CHAPTER – III
CULTURAL FRAGMENTS

All human beings are part of a culture. Though one does not identify himself with a particular culture, he/she is already part of a particular culture. It is an identity one gets even at the time of death, which can never be changed. Culture consists of beliefs, behaviours, objects, and other characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society. Through culture, people and groups define themselves, conform to society’s shared values and contribute to society. Thus, culture includes many societal aspects: language, customs, values, norms, mores, rules, tools, technologies, products, organizations and institutions.

Inevitably, each individual is part of a popular culture and people are proud of their own culture that gives them a distinct identity. Since, the displaced people are left with two choices regarding the culture. They can either assimilate or resist certain cultural practices in both the cultures. Hence it results in the loss of one’s own identity and it causes identity crisis. This chapter deals with the cultural fragments of the immigrants based on their assimilation, resistance and identity crisis.

The threat to a culture comes from various sources in different forms and at different times. As long as the people stick to one place and live together as a group, they resist change and succeed in preserving their culture and individuality. On the contrary, the modern globalized world has dismantled all unities and people go to different places to ensure survival. This has led to the fragments in the culture of the individuals who follows it. But the dislocated people live alone and they are vulnerable to the changes in their language, religion, customs and values. For example, when an Indian goes to US for job, he has to speak only in English for official work and for other social interactions. These people try to ensure the use of
the mother tongue at home and form associations to keep their spirit alive. Thus, they partially succeed in resisting the change in terms of language.

The toughest test the migrants face is resisting change in their religion and customs. Regarding religion most of the people survive since the European countries are secular and nobody will raise voice against individual’s faith. When it comes to the way of life, food and marriage, most of the people could not withstand pressure and they are succumbed by the external pressure. For example, in a tradition-driven community, the orthodox people will be for the marriage within community. On the contrary, in the modern times, especially in the migrated lands, there are many mixed marriages. Such inter-caste and inter-racial marriages have become the order of the day and it has to be accepted by each community.

Popular interests like Arts, Music and Food have undergone tremendous change in the minds of the migrated people. Since the new type of arts, music and food surrounds them, they embrace the new things and their interests assimilate with the newones. It is a known fact that whenever the old ways are forgotten or modified, it upsets the individual and it leads to many problems. But people have to stay in the alien land for survival. As a result, people resist hard for keeping their identity intact for some time. In course of the time, they assimilate with the mainstream society embracing the new identity of the alien land.

“Acculturation” refers to the assimilation towards a different culture and resistance towards a different culture refers to “Contra-acculturation”. These compound global culture results in identical indifferences in post-colonial phenomena. This varied identity finally leads to identity crisis. However, a culture within its domain acts as a unifying factor and across nations as a dividing factor. True culture can be defined as the ability to appreciate the other culture. The ability
of the characters to accommodate and absorb the other culture without losing their Indianness is the major concern of Lahiri’s writings.

There are similarities between the life of Lahiri and the challenges the characters face in her works. She was born to Bengali parents in London and moved to Rhode Island. Her life shows that her cultural upbringing is not homogeneous. She is a recent entrant into the world of Indian writers and tackles the problems of cultural identity of Indians in a far off land. She took the literary world by storm when her book *The Interpreter of Maladies* won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 2000. *The Namesake*, is an ambitious attempt to chart the lives of a family of immigrants through the eyes of a young boy and was adapted into a Hollywood movie directed by Mira Nair. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, the writer has returned to the short story form. Once again, she shows her expertise in comprehending the Bengali-American experience, succeeding immigrants and their offspring while navigating borders and expectations.

Each culture has its own set of practices and customs. It has its own food habits, dressings, religious beliefs, rites, rituals, ceremonies and festivals. Wherever people go, they follow their own culture and tradition. Similarly, Lahiri’s characters almost belong to the Bengali culture. It has established itself as the one of the world’s greatest cultures. Bengalis have high regard for scholarship and learning. Rice and fish are the staple food of the Bengali Indians. A meal is incomplete without sweets. Bengali women wear saris and they keep vermillion on the parting of their hair. Bengali men wear pajamas or Punjabi dhotis. The most popular festivals are the Pujas. The greatest social and religious event of the Bengalis is Durga Puja, where Mother Durga is worshipped as the Goddess of Shakti. It is celebrated in the month of October. Bengalis love to watch movies, read books of literature and participate in
music and dance functions. Most of the characters of Lahiri practice the cultural stigmas and keep at least the spirit of culture and tradition alive.

**In The Namesake**, Lahiri’s characters are Bengali Indians settled in US. In this novel, the characters are classified into two sets of people culturally: the first generation American settlers and the second generation Indian Americans. Ashoke and Ashima are the first generation settlers of US. Their children Gogol and Sonia belong to the second category. Almost all her main characters are split between two cultures namely the Indian and the American. This chapter analyses these cultural split-ups, the so-called cultural fragments in a detailed manner.

**The Namesake** narrates the life of Gangulis in Boston and Calcutta. They are educated, cultured and elite Calcuttans. They are lovers of the Russian and English Literatures. They love to read the books of the authors like Dostoyevesky, Leo Tolstoy, Charles Dickens, Greene and Somerset Maugham. Even during the train accident, Gogol was reading Nikolai Gogol’s *The Overcoat*, which saves his life.

Naming a newborn is a practice in every society. Lahiri presents this practice with bicultural implications. According to Indian custom, the baby is privileged to have the names of his grandparents and the elder members of the family. While in American custom, the baby is given a name at Baptism. The Indians use the naming ceremony for socialization with the relatives. The Bengalis ensure to follow certain cultural practices during ceremonies and festival occasions. Since Ashima gives birth to a child at US in a hospital, they are forced to give up such religious ceremony for their son and compelled to name him for completing the formalities in the hospital. It proves the fact, one has to oblige to the rules and regulations of the migrated land at the cost of his/her own cultural practices. Hence, Ashoke names his son Gogol and Ashima agrees to it hesitantly.
In Bengali culture, there is not baptism for babies. Instead, the first formal ceremony centres around the baby’s consumption of solid food called as Annaprasan. When Gogol is six months old, he had his Annaprasan, the rice ceremony. Dilip Nandi is asked to play the role of his maternal uncle. Gogol is dressed as an infant Bengali groom, in a pale yellow pajamas from his grandmother in Calcutta. His tiny forehead was decorated with sandalwood paste to form six miniature beige moons floating above his brows. His eyes were decorated with a touch of kohl. He sat on the lap of Dilip Nandi and was surrounded by other Bengali friends and acquaintances of their parents. Judy and Alan, the landlords also attended this ceremony. The food was arranged in ten separate bowls. The final bowl was Payesh, a warm rice pudding.

A handful of women ululate as the proceedings begin. A conch shell is repeatedly tapped and passed around, but no one in the room is able to get it to emit a sound. The child is entranced, doesn’t squirm or turn away, opens his mouth obediently for each and every course. He takes his payesh three times. Ashima’s eyes filled with tears as Gogol’s mouth eagerly invites the spoon. (NS 40)

After this ceremony, a grand lunch of Bengali food is arranged with the biryani, carp in yogurt sauce, dal and six different vegetable dishes. Usually, Bengalis are fond of eating many dishes of different tastes. They sit cross-legged on the floor and dine in plantain leaf. Through the depiction of this naming ceremony, Lahiri points out how the Bengalis take pride arranging a party with their traditional food in the alien land. They utilize every opportunity like this to establish the individuality of their culture.

Ashoke and Ashima want their children to be rooted in Bengali tradition. They tried to preserve their culture by visiting India once a year during their Christmas vacation. So that their children can witness their own Bengali culture
practised by many people and through which they will be inspired a lot. They also had
t heir weekend get togethers at US. In get togethers, all Bengali friends join at one of
t heir homes in turns, eat Bengali food, sing and dance. Thus they try to keep intact
their culture and train their children to be a Bengali. Gogol is trained to call those sari
worn Bengali women as “Dada”, and dhoti worn Bengali men as “Mamu”. Thus, he
learns to recognize the photographs of his grandparents and uncles in India.

The first generation American settlers practise their native culture on birth and
death days, marriages, annaprasan and pujas. Like birth, death also provides an
opportunity to the Bengalis to practice their customs. When Ashima’s father is dead,
she refuses to fly back home. Because, she cannot see her mother’s vermilion erased
from her part and her brother’s thick hair shaved from his head in mourning as a part
of ritual. Ashoke also mourned for his father’s death. Later Ashoke himself is dead.
At first, a short obituary is published in the names of Ashima, Gogol and Sonia. For
ten days they ate the mourner’s diet, forgoing meat and fish. On the eleventh day, they
performed a ritual and ate together. Lahiri in the novel, narrates with a sense of
sentiments:

A short obituary runs in the town paper, citing the names of Ashima
and Gogol and Sonia, mentioning that the children had been educated
at the local schools. In the middle of the night, they call their relatives
in India. For the first time in their lives, it’s they who have bad news to
bear. For ten days following his father’s death, he and his mother and
Sonia eat a mourner’s diet, forgoing meat and fish. They eat only rice
and dal and vegetables, plainly prepared, Gogol remembers having to
do the same thing when he was younger, when his grandparents died,
his mother yelling at him when he forgot one day and had a hamburger at school. (NS 180)

Marriage is another important occasion in one’s life in which the uniqueness of a culture is established through various ceremonies, dress, food and other formalities. After Ashoke’s death, Ashima plans for Gogol’s marriage with a Bengali girl named Moushumi. Gogol dresses himself in a parchment coloured Punjabi top and a dhoti with a pair of nagrai slippers on his legs. Moushumi wears a sari and has twenty pounds of jewels on her. Their marriage is a traditionally arranged Bengali marriage. Ashoke wears Punjabi top and dhoti during Pujas. During Durga Puja Bengalis become nostalgic towards Calcutta and wish to visit the city of joy. On Puja women wear Banarasi sari and gold jewellery. Men wear dhoti and topor, pajamas and Punjabis. They also celebrate all the festivals and functions of Bengalis in their tradition to preserve the culture.

Though the expatriates enjoy better position in terms of career and money, at one point they feel that they deserve a better place in their society, which they can never get in the migrated land. It makes them think that if they were in the motherland, they could have got much recognition. But the present situations do not allow them to go back to their native place. So they try to rectify the damage through their children. They teach their children about their family lineage, religious customs, rites, beliefs, food and mannerisms. They feel happy when their children memorise Tagore’s poems, the names of Hindu deities like Saraswati, Kartik, Lakshmi and Ganesha and for adorning Goddess Durga during the Puja.

Sometimes, if she is feeling energetic, she asks Gogol to go and get photo album, and together they look at pictures of Gogol’s grandparents, and his uncles and aunts and cousins of who, in spite of
his one visit to Calcutta, he has no memory. She teaches him to memorize a four-line children’s poem by Tagore, and the names of the deities adorning the ten-handed goddess Durga during pujas: Saraswathi with her swan and Kartik with his peacock to her left, Lakshmi with her owl and Ganesh with his mouse to her right. Every afternoon Ashima sleeps, but before nodding off she switches the television to Channel 2, and tells Gogol to watch Sesame Street and The electric company in order to keep up with the English he uses at nursery school. (NS 54)

When Gogol is in his third grade, he is sent to learn Bengali language and lessons on culture every Saturday. There he is taught Bengali letters. They read handouts written in English about the Bengali Renaissance, and the revolutionary exploits of Subash Chandra Bose. However, they feel the vacuum and become rootless.

The first generation immigrants are reminded of their elder’s words when they left India. They obey the words of the elders. Married women do not utter their husband’s first name because it is a sin. Ashima never uttered her husband’s name. “When she calls out to her husband, she doesn’t say his name. It’s not the type of thing Bengali wives do. And so instead of saying Ashoke’s name, she utters the interrogative that has come to replace it, which translates roughly as “Are you listening to me?” (NS 2). They use vermilion in their parting of their hair as a cultural symbol of the living status of their husband. Ashima wears a sari and keeps vermilion until Ashoke’s death, she does not change her appearance to suit the American culture. She always reminds her family in India and her deceased parents. Women especially housewives like Ashima are able to follow the culture effectively since they are not distracted by the external world.
Though they settle in US, they try to pressurise their own Bengali culture without disturbing or ill treating the other culture. Still they try a lot to assimilate with the American culture. They mingle with the American people in and around their surroundings. Ashoke and Ashima are friendly with Jude and Alan, their landlords. Gangulis give their children American food. They also celebrate Christmas in a grand manner. Ashoke makes Jack-o-lanterns for his daughter Sonia. He takes their children in car and visits various places. All Bengalis long to be in Calcutta for the Durga Pujas, but Gangulis adjust a lot to stay in US till their Christmas vacation. They visit India in the month of December rather than October. Ashima bought modern dresses for her children. In Calcutta, they lived in communities, but in US communities seem to be a disturbance. Gangulis also adapted to such situations. They select a proper name for their second child as Sonia without any trouble. There are so many examples and proved facts to show the Gangulis adaptability towards American culture.

Gogol is ashamed of his name. He did not accept his father’s selection of his name. As he wants to be an American, he chooses his name as “Nikhil” in American style. He took this effort on his fourteenth year by himself. He changes his name to have friendship with his American friends, because they disliked his name and felt him as an alien in their gang. Later, he has many friendships and love affairs as an American. He maintains his relationship with Ruth and Maxine and flirts with them. He enjoys his dating with girls, in spite of his parent’s opposition as cultural deviation. But finally, Gogol is married to Moushumi, a Bengali girl settled in US. His marriage takes place grandly in Bengali wedding style, which is arranged by his mother. However, Sonia is married to Ben, an American. She feels comfortable with American Culture, as her nativity. She does not feel identity crisis like her brother Gogol.
Gogol realizes his mistake of being a fake American in his childhood days. He needs an identity. He feels that he cannot be called an American, as his roots are from India. He also understands the importance of his name then, which was felt earlier by his father. In the novel, Lahiri says

“His father shakes his head. “Not yet. I’ll explain it to her one day. In this country, only your mother knows. And now you, I’ve always meant for you to know, Gogol.

And suddenly the sound of his pet name, uttered by his father as he has been accustomed to hearing it all his life, means something completely new, bound up with a catastrophe he has unwittingly embodied for years. “Is that what you think of when you think of me?” Gogol asks him. Do I remind you of that night?”

“Not at all,” his father says eventually, one hand going to his ribs, a habitual gesture that has baffled Gogol until now. “You remind me of everything that followed.” (NS 124)

So, again he liked to be called as “Gogol” and not as “Nikhil”. After his father’s death, he took the responsibility of being the head of the family. His mother married him to Moushumi. He also accepted to this proposal readily. Both Gogol and Moushumi dreamt of good marriage, profession and identity. Though they practise their native culture, tradition, belief, custom, values and mannerisms at home for a brief time, they belong more to this New American culture in their habits and practices. After marriage, Gogol cherished Moushumi’s love for “a Kashmiri crewel work carpet on the floor, Rajasthani silk pillows on the sofa, a cast-iron Natraj on one of the book cases” (NS 208). At last, their marriage remains to be a broken one in few years. It is important to note that the success of a marriage is not in following one’s
own culture and tradition. It depends upon the mutual love and affection of the couple. For example, in *The Namesake* though Gogol and Moushumi practice their culture in the marriage, it does not withstand. But, Sonia’s marriage is very successful in spite of Ben’s different race.

Next is Moushumi, a second generation Bengali settled in US. She is educated at New York University and her frequent visits to England and France for her research work has made her foreign. Therefore, she assimilates to American culture and resists Indian culture. As a research scholar on French Feminist theory, she has developed an ultra feminist consciousness that goes against her native culture. She had little appreciation for both India and the Indians except Shashi Kapoor and a cousin in India. She is also skeptical about India, US and about her marriage. She is very much westernized in her attitude. She has “privately vowed that she’d never grown fully dependent on her husband” (NS 247). Being a feminist, she is not interested in marriage. If so, she does not like her parents to select her partner. Her friends’ marriages at Calcutta have made her to take an oath of not marrying a Bengali man. For her higher education, she joins Chemistry because of her parent’s compulsion. Without her parents’ awareness, she pursues a double degree in French. Thus, she perfectly leads an American lifestyle.

Moushumi’s four years of secret study made her to fly away to Paris without specific plans. There she meets Graham and falls in love with him. He is an investment banker from New York and is living in Paris for a year. Inspite of her decision, she plans to marry Graham and lives with him. Their marriage is planned and arranged as a Hindu wedding. Suddenly their wedding gets cancelled because of Graham’s sharp criticism of Moushumi’s family heritage. So, they get separated. After few years, Moushumi’s parents arrange her marriage with Ashima’s son, Gogol.
They came to know each other nearly for a year. Then they get married in Bengali tradition. This marriage is also not successful and ends in divorce. Similarly, Moushumi also dislikes her name but does not change her name. Her American friends called her as “Moosmi” or “Moose” which is hated by Moushumi. Ultimately, Moushumi does not feel her loss of identity like Gogol.

Then taking food items into consideration the food items belonging to both the cultures are sparingly used in the novel The Namesake. Ashoke’s favorite dish is lamb curry with potatoes and always like salty taste. He likes to finish his dinner with rice and dal. Ashima’s favorite is Rice Krispies combined with Planters peanuts and chopped red onions. She adds salt, lemon juice and thin slices of green chili pepper to this mixture. She even eats it during the time of her pregnancy. Both Gogol and Sonia are westernized and they love to eat American foods like pizzas, Hamburger, bun and bread, juices, hotdogs, puddings and milk. Gogol’s favorite Indian dishes are lamb curry with lots of potatoes, luchis, thick channa dal with swollen brown raisins, pineapple chutney, sandwiches molded out of saffron tinted ricotta cheese. They all prefer tea [Lipton] along with samosas anytime.

All the functions and ceremonies are arranged at Ganguli’s home itself. Ashima prepares the food at home for guests. At first, in Gogol’s annaprasan many food items are prepared. Next is the Sonia’s rice ceremony, where a grand homemade lunch is prepared. Then, during birthdays a sumptuous meal is prepared. During Pujas, they prepare good, but bland vegetarian food. During Christmas and Thanks Giving Day they prepare roasted turkeys. At Gogol’s marriage, there was a “sit-down” dinner of mounds of hot pink tandoori, aloo gobi in thick orange chauce and chickpeas. In Ashima’s thanks giving party variety of food items are prepared and served: mincemeat croquettes, the dal, roasted cauliflower dish, eggplant, korma of
lamb, sweet yogurt and pantuas are made as desserts. Lahiri takes efforts to document the culturally rich recipes of Bengal in the novel:

She finishes breading the final croquette, and then glances at her wristwatch. She is slightly ahead of schedule. She sets the platter on the counter next to the stove. She takes a pan out of the cupboard and pours in the oil, several cupfuls’, to be heated in the minutes before her guests are expected. From a crock, she selects the slotted spatula she will use. For now, there is nothing left to be done. The rest of the food has been prepared, sitting in long Corning Ware pans on the dining room table: dal coated with a thick skin that will rupture as soon as the first of it is served, a roasted cauliflower dish, eggplant, a korma of lamb. Sweet yogurt and pantuas for dessert sit on the sideboard. She eyes everything with anticipation. Normally cooking for parties leaves her without an appetite, but tonight she looks forward to serving herself, sitting among her guests. (NS 277)

For bereaved ones, the family members eat mourners’ diet of vegetarian food for ten days. The above mentioned food items stands as the reminiscences of their Bengali culture and tradition. Though Gangulis live in US, they prepare and prefer hot and spicy Indian dishes.

Lahiri, equally, presents the modern American food, liked mostly by the settlers in the novel. At first, when Ashima is admitted in hospital for delivery, Patty gives her warm apple juice, Jell-O, ice cream and cold baked chicken. Gogol eats frozen waffles for breakfast. He also eats the pudding and drinks the juice from his mother’s tray in the hospital during Sonia’s birth. While staying in India for eight months, both Gogol and Sonia crave for hamburgers, or a slice of pepperoni pizza or a
cold glass of milk. Then Gogol and Ruth dine at cafe Pamptona and eat ham sandwiches and bowls of soup. During Bengali get togethers, children are given Pizzas or Chinese items to eat. Finally Sonia, Moushumi and Gogol always long for continental dishes. It is Bengali food that Ashima and Ashoke relish and prefer but for Gogol and Sonia they specially arrange American dinner once a week as a treat like shakes and baked chicken or hamburger helper prepared with ground lamb. All Americans are fond of whiskey or scotch and drink it everywhere and at anytime.

There are few contrasts, which are to be seen in particular. The first and foremost thing is Indians are addicted either to coffee or to tea, while Americans enjoy drinking whiskey often. The second is the color of the rice: the rice in Judy’s canister is brown, but Ashima prefers white long grained rice from Purity Supreme. Next is that the Americans prefer half-baked chicken, whereas the Indians prefer well-cleaned and cooked spicy chicken curry or dishes. In Judy and Alan’s home, instead of cereal and teabags, there is whiskey and wine bottles stacked everywhere. Judy misunderstands, Indians to be the vegetarian. Finally, Ashima brings Ashoke homemade Samosas and a thermos of tea at MIT Campus. But in Boston University Jones serves Ashoke homemade banana bread and coffee.

Identity crisis is an important factor in an immigrant’s life. The characters of the novel The Namesake undergo identity crisis, but only Ashima and Gogol are affected very much because of rootlessness. When Ashima finds lonely without her husband, she is unable to decide whether to live in India or in US. She is confused that where she actually belongs, because her brother Rana is in India and her children Gogol and Sonia are in US. Her roots are in India but her fruits are in US. “Ashima has decided to spend six months of her life in India, six months in the States. It is a solitary somewhat premature version of the future she and her husband had planned
when he was alive” (NS 275). Lahiri vividly portrays the identity crisis experienced by the Gangulis. So, Ashima longs to go back to Calcutta, her homeland, but mourns for leaving US, where she has lived for past thirty four years.

In Gogol’s case the scenario is entirely different. In the beginning of the novel, Gogol is fond of American culture and leads an American lifestyle. However, later he realizes the importance of Indian culture. At first he dislikes even his name “Gogol” and changes it as “Nikhil”. But later, he likes his name “Gogol” very much as it [the book of the Russian Writer] saved his father’s life. In the earlier stage, he wants to be transformed into an American completely by changing his name. But his expectations are not fulfilled as his parents, sister and their Bengali friends call him “Gogol”. Similarly, after his father’s death he wants himself to be changed into an Indian and agrees to marry Moushumi, a Bengali American. This also results in failure as their marriage becomes a broken one. Gogol is able to follow neither the Indian culture nor the American culture perfectly. Thus, Gogol is torn between two cultures and loses his identity. Finally, Gogol discovers that in his family, his father is dead, his mother is a widow and “himself” a divorcee and her sister is married to an American. He also realizes that his earlier decision of leading a life in US is a false step. Yet, he is unable to leave US for India or to live in US happily thereafter. Therefore, Gogol’s identity crisis is of greater heights, when compared to other characters in the novel, The Namesake.

Though Gangulis have built their own house in US, they are literally homeless, as their homeland is India. Still, the first generation settlers [Ashoke and Ashima] are able to assimilate to certain American practices and resist few things. The second generations are able to assimilate well to their other world, but only in the beginning stage. However, later they also value Indian culture and even Gogol tries to
adapt it. Moushumi is an exception, because she goes in search of third culture and gets fixed into it. This third culture is French, which is neither American nor Indian. Sonia marries Ben and gets settled within the culture. Thus, Lahiri projects every Indian immigrant in US and Europe through her character Gogol. In the beginning, they perfectly follow acculturation for survival strategy, but finally they try to find solace in contra-acculturation like Gogol.

Addressing the themes of immigration, collision of cultures and the importance of names in The Namesake, Lahiri demonstrates the intensity of immigrant’s struggle. It looks into the second generation immigrant’s cultural dilemma, the child’s struggle to realize that one’s family is different from the others, the teenage desire to fit into a culture so different from that of one’s parents, and the adult desire to reconcile what is left behind and gets lost in the transition from one culture to another.

The nine short stories in the Interpreter of Maladies, speak volume about the family life of immigrants. Lahiri has written about different families settled in the foreign land [US], but they do not have their home metaphorically. Though they are far away from their homeland, they try to keep their culture alive and intact. As well as they try to adapt themselves with the existing culture in their settled areas. Immigrants also get in touch with their own set of people either through the University Directory or by having conversations in the YouTube or at the grocers and form a sort of community. Indians are fond of making communities while the community feeling is absent in US. Through these communities, they bring back their Indian culture, forming “little Indias” irrespective of religion, caste, creed and particular sect.
Lahiri’s characters, located in the Diaspora state or space, indeed belong to different stages of acculturation. Shoba and Shukumar in “A Temporary Matter”, as well as the Das in “Interpreter of Maladies” are Americanized and they belong to hybrid culture. Lilia in “When Mr. Pirzada came to Dine” is born and brought up in the US and looks upon her parent’s cultural habits with some confusion. Boori Ma in “A Real Durwan” is deported to Calcutta from East Pakistan [Bangladesh] because of Partition and she had lost her roots. Sen in “Mrs.Sen’s” is born and brought up in India and got settled in US after marriage. She is a new comer to US who is still deeply rooted in the culture that she has left behind. Twinkle and Sanjeev in “This Blessed House” are Americanised. Twinkle becomes more and more American while Sanjeev tries to identify himself with the Indian culture. The unnamed narrator in “The Third and Final Continent” has survived well in the three continents he has travelled. His wife Mala is bicultural. She was born and brought up in India and she is able to adapt well to the US culture, still holding her own culture.

In the story “A Temporary Matter”, Shoba and Shukumar are husband and wife living in American style. The description of Shoba makes her typical American than Indian. In the story, Lahiri portrays: “She wore a navy blue poplin raincoat over gray sweatpants and white sneakers, looking at thirty three, like the type of woman, she’d once claimed she would never resemble” (IM 1). She also uses lipstick, eyeliner etc. They always drink coffee but not tea. So, they are American in their attitude, dressing, eating habits, dinner style, sharing of household works and at throwing parties. Above all, finally Shoba has decided to live in a separate house without her husband. The Indianisms seen in this short story are the power cut, Shoba’s mother worshipping idols, her knitting of beige, her respect towards her son-in-law and their true love. Similarly cooking and maintenance of home by Shoba in
the earlier stage but it does not continue till the end that project well that Shoba and Shukumar are more American than Indian.

In “When Mr. Pirzada came to dine”, Lilia’s family is well settled in US. Lilia’s parents follow both the Indian and American culture. Lilia is brought up in American culture. Pirzada belongs to Dacca, but came to US for a year to do his research. Lilia’s parents are interested in creating communities they browse the “University directory” and ring a call to the persons belonging to their part of the world. Pirzada is also discovered so, and is invited to Lilia’s home. That year Pakistan is engaged in Civil war. In order to know about the whereabouts of his family, he comes to Lilia’s House for watching television and for his dinner. Lilia’s father tells her that Pirzada is a Bengali, but he is a Muslim. As a child, she is not able to understand this and becomes confused. Lahiri narrates Lilia’s confusion vividly:

Nevertheless my father insisted that I understand the difference, and he led me to a map of the world taped to the wall over his desk. He seemed concerned that Mr. Pirzada might take offense if I accidentally referred to him as an Indian though I could not really imagine Mr. Pirzada being offended by much of anything. “Mr. Pirzada is Bengali but he is a Muslim” my father informed me. “Therefore he lives in East Pakistan, not India” (IM 25).

The immigrants who have lived in India keep on lamenting for their inability to socialize with the relatives and the things they miss in US. Lilia’s parents feel for the non-availability of mustard oil in the supermarket, doctors for not responding house calls and the invitation by the neighbors for visiting their house. Lahiri points out the key difference between the Indians and the Americans as far as the relatives are concerned. The migrated Indians are very keen in finding friends and invite them
to their home for lunch or dinner. They do it voluntarily as Lilia’s parents discover Pirzada through University directory. On the other hand, Americans do not invite their friends to home. It seems that Indians do this desperately of finding a fellow Indian to overcome their loneliness. This behavior of Americans proves that they do not accept non Americans as their relatives in spite of their close association for a longer time. Pirzada’s humbleness and his education mark the Indian culture.

Lahiri in the short story collection, provides enough space to incorporate the traces of culture exist in US and the characters encounter with it, the moment they land in US. First is the designing or making of jack-o-lantern and the other is the celebration of Halloween. Their Jack-o-lantern is designed by Pirzada as per the instructions of Lilia. During Halloween, Lilia and Dora are dressed as witch, and are sent out by themselves unattended that is a trend in US. But in India, children are under adult supervision and they are not given full fledged freedom like Americans. Similarly, in India, the children of a family have similar names and the first letters are same. In this story, Pirzada has seven daughters all between the ages of six and sixteen. All the seven names begin with the letter A. “Mr. Pirzada says, “How am I to distinguish? Ayesha, Amira, Amina, Aziza, you see the difficulty” (IM 24). Above all praying for all, thanking a person and missing a dear person are special characteristics of Indian people. Hence, Lahiri has also provided enough imageries of Indian culture in the story.

In the story “Interpreter of Maladies”, Das is born and brought up in US. Their retired parents live at Assansol, India. Therefore, they visit India once in two years. They have three children namely Tina, Ronny and Bobby. The entire family seems to be Indian but dressed as foreigners. In this story, American culture and Indian art and architecture are dealt in detail. The physical appearance of Mina shows
her as an American. She is much more American in her attitude. She gives a
handshake to Kapasi on his introduction. Ronny is fathered by Das, whereas Bobby is
fathered by his Punjabi friend.

The plight of Das is that he has his roots in India, but he comes to know about
India through a book titled “INDIA” in yellow colour. He is interested in visiting
India like a tourist as well as like a researcher. His appearance makes him to look like
an American. In US, the drivers usually sit on the left side of the cars while in India it
is vice-versa. Bobby asked, “Daddy, why is the driver sitting on the wrong side in
this car too” (IM 18). All the time they prefer A.C., even they ask for air conditioned
car. Their accent sounds like the ones on the American television programmes.
Though the characters are American, they are unable to forget their Indian roots and
are fond of certain Indianisms and Lahiri presents it in the novel. The first one is
Mina eating puffed rice tossed with Peanuts and Chilli peppers from a newspaper
cone. The Indian sculptures at Konark are seen and discussed in many places. The
animal imagery, Dallas T.V. shows, Bullock Carts, interests in watching T.V.
Programmes stands for typical Indian culture.

Kapasi is an Indian, driving Indian American family to the Sun Temple at
Konark. Despite the familiarity of Das’ appearance, Kapasi comes to learn that this
family is as foreign as his other passengers are. The strange behavior of the couple
towards each other and towards their children baffles him. Every one of them is living
in his/her own world. The parents are not very attentive and concern towards the
children, the children is not obedient to their parents. They are much more
Americanised than Americans themselves with their love for freedom and
independence. This episode portrays the encounter between the Indian culture and the
Western culture. Taking care of the children is one of the most important
characteristics of Indian tradition. That is why the parents try to keep the children under their control. Whereas in US, though the parents provide financial support to the children. The children do not get sincere parental care as their Indian counterparts receive but they enjoy better freedom. Here, since the family of Das is influenced by the American culture they have become irresponsible towards their children. Through this Lahiri exposes the important cultural degradation in the life of migrants.

In the story “A Real Durwan”, Boori Ma is settled in India after partition. She moves from East Pakistan [Bangladesh] to Calcutta. Though her native culture is similar to the culture of the settled country, her economical status varies. In Bangladesh, she belongs to a Zamindar family. The turmoil has separated her from her husband, four daughters, a two-storey brick house, a rosewood alamari and a number of coffer boxes. Her third daughter is married to a School Principal. She also continues that, “Mustard prawns were steamed in banana leaves. Not a delicacy was spared. Not that this was an extravagance for us. At our house, we ate goat twice a week. We had a pond on our property, full of fish” (IM 71). Lahiri, in the story brings out Boori Ma’s sophisticated lifestyle at Bangladesh that she does not experience in the alien situation.

Boori Ma works as a sweeper of the stairwell building at Calcutta. She possesses a bucket, quilts and the bundle of reeds that serve as a broom. As she is able to adapt and assimilate with her present situation, she is able to resist her past. Here comes the question of identity, as people cannot believe what Boori Ma says. Her statements are always full of contradictions. This automatically leads her towards identity crisis.

In the story “Sexy”, Laxmi is married nine years ago. She is living an Indian way of life style. She has a son named Rohin. Dev, her husband, wants to get away
from Laxmi. He resists Indian culture of marrying once and being in a family. Like an American, he wants to have another girl named Miranda. Except Laxmi, all others belong to the American tradition.

Dev deserts his wife for Miranda. Miranda also loves Dev, knowing well about the fact that Dev is already married. She loves him because Dev calls her “sexy” at Mapparium. Later she realizes her mistake when Laxmi’s son calls her sexy, and decides to leave Dev for the sake of his family. However, literally they are more American by assimilating towards American culture. There are also traces of the Indian culture or Indian imageries seen in this novel, such as taking photograph in front of Taj Mahal, the Hot Mix, quest for learning many languages, make-up items, shopping, maze, card games, watching television, Dixin’s family, two braids hairstyle, Bombay actress Madhuri Dixit. Then, children knowing about countries and its capitals, papadum and chutney, “Mira”, the goddess Kali, dressing style and samosas stand for Indiannes in this story.

In the story “Mrs. Sen’s”, Sen lives in US but longs for India. She is a baby sitter for Eliot, the eleven years old boy during afternoons. In this story both Indian and American culture can be compared and contrasted with the two characters: Sen and Eliot’s mother. Sen’s husband works as a Professor in the Department of Mathematics at the University. He tries to assimilate with the American culture. She engages herself by becoming a babysitter. US is a place where community feeling is absent which she could not tolerate. When she tries to be friendly with her neighbours, they feel as if their privacy and loneliness are being disturbed. Even, when Eliot’s mother comes to take Eliot home, she is also invited and served something to eat which Eliot mother dislikes. The description of Sen’s house proves
her inefficiency in interior decoration that she hates to its core. Finally, she even tries to learn driving. Ultimately, she meets with a minor accident.

Sen hailing from India is engrossed completely in Indian culture and unable to get back from it. She lives in past culture with its reminiscences like the blade for cutting vegetables, the sarees in wardrobe, preparation of Indian dishes, teapot, her and jewellery. Like any other Bengali, she loves fish the most and even takes effort to get it at US from the beach.

Eliot and his mother are the epitome of American culture. Like all Americans, Eliot’s mother wants to be independent. She goes for a job. They live in a beach house. Their house is decorated aptly. They live in a deserted area without friendly neighbors. Eliot, being the companion of Sen, always compares Sen’s home with theirs. When Sen says “home” she means India and even considers her living in US, as living in “apartments”. She is traditional and wears saree. She always checks her mailbox for letters from India. She talks to Eliot about India gloriously. However, she tries hardly to adapt towards the American culture, which results in the utter failure. Her plight is very dangerous, as she cannot go back to India or to live in her temporary house at US, following the American culture. She is literally torn into pieces between two cultures.

In the story “This Blessed House”, the central characters are Twinkle and Sanjeev belong to the second generation settlers. They got married and bought a house at Connecticut. Twinkle is Americanised while Sanjeev is more Indian than American. They try to find a balance between each other. They have planned for a housewarming ceremony. So they started cleaning the house. While cleaning they found many things belonging to Christian religion. Twinkle liked these precious hunts always, but Sanjeev disliked it.
Twinkle being an American, smokes and drinks whiskey. She is not a great cook and detests Indian dishes. She is not obedient to her husband like an Indian wife. She wants to be independent always. But Sanjeev expects Twinkle to be the opposite of what she loves to be. Sanjeev wants Twinkle to be a typical Indian wife. Therefore, at times he hates Twinkle. Here the cultural clashes result in the disaster of separating a family. Because Twinkle cannot resist American culture and Sanjeev is unable to assimilate completely towards the American culture and vice-versa.

In the story “The Treatment of Bibi Haldar”, Bibi was deeply rooted in Indian culture. Bibi suffers for a long time due to incurable physical ailments. Because of her sufferings, her cycle as a girl is not fulfilled properly. So, she desires at most to get married soon and give birth to a child on her own. To the extent that her desire is the only remedy for her cure.

But then a new treatment was prescribed for Bibi, the most outrageous of them all. One evening on her way to dinner, she collapsed on the third floor landing, pounding her fists, kicking her feet, seating buckets to this lost world. Her moans echoed through the stairwell, and we rushed out of our apartments to calm her at once, bearing palm fans and sugar-cubes, and tumblers of refrigerated water to pour on her head. Our children clung to the banisters and witnessed her paroxysm; our servants were sent to summon her cousin. It was ten minutes before Haldar emerged from his shop, impassive apart the red from his face. He told us to stop fussing, and then with no effort to repress his disdain he packed her into a rickshaw bound for the polyclinic. It was there, after performing a series of blood tests, that the doctor in charge
of Bibi’s case, exasperated, concluded that a marriage would cure her. (IM 161)

Bibi also needs a man to marry her and voices for the search of a suitable man. Lahiri shows Bibi’s love for Indian marriage,

Each day she unloaded her countless privations upon us, until it became unendurably apparent that Bibi wanted a man. She wanted to be spoken for, protected, placed on her path in life. Like the rest of us, she wanted to serve suppers, scold servants, and set aside money in her alamari to have her eyebrow threaded every week at the Chinese beauty parlour. She pestered us for details of our own weddings: the jewels, the invitations, the scent of tuberoses stung over the nuptial bed. When at her insistence, we showed her our photo albums embossed with the designs of butterflies, she poured over the snapshots that chronicled the ceremony: butter poured in fires, garlands exchanged, vermilion painted fish, trays of shells and silver coins. “An impressive number of guests,” she would observe, stroking with her finger the misplaced faces that have surrounded us. When it happens to me, you will all be present. Anticipation began to plague her with such that the thought of a husband, on which all her hopes were pinned and threatened at times to send her into another attack. (IM 160)

Consequently, the neighborhood took great pains to transform her into a perfect lady and find her a suitable partner, but it does not materialize. Therefore, the failure of getting a husband still deteriorates Bibi’s health condition.

The people in this story are also obsessed with Indian culture. Because of superstitious belief, Bibi is condemned for the disease of her relative’s newly born
baby. She is forced to live separately on the top of the roof. There she was once found to be conceived and delivered a fatherless baby. Still, it cured her illness. Later, she raised the boy by running a business of selling cosmetics in her store room itself. Thus she lived a happy and peaceful life then after. Yet she suffers a lot because of her identity crisis.

In the story “The Third and Final Continent”, the nameless narrator is born in India. He studied in Britain and moves to US for his job. Still he maintains his Indian culture and he marries a girl named Mala from India. Adapting to the ways and culture of three continents, the man and his wife succeeded in retaining and enriching their own original cultural identity in US for thirty years. He also understood that his son who is studying in Harvard University would carry on the tradition, which he has set. His son is highly acculturated and motivated.

As far as identity crisis is concerned, the characters are not affected more like those of The Namesake. Shoba and Shukumar realize their identity crisis from the death of their new born child. They lost their meaningful family life. In the story “Interpreter of Maladies”, Bobby alone lost his identity, as he is fathered by his father’s friend which remains a secret. Boori Ma lost her identity as she is deported to Calcutta. Sen is the foremost character undergoing identity crisis in this book of short stories, Interpreter of Maladies. She feels herself rootless as an immigrant. In “This Blessed House”, Sanjeev feels losing his identity because of Twinkle’s interest in Christian symbols. Bibi lost her identity because she got conceived without knowing her husband. Similarly, her son experiences identity crisis, because he is fatherless. Therefore, there are different kinds of identity loss or identity crisis. For Sen, it is loss of social identity. She left Calcutta and lost her female friends and Bengali acquaintances. For Boori Ma, it is the loss of her economic identity and
financial status. She lost her property and is taken to Calcutta as a refugee. Pirzada’s identity loss is due to temporary political crisis of the Bangladesh War in 1947. For Sanjeev it is his loss of religious identity. Finally, the problem of the unnamed narrator in “The Third and Final Continent” is related to the identity crisis of the second generation immigrants.

The eight stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* is expanded upon Lahiri’s epigraph. It is a metaphysical passage from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Custom-House”. It suggests that transplanting people into new soil makes them harder and more flourishing. Here, in these stories Lahiri projects the immigrant experience of first and second generation American settlers. Here they are not safe and are not living the life of comforts as suggested by Hawthorne, but they struggle hard to build normal and secured life. Lahiri’s characters are considered as different plants. She allows them to grow in their new environments, they carry with them the potential for commotion. The growing place is not secured. They live by chance, whatever comes their way. Uncontrollable events control them often like accidents of fate, weather and health. They suffer by cold marriage life, failed love affairs and alcoholism. Almost all the immigrant characters in *Unaccustomed Earth* assimilate themselves with the American culture.

In the title story, Ruma is a Bengali American lawyer. She is married to Adam, an American and has a son named Akash. This story is set after the death of Ruma’s mother who is a typical Bengali woman. Finally, she also decides to travel like an American. Therefore, Ruma has organized a package tour to Paris for her mother on her sixty fourth birthday. But before that her mother is dead. After her mother’s death, her father sells their apartment and starts travelling from one place to another, like a typical American. He is in his seventies but looks as same as before.
At present, Ruma has moved to Seattle for Adam’s job, where they have bought a new house.

Ruma is thirty eight years old and now she is pregnant again. At this juncture, she repeats her mother’s life pattern, which her father dislikes. Ruma gives up her job and follows her husband to a distant city as they wait for the birth of their second child. This was clearly stated as, “Growing up, her mother’s example moving to a foreign place for the sake of marriage, caring exclusively for children and a household had served as a warning, a path to avoid. Yet this was Ruma’s life now” (UE 11). Once her father visits Seattle, then he says that it is right time to build her career and asks her to find a job. He also asks her, “will this make you happy?” (UE 36) which is very much American in attitude. Her father thinks about his wife’s unhappiness in the early years of their marriage and so he agrees to Ruma’s proposal of marrying Adam. Because he has always assumed that Ruma’s life would be different. So, again he reminds to his daughter that self-reliance is important.

Ruma is shocked by father’s appearance, he resembled an American in his old age. “He was wearing a base ball cap that said Pompell, brown cotton pants and sky-blue polo shirt and a pair of white leather sneakers. She is struck by the degree to which her father resembled an American in his old age. With his gray hair and fair skin he could have been practically from anywhere” (UE 11). He is changed into an American in his identity because of his assimilation towards the American culture. But if his wife accompanies him now, she would have remained pure Bengali. It is her mother who would have appeared in this wet Northern landscape, in her brightly coloured saris, her dime-sized maroon bindi and with her jewels. She resists American culture in her dressing style. In the beginning, Ruma’s mother argued with Ruma for marrying Adam, but later she likes him as his son, Romi. On seeing his daughter,
Ruma’s father has the opposite reaction: “something about his daughter’s appearance had changed; she now resembled his wife so strongly that he could not bear to look at her directly” (UE 27). Here Ruma’s identity is changed physically. All these years she had been American in all aspects but now she is transforming to Indian culture. This vividly portrays Ruma’s identity crisis.

Ruma knows well that Akash will be grown up like an American boy. Still she wants him to be an Indian, “When Akash was younger she followed her mother’s advice to get him used to the taste of Indian food and made the effort to poach chicken and vegetables with cinnamon, cardamom and clove. Now he ate from boxes” (UE 23). She also complains her father that Akash refuses to eat anything other than macaroni and cheese for dinner. Akash adds that he hates Indian food. In spite of her efforts, Akash is turning into the sort of American boy, which Ruma fears not to happen. Akash is also interested in gardening like his grandfather. The boy digs holes and plants legos in them, along with a plastic dinosaur and a wooden block with a star. Adam being an American is not worried about Akash state like Ruma, yet he is slightly disturbed. He did not seek any solution but he carried away with his work and went in his own way perfectly. It shows a mother’s desperate attempt to bring up her son in her own cultural roots. Though she is aware of the fact she cannot succeed, her anxiety makes her to behave like this.

Lahiri feels at home with the familiar themes of identity and acculturation in the Bengali families settled in US like her. In this title story, she presents the efforts of three generations of a Bengali family to take deep roots in US, being the unaccustomed earth. The grandfather, a first generation migrant from Bengal settles in US with his wife and children, Ruma and Romi. As second generation immigrants,
Ruma and Romi are brought up in American environment and they begin to acquire the culture as the native uses it.

The gradual acculturation is shown in the use of Bengali language. Ruma’s parents can converse and write in Bengali. Ruma knows only to speak in Bengali. She is unable to decipher the letters written in Bengali on her father’s pictured postcard addressed to Bagchi. For Akash, English is his language of communication and Bengali is a foreign language to him. His grandfather teaches him the numbers from one to ten in Bengali.

As a responsible father, Ruma’s father is extremely delighted that his daughter is happy with Adam. He also takes efforts to plant a garden at Ruma’s home in Seattle. He informs Bagchi about planting a garden at Ruma’s house. This action of gardening symbolizes acculturation process. The involvement of Ruma’s father in creating a garden suggests that it is the old generation that toils hard to preserve the cultural roots. Moreover, he persuades Ruma that she should resume her job as a lawyer. Because job not only gives “financial stability” but also “mental stability” (UE 38).

Unaccustomed Earth explores the family issues associated with Indian culture. Ruma’s sense of obligation to care for her father and ask him to live with her and her immediate family is an example. Ruma desires to have her father with her, as her father is alone after her mother’s death. He should come and live with them, as she needs him. But her father is adamant for “He did not want to be part of another family, part of the mess, the feuds, the demands, the energy of it. He did not want to live in the margin of his daughter’s life, in the shadow of her marriage” (UE 53). Being transformed into an American Ruma’s father dislikes the notion of family, even he finds attachment only with his grandson, “Oddly it was his grandson who was only
half-Bengali to begin with, who did not even have a Bengali surname, with whom he felt a direct biological connection, a sense of himself reconstituted in another” (UE 53). He is also enjoying his newly found independence in his travels and a relationship with a female friend. Thus Ruma’s father has become a complete American, while Ruma is turning towards the Indian culture, especially Bengali culture and tradition like her mother.

The story “Hell-Heaven” deals with the love and friendship between Usha’s mother and Pranab. This breaks abruptly because of Deborah’s arrival. Usha’s parents hails from India and settles in US. At first, they lived in Berlin where Usha is born. After that they settle in Central Square three years ago. Pranab Kaku is an engineering student from MIT. He belongs to a wealthy family in Calcutta. Usha’s parents and Pranab Kaku being Bengali, they became friends easily. In this story, Bengali / Indian culture is predominant. The characters speak in Bengali. They are well-educated. Usha’s mother wears Tangali saris, red and white bangles and vermilion powder in the center parting of her hair. She looks typical Bengali in her appearance with round face and large dark eyes. They drink tea often. They have rice as their main food, which is the important food of a Bengali. Usha’s father remains a typical American in his attitude. Still he also likes Indian food.

Because of this prevailing situation in her family life, Usha’s mother needs a Bengali friendship from Pranab Kaku. This endearing companionship is interrupted when Pranab falls in love with Deborah, an American girl. Usha’s mother hates Deborah and calls this relationship as “Hell-Heaven” because she envies Deborah. Deborah and Pranab get married, in spite of all the warnings and lead a joyful life with two daughters. So, Usha’s mother realizes her mistake, and feels her belongingness towards Usha. This clearly projects Pranab’s assimilation towards
American culture. This is another example for the unsuccessful marriage like Gogol and Moushumi in the novel *The Namesake*.

Usha likes and loves Deborah, as well as American culture. She feels Deborah like her companion. Deborah has gray eyes, wears denim wrap skirts, sandals and her straight hair is designed into all sorts of silly styles. Usha likes to read all American Novels. She wants to attend and enjoy various parties like an American. She also likes Pranab’s and Deborah’s open love and affection towards each other. Pranab lives with Deborah for twenty three years happily, because of his rootlessness and identity crisis leaves Deborah, and then goes along with another Bengali woman.

Usha feels her identity loss, because of her mother. In spite of her many attempts to make her American, Usha is more Indianised. She wants to talk in English like Deborah, but she expressed more easily in Bengali. For parties, Usha wears “ankle-length, faintly coloured Victoria dresses, which she referred to as maxis, and have party hair which meant taking a strand from either side of my head and joining them with a barrette at the back” (UE 69).

Usha’s mother also slowly adapted towards the American culture. Usha is allowed to date with American boys. Her boyfriends are welcomed to home by her mother. She agrees that Usha is not only her daughter but also a child of US. Finally, in her fifties, she decides to get a degree in library sciences at the nearby University. Her American neighbor Holcomb saves Usha’s mother, when she tries to meet death.

In American culture, thanksgiving is an important one. Deborah invited Usha’s family for thanksgiving. Finally, all the characters in this story assimilate with American culture, by establishing their roots in the new land, US. Since Usha’s mother tries the unnatural thing of a complete assimilation with the new culture, she
fails miserably. Her desire to pursue a degree in her fifties stands as an evidence for her unnatural behaviour.

In the story “A Choice of Accommodation” Lahiri delineates an ideal family who has fulfilled their longing for belonging. Amit and Megan are husband and wife. Their children are Maya and Monika. Here also Lahiri projects the immigrant’s experience of the settlers in this story. Here, Megan, the American wife is five years elder to Amit, the Indian husband. Megan, an American physician, is wedded to an Indian journalist Amit. In spite of their profession, they both spare time for their children and care them. Here Amit is shown as a typical Indian in his attitude that he should be married and have his own children, which gives pleasure and the real meaning of one’s life. Thus by begetting children his life is complete and fulfilled with pleasure. Nothing in this world cannot make him happy like his family. However, apart from that, he never enjoyed his visits to Delhi and his broken Bengali language is of no use in that city. Amit is a typical migrant who leads a successful and happy life since he balances his domestic life and professional life. Also he is not very keen on reviving his cultural roots. He focuses only on assimilation with the new culture. So, he is able to lead a trouble free life.

Amit’s parents are well settled in US. Both of them come from a wealthy family and are educated at boarding schools in India. They remain American in their attitude, food habits, dressings and other practices. They are always dismissive and even critical against India, but never homesick or sentimental. His mother has short hair and usually wears trousers. She wears saris only on special occasions. His father has set up a liquor cabinet at home. He likes gin as tonic before his meals. But later Amit’s father feels his loss of identity. He realizes that working as the faculty of Harvard Medical School is making him restless and wants to go back to the hospital
in Delhi. So, Amit joins Langford school. There he meets Pam Borden and feels a crush for her. Later Amit comes back to Langford at the age of thirty to attend Pam Borden’s wedding. Her marriage is arranged in American style. Amit has grown up as an American and he has become a drunkard in western style. Even in Pam’s function, he gets drunk and is unable to know what is happening around him. Amit is a victim of his parents problem of cultural resistance. At the beginning, he is brought up in US. Since his father is a Professor in Harvard University. So, consequently Amit becomes used to American culture. Then his father moves to Delhi in order to revive his roots and get satisfaction. As a result, he has to move to Delhi and then he moves away from Delhi as a grown up boy. Since he is shuttling between the countries and the cultures, he is spoiled and behaves in the worst manner even in a marriage party. It is his father who is to be blamed for this.

Next in the story “Only Goodness”, Sudha is shown as a successful woman with Roger, her American husband and Neel her infant. She leads a happy life with Roger. But Rahul, Sudha’s brother is a total failure. Sudha enjoys her sense of belonging to London because it is her birthplace and she has found Roger there who is an ideal life partner. But Rahul becomes what his parents were afraid of “a blot, a failure” (UE 141). He is brought up well by his parents and Sudha. He has got very good attitude. Yet he falls in his life because of his drinking habit, which makes him typical American. His mother bemoans after her son’s failure in life. He becomes a misfit as the environment in US pollutes him to the core or he becomes a prey to the liberalized American situation. “That is the problem with this country. Too many freedoms, too much having fun. When we were young, life wasn’t always about fun” (UE 143).
In the story “Only Goodness” almost all the characters are Americanised. Their appearance, food habits, practices and even their attitude are very much American. Lahiri pictures the mother and father:

Her mother looked unrecognizably slim, hair styled at a salon, a woven purse shaped like a cornucopia dangling from the crook of her elbow. Even her saris were glamorous back then, tightly wrapped to show off her figure, patterned with a spidery brown batik. Her father seemed vaguely mod, wearing suits with narrow dark ties and sunglasses.

(UE 139)

Both Sudha and Rahul have witnessed that their parents are not living together happily. So, their marriage life is an unpleasant one. Sudha understands even this would end up in divorce. She has also realized that their parents were together just because of their same family background in India. They came from same and shared humble backgrounds.

But in US, Sudha’s parents become aware that they face a life sentence of being a foreigner.

In London her mother had been working toward a certificate in Montessori education, but in US she did work, did not drive. She put on twenty pounds after Rahul was born, and her father put away his mod suits and shopped at Sears. In wayland they became passive, wary, the rituals of small-town New England more confounding than negotiating two of the world’s largest cities. They relied on their children, on Sudha especially (UE 138).
These situations slowly lead them towards identity crisis. Sudha also recognizes this that her parent’s separatism from India is an ailment that ebbed and flowed like a cancer.

The Indian parents once they settle down in US imagine that all is well with them and their children. In fact, they feel, proud that their children need not suffer like them and they provide all sorts of luxuries for their peaceful living. They regard that just because of settling down in US, their children have been assured with a trouble free existence. Sudha reveals the temperament of all such parents who believe that “depression” was a foreign word to them, “an American thing” (UE 144). In their opinion “their children were immune from the hardships and injustices they had left behind in India, as if the medicine which the pediatrician had given Sudha and Rahul when they were babies guaranteed them an existence free of suffering” (UE 144). But later they realize that the reality is opposite of what they have framed earlier in their minds. One of the main problems of an immigrant is acculturation. The children of the migrants are the badly affected victims in the process of assimilation. The migrated parents value everything in terms of the physical comforts they provide to their children. Rather they forget the psychological change the children undergo because of migration. For example, when the parents are moving towards a divorce, the children lose the love and affection of both of them like Sudha and his brother. Naturally, they lose control over the children and some of them become addicts to bad habits like Rahul and Amit.

At first Rahul drops his Biology and Chemistry classes because of his alcoholism and he joins film and English Literature. He is unable to complete his studies. He starts writing plays that ends in vain as he fails to impress the audience. He is filed a case for “drink and drive”. He has an affair with a girl, named Elena who
is elder to him. At first they get separated, but later they reconcile and rejoin. He also
behaves like a “jerk” at Sudha’s wedding. He quarrels with his parents and sister.
Finally he leaves home and deserts his parents. Later, he does not succeed in his
career and has a job only as a line cook in a restaurant. And in the climax, the only
supporter, her sister Sudha hates and dejects him forever because of his carelessness
in looking after Neel. Alcoholism is an American style, and this has made Rahul an
utter failure in his life. The anxiety to bring up the children at any cost is the attitude
of typical Indian parents. They take all efforts to establish a descent space for their
children. The parents’ wish and the children’s inability to fulfill the wish become the
central theme of many stories. The children adopt the American environment so easily
as it is very attractive and catchy, particularly to those who experience first in their
life.

Rahul’s parents neither renounce him nor banish him, though he proves to be
failure. But, his sister Sudha disowns him due to his carelessness. Because for her, he
is “Still only goodness to him, nothing else” (UE 173). In this story, acculturation has
paved way to Sudha’s growth and developments and for Rahul it results in his pains,
miseries, sufferings and failures. It is important to note that the misunderstanding
between the parents is the most important reason for Rahul’s plight. Their longing to
bring back the spoiled son does not work with Rahul.

In the story “Nobody’s Business”, Sang leads an American way of life. She
wants to be independent and is freed from her studies. She drops out of Harvard after
a semester and is working part time in a book store at Square. She is fond of dating
and she is always disturbed by a long-list of suitors over phone, those calls were
attended by Paul and Heather her housemates. But she believes in marriage and
family life like an Indian. She loves Farouk (Freddy) truly and desires to marry him.
Actually, Farouk is shown as a typical American and he is not interested in marriage. He leaves Sang and joins Deirdre. Sang also goes all the way to London to see her sister and her newly born son with lots of lovable gifts. Moreover, at times she pays visits to her parents at Michigan. Later she realizes that Farouk has cheated her. At this juncture, Paul helps her like a true friend. Finally, Sang leaves to London. In this story, Sang’s acculturation can be appreciated.

In the second part of *Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri presents clearly the cultural conflicts of the emigrants. Hema’s and Kaushik’s mother shared their Indian experiences happily during their conversations. They cherish their memories like, “They talked about the lives they had left behind in Calcutta: your mother’s beautiful home in Jodhpur Park, with Hibiscus and rosebushes blooming on the rooftop, and my mother’s modest flat in Maniktala, above a grimy restaurant, where seven people existed in three small rooms” (UE 225). Later, Kaushik’s family moves to India.

In the story “Once in a Life Time”, Lahiri describes the process of acculturation when Kaushik’s family arrives at Hema’s home to settle down in the US for the second time. Kaushik’s parents are tagged as “seasonal migrants”. Parul’s physical appearance is completely changed. Before leaving to India in 1974, Parul Di wears raw silk that is woven around her shoulders like a shawl, had long hair and red vermilion on the parting of her hair. But on returning from Calcutta, she wears slack and tunics, lipstick, haircut to her shoulders and wears a scarf around her neck. His father remains the same, except his glasses. This change even made Hema’s parents to remark them like. India has made them more American. “My parents were at once critical of their appearance” (UE 235). In general, the migrated land used to be an unaccustomed place for the migrants. But in the case of Parul Di, the native land has
become an unaccustomed place. Since she identifies herself more with US, she takes extra care to project her as an American when she is in India.

The ever lingering question in the minds of every migrant is “Are you feeling all right?” because of the intersection of cultures. This question is first asked by Kaushik’s mother, when both the mothers meet for the first time. And again this same question is asked by Hema’s father towards Kaushik family during their second time stay in US. Because, they have to adapt to all the prevailing circumstances like a rebirth. At first, their parents are Bengali Americans, and their children belong to American childhood category. The frequency of this question in the text shows that some specific problem related to migration that exists always in everyone. So they are empathetic towards each others problems and asking such questions ease the mental burden of one another.

In the last decade of Parul Di’s life, she remains a typical American in all aspects. She dresses like an American. She often has Johnnie Walker. She likes Continental food. She always enjoys travelling and is for luxury like an American. She bought an own house on the North Shore which seems to be “a glass palace” filled with modern articles and furniture that is more American. Kaushik’s mother is even Americanised in her attitude. She wants to be free and left all alone by herself. She does not like others to disturb her privacy. Even in her deathbed at the age of forty two, she does not want to be sympathized by friends and others. Taking care of elders in their last stage is one of the important cultural aspects of Indians. The Indian parents long for the nearness of the children at the end, because they used to take selfless efforts to bring up their children. The American parents, in general, prefer solitude in the last days because they do not have such a strong family bonds as
Indians used to have. Since Parul Di has immersed in American culture, like a typical American, she also prefers loneliness for her in last days.

Kaushik’s father remarries Chitra, a widow with two daughters. Kaushik sympathises with his two step sisters. However, he could not forgive his father for his remarriage after his mother’s death. And he cannot imagine his step-mother Chitra to be his mother. Thus, Kaushik’s father remains American in his marriage life. Finally, after completing his course Kaushik visits his father’s home once during Christmas and leaves the house forever. Through the episode of remarriage, Lahiri points out the narrow-mindedness of Indians in the name of culture and tradition. Marrying somebody after the death of the spouse is acceptable and it avoids many problems. Even though it is accepted in society, Kaushik is not ready to accept it. He hates his father and step mother because of the very Indian mindset.

Chitra being a traditional Bengali leads her rest of life following Indian culture at US. She works as a school teacher in Calcutta. She is thirty five, twenty years younger than Choudhuri. Her daughters are seven and ten years old. Chitra’s marriage with Choudhuri’s is a register marriage in American style and not a traditional one. When Kaushik sees her for the first time, she remains a traditional Bengali in her sari with red vermilion on the parting of her hair. She speaks well in Bengali and partly English. Yet she tries to talk in English with Kaushik, thus by assimilating herself towards US culture. Unlike Chitra, her daughters can speak very well in English, as they are educated in English schools. Kaushik likes the children because of their shared childhood experience.

Kaushik remains an American child. He speaks English fluently and partly Bengali. In his teens, he has many affairs and loves dating like an American. He always drinks Johnnie Walker like his mother. He hates Indian food. He cannot accept
the reality of his mother’s death and his father’s remarriage. He likes to be independent and always wants to be a free bird without family bonds. He enjoys travelling like a typical American. He deserts his home and becomes a journalist. As a journalist, he moves from one place to another, thus fulfilling his desire for travel.

His life as a photojournalist begun nearly twenty years ago. He was wandering through Latin US in 1987, living off the money his father gave him he graduated from college. He’d gone with his friend Douglas, and they began in Tijuana, hoping to end up in Patagonia. They spent a few months in Mexico, working their way south, through Gautemala and then into El Salvador. And it was there that Douglas decided he’d enough of Central US, enough of being harassed or looking so obviously American, and bought a ticket to Madrid.

Later Kaushik’s father sold their house at North Shore and moved to the suburbs of Boston with Chitra and her daughters. Though Choudhuri is influenced by American lifestyle, he proves himself as a loving father and husband. In spite of Kaushik’s hatred towards his father and his family, he takes care of his stepdaughters with utmost care.

Kaushik finally decides to settle down in Hong Kong as a photo editor. He meets Hema in Rome and wants her to marry him. She has completed her Ph.D, but she marries Navin traditionally in Bengali culture. So, Kaushik ultimately feels dejected and ends his life. Both of them belong to the American childhood of 1970’s, and they are typical American in their attitude till the end of their life. Kaushik is another example of a spoiled child in the western land, US. He is not matured enough to understand the reality of life. He is neither American nor an Indian at heart. Also he
does not have courage to fight against the shocks of life, so he then takes the extreme step which he deserves.

Lahiri, through these eight stories, highlights the variety of immigrant’s experiences, especially their cultural aspects in US. The second generation Indian Americans and their parents belong to India their homeland, whereas their children born in US feel it as their homeland. But later second generations realize that US is a mirage and go in search of their roots in India. Therefore, they try to assimilate and resist both cultures, which finally ends up in identity crisis. Some of them overcome all odds and some of them become utter failures since they are not able to neither change nor assimilate.

Hariharan’s writings are based on Post-Colonial themes. She does not concentrate more on cultural transitions, only the traces of it are seen here and there. For example, in the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, the cultural fragments are depicted as the conflict between two cultures, one inherited from the birth and the other acquired through education. Her characters lose their identity because of the swing from their past situations or positions to the present circumstances. This chapter delves deeply into her characters adaptability and resistance towards this changed current situations. Hariharan, belonging to a traditional Hindu family, is acquainted with all the myths and she perfectly blends myth and reality in the modern Indian life. Thus, she glorifies Indian culture.

In the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Hariharan skillfully explores the prescription of the gender relations by means of Indian mythology. The stories of Gandhari, Amba, Damayanthi and others reflect on the life of these characters in the novel. The novel establishes the relationships that originate out of the emotional needs of human beings coming in to contact with one another. As a young girl, Devi
inquisitively tries to know the mystery of life. During her childhood, her grandmother told her several stories. Every one gains knowledge as Freud says: “Widely different sources, from fairy tales and myths, jokes and witticisms, from folklore and songs of different people and from poetic and colloquial usage of language” (166).

Indian mothers train, protect and guide their daughters on all their endeavors. With their mother’s guidance and emotional support, they internalize their feminine nature. “She was always our anchor rock, never wrong, never to be questioned, a self evident fact of our existence.” (TFN 16). In order to make her only daughter settle down, Sita decides to call her back from US. Having arrived in India, she realises that her mother is going to arrange her marriage through swayamvara. In Indian social setup marriage is considered as traditional for women. Though Devi is not interested to marry, she accepts the proposal because she does not want to hurt the feelings of her mother. Here, Devi is not keen to protect her individuality, rather she allows herself to be assimilated with the tradition of her mother.

After marrying Mahesh, Devi meets her father-in-law, Baba and the cook in that home, Mayamma. The emotional and mental incompatibility with Mahesh brings her close to Baba. Her relationship with Baba becomes stronger. He is a retired Sanskrit Professor, an intellectual man. He narrates some stories about womanhood, and the wifely vows and duties in a household. Devi compares his stories with that of her granny. Baba talks about Manu, who is the creator of Hindu code of conduct. He teaches Devi what Brahminhood is. Baba dwells deep on the Vedas and Sanskrit hymns. Devi feels glad to be a disciple of such an intellectual man.

Indian tradition of music is deeply rooted and has an ancient origin. It reflects our heritage. The study of music exposes the hitherto forgotten aspects of Indian tradition. Indians are the creators of the two principal forms of music, Hindustani
which is popular in North India and Carnatic, which is popular in South India. Baba used to hear Carnatic music. He talks about the Ragas and Kiriti. He narrates the life history of Muthuswamy Dhikshidhar, one of the greatest composers of Carnatic music. Not only does he narrate about Muthuswamy Dhikshidhar, but also narrates about Jeyadeva who brought out Gita Govinda, a composition on “Krishna’s all encompassing love” (TFN 65). He also talks about his resolution to lead a simple and austere life. Purandara Dasa was a memorable composer of Karnataka. Baba through his stories and incidents from the history of India restates “Non-Violence, truthfulness, honesty, Purity, control of the senses-this, in brief, is the brief dharma of all the four castes” (TFN 66). Though the relationship between Devi and her father-in-law seems to be trouble free, Hariharan exposes the dark side of Indian patriarchal system in which women are not given their due respect. In this novel, since Devi accepts to be a housewife, she is appreciated. In this process of being a dutiful housewife, her hard earned foreign degree goes as a waste.

A newly retired teacher narrates Hariharan’s *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. In this book having spent most of his life teaching at the private P. G. Boys’ School, in an Indian town, Vasu feels quite uneasy after retirement. His farewell present from his students is a notebook, and the other things related to jotting down observations, memories, and thoughts about teaching. He also continues to teach a bit by becoming a tutor. He does not have many students, yet he is left with one that is the most complicated and intractable case, Mani. The boy is twelve when he comes to Vasu, but he was not up to the mark. He does not speak and has been through numerous schools and doctors, without anyone being able to draw him out. Vasu tries to change Mani and eventually finds at least one thing that seems to keep him entertained and interested. And it is none other than the stories. Vasu himself was not brought up on
proper stories but he tries a lot with his childhood experience and finds them useful for himself too. Thus, he tries hard to adapt towards the currently changed position and situation. Hariharan has beautifully used the art of storytelling in this novel, which is a treasure of Indian culture.

Vasu also tries to live in present and brings the past back in his life. His memory of his childhood days always haunts him in all possible ways. For example, Vasu fails to recognize Gopu, Mani’s brother as well as one of the old students of P.G. School in which he worked. He is a college student now and accompanies Mani to Vasu’s house regularly. Now, Vasu tries to locate Gopu in the old scrapbook and asks himself “Can a teacher forget a pupil?” (GVM 100). Then he asks Gopu to locate himself in the same scrapbook. Gopu urges his teacher to come out of the past and live in the present. The conversation between the teacher and the old student illustrates the need for adapting to the changing environment in order to lead a peaceful life.

Forget the past, he said. And sternly: Why don’t you find out what is happening to your students now? What kind of a society are you letting them out into?

Do you realize, he asked me, that your pupils are being bought and sold? That they are, like so many heads of cabbage, being haggled over for bribes and capitation fees? Teachers are selling examination papers; teachers are being intimidated by other teachers and students into allowing any kind of cheating; and a few months back, a resident teacher beat up his wife so badly that the hostel students had to complain – they couldn’t study with all that noise. (GVM 102)
Hariharan demonstrates the fading memory of old people in this passage. Besides, the loss of memory serves as a blessing in the old age. Otherwise, sincere teachers like Vasu cannot tolerate the social injustice around them and they will lose their peace of mind permanently.

In the novel **When Dreams Travel**, Hariharan is audacious to present the story of two valiant sisters, Shahrzad and Dunyazad. Their husbands are two brothers, two Sultans, Shahryar and Shahzaman. It is a fabulous and fearsome story of the four persons who has come together to fulfill a mission to get rid of the stain in the brothers, the scar, the stigma of being caught up by their previous queens. The wise Wazir tries to identify a solution by providing his own virginal daughters Shahrzad and Dunyazad. For one thousand and one nights, Shahrzad's stories hold death at bay, for Shahrzad like her own story, is a survivor. The opening scene clearly projects the prevailing problematic situation among the characters. And the story revolves around each character to tackle it and to find a solution for the problem. But the solution is not yet identified which itself becomes a great turmoil.

The novel **In Times of Siege** covers the span of two months in the life of Murthy. It is an odd academic setting, with the students kept at a distance in an Open University, where Murthy no longer teaches, he coordinates resources for his educational clients.

Two events unsettle Murthy's settled life. He is the "local guardian" for Meena, a student at one of the other Delhi Universities whose mother had asked him to take care of her while she was in Delhi. He has barely done anything for her since she arrived, but when she breaks her knee in an accident she calls on him and he takes her to his home until she can walk again. Murthy's wife is in US where their daughter is working and so he is left pretty much to deal with the girl alone. Equally disruptive
is the tumult that explodes around some material he prepares for one of his B.A. History courses. Murthy writes about Basava, also Basavana the treasurer of a twelfth century Hindu city, Kalyana. Basava had egalitarian ideas that threaten the order of the day, by undermining the caste system he is ultimately not able to overturn it. This version of history does not appeal to certain Hindu fundamentalists who the novelist refers as “fundoos” and on reading it in Murthy's lesson they raise a stench. Thus his successful career as the University Professor of History has been changed upside down because of the prevailing problem. This also finally leads to the identity crisis of Murthy.

Political correctness is apparently all the rage everywhere in India. Murthy is told by the authorities that he has "hurt the sentiments of a Hindu watchdog group" (ITS 68), and things must be put right again. But Murthy is not willing to give in so easily, and he refuses to apologise. Many events rise up as the militant fundoos make a lot of fuss, the media takes an interest, people inside and outside academia take sides. Hariharan’s focus is on Murthy, who often remains a bit on the margin of the events. Meena enthusiastically takes up Murthy’s case, and is of great help in organizing and executing the plan correctly. Thus she along with her friends save Murthy to get out of the turmoil that he faced for the period of one and a half month.

History is considered as the most important aspect in a culturally rich society. Any criticism on the existing norms will be considered as blasphemy and those who are indulged in it will be branded as outcast, Even such people will be excommunicated. Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasreen are the best living examples for such things. Rushdie’s life is in danger since a huge prize is announced by the extreme Islam countries for his head and Nasreen is banished from Bangladesh permanently. Murthy’s attempt to rewrite the rich Hindu heritage also falls in this
category consequently, he has to face a lot of oppression which causes mental trauma for him. Though he wages a valiant fight against the opposition, at one point he gives it up and makes a compromise. It proves in a society the existing cultural norm should be accepted as they are in spite of its shortcomings. An attempt to change anything may backfire as it happens to Murthy. Hariharan excavates the rich layers of Indian history and, at the same time, exposes the intricacies of Murthy's internal conflict and personal life, revealing that the past and the present are always more inextricably linked.

The novel Fugitive Histories is about people picking up threads from the point where the man made upheavals have left them. It is a journey back in time. It is the story of Mala, a Hindu Brahmin woman, who marries Asad, an artist, despite the misgivings of her immediate and extended family. Her grand father in his death bed has even pronounced the ultimate words “you are killing us”, to get her to give up the idea of such an unsuitable marriage. However, Mala is not discouraged.

Yasmin, Sara, Mala and Bala are the women characters in the novel, Fugitive Histories. Yasmin is the riot-ravaged teen who loses her brother and her home in 2002. Sara is the aspiring social worker ill at ease with what she understands of life and misery. Mala is a recent widow who has now agreed to terms with doing away and being distinct as Asad’s wife. But for this, she must know who he is and what happens to him. Bala is an old hysterical woman who has lived her life in submission to the male dominance of her village home, who never went out and hence went within. Sara is Mala’s daughter. Bala is Mala’s grandmother. Yasmin is Sara’s Muse.

In Delhi, the world around Mala comes tumbling down with the death of Asad. All that is left of him are his sketchbooks and their clandestine commentaries on what Asad feels as he falls out of life. And in Mumbai, her daughter Sara is just
stumbling into life as a social worker, as moderately comfortable as youth with a modest job. It is then that she seizes the opportunity to go to Ahmedabad on her friend’s invitation to write a script for a documentary on the Muslim families affected by the Gujarat riots. It is there she meets, Yasmin among others. It is here the author gingerly brings up the horrid, graphic memories of the communal clashes that left in their wake not only in death and in destruction, but also a stern reminder of the propensity of fate to go wrong.

While the Gujarat riots remain the pivot of Fugitive Histories, it goes much further into the past. It suggests that it is easy enough to create a situation where people lose their bearings, trail down those who are perceived as alien, and work to intensify the existing conflicts. Here, the main plot revolves around the communal riots and how the characters adapt towards it or resist it. Then, it also mainly concentrates on the identity crisis of the characters.

Hariharan writes in a clean and straightforward manner that all her characters are suitably dealt, they talk and communicate effectively which keeps her novel flowing. Her stories reverberate with echoes from the text of the past and at the same time curves out the present with clarity. Similarly, her writings project clearly how the characters face the problem and come out of it beautifully. Lahiri’s characters being immigrants, face cultural clashes, acculturation, contra-acculturation and identity crisis problems wherever they go and survive. These are clearly sketched in Lahiri’s work with an “inside” and “outside” attitude.