Multiculturalism implies the acceptance of difference founded in cultural diversity and ethnic values in terms of food, language, attitudes, traditions or cultural heritages. Bhikhu Parekh observes that multiculturalism is not about minorities but is about the proper dealing with the relationship between diverse cultural communities. Multiculturalism enables a social or religious community to permit the expression of different cultures without discrimination. Literature in English has a global application. Recent English literature is increasingly consolidating its multicultural foundation because the writers across the world are writing about their cultures. These works epitomize ethnic and racial dissimilarities from different standpoints which are the crucial characteristics of multicultural literature. Multiculturalism has facilitated Indian writers in English to contribute a lot in popularising Indian culture and ascertaining a recognized place globally.

India itself is a multicultural nation and culture of India has always played an important part in the life of Indians and Indian diaspora is no exception. They carried Indian religious beliefs and practices with them and endeavoured to dwell in surroundings, which was alien to them. As culture is a crucial source of identity, diasporic people are more conscious about it and actively try to maintain this source of identity. The cultural and religious texts were indispensable to get identification and solace. Diasporic people bring Indian religious rituals and practices with them and strive to live in an environment which was indifferent and hostile to them.

It is with respect to the concept of multiculturalism and representation of Indian culture the literary works of Jhumpa Lahiri have been accessed in this chapter. For the sake of the present chapter, it is essential to provide a brief explanation of the concept of culture. Culture refers to the way of life one lives, the food one eats, the clothes one wears,
the language one speaks and the God one worships for well-being in future, all contribute to the definition of culture. In very simple terms culture is the embodiment of the way in which one thinks and does things. It is also the things that one has inherited as members of that particular society. Art, music, literature, architecture, sculpture, philosophy, religion and science can be seen as aspects of culture.

Culture also includes the customs, traditions, festivals, ways of living and one’s outlook on various issues of life. Culture thus, refers to a human-made environment which includes all the material and nonmaterial entities of group life that are transmitted from one generation to the next. Culture consists of explicit and implicit patterns of behaviour acquired by human beings. These may be transferred through symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment as artefacts. Culture denotes historically communicated patterns of meanings embodied in symbols, by means of which people communicate, preserve and develop their knowledge about and express their attitudes towards life.

Culture is the expression of one’s nature in one’s modes of living and thinking. It may be seen in our literature, in religious practices, in recreation and enjoyment. Culture has two distinctive components, namely, material and non-material. Material culture consists of objects that are related to the material aspects of one’s life such as dress, food and household goods. Non-material culture refers to ideas, ideals, rituals, thoughts and beliefs. Culture varies from place to place and from country to country. Its development is based on the historical process operating in a local, regional or national context. In fact the material culture of a civilization is the concrete form of non-material culture. That is why Sunil Khilnani writes,

“Ram’s birthplace is not a quarrel about a small piece of land. It is a question of national integrity. The Hindu is not fighting for a temple of brick and stone. He is fighting for the preservation of a civilization of brick and stone. He is fighting for the preservation of a civilization, for his Indianness, for national consciousness, for the recognition of his true nature.”

Culture adds the meaning to the literary text. Understanding and analyzing a literary text without bearing in mind the cultural aspects can never be completely flawless. Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, analyzing the
critical works of Edward Said, emphasize on the same fact in the following words:

“The text could be seen to be a much more complex formation than a simple communication from an author. But the implicit effect of textuality was to sever the connection of the text from the world. For Edward Said, the world from which the text originated, the world with which it was affiliated, was crucial, not only for the business of interpretation but also for its ability to make an impact on its readers. Said shows how the worldliness of the text is embedded in it as a function of its very being. It has a material presence, a cultural and social history, apolitical and even an economic being as well as a range of implicit connections to other texts. We do not need to dispense with textuality, nor with the centrality of language to show how the embedding of the text in its world, and the network of its affiliations with that world, are crucial to its meaning and its significance, and, indeed, to its very identity as a text.”

Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia here want to suggest that a community’s economic, social, religious and political practices constitute its culture and all of them help understand a text. The cultural aspects form the identity of a text. In other words according to them, culture is both a function and source of identity.

It is essential to give a brief introduction to the Rice Ceremony which Jhumpa Lahiri refers to many times in her works. The *Annaprashan* (Rice Ceremony) is a ritual in Hindu religion that marks an infant’s first eating of food other than milk. The term ‘*Annaprashan*’ literally means eating of solid food for the first time. The rite is usually arranged after a meeting with a priest who suggests an auspicious day on which the ceremony is observed. Referred to as Rice Ceremony or First Rice, it is observed when a child is six to twelve months old. Relatives, friends and neighbours are invited. The mother or grandmother prepares a small bowl of boiled rice, milk and sugar. The child generally sits in the mother’s lap and a senior male of the family member, grandfather or uncle feeds him/her a spoonful of the content. The child is offered with a plate containing a number of objects such as a bangle or jewel which is symbol of wealth, a book which symbolizes learning, a pen, a symbol of career and a clay pot containing soil, symbolizing property. What the child prefers gives direction to the future of the child.

Familial relations for Indians are of prime importance in their life. Loyalty, integrity and unity are the three pillars upon which Indian families
stand. Family is the non-formal source of learning the first letters of collectivism and is the social institution that enables one to sacrifice individualism for collective interest. Sunil Khilnani writes in the *Idea of India*

“From its very earliest days it (India) claimed to speak for the nation and did so by stressing India’s right to collective liberty... Its demands were not for the equal rights of all individuals but that culturally Indians should be at liberty.”

Indianness gives reference to the characteristics which Indians reach to for recognition that they are Indian. Even within India, every community has their own different and distinguished traits though they have certain generalizations. People in foreign land still attempt to preserve their Indian ways of life; they are still using words from Indian languages, a symbol of Indianness and watching TV channels in Indian languages; still listen to Indian music; still cook Indian food; still refer to Indian texts for proper communication of ideas and still derive meaning and source of life from Indian traditions.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s works are the representation of Indian culture and society. In this context, it can be said that Lahiri is here chronicling a society in the process of change. As it had happened in India that Indians who were exposed to cultures that were alien to them adopted and influenced the new cultures, the same case happens for Indians in other countries. What can survive the diasporic people, they believe, are performance and observance of cultural and religious practices and great texts of Indian cultural heritage.

Moreover, Michel Bruneau remarks that

“Through migration, diaspora members have lost their material relationship to the territory of origin, but they can still preserve their cultural or spiritual relationship through memory. Territory or, more precisely, territoriality – in the sense of adapting oneself to a place in the host country – continues to play an essential role. Memory preserves part of territoriality, whilst the trauma of uprooting creates conditions of mobilisation that can play a substantial role in integrating and unifying various family, religious or community sub-networks into a real diaspora. The construction of commemorative monuments, sanctuaries, monasteries and other symbolic (and sometimes functional) places is an essential means, for the members of a diaspora, of a re-rooting in the host country.”

Lahiri is not representing society that is in stability but is representing society that is in motion and change. Perhaps, her objective of representing
this type of society is that here she is more concerned with psychological
effects of migration, alienation and past history. Jhumpa Lahiri establishes
an intricate relationship between history and literature. Instead of dwelling
in presenting the psychological effects in traditional manner, she is rather
interested in things and situations that are consequences of such effects.
There may be different consequences such as unwilling violation of Indian
way of life, psychic disorder and disintegration leading to violation or
passivity, misinterpretation or misarticulation of incomprehensible,
unidentified and unrevealed emotions. In fact, these are the different aspects
of Indianness dealt by Jhumpa Lahiri. Her observation has been drawn so
vividly and minutely that she can present with perfect finishing an imaginary
landscape that has an acute reality weaving the hopes, aspirations, desires
and frailties of the displaced persons.

The backbone of Lahiri’s works is her concern for Indian heritage.
Taylor Shea emphasizes this fact with the following words:

“Lahiri uses her cultural background as an Indian American to
create plots and characters that express the juxtaposition in her
own life. She builds a balanced representation of her cultural
group. She openly admits that Interpreter of Maladies is a
reflection of her own experiences as well as those of her parents
and their Indian immigrant friends.”

Beside Indian inheritance, she deals with questions of identity, alienation
and the troublesome plight of those who are culturally displaced. The
psychological dilemma leaves them at discomfort at the personal, social and
cultural levels. Their painful maladjustment in an adopted country provides
enough scope for dealing with several strategies of immigrants at criticizing,
analyzing, supporting, discriminating and rejecting their lives in the adopted
land. Taylor Shea illuminates how Lahiri employs her cultural foundation to
creatively compare various elements within her short story collection in
order to offer a balanced representation of her modern social set.

At the first vision of the collection, Interpreter of Maladies, it seems
that it is divided into nine short stories having their own autonomous
characters and plots but the short stories are brought together into a single
through their shared themes and common experiences and plights of the
immigrants. The stories are set either in India or in America. The people,
around whom the stories revolve, are Indians in India and American Indians
living in America. Their experiences and characteristics are peculiar to Indian society. Generally the stories are set in America and their principal characters are diasporic Indians who are experiencing struggle with regard to their cultural formation.

In ‘A Temporary Matter’ delighted at the notice for the cut off of the electricity for five days beforehand, Shoba and Shukumar get themselves revealed their secrets in the dark. The temporary matter of cutting off power leads one to comprehend why Shoba mostly spends her time out of the house working on a dissertation on agrarian revolts in India and Shukumar mostly spends his time in the house to avoid outside world which seems to be alien to him.

The characters in Lahiri’s works always miss the members of their family. Shoba is reminded of the things they used to do on the occasions of power cuts. They used to communicate jokes, poems or facts about the world. Mr. Pirzada, who alone has recently arrived in America from East Pakistan as a research scholar, resides with his wife and children emotionally and watches the news from his homeland on TV.

Families for Indians normally mean joint families consisting of grandparents, parents and their children. They all live in the same household, share the common income, eat the food cooked for all and share the same moral values and ways of life. In a traditional Indian family, decisions on social matters are taken collectively after the proper discussion with elders of the family. Utmost care is taken for the improvement of the personality of a child by all elders of the family. In The Namesake at the birth of Gogol Ashima wishes to bring up him under the supervision of the elders of her family and discards the thought of raising him in America. Shoba’s mother maintains a proper distance to her son-in-law. More importantly she is a religious woman.

“She set up a small shrine, a framed picture of a lavender-faced goddess and a plate of marigold petals, on the bedside table in the guest room, and prayed twice a day for healthy grandchildren in the future.”

Normally Indian families sit together to eat and talk of the social and familial matters of day to day life. Shoba is reminded of her life in India. When the power went off, at her grandmother’s house, they used to share a
little poem, a joke or a fact about the world. Shoba is more Indian than Shukumar. She had passed more time in India than her husband. It was Shoba’s plan to share their unacknowledged secrets reminded of her family in India. Shoba and Shukumar decide to confess to each other what they have not yet talked of. Shukumar himself observes about Shoba,

“She kept the bonuses from her job in a separate bank account in her name. It hadn’t bothered him. His own mother had fallen to pieces when his father died, abandoning the house he grew up in and moving back to Calcutta, leaving Shukumar to settle it all. He liked that Shoba was different. It astonished him, her capacity to think ahead. When she used to do the shopping, the pantry was always stocked with extra bottles of olive and corn oil, depending on whether they were cooking Italian or Indian. There were endless boxes of pasta in all shapes and colors, zippered sacks of basmati rice, whole sides of lambs and goats from the Muslim butchers at Haymarket, chopped up and frozen in endless plastic bags.”

When a group of Bengali poets were giving a recital in Cambridge, Shukumar felt it to be monotonous and was unable to decrypt the literary diction of Bengali language. He lately becomes interested in the history of India and studies it as a subject.

Shoba and Shukumar were grief stricken at the death of their child before birth. When she talked of rice ceremony of a child attended by her that the baby continuously cried, Shukumar’s reflection is such:

“Their baby had never cried, Shukumar considered. Their baby would never have a rice ceremony, even though Shoba had already made the guest list, and decided on which of her three brothers she was going to ask to feed the child its first taste of solid food, at six months if it was a boy, seven if it was a girl.”

Death of their child before birth is the most possible reason that leads them apart. Loss of parenthood brings cleavages in their life.

Told from the first person perspective of a ten years old girl, Lilia ‘When Mr. Pirzada Comes to Dine’ reveals how the incidents in Dacca affect the life of a temporary dweller in America, Mr. Pirzada. He was sent there for research to study the foliage of New England. His wife and daughters are there in Dacca. Mr. Pirzada goes to dine to Lilia’s house. The story is about Lilia’s concern for Mr. Pirzada and Mr. Pirzada’s concern for his wife and daughters. It is one of the most noticeable things that there is a special place of child characters in the Interpreter of Maladies through which Lahiri works out for the success of the text. Through the war-like situations in Dacca and
the conversation between Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s father in America, Lahiri gets enough space to clearly indicate the differences between America and India. The character of Lilia who in the following words clearly identifies what Indianness is, is the perfect accomplishment in this regard,

“The supermarket did not carry mustard oil, doctors did not make house calls, neighbors never dropped by without an invitation, and of these things, every so often, my parents complained.”

Lilia is an innocent girl who calls Mr. Pirzada an ‘Indian man’. She has not made distinction between India and Pakistan. Her father makes it clear to her that Mr. Pirzada is no longer considered an Indian since the country was divided in 1947 at the same day it got freedom. Even after her father’s explanation, she discards to make distinction because the things that she compares between her father and Mr. Pirzada are found to be similar

“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, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea.”

Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s father maintained the habit of shaking hands at their first meeting everyday though they were no longer strangers. Before she learned that Mr. Pirzada was not an Indian, she found him to be similar to her father but after learning it, her way of looking at him changed and with great curiosity tried to mark what made him different from her father.

“Now that I had learned Mr. Pirzada was not an Indian, I began to study him with extra care, to try to figure out what made him different. I decided that the pocket watch was one of those things”

Lilia’s innocence thwarts her to elucidate the difference between America and India and between her father and Mr. Pirzada. Lilia takes the year 1947 for India’s freedom but her father clarifies to her that the date marks also the partition of India. Her father told her that during partition Hindus remained in India and Muslims fled away from India to Pakistan. Dacca is no longer a part of India. Hindus and Muslims set fire to each other’s homes and never thought of eating in each other’s company. But the history made no sense to Lilia. What made sense to her is the present: the similarities she
observes in her father and Mr. Pirzada in respect of the language spoken by
them, eating habits, reflecting upon social and religious issues, etc.

There are the things that remind the readers of India or Dacca. Lilia
put the candies given by Mr. Pirzada in small keepsake box made of
sandalwood in India. Her grandmother in India used to store the ground
areca nuts which she ate after bath. Mr. Pirzada kept a pocket watch without
strips. Unlike the watch on his wrist, his pocket watch was set to the time
in Dacca that is eleven hours ahead. The pocket watch reminded him of wife
and children. Lilia views this in the following words,

“When I saw it that night, as he wound it and arranged it on the
coffee table, an uneasiness possessed me; life, I realized, was
being lived in Dacca first. I imagined Mr. Pirzada’s daughters
rising from sleep, tying ribbons in their hair, anticipating
breakfast, preparing for school. Our meals, our actions, were
only a shadow of what had already happened there, a lagging
ghost of where Mr. Pirzada really belonged.”

Though she finds that he is not an Indian, she continues to pray for
his family. It is Lilia’s emotional connectedness to him that

“I did something I had never done before. I put the chocolate in
my mouth, letting it soften until the last possible moment, and
then as I chewed it slowly, I prayed that Mr. Pirzada’s family was
safe and sound. I had never prayed for anything before, had
never been taught or told to, but I decided, given the
circumstances, that it was something I should do. That night
when I went to the bathroom I only pretended to brush my teeth,
for I feared that I would somehow rinse the prayer out as well.”

After Mr. Pirzada was reunited with his family, it is an occasion for
celebration to her family. Her mother prepares a special dinner. But the
celebration is somewhat agonizing for Lilia because of Mr. Pirzada’s absence.
Her feeling of someone’s disappearance is very disturbing to her.

“Though I had not seen him for months, it was only then that I
felt Mr. Pirzada’s absence. It was only then, raising my water
glass in his name, that I knew what it meant to miss someone
who was so many miles and hours away, just as he had missed
his wife and daughters for so many months. He had no reason
to return to us.”

On one hand Lilia’s innocence thwarts her to make the difference between
Americanness and Indianness; on the other hand her knowledge leads her
to the understanding of the differences between lives in America and the
Indian subcontinent. In a way Lilia indirectly tries to define her own identity
as an Indian as different from American in calling Mr. Pirzada an Indian
man. Until now Lilia experienced the feeling of separation from India only through Mr. Pirzada, but now she directly felt it when Mr. Pirzada is away. Lilia’s feeling to Mr. Pirzada is the same as that of Mr. Pirzada to his family.

As it has already been mentioned that customs observed by Lilia and her parents are also observed by Mr. Pirzada. From Lilia’s outlook, the splitting up of Pakistanis and Indians is arbitrary. When her father tells her that Mr. Pirzada is no longer Indian, she inspects him and his actions for clues of difference. This echoes her own affiliation with her father, who worries that her American schooling is making her no longer Indian. However, America allows for Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s father to dine together, worry together and laugh together. Assimilation is seen as both positive and negative. There is no mention of religion in Lilia’s family, though it can be assumed that her family is Hindu since they are unlike Mr. Pirzada. But Lilia gives in to a secular type of prayer with the candy that Mr. Pirzada gives to her. Like traditions, rituals can expose belief systems of a person. American schooling is manifest in Lilia’s concern for Pirzada’s family. Since she, who says she doesn’t pray, performs a ritual to keep the Pirzada girls safe, it can be assumed that she does not typically practice the religion of her parents. Lilia can be read as a secular American, again removed from the culture of her parents.

‘The Interpreter of Maladies’ gives an account of an Indian-American couple who is temporarily in India to visit the Sun Temple in Konark with their three children. Mr. and Mrs. Das hire a tour guide named Mr. Kapasi. Mr. Kapasi at his first sight on the couple and the children noticed

“The family looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did, the children in stiff, brightly colored clothing and caps with translucent visors.”15

Mr. Kapasi performs also as the interpreter of maladies in doctor’s office. He was dreaming of becoming an interpreter for the diplomats and dignitaries so that he could settle down disputes. Along with Indian languages he was fluent in foreign languages like English, French, Russian, Portuguese and Italian. Mrs. Das was impressed with his dutiful job and called it romantic. Mrs. Das wants an interpreter of her feelings which are disturbing her. She acknowledges that one of her two boys is the consequence of her relation to her husband’s friend.
In ‘Mrs. Sen’s’, Mrs. Sen has lately arrived in America. She is a wife of professor who teaches in the mathematics department at a university. She feels inferiority due to her inability to drive. She babysits but most of the parents are concerned that she does not know driving. Her inability to drive, which is characteristic of many Indian housewives, intensifies her sense of alienation in the US where she finds herself entirely constrained to her apartment. She thinks that her ability to drive will smoothen her life in America. This helps her improve in her new American life and kill time as her husband is always busy. Her job mirrors her fear, frustration, isolation, solitude and homesickness. That she is learning to drive does not mean she is assimilating in the new formation but the primary object is to kill time in the absence of her husband. The fact is clear when she says that “Everything is there (India).” She wears sari. She has brought a blade from India. Jhumpa Lahiri is giving the following account of the things connected with blade in India through the mouth of Mrs. Sen to Eliot:

“Whenever there is a wedding in the family,” she told Eliot one day, “or a large celebration of any kind, my mother sends out word in the evening for all the neighborhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night.”

With the passing of time with Mrs. Sen, Eliot comes to understand that whenever Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India not the apartment she was living. She applies scarlet powder in her hair. She explains that she must wear powder every day for the rest of her life she is married.

She misses the ease of the neighbourhood women in her motherland and often romanticizes about life back “home”. In an attempt to reconstruction of her past life, she concentrates on cooking foods from home. She is alone in her apartment only with Eliot for company. In order to remove this boredom, she plays audio cassettes brought from India, shows Eliot her saris and repeatedly reads letters from home.

‘A Real Durwan’ set in India is the story of Boori Ma, a sweeper of staircase in an old building in Calcutta, who was expelled there after partition. She recalls about her past during happier time. The life of grandeur lived by her in the past frequently gets a place in the story. She recalled how they managed her third daughter.
“We married her to a school principal. The rice was cooked in rosewater. The mayor was invited. Everybody washed their fingers in pewter bowls.”

Again, she depicts,

“Mustard prawns were steamed in banana leaves. Not a delicacy was spared. Not that this was an extravagance for us. At our house, we ate goat twice a week. We had a pond on our property, full of fish.”

She knots the skeleton key in the free end of sari and their mosquito nets were as soft as silk. In the end the residents throw Ma out after a theft suspicion.

‘The Treatment of Bibi Halder’ is another story of the marginalized character. Bibi is supposed to be suffering from an unknown mysterious illness and marriage is supposed to be the cure of the illness. Lahiri said in an interview that she preferred a young woman for the subject of a story whom she came to know over the course of a couple of visits. She had never seen her having any health problem. She lived in the same building as her aunt and uncle. From her aunt, Lahiri came to know that the woman used to faint because of convulsions and needed to smell leather. As per a superstition holy water from seven holy rivers was brought to her for cure but it failed. Finally when she got pregnant, she got cured. Though marriage is the assumed cure, she is not fit for marriage. She is prepared for the interview.

“Most likely the groom will arrive with one parent, a grandparent, and either an uncle or aunt. They will stare, ask several questions. They will examine the bottoms of your feet, the thickness of your braid. They will ask you to name the prime minister, recite poetry, feed a dozen hungry people on half a dozen eggs.”

But Bibi cannot light a coal and cannot boil rice. Bibi’s pregnancy leads her towards the perfection of womanhood particularly with regard to motherhood. She is healed and gets herself as a capable woman. So these two stories treated against the background of social and cultural traditions and superstitions are Indian in their character.

The Blessed House’ gives an account of westernised as well as traditional Bengali couple. They are Indian in their arranged marriage as well as their taste of food. Contrasting with many second generation couples, Sanjeev and Twinkle are reliant on upon their parents' cultural formations
to form their behaviour. Gradually Twinkle gets interested in Christian belongings left behind by their former house owner. But Sanjeev’s reaction in this respect is opposite to his wife.

In the story ‘Sexy’ Jhumpa Lahiri wants to prove something different from the other stories of the collection. The situation reverses here. Ordinarily, Lahiri depicts Indian characters who are struggling for adjustment in foreign societies. Here the story is set in America. Miranda is an American girl who is attracted to Bengali language and food. The society in which Miranda is residing is not foreign to her. There is no question of adjustment. Yet her extra marital affair with Dev, a Bengali immigrant, leads her to explore Bengal in America. So through her affair with Dev, Miranda’s willing involvement and knowledge of Bengali traditions, language and food increase. She thought that Bengal was a religion. But her misunderstanding is fixed by Dev when he showed the place on a map printed in an article on the Gramin Bank published in the *Economist*. The cultural conflict is presented in a different way. Dev is bent more upon westernized ways of life than Miranda is to Bengali ways. She learns the ideal of self-sacrifice. She ends up the affair with Dev when she knows the meaning of ‘Sexy’ from seven year sold Robin as loving someone whom one does not know. In her conversation with Robin for explanation of the word ‘Sexy’, he says,

“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.”

Hearing these words, Miranda felt the same feeling of violation which Robin’s mother might have felt. She felt guilty because her affair with Dev would lead him to nothing but the disloyalty with his wife.

In ‘The Third and The Final Continent’ Jhumpa Lahiri once again moves to the same content, life of a second generation couple in America. The title of the story refers to the chief character’s migration from Calcutta to London and the final settlement in Boston. He is working there as librarian at MIT. He is newly married and waiting for his wife’s arrival from Calcutta. To make selection of Mala, he was told that she could cook, knit, embroider, sketch landscapes and recite poems by Tagore.

His wife struggles for the adjustment in America. She experiences the cultural clash before she lands America. She could not take any item for
eating from Calcutta to Boston. Her appetite is lost by the mere thought that she is offered oxtail soup on the plane on the very first morning in the foreign land. She prepares rice and curry as generally happens in Calcutta.

“The first morning when I came into the kitchen she had heated up the leftovers and sat a plate with a spoonful of salt on its edge on the table, assuming I would eat rice for breakfast, as most Bengali husbands did.”

As the time passes on this new land, there come changes in their ways of life.

“Mala no longer drapes the end of her sari over her head, or weeps at night for her parents.”

Though they come across the ways of three continents, they endeavour to retain their mother culture. They arrange meetings with fellow Bengalis.

The parents are experiencing contrasting feeling that though their son is having the best education, there is the danger of gradually getting alien to their original culture. They do their best to get away from the influence of the foreign culture.

“We drive to Cambridge to visit him, or bring him home for a weekend, so that he can eat rice with his hands, and speak in Bengali, things we sometimes worry he will never do after we die.”

The father’s life in this new world for nearly thirty years is not removed from the diasporic sense of uprootedness and unbelongingness. It is astonishing that a life of thirty years in America strikes to be new to the father. Lahiri in the following words put why she concludes the collection with the story.

“If I can survive on three continents than there is no obstacle he cannot conquer. While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination.”

At the outset in The Namesake Ashima Ganguli is found to be combining certain ingredients in a bowl. The very beginning of the novel reminds of an Indian tradition that Indian women during pregnancy are supposed to do.

“Ashima Ganguli stands in the kitchen of a Central Square apartment, combining Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts and
chopped red onion in a bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chili pepper, wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix. Ashima has been consuming this concoction throughout her pregnancy, a humble approximation of the snack sold for pennies on Calcutta sidewalks and on railway platforms throughout India, spilling from newspaper cones.”

The readers are familiarized with Ashima as one who, though far from her motherland, addicts herself to the things that the pregnant Indian women pass by in order to relieve herself from the weight of separation from her family. A sense of continuity is always present in Indians As Salman Rushdie describes,

“I opened the telephone directory and looked for my father’s name. And, amazingly, there it was; his name, our old address, the unchanged telephone number, as if we had never gone away to the unmentionable country across the border. It was an eerie discovery. I felt as if I were being claimed, or informed that the facts of my faraway life were illusions, and that this continuity was the reality.”

The observance of traditions marks this continuity. Again later she infers how she would have been treated if she had been in Calcutta with her family. She repeatedly compares and contrasts the things that are in reality and the things they should have been. She notices many things in this respect. For example,

“She is asked to remove her Murshidabad silk sari in favor of a flowered cotton gown that, to her mild embarrassment, only reaches her knees.”

Again, it seems strange to her to give birth a child in a hospital,

“Ashima thinks it’s strange that her child will be born in a place most people enter either to suffer or to die. There is nothing to comfort her in the off-white tiles of the floor, the off-white panels of the ceiling, the white sheets tucked tightly into the bed. In India, she thinks to herself, women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares, retreating briefly to childhood when the baby arrives.”

Ashima notes that Americans, in spite of their public declaration of their feelings, in spite of their openly hand holding in the streets and in spite of their miniskirts and bikinis, commonly prefer privacy more than Indians.

Past helps one relieve from present because it was past when one was at home both materially and emotionally. In a state of alienation and separation one imagines of his/her past. It is for this reason Salman Rushdie says reversing the view of L. P. Hartley,
“The past is a foreign country’, goes the famous opening sentence of L. P. Hartley’s novel *The Go-between*, ‘they do thing differently there’. But the photograph tells me to invert the idea; it reminds me that it’s my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time.”

The only thing that relieves Ashima from the burden of alienation is anything that is Indian. At the hospital, she wonders if she is the only Indian in the hospital, but the baby in her stomach reminds her that she is technically speaking not alone. The words Dr. Ashley speaks touch Ashima. He says, examining Ashima’s belly, that everything is perfect and the delivery will be normal. But normalcy is a dream to her because during the last eighteen months in America, abnormalcy reigns. She never thinks of motherhood in foreign country. The consequence that she feels abnormality results from her separateness from motherland. She defines motherhood in this way, “It’s the consequence: motherhood in a foreign land. For it was one thing to be pregnant, to suffer the queasy mornings in bed, the sleepless nights, the dull throbbing in her back, the countless visits to the bathroom. Throughout the experience, in spite of her growing discomfort, she’d been astonished by her body’s ability to make life, exactly as her mother and grandmother and all her great-grandmothers had done. That it was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved, had made it more miraculous still. But she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare.”

What comfort in her abnormalcy are the things that remind her of India. She saves a copy of *Desh* magazine that she had brought to read on her plane riding to Boston and yet she is not willing to throw it back. The printed pages of Bengali type are perpetual relaxation to her. Even unconsciously her Indian heritage comes to the forth. Ashima replies to Patty’s questions whether she expected a boy or girl that “As long as there are ten finger and ten toe” Later she realizes the error that she should have spoken fingers and toes. Her subject was English when she was studying in Calcutta and she taught the neighbour children Wordsworth and Tennyson. But the error results from her Bengali tradition that in Bengali language ‘a finger’ is meant the same as ‘fingers’ and ‘a toe’ as ‘toes’.

People customarily remove their shoes outside the main door of the house. Lahiri’s Indian characters observe other people about this. Ashima
is prepared for her marriage in a typical Indian way. Jhumpa Lahiri gives the following description.

“Her lips were darkened, her brow and cheeks dotted with sandalwood paste, her hair wound up, bound with flowers, held in place by a hundred wire pins that would take an hour to remove once the wedding was finally over. Her head was draped with scarlet netting. The air was damp, and in spite of the pins Ashima’s hair, thickest of all the cousins’, would not lie flat. She wore all the necklaces and chokers and bracelets.”

Again Lahiri gives a fine picture of Ashima’s wedding,

“At the designated hour she was seated on a piri that her father had decorated, hoisted five feet off the ground, carried out to meet the groom. She had hidden her face with a heart-shaped betel leaf, kept her head bent low until she had circled him seven times.”

Lahiri’s second collection of short stories, *Unaccustomed Earth* presents an influential reflection of how the life in the new homeland would lead the Indian Americans to smoothness after many complexities. By dealing with the first and the second generation of Indian diaspora, Jhumpa Lahiri feels at home in faithfully recording the struggles for absorption, adjustment and compromise. Most of them are for the better prospects in America. Wish for the better future in foreign land directs to an unexpected outcome along with better standard of life. The diasporic people come across the opportunities as well as the challenges of belonging to the two diverse cultures, two diverse ways of life and two systems of looking at things. The Indian American community according to Michiko Kakutani in *Unaccustomed Earth* incorporates two cultures, two countries and belongs fully to nowhere. People have freedom to retain the rituals and conventions of the homeland and accept the new ones. Maintaining ties to Indian cultures, the Indian American community shows constructive signs towards the new traditions and occupies the middle place for practical function and for a sense of relief. *Unaccustomed Earth* contains eight stories. These stories show the obstacles that the Indian American community must triumph over to pursue success and yet the unwillingness to leave the past identifies it to be related to India. The characters who have been brought up in traditional Indian environment and enjoy families meals, respect elders and follow religious and social customs, are optimistic for accepting new traditions. Enjoying Indian food enables a sense of familiarity.
The home is the central source of identity. Home for them does not mean the concrete place where they dwell in but something abstract or conceptual. The Indian Americans in *Unaccustomed Earth* reproduce the visionary versions of India in their new homeland. They regularly meet their fellow Indians and share their own experiences in India. At social gathering, they fabricate India for each other by talking about it.

The title story ‘Unaccustomed Earth’, opens with thirty-eight year Ruma, who is a lawyer by profession, has lately moved from Brooklyn to Seattle with her American husband and a three year old child, Akash. After her mother’s sudden death, she is now anxious about the responsibility to care her father in her new home. Her individualistic American identity comes into clash with her inherited sensibility that she is a Bengali by birth so she feels that it is her moral duty to call her father live with her. But Ruma is imperfect to believe this since her father, with a changed personality after travelling across many countries, shows unwillingness to be the part of the family. Ruma was taken aback to see her father who ‘resembled an American in his old age.’

The portrayal of Akash in the story illumines the detachment of the third generation diasporic Bengalis from their ancestral homeland and culture. The degree of detachment broadens further as Akash is result of a mixed marriage. Nevertheless, the Bengali grandfather feels in Akash’s direct biological connection, a sense of himself reconstituted in another; he sees the continuance of his family beyond his death, the further strengthening of his roots in this unaccustomed earth. He is visiting their home for the first time in this new city, but instead of being detached and bored in the unfamiliar place, he reads to his grandson, clears the back yard and plants a garden.

*Durga Pujo* bears an important place in Lahiri’s works. It is mentioned in *The Namesake*. But in *The Lowland* its importance is special as it is embroidered with incident of Udayan’s death. Throughout Tollygunge, across Calcutta and even the whole of West Bengal, people woke up in darkness to invoke Durga as she descended to earth with her four children. As Lahiri depicts,
“Every year at this time, Hindu Bengalis believed, she came to stay with her father, Himalaya. For the days of Pujo, she relinquished her husband, Shiva, before returning once more to married life. The hymns recounted the story of Durga being formed, and the weapons that were provided for each of her ten arms: sword and shield, bow and arrow, axe and mace. A conch shell and discus. Indra’s thunderbolt, Shiva’s trident. A flaming dart, a garland of snakes.”

Along with the Durga Pujo, the death rites of Udayan mark Indianness. The readers witness that:

“For ten days after his death there were rules to follow. She did not wash her clothes or wear slippers or comb her hair. She shut the door and the shutters to preserve whatever invisible particles of him floated in the atmosphere. She slept on the bed, on the pillow Udayan had used and that continued to smell for a few days of him.”

Days of Durga Pujo and death rites run simultaneously. The days of Pujo arrive and begin to pass: Shashthi, Saptami, Ashtami, Navami. Days of worship and celebration are in the city and of mourning and seclusion inside the house. Gauri’s vermillion was washed clean from her hair, the iron bangle removed from her wrist. The absence of these ornaments marked her as a widow. She was twenty-three years old.

After eleven days a priest came for the final rites and a cook to prepare the ceremonial meal. Inside the house, Udayan’s portrait was propped against the wall in a frame, behind glass, wreathed with tuberoses. She was unable to look at his face in the photograph. She sat for the ceremony, her wrists bare.

“If anything happens to me, don’t let them waste money on my funeral, he’d once told her. But a funeral took place, the house filled with people who’d known him, family members and party members coming to pay their respects. To eat dishes made in his honour, the particular foods that he had loved.”

After the mourning period ended her in-laws began to eat fish and meat again, but it had not been yet allowed for Gauri. She was given white saris to wear in place of coloured ones who resembled the other widows in the family. The widowed women were three times her age.

“Dashami came: the end of Pujo, the day of Durga’s return to Shiva. At night the effigies that had stood in the small pandal in their neighbourhood were taken to the river to be immersed. It was done without fanfare this year, out of respect for Udayan.”

Common everyday life beliefs are also mentioned in The Lowland. Bela is taught by Bijoli Indian habits of eating dal, rice and other food items when
she visits Calcutta with Subhash. Bela is struck to know that in Calcutta girls are not allowed to wander alone in the city.

*The Lowland* is a tragic novel. Udayan’s noble act turns to be a terrorist act. Udayan is killed. The family is disturbed. Subhash’s sacrifice is great. He marries widow of Udayan and takes her to America. Gauri devalues Subhash’s sacrifice and abandons Subhash and her daughter, Bela. When Bela comes to sense the life, she is saddened by her mother’s act.

The novel, *The Lowland* is basically a family novel. Subhash persuades Udayan not to get involved in Naxalite movement. He tells him to think of their parents when they would grow old. Subhash’s love for Udayan is intense. Subhash has no existence without Udayan. When he is in America, he receives a letter of Udayan from India,

“Subhash reread the letter several times. It was as if Udayan were there, speaking to him, teasing him. He felt their loyalty to one another, their affection, stretched halfway across the world. Stretched perhaps to the breaking point by all that now stood between them, but at the same time refusing to break.”

Udayan’s death fills sorrow in the lives of many. Particularly Gauri’s remembrances of Udayan can deeply move the readers.

“She had married Subhash as a means of staying connected to Udayan. But even as she was going through with it she knew that it was useless, just as it was useless to save a single earring when the other half of the pair was lost.”

Subhash marries Gauri as a help to his brother. Udayan is always present in Gauri’s memories. Subhash’s love for Bela bears a unique place in the novel. Gauri leaves Bela but Bela does not follow her mother’s example. She is pregnant before marriage but tells Subhash to keep the child.

Apart from her name, Bela’s complexion is another link to the Indianness. Though she does not resemble either of her parents, her lighter complexion was delivered down from her paternal grandmother. Though she is not born in India, she can valuably appreciate Subhash’s sacrifice. She is unprivileged with respect to mother’s love but she does not wish to happen to her daughter what had happened to her. She becomes pregnant before marriage but tells Subhash that she wants to keep and give birth to the child. Bela follows Gauri as after the birth of Magna, she starts working in
the farms and leaves Magna alone as Gauri had done. But Bela comes to sense her mistake earlier than Gauri and returns home earlier than Gauri:

“Bela’s second birth felt more miraculous than the first. It was a miracle to him that she had discovered meaning in her life. That she could be resilient, in the face of what Gouri had done.”

Bela is thus more devoted to her father.

The ultimate confrontation between Gauri and Subhash reveals the distressed mind of Gauri. Bela comprehended the injustice done to Subhash by Gauri more than her mother. Bela accuses Gauri of both taking benefit of Subhash and forsaking her. It was a touching scene with Gauri trying to befriend Meghna and Bela purposely sending the girl out as if she doesn’t want even the shadow of Gauri to fall on her daughter. She heartlessly asks her mother to leave the house as if the house would be polluted by her presence.

Food, an essential facet of Indian culture, also plays a noteworthy role in many stories and the novels. Food is a source of binding with fellows of the same community and separates from other groups. Food carries many things such as the nationality, economic class, social position, psychological state, culture and many other. Thus, it becomes a crucial source of identity. For Indians, food imparts a sense of Indianness. For the diasporic people, food certainly serves as an important part of their identity. In strange places, the familiar items of food are as welcome as the familiar places. Food serves as the remover of the sense of alienation and reminds of the happier times. In ‘Temporary Matter’ the pantry was always stocked with extra bottles of olive and corn oil, depending on whether she was going to prepare Italian or Indian food.

Shoba’s journeys to the market are exciting for Shukumar in the beginning of their marriage. In happier times, Shoba would prepare lavish meals and a particular gourmet cake for his birthday. Shoba would buy in bulk and prepare meals and chutneys that could be served at important occasions. Thus, their home was always open to others and always filled with love.

Jhumpa Lahiri herself is second generation diaspora and has experienced the various conflicts of identity and rootlessness. She feels that
no country is her motherland and wherever she goes, she perpetually finds her in exile. She writes in ‘My Two Lives’,

“Indian-American” has been a constant way to describe me. Less constant is my relationship to the term. 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.”

As Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the multicultural society, her sense of non-belonging compels her to write about the lives of multicultural people experiencing the situation. But she represents these experiences in a sustained and balanced manner as Taylor Shea writes

“Interpreter of Maladies attempts to successfully represent an entire community within the limitation of a single work and Lahiri succeeds by harmonizing a variety of depictions instead of offering only a single representation as many novels or single short stories do. However, through these contrasting elements, Lahiri creates a balanced representation of Indian immigrant culture.”

In the first story though Shoba and Shukumar are delighted because they were informed beforehand, Shoba views that they should do this sort of thing during day and objecting her view, Shukumar says, ‘when I’m here, you mean.’ The alienation leads them apart.

“The more Shoba stayed out, the more she began putting in extra hours at work and taking on additional projects, the more he wanted to stay in, not even leaving to get the mail, or to buy fruit or wine at the stores by the trolley stop.”

It is Shoba who insists that Shukumar should increase outside contacts in order that he is to enter job market the next year. But Shukumar seeks excuses for continuing at home.

The present leads them in the past. In fact the present time of the story makes them understand their past in the dark: the time before and after marriage, the time when Shoba was pregnant and when their child was born dead. It is now present that the imagination of parenthood gives pleasure which was hated by Shukumar in the past.

Shoba and Shukumar grow proficient in avoiding each other. Shoba leaves the home before Shukumar wakes up.
“He thought of how he no longer looked forward to weekends, when she sat for hours on the sofa with her colored pencils and her files, so that he feared that putting on a record in his own house might be rude. He thought of how long it had been since she looked into his eyes and smiled, or whispered his name on those rare occasions they still reached for each other’s bodies before sleeping.”

The house appears to be a hotel to them. They are outsiders in their own home. Instead of sharing their moments of happiness or sorrow in their own home, they normally remain silent. Sometimes they do not take their dinner facing each other.

“He’d taken his plate into his study, letting the meal grow cold on his desk before shoving it into his mouth without pause, while Shoba took her plate to the living room and watched game shows, or proofread files with her arsenal of colored pencils at hand.”

In the title story, Interpreter of Maladies, the Das family seems to be the strangers to their own culture and heritage. Mr. and Mrs. Das happen to be remote from their Indian heritage that they have to hire a tourist guide. Mrs. Das is depicted in total equilibrium and in total alteration with American life style. The same is true with her children. The ways of life such as wearing, behaving, expressing and eating food are in the vein of strangers. For example, the way they appreciate the sun temple at Konark makes them to be clearly Americans. Mr. Das has to rely on a guide book to know the significance of the sun temple and reads the following lines about the temple:

“The wheels are supposed to symbolize the wheel of life,” Mr. Das read. “They depict the cycle of creation, preservation, and achievement of realization. ’Cool.” He turned the page of his book. “Each wheel is divided into eight thick and thin spokes, dividing the day into eight equal pans. The rims are carved with designs of birds and animals, whereas the medallions in the spokes are carved with women in luxurious poses, largely erotic in nature.”

Mr. Kapasi watches Mrs. Das, the first person to take an interest in him and notices the difference in Mrs. Das.

“He had never admired the backs of his wife’s legs the way he now admired those of Mrs. Das, walking as if for his benefit alone. He had, of course, seen plenty of bare limbs before, belonging to the American and European ladies who took his tours. But Mrs. Das was different. Unlike the other women, who had an interest only in the temple, and kept their noses buried in a guidebook, or their eyes behind the lens of a camera, Mrs. Das had taken an interest in him.”
At the first sight upon meeting them Mr. Kapasi determines that Mr. and Mrs. Das and their three children resemble him with the bodily structure. Mr. Kapasi comes to the conclusion that they are all Indian by ancestry. But he gets struck at the fact that although he recognizes that the family is different from him culturally and learns that their nationalities have an immense disparity, they share a common heritage with him. He chooses to focus on their visually obvious shared race as a sign of shared ethnicity and thus imagines a personal connection with the Das family and especially with Mrs. Das, thinking that they have much more in common than they actually do. He does so in spite of intimations, from the beginning of the story that the Dases are more different from than similar to him. Having perceived the difference in Mrs. Das, Mr. Kapasi dreamt of cultivating warm feelings by discussing the beauty of Surya and thus serving as an interpreter between nations:

“He hoped that Mrs. Das had understood Surya’s beauty, his power. Perhaps they would discuss it further in their letters. He would explain things to her, things about India, and she would explain things to him about America. In its own way this correspondence would fulfill his dream, of serving as an interpreter between nations.”

The fact they need an interpreter emphasizes the distance. The view is symbolically presented by Mr. Kapasi’s observance of Mrs. Das through the mirror rather than directly. He sees the distance between them and the way they shake hands like Americans and the methods of parenting resemble those of Americans. These are matters which seemed strange to Mr. Kapasi from his Indian perspective. When asked if he had left India as a child, Mr. Das corrects him, answering that he and his wife had been both born in America. The connection Mr. Kapasi feels to the Das family based on their shared race and ethnicity soon appears to be imagined and partial. Clearly the Das family sees him and all of India in a romanticized way, far removed from their American lives.

Unlike Mr. Kapasi, Mr. Das does not suppose that they have a lot in common with one another because of their shared race. When he says that in a way they have a lot in common, he is getting very courteous and refers to the fact that he takes his students on tours of museums while Mr. Kapasi undertakes tours in India. Again, unlike Mr. Kapasi, Mr. Das appears to be
aware that they are not fundamentally alike simply with respect to their shared race and ethnicity. Moreover, Mr. Das views India as well as Mr. Kapasi, an Indian man, in an unusual way, as is shown in his lack of emotion or connection as he takes a picture.

“Mr. Kapasi pulled over to the side of the road as Mr. Das took a picture of a barefoot man, his head wrapped in a dirty turban, seated on top of a cart of grain sacks pulled by a pair of bullocks. Both the man and the bullocks were emaciated.”

Mr. Das shows no feeling of identification with or sympathy for him, but instead sees the Indian man as a world away from himself in spite of their shared race. In fact, the scene in which Mr. Kapasi takes a picture of the Indian man directly echoes an earlier scene in which Mr. Das asks Mr. Kapasi to stop the car so that he can photograph monkeys that are wild and therefore, like the Indian man, exotic. The detached way in which Mr. Das views both the man and the monkeys as foreign objects through the lens of his camera emphasizes his detachment from India as a whole and points to his tendency to reduce everything in India - even human beings - to objects that exist to enhance his pleasure in the exotic spectacle of the country.

‘Hell-Heaven’ is narrated by a young girl, Usha, whose mother falls deeply in love with Pranab, a young and unmarried Bengali. At the outset, references are given of Indian traditions of addressing and dressing. Pranab calls Usha’s father Shyamal Da which is a form of politeness and her mother ‘Boudi’ for an older brother’s wife. Usha uses Pranab Kaku to call him. Pranab observes

“My mother was wearing the red and white bangles unique to Bengali married women, and a common Tangail sari, and had a thick stem of vermilion powder in the center parting of her hair, and the full round face and large dark eyes that are so typical of Bengali women. He noticed the two or three safety pins she wore fastened to the thin gold bangles that were behind the red and white ones, which she would use to replace a missing hook on a blouse or to draw a string through a petticoat at a moment’s notice, a practice he associated strictly with his mother and sisters and aunts in Calcutta.”

Pranab rapidly becomes one of the family members. Pranab’s frequent visits and interactions result in Aparna’s soft emotions for him. With the coming of Pranab, Aparna’s alienated existence comes to life and adds happiness to her life
“He brought to my mother the first and, I suspect, the only pure happiness she ever felt. I don’t think even my birth made her as happy. I was evidence of her marriage to my father, an assumed consequence of the life she had been raised to lead. But Pranab was different. He was the one totally unanticipated pleasure in her life.”

Ultimately Pranab marries an American woman, Deborah and their lives drift apart. Their wedding ceremony marks multiculturalism.

“My mother prepared a special meal to mark the end of his bachelorhood. It would be the only Bengali aspect of the wedding; the rest of it would be strictly American, with a cake and a minister and Deborah in a long white dress and veil.”

The wedding was performed at a church. It was a small ceremony for Usha’s parents. Because Aparna was shocked to know that there were only thirty people invited as opposed to two or three hundred and among them they were the only Bengalis. Aparna felt so insulted that she bluntly criticises the formality of the wedding.

“She kept speaking in Bengali, complaining about the formality of the proceedings, and the fact that Pranab Kaku, wearing a tuxedo, barely said a word to us because he was too busy leaning over the shoulders of his new American in-laws as he circled the table.”

After the marriage, Pranab gets physically and emotionally away from Bengali circle and Deborah was blamed for that.

“My parents and their friends continued to invite the Chakrabortys to gatherings, but because they never came, or left after staying only an hour, the invitations stopped. Their absences were attributed, by my parents and their circle, to Deborah, and it was universally agreed that she had stripped Pranab Kaku not only of his origins but of his independence. She was the enemy, he was her prey, and their example was invoked as a warning, and as vindication, that mixed marriages were a doomed enterprise.”

Occasionally Pranab appeared with his wife and two daughters. Usha notices that unlike her, the daughters only spoke English and were not looking like Bengali. They were raised like American, differently from Usha. Usha further remarks,

“They were not taken to Calcutta every summer, they did not have parents who were clinging to another way of life and exhorting their children to do the same.”

As an Indian, some restrictions put on Usha as she grows out of girlhood. She was not allowed to date, to let any boy to touch her and to wear bra. But as an American, Usha grows away from her mother, refusing her in
favour of the more alluring American life, much the same as Pranab. She begins to disobey her mother.

“I went to parties, drinking beer and allowing boys to kiss me and fondle my breasts and press their erections against my hip as we lay groping on a sofa or the backseat of a car.”

This is possibly the consequence of prevalent club culture encouraging among the second generation Indian American girls. Usha like Pranab is multicultural and finds herself more comfortable in American ways. Usha fosters amid the socio-cultural variations and despite of her strong relationship to her cultural roots, she starts picking up the American way of life causing much anxiety to her mother, the conventional conserver of cultural purity. Usha’s growing keenness for Deborah over her mother is evocative of her adherence to the American multicultural values. She adores privacy, autonomy and non-dependence in her life.

In ‘A Choice of Accommodations’, Amit and his American wife, Megan are on their journey to the wedding of Pam and Jhumpa Lahiri has the suitable occasion to explore many issues during that such as father-daughter relationship, mother-daughter relationship, Indianness, Multiculturalism, second generation conflict, Indian-American relationship, mixed marriage, etc. Amit is a dedicated husband and father. He is more careful than Megan with respect to parenthood.

“He stopped himself, knowing that she would accuse him of not trusting his in-laws. As a parent she was less fussy, less cautious than he was.”

They feel confused that their journey would lead them to nowhere. Megan says that they are in the middles of nowhere. It seems that they are going to an unfamiliar place which makes no sense to their married life.

“Though Megan hadn’t protested, he understood that on some level he had dragged her here, to an unfamiliar place full of unfamiliar people, to a piece of his past that had nothing to do with the life he and Megan shared.”

Indians have a strong sense of inheritance and a sense of life beyond death. They believe that they live in form of their children. But mixed marriage which is the characteristic of multicultural societies means the loss of inheritance and culture and so consequently life. This sense of the loss of inheritance and culture troubles Amit:
“His daughters looked nothing like him, nothing like his family, and in spite of the distance Amit felt from his parents, this fact bothered him, that his mother and father had passed down nothing, physically, to his children. Both Maya and Monika had inherited Megan’s coloring, without a trace of Amit’s deeply tan skin and black eyes, so that apart from their vaguely Indian names they appeared fully American.”

Instead of home, Amit talks of life passed in hotels. They had tradition of switching of hotel rooms. During their trips to Puerto Rico, in Venice and at the present trip, they had to switch rooms. When Amit was a teenager, Amit is stunned by his physician father’s decision of returning ‘home’ to join a Delhi hospital, because

“His parents, unlike most other Bengalis in Massachusetts, had always been dismissive, even critical, of India, never homesick or sentimental…. His father kept a liquor cabinet and liked a gin and tonic before his meals.”

They enrolled Amit at Langford, a boarding school in the Berkshires, where he was the only Indian student. Amit is forced to lead life alone so he blames his parents for his alienation. He was crippled with homesickness, missing his parents to the point where tears filled his eyes. His marriage with Megan does not drift him apart from alienation but on the contrary strengthens it. Amit fails to feel intimacy from his parents’ side as well as from his wife and daughters and it is the central source of personal turmoil. Amit seems to be a passive object in the story. His identity has a troubled character. Though Amit never mentions any Indian friends, traditions or anything else that reminds one that he is in fact an Indian American, he is nevertheless always conscious of his Indian American identity and of how insensible his wife is to this aspect of him. What troubles him is that Megan looks nothing like his mother and the women that his parents might have desired him to marry. When Megan applies a reddish lipstick,

“He found it distracting, preferred the intelligent, old-fashioned beauty of her face. It was the face of someone he could imagine living in a previous era, a simpler time, in an America that was oblivious to India altogether.”

He recognizes the depth of loneliness that is unbearable for him.

‘Only Goodness’ epitomizes a penetrating, intuitive picture of a family surviving addiction. The fear, anger, disappointment and bewilderment due to the addiction are illuminated through the cultural customs and familial expectations of an immigrant couple educating their children in the U.S.
Apart from having the previously covering concerns with her earlier works, the *Unaccustomed earth* elevates some matters which are not previously explored in Lahiri’s works, matters that are exclusively sensitive for the traditionalist Bengali-American community. These matters consist of alcoholism which she attempts to explore in the story ‘Only Goodness’. In this story, a sister who is eager to give alcohol to her younger brother with a view to imparting a childhood that characterizes Americanness and of which she is deprived, permits him to join her in drinking adventures which ultimately directed Rahul towards becoming an alcoholic.

“Only Goodness” begins: “It was Sudha who’d introduced Rahul to alcohol” journeying from there into the frightening nightmare of alcoholism.

“After her parents were asleep she brought some cans into Rahul’s room. He snuck downstairs, bringing back a cup of ice cubes to chill down the warm Budweiser. They shared one cupful, then another, listening to the Stones and the Doors on Rahul’s record player, smoking cigarettes next to the open window and exhaling through the screen.”

Rahul is fine-looking, smart and talented but a despairing drunk. This is so because Sudha was deprived of certain things. Their parents did not like it.

“Sudha had waited until college to disobey her parents. Before then she had lived according to their expectations, her persona scholarly, her social life limited to other demure girls in her class, if only to ensure that one day she would be set free. Out of sight in Philadelphia she studied diligently, double-majoring in economics and math, but on weekends she learned to let loose, going to parties and allowing boys into her bed. She began drinking, something her parents did not do.”

Sudha’s parents are optimistic with regard to Sudha’s education. They feel that by having imparted good education, their job is done. As Sudha gradually comes to realize her failure in performing responsibility to her brother that she is now overcome by guilt and resentment when Rahul’s alcoholism spoils her childhood family and now threatens her own family.

“Her parents had always been blind to the things that plagued their children: being teased at school for the color of their skin or for the funny things their mother occasionally put into their lunch boxes, potato curry sandwiches that tinted Wonderbread green. What could there possibly be to be unhappy about? her parents would have thought. "Depression" was a foreign word to them, an American thing. In their opinion their children were immune from the hardships and injustices they had left behind in India, as if the inoculations the paediatrician had given Sudha and Rahul when they were babies guaranteed them an existence free of suffering.”
Therefore, when Rahul slowly takes to alcohol and is dropped out of Cornell without finishing his studies, it is up to his sister, Sudha to confront him, since the parents would never know what to do in this situation. This is an epitome of the lack of communication gap between parents and children in diaspora. But similar incomprehension and confusion, in turn, often function to strengthen bonds among second generation fellows.

Sudha eventually marries a man named Roger in London and has a child. Still overwhelmed by a sense of responsibility for Rahul, Sudha is surprised to receive correspondence from Rahul and hear that he has confronted his drinking problem. She invites him to London to meet his nephew.

Constructing conviction over the week that he visits, Rahul surprisingly breaks back to drinking when Sudha has put her fullest faith in him. In a nearly tragic turn of events, not only is Sudha’s belief in Rahul shattered, Roger’s trust of his wife is similarly tainted. Uninformed of Rahul’s drinking problem, Roger is horrified when the complete, dark truth is revealed itself.

In “Nobody’s Business” Sangita, a second generation Bengali-Indian immigrant, is the chief protagonist of this story. Though her name is Sangeeta Biswas she prefers to be called as Sang. Sang is of eligible age for marriage. Therefore men often called for her with the desire to marry her. As an American she feels that men violate her privacy and make insult her adulthood. She does not believe in arranged marriage. She studied philosophy and graduated from New York University. She was getting her doctorate at Harvard University. But she dropped out after a semester and was working part time at a book store.

Paul and Heather are Sang’s housemates who always tell her when there was a prospective groom on the phone. Paul notices that Sang shared many things with her boyfriend. Like her, Farouk wants to be called Freddy.

“Paul decided, but in certain ways he strongly resembled her, for they shared the same height, the same gilded complexion, the same sprinkle of moles above and below their lips.”

Sang is a multicultural personality. On one hand she prefers to be called Sang instead of Sangeeta, on the other hand she wants to be used the
word *Mashi* for her by her sister’s baby boy. Normally she does not use Bengali, but for this relationship, she maintains the Bengali tradition.

“All going to be called Sang Mashi,” she told him excitedly, explaining that *Mashi* was the Bengali word for “Aunt.” The word sounded strange on her lips. She spoke Bengali infrequently—never to her sister, never to her suitors, only a word here and there to her parents, in Michigan, to whom she spoke on weekends.”

When Sang leaves for London, Deirdre, a former girlfriend of Farouk contacts with Paul to gather about the relationship of Sang and Farouk. She told Paul that he should tell everything about Freddy to Sang because she has the right to know that she is not the only girl in Freddy’s life. Seeing Farouk with a woman, Paul thought

“For this man, Deirdre had called a perfect stranger; made fool of herself. For this man Sang would rush from the house, had refused all her suitors”

Sang is misleading her life by choosing a man who is disloyal. Sang’s desire to marry Farouk is revealing of how she is a traditional Indian American girl, who wants to be able to identify herself as a married woman.

The last three stories named collectively as ‘Hema And Kaushik’ in the collection *Unaccustomed Earth* are interwoven as they portray the explorations of two childhood friends Hema and Kaushik. The first story “Once in a Lifetime” is told from Hema’s perspective, the second “Year’s End” from Kaushik’s outlook and the last one “Going Ashore” from the perspective of a third person. The first and the second stories thoroughly foreground the contradictory multicultural experiences of two different displaced families.

‘Once in a Lifetime’ depicts the communication between two Indian immigrant families from the point of view of a thirteen year old girl Hema. The story drives seven years back to a farewell party hosted by Hema’s parents for another Bengali family that of Dr. Choudhari who decided to move all the way back to India. As at the outset of the story Lahiri writes:

“This parents had decided to leave Cambridge not for Atlanta or Arizona as some other Bengali had but to move all the way back to India abandoning the struggle that my parents and their friends had embarked upon.”

The families of Hema and Kaushik develop a familial relationship in America which is the consequence of the profound loneliness and the homesickness for their homeland they sustain in their heart and the craving for harmony
in this obviously unaccustomed country. Here it is an important thing to note that Lahiri’s resolution to create relation of two families living together, is successful and it shows the sense of life in collectivity among Indian and which is the mark of Indianness. Hema as in the case of many second generation Indians is caught in the feeling of being insider outsider. She is comfortable in the American ways of life which she upholds in the public domain but all the same time she is compassionate towards her parents’ predicament of being uprootedness. Hema’s family, though an immigrant, is still Indian in many respects. Hema’s mother never wore skirt. She considered it to be indecent and unsuitable as an Indian woman. Her job is to cook for her family; she does not need to hire a cook; she does not wear makeup apart from her bindi and as Mena says,

“My mother considered the idea of a child sleeping alone a cruel American practice and therefore did not encourage it, even when we had the space.”

This is Indianness well expressed in her character. Hema’s mother proudly upholds her Indian values. Turning to Kaushik’s family, they are more westernised. He wished her mother to be buried rather than cremated. He says,

"It makes me wish we weren’t Hindu, so that my mother could be buried somewhere. But she’s made us promise we’ll scatter her ashes into the Atlantic.”

Lahiri beautifully makes accessible the idea of multiculturalism by comparing both families.

“There was your mother, her slippery dark hair cut to her shoulders, wearing slacks and a tunic, a silk scarf knotted at her neck, looking only vaguely like the woman I’d seen in the pictures. With her bright lipstick and frosted eyelids, she looked less exhausted than my mother did. She had remained thin, her collarbones gloriously protruding, unburdened by the weight of middle age that now padded my mother’s features.”

Again,

“There were remarks concerning your mother’s short hair, her slacks, the Johnnie Walker she and your father continued to drink after the meal was finished, taking it with them from the dining room to the living room. It was mainly my mother who talked, my father listening and murmuring now and then in tired consent. My parents, who had never set foot in a liquor store, wondered whether they should buy another bottle—at the rate your parents were going, that bottle would be drained by tomorrow, my mother said.”
His mother had breast cancer. Primarily for this reason they are turning to India but there is another reason for that as Hema narrates:

“It was not so much for treatment as it was to be left alone. In India people knew she was dying, and had you remained there, inevitably, friends and family would have gathered at her side in your beautiful seaside apartment, trying to shield her from something she could not escape.”

It suggests that for the immigrant to return home is a form of self-liberation from estrangement.

'Year’s End' is told by Kaushik. It seems that generational gap gets stronger when Kaushik hears of his father’s second marriage through a phone call from his father. At the outset he confesses that he was not present at his father’s wedding. What he tells Jessica about his family “after crying briefly against her body” is teeming with the depth of his lamentation. Kaushik seems to be different from the first story. He is found to be frustrated at the loss of mother’s love and his father’s second marriage.

The story centres round Kaushik’s reaction first to his father’s remarriage and secondly to Chitra’s Indianness. Kaushik always compares his new mother’s Indianness with his dead mother’s Americanness. As Chitra’s grip on the family increases, Indianness gradually replaces Americanness.

“My mother had insisted on furnishing the house with pieces true to its Modernist architecture: a black leather sectional configured in a U, a chrome floor lamp arcing overhead, a glass-topped kidneyshaped cocktail table, and a dining table made of white fiberglass surrounded by matching chairs. She had never allowed a cloth to cover the table, but one was there now, something with an Indian print that could just as easily have been a bedspread and didn’t fully reach either end. In the center, instead of the generous cluster of fresh fruit or flowers my mother would have arranged, there was a stainless-steel plate holding an ordinary salt shaker and two jars of pickles, hot mango and sweet lime, their lids missing, their labels stained, spoons stuck into their oils.”

After Chitra’s arrival, Kaushik’s father leaves Johnnie Walker. The family starts eating Indian food. Bengali language which was no longer to be spoken in the family begins to be used for ordinary communication. She talked with her husband at a lower pitch than Parul. Chitra’s Indianness reminded them of their past lives in Calcutta.

“The arrangement of the bowls, small glass bowls in which we normally had ice cream, felt too formal to me. This was the old-
fashioned, ceremonious way I remembered my grandfathers eating in Calcutta, being treated each day like kings after their morning baths…. In the meantime I ate the luchis, still warm and impressively puffed, on their own. I was reminded of Sunday mornings in Bombay, eating luchis prepared by our Parsi cook, Zareen. I could hear my mother complaining cheerfully in the kitchen, telling Zareen to try another batch, that she was frying them before the oil was hot enough.”

Kaushik is uninterested and no longer accustomed to Indian food. At school he ate in the cafeteria and during his time at home after his mother’s death he and his father used to eat pizzas.

Chitra continues to wear Bengali saris and is reluctant to learn English and to drive. Her assertiveness is reminiscent of her preference towards Indian traditions and ideals. Kaushik notices that

“She wore vermilion in her hair, a traditional practice my mother had shunned, the powdery red stain the strongest element of her appearance.”

Indian attire, food and drink are crucial factors in determining whether to what an extent one is Indian. Both Hema’s family and Kaushik’s family are very remote in this respect. But the Choudhari family’s return to their original roots proves them to be multicultural.

Lastly in ‘Going Ashore’ there is once again Indian Hema for whom Indian values are of prime importance over American values. Years in America have not compelled her to give up her Indianness. In the story, a gold bangle, a piece of Indian jewellery which Hema wears since childhood, is reminiscent of her Indianness. Hema is very much attached to bangle which she has inherited and worn throughout her life. Loss of bangle for her meant loss of heritage. Her mother views that losing gold is inauspicious. The bangle implies the invariable values of family that are inherited by the next generation.

Hema moves to India with a view to marrying Navin. Moving to India merely for an arranged wedding illustrates that although she has passed most years of her life in America, the strong family ties that connect her to India make her decide her life partner from India. Before she moves to India, she is in Rome where she feels herself free from her past as well as present.

“Now she was free of both of them, free of her past and free of her future in a place where so many different times stood cheek by
jowl like guests at a crowded party. She was alone with her work, alone abroad for the first time in her life, aware that her solitary existence was about to end.”77

But her affair with Julian in Rome could not thwart her awareness of being alone to come forth. She is constantly reminded of Calcutta in Rome.

“Certain elements of Rome reminded her of Calcutta: the grand weathered buildings, the palm trees, the impossibility of crossing the main streets. Like Calcutta, which she’d visited throughout childhood, Rome was a city she knew on the one hand intimately and on the other hand not at all—a place that fully absorbed her and also kept her at bay.”78

Though she knew the ancient language of Rome, its rulers and writers, its history from first to end, she is foreign to Rome only due to her attachment to India.

Lahiri’s *The Lowland* is significant with respect to multiculturalism. When Subhash meets Holly who is a Massachusetts-born French Canadian nurse, his Indianness starts getting worn out. At the beginning, he falters to mix with Holly. There is a gap of 10 years between their ages and he cannot imagine a married life with her. But over times, he comes close to her and makes sexual relationship with her. When Holly asks him if he returns to Calcutta after finishing his degree, he replies in positive. But her closeness forwards him to the normal American culture. With her company, he feels that it would be very difficult for him to return to Calcutta. His assimilation with American culture seems to complete when he dreams to be like Narasimhan, to have children like him from American wife. In a traditional Indian family, a wife is supposed to have meal after her husband finishes it. But Gauri does not have to wait to have her dinner before Subhash. She roams about university campus independently.

Bela follows American culture. In contrast to Gogol, Sonia, Lilia, Usha and Akash, Bela has no one who teaches her Bengali language and culture. No one teaches her how to stick to Indian culture. She is completely unaware of life in Calcutta. She is taken to Calcutta by Subhash but does not feel affinity with India. Bela grows to be a multicultural personality. Her physical construction resembles her grandparents. When she gets matured enough, her Indian self comes out and values her uncle’s sacrifice. She thinks

“She [Bela] will never marry, she knows this about herself. The unhappiness between her parents: this has been the most basic awareness of her life.”79

93
She does not want to pave to her mother’s way.

Subhash like Gogol has many sexual relationships with women. First of all, Holly is in his life. Then he marries Gauri. Even in his old age, when Gauri abandons him, he marries Elise Silva, Bela’s history teacher. These relationships are not for the sexual gratification but for having homely feelings. Likewise, Gauri, though late comer in America, reaches an extreme in comparison with Subhash. She follows a professor. She has Lesbian relationship with Lorna, a graduate student from University of California.

Taking Lahiri’s works as a whole, they are presenting the soul of multicultural society. On one hand, the first generation Indian American try to maintain their Indian identity by observing specific traditions and following habits such as eating with hand, wearing sari, vermilion, etc. On the other hand, their children find themselves on intense pressure to come to terms with regard to identity as they are in contact with the multiculturalism more than their parents. Even among the second generation children, some are more concerned with their heritage. Ruma, Hema and Usha in Unaccustomed Earth, Lilia, Shoba and the narrator of ‘The Third and the Final Continent’ try to view themselves as Indian and are much troubled with their identity as American. Gogol is a notable character in this respect. Initially, he is more Americanized, but after his father’s death, he is more Indian than ever before. To some extent, he gets relieved from his troubled self by following the rites of his father’s death.

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**IV**

**MULTICULTURALISM AND INDIANNESS**