CHAPTER 3

CROSS-CULTURAL REFLECTIONS

Trans-national migrations lead to negotiation between cultures which ultimately paves the way for cultural hybridity and hyphenated identity. America has been a country of immigrants who share a common philosophy of becoming an integral part of the country by means of cultural assimilation which may otherwise be termed as Americanisation. Every immigrant travels to America, the land of opportunities, with a dream, an American dream. James Truslow Adams, in *The Epic of America* (1931), mentions that the migrants ‘dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement’ (404). This dream, an embodiment of freedom and Americanisation, having the transforming power, is considered as a unifying element, which connects all the world diasporas settled in the American soil, the Melting Pot. The period after the Second World War is marked as the amalgamation of hyphenated Americans like Mexican-Americans and Chinese-Americans. Immigrant fiction in the recent decades, according to Kathryn Hume (2002), projects America to be falling down from its ideal image. Hume observes that writers express their disappointment with the ideals of the country:

Novels of the last thirty years have focused on the estranging aspects of immigration, on the slippage between America’s promises – equality, justice, prosperity – and the actuality of encounters between newcomers and the culture they enter. (10)
The failure of the dream is due to the clash of the immigrants’ expectations with reality in the assimilation process.

The fictional world of Jhumpa Lahiri always questions the existentialistic capabilities of the migrants, essentially the Indian Americans, under the realm of multi-cultural gregariousness. She offers new insights into the immigrants’ experience in her novels and short stories. In all her works, the first generation immigrants are successful in adopting the culture and the standards of life of the host country. The experience of the second generation, born in America is different. For them, the fulfilment of the American dream is a lifelong question. Lahiri makes it clear that the cultural differences emerging between the generations are crucial in achieving success and also in establishing identity. Jaydeep Sarangi, in his article *Fusions of Horizons*, mentions that ‘culture provides a man with a system of meaning, which is valid within his own socio-cultural group’ (39).

Jhumpa Lahiri, the true child of displacements and dislocation, having inherited Indian ancestry, is a second-generation immigrant born in London and lives in Rhode Island in America. This background leads her to acquire multi-cultural life style and this life style serves as a central theme in all her works. Both Indian and American settings in her works give an unconscious vent to her biological association with India and America and they establish a certain cultural link which may, otherwise, be termed as ‘Indian-American’. It is obvious when she says:

When I first started writing, I was not conscious that my subject was the Indian-American experience. What drew me to my craft was the desire to force the two worlds I occupied to mingle on the page as I was not brave enough, or mature enough, to allow in life. (Newsweek 2006)

Diaspora human beings, the victims of displacement, are subject to multiculturalism or cultural conflicts, disorientations and dilemmas. The first
generation diaspora Indians somehow manage to stick on to their culture and heritage but the second generation Indian immigrants are unable to accept either their parental culture or the existing social culture. Jhumpa Lahiri herself is in a state of predicament either to be an Indian by following the Indian tradition, culture and habits or to be an American by simply assimilating herself with the existing social set up. She compares the immigrants’ experiences with those of her own. She thinks that the challenges faced by the parents – exile, loneliness, alienation and cultural conflicts – are very clear and distressing for their children. She has put it in her own words:

At home I followed the customs of my parents, speaking Bengali and eating rice and dal with my fingers. These ordinary facts seemed part of a secret, utterly alien way of life, and I took pains to hide them from my American friends. For my parents, home was not our house in Rhode Island but Calcutta, where they were raised. I was aware that the things they lived for – the Nazrul songs they listened to on the reel-to-reel, the family they missed, the clothes my mother wore that were not available in any store in any mall – were at once as precious and as worthless as an outmoded currency. (Newsweek 2006)

Jhumpa Lahiri’s novels and short stories mainly focus on the issues arising out of the cultural clash in the lives of the Indian Americans. She herself stands at a cross-road of culture where she finds the constant dissimilar presence of the two separate cultures - one the past and the other the present. Her writings are not merely about ‘a specific cultural experience’ but also about ‘human beings and the difficulties of existence’ (Das 2008: 15). Her first novel, The Namesake, is a chronicle of the displaced characters and their conflicting cultural identities in the multi-cultural social order. Displacement is the root cause of the cultural dilemma. Geographical dislocation is the first shock for the first generation immigrants like Ashoke and Ashima. Ashima, for instance, encounters, after her arrival in the USA, the differences in the landscape – ‘heaps of broken snow’, ‘the frigid New
England chill’, ‘leafless trees with ice-covered branches’, ‘not a soul on the street’ (NS 30), but more than that she realises the intensity of the loss of the family and community support during her pregnancy and after. She accepts that there is no one to sweep the floor or do the dishes or wash clothes and ‘that the very lack of such amenities is the American way’ (32). On the basis of her eighteen months’ experience in the country, she knows that it is difficult for her to bring up her child in ‘this lonely country.’ However, it is essential for expatriate people like Ashima to encounter difficulties to undertake a transformed identity. Himadri Lahiri (2008) points out that:

Expatriate on the other hand, is a sort of static state; it is a refusal to become amalgamated into the new society. An expatriate considers his or her stay in the new country as a temporary matter and looks back to the ‘home’ country for emotional sustenance. Both Ashoke and Ashima at the moment are therefore not in a position of ‘exuberance’.

(6)

Ashima’s husband, Ashoke, goes out for his work and adjusts himself to the life style of the settled land since he feels that the new land is the land of opportunities. For him, prosperity alone matters and the rest are secondary. He lives his life like the water on the lotus leaf so that he is capable of living a determined life. Forgetting his Bengali-Indian heritage, he successfully starts living with both the identities:

Though Ashima continues to wear nothing but saris and sandals from Bata, Ashoke, accustomed to wearing tailor-made pants and shirts all his life, learns to buy ready-made…..Though he is now a tenured full professor, he stops wearing jackets and ties to the university. (65)

One of the most significant characters of the immigrant existence is the blend of the two worlds – the homeland and the adopted one. The admiration for one’s culture and roots is never out of mind and the first generation migrant always expects his children to admire the same roots and
culture. The immigrant children are made familiar with the cultural products of his country by the parents – the myths, stories and literature. At the same time, the importance of the cultural shades of the adopted land cannot be negated. Since the future of the second generation lies there, they must be made to learn the customs of that culture too:

Most of the toys of her baby boy Gogol come from yard sales as do their furniture, curtains, toaster and the like.

At first Ashima is reluctant to introduce such items into her home, ashamed at the thought of buying what had originally belonged to strangers, American strangers at that. But Ashoke points out that even his chairman shops at yard sales, that in spite of living in a mansion an American is not above wearing a pair of secondhand pants, bought for fifty cents. (NS 52)

Ashima’s aspirations are at fiasco and she faces cultural shock on many occasions. One such is the naming of their first born, Gogol. Before leaving the hospital after delivery, the hospital administration demands a name for the baby, to be entered in the birth certificate as it is a practice in American hospitals. On the contrary, in India, a baby gets an official name mostly when he or she enters school. Till then the baby is known by its pet name which is usually meaningless. The text goes like this: ‘Names can wait. In India parents take their time. It wasn’t unusual for years to pass before the right name, the best possible name, was determined’ (25). All of a sudden, it becomes inevitable for Ashoke and Ashima to decide on a name for the baby to be discharged from the hospital in Cambridge. Ashoke names the child Gogol after the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. Ashima too approves of this name as it is closely associated with the life of Ashoke. Further, when he is taken to the school with the good name ‘Nikhil’, Gogol himself decides to retain his nickname ‘Gogol’ by mentioning it in the registration form. Ashoke and Ashima are shocked to know that ‘due to their son’s preference, he will be known as Gogol at school’ (60). Also they try to find out an answer for the
question ‘What about the parent’s preference?’ (60) Ultimately, they stop grieving over the fact that their son lacks a good name and has only a pet name because they are convinced by the fact that they ‘live in a country where a president is called Jimmy’ (77). However, having been born to Indian parents, Gogol has to endure a Russian name in America. All this leads to a tri-cultural collision from the very early years of Gogol’s life. Later, when he happens to attend a panel discussion about Indian novels written in English, he arrives at a clear and distinctive definition of the cultural conflict he is facing. He learns that ‘ABCD’ means ‘American-born confused desi’, and the C also means ‘conflicted’. He avoids being friendly with ABCDs in his college ‘for they remind him too much of the way his parents choose to live, befriending people not so much because they like them, but because of a past they happen to share’ (119). His realisations of the binary identity detest his origin. He ‘never thinks of India as desh. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India.’ Gogol, as a confused desi, thinks that ‘Living with a pet name and a good name, in a place where such distinctions do not exist – surely that was emblematic of the greatest confusion of all’ (118). Gogol, like a typical second generation Indian-American, makes a conscious effort to be different from his parents. He wants to live in a world free from the Bengali culture, from the traditions that tie him down to a country and culture he does not know. He experiences a cultural dilemma on numerous occasions. He has a strong need to assimilate, amalgamate and be one among the American multitudes. He does not want to be known as an outsider. He feels that he is an American and he wants to distance himself from everything which is Indian or Bengali.

Frequent get-togethers take place in order to bring a miniature India into their houses. Also, they do not forget to adopt the culture of the settled land since the survival of the second generation has been destined there. They even start celebrating Christmas for the children look forward to such
celebrations more than the worship of Durga and Saraswathy and decorate the door with a wreath during December. As years go by, they gather more ‘fellow Bengali friends’ in New England but the members of the ‘former life, those who know Ashima and Ashoke not by their good names but as Monu and Mithu, slowly dwindle’ (63). Both Ashoke and Ashima accept certain cultural collusion for the sake of their children, Gogol and Sonia. Ashima learns to cook turkey for Thanksgivings and

... in the supermarket they let Gogol fill the cart with items that he and Sonia, but not they, consume: individually wrapped slices of cheese, mayonnaise, tuna fish, hot dogs. For Gogol’s lunches they stand at the deli to but cold cuts, and in the mornings Ashima makes sandwiches with bologna or roast beef. At his insistence she concedes and makes him an American dinner once a week as a treat. Shake ’n Bake chicken or Hamburger Helper prepared with ground lamb. (NS 65)

Cultural devastation takes place when the children grow older. Gogol dates with his girlfriend which is strange to the parents but for Gogol he is already too late to move with girls since the boys and girls of his age have already paired. When he brings in his girlfriend, Maxine, to the house in Pemberton Road, he can read the signs of disapproval from his parents. Ashima gets relieved on hearing from Gogol that he has not yet thought of his marriage. Since Americans value an individual’s liberty, when kids turn sixteen, they are no more under the control of their parents. Gogol feels neither fully Indian like his parents nor fully American, though he was born and raised in America. However, his sense of duty kindles his cultural roots after his father’s death and he ignores Maxine deciding to be an emotional support to his mother. Maxine also repents the fact that she cannot provide any solace to Gogol as she belongs to a different world. The cultural differences between Gogol’s and Maxine’s worlds end their relationship. After the death of her husband, Ashima insists on Gogol marrying the girl of
his choice, unmindful of the cultural variation for the sake of her son’s well-being. He decides to marry the Bengali Indian-American Moushumi Mazoomdar, his mother’s choice. She may also be described as the daughter of the cross-cultural heritage like Gogol and Sonia. For the time being their marriage seems to be a settled affair. But Moushumi’s sexual infatuation, or one may say the sense of American individuality, has led her to discard her marital relationship in spite of the fact that she wants to lead a family life like her mother.

Moushumi, like Lahiri, inherits various cultural bases. Her (Moushumi’s) personal experience with the twin culture (British and American) and the constant exposure to the root culture (Indian) at home perplexes her and she decides to move on to a new one (French) in a new world where none can influence her. While speaking to Gogol, she recollects that ‘her family had spent in England, living at first in London … and then in a brick semidetached house in Croydon…’ and ‘she had hated to moving to America, that she had held on to her British accent for as long as she could.’ Moushumi’s parents also had feared ‘America much more than England, perhaps because of its vastness, or perhaps because in their minds it had less of a link to India’ (212). Her shift from culture to culture and country to country disables her from having ties with everyday social life but she grows conscious of the things happening around. Her awareness of the American culture makes her determine ‘not to allow her parents to have a hand in her marriage.’ Also she decides ‘never to marry a Bengali man’ (213). Her unexpressed cultural sociability bursts out when she enters into her college education. She studies chemistry on the insistence of her parents and pursues a double major in French secretly in order to escape into the ‘third culture’ with the ‘third language’. On completion of her college, she moves to Paris ‘with no specific plans’. There ‘she began to fall effortlessly into affairs. With no hesitation, she had allowed men to seduce her in cafes, in parks, while she
gazed at paintings in museums’ (215). Her decision to move to Paris is not sudden. She decides it years ago and starts preparing to leave America by learning French. In Paris, she does not want to be mistaken for a tourist and feels that she belongs there. Her frequent trips to countries like England and France have made her give up her native cultural consciousness and left her doubtful about India and America. Field (2004) states that she is the representative of the global citizen. He further says:

Moushumi’s decision to control her own cultural identity may well prove to be the normative behaviour for the later generations of immigrant families in the United States. As their direct connection to certain roots diminishes and other cultural options are presented, these Americans will create their own personal bricolage of various cultural materials in order to form their identities. (176)

Cultural disharmony affects the second generation Indian-Americans more than the first generation Indian-Americans. When the Gangulis go to Calcutta, the spirits of Ashoke and Ashima become boundless. During their stay in Calcutta, Ashima never sets foot in the kitchen and ‘she wanders freely around a city in which Gogol, in spite of his many visits, has no sense of direction’ (83). Ashoke, on the other hand, busies himself with his research, ‘delivering lectures at Jadavpur University’. But, for Gogol and Sonia, they feel like losing their identity; they feel alien in their real root, they feel like losing their privacy and above all, the sudden nearness and overflowing affection of so many relatives are distressing. Only on their return to America, they feel at home and admit that they craved ‘for hamburgers or a slice of pepperoni pizza or a cold glass of milk’ (84). Graham’s experience in India is almost similar to Gogol’s and Sonia’s. He says that:

People tended to stay at home most of the time. There was nothing to drink. “Imagine dealing with fifty in-laws
Certain aspects of American attitude are still confusing to Ashima. In India, the burial grounds or cemeteries are considered to be the most haunted and forbidden places whereas in America these places are of cultural importance. Out of disgust to such culture, Ashima says:

Only in America (a phrase she has begun to resort to often these days), only in America are children taken to cemeteries in the name of art. What is next she demands to know, a trip to the morgue/ in Calcutta the burning ghats are the most forbidden of places, she tells Gogol, and though she tries her best not to, though she was here, not there, both times it happened, she sees her parents’ bodies, swallowed by flames. (NS 70)

But Gogol is fascinated by the images in the graveyard and moves ‘from grave to grave with a paper and crayon in hand, bringing to life one name after another’ (70). He reads the names, finds the peculiarities of those names and thinks of his own name and realises that he has never met another Gogol. Even one of the chaperones who accompanied him to the graveyard remarks ‘Now those are some names you don’t see very often these days,’ ‘Sort of like yours’ (70). In spite of his mother’s disgust, Gogol preserves those collections from the graveyard ‘behind his chest of drawers, where he knows his mother will never bother to look’ (71).

In general, American parents never interfere in the personal affairs and freedom of their children. They respect their privacy and their individuality. This is quite opposite to the Indian parents who interfere at every juncture of their children’s life. Gogol has no difficulty in getting into Maxine’s life. In one of the parties with his friends, he meets her who finds him interesting as she is tired of her boyfriend. The next morning she calls him over the phone and ‘without awkwardness or pause, she invites him to
dinner at her place’ (129). He asks her whether her parents would mind his coming over there. Her response is typically American: ‘Why on earth would they mind?’ (129) Maxine’s parents, Gerald and Lydia, like Gogol very much; so he is a welcome guest in their house. Gogol and Maxine often go out shopping, ‘without deliberation or guilt’ (136). Soon after his work, Gogol goes to their house and sleeps with Maxine. The whole night he would be making love to her; the young people’s room is just above the one in which Gerald and Lydia lie. Gerald and Lydia think nothing when they see Gogol and Maxine join them downstairs in the morning for coffee. Quickly, Gogol ‘falls in love with Maxine’ (137).

Likewise, the children of the immigrant parents too imitate the American children in deciding their life. Gogol, Sonia and Moushumi are no exceptions and they reflect typical Americans. Gogol willingly accepts the American way of life in order to gain a sense of belongingness in the new land, the lack of which forced his parents to face hardships in the sociocultural life. His smartness, in gaining identity for his own, finds friendship with many American girls. Only an Indian mother could understand how much Ashima was affected when she learns that her children are fond of American culture and ways which are totally a contrast to her social and religious beliefs and practices. When Gogol dates with the American girl Maxine and goes to spend his vacation with her parents, Ashima becomes heart-broken. Even Gogol could feel his mother’s desperation when he says:

“I’m going with a girl I’m seeing”, he tells her. “Her parents have a place there”. Though she says nothing for a while, he knows what his mother is thinking, that he is willing to go on vacation with someone else’s parents but not see his own. (NS 145)

Gogol’s parents live a contrasted life when compared to Maxine’s parents. Gerald and Lydia kiss openly, go for walks through the city, curl up
‘on the sofa in the evenings and Gerald’s head resting on Lydia’s shoulder’. When Gogol thinks of his parents, he ‘is reminded that in all his life he has never witnessed a single moment of physical affection between his parents. Whatever love exists between them is an utterly private, uncelebrated thing’ (138). During parties, Gerald and Lydia ‘preside at the centre of their dinners’ whereas his parents behave ‘more like caterers in their own home, solicitous and watchful, waiting until most of their guests’ plates were stacked by the sink in order finally to help themselves’ (141). When Gogol takes Maxine to his house, he tells her ‘that they will not be able to touch or kiss each other in front of his parents, that there will be no wine with lunch.’ But ‘the restrictions amuse her; she sees them as a single afternoon’s challenge, an anomaly never to be repeated’ (146). Ashima always ensures that the door is locked behind every visitor but the Ratliffs never lock their house. During his visit to Gerald and Lydia, in their lonely and dark house in New Hampshire, Gogol could not stop comparing his parents’ views if they happen to live in a house like this: ‘They would have felt lonely in this setting, remarking that they were the only Indians’ (155).

The central character, Gogol, is the true child of cultural disorientation. As he grows up, he wants to find a place for himself among other American children. Therefore, he loses all his interest towards the lessons on his native culture. He finds ease in speaking in English even though his parents speak to him in Bengali, in using fork during dinner and occasionally ‘wandering through the house with his running sneakers on’. He can see that the efforts taken by his parents to bring him up in the Indian way are coaxing and he feels burdened. His preference to live in the American way makes him move from one relationship to another. At last, all his relationships break up. Ruth is only a temporary matter for him. His father’s sudden and unfortunate death brings him close to the family. Like all other Indians, he too remains a consolation to his mother by staying with her throughout his leave
period and visiting her every weekend. His sudden closeness to his mother makes Maxine feel that she is ignored. His affair with her ends shortly afterwards as she cannot understand his cultural background and provide solace.

Cultural distortion or disorientation is realised when Moushumi breaks her relationship with the American Graham. As Maxine is for Gogol, Graham is for Moushumi. Having decided to marry Graham, Moushumi takes him to India along with her parents. At first, Graham seems to be attracted towards the habit and culture followed in India. He even learns how to get blessings from the elders and eat with hand sitting on the floor. On their return to America, when the date of their marriage is fast approaching, she comes to know the true colour of Graham. His grievances and criticism to others over the Indian way of life affects her: ‘he was complaining about it, commenting that he found it taxing, found the culture repressed’ (217). She understands the striking difference between the two cultures and decides that these two ends cannot meet together.

In the case of Gogol and Moushumi, they reflect each other in many aspects. They both strive to live like Americans. As far as their studies are concerned, their parents expect them to do one thing but they do different things, the thing of their choice and become what they want to be. After matriculation, Gogol’s parents think that he will choose MIT and move to Massachusetts but, instead, he chooses Columbia University for his Architectural programme and moves to New York, a place which his parents do not know well. Even for weekends he does not want to go home. To go with his parents ‘to pujos and Bengali parties, to remain unquestionably in their world’ (126), is something that is inappropriate to what he wants to be. Moushumi also acts against the wishes of her parents and studies French to be lost in a new world where she will find no conflicting catastrophes. In terms
of their personal life, they want to settle in life like their parents but their conflicting identities interact with each other and put them dismantled. Gogol wants to have a house of his own and ‘he wonders if he will be married again one day, if he will ever have a child to name’ (289). Moushumi, as expected by Gogol, wants to be a true Bengali housewife like her mother but her conflicting identities wreck her marriage and ‘she wonders if she is the only woman in her family ever to have betrayed her husband, to have been unfaithful. This is what upsets her most to admit: that the affair causes her to feel strangely at peace, the complication of it calming her, structuring her day’ (266).

Fated to live the double life of a diaspora individual, it will take time for Gogol to enroot himself in a new soil. He finally tries to find solace by marrying a Bengali childhood friend Moushumi which also breaks down soon after the marriage as he finds it difficult to compromise both American and Indian cultural backgrounds. He does not have any scope in the new land. It is inevitable for the second generation Indian Americans, like Gogol and Moushumi, to be caught up in a critical cultural juncture at a particular moment in the history of Indian American immigration. People like Gogol and Moushumi cannot decide on any particular cultural position which indicates the many possibilities of Indian-American existence in the new continent.

For immigrants, confronting the challenges of exile, loneliness, conflicting culture and the constant sense of displacement are more excruciating and agonising than those of their children. As far as the children are concerned, they are more Americans than their parents, yet not fully Americans. However, the children of the immigrants, with strong flavour to their native land, feel that they are neither Americans nor the children of the root. Since Jhumpa Lahiri is one among such, the thirst for roots drives her
characters to India. Ashima, after spending all her married life in America, completely retains Indian sentiments in such a way that America never feels like her home. Since Lahiri herself is the representative of cultural displacement, she, as a fictional creator, is the right person to talk on this transition between the two cultures, the two countries and the two continents. She says:

> When I was growing up in Rhode Island in the 1970s I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen. Looking back, I see that this was generally the case. But my perception as a young girl was that I fell short at both ends, shuttling between two dimensions that had nothing to do with one another. (Lahiri 2006b)

To settle down in family life is the prime expectation of every Indian immigrant parent. Like Ashima, Moushumi’s parents too expect her to settle in married life. When Moushumi brings Graham home, her parents are greatly relieved that she has found a suitor at last:

> It didn’t matter to them that he was an American. Enough of their friends’ children had married Americans, had produced pale, dark-haired, half-American grandchildren, and none of it was as terrible as they had feared. (NS 216)

The second generation Indians who have spent their formative years in a country different from that of their parents find themselves constantly negotiating their commitment to their parents’ biological culture and the culture of their adopted home. Gogol and Moushumi, like many second generation immigrants, can never find their places in the world. Gogol’s conflict with his family is about the dilemma between the culture in which he is growing, which his parents think is simply corrupt and not
genuinely respectful and the one they had brought with them. Lahiri says in an interview that:

While I am American by virtue of the fact that I was raised in this country, I am Indian thanks to the efforts of two individuals. I feel Indian not because of the time I've spent in India or because of my genetic composition but rather because of my parents' steadfast presence in my life.... It was always a question of allegiance, of choice. I wanted to please my parents and meet their expectations, I also wanted to meet expectations of my American peers and the expectation I put on myself to fit into American society. It's a classic case of divided identity. (Lahiri 2006b)

Most of the stories in Interpreter of Maladies deal with the lives of culturally dislocated diaspora Indians and their dilemmas of belonging. While talking of the stories in this collection, Mishra (2001) points out in his article that the stories deal with ‘the lives of Indians in exile, of people navigating between the strict tradition they have inherited and the baffling new world they must encounter every day’ (116). Nayar (2000), in her article An Interpreter of Exile, rightly points out that:

Lahiri negotiates the dilemmas of the cultural spaces lying across the continents with a master’s touch. Though endowed with a distinct universal appeal, her stories do bring out rather successfully the predicament of the Indians who trapeze between and across two traditions, one inherited and left behind, and the other encountered but not necessarily assimilated.

The stories, A Temporary Matter, Sexy, This Blessed House and The Third and Final Continent, celebrate the common cultural richness of Indian tradition, arranged marriages. The protagonists of these stories are the beneficiaries of arranged marriages, which took place either in India or in their settled land. Marriage is a celebrated occasion in both the cultural contexts. But the value given to the marital bond differs to a great extent
between Indian and American cultural adherence. Indian value system respects much the love between spouses only after marriage whereas the American value system believes in love and understanding before marriage. The native practice makes it mandatory for the couple involved in conjugal relationship that there must be a ‘willing suspension’ of certain expectations, desires and personal likes, and an acceptance of life with all its traditional, ethical and cultural codes instructed by the society. Unlike the Indian practice, marital life in America is something that is voluntary. Insistence does not work out. The couple volunteer themselves into the marital bond with an unspoken agreement that they may terminate their marriage at any time if there is a disagreement. The so-called Western attitude to life influences the children of the immigrant Indians in the host country. The first generation immigrants live true to the cultural heritage of their root but their children, born in an ambiguous cultural background, take a lead towards the acquired culture since the inherited culture seems valueless in a societal set up which gives importance to the individual and the self in a liberated atmosphere.

Shoba and Shukumar in A Temporary Matter are prone to their ambiguous cultural background. Their marriage becomes meaningless and the bond out of marriage has no cultural value when the couple encounters a crisis. The humble submission to the acquired culture helps Shoba to envision her role and place in the Westernised society but her dominant self miserably fails to look back at the root and its value systems. Shoba’s uncompromising attitude disables her from being with Shukumar. Though Shukumar regrets her decision, he does not complain about her selfish attitude as the liberated society favours the individual’s choice. She feels that her isolation will give her strength to recover. But for Mrs.Sen, the first generation immigrant in Mrs.Sen’s, isolation is taxing. By these contrastive characters, Jhumpa Lahiri brings out the subtle difference between the first and the second generation immigrants. Shoba, the second generation immigrant, suffers from psychological dilemma which arises out of her twin cultural background.
Tejender Kaur (2002) puts forth his opinion on cultural dilemmas. He says that the immigrants

… stand bewildered and confused, and show resistance also to the discourse of power in various forms. In the following generations these confusions, problems and yearning become less intense as they get influenced by the culture of that country and also adapt themselves to it. (192)

This is in fact true in the lives of Shoba and other Lahiri’s characters like Mrs. Das, Twinkle, Usha and Hema. Kaur (2002) further talks on his ideas on cross-cultural interactions:

This interaction and comingling of the cultures no doubt leads to further conflicts but it certainly opens new routes and modes of thinking for the individual and group identities of diasporas and guides them to outgrow the stereotyped experiences of uprootedness, displacement and marginalisation. (193)

Outwardly, the power cut seems to be a temporary matter but the darkness brings to light many hidden realities in the lives of both Shoba and Shukumar. Shoba is no longer the same woman that Shukumar married, nor is he the same man. Their still-born child has ravaged their marriage and their lives. Shoba makes up her mind to forget the past by giving extra care to their responsibilities he renders Shoba but they are the outcome of real love and sympathy drawn out of the dead child. Her indifference to life and disheartened attitude is reflected from the extract:

But now she treated the house as if it were a hotel. The fact that the yellow chintz armchair in the living room clashed with the blue-and-maroon Turkish carpet no longer bothered her. On the enclosed porch at the back of the house, a crisp white bag still sat on the wicker chaise, filled with lace she had once planned to turn into curtains. (ATM 6)
But Shukumar, still clinging to the fact that he has to act as a therapist, waits for circumstances to set things right. In his observation, Shoba’s routine seems to be something that she tries to hide or overcome the terrible truth:

Each day, Shukumar noticed, her beauty, which had once overwhelmed him, seemed to fade. The cosmetics that had seemed superfluous were necessary now, not to improve her but to define her somehow. (ATM 14)

Two different personalities, Sanjeev and Twinkle, live together with a war against each other in *This Blessed House*. The conflict is due to Twinkle’s free spirit and frequent crossing of limits which Sanjeev has drawn as a husband keeping in mind his Indian cultural and religious background and sensibilities which define the role of a woman as ‘a wife to look after and love’ (TBH 148). Twinkle is a sort of woman who ‘acculturates the foreign without demeaning the native’ (Chowdhury 2009: 19). ‘In the end they settled on a compromise’ (TBH 149). Sanjeev’s tolerant attitude overwhels his irritation and he is finally dissipated by the ‘pang of anticipation’ (TBH 157).

Sanjeev undergoes a psychological trauma when he locates Christian symbols in his newly-bought house. His sufferings get further deepened when his wife Twinkle is very much attached to those symbols and declared the house as a blessed one. Basically, Sanjeev has no ill-feeling or attachment for any religion. He never speaks of his own religion before witnessing the Christian relics in his house. While seeing Twinkle’s fascination towards those relics, he is in an urge to defend his religion to withstand his identity as ‘Hindu’. For Sanjeev, religious identity is important in order to save his original identity. The first generation immigrants generally compromise religious identities only for the sake of their children and their social identities and not for their own self. Thanksgiving, Halloween and Christmas are some of the commonly-accepted occasions and they are equally celebrated with Saraswathy and Durga pujos, with the same
enthusiasm in an alien land by the immigrant Indians to make their children, born in the cross-cultural environment, happy. Sanjeev, the first generation immigrant, is unable to compromise his religion for his survival in an alien land with Twinkle whose perception of life is in no way different from that of an average American national. He endures her indifference to cooking and Indian food habits:

Indian food, she complained, was a bother; she detested chopping garlic, and peeling ginger, and could not operate a blender, and so it was Sanjeev who, on weekends, seasoned mustard oil with cinnamon sticks and cloves in order to produce a proper curry. (TBH 144)

He even carries on with her habit of smoking, her careless attitude to cleanliness and her unmindful act of calling over phone ‘her girlfriends in California even though it was before five o’clock and the long-distance rates were at their peak’ (141). What is more exhausting to Sanjeev is her excitement at every discovery of the statue of Christ and the related symbols. He is scared that he may lose his Hindu religious identity. His awareness of the constant presence of those symbols develops in him a kind of hatred against them. He has no grumble over his professional identity in an alien land but as far as his national and religious identities are concerned, he wants to be a staunch Indian Hindu. Unlike Pranab in *Hell-Heaven*, who renounces all his cultural, religious and national identities to marry a white American woman, Sanjeev, unwilling to forgo his identities, marries an Indian woman. His modest experience and a few years of life in America make him choose a girl whom he knows for sometime. But he regrets his decision after marrying Twinkle for her unusual attachment to the Christian symbols. He recalls his efforts to get married to Indian brides before meeting Twinkle:

He thought with a flicker of regret of the snapshots his mother used to send him from Calcutta, of prospective
brides who could sing and sew and season lentils without consulting a cookbook. (TBH 146)

Sanjeev’s resistance to Western attitude to life is only with his wife Twinkle but Mrs.Sen’s struggle is to assimilate into American culture. Lahiri makes use of child characters to serve as a medium to demonstrate the inabilities of the immigrant characters to enroot themselves in the acquired land and culture. An eleven-year-old American boy, Eliot, in Mrs.Sen’s, a ten-year-old American born Indian girl, Lilia, in When Mr.Pirzada Came to Dine and Rohin, a seven-year-old Indian boy born to ‘a Punjabi mother and a Bengali father’ in Sexy, are some of Lahiri’s child characters who are exposed to twin cultural backgrounds. By and large cultural ambiguity will arise only for the children of the immigrant parents. In spite of being an American child, Eliot is capable of observing the cultural practices of a conventional Hindu family through his baby-sitter Mrs.Sen. Comparing his own mother’s attitude to life, food habits, daily routine and her sense of dressing with those of Mrs.Sen’s, he senses that Mrs.Sen practises a rich and worthy culture. What he and his mother practise in their life seems odd and incomplete. He is marvelled at Mrs.Sen’s care and gracefulness in preparing food for her husband which is in contrast with his mother’s reluctance in preparing food for them. He recalls an evening at home:

The first thing she did when they were back at the beach house was pour herself a glass of wine and eat bread and cheese. Sometime so much of it that she wasn’t hungry for the pizza they normally ordered for dinner. She sat at the table as he ate, drinking more wine and asking how his day was, but eventually she went to the deck to smoke a cigarette, leaving Eliot to wrap up the leftovers. (MS 118)

Mrs.Sen is not the only diasporic woman showing such delicacy in cutting vegetables and fish using the Indian-made blade ‘curved like the prow of a Viking ship’ (114) and cooking Indian food. Ashima, in The Namesake, Lilia’s mother, in When Mr.Pirzada came to Dine, Sanjeev, in This Blessed
*House*. Ruma’s mother, in *Unaccustomed Earth*, Aparna, in *Hell-Heaven* and Hema’s mother, in *Hema and Kaushik* are all good at preparing Indian food with Indian flavour in addition to their learning a few American dishes like cooking turkey for parties like Thanksgiving which include American neighbours. Throughout their life in the US, they never give up their fondness for preparing and serving Indian food but for their children and the second generation immigrants, they neither develop a taste for the Indian food nor like to cook at home. Gogol, Sonia (NS), Twinkle (TBH) and Usha (HH) show signs of disapproval for Indian food either because of the embarrassment they faced when they opened their lunch boxes at school before American children or because of the taste they developed for the American food over the years. However, their dislike is not biological but cultural.

Mrs. Sen’s efforts to Americanise herself in the assimilation process become futile when ‘she was so startled by the horn that she lost control of the wheel and hit a telephone pole on the opposite corner’ (MS 134). Also she never likes to give up her cultural inheritance. She used to wear sari, coral glass, golden bangles and vermilion paste in her parted hair. She explains to Eliot that the vermilion has religious significance and every married woman in India wears it like a wedding ring. In contrast to Mrs. Sen, Eliot’s mother invites a man to dinner and he spends the night in her bedroom. Eliot never sees him again. The separation from homeland and relatives is a pain which Mrs. Sen feels poignant. Celebrations and get-togethers form an important part of culture she has left behind. The only possible moment she can again join those happy occasions is either to recollect from her memories or to listen to the tape recorder. While remembering the past, she cannot hold back her straying thoughts from recalling the sleepless nights that were so much peaceful in contrast to the peace that is so painful in exile. In India it was ‘impossible to fall asleep those nights, listening to their chatter’ (115). But
here in the home found by her husband in the alien world, she ‘cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence’ (115). Buddhadeb Roychoudhury (2008), in his article *The Metaphor of Pain*, states that ‘the way Mrs.Sen suffers and narrates her sufferings draws attention to the gap between cultural practices and between human perceptions of their tales’ (92). She never gives up her taste for Indian food. Her grudge over the unavailability of varieties of fish and her longing to have them are expressed in the following lines:

She had grown up eating fish twice a day. She added that in Calcutta people ate fish first thing in the morning, last thing before bed, as a snack after school if they were lucky. They ate the tail, the eggs, even the head. It was available in any market, at any hour, from dawn until midnight. (MS 123-124)

Lilia, in *When Mr.Pirzada Came to Dine*, is also a child observer like Eliot who is brought up with Indian beliefs, customs and culture at home but exposed to American culture in the outer world which confuses her to be either on this side or on that side. While talking of the cultural and social space occupied by the second generation immigrant children, Tejinder Kaur (2002) says that:

...we are shown through Lilia’s retrospection and scarred psyche that these children carry with them the past history of ‘origin’ of their parents and grand parents and are treated with an Orientalist attitude even though they are born and brought up here, read the history and geography of America in schools and have assimilated their culture. (40)

At her friend Dora’s house, Lilia notices the differences when she calls her mom over the phone after a night of trick-or-treating: ‘When I replaced the phone on the receiver it occurred to me that the television wasn’t on at Dora’s house at all’ (39). Lilia’s family is used to eating in the living room in front of the TV, looking for the evening news about the war which
takes place between India and Pakistan. They dip biscuit in tea, drink no alcohol, eat rice for supper, pickled mango and fish in yogurt sauce with hands. It is evident that Lilia is placed between her Indian and American culture because she is born to Indian parents in America and her parents bring her up on Indian tradition. When Lilia’s father tells her that Mr. Pirzada is not an Indian, she is perplexed as she is unable to locate any difference between her parents and Mr. Pirzada. She studies the possibilities of differentiating him but in no way does she arrive at a compromise that he belongs to a different country. She says:

It made no sense to me. Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents, Mr. Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, … (PCD 25)

Her father explains the ways in which he is different from them: ‘Mr. Pirzada is Bengali, but he is Muslim’ and ‘he lives in East Pakistan, not India.’ ‘As you see, Lilia, it is a different country, a different color’ (26). He also insists on Lilia watching the evening news with him every night to be aware of the current situation in their homeland, when he learns that she is taught only American history at school. While watching the news regularly, she finds out the difference that she is living a life totally devoid of Indian culture.

Mr. Pirzada sets the watch to Dacca time to forget the absence of his daughters during every meal. He wants to feel more at home in the alien land by moving closely with Lilia. Lilia observes that his fortune is tied with his homeland and not in America. His attachment to his home and homeland is acknowledgeable and his aspiration to never part with his homeland is appreciable. Lilia’s parents know very well that they will never meet again after his return to Dacca. Lilia too observes this attitude from him and says:
When I saw it that night, as he wound it and arranged it [watch] on the coffee table, an uneasiness possessed me; life, I realized, was being lived in Dacca first... Our meals, our actions, were only a shadow of what had already happened there, a lagging ghost of where Mr. Pirzada really belonged. (PCD 30-31)

Pirzada has a staunch faith to return to his homeland. His future being destined there, he is not least bothered to learn certain American common mannerisms which Lilia and her parents have adopted. Even he condemns the habit of thanking people every time for everything. He says:

What is this thank-you? The lady at the bank thanks me, the cashier at the shop thanks me, the librarian thanks me when I return an overdue book, the overseas operator thanks me as she tries to connect me to Dacca and fails. If I am buried in this country I will be thanked, no doubt, at my funeral. (PCD 29)

Like Lilia and Eliot, Laxmi’s cousin’s son, Rohin, in Sexy, functions as a psychological revelation to Miranda’s cross-cultural infatuation. The protagonist of the story Sexy is an American woman rather than an Indian. The story seems to suggest a clash between two very different cultures, the immigrant and the native. Of the two, it is not only the immigrant other who fails to live up to its cultural boundaries but also the native self which falls a prey to cross-cultural encounters. Miranda, a young American woman, gets involved in an affair with a married Indian, Devajit Mitra. Not only the opposite sex but also the opposite cultural backgrounds drag the native self (Miranda) and the immigrant other (Dev) towards mutual attraction and finally to sexual indulgence. Miranda, who knows nothing about Indian culture, tries to explore it and learn more about it by visiting Indian grocery and Indian restaurants. She contemplates over the thought that the first part of her name ‘Mira’ is Indian. She tries to learn a few Bengali letters. On the whole, India with its rich culture and tradition, is a fascinating study to Miranda and she sacrifices her ‘self’ for the exploration of a foreign land
through Dev. But he takes advantage of his ‘otherness’ and does not think of Miranda as anything more than a mistress meant for sexual indulgence though he has a wife who ‘resembled an actress in Bombay named Madhuri Dixit’ (98). She feels a kind of safety by moving with Dev who is constantly teaching her about India and its geographical locations. When Rohin describes to her his father’s affair with a foreign lady, she is able to bring in a comparison between her own affair with Dev and Rohin’s father’s affair with a lady whom he has travelled with in an aircraft by sitting next to her. Rohin tells Miranda: ‘That’s what my father did … He sat next to someone he didn’t know, someone sexy, and now he loves her instead of my mother’ (108). Rohin’s father still has not ‘come to his senses’ (99), flies to London to live with the woman and wants a divorce from his wife but she’s willing to forgive him for the boy’ (91). The frequent sharing of Laxmi about her cousin’s miseries and Rohin’s psychological understanding of a woman’s interference in his father’s life and its effects on his mother facilitate Miranda to realise the cultural differences between her and Dev. Her realization, that estranged relationship in the long run may destroy Dev’s family life, allows her to throw away her ties with Dev. Michael Cox (2003) points out that:

Through her encounter with Rohin, Miranda is allowed the sudden insight necessary to end her own affair with dev. She is able to realize, in part, that she is of a different culture is largely the reason for Dev’s being attracted to her, just as her attraction to him has more to do with his group identity than with any individual merits. Motivated by the romanticizing of other cultures by both participants, the story provides a compelling look at the unhappy consequences of such self-interested prejudice. (128)

The Das family, in the title story Interpreter of Maladies, makes a visit to India every year to visit their parents who live in Asansol. They neither retain any qualities of being Indians nor feel happy to identify themselves as Indians. The very fact that they were born in America, though
to Indian parents, is a pride to them. They have no introspection to Indian
culture or attitude to life like that of an Indian. But there are certain
unconscious elements which are primarily Indian which work psychologically
on both Mr. and Mrs. Das. Mr. Das believes that she loves him but she has no
love for him and continues to live with him carrying a guilt throughout her
life that her second child Bobby is not born to him. For an American woman
infidelity is only a slip which has nothing to do with her psyche. Her
faithlessness is due to her American liberal ways of life whereas her guilty
consciousness is due to her inability to discard her marital relationship.

Himadri Lahiri (2008) points out in an article entitled Family as
Space in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Short Stories that:

Cultural specification and cultural differences in Lahiri’s
stories are, however, important so far as they place the
characters in proper perspectives. But Lahiri is not
interested in merely speaking about the cultural
experience of her characters. (48)

Mr. Kapasi observes that Mr. and Mrs. Das have taken up a hybrid
culture. Mrs. Das calls her husband by his first name, has shaved her largely
bare legs, Mr. Das squeezes Mr. Kapasi’s hand like an American, they speak
differently and use American terminologies like ‘restroom’. Hailing from
India, they seem more Americanised than Americans themselves. They love
American independence and ‘view India as the exotic land of their forefathers
fit to be captured in the films of their camera and read its history in the tourist
guide books’ (Narzary 2008:67).

*The Third and Final Continent* is about a Bengali young man’s
travel from Calcutta to London in 1964 and then to Boston with his wife Mala
in 1969. In all these phases of his life he never laments the home left behind
in Calcutta, though there are frequent recollections of the original home.
Instead, he and his wife decide to accept the land where they make their final settlement as home by retaining their cultural identity as Indians. It is obvious in his narrative that ‘Though we visit Calcutta every few years, and bring back more drawstrings pajamas and Darjeeling tea, we have decided to grow old here’ (TFC 197). They merge their lives with ‘the Third and Final Continent’ as they ‘are American citizens now, so that’ they ‘can collect social security when it is time’ (197). He owes his debt to Mrs.Croft, a hundred-and-three-year old lady, the owner of the house in which he has lived on rent, which he considers as his ‘first home’ in America. Assimilation is a serious and difficult process for which he takes every possible effort. He says: ‘I read every article and advertisement, so that I would grow familiar with things’ (176). He ‘learned that Americans drove on the right side of the road, not the left, and that they called a life an elevator and an engaged phone busy’ (174). His wife, Mala, seems to be an ideological wife who follows both her husband and the cultural heritage of India along with her strong need to assimilate herself in the settled land. As they have understood the effects of cross-cultural upbringing in which their son has been brought up, they advise him not to get lost, feel desolate or discouraged in the perplexing presence of the ambiguous cultural identities which are always a threat to the immigrants. Despite the fact that they are imitating the natives in dress, gestures and postures, there is always an anxiety which is the outcome of the feeling that they are culturally alienated. Choubey (2011), in her essay Food as a Metaphor, writes that ‘the man and his wife succeed in retaining his original cultural identity’. The smell of ‘steamed rice’ (192), a dish of chicken made with ‘fresh garlic and ginger on the stove’ (TFC 193) and the eating habits induce a sense of belonging to one’s original culture. Choubey (2011) also observes that ‘this habit, which is becoming considered contemptible and uncivilised in India itself, is in great favour with Indians settled abroad’. The habit of eating with hands and speaking Bengali at home will no longer be in practice after the first generation immigrants leave this world. They are
worried that their son will not follow these practices after their death. Lahiri herself says (2006b): ‘I have always believed that I lack the authority my parents bring to being Indian. But as long as they live they protect me from feeling like an impostor.’

The protagonist of this story, the adventurous father, quotes his own example to his son: ‘Whenever he is discouraged, I tell him that if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he cannot conquer’ (197-198). The couple advises their son to come up with a new knowledge and new ways of seeing the world by exploring the possibilities of fighting against the odds to succeed in life like his father. Tejinder Kaur (2002) writes on this story as:

This story is certainly a new narrative (rightly placed in the end) constructed to suggest the new ways of thinking and new possibilities to the migrants and their descendants showing them a way of not lamenting over the lost past and looking or the “secure roots” which “fix them in place, in a nation or an ethnic group”. (201)

Mala resembles neither Ashima, in The Namesake nor Mrs.Sen, in Mrs.Sen’s. It takes Ashima some time to accept her life in the settled land. However, her attachment to the homeland makes her turn back to India after her husband’s death. Mrs.Sen’s troubles are eternal since she is left alone at home to ruminate over her life in Calcutta. Mala is neither sentimental like Ashima nor nostalgic like Mrs.Sen. She makes her life comfortable in the settled land by amalgamating herself among the American multitude. Her travel is inevitable as a wife and her life is meaningful with the inheritance of the Indian culture. Her readiness to join her husband in the new land reveals her attitude to a prospective life. She writes him a letter from Calcutta that ‘I write in English in preparation for the journey’ (TFC 189). Her husband recalls that ‘Mala had travelled far from home, not knowing where she was going, or what she would find, for no reason other than to be my wife’ (195).
The marriage between the couple is symbolic of the reverence given to cultural and social aspects and not to the individuals involved in the ceremony. He regards ‘the proposition with neither objection nor enthusiasm’. He regards it as ‘a duty expected of’ him ‘as it was expected of every man’ (181).

Lahiri deals with the cultural division between American-born Indian children and their Bengali parents in her debut novel *The Namesake*. She returns again to the same theme in her second collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth*. These stories, unlike *Interpreter of Maladies*, deal with mingled marriages and tangled relationships. Ruma, in the title story, marries an American and her relationship with her widowed father is fragile. Amit in *A Choice of Accommodations* marries an American woman and his life in America is in no way related to his homeland and parents. Pranab’s failed marriage with an American woman, Deborah, after twenty-three years and his union with a Bengali woman in *Hell-Heaven* convey the conventional reality of life that one’s root culture can never be forgotten but can be hidden for some time. Sudha, in *Only Goodness*, marries an Englishman, Roger. Her scrambled relationship with her brother, Rahul, and the eventual reunion mars her own marital life. Sangeeta’s relationship with an Egyptian Farouk in *Nobody’s Business* ends in disappointment. Usha in *Hell-Heaven* and Hema in *Going Ashore* sleep with many a man but setting a family of their own with any of their American boyfriends is still a question of sustenance. All these culturally-exiled characters struggle initially to accept either the native or the adopted culture but later they decide to move on with the culture of the settled country as they have had enough of humiliating experiences in every phase of their lives. Iwona Filipczak (2012), an author, writes on Lahiri’s writings:

*Inhabiting the fictional world of large-scale transnational migrations, in which borders of cultures are frequently traversed and need to be constantly negotiated, Lahiri’s*
characters are identified as cultural hybrids, whose hyphenated identities are troubled by tension and anxiety. (1)

Ruma and her brother Romi, in the title story *Unaccustomed Earth*, remain true to their cultural fusion. Ruma’s parents, like all other first generation immigrant parents, expect their children to follow their footprints but Ruma and Romi take a different path totally devoid of their parents’ expectations. Lahiri’s narration goes like this: ‘The more the children grew, the less they had seemed to resemble either parent – they spoke differently, dressed differently, seemed foreign in every way, from the texture of their hair to the shapes of their feet and hands’ (UE 54). Ruma’s father who himself ‘turned his back on his parents, by settling in America’ (51), thinks of the third generation Indian American, his grandson Akash, born to the second generation Indian mother and an American father, who will ‘occupy this very room, shutting the door as Ruma and Romi had. It was inevitable’ (51).

Ruma’s parents’ ‘trips to India were always epic, ...having to pack so much luggage and getting it all to the airport, keeping documents in order and ferrying his family safely so many thousands of miles’ but ‘those returns to India had been a fact of life for him, and for all their Indian friends in America’ (UE 8). Quite the opposite, the children, like any other second generation children, like to stay back instead of flying to India. Ruma’s father recalls ‘the fact that the older his children grew, the less they wanted to go’ (8). The making of Americans from Indians is slow and steady as well as an unconscious effort. Ruma prefers ‘pants and skirts’ to saris, marries Adam, an American, and has stopped removing shoes outside the house, ‘which she’d shed in her adult life, without knowing when or why’ (14). However, her mother’s death makes her identity strongly with Indian heritage. Her life between Indian and American culture is a constant negotiation. Iwona Filipczak (2012) says that:
Ruma lives immersed in the memories of her dead mother, and even though it contradicts her American upbringing, she starts imitating her example. She does not reject American clothes, taste for American food, nor does she use Bengali, her parents’ native language. She rejects something more fundamental: her independence, professional success, and sense of equality with her husband. He accepts her position according to the Indian tradition: serving the husband (her mother always did it), being mainly a mother and a housewife. (5)

Mrs. Bagchi is a peculiar Indian in the US who turns her back to India at the age of twenty-six and has never returned except to attend her parents’ funerals. She is identical in nature and thought with Gauri in *The Lowland*. Both lose their husbands after a few months of their marriage and escape to America; the former to avoid her to be married off again and the latter by marrying her husband’s brother who is in America. Both elevate themselves to the level of university teachers but refuse to love any one except their dead husbands. Ruma’s father, who is in sixties, like Kaushik’s father in *Hema and Kaushik*, falls in love with the sixty-year-old Mrs. Bagchi, after his wife’s death. When Ruma receives her father in her house, ‘she was struck by the degree to which her father resembled an American in his old age’ (UE 11). She and her father have never been close and she suspects he does not really miss her mother. She can smell the changed attitude of her father; his efforts to be free from any responsibility or commitment which he once had ‘in the name of ambition and accomplishment’ (51) and his new attire, love. His love to Akash is strange to Ruma because she has never experienced such closeness to her father and she realises ‘that for the first time in his life her father had fallen in love (48)’ but very soon she finds ‘the evidence that it was not with Akash that her father had fallen in love’ (58) but with Mrs. Bagchi too. ‘He is seeing another woman, but cannot bring himself to tell Ruma’ as ‘the positions of father and child have been reversed’ (C. Choudhury 2008:38). Strangely enough, ‘it is the old man who seems
ready to claim his independence, to make his fresh escape from the clinging and the chronic role-assigning of family, like a boy heading off to school’ (UE 29). Sarah Kerr (2008) in The New York Review reviews that ‘it is the daughter, crushed by her mother’s absence, who seems committed to old patterns, yet absorbed in her tangled feelings in a way that suggests she has not quite grown up’ (29).

In Hell-Heaven Jhumpa Lahiri talks about the struggles of living in the United States with Indian culture. This struggle is shown through the characters Usha and Pranab Chakrobarthy. Both make decisions that make them choose one culture over the other. Pranab is constantly aware that he wants to belong to a higher culture than the one he has been raised with. In Usha’s case it is an unconscious transformation due to her conscious exposure to foreign culture. Whatever the circumstances in which one’s life is led in a foreign country, one’s native roots will always be there. Pranab has identified his roots and learnt to explore them inside his own self. Usha is sure to find her roots with the help of her mother who is good at understanding the children born in the American soil (Essay Judge 2012).

Usha, in Hell-Heaven, recalls her Boston childhood and conjures up the socio-cultural alienation that burdened her mother Aparna, who wears ‘the red and white bangles unique to Bengali married women, … and a thick stem of vermilion powder in the centre parting of her hair’ (HH 61). She reflects Lahiri in lineage. Usha was born in Berlin and the family moved to America after a few years. Before marriage, her parents lived in India ‘where they were strangers to each other, and where their marriage had been arranged’ (61). Both the mother and daughter live two different lives: the former’s is purely Indian with all its ethical codes and cultural heritage whereas the latter surrenders herself to Americanism in spite of her mother’s advice and rebuke. Usha is never allowed to attend dances or to date. When she ‘began
menstruating’, her mother told her ‘to let no boy touch’ her (76). For Aparna, ‘mixed marriages were a doomed enterprise’ so she warns Usha: ‘Don’t think you’ll get away with marrying an American’ (75). But Usha had different accomplishments in secret: she ‘went to parties, drinking beer and allowing boys to kiss’ and fondle her breasts (76). On completion of becoming a perfect American, she begins to pity her mother for her desolate life because ‘her only job, every day, was to clean and cook for my father and me’ and calls to mind the insults faced by her mother from her father: ‘If you are unhappy, go back to Calcutta’ (76). Aparna’s anxiety is to avoid her daughter being trapped by American culture whereas Usha’s happiness lies on the absolute acceptance of American realism. Aparna’s belief in Indian culture and Usha’s adherence to American culture negotiate each other and at certain point of time, the host culture dominates the other and the parental generation accepts this change as Aparna has accepted. Usha recalls:

My mother and I had also made peace; she had accepted the fact that I was not only her daughter but a child of America as well. She accepted that I dated one American man, and then another, and then yet another, that I slept with them, and even that I lived with one though we were not married. (HH 82)

Aparna and Ashima (NS) are in the same boat and they expect their children to be true to their native culture in the beginning but when their expectations become futile, they pray for a peaceful and settled family life. Ruma’s mother and Sudha’s parents also accept the cross-cultural marriage of their daughters. Their wider experience in the new land, with the Native Americans, Indian Americans and with their own experience as the diasporic Indians, enables them to accept the identities of their children which are similar to those of the Native American children. They are ready to accept the bi-cultural identity of their children but are not ready to bring it out in practice in their own lives and they still have complaints over the cultural clash
between Indian and American culture. During Pranab’s wedding, Aparna ‘keeps speaking in Bengali, complaining about the formality of the proceedings’ (HH 73) and her husband ‘methodically working through his meal, his fork and knife occasionally squeaking against the surface of the china, because he was accustomed to eating with his hands’ (HH 74). Usha is at times jealous of Pranab’s children as they have been brought up purely with American flavour of life. Not only does Pranab take to American way of life but also disowns his earlier Indian acquaintances in America.

Cultural conflict and communication gap distance the immigrant children from their parents and the relationship between them becomes complex. Amit Sarkar, in A Choice of Accommodations, recalls that there is some relationship between him and his parents. Rahul, in Only Goodness, is cut off from his parents after becoming an alcoholic, Ruma feels embarrassed to have her father in her house and Kaushik, after his mother’s death, forbids himself to set foot again into his house where his father is now living with his newly-wed. Only a few like Gogol and his parents (The Namesake) and Usha and her mother (Hell-Heaven) have eventually reached some kind of understanding.

Cultural inheritance and the related psychological anxiety have nothing to do with one’s economic stability and social background. Amit’s parents, basically from affluent families, lived an almost equal life with that of the Westerners even in India. Unlike ‘other Bengalis in Massachusetts’, they have neither sentiments about India nor are homesick. His father grew restless over his faculty position in Harvard Medical School and decided to return to India with a position in a Delhi hospital. ‘The relative affluence of America never impressed them’ and ‘they left the country and had not looked back’ (ACA 96). He was shocked by their decision and later he dreaded his trips to Delhi during Christmas and after each academic year’s end. While all
his relatives were in Calcutta, ‘he never enjoyed his visits to Delhi’ as ‘his broken Bengali’ is of no use in that city. He remained indoors without moving out, ‘without friends’ and ‘without anything to do’. He is accepted by his American peers and complimented for ‘his accent’ in Langford and those comforts which his native land refuses to give him. This is where he develops his individuality and learns ‘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’ (97). His American attitude to life and the adaptations of liberal ways of life embolden him to marry Megan, a five-year-senior American woman. His parents ‘for all their liberal Western ways’ ‘wanted him to marry a Bengali girl, raised and educated as he had been’ (112).

The first generation immigrants, Sudha and Rahul’s parents in Only Goodness, are Bengali immigrants. They first immigrate to London but the racial discrimination there drives them to the United States. The new settlement provides them equal opportunities to prosper economically but they are not prepared to take cultural advancements of the new country. Nor can they forego their native culture. As a result, they depend on their children who are tuned better to American habits and new adaptations of life for their everyday routine and social life. In spite of being rich, ‘they faced a life sentence of being foreign’ (OG 138) and they cannot approve of America for ‘too many freedoms, too much having fun’ (143). Even they resist that the very word ‘depression’ is ‘an American thing’. Sudha’s mother blames America and its laws for she comes to know that ‘everyone at American colleges drinks’. Rahul’s alcoholism is a symbolic expression of distrust that comes out of his hybrid cultural background. They expect him to make use of the opportunities provided in America like education and job but at the same time want him to fall in line with other Bengali Indians who carry their native culture. Iwona Filipczak (2012) states that:
Rahul is suspended between the strains put on by his Indian parents and his already acquired Americanness. The Indian way of life pressed upon him by his parents stifles his American spirit of individualism, desire for freedom and self-fulfillment, expressed by his wish to engage in artistic activity and other attempts of breaking away from the parental control. (8)

As a hybrid, Rahul cannot be the ‘one’ or the ‘other’. He does not want to identify himself either with Indian family or with Indian way of life. His dislocated self, which he identifies as American self, gives him the strength to leave his parents and to live with an American woman, Elena, who is ‘practically old enough to be’ his mother, only to be failed miserably in his life (OG 155). He can never succeed until he understands his middle position as a cultural hybrid. As a hybrid, Sudha succeeds in getting consent to marry an Englishman, Roger, and blessing from her parents. There are times when she considered Rahul a blessed one as he is more privileged than Sudha in being exposed to American ways of life during their childhood. She knows her limits and her parents too, understanding her responsible attitude to life, give their consent to marry her choice.

Lahiri’s stories not only reflect the existentialistic nuances of the first generation immigrants like Pranab, Aparna, Sanjeev, Ruma and Sudha’s parents but also of the second generation cultural hybrids or the cultural minorities like Usha, Amit, Ruma, Rahul, Sudha, Sangeeta, Hema and Kaushik. Hema and Kaushik, in Once in a Lifetime, experience two different cultures under the same roof in Massachusetts: the one observed by Hema’s parents, the conventional Hindu culture and the other followed by Kaushik’s parents, the Westernised sophisticated Indian culture. Kaushik’s parents, unable to continue life in America, move back to Bombay, India. After a few years of stay there, they return once again to America. Hema once refers to them as ‘seasoned immigrants’ (HAK 224). Their status is ‘regarded as a wavering, a weakness’ (227). They are condemned ‘for having failed at both
ends’ (228). Hema considers that Kaushik is from India like her own parents but finds nothing similar to them. Dr. Choudhury, Kaushik’s father, says that Kaushik is unhappy for leaving America first and then for leaving India now. However, he feels proud to say that ‘even in Bombay we managed to raise a typical American teenager’ (238). Hema never invites her American friends out of fear that they may mock at her for their lifestyle which is basically Indian. She is worried that she will be ridiculed by her school friends over the fact that she is not allowed to sleep alone in her room. She regularly slept with her parents because her mother, Shibani, considers ‘the idea of a child sleeping alone a cruel American practice and therefore did not encourage it’ (229).

In the second story, Year’s End in Hema and Kaushik, Kaushik is a grown up man studying the psychology of his father who has married recently a widowed Bengali school teacher. Like Ruma’s father, Kaushik’s father is suddenly changed. He is no longer seen with Johnnie Walker either in his hand or set out on the cocktail table. The practice of drinking, which was once privileged during his life with Parul, Kaushik’s mother, is obsolete now with the arrival of Chitra and her two little daughters. The children are wearing ‘thick sweaters and socks, incongruous Indian things’ (HAK 261) which will be replaced very soon with American clothing, a premonition becoming true with every Indian children arriving at America. Kaushik has grown out of taste for Indian food. At school he used to eat in the cafeteria and at home after his mother’s death he and his father went out for food or to buy pizzas. In the New England house, Chitra’s cooking reminds Kaushik of his meal in his grandparents’ houses in Calcutta – ‘being treated each day like kings after their morning baths’ (261).

Chitra’s daughters, Rupa and Piu, are located in a new world where everything is new to them. For Mr. Pirzada the expression ‘thank you’ has
become boring. He does not need to learn it as his life is not going to be lived in America but for Rupa and Piu, it is important to learn common mannerisms like ‘hello’, ‘thank you’ and ‘sorry’. They are afraid to go to school as their accents are different from the Native Americans’. It is evident in all Lahiri’s works that the immigrant children like to pursue their college education or masters or doctoral programme in a distant place far away from their homes. Kaushik is not an exception. When Chitra questions his choice of a distant university, he has no answer. Like many other Bengalis, she too preferred to live along in a place where so many other Bengalis are living. They moved to a traditional house ‘in a less isolated suburb of Boston’ (292). Living among Bengali families with an Indian grocery nearby is more important to average immigrants like Chitra than ‘the proximity of the ocean and Modernist architecture’ (292).

Lahiri’s fiction generally scrutinises the fate of the immigrants in the settled land. In almost all the stories she has given an appealing picture of the second and third generation characters who are increasingly assimilating into American culture and are ‘comfortable in constructing perspectives outside of their country of origin’. In the process of assimilation, the second and third generations withdraw from the constraints of their immigrant parents who are often loyal to their native culture. In Going Ashore, the last of the collection Unaccustomed Earth, both Hema and Kaushik depart from their native culture but Hema is somehow convinced to come back to the cultural boundaries of her parent culture at least at the age of thirty-seven by deciding to marry Navin, a non-Bengali Indian who has found work as a professor of physics at Michigan State. On the other hand, Kaushik is boundless to any country or any culture. His childhood was spent both in India and America and both the settlements were against his wishes. His psychological attachment to his mother does not allow him to return to his parental house in New England after his mother’s death. His profession as a photojournalist
takes him to faraway lands where he loses himself among strangers. It is his choice to live among the strangers, to know nobody and it is ‘his inability to form attachments’ (HAK 326). Like Paul Morel, in *Sons and Lovers*, Kaushik’s hovering over the thoughts of his mother forbids him to own a family for him. Finally, he finds himself nowhere but everyone, professionally acquainted, identifies him as an Indian. His last visit to India is at the time of his mother’s death and thereafter he finds no reasons or inclination to visit India. Neither does he visit his father who lives now in the suburbs of Boston with Chitra and her daughters since ‘the demands of the job allowed him permanently to avoid the United States’ (305).

Bi-cultural offsprings always live with the double consciousness of being Indian at home and being American in the outer world. Kaushik has no consciousness of any culture at all and he can neither be an Indian nor an American. He thinks that ‘as a photographer, his origins were irrelevant’ (310). Unlike Kaushik, Hema has to find her roots. Her parents, the first generation immigrants, have already left the country to their homeland. For the second generation the home left behind is undoubtedly not the place to be. She has bought a house of her own in the United States. Her native consciousness allows her parents to assume ‘that she was single because she was shy, too devoted to her studies to bother with men’ (297). Her American consciousness has given her freedom to live a secret life with Julian, a married man. Unlike Maxine, in *The Namesake*, whose relationships with men are open to her parents, Hema maintains her relationships secretly from her parents as she was born in a family where drinking Johnnie Walker is considered foreign even in American atmosphere. Hema breaks her ties with Julian putting an end to her courtship ‘after years of believing that Julian would leave his wife’ (297). She regains her native consciousness and feels reconnected to her parent culture by believing in marriage. Her regaining is
similar to that of Gogol, who, after many relationships, turns to look at life like his parents. However, her return is not willing but inevitable. She says:

> It was her inability, ultimately, to approach middle age without a husband, without children, with her parents living now on the other side of the world ... though she had proven to herself, to her parents, to everyone, that she was capable of all those things – it was her unwillingness to abide that life indefinitely that led her to Navin. (HAK 298)

One of Lahiri’s reviewers, after reading *Unaccustomed Earth*, writes on the destiny of immigrant characters:

> The first wave of settlers has arrived for long; some have switched to the new culture aggressively even as some stick to the old far off land. Then there are some who are straddling across two boats. Food, clothes and customs rendered unpalatable by the Indian ethos pose major stumbling blocks to smooth transition for some. Unable to cope, they fiercely cling to the earlier ways of life, almost as if mourning. The problem takes an acute turn when they succumb to the basic biological urge of perpetuating their existence through their children. (Pandey 2012)

To be an American, an immigrant has to experience unceasing alternations of his own self, an intimate observation of the host culture and an isolation to disown his native culture. *The Lowland*, by Jhumpa Lahiri, is yet another milestone portraying the taxing realities of immigrant lives in multi-cultural phenomena. Subhash, Gauri and Bela are caught up in America’s multi-cultural environment either for good or for the preparation of the worst. Of course, Gauri is benefited but her estranged relationship with her daughter Bela and Subhash dooms their lives. Subhash rescues Gauri from Tollygunge, from the secluded life of a widow in the house of her in-laws and from the clutches of social evils and she is ‘unable to express her gratitude for what he’d undertaken’ (LL 137). Her marriage with Subhash takes her to Rhode
Island and she transforms herself to enter a new world, a world even Subhash himself has not seen after his arrival to the United States. Her transformation is distinctive and determined but not natural though gradual. In the beginning she never ventures out and stays always ‘indoors, resting, reading the campus paper Subhash brought home with him every day’ (130). Her expedition on a rainy day to a nearby grocery store ends after eating ‘cream cheese’ unknowingly that ‘it was intended to be spread on a cracker or bread’ (131). Her exploration of buildings, departments, classroom and finally the philosophy department in the campus interests her to attend classes. Later, she makes it a routine and ‘liked spending time in the company of people who ignored but surrounded her’ (133). Her observation of other American girls helps her to bring in a revolutionary change in her dressing which Udayan himself may not have liked. A few months of her life in America has given the feeling that she is tired of her long hair and Indian costumes. She has accepted the physical reformation whereas for her psyche there is no cure. She still lives with Udayan, still expects him to come one day to her surprise. She is unable to reconcile with fate because Udayan is felt in each and every action. Unable to keep traces of Udayan out of her life, she decides to break all ties with Subhash and Bela as she finds it difficult to make them a part of her life.

Subhash rescues not only Gauri but also her daughter Bela from her mother who dislikes her and behaves indifferently with her. Gauri’s interests are more in philosophy than on Bela. He disapproves of the idea of hiring somebody to take care of Bela ‘though he’d told her, when he asked her to marry him, that she could go on with her studies in America, now he told her that her priority should be Bela’ (165). At the same time Gauri’s independent self demands freedom from the responsibilities. She has grudges over ‘Subhash’s absence when he was at work, his ability to come and go and nothing more’ (163). His responsible nature and willingness to dedicate life
are not emotional expressions lasting for sometime. For him it is a penance made to achieve the meaning of life. He ventures into this phase and completes his mission successfully like a yogi and finds the meaning through Bela’s upbringing.

Initial interventions like Holly and his free spirit to amalgamate himself in the American soil, like any other American, may have changed his life if Subhash has not brought Gauri to America or Holly has not reunited with her husband. He retains his self-respect both with Holly and Gauri. Though his relationship with Holly continues for sometime, his cultural upbringing forbids him to think of marrying her because of ‘the fact that she was technically another man’s wife’ (77). Holly, an American woman of French Canadian descent, lives a lonely life like any other American woman who lives away from her husband. Eliot’s mother in Mrs. Sen’s lives in a lonely house devoid of any human contact. Perul Mashi in Hema and Kaushik prefers to live in a seaside lonely mansion. Holly, like Miranda in Sexy, has an enchantment towards Indian culture, the way of life, family and relationships. Miranda collects fragments of facts about India from her boyfriend, Dev. Likewise, Holly collects details from her boyfriend, Subhash, and recalls that: ‘The most ordinary details of his life, which would have made no impression on a girl from Calcutta, were what made him distinctive to her’ (76).

The relationship between Gauri and Subhash is neither physical nor spiritual. Her spiritual relationship with her dead husband, Udayan, offers no room for anybody to move with her. Even her daughter, Bela, is secondary. Though Subhash marries her and assures her safe life both to her and her child, he also inherits her physique through their marriage. He never takes advantage of seducing her but waits till she herself yields. Such tolerant life is impossible in a country like America where everyone’s individuality is measured in terms of his freedom and happiness. Subhash is an idealist who
lives an isolated life carrying the injustice done to him by Gauri without grudges but with principles.

Every first generation immigrant is tormented between the two selves, native and alien. Subhash’s sufferings are different for different causes. His sufferings are for his duty in India as a son and for his responsibilities in America as a father. He forsakes his duty of caring his parents in Tollygunge to carry out the responsibility of bringing up Bela. His efforts to bring his parents to Rhode Island to live with him failed. Bijoli, his mother, cannot love the living son in the absence of the other. His parents’ love for their house is greater than that of their children; ‘in a sense it had been their first child’ (184). He realises that his relationship with his homeland is diminishing and yet he writes to his parents that ‘he was eager to see them. And yet day after day, cut off from them, he ignored them’ (63). He has learned ‘to live without hearing their voices, to receive news of them only in writing’ (63). Among these complicated personalities and their perceptions Subhash remains as a tormented soul with none to console except the presence of his much-loved daughter, Bela. Though he lives far away from his original home where he has nobody to mention, he feels connected to it. Also he cannot accept America, like Bela, as his own. He says that ‘this arbitrary place, where he had landed and made his life, was not his. Like Bela, it had accepted him, while at the same time keeping a distance’ (253). He carries certain aspects of his native land like the language, relationship and food, even to the third generation immigrant, Bela, not knowing whether they will be of any good to her. Subhash’s personal feelings are reflexive of Lahiri herself:

Around non-Indian friends, I no longer feel compelled to hide the fact that I speak another language. I speak Bengali to my children, even though I lack the proficiency to teach them to read or write the language. As a child I sought perfection and so denied myself the claim to any
identity. As an adult I accept that a bicultural upbringing is a rich but imperfect thing. (Lahiri 2006b)

Gauri has been influenced in many ways by the Western philosophy of life. In her childhood she was not brought up by her mother. She returns the same to her child also. Udayan promises her education after her marriage. Her interest in philosophy leads her to pursue higher studies at the cost of her family. Self-alienation is an escape from reality and responsibility. Kaushik does the same in *Hema and Kaushik*. He travels to far away lands by deciding photography as his profession. Gauri decides her destiny in California by choosing teaching as her profession. The only difference between the two is that Kaushik decides not to marry to live an isolated life whereas Gauri marries Subhash to isolate herself from her in-laws and the country of her birth. Isolation is exile to the immigrants but for Gauri and Kaushik isolation is a reward. Mrs.Bagchi, in *Unaccustomed Earth*, leaves India in order to escape from being married again after her husband’s death. Both Mrs.Bagchi and Gauri want to live a secluded life in the United States and for the former the seclusion is natural whereas for the latter it is forcible. Mrs.Sen and Eliot’s mother, in *Mrs.Sen’s*, stand on either side of Gauri. Mrs.Sen is extremely careful in handling the little boy, Eliot. Eliot’s mother, a duty-bound lady, considers it a duty and for Gauri it is a burden, an unwanted thing on the earth, a mistake made ‘unwittingly’.

Bela is not only the cultural offspring but also the daughter of America. Her father respects her individuality much. He is conscious of getting her married but they are living in a place where none can force her. Even Elise advises him to say nothing in this matter. If it is India, he would have taken his responsibility. He says:
He had learned to set aside the responsibility he’d once believed would be his: to do his part to secure a daughter’s future by pairing it with another person’s. If he’d raised her in Calcutta it would have been reasonable for him to bring up the subject of marriage. Here it was considered meddlesome, out-of-bounds. He had raised her in a place free from such stigmas. (263)

Subhash wants Bela to introduce somebody as her boyfriend. But it never occurs. Instead, she tells him that she is pregnant. ‘She wanted to become a mother’ (263) but ‘the father was not a part of her life’ because he is not like Subhash. Her impulse to deliver a child without a father is a revolutionary thing in the Indian concept. Like Pearl, the daughter of Hester in *The Scarlet Letter*, Bela’s child may also be considered as a sin in any other civilisation but in the American context, it is the liberty the land has given to its citizens. Bela, unmindful of her origin, a place where she has visited only once, and the cultural aspects of her ancestry, which was once marred by her father, decides to bring up her child alone. The determination and the strong will with which she carries the child make Subhash believe that she will be ‘a different mother than Gauri’ (265). He knows that the contempt about his own life with Gauri is the reason behind her choice. Bela too tells once to Drew, her boyfriend ‘the truth about her mother. That she’d left and never returned’ (299). However, the land of opportunities has given Subhash an opportunity to be blessed with a wife to love and children and grand children to care. His marriage with Elise Silva is ‘a looking forward late in life’ (330). Elise says that ‘their purpose was religious, perhaps funerary or commemorative’ (331).

Cultural values and certain ethical codes are identified as important phenomena while the immigrants experience terrible disaster due to the non-observance of their original culture. Most of the immigrants like Ashima, Ashoke, Mala and her husband, Ruma, Sudha, Aparna, Shibani and Subhash
have understood their limitations and break away from such disasters. Even Sanjeev is able to comprehend the Indian value system in a few months of his married life in an alien nation by regretting his marriage with Twinkle. For Shoba and Shukumar, comprehending the values is not a problem but compromising with each other for the value system is a problem. For them marriage itself has no value and it is only a temporary matter. Mr. Pirzada’s life in America is completely alien. He never tries to acculturate himself in the foreign land as his life there is only a temporary matter. Nor has he any need to imitate or comprehend the American dream or vision since he has left behind his family and responsibilities in his native land. Mrs. Sen’s problems are purely socio-cultural and her isolated psyche torments her for want of human relationship. Her husband’s busy schedule and his inability to understand her cultural dislocation arise in her a question about her survival in the multi-cultural milieu. Her intense cultural disagreement escorts her to live in nostalgia about her homeland and cultural roots. The protagonist of The Third and Final Continent is a sensible young man who yields himself to positive changes for economic and professional development but not for cultural degradation. He and his wife, Mala, learn to live together with an alien culture by boldly facing some of the teething societal issues as they have decided their life there. People like Mrs. Das and Parul Mashi have no regrets over the cultural background as their focal point is to live a trouble-free life.

The first generation immigrants learn the language of the settled land and they are benefited by taking part in the culture and accepting the hyphenated American identities. Their children, in the process of acculturation, learn not only the new language but also the negative cultural norms that are remote to their families. Their excessive involvement leads to
harmful effects. While writing on Lahiri’s stories, Professor Robert Gnanamony (2006) considers that:

Lahiri’s stories do document the characters’ trauma of cultural displacement and the feeling of cultural nostalgia. But there is no ill will and malice against the host country and no clash between Indianness and Americanness unlike her fellow litterateurs. This is not to deny that her stories are also documentation of exiled souls chained in muted boundaries of space and time. (104)