DISPLACEMENT IN JHUMPA LAHIRI’S

INTERPRETER OF MALADIES

Indian writers have been making a significant contribution to world literature since independence. The past few years have seen a massive flourishing of Indian fiction in the global market. However, there is a great deal of Indian writers with few themes that loosely link them together the issues of identity and language for example, the themes of exile and diaspora which have been focal point of most of the Indian fiction. The Immigrant experience, the question of identity and the expatriate experience continues to furnish remarkable material for fiction and can be traced in the works of various South Asian women writers too. Salman Rushdie states: “Exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back even at the risk of mutated in the pillars of salt” (Rushdie 75).

The migration has become one of the most important issues of the contemporary world. Travelling and adapting across cultures have turned into major issues and concern of the contemporary globalizing environment. Jhumpa Lahiri is also a diasporic writer like Salman Rushdie, V.S Naipaul, and Bharati Mukherjee. The term Diaspora came into use only with reference to the Jews who dispersed in different parts of the world either forcibly or due to other reasons. Pradeep Anand says:

Diaspora is spreading of the seed when planted in different parts of the world, absorbs unique characteristics from the local soil. Every story about the Diaspora thus becomes a unique context, a co-
ordination of space, time and experience, which someday will collectively tell the whole story of a Diaspora (Anand 4).

Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* won the Granta’s best young British Novelists of the decade. The truest part of Monica Ali’s writing is about the experience of exile and the pain of un-belonging. Zadith Smith, another non-white novelist blasted into the literary scene with *White Teeth* the Booker nominated bestseller about immigrant culture in London. Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) also illuminates the pain of exile and the ambiguities of post-colonialism. Jhumpa Lahiri has three books to her credit. Her first work *The Namesake* (2003) reflects her personal experiences. In this story, the Calcutta born parents immigrated to USA where their children Gogol and Sonia, grow up experiencing the constant generational and cultural gap with their parents. Her second work *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) is a collection of eleven short stories deal with two separate cultures, and how people deal with one other, and her third work *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) is a collection of nine short stories, reflecting different South Asian Communities.

*Interpreter of Maladies* indicates interpreter of emotional pain and affliction. The nine stories are the examples of various aspects of Indian immigrants living in America. Each story interprets the character’s sufferings, sacrifices and struggles. Indian Heritage is the basis of her short stories in which she deals with the question of identity, alienation and the plight of those who are physically and psychologically displaced. Most of the characters in the stories have fluid (a substance that can flow) identities like other contemporary post-colonial literary characters. In most cases they are the citizen of two countries (their first country
and their new country) so, their national and cultural identities are not fixed. They are physically in USA and psychologically their minds are in South Asia. 

*Interpreter of Maladies* reveals her admirable grasp of biculturalism and reliable style. Lahiri’s subject is the loneliness of dislocation, cultural displacement, and sense of identity and belonging with the fine details of both Indian and American cultures. Lahiri’s stories describe universal sympathy, the breakup of identities, the alienation and sense of loneliness experienced by all immigrants, giving voice to their pain and interested into their complex psychoses.

The first story *A Temporary Matter* presents the casual but systematic build-up towards a crucial revolution of a young and financially independent woman against an unbearable, loveless marriage. A story of husband and wife, Shukumar and Shoba whose life was filled with joy and after the death of their first-born baby both started drifting apart. Each one felt uncomfortable in each other’s presence and a forced blackout for eight consecutive nights to repair damage done by an ice storm made them unmask their faces and start conversing and confessing their deepest fears and thoughts. Her act of walking out of such a marriage is an assertion of independence, identity determination and capacity to choose her own way of life and to get rid of the emotional and physical stress. The title of the story does not refer to the temporary power failure alone. Their stillborn child has created distance between them. Shoba is incapable to deal with her pain and frustration at losing her baby and projected her anger and frustration on her husband because he was absent during her labour. Shukumar was not there by her side at the time in the hospital as he was attending an academic conference in Baltimore that he “hadn’t wanted to go to . . . but she had insisted” as it was “important to make contacts” (2-3). However, he had come back in time to hold
the child for few minutes before the child was cremated. Shukumar was neither indifferent nor irresponsible towards Shoba or the child; rather he looked forward towards being a father. They lost touch with one another in their relationship; Shoba silently blames Shukumar for the tragedy. Within six months of the incident “he and Shoba become experts at avoiding each other in their three bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible”(4).

Jhumpa Lahiri’s modern approach is evident in her themes as well as narrative style. The power cuts in their area, force them to spend time together by candlelight. The power cuts for a notified duration form the ‘temporary matter.’ During these phases of darkness, they could restart talking and sharing. When we expect a happy reunion after the closeness that Shoba and Shukumar shared by exchanging untold experiences, it feels like a douse of freezing cold water, when Shoba announces her decision to move into a new apartment. The death of the child completely changed the lives of both the husband and the wife. Somehow, their relationship had reached a stage where “he didn’t want her to be pregnant again. Shoba’s confession leads to a further revelation by Shukumar. Both Shoba and her mother assume Shukumar to be a heartless, absent father” (22). Shoba’s problem is her inability to deal with her anger and frustration of losing the baby for whose arrival she plans elaborately. As in case of the narrator in Margaret Atwood’s novel Surfacing, the yet-to-be born child gives meaning and direction to the life of Shoba Shukumar. As they grow increasingly cold towards each other, the marital relationship becomes a burden for both of them. Catherine Belsey states:
Despite suffering due to the patriarchal practices and values, women have not been able to overthrow patriarchy. The reason for this is that the female subjectivity itself is constructed and defined by the prevalent patriarchal conventions education, and culture in its broadest sense (Belsey 593).

The child was the only bond that tied them together as couple. The poignancy of the situation is revealed when he tells his wife that the baby was a boy and describes him for the grieving mother. He says that he had not told her because she wanted the sex of the baby to be a ‘mystery’ and now in their shared grief they “wept together, for the things they know new” (22). Thus, their separation is over and they are able to regard their gap as ‘a temporary matter’. This clarification is much more a satisfying ending. The theme of the ‘temporary matter’ means that it is their separation, and not their marriage, that is temporary. This is reinforced by Shoba’s declaration that “she needed some time alone” (21) not that she wants to get rid of their relationship. The major themes are grief, alienation, and deception. In grief, Shoba stays away from the house as much as she could and on the other hand, Shukumar had withdrawn himself from the world and seldom leaves the house. Realism is reflected in a Lahiri’s stories. Lahiri uses dozens of everyday details to create realism (4). In this story, main plot directly revolves around the construction of the female identity rather than the male.

_When Mr. Pirzada came to dine_ is a story about a Pakistani (Bangladeshi) man, who is to dine with an Indian family in 1971, when a war is going on in Pakistan. The story is set in North America and is told from the point of view of a ten-year-old Indian American child, Lilia. The story begins with Bangladesh’s War of
Independence of 1971 and a brief commentary on the history of the partition. The narrator belongs to Hindu family and is an Indian Bengali; Muslim Pirzada is a Pakistani Bengali in the process of becoming a Bangladeshi. The contradiction of their different citizenship plays a vital role in the story, especially when balanced against the linguistic and cultural oneness of the Bengali community. Lilia’s father corrects her when she (Lilia) calls Mr. Pirzada an Indian: “Mr. Pirzada is no longer considered Indian . . . . Not since Partition. Mr. Pirzada and her parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, and looked more or less the same” (25). However, by showing her a world map, her father still insists that she understand the difference. Questioned from the staged naivety of a child’s view, similar to Bapsi Sidhwa’s Partition novel *Cracking India* (1991), the story unsettles the broader ‘adult’ presumptions behind nationality and citizenship. The text show the relative marginalization of Lilia as an ethnic minority in the United States by depicting how she has little and strained access to the Bengali/Indian part of her history and culture. Like Mr. Pirzada, the complexities of identity and belonging become negotiations and hazards of nationality and citizenship. The first-person speaker is a ten-year-old girl, Lilia, who finally comes to understand the pain caused by separation from one’s family. Lilia is caught between the traditions of her parents and American culture. She does not understand her parents’ complaints about the unavailability of ingredients for Indian food, or their lament that neighbors “never dropped by without an invitation” (24). Mr. Pirzada is invited to their house simply because he is Indian; or, as her father explains, “Mr. Pirzada is no longer considered Indian” (25). Her mother understands that Lilia is an American as she was born in America and has little understanding of the politics of India and Pakistan. Mr. Pirzada’s presence makes Lilia feel rather
like a stranger in her own home. Every evening he brings her sweets, which she feels are “inappropriate … to consume” (29). Lilia, through her contact with Mr. Pirzada is brought to understand the significance of other culture and other people’s fight for independence. After the war, Mr. Pirzada returns home to his family, which has survived. He will never revisit America, but Lilia has learned through this stranger what it means, “to miss someone who was so many miles and hours away” (42). For Lilia, and similarly for Mr. Pirzada, the relationship between identity and nationality is unstable and fluid. On the one hand, Mr. Pirzada and Lilia can be read as universal that transcend history and geography and that connect the two Bengals; but equally easy, the connection is a broad sign towards the universalism of human feelings. This universally bridge of unity through age and gender. The discussion of Bangladesh is disaster takes place over dinner during commercial breaks, most probably flashing advertisements of the American way of life. Lack of food for the refugees and picture perfect plentiful life in American must occur simultaneously: Lilia’s father serves her another piece of fish while reminding her of what ‘children her age must do to survive’ (31). The story begins with even his pocket watch fixed on with the standard time of his country. As he says to Lilia: “Unlike the watch on his wrist, the pocket watch, he had explained to me, was set to the local time in Dacca, eleven hours ahead” (30). Judith Caesar says, “It is almost as if a shadow of Mr. Pirzada is trapped there in New England, while the true Mr. Pirzada goes about his life in East Pakistan” (Caesar 82). Lahiri shows the effect of western colonialism in this story when Lilia tries to read about India in her school library, the following exchange occurs with her teacher “is this book part of your report Lilia?” “No Miss Kenyon”. “Then, I no reason to consult it she said, replacing it in the slim
gap on the shelf. Do you?” (33) The war finally ends in December 1971 and Pirzada goes back to Bangladesh in January 1971. Several months later Lilia’s family receives a card and a short letter from Mr. Pirzada who says he has been reunited with his family. Therefore, Mr. Pirzada’s temporary migration comes to an end he does not return to the United States and Lilia’s family does not see him again. Mr. Pirzada’s identity has always been attached in Bangladesh becomes independent from Pakistan. Mr. Pirzada rushes back to reunite with his family.

*Interpreter of Maladies* indicates interpreter of maladies. This is the story of an Indian-American couple, Raj and Mina Das who comes to India along with their three children. They hire a tour guide, Mr. Kapasi. Besides working a guide, he also works as an interpreter in a doctor’s office. Mina Das, the wife, dubs his job of interpreter of maladies as “romantic”. This arouses a feeling of romanticism in Mr. Kapasi whose marriage is on the rocks. He begins fantasizing about her. Mina Das reveals a long kept secret to Mr. Kapasi. Mina Das reveals this secret to Mr. Kapasi hoping that he might provide a remedy for this. Probably she read too much into his profession. The thematic conclusion is also clear in order to overcome the maladies, one has to interpret them and seek refuge within one’s own self. Most of the Characters are suffering from psychological or social diseases. In this story Mr. and Mrs. Das both born and raised in America, although their retired parents have now moved to India. Soon after marriage as Raj becomes busy with his teaching assignments, life became dull and drab for Mina: “she was left at home all day with the baby . . . Always cross and tired” (64). Her problems were further complicated when she conceived her younger son Bobby because of a sexual encounter with a friend of her husband who once happened to stay with them for a few days. She kept the secret for eight years before revealing
it to Kapasi, the interpreter of maladies, hoping that he would help her ‘feel better’ by saying ‘the right thing’ or ‘suggest some kind of remedy’. S.C Dube states:

The Ideology of subordination (of women . . . is pervasive and has invaded the worldview and ethos of almost the entire Indian society . . . The women’s sexuality is controlled much more strictly then men’s. . . Implicit in the control of sexuality is the control over reproduction, i.e., giving birth to progeny (Dube 107).

She tells Kapasi that she is troubled by ‘her secret,’ though Raj, her husband, “doesn’t even suspect it” and thinks she is “still in love with him” (65). Kapasi, because of his typical Indian background and patriarchal ideology cannot understand the complicated and taxing situation. Mina has been through as a young lonely housewife and mother. Mina is not ready to accept that it is her guilt that makes her suffer. Ignoring him and his diagnosis completely, she seeks refuge, at the end of the story, in her parental duties, nursing injured Bobby, her illegal son. Kapasi believe that like Raj and Mina, he and his wife were “a bad match . . . had little in common” except “the bickering, the Indifference, the protracted silences” (53). However, most of the stories in the collection deal with the matrimonial problems and cultural alienation of Indians settled in the United States. The narrative focus is generally on the female protagonist: a lonely individual struggling to come to terms with her new environment, oppressive matrimonial or extra matrimonial relationships, an alien culture, social and economic insecurity or her natural support to survive with an identity of her own.
Marriage, as portrayed in this collection, is neither stable nor valuable as a social or religious institution nor is it as dependable or fulfilling as a personal relationship based on mutual respect, emotional dependability, human understanding or shared interests or attitudes. There is no attempt to present the matrimonial relationships explored in these stories as typical representative of Indian or even expatriate Indian population in general. These stories have a definite feminist orientation, explore the nature and usefulness of certain patriarchal institutions like marriage and family in the contemporary society, and raise some disturbing questions about security dependability, fulfillment, meaningfulness, happiness, love and affection.

Kapasi because of his typical Indian background and patriarchal ideology cannot understand the complicated situation. Mina has been through as a young lonely housewife and mother. Rather than understanding the complete dryness and dullness of her married life as the cause of her complete indifference towards extramarital sexual advances. He considers it an act of unfaithfulness and traces her pain and suffering to her feelings of guilt. She is not ready to accept that it is her guilt that makes her suffers. Ignoring him and his analysis completely, she seeks refugee, at the end of the story, in her parental duties, nursing injured Bobby, her illegal son. In case Mina’s limited sphere of activity resembles that of Mrs. Kapasi’s typical Indian lower middle class selfless, housewife completely devoted to the service of the husband, the family. In this story, Lahiri shows the difficulties that Indians have related to Americans and the ways in which Indian and Americans caught in the middle of two different cultures. Mr. Kapasi wishes for an close connection with Mrs. Das, but when she finally does leak her secrets her affair, her true feelings about her husband, Mr. Kapasi is overwhelmed and
disgusted. Mr. Kapasi thinks he and Mrs. Das have a connection because he recognizes her situation, the isolated wife and troubled marriage from his own life. Mrs. Das has shared this secret with Mr. Kapasi in the hope that he, being an interpreter of Maladies, should be able to suggest a remedy to her also. In this story, Mr. Kapasi plays the role as a cultural broker, tour guide and interpreter for a doctor. As a tour guide, he shows English speaking Europeans and Americans the sights of India, and in his work as an interpreter, he helps the ailing from another region to communicate with their physician. Mrs. Das as a wife/mother confides that one of their sons is not her husband’s child and asks Mr. Kapasi for his help. He admits that he is only an interpreter of languages, not of her guilt. These relationships explore the idea of displacement through isolation and identity both cultural and personal. Kapasi’s attitude towards his wife is similar to that of Raj towards Mina at a more distinct level: both ignore individual, emotional and physical needs of the wife condemned to the boring repetitive domestic backbreaking responsibilities. The problems for both the couples are caused by the nature of marital relationships dramatized in the story, which are unsatisfactory for the man as well as the women. Desai and Thakkar states:

The family is not a homogenous group where all the members’ occupy equal positions and derive equal benefits in terms of source, training opportunities and entitlements. The socialization of members and especially girls lead to women themselves accepting their secondary role in family . . . gender difference that are culturally produced are , almost invariably, interpreted as being rooted in biology, as part of the natural order of things. However,
gender roles are conceived, enacted and learnt within a complex of relationships (Desai and Thakkar 80).

The husband with his patriarchal ideology almost completely ignores the individual needs of the wife. There are many themes in the story: communication gap, broken marriages, and the danger of romanticism. Camera is the symbol in this story. Mr. Das’s camera represents his inability to see the world clearly or connect with it because he views the world through his camera. Mr. Das misses the reality of the world around him, both in his marriage and in the scene outside the cab. The common thread throughout the stories in this collection is the same kind of malady that the Das family suffers. All characters are defined by isolation of some form or another: husbands are isolated from wives; immigrants are isolated from their families and their homes; children are isolated from their parents; and people are isolated from the communities in which they live. In their isolation, these characters feel that they are missing something very important to their identities.

* A * Real Durwan * is the story about Boori Ma, a sweeper who did not migrate to India from Pakistan for financial reasons but for political reason. A sweeper of the stairwell in an old building in Calcutta, who was deported to Calcutta after partition. In 1947, the South Asian subcontinent was divided in to two countries, India and Pakistan. The partition created a mass migration of Hindus and Muslims from India to Pakistan. Writing about Punjabi Migrants in Britain, Dhooleka Raj argues:
Partition is remembered and recounted or forgotten and hidden, but some times, it emerges in specific contexts. Resurrected and imported to Britain through visits by elder generations, ‘Partition becomes a beginning point and an anchor for many peoples’ life stories (Raj 58).

During this mass migration, some people lost everything including their identity. To the tenants, the partition and its trauma are things of the past and they listen with surprise to the old woman’s narrative of loss and homelessness. No doubt, she was a refugee but the rest of the tale they found hard to believe because such stories recounted loss of amazing wealth, the details of which changed everyday. Boori Ma means ‘big mother’ in Bengali, usually this kind of name is given to an old female servant in South Asia. She works as a sweeper cum security guard (durwan) in a building of a poor neighborhood in Calcutta:

It was with this voice she enumerated, twice a day as she swept the stairwell, the details of her plight and losses suffered since her deportation to Calcutta after partition. At that time, she maintained, the confusion had separated her from a husband, four daughters, a two-story brick house, a rosewood almari, and a number of coffee boxes, whose skeleton keys she still wore, along with her life savings, tied to the free end of her sari (70-71).

A Real Durwan just as they have in other Diaspora South Asian novels. Throughout the story, Boori Ma’s identity is attached to those keys that are stolen
at the final stage of the story. Her past identity of a rich man’s wife of East Bengal is important than her past present identity as a sweeper of Calcutta city. She cannot forget her identity related with her first homeland. The idea of ‘Imaginary home’ is present in the story. She left a rich life style in Pakistan for a poor life style in India, who is fixed with her upper class identity and remains alienated from the West. This story focus on the plight of the lower class casually in that selection of the social strata because of forced diaspora and political struggle. In exchange for her services, the residents allow Boori Ma to live on the roof of the building. While she sweeps, she tells stories of her past: her daughter’s extravagant wedding, her servants, her estate and her riches. She cannot forget her identity related with her first homeland. As she claims: “Yes, there I tasted life have I mentioned that I crossed the border with just two bracelets on my wrist? Yet there was a day when my feet touched nothing but marble. Believe me, don’t believe me, such comforts you cannot even dream them” (71). The residents of the brick building hear continuous contradictions in Boori Ma’s storytelling, but her stories are seductive and compelling, so they let her contradictions rest.

Mrs. Dalal often gives Boori Ma food and takes care of her ailments. When Mr. Dalal is promoted at work, he improves the brick building by installing a sink in the stairwell and a sink in his home. While the Dalal’s are away, the other residents become obsessed with making their own improvement to the building. Boori Ma even spends her life savings on special treats while circling around the neighborhood. However, while Boori Ma is out one afternoon, the sink in the stairwell is stolen. The residents accuse Boori Ma of informing the robbers and in negligence for her job. “This is all her doing,” one of them hollered, pointing at Boori Ma. She informed the robbers. Where was she when she was supposed to
guard the gate?” (81). When Boori Ma protests, the residents continue to accuse her because of all her previous inconsistent stories. The story concludes as the residents throw out Boori Ma’s belongings and begin a search for a “Real Durwan”. Thus, alienation and identity crises are the themes of the story. Alienation and identity crises explore the idea of displacement because Boori Ma is displaced from Pakistan to India. She lost her financial and economic identity. Boori Ma acts and interprets her own identity and class status “Boori Ma’s mouth is full of ashes, but she is the product of changing times’ was the refrain of old Mr. Chatterjee” (72). At the end of the story, a basin is stolen from the building and Boori Ma is expelled from that building. The ‘basin’ incident is like the driving accident of “Mrs. Sen” symbolizing that she has been always alienated in West Bengal and her identity will be always attached to East Bengal.

**Sexy** is a story of a young American Indian girl Miranda, and her affair with a married Indian man named Dev. Miranda tries to adopt Bengali culture, as she tries to learn Bengali Language, eat Indian food, watch Indian movies and finally Miranda realizes the uselessness of this relationship. Lahiri beautifully captures Miranda’s various ranges of emotions: joy, doubt, and grief. **Sexy**, taking a mid position among all other stories, can be considered as the most thematically different and yet significant story of Lahiri’s collection based on the fact that unlike other stories its protagonist is an American rather than an Indian female. What makes the story relevant to the present study is that together with the other two stories which deals with the trauma of the identity crisis in the lives of Mrs. Sen, a female Indian immigrant in America. On the other hand, Bibi Haldar, a marginalized subaltern female of India origins in Calcutta the story of Miranda, a female American in Boston, can provide a structural balance. As threatening as
the confrontation between the native self and the immigrant other can be, there is always an appeal and mutual attraction in between. This double sense of charm and danger is overtly dramatized in the sexual appeal that exists between Miranda, the American female protagonist, and Dev, the Indian male protagonist of the story. Dev in *Sexy* has misplaced conventional view of Miranda as an alien woman of high sexual appeal all through the story. Thus, he cannot take part in creating the ethical stance of making discursive room for the other to exist. So that the one single attempt on the part of the female subject is unanswered, silenced and doomed to fail. The story develops against the background of man leaving his wife and child for another woman whom he met on a plane journey from USA to UK. The child Rohin explains the meaning of sexy to Miranda “When you love a person without knowing them at all” (107). The concepts of childhood and maturity feature in eight of Lahiri’s tales. Lahiri’s work focus on the collision of Indian and American culture. Rohin, insightful seven year old who perceives the concept of sexy in a fresh and touching way, to young Lilia of “ When Mr.Pirzada came to Dine” who cannot see political differences through cultural similarities. Michael W.Cox states:

Lahiri’s child observes, untainted by the effects of prolonged enculturation, bring to the narrative fore from those conflicts or core issues-maladies, perhaps that arise between and among native and immigrant groups (Cox 120).

Rohin has travelled with his mother from their home in Canada to Miranda’s in Boston on their way to California, his history lies in India half a world away, and
“the farthest Miranda had ever been was to the Bahamas once when she was a child” (91). Despite the decades more life experience Miranda possesses, Rohin trumps her in every area of intelligence. Even though Miranda is the adult, the one with the book and the answers, Rohin possesses more knowledge because he holds it within himself. Lahiri reminds her readers of his small age by noting, “When they reached the last of the countries in Africa, Rohin said he wanted to watch cartoons” (103). His environment and the inability of his mother to be more adult in his everyday behavior force where Lilia dresses up like a witch for Halloween and goes to bed early, Rohin is forced by his environment and the inability of his mother to be more adult in this story. This story explain the emotional, Psychological and social impact of extramarital relationships between women and children. The story deals with the affairs of two different men, the situations and incidents involving them are so similar that they can be treated as two manifestations of the same behavior pattern. An expatriate Bengali married man, his wife temporarily away from him, accidentally meets a young white girl and gets involved in an extramarital affair with her. The husband of Luxmi’s cousin (Luxmi is Miranda’s colleague) returning from India to his wife and son in Montreal, happens, on the flight, to sit next to ‘an English girl, half his age’ and is so impressed by a ‘conversation’ he has with her that he decides to deserts his family to be with her in London. Both the stories focus on the plight of one of the woman involved, Miranda and Luxmi’s cousin, and are focalized from the perspective of the concerned woman alone.

Thematically, both the stories are complimentary: one presents the implications of the affair from the perspective of the wife and the other from that of the suffering mistress. Miranda, the mistress, misses Dev and suffers loneliness because he does
not leave his wife: Luxmi’s cousin, the wife, and her son Rahul are devastated because man deserts his family to be with his new beloved. Miranda is actually stranger for ending her relationship with Dev because she can see that he has no potential. Lahiri focuses on the gender roles in this story, because Dev, the Indian lover cheating his wife, utilize the western fetishization of Indian men to his own advantage. Cultural clash, broken marriages, Culture, tradition and search for identity are the major themes in the story. Lahiri deals most efficiently in the search for identity, as defined by herself, by other, by location and by circumstances. The main motifs are religion, new world and old world tradition, gender roles and secrecy. Diaspora or expatriate communities feel alienated in their host country. For this reason, they suffer from identity crisis. People have to continuously face and overcome displacement.

_Mrs. Sen_ is a story of an expatriate Indian Bengali housewife who is trying to make a mini India in her house. Mr. Sen works as a university teacher and spend time at his workplace. As a result, Mrs. Sen remains lonely and alienated in her home. The main point of her alienation is that “Mrs. Sen did not know how to drive” (111). Eliot’s mother is also concerned about the fact that Mrs. Sen does not how to drive. Driving is an essential skill in the United States. However, Mrs. Sen is attached to India: “Yes I am learning,” Mrs.Sen said. “But I am slow student. At home, you know. We have a driver” (113). She spends her time doing household work and baby-sitting for an eleven-year-old American boy, Eliot. However, Mrs.Sen is attached to India, as she is physically in the United States but mentally in India. The activity sphere of Mrs. Sen is limited. Ironically, the main desire for fresh fish that she might cook for her husband is the only passion that keeps her going in the alien American environment. Her interest in learning
how to drive a car is directed at achieving freedom not to move around independently of her ever-busy husband, but is a reflection of her cultural propaganda in native Bengal that a wife must be a good house-keeper and cook and that she must carefully select fish to be bought relying on her senses. The different meanings attached to localities and regions as opposed to the nation cause of difference in refugee memory because ethno-cultural territories do not necessarily cross with geographical boundaries. Mrs. Sen continuously confirms her nostalgic memories of India.

Mrs. Sen never named, is a thirty-year-old helpless, obedient, Bengali wife brought to America by her husband. Being isolated, her family and friends and displaced from her home, she finds the North American life irritating and aggressive. As Eliot, the young boy she babysits, recognizes, “When Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables” (116). Her daily activities are arranged upon the theme of escape. While she prefers delaying her driving practices, which are obviously the necessity of her new life, she steadily keeps her special Indian-cooking daily practices and cooks heartily despite the fact that there now exist only she and her husband to eat all this food. It is as if her cooking style and her interest in buying and having fish, which have links with her idea of homeland, and her means of asserting her cultural identity. Although useful in lubricating the process of change and paving the way towards formation of her future hybrid identity, Mrs. Sen attachment is also simultaneously blocking the “acculturation” process which M.J. Esman defines as “acceptance and adaptation of basic elements of the local culture, its language and its lifestyle” (Esman 103). She talks about her experience of joint cooking with neighbors in Calcutta or how letters from India make her happy. It
seems Mrs. Sen did not think she would leave her home one day as she says to Eliot: “When I was your age I was without knowing that one day I would be so far” (123). Mrs. Sen’s experience is similar to Gloria Anzaldua. Anzaldu states in her essay “Borderlands/La Front era” that:

> I was the first in six generations to leave the valley, the only one in my family to ever leave home. However, I did not leave all the parts of me; I kept the ground of my own being. On it, I walked away, taking with me the land, the valley. (Anzaldua  887)

The lack of mobility is gendered for Mrs. Sen: her immigration experience is markedly different from Mr. Sen, an Assistant Professor of mathematics in the University. The gendered lack of mobility connects Mrs. Sen’s story with Boori Ma’s tale of forced migration and exile from home, as much as with the restricted living Boori Ma has in her new country and society, and also in her second banishment. Not only one can argue that all women are essentially displaced in the state of patriarchy, but one can also state that displacement itself is a gendered experiences. Mrs. Sen lives in some kind of ‘past- present’. Homi k. Bhabha writes in his essay *The Location of Culture* ‘The past-present’ becomes the part of necessity not the nostalgia of living (Bhabha 938).

*This Blessed House* is the story of a young Asian couple, Sanjeev and Twinkle, who have just started their married life in USA. The parents of Twinkle and Sanjeev, like those of Raj and Mina, “were old friends, and across continents they had arranged the occasion at which Twinkle and Sanjeev were introduced though his parents still lived in Calcutta and that of her in California” (142). They come
from different cultural backgrounds with different experiences. This story deals with a relatively early period of the married life when the partners are quite emotionally attached to each other. Still the incidents captured in the narrative reveal the inherent incompatibility of Twinkle and Sanjeev because of their contrastive temperaments and tastes. The couple keeps encountering flashy Christian things left behind by their home’s former owners, like a statue of Mary, a plastic nativity scene, etc. Sanjeev and Twinkle who have moved to newly purchased house in the USA. There they find the statue of Christ. Twinkle is excited about this discovery and starts calling the house ‘a blessed house’ but Sanjeev is not happy about this. He says, “We are not Christians” (137). The existence of Christian symbols at home is uncomfortable for him. In order to remove these symbols from the house, Sanjeev quarrels with Twinkle. She explores both the complications of an arranged marriage and the adjustments that must be made to accommodate a couple’s different personalities within any relationship.

Twinkle, the female protagonist represents second-generation female immigrants who, being submerged by the culture of the other for rather a long time, have fashioned such hybrid diasporic identities, which let them survive and succeed even far above their male counterparts. Twinkle’s parents have lived in California and seemingly, she (belonging with the second-generation immigrants) is simply an American of Indian origin. It is a preference to welcome multiplicity and to embrace the conflicting aspects of the blended culture. Later, when Twinkle’s guest considers her name as strange, she shows no signs of shame and sorrow. Instead, who probably has accepted the ridiculous ring to names like hers in an American context “There is an actress in Bombay named Dimple Kapadia. She
even has a sister named Dimple” (151), is able to start a self-derision without being upset or disturbed. It is this dynamic positive hybridity present in Twinkle that makes her survival definite and gives her superiority and charm over other female characters whose confrontation with the other either involves them in cycles of escape or at most terrible in a total otherness. In other words, there is still time and hope of survival for those like Sanjeev and Mrs. Sen to pass through the threshold of liminality into the hybrid space. Sanjeev is a displaced person but he wanted to save his original identity. He is irritated because Twinkle does not come up to his expectations of wifehood due to her careless and lazy indifference towards the kitchen and the upkeep of the household and on the other hand, because of her, childlike fascination for the Christian things that she keeps finding in the house. Twinkle in her manner and habits is more American than Indian. R.Chetty states: “positively negotiates her identity as an American of Indian descent” (Chetty 23). With her Americanized orientation, she responds to Christianity and its symbols in a way in which Sanjeev cannot. Their contrastive religious and cultural orientation soon manifests itself in a kind of open antagonism. Thus, we can say national and cultural identities are not fixed. Lahiri explores both the complications of an arranged marriage and the adjustments that must be made to accommodate a couple’s dissimilar personalities within any relationship. As Sanjeev’s character shows, the immigrant experience is often painful and the adjustments frequently overwhelming. Talking about various aspects of identity, Psychologist Sudhir Kakar says:

An individual’s sense of identity is neither completely conscious nor unconscious, although, at times, it appears to be exclusively
one or the other. At some place identity is referred to as conscious sense of individual uniqueness, at others, to an unconscious striving for continuity of experience, and yet other places as a sense of solidarity with a group’s ideal (Kakar 16).

*The Treatment of Bibi Haldar* and *A Real Durwan* are the examples of the effects of globalization in India. Although, the Indian government officially eliminated the caste system in 1949, it is still a part of the social structure in India because of its deep-rooted tradition in history. If marriage creates a problem for other couples, getting married is the problem for Bibi Haldar in *The Treatment of Bibi Haldar*. Bibi is twenty-nine year old poor sickly Indian girl gripped with the idea that her life would be meaningful only if she got married and had a family of her own. Staying with her elder cousin and his wife in a rented apartment in Calcutta in pitiable and humiliating conditions, she desperately wants to get married like other girls in her cultural background. Initially, she feels more frustrated at being denied the participation in the ceremonies connected with marriage that she cherishes and values so much.

*The Treatment of Bibi Haldar* and *Mrs. Sen* have two shared points: firstly, both women are thirty years old. Secondly, Bibi Haldar’s neighbors are replications of those Indian neighbors who Mrs. Sen had longed for in America: “At home that is all you have to do. Not everybody has a telephone but just raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole neighborhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with arrangements”( 128). Bibi has suffered from a strange unknown disease, and while numerous possible treatments have been suggested, none has proved to be useful. Bibi longs for a normal life in
which she can have a husband and bear children. Yet, her attempt fails as nobody agrees to take the sick Bibi Haldar as a wife. The twist though comes at the end of the story when Bibi, who has led a life of loneliness and isolation on the roof of the building, gets pregnant and, gives birth to a son, finally yet strangely cured. The lonely, neglected and underprivileged girl had neither the physical attributes nor the social/financial status or concerned relatives to find a husband for her. In addition, she suffers, since early childhood, from a mysterious malady that could not be diagnosed despite the best efforts of her father and others. Bibi’s” liable to fall unconscious and enter, at any moment, into a shameless delirium, Bibi could be trusted neither to cross a street nor board a tram without supervision” (159).

To add to her woes, her cousin and his wife, finding her too much of a liability and nuisance, desert her by moving out of that building, leaving her alone to fend for herself. Her friendly neighborhood comes to her save and she not only survives on her own but also finds meaning and purpose in life when unable to find a husband for herself. She wishes to deny a man of any power or right on her offspring. She is not amazingly cured of her almost incurable sickness; she also becomes financially independent with the help of neighbors and sympathetic women by taking control of the shop vacated by her cousin. Reading the story in the light of female identity-formation process, one can come up with the view that The Treatment of Bibi Haldar is a commentary on the contractedness of the Indian notion of feminity and its possible burden on the life of the marginalized female in Calcutta, India. Simone de Beauvoir argued in her most famous work The Second Sex (1949), that:
Women were always the negative of the men, where man was the ideal, the norm and the women, the deviant or the other. This is the process of othering where women will always be seen, not as independent. Men and women are constantly engaged in this subject-other relation where the man is the subject and the woman the other. It is based on this myth of the Woman as inferior and Man is superior. Simone De Beauvoir’s states: “One is not born a woman but becomes one” (Beauvoir 267).

The process of othering takes place everywhere and at all times; identities, therefore, are always in the process of being made and remade. The source of this disease seems to be nothing but a departure from an adherence to the ethnic cultural codes. Anyone not clinging to these codes is doomed to Otherness even in her own homeland. Bibi’s disease is the result of her breaking of such codes both by her physical look; “She was not pretty. Her upper lip was thin, her teeth too small. Her gums protruded when she spoke” (174), and the things she could not do; “Bibi had never been taught to be a woman” (178). Many women enter the "unorganized, underground economy”. In this type of economy, there are extended hours, horrible conditions, poor wages, and they treated unfairly. Furthermore, women's poverty is direct link to the lack of access to education and legitimate healthcare. Lack of communication leads to isolation, she is isolated because of her illness; she is unable to communicate her needs to those around her because she is marginalized by society. Isolation leads to displacement. Therefore, we can say that displacement is the central theme in the story. This story ignores the immediate cultural and social context to give a direction to the sequence of
events that assert the dispensability not only of man but also of the institution of marriage. Rather than the husband or a religiously or socially solemnized marriage, the story appears to emphasize that it is the child or rather the reproductively of the mother and her independence and ability to survive on her own that gives purpose and meaning to life of a woman.

*The Third and the Final Continent* is the final story in the collection, told by a male narrator. It presents a contrast of attitudes and culture between two women whose husbands die early leaving the families to fend for themselves. The narrator’s mother was completely devastated by the death of her husband. Physically, she did not commit sati (self-immolation) with him, as an orthodox patriarchal/feudal ideology would have expected her, back in the nineteenth century when Mrs. Croft was born but symbolically she died with him, losing completely her sanity reason and dignity. She had to be protected and cared for by her sons: she “refused to adjust to life without her husband; instead she sank deeper in to a world of darkness from which nothing could save her” (187). Even as one hundred and thirty years old woman she hates having to depend on her daughter or anyone else in a way. She has a passion for and involvement with life that makes her celebrates the landing of two Americans on the moon in 1969. The death of his mother had brought relief to the narrator but he mourns. Mrs. Croft also contrasts with that of narrator’s wife Mala who as a twenty-seven year-old bride missed her parents and wept after her marriage. When his wife Mala arrives in America, Mrs. Croft called her a perfect woman after seeing her in the Indian sari. This compliment from Mr. Croft evokes a sympathy and love in his mind for his wife because until now he had an aversion to the idea of an arranged marriage. Lahiri explores the idea that, identity, especially for immigrants, is something that
is required. We gain a sense of identity through family, society and culture. He is born in Asia, travels to Europe to study, and finally immigrates to North America. Although he has adapted to the British way of life as a student, it is not a true cultural integration as “he lives in a house occupied entirely by penniless Bengali bachelors like him” (173). He attempts to keep his cultural identity intact by keeping the most trivial of Indian traditions alive, such as eating ‘egg curry’. When he is posted to America, he relies on the Britishness that he has learned in London, converting ‘ounces to grams’ and comparing “prices to things in England” (175) as a survival strategy. Even in America Mala depends completely on her husband. As a wife totally dependent on her husband in an alien social and cultural environment, the circumstances of Mala’s life in Boston closely resemble that of Mrs. Sen’s. However the narrator was able to find time to accompany Mala and ‘together’ they “explored the city and met other Bengali’s discovered that a man named Bill sold fresh fish took pictures of her so that she could send them to her parents and discovered pleasure and solace in each other’s arms”(196).

The speaker sees only their differences, whereas Mrs. Croft appreciates Mala’s grace and charm. The speaker’s ability to adjust is Lahiri points out, a human adaptation. He has discovered that the ability to feel at home no matter what country he lives in comes only from having a strong sense of self. The “ambition that had first hurled him across the world” (197) is part of his ability to know himself and to recognize that the strength he gains from his origins is the ideal foundation on which to build a strong identity. The core of this story lies in his interactions with Mrs. Croft, which affected his own arranged but adjusted marriage, and his consciousness of the differences between Indian and American ways bring about a long and loving relationship with his wife, Mala. The main
reason for his migration seems economic. The narrator gets an offer of a full time job in America in processing apartment of a library at MIT. Lahiri shows the marital relationships and different factors responsible for disharmony and discontent at different stages of relationships. The remarkable thing about these relationships is that in most cases the spouses are faithful towards each other and are not exceptionally mean or selfish. Happiness and dignity appear to lie in self-sufficiency and freedom from dependence on any man or any patriarchal institution like marriage and family. The narrator thinks that he and his wife became Americans but still attached with South Asian food and Indian tradition. The narrator wants his son to retain his Indian culture. Eating rice by hand and speaking Bengali are two important symbols in this story, which proved the original nationality is still important for the migrant.
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(All the references in the parenthesis are from this edition only).