CHAPTER 4

HUMAN PSYCHE: AN INTROSPECTION

The fascinating aspect of literature is its depiction of human beings and their relationships. A psychological approach to literature can help one to understand the behaviour of the realistically drawn characters in the same way one understands the behaviour of real people. The characters are only imagined human beings without flesh and blood but they have many parallels with real human beings. Barnard J. Paris writes that ‘It is extremely valuable to bring psychology and literature together. The psychologist and the artist often know about the same areas of experience, but they comprehend them and present their knowledge in different ways’ (26). Human psychology is a complex phenomenon which requires so many approaches to understand. Many psychologists have derived so many approaches based on their experiences which are either limited or unlimited. Apart from these approaches, the characters and their psyche can be studied from the perspective of the author, the locale of the characters and also from the reader’s point of view.

Psychology is an ever-developing field which has seen a lot of psychologists who have produced remarkable insights in this field. Ivan Pavlov and John B. Watson based their experiments with animals in order to arrive at a conclusion about human behaviour. While the former is remembered for establishing psychology as a field of study, the latter is the first behaviourist to mention that psychologists can base their theories only on observation. Skinner's staunch behaviourism made him a dominating force in
psychology and his theories and techniques are used extensively in many fields. While thinking of psychology, the first name which comes to everyone’s mind is Sigmund Freud, the founding father of psychoanalysis. His theories of psychoanalysis are extremely influential in this field. Freud proposed that the human psyche could be divided into three parts: id, ego and super-ego. His essay, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), elaborates these principles. C.G. Jung is a Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist who developed the concepts of human personality theories – extraversion and introversion – archetypes and the collective unconscious. His work has been influential in psychiatry and in the study of religion, philosophy, archeology, anthropology, literature and related fields. Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund Freud, is a pioneer in child psychology. She adopted her father’s theories of psychoanalysis to recognise the differences between children and adults. Erik Erikson, one of the pioneers in child psychology, formed theories about the development of identity throughout the lifespan — childhood, adulthood and old age. Jean Piaget (1970), a Swiss philosopher, is one of the first psychologists to acknowledge that children think differently than adults. His theories focus on children’s cognitive abilities. He says: ‘It is with children that we have the best chance of studying the development of logical knowledge, mathematical knowledge, physical knowledge, and so forth’ (14). Abraham Maslow (1954), an American psychologist, stressed the importance of focusing on the positive qualities in people which resulted in Humanistic Psychology. He is known for his theory of Hierarchy of Needs. Carl Rogers, another American psychologist, who became one of the major humanist thinkers, devised a unique approach known as Person-centred Approach to understand personality and human relationships. This approach has a wide application in various domains. Some of the theories have lost their favour while others remain widely-accepted but all have contributed enormously to the understanding of human thought and behaviour.
Humanistic Psychology is a psychological approach which emphasises the study of an individual on the whole. The psychologists dealing with humanistic psychology look at human behaviour not only through the eyes of the observer but also through the eyes of the person whose behaviour is observed. This approach suggests that everyone is responsible for his own happiness and well-being. As human beings, everyone wants to achieve higher objectives and everyone has the freedom to change his life at any point of time. This approach to life is within everyone and this behavioural pattern has nothing in common with the scientific methods which are mostly inappropriate for studying behaviour. An individual has unique self-image and the need for self-esteem is more important than any other attributes of his life. To achieve the highest potentials, self-actualisation is essential. Maslow (1954) states in his *Motivation and Personality* that:

What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization...It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualised in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming. (93)

Bernard J. Paris (1974) tells in his book that ‘Psychology helps us to talk about what the novelist knows, but fiction helps us to know what the psychologist is talking about’ (27). This chapter uses psychology to analyse characters and to explore the consciousness of the author Jhumpa Lahiri and her works. Since Lahiri excels in bringing out her immigrant self through her characters who are mostly immigrants and who are subject to the multicultural environment, a psychological study of her characters is a rightful thing. A psychological study of the characters, either Eastern (Ashima, Ashoke, Gogol, Moushumi, Ruma, Shoba, Sanjeev, Aparna, Hema, Kaushik, Subhash, Bela, etc.) or Western (Maxine, Ruth, Graham, Ben, Adam, Megan, Elise, Drew, etc.) throws light on the intricacies of mimetic characterisation.
Paris (1974) says in his Preface that ‘One of the most splendid achievements of realistic literature is its mimetic portrayal of characters…’ (xix). As a writer of realistic fiction, Lahiri stands just above her contemporary writers in portraying both the Eastern and the Western characters without changing the flavour.

Wherever there is a conflict, an in-depth study of the psychological aspects of the conflicting subjects is required in order to identify the factors which lead to conflicts. Many of Lahiri’s characters encounter conflicts which mostly arise out of their twin cultural backgrounds. Therefore, a psychic study of the protagonists, under the light of their varied cultural background, will bring to light the interaction between native conscience and alien inevitability.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s first novel, *The Namesake*, is not only about the journey of the Gangulis to the United States but also about the psychological sufferings, struggles and transformation the immigrant characters encounter in anchoring themselves in the alien soil. Ashima’s longing for home, for Indian food and the frequent recollections of her life at Calcutta have become a part of her life in Cambridge. Immigrant psyche has a very deep effect on Ashima as a wife in America because she cries and feels homesick when she is alone. Manju Kapoor (2008) describes the same with her Protagonist Nina who passes her time in reading books:

It has been a month, and she was keen to set down roots that would make her feel more at home. In India these relatives had seemed peripheral, more tourist than family. Now her perception has changed. She wanted to be close to them. (132)

She always keeps in mind what her elders in India told her: ‘not to eat beef or wear skirts or cut off her hair or forget her family’ (37). She feels a deep pain in the absence of Ashoke when she is left alone with a new-born
baby. In Cambridge all Americans are perfect strangers to her. M.G.Kadam (2008) writes in his article about the psychological depression of the immigrants and the outcome:

The restlessness of Bengalis in America where they can not vote is revealed through their discussions about Bengali arts, music, drama, literature and politics. They experience the spatial, cultural and emotional vacuum in their efforts to settle and adjust in an adopted new land during these days of globalisation. (124)

The memories of her parental house keep haunting her when they decide their house in Pemberton Road, where ‘all houses belong to Americans’ (50). She tries to overcome those memories by developing acquaintances with other Bengali immigrants. She becomes friendly with them only for the reason that ‘they all come from Calcutta’ (38). The food that she cooks at home, their names, their accent and their dressing always reflect that they are unchanged but this very fact that they are different from other Americans alienates them from Americans. It is not intentional that they want to be different but it is their psyche that forbids them from forgetting their original identity. Being true to one’s native in one’s native land is not unique but living with native visions in an alien land is something that is unique in nature which is unimaginable in the settled land. The Gangulis make their stay in India for eight months in one of their visits to India. For Ashima and Ashoke it is not a mere trip but it is their happiness, regaining consciousness and life and return to normalcy. They do not stay back in their respective parental houses in India. Instead, they pay a visit to all their relatives living near and far making their schedule busy always. But their children Gogol and Sonia who accompanied them feel as if they had lost their privacy, freedom, individuality and happiness and above all they feel alienated in their own land. They can neither accept India as a homeland nor disown America as a foreign land. When they return unlike their parents,
they feel rejoiced. Their American friends ‘ask them nothing where they’ve been’ (87). Lahiri relates her own life as an immigrant and the negation between her Indian self and American self:

When I was growing up, India was largely a mystery to Americans as well, not nearly as present in the fabric of American culture as it is today. It wasn’t until I was in college that my American friends expressed curiosity about and interest in my Indian background. As a young child, I somehow felt that the Indian part of me was unacknowledged and somehow negated, by my American environment and vice versa. I felt that I led two very separate lives. (Lahiri 2006b)

It is very difficult for an immigrant to balance between two cultures and he always lives with a wavering mind between cultures and between countries. Whether to be here or there is an unanswerable question. Though it is impossible for him to think of returning home, since the second generation has begun to enroot in the settled soil, he will have a sense of attachment to his native soil. Only an immigrant can understand his feeling and Jhumpa Lahiri, as an immigrant, is the right person to speak of the diluted immigrant personalities. Satendra Nandan (2000) speaks about the immigrant consciousness in his essay:

What then is writer's enigma of survival? Initially, it is an outrage of more horrendous fates of people elsewhere. One is dislocated from one world, but is connected to so many others. Suddenly they become closer to one's own. The writer then tries to find new ways of being human, new ways of redefining his humanity, new ways of recognizing his inseparable humanity with others. (57)

The ethnic identity to the first generation immigrants is a protective cloak over the American identity. They take into their minds that the ‘Western culture’ is a degenerated culture and so they carefully cultivate Indian values and culture and transplant them in their children’s minds. The children
acquiring their native culture through their parents and Western culture through their peers become an embodiment of the ‘social psyche of an exilic population’ (Singh 2006:4). They become the subject of the double consciousness where many fail to perceive the right one by deciding the other. Alfredo Morabia (2004) says that ‘the world does not reveal its truth passively. It resists and, therefore, we must act upon it and learn from these actions’. Even a purposeful decision to migrate from the native has its own consequences. Relocating into a new cultural ethos with an existing practice requires a psychological determination. Only people like Ashima and Ashoke have such mental make up. Anita Singh (2006) points out in an article that:

The authentic immigrant sees the nationalistic values inherited from an old country as vital to his survival in a new alien land. These atavistic interpretations of natal culture are then rigorously enforced and in doing so the parents, who consider themselves as guardians or upholders of the natal culture, expect their children to follow their footsteps. (9)

Gogol, the bi-cultural brought up, is unhappy over his name for its peculiarity in the American context. He refuses to look back at his parental culture that a man will have two names; a good name and a pet name. Unfortunately, in his case the pet name becomes his good name. When he becomes old enough, he changes his name officially as ‘Nikhil’ which sounds more sophisticated and more importantly sounds at par with American names like Colin, Jason and Mark. The new name gives him confidence and he marches into the world along with his other American friends. He smokes, drinks, listens to pop music and fills the wall with American heroes in his room in New Haven and more than that ‘it is as Nikhil that he loses his virginity’ (NS 105). His parents are able to notice his changed attitude and Ashima is enraged by his mentioning of his room as ‘home’ and remarks that ‘after twenty years in America, she still cannot bring herself to refer to Pemberton Road as home’ (108). Ashima never gives up her native practice
and even ‘retains a tattered copy of desh magazine and still cannot bring herself to throw away’ (6) but it is highly difficult for Gogol to come to terms with the Indian way of life which his parents insist on. He wants to be completely free from Bengali culture and the tradition that binds him down to the country. All his emotional setbacks come to a halt and self-actualisation takes place in himself and reconciles his mother and sister after his father’s death. He shaves his head to mourn his father’s death. This act is an imitation of his father who did the same when Gogol was a small boy. Abraham Maslow (1999) states in his Towards a Psychology of Being that ‘self-actualising people enjoy life in general and practically all its aspects, while most other people enjoy only stray moments of triumph …’ (37). Gogol’s emotional attachment with his family separates him from Maxine’s relationship. His realisation makes him fear that he does not possess the stamina that his parents had, to make their lives in America by missing so much behind them in India and wonders:

... how his parents had done it, leaving their respective families behind, seeing them so seldom, dwelling unconnected, in a perpetual state of expectation, of longing. All the trips to Calcutta he’d once resented – how could they have been enough? They were not enough. (NS 281)

Self-actualisation has taken place not only with Gogol but also with Ashima and Ashoke. After the birth of Gogol, Ashima wants to raise him in Calcutta but keeping in mind Ashoke, she stays back in America but decides to bring him up in the Bengali way. She puts ‘him to sleep, she sings him the Bengali songs her mother had sung to her’ (35). When Gogol is six months old, they celebrate ‘Gogol’s annaprasan, his rice ceremony’ (38), in the Bengali way. The successive death of their family members in India is a great shock to the couple and by staying in a distant place, they can only grieve. They carry a life-long guilt that they are not present during those deaths.
Their alienated emotions are further aggravated by these deaths. However, they take necessary steps to adjust with the new life in America by assimilation. For them assimilation is actualisation. They understand the differences between cultures and decide to take up the new one gradually as it can play a major role in their lives and the future of their children is also destined in that country. Their desperate effort to cling to their past history and culture seems to fade away and there is enough space to accommodate other things also. They set up Christmas trees every year and celebrate Thanksgivings in addition to all other Hindu religious ceremonies and celebrations. Also they learn to show no excitement over the fact that their children are ‘dating’ with the girls and boys of their age. This psychological transition is meaningful and necessary for every immigrant to thrive in the new environment.

Love between Ashoke and Ashima is an ‘uncelebrated thing’. For them love is an ‘utterly private’ affair. Contrary to the American setting, total strangers are brought together for marriage but the spouses develop an intimacy and understanding in such a way that their marriage never ends in divorce. Ashima never calls Ashoke by his name. Instead ‘she utters the interrogative that has come to replace it, which translates roughly as ‘Are you listening to me?’’ (NS 2). Though she has adopted his surname, she refuses to say his first name because for the Bengali wives, ‘a husband’s name is something intimate and, therefore, unspoken’ (2). But Moushumi, a second generation Indian American, has no such sentiments like Ashima. She calls her husband Gogol by name and she has never thought of ‘changing her last name to Ganguli’. Even she disapproves when she receives letters from relatives in India addressed as ‘Mrs. Moushumi Ganguli’.

Gogol observes distinctive differences between the lives of Indians and Americans especially between his parents and Maxine’s parents. When
Ashoke leaves for Ohio, he installs a ‘security system’ for the sake of Ashima who stays alone in the house. In Maxine’s house, the Ratliffs live a care-free life. Gogol views that: ‘Nothing is locked, not the main house, or the cabin that he and Maxine sleep in. Anyone could walk in’ (NS 155). But Ashima, before going to bed every night, ‘would double-check all the window locks, making sure that they were fastened tightly’. ‘Everyone should learn to live on their own at some point’ is the primary motto of every American ‘but Ashima feels too old to learn such a skill’ (161) and experiences the solitude at the age of forty-eight. Like Ashima, a number of Americans live alone ‘because they are divorced’ (162).

Ashoke’s unfortunate death brings in Gogol a sea change. He does not want to look back at his life with a number of American girls. Instead, he looks back at his own culture which he once rejected. What he hated most became his feast. Despite the influence of pop culture, white girlfriends and a name change, Gogol could not escape from being an Indian with an attitude to life which his parents always expected to have from their children. He listens to his mother’s words and agrees to marry a Bengali childhood friend Moushumi whose upbringing is similar to that of Gogol. He prepares to lead a peaceful family life with his Bengali-American wife but fails in it while Moushumi decides to leave him to live with Dimitri, her first lover whom she met first in the final month of her school days. Nayak (2008) reviews her psyche that: ‘As a research scholar on French feminist theory she has developed an ultra feminist consciousness that goes against her native culture’ (143). After her desertion it took him a year to wear off the shock. His mother’s decision to move back to India, separating her days into two between India and America, creates emptiness in him and this emptiness upsets him. He feels that:
Without people in the world to call him Gogol, no matter how long he himself lives; Gogol Ganguli will once or all, vanish from the lips of loved ones, and so cease to exist. Yet the thought of this demise provides no sense of victory, no solace. It provides no solace at all. (NS 289)

Sujatha Rana (2010), while writing about his assimilation into American culture and his return to Indian way of life, says that his dual identity is the strength of his character. He further analyses that:

Gogol realizes that his identity is embellished by both cultures. He does not have to be one or the other; he does not have to choose. He is made up of both, and instead of weakening his pride, his identity is strengthened by this. Coming out of his turmoil Gogol is able to stand on his feet and is no longer ashamed of himself or the way he has lived life till then. He has assimilated himself in American culture and values, at the same time retaining his parents’ Indian heritage and is now proud of his name Nikhil Gogol Ganguli and all that it means. (183)

Both Maxine and Graham stand at the same point while their psyche is measured. Maxine fails to understand Gogol’s emotional attachment to his family and his sentiments over his cultural roots. Graham seems to accept every aspect of the Indian way of life but later his tolerance becomes desperation and Moushumi understands that he can never comprehend and respect Indians and Indian way of life. Ultimately, Gogol decides to give up his relationship with Maxine and Moushumi decides to give up her relationship with Graham. In inter-continental marriages, understanding the cultural background of the partner is more important than the understanding of the individual. Not all the psyche works together as it works in Ruma and Adam in Unaccustomed Earth.

Lahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies explores the complexities of culturally-displaced South Asian diaspora families in the United States. These complexities naturally lead to psychological turmoil but the settled
relationship with the outer world and the surrounding environment give them peace and hope. Only Lilia’s parents in *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* and the protagonist and his wife, Mala, in *The Third and Final Continent* are good at having a smooth relationship with the society where they decide their livelihood. All others fail to follow their example and struggle to succeed. Shoba and Shukumar in *A Temporary Matter* begin a happy family life but the lack of understanding of their cultural roots and the necessity of the marriage bond separate them. Who is to blame for their separation? Is it their own psyche which fails to instill in them the confidence to overcome their sufferings and rebuild life or the society that gives them independence to decide on their life without the other? They live as a family and the meaning of being a family is to shift their places during a catastrophe; the husband will be a moral support to the wife in her suffering and vice versa but Shoba and Shukumar lose concerns for each other. In this regard Himadri Lahiri (2008a) writes:

Lahiri underplays the subtle violence lurking imperceptivity underneath the veneer, a violence that bleeds their minds. Sharing of meal on the same table, displaying affection, showing occasional concern for each other and even making love appeared to be mere play-acting. (49)

Though the couple hides each other in the other’s presence, the love they once had between them is still fresh and it is obvious when she ‘wept without sound, and whispered his name, and traced his eyebrows with a finger in the dark’ and he reveals to her the hidden fact that their still-born baby is a boy, ‘his skin was more red than brown. He had black hair on his head… His fingers were curled shut, just like yours in the night’ (22). The new revelation shocks Shoba and she ‘turned off the light, and sat down on the table and Shukumar joined her shortly. They wept together for the things they now knew’ (22). They mourn the loss together and Lahiri leaves the fate of the
family life between the two to the readers. Human predicament is unpredictable. Lahiri’s characters always carry a strong will power to carry out the oddities of life. In that sense Shoba and Shukumar will also inherit certain positive responses to life which will unite them ultimately. It is the psychology of human mind to look at the negative aspects of life and in Shoba and Shukumar their marriage is looked upon as a temporary matter. On the other hand, Lahiri’s psyche allows the readers to look at their separation as a temporary matter giving a positive note to their reunion.

Communication functions as a psychic healer between the couple in A Temporary Matter and the lack of it generates a malady to Mrs.Das in the title story Interpreter of Maladies. Mrs.Das thinks that a psychological union with her husband, Raj, is impossible since she finds no trace of love between them in their marital life. Her guilt of bringing up a son born to another man still distances her from her husband. However, bound to the societal norms taught by her native soil and parents, she continues to live as Mrs.Das. Deeply immersed in the alien culture, Mr.Das never worries about his wife’s psyche. Nor does he suspect that she suffers from some psychological trauma. Her past haunts her like a ghost for almost eight years and she needs it to be exorcised. Her mere physical presence in the family does not give her any happiness. Her psychological depression forbids her from being a part of her family and the society. Her desperate involvement in life is similar to that of Moushumi’s in The Namesake. Both find their attachments somewhere and Mrs.Das regrets the guilt whereas Moushumi deserts her husband to move forward towards her lust knowing that what she is doing to Gogol is a sin. Himadri Lahiri (2008a) says about Mrs.Das and her emotions:

In Mrs.Das’s own life however, the cycle of creation and that of preservation has gone through rather casually, even in a depraving way without love and emotion – and there has been no “achievement of realization”. (54)
Mr. Das’ Punjabi friend is an opportunist who seduces Mrs. Das. His approach is casual, lustful, self-centred and self-satisfied. Like Dev in Sexy, he is intent on his purpose and ‘made love to her swiftly, in silence, with an expertise she had never known’ (PCD 64). It is only she who carries the guilt for ever and not he who later marries a Punjabi girl and exchanges greeting cards with the Das family. Mr. Kapasi, the tour guide finds a similarity between Mrs. Das’ family life and his own family life. Both lead a desperate life and Kapasi’s intention is to win the heart of Mrs. Das. He thinks of having communication with her after she left India but when the address slip handed over to her slips away, he realises that he can preserve only the floating memories of the Das family and nothing more. Robert Gnanamony (2006) writes of Lahiri and her sensibilities in relation to the story that ‘Lahiri, though accustomed to live in the west for most part of her life could not dismiss human values like love, understanding and fidelity in marriage…’ (101).

Mrs. Das lives an ‘unhealthy’ life in the pretext of her guilt which, Mr. Kapasi thinks, can be cured if she confesses to Mr. Das. Mr. Pirzada in When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine lives a detached life in the US. He never tries to learn the habits of Americans due to his concern and attachment with the family he has left behind in Dacca. Lilia’s parents invite Mr. Pirzada to their house by looking at his name in the telephone directory. They cultivated this habit since their settlement in the states. They need to give vent to their psychological thirst for being with Indians. Food they can buy in Indian shops, news about India they can watch on the television but for the company of Indian people, they need to find people out and invite them home. A psychological attachment with the native country keeps one physically active in a foreign country and the survival is less complicated because one does not maintain any emotional relationship with the new country. Mr. Pirzada knows nothing about the country but dares to survive because as soon as his tenure is
over, he will fly back to his native. Lilia’s parents feel for the absence of some of the amenities available in India but they adjust to live here for better prospects of life. Lilia is guaranteed a good school, education and career. They compromise comforts for prosperity. But Mr. Pirzada is not ready to compromise things and makes no attempts to assimilate as he never intends to live a displaced life. He lives in America but he constantly observes what is happening in his homeland. Lilia senses that he is physically present in America but his senses dwell in Dacca. In her vision she presumes that Mr. Pirzada practises things that were done in Dacca: ‘Our meals, our actions, were only a shadow of what had already happened there, a lagging ghost of where Mr. Pirzada really belonged’ (PCD 31). During the twelve-day war in India, Mr. Pirzada is identified neither as an Indian nor as a Pakistani nor as a Bangladeshi. Nor is he a Hindu but they all hail from the same origin, India, and it is the only fact that unites them in America. Reetamoni Narzary (2008) visualises things from Lilia’s perception that:

Lilia learns a little about human relationship and what it means to miss a close one. She gets an idea of what it has meant for Pirzada to be away from his family for so long. And when she realizes that Mr. Pirzada would never come back to visit them she feels the full force of that feeling. (70)

Lilia’s mother hesitates to tell Lilia certain bitter facts about India. They still feel Indian and practise only Indian habits but want to bring up their daughter as American. They teach her American mannerisms and allow her to move with American friends. They feel that it is necessary for Lilia to know about America since she is going to live there. Like Lahiri’s many other assimilated characters, Lilia is also a cultural offspring with a bi-cultural vision. She explores her cultural juxtaposition; her parental culture and the American culture. While working on her school assignment, her thoughts hover over the geographical structure of Asia and in particular she tries to
explore India. Her psyche is not only to explore but also to wish peace for Mr. Pirzada and his family. Her prayer is so powerful that he rejoins his family:

I prayed that Mr. Pirzada's family was safe and sound. I had never prayed before, had never been taught or told to, but I decided, given the circumstances, that it was something I should do. That night when I went to the bathroom I only pretended to brush my teeth, for I feared that I would somehow rinse the prayer out as well. (PCD 32)

Mr. Pirzada’s psyche is to return to his roots and never to return to the place where he experienced physical alienation and psychological union. Mrs. Sen’s psyche in *Mrs. Sen’s* is to somehow adjust to the new environment in the new land. Though she keeps herself busy to forget her glorious past amidst so many members of her family and relatives in India, her inability to learn things and to become accustomed to the new life invokes in her the memories of her past. Her life in India haunts her and her only companion is Eliot, an American boy, who understands her loneliness and her bewilderment in a strange new culture. She takes all possible efforts to recreate India in her American house by playing audio cassettes to listen to the voice of her dear ones living in India. Her love for being sociable, sharing information and chatting with neighbours for everything is a sharp contrast to the Americans’ love for silence and privacy. The home-sick Mrs. Sen feels happy whenever she receives letters from India and gets fresh fish from the sea. She becomes alive in the kitchen while preparing food for her husband. She smells India in the smell of her food. She wants to befriend Eliot’s mother, the only visitor to her house but the lady, unwilling to move with anyone, maintains distance expressing her peculiar American mannerisms. Though the land has a lot of space to accommodate anyone who approaches for survival, Eliot’s mother has no space in her mind to accommodate Mrs. Sen. This attitude intensifies the alienated feeling of the settlers. Mrs. Sen’s settler soul, unable to accept
the reality, suspects the safety of the individual. The following conversation between Eliot and Mrs. Sen brings to light her doubts and anxiety:

“Eliot, if I began to scream right now at the top of my lungs, would someone come?”

“Mrs. Sen, what is wrong?”

“Nothing. I am only asking if someone would come”

Eliot shrugged. “May be”. (MS 116)

Roychoudhury (2008) reviews the reason for Mrs. Sen’s resistance to foreign ways of life. Her cultural re-adjustments force her to think of food as an important alibi to escape the discomforts of an alien culture. She seeks recluse in food because she is affected by the silence which is a part of her present life and the gap in understanding the people around her. He also observes that:

Mrs. Sen’s refusal to learn driving is her personal strategy to resist participation in a culture that has alienated her from the place where she wants desperately to belong to. (93)

Mr. Pirzada’s consciousness is to return to his native for a reunion and Mrs. Sen at least has a hope to visit her relatives she left behind in India in the near future. But Boori Ma in The Real Durwan can only recollect her previous life in the long-left country and has no hope for return and reunion. Lahiri has presented her as a tragic psyche but with a positive attitude to move on further with no hold in future. The pain she undergoes can be understood by her words though she herself is not aware of it:

At our house, we ate goat twice a week. We had a pond on our own property, full of fish…. Yes, there I tasted life. Here I eat my dinner from a rice pot. (TRD 71)
In an attempt to come to terms with the present and to escape from everyday hardship, it is essential for Boori Ma to create a world for herself through imagination. She, though sixty-four, never considers her age as a constraint to construct stories. Nobody knows about her antecedents and every one knows that she is a refugee deported to Calcutta after the partition. Though nobody believes her contradictory stories, she finds solace in travelling back to her past. Her present job as a stair sweeper does not allow the residents to believe that she is the mistress of a rich family. However, they accept her as ‘the victim of changing times’, though they have questions like ‘what kind of landowner ended up sweeping stairs?’ (TRD 72) Strongly understanding the psyche of a refugee and keeping in mind her age, Mr.Chatterjee, an elderly man, treats her kindly and thinks that ‘certain benefits of doubt should be given to her because of her status as a refugee in India and because such a drastic change in circumstances was not impossible’ (Narzary 2008:66).

Jhumpa Lahiri presents a positive second generation hybrid psyche, Twinkle, in the story This Blessed House. Sanjeev’s marriage with an American of Indian descent, Twinkle, may be the first step towards assimilation but it is also an effort to establish his identity as an Indian especially as a Hindu in a country where majority are Christians. His newly-wed is a threat to his identity because of her extraordinary attachment to the Christian symbols. As soon as she finds a statue of Christ, she affirms, ‘we’re good little Hindus’, but also remembers to leave ‘a kiss on top of Christ’s head’ (TBH 149). As she is a second generation Indian, she has no bicultural ambiguity. Her bicultural upbringing has taught her to be unbiased to religious and cultural beliefs. Sanjeev too is not an orthodox Hindu but her over-attachment to Christian symbols induces in him his religious fervour. Moreover, it is an unconscious awakening to preserve his own religion from the dominance of Twinkle’s Christian sentiments. At the same time, she is not
worried about the criticisms and contempt raised about her name. Even for the
greatest people like Edward Said, it has taken a long time to adjust with their
names. Said (1984) has once said that ‘Thus it took me about fifty years to
become accustomed to, or, more exactly, to feel less uncomfortable with
“Edward”, a foolishly English name yoked forcibly to the unmistakably
Arabic family name Said’ (1). Unlike Gogol, who is much disturbed by his
strange name, she takes things in a lighter vein and even faces them with an
unusual courage. On hearing her name, one of the guests asks her whether her
last name is ‘Little Star’. For those who frown at her name, she replies that
‘there’s an actress named Dimple Kabadia in Bombay. She even has a sister
named Simple’, ‘as if to let the absurdity of the names settle in’ (TBH 151). It
seems Twinkle has taken enough time and given a lot of exposure to a
different culture to form this transformed identity. But Sanjeev, being new to
the environment, refuses to accept a new attitude to life which Twinkle has
gone through. Though these contradictions create a frequent rift between the
two, Twinkle, as usual, takes nothing into her heart but moves steadily with
the aim to succeed in life with the attitude she learnt in her bi-cultural
upbringing. People like Sanjeev and Mrs.Sen have to come over these hurdles
for survival though ‘they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that
homeland in one way or another and their ethnocommunal consciousness and
solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship’
(Safran 1991:84).

Almost all the protagonists of Lahiri are immigrant characters
except Miranda in Sexy and Bibi Halder in The Treatment of Bibi Halder.
Every immigrant of Lahiri suffers from physical or psychological alienation at
some point of time. Miranda is not an immigrant but she experiences a
psychological transformation while trying to figure out the sensations of
Indians through an Indian, Dev. Her physical involvement with Dev motivates
her to learn more about India and the life style of Indians. Also, she is
bewildered by the beauty of his wife. She is both thrilled and threatened. The thrill is due to her exploration of India and Indian culture and the threat is due to the overwhelming beauty of Dev’s wife. She struggles with writing her name in Bengali to get more of Dev in her life. Lahiri captures the various emotions that Miranda goes through during their relationship:

After lunch they made love, on sheets covered with crumbs, and then Dev took a nap for twelve minutes. Miranda had never known an adult who took naps, but Dev said I was something he'd grown up doing in India, where it was so hot that people didn't leave their homes until the sun went down. "Plus it allows us to sleep together," he murmured mischievously, curving his arm like a big bracelet around her body.

Only Miranda never slept. (Sexy 94)

Miranda’s interaction with a small boy, Rohin, Laxmi’s cousin’s son, enlightens in her the true meaning of her relationship with Dev by calling her ‘sexy’ and explaining the meaning in the true Indian context. A seven-year-old boy, Rohin, has such an insight to perceive the meaning of the word ‘sexy’ in an admiring way whereas Lilia, an eleven-year-old girl in When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine is unable to perceive the political differences that her father tries to convey. Cox (2003), who writes about Lahiri’s child, observes that they are ‘untainted by the effects of prolonged enculturation, bring to the narrative fore from those conflicts or core issues-maladies, perhaps that arise between and among native and immigrant groups’ (120).

Rohin’s revelation makes Miranda understand the meaninglessness of their relationship and she decides to leave Dev unwilling to create a rift in his smooth family life. Sah (2008) observes that their ‘sexual encounter’ is ‘devoid of any emotional attachment’:
They represent the chasm between the East and the West; both appear to be different and mysterious to each other, and, yet, equally attracted. The differences between the East and the West is not only cultural, but also physical and colour-related, i.e., Dark (East) and Fair (West); these two opposites feel magnetic enticement between them for their strangeness and otherness leading to their physical union as exemplified by Dev and Miranda, but due to the cultural alienation we witness hindrance in the attainment of a total sexual assimilation. (79)

Dev is under the influence of the liberal sexuality of the West but at the same time unlike Laxmi’s cousin’s husband, he is not ready to disown his family for the sake of sex. As an opportunist, he uses Miranda for his sexual gratification. His psyche is to pretend loyalty to his marital life and at the same time commit adultery by indulging in extramarital affairs.

Miranda, Lahiri’s Western protagonist, got her sensibility transformed by a rude awakening in the United States from Rohin, an Indian boy. In *The Treatment of Bibi Halder*, Bibi Halder, an Indian protagonist, left to be orphaned in the streets of Calcutta, is brought to her senses by benevolent neighbours. For immigrants, threats are from the society outside the home but for the native Bibi, threat is within her home. Her incurable unknown sickness does not fetch her any bridegroom though she longs for wedlock and a family of her own. Her male cousin’s lack of interest in bringing a suitable boy drives the neighbours to bring one but in vain. By reading her character, she is assumed to be childish, lacking mannerisms and less knowledgeable. Her cousin’s wife used to say: ‘The girl knows nothing about anything, speaks backward, is practically thirty, can’t light a coal stove, can’t boil rice, can’t tell the difference between fennel and a cumin seed’ (TTH 163). In fact it is the wife of her cousin who does not have worldly knowledge. She does not know to treat her dependent. She fails to win the favour of her neighbours. She fails in her responsibility to cure Bibi’s malady and bring in a suitor to Bibi. But Bibi is open to all, hurts none and is
capable of winning over the hearts of everyone nearby. Moreover, she expresses an extraordinary courage while she is sent out of the house with the accusation that she has infected her cousin’s baby. While all others pity her, she says, ‘The world begins at the bottom of the stairs. Now I am free to discover life as I please’ (TTH 170). She does not hesitate or pretend to express her desire that she wants a man. When her cousin’s family moves away, she stays back in the same ‘unpainted four-storied building’ (159) and continues to survive by being fed by her neighbours. After her unknown pregnancy followed by child birth, she becomes perfectly normal. She runs the shop again which was once owned by her cousin. Bibi is living in a land which Mrs.Sen longed to live in America:

At home that is all you have to do. Not everybody has a telephone but just raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole neighborhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with arrangements. (MS 116)

Lahiri has attained the height in presenting a distinctive destitute woman, alienated in her own house for no fault of hers. Her success is doubled while Bibi draws sympathy both from her neighbours and readers and attains success in her life giving a psychological strength to the readers by strengthening her own psyche. The narrator of The Third and Final Continent is an ordinary man encountering life in three different continents. Both Bibi and the narrator encounter entirely different circumstances but succeed at the end. The narrator leaves home and homeland and searches his identity across continents but Bibi searches her identity within the four walls of her apartment and gets her identity somehow. He remains Indian wherever he goes. He accepts all the identities given to him, first as Indian, second as English and finally as American. He changes his residence from continent to continent but not his beliefs. In America, he prefers eating cornflakes instead of ‘hamburgers or hot dogs’ (TFC 175). He is officially given an identity in
the country of his final settlement but he is constantly pulled backwards towards his original identity. It takes a long time for him to assimilate. Nina, the protagonist in *The Immigrant* (Kapoor 2008), rightly perceives the immigrant psyche in the settled land. She thinks that Indians become immigrants slowly because they are not among those who have fled persecution, destitution, famine, slavery and death threats. She further explains:

> These immigrants are always in two minds. Outwardly they adjust well. Educated and English speaking, they allow misleading assumptions about a heart that is divided. In the new country they work lengthy hours to gain entrance into the system, into society, into establishing a healthy bank account. (123)

The protagonist in *The Third and Final Continent* is inspired by the hundred-and-three-year-old lady, Mrs. Croft, who describes his wife Mala as a ‘perfect lady’. Mala, like her husband, never changes her identity and is used to wearing only saris. They succeed in retaining their original identities. They raise their status in the society and own a house in the suburbs. The narrator compares the life of the strong-willed Mrs. Croft to his own. If she can withstand generations, he can also be successful in three continents. He is conscious of making America his home. He says that they ‘have decided to grow old here’ (TFC 197). He remains an example for his son. He says, ‘In my son’s eyes I see the ambition that had first hurled me across the world. In a few years he will graduate and pave his way, alone and unprotected’ (197).

Art is a generalised self-expression and the artist's identity is obtained through his works of art. Harold Osborne (1968) observes that the work of art sometimes seems to express directly the artist's character and at other times it gives vent to his submerged personality traits which normally do not find expression in his non-artistic life. Jhumpa Lahiri, as an artist, excels in portraying her identity both as an Indian and as an American either
directly or, at times, through her submerged personality traits. Lahiri’s own psyche takes its form as characters. Her characters are Indians and Indian Americans who are caught between native and acquired cultures. Like the stories in *The Interpreter of Maladies*, the stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* also ruminate over the estranged psyche of the immigrant characters who explore the secrets at the heart of family life. Lahiri has elaborately brought out an intricate working between the heart and mind in the world of fathers and mothers, parents and children, sisters and brothers and friends and lovers. She puts it in her own words:

I was aware of certain common elements: the creation and dissolution of families, the fault lines between parents and children, the confluence of life and death. And though these are not autobiographical stories, they reflect a certain transformative phase of my life, during which I became a mother and experienced, albeit as a daughter-in-law, the loss of parents. (Mullen 2013)

Melanie Haupt (2008) reviews the book in *The Austin Chronicle* as:

The tales in *Unaccustomed Earth*, the title of which comes from Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Custom-House," seep into the psyche quietly, unassumingly stealthy in their power to affect deeply. Each of the first five stories follows a family in some sort of crisis, even though they may not be conscious of it.

The title story, *Unaccustomed Earth*, ponders over the disturbed psyche of a young mother who is anxious about the visit of her widowed father. Ruma feels uneasy to have her father in her house. In all his previous visits he accompanied her mother and for the first time he visits Ruma alone after his wife’s death. Ruma is worried about the responsibility bestowed on her in the absence of her mother. She was never close to her father and her mother was always between the two. Now the sudden closeness is felt strange but inevitable. Her father, who brought up his children in the American soil,
agrees that ‘Ruma hadn’t been raise with that sense of duty’ (UE 29). All her assumed responsibilities are only disillusionment as he is very much attached to Ruma and even more to Akash, her little son. His affection is something strange to Ruma and she has not expected it from him. When he is about to part, he longs for his stay in Seattle but he resists because he ‘knew that it was not for his sake that his daughter was asking him to live here. It was for hers’ (53). However, his association with Akash, as a grandfather, makes him feel restless while taking leave: ‘He was suddenly desperate to leave, the remaining twenty-four hours feeling unbearable’ (53).

At every end Ruma seems to be an imitation of her mother though she leads ‘her own life, has ‘made her own decisions’ and ‘married an American boy’ (29). Adam encourages her ‘to hire a babysitter’ but she volunteers to take care of her son because she ‘couldn’t justify paying for something she now had the freedom to do’ (5). Her first concern is her children and she tells her father that she ‘will be taking care of two children, just like Ma did’ (36). Her mother, who ‘hadn’t been built to live on her own’, (29) flew with her father. Like her mother, she moves to Seattle from Brooklyn for Adam’s job.

For Ruma’s father, ‘work is important’. He ‘cannot stay unoccupied’ (38) and finds some work after his retirement which he ‘could do from his computer at home’ (29). He even insists on Ruma resuming her career and tells her that ‘self-reliance is important… Life is full of surprises. Today you can depend on Adam, on Adam’s job. Tomorrow, who knows’ (38). He is always concerned about his duties both as a father to his children and as a son to his parents. But he succeeds as a father and fails as a son. After his father’s death he can neither move his family back to India nor move his eighty-year-old widowed mother to Pennsylvania. She is left under the care of his siblings until death. He had been a workaholic father and husband
throughout his life. Unlike his wife, who always complained about the isolated life in the American suburbs, ‘he enjoyed solitude’ (29). In his solitude, he finds a companion after his wife’s death to share the rest of his life. Leaving Ruma and Akash in Seattle, he heads back ‘to Prague with Mrs. Bagchi, sleeping next to her at night’ (53). Ironically enough, it is Ruma’s father who has been transformed physically, emotionally and even psychologically and not Ruma who still holds fast certain values acquired from her mother.

Lahiri stands out of the ordinary by creating equal stock of immigrant men and women characters. Also she is remarkable for leveling both the characters in the often-represented ‘distant culture’ background. Unlike Bharathi Mukherjee, who finds solace in presenting women as central characters under the multicultural backdrop, she takes to the air both the immigrant characters to fly freely so as to let the readers comprehend their psyche. Bharathi Mukherjee herself says in an interview that she produces more number of Indian immigrant women than their male counterparts. She further explains that women undergo a more psychological transformation than men because men aim at making money and return to their native but women follow men without any aim but are bound to the norms of the society. Lahiri’s Aparna is such a woman who follows her husband to the US and is left to live alone at home only to experience bitterness and despair. Another immigrant, Pranab, a male counterpart, who is helped by Aparna to overcome his unfriendly atmosphere, makes his life in the very American way in a very short period of time.

An immigrant mother’s psyche is presented in *Hell-Heaven* by her Americanised daughter Usha. Usha’s mother, Aparna, closes the blinds to be away from American culture and from the people around her out of fear for change. Like most other immigrants she wants to preserve her cultural aspects
to be taken to her future generations. As an immigrant she is reluctant to integrate into the American culture. She is distanced from her own daughter for her continuous insistence on strict adherence to parental culture. Her confrontation angers Usha and she, like her father, rejects her mother and irreconcilable differences arise between the two. Her unbecoming of an American and her husband’s unenthusiastic nature force her to be in isolation.

Manju Kapoor (2008) strongly feels for the plight of immigrant wives:

The immigrant who comes as a wife has a more difficult time. If work exists for her, it is in the future, and after much finding of feet. At present all she is, is a wife, and a wife is alone, for many, many hours. There will come a day when even books are powerless to distract. When the house and its conveniences can no longer completely charm or compensate. Then she realizes she is an immigrant for life. (124)

Pranab’s arrival helps Aparna let go off her isolated feeling. His frequent visits make her forget her secluded life in the US. Usha discovers that ‘he brought to my mother the first, and, I suspect, the only pure happiness she ever felt’ and he ‘transported my mother back to the world she’d left behind in order to marry my father’ (HH 65). She falls secretly in love with him which is an unbecoming act of an Indian wife in America. She is unable to resist her feelings as she finds him the only solace in the alien land. Very soon she becomes heart-broken and lets Pranab go off when he declares his marriage with Deborah, an American woman.

Usha is not allowed to move with Deborah but she ‘fell in love with Deborah, the way young girls often fall in love with women who are not their mothers’ (69). She is becoming more of an American and to her mother’s dismay she is leaving her Bengali culture and traditions. Aparna resents Deborah for taking Pranab away from them. Her resentment is also due to the fear that she may be an inspiration for Usha to marry an American. Years
After Deborah confesses to Aparna that ‘she had tried, for years, to get Pranab Kaku to reconcile with his parents, and that she had also encouraged him to maintain ties with other Bengalis, but he had resisted’ (82) and Aparna feels sorry for the ill-feeling she had on her. Every heart takes its turn in a point and the turn paves the way for reconciliations. Usha recollects that ‘as my parents approached their old age, she and my father had grown fond of each other, out of habit if nothing else’ and ‘my mother and I had also made peace’ (81). But Pranab, who once turned his back to his parents, now deserts Deborah too for a married Bengali woman. His psyche is to come back to the same point of origin where he started his life by ‘destroying two families in the process’ (81).

Like Pranab, in Hell-Heaven, Amit, in A Choice of Accommodations, gets into inter-continental marriage. Pranab is punished by his parents for his marriage with an American woman by showing their back to him and Amit punishes his parents by marrying an American woman, Megan, against their wish. Amit’s parents leave him in a boarding school at Langford at such a young age and return to India. He cannot figure out how his own parents could leave him and this feeling generates animosity with them. However, ‘he learned to live without his mother and father, as everyone else did, shedding his daily dependence on them even though he was still a boy, and even to enjoy it. Still, he refused to forgive them’ (ACA 97). But he can never imagine parting with his own children. The more he cares, the more he is worried about their safety. In the marriage party, he misses his children. On seeing the other kids playing happily, he thinks of his children and tells Megan that ‘the girls would have enjoyed this’ (101). His sense of love as well as his insecure feeling does not allow him to enjoy the blessings but his wife enjoys her time unmindful of her kids.
*Only Goodness* is about the addictive psyche of the brother for whose alcoholism his own sister is responsible. Sudha seems to be perfect in the eyes of her English husband and her immigrant parents who have travelled from India to London and finally to Massachusetts. As an elder child she took care of her brother Rahul and was more concerned about giving him an American beginning. Her strange experience in her grade school in the UK made her determine ‘that her little brother should leave his mark as a child in America. She sought all the right toys for him… asked her parents to buy him the books she’d been read by her first teachers… and read them to Rahul herself’ (OG 136). While visiting her university, she introduces him the first sip of beer as a way of amalgamation into American culture. And years later, Sudha becomes mature enough and, on understanding her parents’ psychology, waits for them to let her go off independently. On the other hand, Rahul nourishes his drinking habit and ‘eventually it was no longer a game for him but a way of life’ (171) becomes addicted to it in his adulthood. *Crossroads* (2012), a report on the immigrant psychology in the new century, says that:

For immigrant children, it can be difficult to live with the expectations and demands of one culture in the home and another at school. Children may not turn to their parents with problems and concerns, believing their parents do not know the culture and its institutions well enough to provide them with good advice or assistance. In addition, they may see their parents as burdened with the multiple stresses of resettlement and therefore psychologically unavailable. (29)

Immigrant parents encounter psychological alienation apart from geographical confrontation and cultural dislocation. The first generation immigrant parents rely on their children to understand the outer world. It is only Sudha who teaches her parents American habits. She mediates between cultures and later between her brother and parents. Though their
consciousness centres round their children for their well-being, Rahul becomes a failure by bringing shame on his family. Sudha suffers from the guilt of introducing him to alcohol. Rahul’s defeat increases her sense of responsibility and her parents continue to rely on her to mend his ways. Her mother asks her to talk to him to ‘find out what went wrong’ (140). Filipczak (2012) observes his psychological in-betweenness thus:

Rahul is a dislocated subject. He does not want to identify with his Indian family and Indian way of life. However, when he eventually finds strength in himself to abandon his parents in order to live his own way, the American way with an American girlfriend, he fails. His failure should be read symbolically – as a hybrid, he cannot be the One, or the Other, he cannot live as an American or an Indian. He will not succeed until he agrees to his middle position, his in-betweenness. Only from this position he can start building anew. (8)

Sudha, like Jhumpa Lahiri, having been born in London to Indian parents and brought up in America, knew her limitations. She went to college in Philadelphia, studied diligently ‘but on weekends she learned to let loose, going to parties and allowing boys into her bed. She began drinking, something her parents did not do’ (OG 129). She loved Roger, ‘the first man she’d dated’. ‘Like Sudha, he was moderate with alcohol’ (147). Her parents accepted him for the fact that ‘he’d been born in India, that he was English not American’ (152). At the same time Rahul began dating a woman named Elena who was eight years senior to him. When he announced that they were engaged, everyone was shocked. His father told him that he was only a boy, had ‘no career, no goal, no path in life’ and that woman was ‘practically old enough’ (155) to be his mother. These revelations and resistance irritated him and he called his father ‘a snob’ and ‘nothing but a pathetic old snob’ (155). He left home after Sudha’s marriage and ‘she never told Roger about the old game of hiding beer cans, a fact that now tortured her’ (157). Though she longed for reunion, his return to see her son Neel shattered her family into
pieces by throwing her relationship with her husband as well as her infant son's safety into peril.

Psychic development and self-invention are necessary for an immigrant to be successful in America. Psychological development implies ‘a progressive process of change and growth which leads from a very simple, almost unstructured primary configuration to a very complex, highly individualised, and highly structured end-condition that we equate with the idea of maturity’ (Lichtenstein 1964:55). Jhumpa Lahiri has made her immigrant characters realise their self and given them the strength to develop their psyche. In contrast to the first generation immigrants, the second generation immigrants, Hema and Kaushik, in the story *Hema and Kaushik*, travel almost half the world in search of their place, like two astronomical bodies which fall out of their crystal constellation. At last, Hema finds that she has no other go except to accept the place created by her parents and Kaushik finds that he belongs to nowhere. They become maximalists and are unable to compromise with the expectations of their parents. Their life is an example of what Mukherjee terms ‘maximalist character’: They have ‘shed past lives and languages, and have travelled half the world in every direction to come here and begin again... They've lived through centuries of history in a single lifetime - village-born, colonized, traditionally raised, and educated’ (Mukherjee 1998:2).

Like Mukherjee’s Jasmine, Lahiri’s Kaushik reinvents himself in every stage of his life and in every continent of his travel. His formative years of stay in India do not help him identify himself as an Indian. His return to the US does not create an impression to Hema that he is an American except that of his accent. His socio-psychological journey into distant countries and cultures refuses to give him a unique identity but he is always identified as an Indian by others for his colour and ethnicity. He experiences a significant
sense of loss due to his mother’s impending death and a sense of loneliness after his mother’s death and his father’s remarriage. His conscience does not allow him to return to the house where his father’s second wife and her daughters are living now. His terrific loss drives him away to far-off lands.

In the first story, *Once in a Lifetime*, Kaushik’s family decides to return to India, the country of their origin. It is a decision no immigrant dared to do. Their decision confirms the affirmative sense the family possesses for their home country. During their return to India, the family is appreciated by many of the Indians for their decision to return home and Hema’s family remarks that it is ‘a form of self-liberation from alienation’ (Egya 2008:94). Kaushik’s mother Parul Mashi also insists that it is ‘too good to turn down’. Their return again to the US, after seven years of stay in India, is viewed as an outcome of the moral and psychic failure of the immigrants. Lahiri is capable of projecting the psychic devaluation undergone by the immigrant characters through Kaushik’s family. Through their resettlement, the family presents a striking difference with other Indian immigrant families. Hema’s mother observes that they fly in the first class compartment, speak ‘in English, in a pleasant, unhurried way’ (HAK 232) and Parul does not cook, even though she keeps her company in the kitchen. Sule E Egya (2008) speaks of Parul’s psychic status:

… a woman living with cancer, now dying of cancer because of the ways of life of the Western people she has chosen, but yet fleeing the hospitality of her homeland. Parul Mashi returns to the US to die because the cancer she is dying of is product of the US, it is a mark of her psychic and self-devaluation in postcolonial immigration. Lahiri’s juxtaposition of the two families offers us an alternative discourse to the psychic-devaluing one that goes with postcoloniality. (96)

Only the Kaushiks live a different life among the immigrants. They have the privilege to live a Westernised life even in Bombay. After a few
years of life in America, their return again to Bombay has made them more American than Indian. Kaushik is brought up both in India and in America only as an American but Hema is brought up in America as an Indian. For Hema’s parents certain American practices seem cruel and alien. What seems to be normal to the immigrant parents is abnormal to their children. Hema’s mother considers ‘the idea of a child sleeping alone a cruel American practice’ and, therefore, she does not encourage it. Hema’s mother recalls that she ‘slept in the same bed as her parents until the day she was married and that this was perfectly normal’ (HAK 229). Hema knows perfectly well that ‘it was not normal’ in the American context. She knows that her friends will ridicule her if they know and insists on sleeping alone before she starts middle school.

Kaushik’s memories of his dead mother torment him in the second story of the triology Year’s End. His father tries to erase the memories of his wife completely by getting rid of the things she ‘touched, known, or otherwise occupied’. ‘He had wasted no time giving away her clothes her handbags, her boxes of cosmetics and colognes’ (HAK 256). Kaushik is unable to see another woman standing in his mother’s kitchen and living in the house. Slowly complications arise in his relationship with his recently-remarried father and his new wife, Chitra, and her two daughters. Ultimately, these situations influence Kaushik to lead the life of a wanderer.

Going Ashore, the last of the triology, once again connects the lives of the two, Hema and Kaushik, who have now taken different turns and decided to enter a completely different phase of their lives in a few days. Their chance meeting in Rome after two decades helps them discover the strong connections they have with each other. Their wandering in Rome characterises their independence and freedom from the cultural bonds which have helped them shape their lives. But for Hema, this freedom is short-lived
because she has decided to allow her parents to arrange a marriage after her disastrous affair with a married American.

Excepting the inabilities to cope with the society in the day-to-day social life, the first-generation immigrants show a remarkable interest while entering the US schools. They possess higher levels of optimism, aspirations, dedication to duty and positive attitude along with the ethical qualities they bring from their native. Also their academic outcome is stronger than the expected. Lahiri’s second novel, *The Lowland*, presents such hard-working personalities who excel in their field of study but stand at two different ends. The psychological journey of Subhash and Gauri starts from the lowland of Calcutta to the two different destinations in the United States, Rhode Island and California. Initially, Subhash undertakes this journey for academic advancements and material prosperity but later he gives a meaning by promising Gauri a free and independent life by way of losing his own life. Though both stand at different poles, they live with a guilty conscience throughout their life. Gauri carries the guilt of having married her husband’s brother and deserting her child Bela whom she is unable to love. Subhash suffers the guilt of pretending to be Bela’s father and deserting his own parents in Tollygunge.

Gauri’s psychological union with Udayan never allows her to accept Subhash in his place. She is grateful to Subhash for releasing her from her in-laws and for setting her free in Rhode Island to find her own path. She marries Subhash with the hope that ‘she could come one day to love him, out of gratitude if nothing else’ (L.L. 127). But Subhash’s mother, though in an attempt to dissuade him, warns him saying ‘she’s Udayan’s wife, she’ll never love you’ (160). She proves her mother-in-law’s statement true. She neither accepts Subhash nor loves her daughter Bela:
Nor was her love for Udayan recognizable or intact. Anger was always mounted to it... Anger at him for dying when he might have lived. For bringing her happiness, and then taking it away. For trusting her, only to betray her. For believing in sacrifice, only to be so selfish in the end. (LL 164)

In childhood she was alienated from her family but then her mother did not stop loving her. She had no memory of spending her time either with her mother or with her father. She always lived under the shadow of somebody. She was afraid she could not cast a shadow of her own and it was Udayan who brought her out to her own senses and gave her the confidence that she could play her role. Now he is gone. It is the regret and the guilt which make her life not worth living. Until she loses herself in California, she lives with the guilt of marrying Subhash and wrongly establishing him as Bela’s father. Afterwards she regrets deserting Subhash and Bela and ‘she was the sole accuser, the sole guardian of her guilt... Sentenced in the very act of being forgotten, punished by means of her release’ (320). She considers her lonely life as a self-imposed punishment for her crime. In her new environment, she always retires to her room without anyone’s companionship. For her ungratefulness to Subhash and Bela, ‘it felt wrong to seek the companionship of anyone else. Isolation offered its own form of companionship’ (237). The narrator says:

She understood now what it meant to walk away from her child. It had been her own act of killing. A connection she had severed, resulting in a death that applied only to the two of them. It was a crime worse than anything Udayan had committed. (LL 242)

Gauri is unconventional in every act. She finds a possible atmosphere in the United States to reinvent herself again and again. Her first act of rebellion is to bring in a changed attitude in dressing. She never cares for Subhash’s opinion. She feels like setting into the American costume and
without any second thought throws away petticoats and saris. When she is asked, she simply says, she ‘was tired of those’ (141). Manju Kapoor’s *The Immigrant* (2008) narrates the immigrant psyche in terms of dress:

As immigrants fly across oceans, they shed their old clothing, because clothes maketh the man, and new one help ease the tradition. Men’s clothing has less international variation; the change is not so drastic. But those women who are not used to wearing western clothes find themselves in a dilemma. If they focus on integration, conversion, and conformity they have to sacrifice habit, style and self-perception. The choice is hard…. (152)

Gauri is away from such dilemmas which Manju Kapoor’s Nina is facing. She plays changing roles from time to time. She changes her role from a college-going girl to a wife, ‘from wife to widow, from sister-in-law to wife, from mother to childless woman’ (I.I. 240). She takes many forms like Bharathi Mukherjee’s Jasmine who adapts to different styles of life from a small ghetto in India to a sophisticated metropolitan in America with different names and identities. She has generated alternative versions of herself by marrying Subhash and abandoning Bela and in all these conversions she has ‘insisted at brutal cost’ (240). She feels that Subhash and Bela are physical barriers to her psychological journey and discards them from her life. Though she is emotionally detached from Subhash, she makes love to him. For her mind and body are two different entities. She can never part with Udayan and his death cannot separate them. She lives with him recollecting him in her thoughts. He dies in the lowland amid the hyacinth but emerges from death to live with her because she never lets him die. A psychic union has no death. She regrets leaving Bela and Subhash but prepares to die for Udayan. She visits the lowland after forty years to see the stone laid in memory of Udayan but it is of no use. The landscape is changed. Unable to find him, she feels ‘a new solidarity with him. The bond of not existing’ (320). Now, he is not
alone. She stands in front of him. She has found a new way of uniting with him.

By way of healing the emotional scars of his brother’s wife, Subhash decides to take Gauri to Rhode Island. He promises her an autonomous life and tells her that he will bring up her child as his own. Though she is a brilliant academic, she has no emotional attachment with Subhash. Her focus is more on her studies than on her daughter. She cannot hide the fact that Bela is born to Udayan and Subhash is afraid to reveal the fact to Bela that he is not her real father. He moves away from Tollygunge for his own benefits but he deprives his parents for Gauri and her child and never returns to Tollygunge for twelve years. Bijoli, his mother, ‘feels the deepest shame a mother can feel, of not only surviving one child but losing another, still living’ (186). As an immigrant, his intrinsic memories are still attached to the place of his birth where his parents live. But he cannot accommodate two places in his mind. At the same time he feels extremely difficult to ignore the aged parents in Tollygunge. He can neither bring them here nor live with them there. He regrets the comforts he enjoys in one part of the world and the condemned life led by his parents in another part of the world. He is only an immigrant and cannot have the psychological attachment with the country as other Americans have. He says: ‘Among its people, its trees, its particular geography he had studied and grown to love, he was still a visitor. Perhaps the worst form of visitor: one who had refused to leave’ (253). Victor Ramraj (1996) writes about the immigrant psyche:

Yet though diasporans may not want actually to return home, wherever the dispersal has left them they retain a conscious or subconscious attachment to traditions, customs, values, religions, and languages of the ancestral home. (215)
Subhash, though conventional in nature, dates an American woman for sometime. In this regard Manju Kapoor’s Ananda is a contrast to Subhash. Like Subhash, Ananda is quick to adopt the local food, clothes and customs and feels every bit a Canadian but he is a failure to sleep effectively with a white woman. Ananda recalls: ‘As he tried to figure out his feelings in the dark watches of the night, he wondered whether his inability to love a white woman meant he had never really left India’ (Kapoor 2008:45). Unlike Ananda, Subhash moves freely with the American woman but he cannot possibly think of marrying her as she is practically senior to him and has a son born to her from her previous affair. During his sixties, he falls in love with an American woman, Elise Silva, who is the mother of three and has grand children. Bela approves of his affection with the hope that his life may encounter some peace at least now. Bela observes ‘a tranquility in their faces’ and ‘saw how, shyly, in contrast to her mother and father, they were already united’ (LL 258).

After his brother Udayan’s marriage, Subhash gives promises to his parents that he will let them look for a girl for him. He neither fulfils his promises nor obeys their words. His marriage with Gauri disappoints them and he waits for them to come to terms with him. Finally, his parents long to meet their grand daughter and anticipate a reunion with their son. At a certain point his father suggested selling the house and moving to another part of India ‘or perhaps applying for visas, and going to America to stay with Subhash and Gauri’ and his mother also thinks of ‘making amends with Subhash, accepting Gauri, getting to know Udayan’s child’ (181). Subhash, owing to the affection he showered on Bela, refuses to bring her to Tollygunge unwilling to let the truth be known to her through his parents. During the last years of his mother’s life, he consecutively visits Calcutta every winter to take care of her who has now become wild and needs to be
attended to. Also, he is unwilling to sell the house even after her death as it is the only link between him and Calcutta.

Subhash, as an affectionate father, takes care of Bela during her mother’s abandonment. He seeks remedy for her psychic deterioration. He helps her to rebuild both her mind and body. He feels that it is his utmost responsibility to secure his ‘daughter’s future by pairing it with another person’s.’ If they live in Calcutta, he thinks, it is ‘reasonable for him to bring up the subject of marriage’ (265).

Bela, the offspring of American soil, grows much like her real father Udayan. Unlike Udayan, she is not blind to facts. Brought up by Subhash in Rhode Island, she is capable of perceiving the meaning of family life and marital bonds. She has no place for marriage in her life. The most basic awareness of her life is ‘the unhappiness between her parents’ (258). Her parents ‘were a family of solitaries. They had collided and dispersed’ (262). She hates to live the life her parents lived. But she wants to become a mother and tells her father one day that she is pregnant. She has no special friends and never invites anyone to the house. Now, she tells her father the person responsible for her pregnancy. Her mother’s desertion, when she is only twelve years old, baffles her. Though she recovers from the shock, she withdraws herself from her father too. When her mother comes to see her after long years, she becomes violent and is unwilling to share with her ‘the facts and choices of her life’ (309). She tells her, ‘you are as dead as he [Udayan] is. The only difference is that you left me by choice’ (313).

Lahiri has skilfully contributed to the subject of psychic tension faced by the immigrants in their settled lands. In all her works, she prominently presents the psychic condition of both the first generation immigrants and their half-rooted children. As an immigrant writer she has proved her talents by exhibiting the inner conflicts of an expatriate Indian in
the American continent. Living a life with scorching conflicts, around as well as within, in a foreign country is not simply an experience but a penance. Every immigrant is a subject to it. Bharathi Mukherjee (1998) sorts out her feelings as an expatriate:

I was a psychological expatriate, though a naturalized Canadian, for fifteen years, simply because Canada is country officially hostile to the concepts of assimilation (It proclaims the virtue of its multicultural policy). Perceiving myself to be in a comfortable but unwelcoming environment, I struggled to maintain various emblems of my difference. (29)

To overcome those conflicts is a struggle even to people like Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharathi Mukherjee who have enrooted themselves in the alien land a generation ago. When such is the case, ordinary mortals like Ashima, Ashoke, Gogol, Moushumi, Mr.Pirzada, Ruma, Usha, Aparna, Hema, Kaushik, Subhash and Bela have to necessarily encounter the psychological conflicts arising out of their oscillating status.
CHAPTER 5
CRAFTSMANSHIP

The word craft primarily means an activity involving special skills. The Free Dictionary gives a usage note that the word craft has been used as a verb since the Old English period and was used in Middle English to refer specifically to the artful construction of a text or discourse. In recent years, crafted, the past participle of craft, refers to well-wrought writing. Craft is more acceptable when applied to literary works than to other sorts of writing. A craftsman is a skilled manual worker who makes items that may be functional or strictly decorative. As far as literary works are concerned, craftsmanship implies the use of words, techniques of telling the story, handling the characters and the choice of locale and themes. Eloquence is considered to be an essential characteristic of a good writer. Emerson speaks of the need for eloquence in a narrative:

Eloquence must be grounded on the plainest narrative. Afterwards, it may warm itself until it exhales symbols of every kind and color, speaks only through the most poetic forms; but first and last, it must still be at bottom a biblical statement of fact. (Holmes 2007:196)

For a fiction writer style is also important. Writing style refers to the manner in which an author chooses to write to his or her audience. A style reveals both the writer’s personality and voice but it also shows how he or she perceives the audience. The choice of a conceptual writing style moulds the overall character of the work. This occurs through changes in syntactical structure, parsing prose, adding diction and organising figures of thought into
usable framework. William H. Coles (2010) points out that style is everything a writer does in creating: thousands of ideas and choices; hundreds of associations and comparisons; myriads of opinions, images and feelings - all depend on the writer's intelligence, experience, education, memory, imagination and creative integrity.

Jhumpa Lahiri, the true daughter of Indian soil, possesses an astonishing style which elevates her to the level of writers like V.S.Naipaul and Salmon Rushdie. Her choice of diction, point of view, characters and their relationships, themes, ideas, settings and titles very often make the readers wonder about her acute powers of observation both in the settled land and in homeland. Dolores Herrero (2008) mentions that ‘As a writer, she could embody any individual her imagination called into existence, of any time and origin’ (70). Her personal experience in different countries, especially in India and in America, has given her the capacity to transport her readers to an imaginary landscape to explore and expose the frailties common to all humanity with her mesmerising narrative. As an admirable young writer of Indian background, Lahiri can be considered as a right representative for native Americans who do not know what it means to straddle the line between two cultures. Gita Rajan (2006) implies in her work that:

She deploys two interconnected narrative strategies quite successfully. First, she crafts familiar, easily recognisable characters and situations, and second, she interrogates the cognizance by presenting them with uncomfortable ethical issues. (124)

Lahiri states the reason that has enabled her to write fiction. She does not want to be classified as one thing or the other. Knowing her limitations, she just acts as a translator by bridging the gap between different cultures. She says:
Growing up in two countries, I see things in a way that not everyone around me. I’d talk to my cousins about what life’s like in America and still know that they’ll never get it because they haven’t been there. Talking to Americans about India is the same – it’s always partial. As a storyteller, I’m aware that there are limitations in communication. (Mandal 2002:25)

Writing a sentence artistically by using a handful of words in an arrangement is a magic. Lahiri is an expert in practising this magic. She writes in The New York Times (Lahiri 2012) opinion page that: ‘The urge to convert experience into a group of words that are in a grammatical relation to one another is the most basic, ongoing impulse of my life.’ She compares the best sentences to the stars in the sky; they orient her and they are ‘like landmarks on a trail’. A perfectly-framed sentence is equal to ‘a Polaroid snapshot’. In her opinion ‘not all sentences end up in novels or stories. But novels and stories consist of nothing but sentences.’ She further considers that:

The most compelling narrative, expressed in sentences with which I have no chemical reaction, or an adverse one, leaves me cold. In fiction, plenty do the job of conveying information, rousing suspense, painting characters, enabling them to speak. But only certain sentences breathe and shift about, like live matter in soil. The first sentence of a book is a handshake, perhaps an embrace. Style and personality are irrelevant. They can be formal or casual. They can be tall or short or fat or thin. They can obey the rules or break them. But they need to contain a charge. A live current, which shocks and illuminates. (Lahiri 2012)

The researcher feels it essential to make a study about the craftsmanship of Jhumpa Lahiri since all her works focus more on the Indian attitude to American life in the United States. Moreover, the protagonists are immigrant Indians. Their language, culture and way of life completely differ from those of the natives. Lahiri is delicate enough to bring out, in a simple
and lucid manner, the feelings of immigrants in the United States through her fiction. She has carefully handled every situation and character with a view to providing the readers every touch of Indianness in the mixed milieu. The study of the thesis is about immigrant life in the United States. The study will remain incomplete if Lahiri’s demarcation of characters, themes and values is not touched. In order to render completeness to the research work, the researcher has concentrated on the penmanship of Jhumpa Lahiri.

Lahiri’s personal perspective gives an insight into the narrative which enriches the plot with a touch of reality and imagination mingled with pathos. Through delicate descriptions, she is capable of creating intense situations, relationships and moments which bring intimacy between the readers and the characters. There is a refinement in her prose that conveys the emotions of the characters in a natural rhythm. Lahiri makes use of the third person point of view in almost all her works. Both of her novels, *The Namesake* and *The Lowland*, are narrated from the perceptions of the principal characters. Lahiri’s first novel, *The Namesake*, is a touching tale of tradition, transformation and reinvention. It chronicles the trials and tribulations of the immigrants in a different world. The story is narrated from the third person point of view and also from the perspectives of Ashima Ganguli and Gogol Ganguli. The female protagonist, Ashima, narrates the story as an immigrant mother and the male protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, narrates it as the subject of bi-cultural revelation. Until Gogol’s fourteenth birth day, Ashima leads the story with her view point and afterwards both Ashima and Gogol take their turns in guiding the narrator with their perceptions. The novel is written heavily in exposition and abounds in a lot of descriptive passages which allow Lahiri’s own voice to come through her characters. Using this technique she covers a great deal of time in a few pages of the narrative. Her flow of captive narrative proves her mastery and
command of language. When the Gangulis make a trip to the seashore, Ashoke tells Gogol, who is only a small boy, that:

“Try to remember it always," he said once Gogol had reached him, leading him slowly back across the breakwater, to where his mother and Sonia stood waiting. "Remember that you and I made this journey together to a place where there was nowhere left to go". (NS 64)

Lahiri has the power to convey more in a simple sentence than many others who do it in a paragraph. It is her speciality to skilfully use the present tense to narrate the story. Contrary to many other novels, The Namesake is narrated in the present tense which gives her audience a lively atmosphere as if the events were taking place before their eyes. She avoids bringing the fact in a roundabout manner. Her language is direct and crisp. During their initial settlement in Boston, Ashima does not feel at home. She even delivers her son in an unpleasant atmosphere. She narrates her feelings as an immigrant: ‘For being a foreigner Ashima is beginning to realise, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts’(49). Throughout her narrative, Lahiri is conscious that the readers are able to perceive the difference in life styles between the immigrant Indians and the native Americans. Immigrant life is pictured through the Gangulis and the American way of life is learnt in every walk of life starting from Gogol’s school. The conflicting attitude of the second generation immigrants to Indian culture and heritage is shown through Gogol, Sonia and Moushumi. Lahiri is competent enough to bring in those conflicts in her narrative from the second generation immigrants. Her competence is due to the inheritance of such a tradition common to the immigrants. As an immigrant writer, she renders her personal life and experiences in the form of a work of art, a written documentation, a novel. Jeanette Winterson (2011) sums up the experiences necessitated for a writer to feature in literature:
Truth for anyone is a very complex thing. For a writer, what you leave out says as much as those things you include. What lies beyond the margin of the text? The photographer frames the shot; writers frame their world.

*The Namesake* puts forth many a theme: search for identity, alienation, nostalgia, romance, idea of home, family and dissatisfaction. Everyone in the novel struggles to find out his or her identity. Every character virtually feels the burden of living in different cultures and different traditions. Gogol is torn between two cultures – the native culture imported by his parents and the mainstream American culture in which he grows up. His struggle is similar to that of Sonia and Moushumi. It is almost the same with Ashima and Ashoke who hesitate to assimilate into the American culture.

Alienation naturally leads to nostalgic feelings and Ashima, when left alone at home, does not like to be alone. She refuses to bring up her children in a lonely atmosphere. After Ashoke’s death, she does not want to settle in Calcutta with the family she left many years ago or plan to be in the United States with her children. She feels alienated everywhere in the world without her husband. Gogol and Moushumi also feel alienated because they can feel at home neither in India nor in America with the constant adaptations of conflicting cultures.

A mutual love, not the sexual attachment or cultural similarities, leads to an everlasting relationship. Ashima and Ashoke started loving each other only after their marriage. Gogol makes love to many but those relationships are short-lived. Family means many things in India: adjustability, compromise, respect, tolerance, community celebration, cooking, caring, child rearing and many more. In the American set up it slightly varies and means equality, attending parties, smoking together, boozing together and above all marrying a man or a woman who is already
known and loved. One who is unable to fit into the American culture and family set up naturally feels dissatisfied. Gogol and Moushumi could not draw a clear line between their native culture and acquired culture and this inability leads them to two different directions and their family life is disturbed.

The view point varies from chapter to chapter in the second novel *The Lowland*. Lahiri has given equal weightage to all the main characters to take their lead in narrating the story. In general, Lahiri is fond of introducing varieties of characters of diverse nature and varieties of narrative style. A close observation of her style and characterisation will reveal the motif behind such a pattern. She displays her proficiency as a diaspora writer by writing from an unusual but a striking point of view. Her novelty in telling stories goes beyond capturing the sense of displacement, disorientation, exile and alienation experienced by the immigrants to the extent of understanding human nature. When she is asked about her ‘unself-conscious’ and ‘not showy’ style of writing, she says, ‘I like it to be plain. It appeals to me more. There’s form and there’s function and I have never been a fan of just form’ (Chotiner 2008). The early part of *The Lowland* is narrated from the perception of Subhash and a turn of narration is realised when Subhash returns to Rhode Island after his brother’s death. Gauri, the wife of Mitra brothers, Bijoli, Subhash’s mother and Bela, Gauri’s daughter grab an occasion to lead the story in their perceptions. Unlike *The Namesake*, *The Lowland* is narrated in the past tense like any other novel – a commonality Lahiri shares with other writers. The frequent recollection gives life to the novel. Throughout the novel both the male and the female protagonists live on their memories - Subhash with the memories of his brother, Udayan, and Gauri with the memories of her dead husband, Udayan. Till the end of the novel Udayan lives only in memory excepting the few occasions when both Subhash and Udayan share together. George Grote (1880) has made a
A thorough study of the classification of these ‘partly corporeal and partly psychical processes’ into memory and reminiscence. He states that memory functions ‘unconsciously and instinctively’ whereas reminiscence is a ‘deliberate and intentional’ process that involves ‘ratiocinative inference’ and is ‘instigated by the desire to search for and recover some lost phantasm or cognition’ (476-477). He describes the process of reminiscence:

In reminiscence, we endeavour to regain the forgotten consequent by hunting out some antecedent whereupon it is likely to follow; taking our start either from the present moment or from some other known point. We run over many phantasms until we hit upon the true antecedent. (477)

Psychological meandering and backward journey constitute Gauri. Her new life in Rhode Island is met with more silence and nostalgia while she is struggling to keep traces of her first husband out of her life. She recollects her love and life with Udayan every now and then. Her life, bound to Udayan’s in her twenties, lasts only for a few months but she is unable to break her psychological relationship with him even in her sixties. The narrative takes a different course, when Udayan is felt in each and every action of Gauri. Her psychological struggle with fated life comes to an end when she cannot reconcile with her second wed.

Chahiri’s ability lies in bringing out the personal lives of people out of Bengal history and political devastation. She has an insight to look into the Naxalite movements and the after effects. Through this novel she has proved that the faraway political events too can transform and devastate lives. She talks about her knowledge about the movement and the idea of writing on it:
I had no sense of the political context as a child. But over time, as I grew older, I began to get a sense of it, given that a few of my extended family members had been involved in the movement when they were students in Calcutta. It was only once I began to grow curious about what had happened to those boys in my father’s neighborhood, and was inspired to write about it, that I started to learn about the Naxalite movement formally. (The New Yorker 2013)

The novel withstands different phases of life like love, death, responsibility, sacrifice, betrayal, history, politics, violence and travel, both physical and psychological. Love is conferred at two extremes. The love Bijoli has on her son Udayan makes her reject the only other living son, Subhash. She feels that ‘she was unable to love one without the other’ (L.L. 186). Gauri is unable to love her only daughter Bela since she has no space for anyone in her heart except Udayan. She senses that she is not a normal mother. She recollects the day when she forced Bela to walk in a path full of earth worms: ‘Another mother might have indulged her. Another mother might have brought her back, let her stay home, skip a day of school. Another mother, spending the time with her, might not have considered it a waste’ (169). Subhash is both a responsible father and son. He cannot imagine his life without Bela and his yearning to take care of his parents at Tollygunge disturbs his peace in Rhode Island. His travel continues between Calcutta and Rhode Island till the death of his parents.

The title, The Lowland, refers to the space between the two ponds located just a few yards away from the house where Subhash’s parents live. During the monsoon, the lowland floods and the divide is immersed into it. This is the place which helped Udayan to vanish momentarily and it is the place where he was shot dead. The place gives an emotional return to all the major characters though in later years buildings have occupied it.
Lahiri’s works mostly focus on the lives of Indian Americans and the stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* are set in India or in the United States. The stories in this collection give an emotional appeal with a touch of poetry and the factual narration involves the readers into realistic niceties and ethical predicament. Lahiri tells her stories mostly through an unexpected narrative perspective. Eliot tells the story in *Mrs. Sen’s* and Miranda’s point of view dominates in *Sexy*. She makes her characters come together for reasons unknown and develops an intimacy among them. Miranda, in *Sexy*, enters into the life of Dev, Eliot in *Mrs. Sen’s* observes Mrs. Sen, the protagonist and his wife Mala in *The Third and Final Continent* show respect to Mrs. Croft, Mr. Kapasi in *Interpreter of Maladies* becomes close to Mrs. Das and Lilia and her parents in *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* welcome Mr. Pirzada. Some of the stories sketch astonishing events like an affair (*Sexy*), a miscarriage (*A Temporary Matter*) or immigration (*Mrs. Sen’s* and *The Third and Final Continent*). Brada Williams calls these short stories ‘a sort story cycle rather than simply a collection of separate and independent stories’ (451). Herrero (2008) points out that the use of ‘single location’ and the recurring characters turn the ‘apparently disconnected components into a whole’ (71). *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth* tell the stories in the past tense. Lahiri takes no time to get into the narrative of both men and women alternatively. *A Temporary Matter*, the first story in *Interpreter of Maladies*, is narrated by a third person from Shukumar’s point of view. Lahiri’s intention is obviously known when she repeatedly uses the pronoun ‘he’ for Shukumar in the narrative. The text reads like this:

Each time he thought of that moment, the last moment he saw Shoba pregnant, it was the cab he remembered most, a station wagon, painted red with blue lettering... As the cab sped down Beacon Street, he imagined a day when he and Shoba might need to buy a station wagon of their own, to cart their children back and forth from music lessons and dentist appointments. (ATM 3)
Lahiri has succeeded in painting a sensitive young woman, Shoba, and the picture of a failed marriage in *A Temporary Matter*. A change of atmosphere is enforced into the story in the very beginning of the narrative in a symbolic way: ‘The notice informed them that it was a temporary matter: for five days their electricity would be cut off for one hour, beginning at eight P.M.’ (ATM 1). Both Shoba and Shukumar reminisce the events that took place before the death of their still-born child. The story moves around dinners and conversations every evening. Lahiri has created an opportunity for the characters to exchange their hidden past in the story line itself in the dark hours during power cut. The couple uses candles to drive away the darkness inside the house but is unconscious about the constant growth of isolation inside their minds. Marriage is an institution where there is a beginning for new lives. Shoba and Shukumar let loose the values of the marriage system and decide to separate due to lack of communication and understanding though there is love between the two.

Children in Lahiri’s stories have authoritative points of view and they can have an effect on the narrative in significant ways. In *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine, Sexy* and *Mrs. Sen’s*, Lahiri has made use of children as observers. Lilia, a ten-year-old girl, narrates the story in the first person point of view. Through this little girl Lahiri presents conflicting cultural differences between Indians and Americans and the theme of Partition and its outcome. Lilia observes the habits and customs of her own parents and compares them with those of her American peers and their parents. She also tries to decipher the differences between Indians and Pakistanis but finds only similarities. Her father tells her that Mr. Pirzada is a Pakistani, not an Indian but she finds no difference between him and her parents. Lilia is ambitious to know the details about her homeland, a sensation peculiar to every second generation immigrant. She locates a book about Pakistan in her school library and begins to read about Dacca but her teacher,
Mrs. Kenyon, is worried about the assignment and replaces the book on the shelf as she has ‘no reason to consult’ the book (PCD 33). Mr. Pirzada yearns to return to his own country to join his wife and seven daughters but he graciously gets into American celebrations like Halloween with Lilia. But Mrs. Kenyon’s contrastive temperament is reflected when she forbids Lilia to refer to the book about Dacca. When the war gets over and Mr. Pirzada joins his family, Lilia feels his absence and realises ‘what it means to miss someone who was so many miles and hours away, just as he had missed his wife and daughters for so many months’ (PCD 42). Lahiri is not interested in discussing the religious identity of Mr. Pirzada though she mentions that he is a Muslim. Lilia prays for the safety of Mr. Pirzada and his family in her own way as a Hindu though she was not formally taught to pray. Lahiri’s religious tolerance is exposed through her subtle narrative which leaves the readers to decide on their own way of prayer irrespective of their religion.

*Sexy* is told from a young American woman Miranda’s perspective in the third person point of view. In *Mrs. Sen’s* and *Sexy* Lahiri has chosen Americans to tell the story. Lahiri brings in Miranda a revelation through a seven-year-old boy, Rohin. He acts as her conscience instructing right and wrong. He makes her understand the hopelessness of extra-marital affairs. Though a small boy, he has an understanding of the world. Apart from his knowledge of languages and geographic locations, he has understood the relationship especially between his father and mother. Though he seems to be a happy child, he concerns more for his mother. Laxmi tells Miranda her cousin’s plight but she gets the meaning of what she is doing to Dev’s family only after Rohin tells her the meaning of the word ‘sexy’. He says it means ‘loving someone you don’t know’ (*Sexy* 107). His mother herself is the victim of her husband’s affair with an English woman and tells her that his father ‘loves her instead of my mother’ (108). Rohin’s understanding of the English woman his father dates and Miranda’s appearance resemble the same
to him. As an intelligent observer, he brings parallel to both the women and lets it open to Miranda. In turn Miranda envisions her own affair with an Indian as immoral and puts an end to it. In his phrase, Miranda understands that she is drawn to Dev for his exotic appearance and race and she realises that he wants her only for sex.

*The Mapparium* is a place where Miranda comprehends the many countries lying side-by-side to constitute the world. Though she stands beside Dev, she is identified as the other. This story brings out the themes of marriage and value systems and an insight into the mother-son relationship. Unlike Rohin’s father, his mother waits for her husband’s return and reunion and ‘she is willing to forgive him for the boy’ (91). Both Dev and Rohin’s father feel less guilt because they have an affair with other women either American or English and not with an Indian woman.

Another child interpreter Lahiri introduces in this collection is Eliot, an American boy, in *Mrs. Sen’s*. Her narration allows this eleven-year-old boy to be aware of the immigrant world through the central character Mrs. Sen. He observes Mrs. Sen as a contrast to his own world which comprises of his mother and a lonely house without a neighbourhood. His mother’s aloofness is the way she prefers to live whereas Mrs. Sen’s loneliness is a destiny drawn on her. Assimilating in the alien land is very difficult for her. Like Lahiri’s parents, Lilia’s parents and the narrator of *The Third and Final Continent* accept cultural disharmony in the process of assimilation. It is only Mrs. Sen who finds it impossible to integrate into her new country. She refuses to learn to drive. She considers Eliot as a source to filter her frustrated feelings and thereby believing him to be the source of consolation. Debarati Bandyopadhyay (2009) writes of Lahiri’s shifting narrative from India to America:
However, in Lahiri’s fiction the readers are constantly being invited to cross over from India to the USA along with the characters. Against a panoramic background of journeys – not merely in terms of physical and career relocation as in the case of Mrs.Sen in a short story and Ashoke in *The Namesake*, but also emotional, leaving behind permanent fault-lines marking rupture and patching up – the minute details representing socio-cultural parameters for acceptance and rejection, stand out conspicuously. (100)

As an unsuccessful immigrant Mrs.Sen lives in the world of her own often complaining about the inconveniences and the loneliness she meets within her everyday life. Her desire to taste Calcutta fish makes her always attached to India. She craves for communication with her family in Calcutta but the distance lets her be content with the objects she brought from her parental house. Lahiri is clever enough to pass on a meaning even through the unimportant objects which are valued much by Mrs.Sen. She finds significance with the kitchen blade, the tape of her family’s voice, the aerograms and her saris which continue to be a contrast to her American world. Mrs.Sen’s kitchen knife stands as a symbolic representation of two things: her observance of old ways of life and the alarming danger of her attachment to the old ways of life in the new country.

*Interpreter of Maladies* is recounted from the third person point of view by an objective narrator who depicts from the perceptions of Mr.Kapasi, the interpreter. Every detail is let out only through the eyes of Mr.Kapasi. Flattered by her appearance, he wants to have an intimate connection with Mrs.Das. Both Mrs.Das and Mr.Kapasi suffer from troubled marriages. He thinks that his life is parallel to that of Mrs.Das. He draws in himself a psychological union with her as he lives a distanced life with his own wife. When he comes to know about the secret of Bobby’s conception from Mrs.Das, he realises that there is no room for genuine connections between them and feels disgusted. Sue suffers from the guilt of being unfaithful to her
married life. Her guilt is due to her stand on both the cultures. The family boasts of being born and brought up in America, although their retired parents have now returned to India, their homeland. They make it a convention to visit India every year with their children but feel no hold in their homeland. For them, India has become a place of tourist worship meant for any other foreigners.

Lack of communication and unreliable romance are the themes perceived from this story. Mrs. Das continues to live the life of guilt due to her inability to communicate with her husband to redeem her guilt for peace. Mr. Kapasi interprets everyone’s maladies but his poor understanding of his own malady, the failure to communicate with his wife, spoils his life. He develops a romantic love for Mrs. Das only to end in desperation. Her sudden sexual involvement with her husband’s Punjabi friend torments her to lose happiness and peace of mind. Erin Delaney (2013), in her presentation on Asian Indian Americans, states that:

Central themes of all of Lahiri’s work, “Interpreter of Maladies” included, are the difficulties that Indians have in relating to Americans and the ways in which Indian Americans are caught in the middle of two very different cultures. Lahiri layers small, specific details in her descriptions of each character, giving them depth and richness.

Lahiri brings two different personalities, Sanjeev and Twinkle, together under marital bond in This Blessed House. Sanjeev craves for order and observes that Twinkle never cares for scattered things. He says ‘they didn’t bother her, these scattered, unsettled matters’ (TBH 141). Literally the narrative shows that there arises a conflict between the spouses due to religious identity but, in fact, the inability to understand each other is the root of the conflict. Sanjeev himself says that ‘she was like that, excited and delighted by little things… It was a quality he did not understand. It made him
feel stupid, as if the world contained hidden wonders he could not anticipate, or see’ (142). Narrated from Sanjeev’s point of view, the story, keeping the forthcoming house-warming ceremony as the focal point, revolves around the couple who fails to understand each other as well as the values implied on marriage. Sanjeev, who has never fallen in love, does not know whether he loves Twinkle or not. He gets irritated whenever she is delighted. However, Lahiri ends the story with a positive gesture from Sanjeev who carries ‘the massive silver face’ of the statue ‘to his ribs’ carefully and follows her (157) accepting the Christian symbols as part of the assimilation process. Melita Richter (2009) says in her essay that she ‘considers citizenship as a process and not simply as an outcome’. Lahiri makes it very clear that Twinkle, as a second generation immigrant, finds fascination towards those symbols and Sanjeev, as a first generation immigrant, has to go a long way to understand that they are not only symbols but the routes to integrate into the American way of life. Throughout the narrative, Lahiri does not fail to give the impression that she is delivering a carefully-constructed story using appropriate words needed to convey the sense of diasporic alienation from the motherland:

Still, the presence of his college books in the room reminded him of a time in his life he recalled with fondness, when he would walk each evening across the Mass. Avenue bridge to order Mughlai chicken with spinach from his favourite Indian restaurant on the other side of the Charles, and return to his dorm to write out clean copies of his problem sets. (TBH 138)

*This Blessed House* brings forth themes like marriage, love, sacrifice and immigrant experience. Thinking that he is in love, Sanjeev agrees to marriage. After marriage he realises that a loveless marriage cannot withstand. For the sake of love and marriage he sacrifices his personal belief of being a Hindu and holds the bust of Christ at the end of the story.
The narrator-protagonist of the story *The Third and Final Continent* is an Indian who narrates the life of an immigrant in different countries, first in England and then in America. Jhumpa Lahiri captures well the experiences of an immigrant in a foreign land, the realities of arranged marriages, the inevitable loneliness, the need for adjustment and the long process of assimilation into American culture. She has modelled the lives of her own parents for this story. She says 'there's a real life analog, in the case of *The Third and Final Continent*, certainly' (Washington Post 2003). The narrator’s wife, Mala, experiences a similar situation with Mrs.Sen in the story *Mrs.Sen’s*. Unlike Mrs.Sen, the narrator and his wife assimilate into the adopted culture, overcoming the cultural differences and the sense of isolation. Lahiri recounts the events that led her to initiate the story:

In Third and Final Continent, the story grew out of an anecdote that my father sometimes told about his arrival in the United States. I was struck by the circumstances of a man coming to a new country in the recent wake of the moon landing, and how that historical event strangely paralleled what this character was experiencing and what my father was experiencing... I knew he lived with the old woman who played piano, and that she couldn't stop talking about the fact that man had landed on the moon. (Washington Post 2003)

The narrator vividly describes the differences between his life before and after marriage in the settled country. He feels that his stay with the hundred-and-three-year-old Mrs.Croft is memorable. Their relationship is beyond explanation which can only be felt and not analysed. He recounts his life in her house:

In the mornings when I left for the library Mrs.Croft was either hidden away in her bedroom, on the other side of the staircase, or she was sitting on the bench, oblivious to my presence, listening to the news or classical music on the radio. But each evening when I returned the same thing happened: she slapped the bench, ordered me to sit down, declared that there was a flag on the moon, and declared that it was splendid. (TFC 183)
At the end of the story the narrator feels that there will be no parental cultural orientations for their future generation since the second generation has already rooted into the new culture. A sense of cultural loss is realised when he thinks of his college-going son. The parents bring the son home to ‘eat rice with his hands and speak Bengali’ and regret that he will no longer do these things after they die (197). Being an Indian immigrant herself, Lahiri is able to assess the outcome of the narrator’s son who is born and brought up in the familiar American way. In the first story, *A Temporary Matter*, she deals with the death of the still-born child and the broken marriage but in the last story, *The Third and Final Continent*, she paints an optimistic note about the immigrants through a perfect love between the couple subject to arranged marriage and the care and hope provided by them to their university-going son.

*The Treatment of Bibi Haldar* and *A Real Durwan* are set in India. Though the protagonists are living in India, Lahiri has created an opportunity to the readers to envision the multitudes of human maladies in two different settings. They are depicted as the representatives of the still-suffering examples of the whole women community who are living in the peripherals of certain societal norms which are beyond their control. Bibi, in the first story, somehow, finds a place to live in the world after the desertion of her cousin’s family. Boori Ma in *A Real Durwan* is thrown out on the streets after many years of her noble service to the people in the apartment where she makes her livelihood in the rooftop. In Indian culture, neighbours are always in close proximity with one another. Mrs.Sen feels for the loss of this proximity in her new settlement in the US. Being close to one another in the neighbourhood does both good and evil. It is good to Bibi but it becomes a curse to Boori Ma. Bibi’s neighbours take care of her and at every opportunity they remind her that they surround her and persuade her saying: ‘she could come to us if she ever needed advice or aid of any kind’ (THH 171). In Boori Ma’s case, her
neighbours accept her ramblings about her past affluence in a humorous way but fail to understand her real nature. When the sink in the stair wall is stolen, even Mr. Chatterjee, a noble wise man, is ready to send her out and he utters: ‘Boori Ma’s mouth is full of ashes. But that is nothing new. What is new is the face of this building. What a building like this needs is a real durwan’ (ARD 82).

The Treatment of Bibi Haldar is told in first person plural. The narrators are the neighbours of the protagonist, Bibi Halder. They are not class conscious and so Bibi is benefited by their support. Exile within the house is the predominant theme of the story but Lahiri has given psychic strength to Bibi to overcome her alienation. When she is exiled by her cousin and his wife, she tells her neighbours who have come to console her that ‘the world begins at the bottom of the stairs. Now I am free to discover life as I please’ (TTI 170). She takes her exile in a positive sense that it is a freedom set upon her in disguise. The title given to the story is ambiguous. It represents the medical treatment given to Bibi to cure her epilepsy in one way and the way in which she is treated by her cousin and the wife as well as by the neighbouring community. The story is also remarkable for its association of seasons with the incidents that take place is Bibi’s life. In the autumn, Bibi is exiled, in the winter, her cousin deserts her, in the spring her pregnancy is found out, in the summer she delivers her baby and in the spring she begins a new life. On the whole, Lahiri’s treatment of Bibi Halder in an interesting way decides the course of the story.

Unlike the story of Bibi, Boori Ma suffers from caste consciousness and communal resentment. Lahiri emphasises the sharp differences between the haves and have-nots. In Bibi’s apartment everyone is kind to Bibi but not to the Halder wife. Like a coin, everybody has two sides. Lahiri beautifully presents the other side of the human psyche in A Real Durwan through the
class conscious society in the Indian cultural backdrop. When the Dalals buy a basin for their apartment, their neighbours feel jealous, gossip about the fight in their family and spread rumour. The focussed theme of the story is partition. Boori Ma’s status, as a refugee in Calcutta, tells a pathetic tale though she very often recalls contradictory tales about her past. She repeatedly uses a phrase, ‘Believe me, don’t believe me’ (ARD 72) to make others believe her tales but Lahiri’s narrator subtly conveys that her rattlings are to forget her own worries. When she is pathetically sent out of the apartment, her shouts, the cry of her heart, ‘believe me, believe me’ (82) is not heeded by anyone. When she tells her past, they are entertained, when she cries for life, they punish her unmindful of her age and homeless status, aiming for a real durwan to raise the status of their apartment.

Most of Lahiri’s characters in Interpreter of Maladies are Indians living in America with twin cultural backgrounds. Shoba and Shukumar, Lilia and her parents, Mr. and Mrs.Das, Mr. and Mrs.Sen, Dev, Laxmi, Sanjeev and Twinkle and the Narrator of The Third and Final Continent and Mala are all exposed to unseen realities of life caused, in one way or the other, by their new cultural adaptation in a foreign country. Some of the non-Indian characters who represent the multitudes of the American society, like Eliot and Miranda, try to delve deep into the Indian cultural aspects and succeed to some extent. Jaya Lakshmi Rao writes about the stories in Interpreter of Maladies that:

They combine learning experience with delight. The yearnings of exile and the emotional confusion are the two significant strands of these stories of power and impact. Her language, consisting of short sentences and spare exchanges, demands a deep understanding and a deeper sense of affinity with others of our planet.

Herrero (2008) opines that:
This collection could be said to bring to the fore the lethal consequences of arresting dialogue, absolutising certain forms of life and thought, and idealizing the so-called ‘home’. It invites the reader to meditate on the experience of otherness and the need to endorse a dialogical ethical model, thus subtly echoing some of the most well-known current discourses on narrative ethics. (76)

Structurally longer than the first collection of short stories, *Unaccustomed Earth* reveals Lahiri’s rising literary genius as a teller of immigrant tales. She begins her stories with an inspiring quote from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Custom-House*: ‘Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth.’ Michiko Kakutani (2008) remarks in the Editorial Reviews column of *The New York Times* about the stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* that ‘a Chekhovian sense of loss blows through these new stories’ as they deal with ‘missed connections that plague her husbands and wives, parents and children, lovers and friends.’ Similar to *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*, *Unaccustomed Earth* chronicles the pain and loneliness experienced by Indian immigrants. Lahiri’s characters and their actions, thoughts and emotions are not merely literal creations but are emotional experiences of every individual. She has the unique ability to communicate with her characters sometimes through unnamed narrators in an extremely captivating style but with a simple and fascinating language. Nalini Iyer (1999) observes that:

Lahiri’s strength as a story teller is characterisation. The people she creates are real, alive, complicated, and individual. She never descends into stereotypes nor does she engage in grand generalisations about social and political relationships. Instead, she sweeps her reader through a range of emotions and experiences and lets her characters speak for themselves. (7)
Lahiri’s writings are born out of her own experiences. No matter whether her characters are real or imaginary, she writes about them with ‘an intimate knowledge of their conflicted hearts, using her lapidary eye for detail to conjure their daily lives with extraordinary precision’ (Kakutani 2008). Her stories, in *Unaccustomed Earth*, deal with well-educated children of immigrants who become cultural off-springs. Their contact with the surrounding cultural set up leads to strained relationships with their first generation immigrant parents. The eventual mixed relationships, mixed marriages and addiction to alcohol disappoint the parents. Chandrahas Choudhury (2008) reviews the stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* in *The Guardian Weekly* as:

> These are stories that take storytelling seriously and everything in them works together to let us know they are so: the slow openings; patiently building up a scene and behind serene sentences, accumulating weight and meaning clause by clause; the unvarying gravitas of the narrators. (37-38)

The title story, *Unaccustomed Earth*, details conflicts arising out of the characters’ hybrid identity. Lahiri’s narrative style brings to light the conflicting identities of the immigrant characters, Ruma and her father. Ruma’s father, the first generation immigrant, lives the coded life expected from every Indian immigrant until his wife’s death. The story takes its turn when he becomes friendly with another Bengali woman, Mrs. Bagchi, who left India in her twenties as a widow. Lahiri is able to read the sensibilities of immigrants though she makes America her home and spends most of her time away from her homeland. Developing affairs out of wedlock is considered immoral in India. Ruma’s father dates an Indian woman in America and shares much in common with her but he cannot escape from the guilt and hides his relationship with her from his daughter. Dev, an Indian, had sex with an American woman Miranda in *Sexy* and Subhash, an Indian, had sex with
an American woman, Holly, in *The Lowland* but they had no guilty conscience as the other one they courted was not an Indian. Despite his continued relationship, Ruma’s father is unable to think of replacing his new companion with his dead wife. Kirkus Review (2008) comments on the themes of this story:

The stunning title story presents something of a role reversal, as a Bengali daughter and her American husband must come to terms with the secrets harbored by her father. The story expresses as much about love, loss and the family ties that stretch across continents and generations through what it doesn't say, and through what is left unaddressed by the characters.

Narrated by a third person from Ruma’s point of view, this story again projects usual themes of self-identity and cross-cultural life styles. The story opens with the remote relationship between Ruma and her father and her necessity for voluntary care to be given to her father after her mother’s death. Also, she is unconsciously torn between her twin identities. She is able to bring in a changed attitude in dressing, language, habits and in deciding her life with an Englishman but the responsibility that she has learnt from her mother in bringing up children, caring husband and getting hold of the household activities prevent her from moving further into the American culture. Though Adam, her husband, works hard to make money and the family needs to improve its financial status, she is worried much about bringing up her children than the financial support she can provide her husband through her profession as a lawyer. She lacks self-identity like her mother who always lived carrying the family and children into her head. The memories of her mother and the life she led influence Ruma to choose the paths for the subsequent stages in her life. Despite the complex relationships between them, she is always close to her at heart:
There were times Ruma felt closer to her mother in death than she had in life, an intimacy born simply of thinking of her so often, of missing her. But she knew that this was an illusion, a mirage, and that the distance between them was now infinite, unyielding. (UE 27)

Lahiri has not failed to bring out the fascinations of the third generation immigrants. From a child’s perspective, she looks at things and makes a mark in her stories. One such is the manifestation of Ruma’s son, Akash. He is brought up in the common American way but he is captivated by his grandfather’s habits which are completely foreign to him. He learns to eat with his fingers, remove his shoes outside, speak a few Bengali words and work in the garden. How the complexities vanish with the arrival of a child is also depicted by the narrator:

It was after she’d had a child that Ruma’s relationship with her mother becomes harmonious; being a grandmother transformed her mother, bringing a happiness and an energy Ruma had never witnessed. (UE 26-27)

Lahiri is good at creating stories which are related to one another in many aspects. It is a proven fact in her first publication, *Interpreter of Maladies*. Like the first collection, the stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* also carry certain inter-related relationships. Lahiri’s intention in the title story is to develop the character of Romi, Ruma’s brother, to some extent. When the story gets developed, she finds a lot of ingredients sufficient to deal with Ruma and her father and so she cannot continue to take Romi to higher ends. The spirit to develop Romi’s character persists and the result is *Only Goodness*. She lets Sudha and Rahul, the duplicate versions of Ruma and Romi, out under the American sun to learn the new life which their parents themselves dare not. In a delicate narrative, she puts forth the hardships experienced by the immigrant children everywhere in the culturally-conflicted
society. The more pitiable fact is the immigrant parents’ inability to come to terms with their own children. The narrator says:

Her parents had always been blind to the things that plagued their children: being teased at school for the color of their skin or for the funny things their mother occasionally put into their lunch boxes, potato curry sandwiches that tinted Wonderbread green. (OG 143)

While the children suffer humiliation, the parents, unable to comprehend the reality, feel proud that:

[Their] children were immune from the hardships and injustices they had left behind in India, as if the inoculations the pediatrician had given Sudha and Rahul when they were babies guaranteed them an existence free of suffering. (OG 144)

In *Only Goodness*, Rahul is presented as a typically-diluted child among the successful Bengali immigrant children. As a son born to successful immigrant parents and a scholarly sister, it is unfortunate for Rahul to fall into uncontrollable alcoholism in his teens and lose the hope of his family. He drops out his education, disobeys his parents and ultimately leaves home to live of his own with a woman some years senior to him. His unexpected return seems to bring happiness but brings only catastrophic effects again in the form of his alcoholism. Sudha’s baby, Neel, left under his care, is left in danger and this leads to an emotional separation of the couple. Usually, Lahiri gives no definite or grand endings to her stories but what is suggested indirectly is memorable and beyond imagination. Not only do the characters remain imperfect but also the climax remains incomplete in all her stories in order to allow the readers to decide the fate of the characters. Liesl Schillinger (2008) writes about her characters in *The New York Times* Book Review that she allows them to grow as if unguided, as if she were accompanying them
rather than training them through the espalier of her narration’. Sarah Kerr (2008) writes in *The New York Review* that:

Characters in her work constantly go on tiny, utterly ineffectual emotional strikes, or postpone living out of what they deludedly call common sense. They fail to brush their teeth, or start wearing sweatpants instead of fitted clothes. They paint their rooms a beautiful mauve and spend far too much time inside. They study for, and then blank out during exams. They pull the shades down and place plastic wrap on their furniture as if they were squatters afraid of leaving a mark. (29)

*Hell-Heaven* is presented in the first person point of view and the narrator is an Indian woman, Usha who tells the story in her later years while recounting the relationship of her mother Aparna with an Indian Pranab Chakraborty. The story begins in Central Square in Boston, picturing the Harvard Yard area. In spite of living in the middle of an American park, it is learned that Aparna still speaks Bengali at home and wears Bengali clothing. Lahiri captures the pains of moving away from one’s own roots and customs and the struggles of a middle-class family in a foreign land. Disconnection and disappointment are the themes of the story and Lahiri’s prose perfectly rouses those sensitive emotions invariably common to everyone among the readers. As a child, Usha observes that her mother is unsympathetic and cold. She takes utmost efforts to be just another American girl against the will of her mother but is unable to do as she grows up in an orthodox Indian household. She detests Aparna’s restrictions but in later years she is able to reason out her mother’s actions. The story ends with Aparna’s sharing of her secret with Usha who becomes heart-broken because of a person whom she has hoped to marry.

The title of the story, *Hell-Heaven*, is derived from Aparna’s statement about Pranab to other Bengali women. Aparna feels that he has changed suddenly after meeting Deborah. She resents that ‘he used to be so
different. I don’t understand how a person can change so suddenly. It’s just hell-heaven, the difference’ (68). Apart from the description of the location of Aparna’s house, such as Massachusetts Avenue and the Harvard Coop, Lahiri details the settings at the Thanksgiving parties. It is described by Usha that:

[The tables] were covered with tablecloths, set with white plates and silverware, and had centerpieces of gourds. I was struck by the toys and dolls that were everywhere, dogs that shed long yellow hairs on everything, all the photographs of Bonny and Sara and Deborah decorating the walls, still more plastering the refrigerator door. (HH 77)

Lahiri has worked out the second part consisting of three interlinked stories under the heading Hema and Kaushik. Each story offers a clear picture of the cultural conflicts that affect the immigrants and the resultant dichotomies between the first and the second generation immigrants. Though Lahiri creates universal characters, they are often bound with cultural conflicts. The story revolves around two people, Hema and Kaushik, who lead drastically different lives. Lahiri says that she was contemplating over those two characters for over a decade.

Once in a Lifetime, the first story, is narrated from the first person point of view. It is narrated by Hema to Kaushik. This story begins with two families being very close to each other due to their shared cultural background and ends with drifting as they both vastly vary in accepting changes in the assimilation process. Lahiri recounts in an interview about the narrative style of the story:

Once in a Lifetime started in the third person, and I never liked it. It started to come alive when I had Hema addressing him. I’ve always been curious about that form of narrative and that point of view. There’s a beautiful short novel by William Trevor called Fools of Fortune, which goes back and forth in the same mode, and I was inspired by that novel, so I tried to put it to work. (Bookforum 2008)
Friendship, cultural diversity, disease and loss are the themes of the story. Hema’s family welcomes Kaushik’s family to stay with them as houseguests, as a mark of reverence to their friendship but Hema’s mother, Shibani, later, finds that there is a vast cultural difference between the two though they both originate from the same roots. Hema comes to know through Kaushik the disease that eats his mother, Parul Mashi. Only at the end everyone knows that the eventual return of Kaushik’s family to the once-left US is to hide the deadly disease. Lahiri introduces all the events in the form of Hema’s flashback as if Hema were trying to recount the memories of Kaushik. Lahiri ends the story by not fully closing the story but by giving the reader the feel that the story is close to the end.

*Year’s End* is told from Kaushik's point of view and he narrates his life after his mother’s death. This part deals with Kaushik’s return to his house for vacation. After his mother’s death, his father has married an Indian woman with two daughters. Disturbed by the memories of his dead mother and unable to compromise with his father’s new life, Kaushik leaves home and drives for days up to the coast of Maine. Almost throughout the story, Kaushik recounts his mother’s ordeals at the time of her death, his sense of loss and the loneliness experienced by him at Swarthmore College. He makes no mention of Hema except to remember that he hated every day spent under her parents’ roof.

*Going Ashore* is the last of the three presented in the third person point of view, narrated by an omniscient narrator. Lahiri has an intention to bring together her two protagonists; Hema and Kaushik meet by chance in Rome after two long decades. Homelessness and rootlessness are the themes perceived from Kaushik’s point of view. Struggle for connection, longing for reunion, loss of love, confusion and compromise can be traced out as themes from Hema’s perception. Hema suffers from failed love affair and is unable to
think of the life decided by her parents. Her love for Kaushik also finds no shape but it cannot escape from the heart’s deep connection with him. At the age of thirty-eight, in order to live the life and for personal benefits, she decides to marry Navin. Her character may be observed here as the one which lacks uniqueness due to her readiness to obey her parents in marriage against her wish but it is Lahiri’s decision to give her life after the Tsunami. Kaushik accepts jobs anywhere as he finds his root nowhere. He accepts a job in Hong Kong and on the way spends a few days in Thailand where he gets lost in the Tsunami. His death has no power to control her emotions and Lahiri filters the emotions of Hema for Kaushik: ‘I felt it as plainly and implacably as the cells that were gathering themselves in my body….It might have been your child but this was not the case. We had been careful, and you had left nothing behind’ (HAK 333). The omniscient narrator leaves behind the story unfinished and it is Hema who comes again to talk about the remnants. She completes the story by saying that she is ‘burning with new life but mourning’ Kaushik’s death (333). Sarah Kerr (2008) views in The New York Review that:

Ambitions run high in these last three stories: to give narrative shape to rootlessness; to tease out the puzzle of why the passage of years helps some people figure out enough of what they need to know to help themselves, but not others… In the big picture, Hema and Kaushik may be vaguely star-crossed lovers for unmanageably complicated times. Yet more than this relationship, by the end we remember small vignettes of solitude, and fragment scenes of fragile families: each with its distinctive collective personality…

*Unaccustomed Earth* remains as a signpost in Lahiri’s literary journey. Her literary rendering shows her sense of commitment and her ability to portray an imaginary world as real. ‘Each story creates a unique, self-contained world. Yet, there is always the metaphor of disconnection, disengagement with life in America’ (Knopf 2008). Though the stories very often fall under the Bengali frame, the themes they reflect are universal in
nature. The way her characters struggle with cultural conflicts, marital disharmony, parent-child relationship, displacement and the sense of not fitting in are all universal issues which are so carefully designated into the immigrant characters.

Jhumpa Lahiri is passionate about arranged marriage which is a dominant aspect in her writing through which she differentiates her first generation immigrants from her second generation ones. The tales of arranged marriages are a mystery to the American-born Indian immigrants. One may clearly say that she has modelled on her own parents’ lives to the first generation immigrants. Starting from *Interpreter of Maladies*, all her stories primarily talk about the niceties of arranged marriages and the closeness developed thereafter between the spouses. The narrator in *The Third and Final Continent* narrates in detail the way in which his arranged marriage was performed and how the couple started their life in a new land not knowing much about each other. Only in this story Lahiri has made the narrator mention his arranged marriage. In all other stories, although no mention is made about the marriage, her writing style and the insight instruct the readers that the marriage of the first generation immigrants is purely arranged by their elders. Mrs.Sen withstands her sufferings of being alone in the new land due to her arranged marriage and Mr.Kapasi in the *Interpreter of Maladies* continues to live a loveless life with his wife but has no idea to desert her. Mrs.Das behaves indifferently with her family members but is fated to live with Mr.Das. Lilia’s parents in *When Mr.Pirzada Came to Dine* have settled in the US after their marriage and show no resentment over their marriage. Ashima and Ashoke in *The Namesake* unite themselves only in marriage and constantly prove their American peers and the American born Indian dynasty that their marriage is a success story. Usha’s mother in *Hell-Heaven* hides her unrequited love to Pranab and lives true to her husband. Usha, in her narrative, mentions that she could see mutual love being developed between
her father and mother in due course. Hema, though a second generation immigrant, gets into arranged marriage in *Going Ashore*. Lahiri strongly considers that happiness is sure in arranged marriages though not at hand now.

Lahiri has a high esteem for educated people especially for immigrants. Having acquired multiple degrees, she herself believes in making her characters pursue higher degrees in the field of engineering, medicine, law, architecture and journalism. She considers that a Ph.D., is an essential qualification for any discipline and sends her characters to Prep Schools, Ivy League, NYU or some other finer institutions. Nearly everyone has got a Ph.D., or at least in the process of getting a Ph.D. Age does not matter for education. Most of her characters are pursuing Ph.D., only after getting married. Shukumar, in *A Temporary Matter*, is ‘trying to complete the final chapters of his dissertation on agrarian revolts in India’ (2), ‘Mr. Sen teaches mathematics at the university’ (112), Sanjeev, in *This Blessed House*, is an engineering graduate from MIT, the narrator in *The Third and Final Continent* is working in MIT library, Ashoke, in *The Namesake*, ‘is a doctoral candidate in electrical engineering at MIT’ at the time of his marriage (2) and Moushumi is emerging to the level of a French Teacher. Ruma’s father in *Unaccustomed Earth* possesses a Ph.D., in Biochemistry, Ruma is a lawyer, Usha’s mother (IIH) and Ashima (NS) pursue library science in their forties, Pranab is doing engineering at MIT, Megan, in *A Choice of Accommodations*, is practising medicine, Sudha, in *Only Goodness*, is sent to Philadelphia for ‘a master’s in international relations’ (129) and later gets admission into LSE and Hema, in *Going Ashore*, has earned a Ph.D., and works as a professor of Latin. Gauri, in *The Lowland*, has an unquenchable thirst for philosophy and becomes a professor of philosophy with a Ph.D., in a college in California and Subhash receives a Ph.D., in Marine Chemistry. Education determines one’s future and gives a unique identity to an individual irrespective of national and
cultural boundaries. Therefore, Lahiri is compassionate enough to introduce education and its importance in everyday life through her characters who are specialists in various fields of study.

Jhumpa Lahiri has added colour to her prose by introducing a few Bengali words and certain conventions into her stories and novels. She senses that an intimate relationship among the characters is possible only when they converse in their own language. Despite being written in English, her limited use of Bengali words in the running text not only adds beauty but also brings the readers very close to the characters. Words like *daknam* (pet name), *bhalonam* (good name), *annaprasan* (rice ceremony), *payesh* (a warm rice pudding), *Durga pujo*, *vermilion* (a deep shade of red) *mashi* (Aunt), *mesho* (Uncle) *aloo gobi*, *bidi*, *biryani*, *coolie* in *The Namesake* and *almari*, *bechareh*, *zamindar*, *durwan*, *salwar-kameez* (a traditional two-piece garment), *Boori Ma* (Big Mother) in *Interpreter of Maladies*, *boudi*, *da*, *di*, *Kaku*, *khub bhalo*, *aacha* in *Unaccustomed Earth* and *shakal bela*, *bikel bela*, *ratrir bela*, *dadu*, *dida*, *mamoni*, *kal*, *barsha kal* (monsoon season) in *The Lowland* and many other words representing blood relations like *Baba*, *Ma*, *Dada* are commonly used almost in all the works. Ashoke, in *The Namesake*, shaves his head at the time of his father’s death and Gogol also volunteers the same when Ashoke dies. Further, the immigrant families never forget to perform pujos at home. In addition to wearing traditional dress, they are fond of cooking Indian food in their kitchens though their children prefer to take non-spicy American food.

Naming the characters is essential in every piece of literature. Lahiri takes utmost care in naming her characters. Personally, she herself is the victim of losing her good name in the culturally-different country where there is no difference between a good name and a pet name. She happens to lose her good name Nilanjana Sudeshna in the very early age for her pet name
Jhumpa. This personal experience drives her characters too to choose a name which fits the American context. While naming the characters, it is obvious that she is culturally bound but universally acclaimed. Gogol gets his name changed to Nikhil, again an Indian name but sounds like an American name when called shortly as Nick. Likewise, Sonali becomes Sonia and Moushumi is called Mouse by Dimitri. ‘Moushumi’ means ‘season’. Like a changing season, she changes her affair from time to time. Therefore, her name is suitable for her nature. ‘Lilia’ is the modified version of ‘Lila’, an Indian name. Boori Ma and Mrs. Sen do not have a name of their own. Mrs. Sen is called after Mr. Sen because Lahiri does not intend to bring in another complication in the alienated society to Mr. Sen by revealing her real name. Boori Ma means ‘Big Mother’ which is a common name usually given to aged women who make their livelihood by doing odd jobs in the neighbourhood. Purely immersed in the American multi-culturalism Twinkle does not mind calling her husband Sanjeev Sanj. For her, the name Sanjeev is quite Indian to which she is not accustomed to. The names Ruma and Romi match both the cultures and they find no issues related to their names. Sudha feels in every way for not being able to be one with her American peers. She is fully aware that her brother Rahul should be exempted from such struggles. She is happy with his name that it is pronounced in a purely American way as Raul. Sangeeta in Nobody’s Business prefers to be called Sang which is, though not American or English, definitely foreign. Bela, in The Lowland, carries neither a surname nor another name. Her name means time or season or a flower. The name sounds different in America but not peculiar.

The stories and novels of Lahiri deal with people belonging to different professions and lifestyles but in a sense they all share a profound connection as immigrants. The first generation immigrants are highly conscious of their ambition and succeed in every endeavour. However happy
the first generation people seem to be, there always remains a melancholy strain in the depth of their hearts.

The second-generation children deeply land their lives to enroot in the new culture rather than choosing them for a mere survival. They can only see the present with the American vision but their native vision, acquired genetically, guides them unconsciously from within. The conflict between the adapted present and the acquired past is inevitable in the life of an immigrant and this conflicting aspect is well-wrought under the able craftsmanship of Jhumpa Lahiri.