somewhere else. The human culture is beyond physical borders and one can voluntarily decide the place of one’s dwelling, as exemplified by Ashima of *The Namesake* who lives the true meaning of her name, that is, without border; here, there, and everywhere.

Notes:

1. By group differentiated rights I mean those rights which enable the diasporic people to practise their cultural traits in the host land, such as, wearing turbans for the Shikh, beard and ‘burquas’ for the Muslims, saris and vermillion for the Hindus. Such rights immediately set them apart from their local counterparts.

2. In a genuine multicultural context, one’s identity is made intact only through its proper recognition in terms of its difference from the other. As such the politics of difference and recognition naturally infuses in the politics of identity formation in multicultural context.

3. Liberal multiculturalism focuses on the cultural practices of ethnic minorities propagating tolerance, pride and the celebration of diversity. It mainly restricts to the area of education and arts, and is depoliticized.
4. Cultural pluralism is a term used when smaller groups within a larger society maintain their unique cultural identities, and their values and practices are accepted by the wider culture provided they are consistent with the laws and values of the wider society. Cultural pluralism is often confused with Multiculturalism. Multiculturalism lacks the requirement for a dominant culture. The important advocates of the cultural pluralist movement were Horace Kallen, Randolph Bourne, Louis Adamic, and Leonard Covello.

5. The melting pot theory rationalized the coercive essence of Americanization by proposing that this approach would hasten the process of immigrants adopting the American culture, and also fostered a number of less explicit agendas, such as eradicating radical ideologies in America. The melting pot has functioned as a smelting pot, where the immigrants’ languages and cultures flowed away as dross. The remaining molten mass could then be quickly and effortlessly shaped and imprinted by the dominant culture without resistance.

6. Critical multiculturalism encompasses the whole society and is highly politicized. It propagates recognition, rights and living with difference. It sees race and racism as fundamental issues and attempts to multiculturalize all areas of government and society.

7. a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.
Works Cited:


