IN THEMES AND CHARACTERS

In his concept of worldliness of text, Edward Said reveals that a text is formed out of world. It is helpful to prove that Jhumpa Lahiri’s works are expressions of Indianness and multiculturalism. According to him, the text could be seen to be much more formation than a simple communication from an author about the world. The implicit effect of textuality was to serve the connection of the text from the world. He believes that the world from which it originates and the world with which it is affiliated, is crucial not only for the business of interpretation but also for its ability to make an impact on its readers. The Indian English writing manifests marked Indianness in theme and characters fairly and largely because writers tend to reflect the society in which they used to live and are living. An important criterion for Indianness in theme relates to the experiences described. A typical Indian theme is one with which a majority of Indians would empathize and identify with. Within the Indian context, most Indian English texts emphasize on the independence movement or partition of India, India’s modern destiny, political and religious problems, social change and cultural transformation, the multifaceted and dynamic effects of progress on the community, the breakdown of the joint family, nostalgic reminiscence, the conflict between ancestral orthodoxy and rebellious individualism, marital relationship, the search for order and integration, fusion of modern and traditional value, contemporary alienation and existentialism, conflicts because of two extremes: tradition and modernity, struggle against cultural calamity, superstition, mysticism, the moral disruption caused by loss of identification, East-West encounter, cultural shocks and contrasts, Hindu metaphysics and western pragmatism, racial tensions and colonial conflict, Indian expatriatism, the effects of western values on Indian social relations and social codes of conduct, the living vitality of religious myth and social symbols, the operations of dharma, karma and moksha, involvement and renunciation, illusion and cross-cultural interaction, reality, etc. as their principal themes.

Differences of worldly position and ways of living may constitute reasonable ground for classifying people. Indians believe that real religious
life can and does evolve in the human heart everywhere and it is a source of uniformity at all times. As regards the dogmas and doctrines; ninety-nine out of every hundred persons are mentally unfit to think rightly about them. External rituals and ceremonial observances, mostly symbolical as they are, represent the preliminary, non-essential aspect of real religion. The idea of *karma* has been very crucial from the beginning of philosophic reflection. Surely one becomes good by good actions and bad by bad actions. When a man dies, the two things that accompany him are *vidya* and *karma*. As per one’s acts and conduct in this life, he gets his new life. Evolution of life goes on until salvation is attained. These are some of the things the India writers try to justify in their writings.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s works are largely based on the ideas of the above discussion. This is so because abundant references of Indian traditions are found in her works though she is born in England and raised in England and America. Lahiri’s parents and their Bengali group have deep influence on children. They used to visit their relatives in Calcutta as she depicts the Ganguli family. She is also fond of the Bengali literary works of Rabindranath Tagore and Ashapuma Devi. She herself admits the influence of India on her in the following words:

> “These trips to a vast, unruly, fascinating city so different from the small New England town where I was raised shaped my perception of the world and of people from a very early age. I was to Calcutta neither as a tourist nor as a former resident – a valuable position, I think, for a writer. The reason my first stories were set in Calcutta is due to partly to that perspective – that necessary combination of distance and intimacy with a place.”

That Indianness is unquestionably existent among multi-cultures in Lahiri’s works is clear from the above quoted lines. Like Jhumpa Lahiri who follows Indian customs at home and American traditions outside, many second generation Indian Americans behave the same way. Again In ‘My Two Lives’, she writes,

> “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."

This shows the existence of multiculturalism in her works.

Her works present themes such as cultural and social changes, struggle for preserving distinctiveness of being Indian, faith in cultural and religious practices, rituals and traditions, conflict between past and present, immigrants’ experiences, faith in spirituality and disregard of materialism, conflict between tradition and modernity, belief in the theory of *Karma*, mysticism, cross cultural relationship and a sense of humanity. Though used in different ways, she used these themes very creatively. In fact, she has art of suggesting various things in a single situation.

Themes like social and cultural changes, faith in Indian tradition and struggle for preserving Indian culture, immigrants’ experiences and disregard of material life are found throughout the books. These themes mark Indianness. East West encounter, alienation in foreign land, sense of displacement, adoption of new culture, sense of unbelongingness, etc. mark multiculturalism. The characters are always conscious about their history. Their disorder, disintegration and violation cause in them neurosis. To attain order they turn to different things. Some go to fantasy; some escape physically, some face reality.

Indianness in characters forms one of the crucial parts of her books. It is through the Indianness of characters that she succeeds in her desired themes. What forms Indianness in characters are their sensibility, love for humanity, pride for culture faith in traditions and rituals, longing for order and unmistakable faith in destiny. Indians always preserve their trust in God. In whatever plight they remember God for inspiration and guidance.

The stories of *Interpreter of Maladies* are built on the specific thematic structure of communication and interpretation. The characters communicate their feelings to other in order to interpret them. They are in dilemmas and need diagnostic interpretation. But the interpretation fails. There are two possible reasons for that. One is error in preferring an appropriate person who is supposed to have interpretation of the malady. Secondly what they communicate is different for which they are expecting interpretation. It means that they are unable to comprehend what the
malady is. So the interpretation is ineffective. Defective communication leads to defective diagnosis. Shoba and Shukumar make an attempt to comprehend each other in dark by sharing secrets in order to get relief from the burden of death of unborn baby but before they could do that, the period of power cutoff ends. Mrs. Mina Das wants to be cured by Mr. Kapasi. Her craving to seek a remedy is deeply heart-touching as it is depicted in the following words,

“I’m tired of feeling so terrible all the time. Eight years, Mr. Kapasi, I’ve been in pain eight years. I was hoping you could help me feel better, say the right thing. Suggest some kind of remedy.”

But the interpretation never comes. Miranda is in dilemma whether her decision of maintaining relationship with Dev is worthy for Dev’s family. The solution comes when Rohin explains the meaning of ‘sexy’. The narrator of ‘The Blessed House’ and Twinkle are divided by their views on how to deal with Christian things left by the former owners. Lilia searches for Mr. Pirzada’s malady. Boori Ma communicates her past glory to apartment dwellers but they are not impressed by that. The malady of Bibi Haldar is cured when the accurate diagnose occurs. In ‘The Third and Final Continent’ the narrator knows it well how to adjust in a new land as he has travelled far and wide.

Identity is a great thing to be achieved and enjoyed for a diaspora. The Namesake is built upon this idea. Gogol finds himself in trouble with his name. Moreover, when he reads the life and works of his namesake, particularly ‘The Overcoat’, the trouble gets even more intense. Nikolai Gogol explains that the main character of ‘The Overcoat’ is identified through his overcoat. His overcoat is who he is and without his overcoat, he is nobody. Similarly the same is true with Gogol. He is confused only because he wears the coat of the name of Gogol. If his name was not Gogol, he might not have been confused. The epigraph of the novel supports this fact.

“The reader should realize himself that it could not have happened otherwise, and that to give him any other name was quite out of the question.”

If Gogol was named otherwise, he might not have been disordered with his name. So name formulates his life and character. Gogol would have not been himself if he had been named something different. A struggle of many years
comes to an end when the readers find Gogol ultimately reaching to the short stories of Nikolai Gogol. It is an irony that over the complete course of the novel, what Gogol had dismissed hitherto had to be accepted by him. When Gogol goes upstairs to get camera, he finds the book presented by his father and settles there to read it.

In her second collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri tries to prove that a plant may get strengthened by transplanting to a new soil but a person transplanted to a new land may not flourish since it is full of complex consequences. This collection depicts the two generations of Bengali immigrants’ conflict to create safe and strengthened lives. This conflict involves anxiety for the first and excitement for the second. It is the recreation of the second generation’s sense of dislocatedness which is tougher than the trauma of transplantation of the first generation. The unverbalized ambivalence is more traumatic than the publicly declared emotions. The first generation gets relieved from the traumas by performing cultural occasions. The second generation can follow either both or neither. Aware of their own advantageous positions, e.g. their accent-free English and freedom from the duty of maintaining old customs, the second generation cannot help realizing their complex role at home and outside as for instance, Lahiri writes

“At Langford, Amit was the only Indian student, and people always assumed that he’d been born and raised in that country and not in Massachusetts. They complimented him on his accent, always telling him how good his English was.”

The stories of *Unaccustomed Earth* are based on this foundation. All the stories deal with the first generation Bengali parents’ struggle to have healthy family relations as opposed to those of the new land, to get their children familiarize with mother land’s culture and customs by getting adrift from the main stream of American culture which marks individualism and isolation against the interdependence, communism, attachment and collectivity of Indian culture. The characters in ‘Only Goodness’ transplant themselves to new ground. Sudha and Rahul’s parents move from India to London to the United States; Sudha from home to college to London; and Rahul periodically. In every home of new transplantation the characters face
questions of identity, issues of guiltiness and the baffling complexities of affiliations.

The theme of east-west encounter is well represented through the way the first and second-generation Indians look at the cultures of India and America. The Indians who have migrated to America show a more obvious sense of violation and loss than their children. In this respect, Jhumpa Lahiri is in line with Salman Rushdie. Rushdie’s *East, West* is a collection of short stories on the theme of western and eastern cultural comingling. The collection best displays the mixing of cultures, resulting in hybridity and similarities and dissimilarities between Eastern and Western ways of life. Formation and maintaining of identity is the central theme of multicultural literature. Rushdie observes how and why one is tempted to move to either East or West and more importantly inquires the circumstances at the certain point when both East and West meet. Rushdie touches several aspects of culture in Eastern and Western traditions such as the life styles, events, stereotypes and prejudices and food ways. The same matters have also been touched by Jhumpa Lahiri in her works. This is what Gogol and Sonia feel during the family’s long stay in Calcutta,

“Every few weeks there is a different bed to sleep in, another family to live with, and a new schedule to learn.”

There is a comprehensive difference between Indian and American culture as far as physical love is concerned. For the parents of Maxine, kissing in presence of children is a common feature in American culture. But for the parents of Gogol, physical love is very private moment not to be shared or disclosed in the presence of children. There is a difference between Western and Eastern views with respect to the role assigned to women. Adam thought that Ruma’s father would be able to help her in her household work but for Ruma,

“It was her mother who would have been the helpful one, taking over the kitchen, singing songs to Akash and teaching him Bengali nursery rhymes, throwing loads of laundry into the machine. Ruma had never spent a week alone with her father.”

The characters in *The Namesake* are consciously and constantly making comparisons between Indianness and Americanness. For the first generation immigrants, certain aspects of American culture are foreign to them and seem to be strikingly opposite to Indian culture. The characters
like Ashoke, Ashima and Aparna maintain the Indian traditions for the sake of their Indian heritage as well as adapt American customs such as celebration of Christmas and Thanksgiving for the sake of their children. The characters like Gogol, Moushumi, Usha, Mr. and Mrs. Das and Ruma often feel foreign to both India and America as they belong to nowhere fully.

This is because of foreignness of American culture that Ashima’s sense of unbelongingness becomes so intense that standing nearby with the empty bottle of wine and whisky makes her feel drunk.

“Instead of cereal and tea bags, there were whiskey and wine bottles on top of the refrigerator, most of them nearly empty. Just standing there had made Ashima feel drunk.”

Ashima feels being foreign in the hospital at the birth of Gogol when she hears a man telling his wife ‘I love you’.

“Words Ashima has neither heard nor expects to hear from her own husband; this is not how they are. It is the first time in her life she has slept alone, surrounded by strangers; all her life she has slept either in a room with her parents, or with Ashoke at her side.”

Mrs. Sen says to Eliot,

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

She asserts what community means in India in the following words,

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

Mrs. Sen has deep affinity for everything that is Indian, for example, food. She says to Eliot that she had grown up eating fish twice a day and that in Calcutta people ate fish first thing in the morning, last thing before bed, as a snack after school if they were lucky.

She has pleasure serving croquette to Eliot’s mother, with a fish called bhekti but she misses the taste in it. The story has abundant references to Bengali food as a marked difference between the American culture and the Bengali culture. There are many attempts done by Mrs. Sen to feel real India in imagination. On the other hand her longing for learning driving gives an imprint of her assimilating feeling. But it is through the interaction and sharing of her past life that impossibility of assimilation is realized.
East-West confrontation is visible in Jhumpa Lahiri’s new novel, The Lowland. In Tollygunge, the girl is not permitted to leave the house alone. In Rhode Island, Gauri had allowed Bela since third grade to wander the campus.

“He saw foreigners on the streets, Europeans wearing kurtas, beads. Exploring Calcutta, passing through. Though he looked like any other Bengali he felt an allegiance with the foreigners now. He shared with them a knowledge of elsewhere. Another life to go back to. The ability to leave.”

When Subhash wonders in the market of Calcutta, he enters a cloth shop. The owner of the shop calls him, offers a seat and tea and asks warmly what he wants. This seems foreign to him.

“He had forgotten about such gestures of hospitality from shopkeepers. He entered and sat on a stool, watching as the woolen shawls were spread out one by one on a large white cushion on the floor. The generosity of the effort, the faith implicit in it, touched him. He decided to buy one for his mother, realizing only now that he’d brought her nothing from America.”

When Subhash steps in America, life on Rhode Island seems to be utterly diverse compared to life he was used to in Calcutta.

It is noticeable that differences are perceived through the child characters such as Eliot, Lilia, etc. In ‘Mrs. Sen’s’ it is through Eliot that one realizes what the past meant for Mrs. Sen,

“Eliot understood that when Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India, not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables. He thought of his own home, just five miles away, and the young married couple who waved from time to time as they jogged at sunset along the shore.”

That Mrs. Sen is foreign is perceived through the eyes of Eliot: her knife which was brought from India and about which Mrs. Sen talks very proudly: the traditional manner of proudly preparing meals for her husband in reverence; her wearing vermillion powder and her collection of saris and many more. These are the manners of her behaviour which foreshadow the differences from American women observed by Eliot. When Eliot finds his own mother and Mrs. Sen, he engages himself in comparing both women. According to Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero, Eliot’s comparison shows that difference is relative. Moreover, he recognizes Mrs. Sen as a different type of mother figure than what he is used to. As a result, in his early days at Mrs. Sen’s, other distinctions make themselves apparent and highlight that Mrs.
Sen adheres to particular gender roles in ways that his mother does not follow e.g. Mrs. Sen prepares elaborate meals while his mother is usually content to order a pizza. Eliot notices difference in their styles of parenting.

‘Mrs. Sen’s’ is the perfect example of multicultural piece of literature. This is clear from Mrs. Sen’s statement that everything was there in India and her desire to learn driving. Mrs. Sen is always struggling to reconcile between her Indian heritage and American ways of life. She thinks that ability of driving is a must for a long term stay in America. It is significant that her attempt to learn driving is not aimed at the assimilation because she yet appreciates the life in India. She desires to drive all the way to Calcutta and asks Eliot how much time it would take to reach ten thousand miles at fifty miles per hour.

The characters compare the things in India and America. As Lilia says that she was assured a safe life, an easy life, fine education and every opportunity, at the other time, the readers have the following lines:

“Imagine having to place her in a decent school. Imagine her having to read during power failures by the light of kerosene lamps. Imagine the pressures, the tutors, the constant exams.”

The experience of diaspora is specific for every community at the individual as well as collective level. Alwyn D. Gilkes writes,

“Immigration is a stressful experience that produces immediate and long-term consequences for the immigrants and the immigrant-receiving countries. Moreover, the stress caused by these changes often leads to altered physical and psychological health outcomes, at the individual level.”

Immigration imparts opportunities to compare and contrast the same community in different settings. The diasporic communities retain their distinctive identity and difference by means of various cultural behavioural patterns. They include attire, food and food habits, education, literature, religion, language, beliefs, modes of social behaviour, social norms, philosophy, history, emotions, family and relationships. Stuart Hall refuses any possibilities of fully maintaining the home culture as well as unambiguous adoption of the received culture. He is of the view that the cultural representation is marked by hybridity, heterogeneity of cultures and translation of the self. According to Vijay Mishra,
“Homeland is the desh (in Hindi) against which all the other lands are foreign, or videsh; it is the source of homesickness, that which gives rise to the adventures.”

India is always taken as Desh. Homesickness is caused from immigration. For the first generation characters India is home. The same is not true with the second generation. For the first generation, home does not mean the house they reside in but India. Homesickness is the feature that defines the diasporic communities. In her works Jhumpa Lahiri tries to explore the diasporic experience. This fact is confessed by her in the following words,

“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.”

‘The Third and Final Continent’ shows positive signs of immigrant experience towards adopting the new culture. Mala, like Mrs. Sen is also making attempts to cope with the American culture. Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero, in “Immigrant Motherhood and Transnationality in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Fiction”, is of the view that When Mala arrives in Boston, she is practically invisible, her presence making itself known to the narrator in the smell of the steamed rice she cooks in the apartment, the wiped clean bathroom counter and the extra toothbrush by the sink. However, she slowly begins to acclimatize. Finding a place to buy fresh fish and another shop that sells Indian spices create in Mala a stake of ownership in her new surroundings. The narrator and Mala maintain Indian ways of life along with acceptance the new ones. They want to be benefitted by the American citizenship. On the other hand,

“She (Mala) weeps for our son. So 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”.

This is an attempt towards resolution of conflict. It proves that what Alwyn D. Gilkes writes in the following lines is true.

“Helping immigrants manage the stress of moving to another country and culture is fundamental to the resolution of conflicts – intrapersonal and interpersonal - that often arise as a result of the interactions between different national, cultural, and ethnic groups who have different, and sometimes, conflicting beliefs and values.”
The same is not true in all the cases. Unlike the narrator of ‘The Third and Final Content’ and his wife, Mala, the characters like Ashoke, Ashima, Ruma, Shoba, etc. are facing physical as well as psychological problems due to displacement.

Emotional breakage in the relationship of Shukumar and Shoba is due to immigration. Vijay Mishra writes,

“A Temporary Matter’ touches so delicately on an emotional register often overlooked in theorizations about diaspora: the lived experiences of diasporic bodies as individuals, as people with their very human dilemmas.”

What the theorizations of diaspora miss are the psychological effects at the individual level and interpretation of personal relationships at the familial level. The tales in Interpreter of Maladies are not overtly referring to nostalgia for the homeland, no doubt, it exists there but the readers reach it via experiencing psychological effects by the characters. Again about the relationship of Mr. Das and Mrs. Das, Vijay Mishra writes

“For Lahiri, Mr Raj and Mrs Mina Das, like Shukumar and Shoba, are faced with dilemmas of the kind that face Western nuclear families, and what has to be resolved is not a trauma about homeland, or the sense of being left adrift; it is a matter of negotiating relationships that have foundered and been irrecoverably damaged.”

What Vijay Mishra emphasizes here is that dilemmas are not recoverable because the characters do not come to terms to their dilemmas. This argument is supported by the fact that at the end of the stories, the characters are not able to attain a relieved state. Shukumar and Shoba wish to continue sharing secrets to each other even after the period of electricity outage is over. They became expert in avoiding each other. Shoba remains outside home and Shukumar stays inside home fearing outside world. Mr. Pirzada, though physically in America, is much attached to his family in Bangladesh. Kapasi could not supply even a temporary solution to the maladies of Mrs. Das. They ask for what they do not need or may be that communicating their problems is lacking at some point. Mrs. Das desires to throw everything she possesses. Mrs. Das reveals her anguish to Mr. Kapasi in the following manner.

“About what I’ve just told you. About my secret, and about how terrible it makes me feel. I feel terrible looking at my children, and at Raj, always terrible. I have terrible urges, Mr. Kapasi, to
throw things away. One day I had the urge to throw everything I own out the window, the television, the children, everything. Don’t you think it’s unhealthy?”

Diasporic experience marks the consequences of hybridity and marginalization. Coming to America is a curse to Ashima. Ashima feels marginalization in the hospital. Gogol also feels marginalized in his public life. The time before and after her pregnancy causes a feeling of eternal alienation in her to an unbearable extent. This feeling clearly discriminates the Indian way from the American way.

“As she walks slowly through the rooms it irks her that there are dirty dishes stacked in the kitchen, that the bed has not been made. Until now Ashima has accepted that there is no one to sweep the floor, or do the dishes, or wash clothes, or shop for groceries, or prepare a meal on the days she is tired or homesick or cross. She has accepted that the very lack of such amenities is the American way. But now, with a baby crying in her arms, her breasts swollen with milk, her body coated with sweat, her groin still so sore she can scarcely sit, it is all suddenly unbearable.”

She does not want to raise children in America.

Jhumpa Lahiri differently deals with the immigrant experience in an unusual way in ‘Hema and Kaushik’. In ‘Once in a Lifetime’ the readers come across the fact that on first encounter of Hema and Kaushik when she was six and he was nine, they were identified with common culture and common language. But their second encounter in the US after Kaushik’s family’s stay in India becomes growingly ambiguous to be judged whether the shared culture ever existed among them or not. Instead of living as an Indian in India Kaushik’s family continues to behave in an American way as they did not follow Indianness when they migrated in America. Bombay had made them more American than Cambridge. But change comes in ‘Year’s End’. Kaushik observes

“Chitra hovered over my father and me and the girls, eating privately after we were done, the way our maids would in Bombay.”

Indianness gradually becomes visible in Kaushik’s family in the form of his step mother, Chitra and her two daughters.

In *The Lowland* Subhash makes attempts to translate between India and America. Though the physical aspects of Rhode Island corresponded to
those of Calcutta, he is enormously shocked to know the discrepancies between the two.

“The difference was so extreme that he could not accommodate the two places together in his mind. In this enormous new country, there seemed to be nowhere for the old to reside. There was nothing to link them; he was the sole link. Here life ceased to obstruct or assault him. Here was a place where humanity was not always pushing, rushing, running as if with a fire at its back.”

The two extremely different places are compared by Subhash as an attempt to gain familiarity to a new place. Again he observes

“Certain physical aspects of Rhode Island—a state so small within the context of America that on some maps its landmass was indicated only by an arrow pointing to its location—corresponded roughly to those of Calcutta, within India. Mountains to the north, an ocean to the east, the majority of land to the south and west.”

Both places are close to sea level and Calcutta was flooded by the sea and Rhode Island was covered with sheets of ice. Bela has also to confront the diasporic experiences though she belongs to second generation. She has to remain with her father and motherly love is denied to her as Gauri, like any other American woman, is much involved in her study.

While leaving the hospital, Gauri felt terrified, aware that America was just as dangerous a place as any. She was also aware of the fact that there was no one except Subhash to protect Bela from the harmful atmosphere of America. Bela is a constant, ‘living’ reminder of what had happened in India. It is easy to change place and uproot oneself, but impossible to escape the consequences of past decisions and actions.

The theme of lack of communication is repeatedly drawn in the stories and the novel. Breakdown of communication leads to harmful consequences. The story ‘Interpreter of Maladies’ is primarily based on this theme. Mrs. Das fails to communicate the secret to her husband that Bobby is not the product of Mr. Das and keeps it in her heart for eight years but she communicates to Mr. Kapasi whom she knows no longer than a day. The communication takes place at the time when she finally reaches at the extreme point of unbearable feeling. She finds a proper interpreter of her maladies. Mrs. Das asks for the interpretation which Mr. Kapasi fails to impart for unknown reasons. This is not the sole example of his failure. He
failed in keeping warm feelings towards his wife. He failed to save his son. His failures create struggle for his arranged marriage. Mr. Kapasi bears two jobs: as a tour guide and as an interpreter to a doctor. What is common in these jobs is communication. As a tour guide he communicates to foreign visitors. He was the master of many European languages but now only English remains. That implies that he has lost his ability to communicate in many European languages except English. This shows his failure of communication. As an interpreter, his work is communication of maladies of Gujarati speaking patients to a doctor. He fails in this job also because he could not save his son. Again he fails to provide maladies to Mrs. Das.

Most of the time Mrs. Das is hidden behind her sunglasses and Ms. Das behind guidebook. The children behave on themselves. At the end of the story, the loss of a paper slip on which Kapasi’s address was written marks the termination of the possibility of any communication between Mrs. Das and Mr. Kapasi leading to proper interpretation. Mrs. Das took Mr. Kapasi’s address to communicate through letters. The subjects to be discussed in the letters would be various. Mrs. Das would reveal the disappointment of her marriage and similarly Mr. Kapasi would follow the same as he was also dissatisfied with his marriage. They would also discuss the beauty of the Sun Temple and the things about India and America as Mrs. Das does not comprehend India. Thus, Kapasi would serve as an interpreter between two nations. Finally, fluttering away of Kapasi’s address slip in wind negates any possibility of communication which was yet to be existed in future.

Reading *The Namesake* one finds that Gogol moves to Nikhil in order to communicate to himself not to others as Nikhil. But it is a question whether it really works for him. Truly speaking, changing name makes no difference. He does not feel like Nikhil. Part of the problem is still lingering as Lahiri writes,

“Part of the problem is that the people who now know him as Nikhil have no idea that he used to be Gogol. They know him only in the present, not at all in the past. But after eighteen years of Gogol, two months of Nikhil feel scant, inconsequential. At times he feels as if he’s cast himself in a play, acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different.”

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In a way, it is a lack of communication. By changing his name he communicates his Indian identity to himself not to other people around him. Because presently no one around him knows that he used to be Gogol. There is no need to change his name officially as he has introduced himself as Nikhil. The irony is that as Nikhil, the acts performed by him truly mark Americanness. One of them is that he loses his virginity before marriage at a party with a girl whose name he is unable to recall in the morning.

Ashoke is also on his mission to communicate to Gogol right from Gogol’s birth why he was so named. By naming his son as Gogol, Ashoke communicates to the readers how great his tribute is to Gogol who saved his life in a train accident. Ashoke searches for the best occasion on which to reveal to Gogol his name’s secret. His search lasts as long as Gogol becomes young. In an attempt he presents Gogol a book of collection of short stories of Gogol which he put aside and thought no more about reading it. Ultimately once Ashoke successfully conveys but Gogol does not successfully receive it. In the last pages of the novel Gogol gets interested in reading the book on which was written by Ashoke ‘the man who gave you his name, from the man who gave you your name.’

The concept of identity is a problematic one and one that is continuously debated by many. In his article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” Stuart Hall scrutinizes cultural identity and investigates the issues adjacent to the identity politics or the politics of recognition for identity. Identity develops at the personal level when one presents himself in terms of his cultural identities. Hall moves on to suggest that the identities of the past which were viewed as stable are becoming fragmented in the global society which is the consequence of migration. Thus, one’s identity is no longer composed of a single identity but several identities that become contradictory. Stuart Hall writes,

“The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and Diaspora”29
There is always an unfinished and never static process of identity construction which ultimately leads to the recognition of difference. In the same article, Hall talks of the nature of identity politics in the following words,

“\[\text{It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a \textit{positioning}. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'.}\]

Hall initiates his essay saying that identity is not as transparent and unproblematic as it is taken to be. So instead of thinking of identity as an accomplished fact, it is a product, which is never complete and stable but is always in process towards completion by way of recognition which never ends. As per his definition, ‘cultural identity’ is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’. Cultural identity is a matter of the future as well as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending time, place, history and culture by way of performance and imagination. Multicultural literature is the literature of recognition.

Recognition is performed by observing customs, wearing clothes and eating food. Lahiri’s works have abundant references of social and religious traditions such as rice ceremony, Durga Pujo, marriage traditions, etc. The Indian characters recognize themselves wearing saris, pajamas, shalwar kameez, etc. Indian married women wear a thick stem of vermilion powder in the centre of the parting of their hair as a sign of their marriage. In ‘The Third and Final Continent’ the readers have the narrator recognizing his wife’s Indianness

“At the airport I recognized Mala immediately. The free end of her sari did not drag on the floor, but was draped in a sign of bridal modesty over her head, just as it had draped my mother until the day my father died. Her thin brown arms were stacked with gold bracelets, a small red circle was painted on her forehead, and the edges of her feet were tinted with a decorative red dye. I did not embrace her, or kiss her, or take her hand. Instead I asked her, speaking Bengali for the first time in America, if she was hungry.”
Food and eating habits such as eating with hands and consumption of vegetarian food play a vital role in recognition. Taking shoes off before entering the house obviously marks Indianness.

Viewing her works paying attention to Hall’s theory it can be said that Lahiri’s characters are always asserting themselves, constructing identities and recognizing themselves. The instability of identity is present in Jhumpa Lahiri’s works. Gogol Ganguli is more confused regarding his identity than Ashok Ganguli since Gogol assumes many identities. It is important to know that whenever change or move happens, uncertainty in one’s sense of identity strengthens the multiplicity of identity. The move or change that leads to this state may be of place, culture, tradition or thought. The more a person moves for identity, the more one gets puzzled. Everyone in the novel is seeking identity, especially Gogol who is an embodiment of triple identities namely Indian, American and Russian. This crisis is because of pluralism of cultures and traditions. Gogol is torn between two cultures – the rich Indian heritage from his parents’ side and the American culture where his present lies. Gogol’s identity crisis is at its peak when he comes across the term ABCD. He comes to know that the ABCDs are unable to answer the question “where are you from?”. Jhumpa Lahiri has an occasion to describe Gogol’s confusion in the following manner when Gogol attends a panel discussion about Indian novels written in English,

“Gogol has never heard the term ABCD. He eventually gathers that it stands for "American-born confused deshi." In other words, him. He learns that the C could also stand for "conflicted." He knows that deshi, a generic word for "countryman," means "Indian," knows that his parents and all their friends always refer to India simply as desh. But Gogol never thinks of India as desh. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India.”  

He is half-Indian and half-American not touching to any of them fully. The same is true with Sonia and Moushumi.

In ‘Hema and Kaushik’ Kaushik is a photojournalist who travels the world particularly Latin America and the Middle East not the US or India. Formally he is resident of Rome, but he is rarely in one place for long.

“For years he had drifted across the globe without making meaningful ties.”
However much he tries not to recognize himself as an Indian, his identity follows him as his shadow.

“He had so little to do with India. He had not gone back since the year his mother died, had never gone there for work. As a photographer, his origins were irrelevant. And yet, in Rome, in all of Europe, he was always regarded as an Indian first.”

But Hema does not suffer from such crisis.

“Theyir parents had liked one another only for the sake of their origins, for the sake of a time and place to which they’d lost access. Hema had never been drawn to a person for that reason, until now.”

By the characters of Hema and Kaushik, Lahiri depicts the typical attachment to and estrangement from Indianness. Both attachment and estrangement existed simultaneously in ‘Hema and Kaushik’. Being an immigrant family, Hema’s family retained their Indianness as a responsibility. If they had returned to Indian, it would not have been their responsibility to follow Americanness. Kaushik’s family did vice versa. They did not retain Indianness and on returning they became more American. Hema says

“We had stuck it out as immigrants while you had fled; had we been the ones to go back to India, my parents seemed to suggest, we would have stuck it out there as well.”

Chitra behaves exactly the way she would have done in her native home back in Bengal, conforming to the role for the married woman in Bengali culture.

Recreating past in imagination is an important theme in many of the stories. Many characters are always concerned about their past and form their behaviour according to their past. Mrs. Sen recreates her past to Eliot with minute details. Shoba and Shukumar reach to past for what to do during the period of electricity cutoff and share their past secrets. Mrs. Das is uneasy with her past of eight years before and cannot help herself revealing the secret to Mr. Kapasi. Ashoke and Ashima frequently make visits to India. Hema makes Kaushik recall their shared past. Boori Ma finds solace by telling stories of her grand past to the apartment dwellers. ‘When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine’ is built upon history. In the story ‘When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine’, Lilia takes the year 1947 to be the year of India’s freedom but her father clarifies to her that the year is also mentioned for the
partition of India. Her father told her that during partition, Hindus remained in India and Muslims went away from India. Dacca was no longer part of India. Hindus and Muslims had set fire to each other’s homes and never thought of eating in to each other’s company. But the history made no sense to her. What makes sense to her is the present: the similarities she observes in her father and Mr. Pirzada.

In ‘The Third and Final Continent’ Mrs. Croft told the narrator that America fluttered a flag on the moon, she was dissatisfied with his reply unwanted by her and emphasized him to say splendid. By this he was felt baffled and insulted. This led him in his past in India. He narrates,

“It reminded me of the way I was taught multiplication tables as a child, repeating after the master, sitting cross-legged, without shoes or pencils, on the floor of my one-room Tollygunge school. It also reminded me of my wedding, when I had repeated endless Sanskrit verses after the priest, verses I barely understood, which joined me to my wife.”37

Multicultural societies embody a very special feature of imagined communities, as they construct a national identity in a distinctive manner. A multicultural society consists of the people who have migrated from another place. Thus, the experience of the migrated people involves the transference, through migration, of a particular national culture. The more one is away from his/her homeland in term of time, the more complex the question of identity is and the more one is removed from the imagined community. It is also true that imagination of the first generation is more assuring and detailed than that of the second and third generation. Benedict Anderson refers to the nation as an ‘imagined community’ in this respect. This imagined community has particular characteristics. The imagined community imparts a perception of nationality in imagination. Thus, it provides a sense of belonging. The national identity is constructed in imagination by retaining the old customs, language, food and attire. The following lines by Johanna Lessinger in ‘Indian immigrants in the United States’ support this argument.

“Today ethnic groups, including new immigrants, are officially encouraged to retain, and even to recreate, their separate ethnic identities as part of their celebration of ‘Americanness’. Within this cultural climate Indians have been quick to create customs and institutions emphasizing the most picturesque and nationalist aspects of their Indian heritage.”38
So Americanness conveys a fundamental right to freedom to either follow the traditionality or adopt the new or to observe both. This freedom helps diaspora retain their distinctive identity without any tension.

Hema and Kaushik always meet each other with their shared past. It is Hema who makes Kaushik recall their past. Whereas Hema admits the privileges of the past upon her which is clear from her research and her willingness to have an arranged marriage to an Indian, Kaushik proves to be her antithesis.

Multicultural people are often feeling sense of displacement at the initial stage. But as the time passes, they are reconciled with their multicultural society. If one observes Ashima, s/he will discover the changes brought about in Ashima from beginning to the end of the novel. At the outset, she is the one who does not want to raise her children in America. At the end of the novel she herself decides to pass six months in America and six months in India. It means that she belongs to both places and belonging to many places carries sense of displacement. Stuck to her Indian customs, she continues to celebrate American festivals. For her, a woman’s role in the society is to care her household: serving husband and parenting children but Ashima accepts the job of a librarian which may be interpreted as a step towards Americanization. She thinks of learning driving and making American friends. Gradually she accepts her husband’s duties such as paying bills, driving the car, buying tickets, etc. Ashima is made of Indianness as well as Americanness and thus turns to be a multicultural entity.

“True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere.”

Ideas never die. Though both the man who gave the idea of seeing the world to Ashoke and meeting were short-lived, the idea changed the destiny of Ashoke and his family. Had Ashoke never met Ghosh, he would have never gone to America. Ashoke and Ashima form the bridge to their children between India and America. This fact is realized when Ashoke dies. Gogol has to perform the duty of the manager of the family. Gogol brings his relationships with girls to end, feels more concerned about his family and
performs the funeral customs. It means that Ashoke’s death changed Gogol’s life.

Lahiri’s characters are multicultural. It may be possible that they may be either Indian or American by origin but follow both. For example Gogol may be Indian and American or either but to say that he is not Indian as well as not American is not without fault. Belonging to everywhere is the characteristic of multicultural people. Gogol and Sonia are as foreign to India as Ashoke and Ashima to America though they are a one family. Gogol’s and Sonia’s struggle to get adjusted in India is as intense as that of Ashoke and Ashima in America. When one is at uneasiness with something, it means that one’s belongingness to a particular side is stronger than the other. Gogol and Sonia are as strongly attached to America as Ashoke and Ashima are to India.

Both Mr. Pirzada and Mrs. Sen have recently arrived in the US. Both of them have child characters. Lilia in ‘Mr. Pirzada Comes to Dine’ is Indian American while Eliot in ‘Mrs. Sen’s’ is American. Mr. Pirzada goes to Lilia’s home to dine while Eliot is taken to Mrs. Sen’s house. Both of the stories revolve round the relationship of the main characters with the child characters. It is through these child characters that the consciousness of being displaced comes to the eyes of the readers.

Food, attire, religion, language, music, literature, rites and myths mean a lot for the culturally displaced persons because cultural dislocation involves loss of ties with the homeland and language. Lahiri is concerned with the experiences of the dislocated. Ashima and Ashoke do hard to retain their Indianness, their culture though they are surrounded by Americanness. When Ashima cannot let go a copy of Desh magazine, it is proved that it immediately converts into more than just a literary magazine. Desh transmits layers of meanings allied with ‘desh’ sensibilities. They watch the Kathakali dance performance and listen to a sitar recital. They send Gogol to Bengali language class when he was child and perform social traditions. But when Gogol and Sonia come to their own, they tend to the American ways. They feel it easier to follow the America’s multicultural norms. This is clear when on their visit to Calcutta, Gogol and Sonia are having difficulty to remember the endless names.
“There are endless names Gogol and Sonia must remember to say, not aunt this and uncle that but terms far more specific: mashi and pishi, mama and maima, kaku and jethu, to signify whether they are related on their mother’s or their father’s side, by marriage or by blood.”

Ashima’s intense affection towards her family influences her to bring into existence a well woven group of Indian friends. This group practices Indian social and religious rites and uses the mother tongue for conversation. It forms a substitute for India. On one hand, Ashima wishes to maintain the ties by wearing Indian clothing and eating Indian food. On the other hand, the situation reverts when her children follow the American tradition.

Gogol does not seem to be a stranger in America. But Gogol’s incapability to move from his own past is eye catching in his interactions with women. He absorbs with the American culture. He is attentive to avoid any contact with the past. India is not a subject to be discussed for him. He adopts Maxine’s carefree life style. He drinks wine and lives with Maxine. In spite of all these things his past follows him. Gogol cannot avoid the memories of past – his name, his parents, his Indian heritage though he does not follow it. When his father dies, he realizes that he cannot simply get away from what he is. There is something that connects him with Indian heritage. In fact, throughout its course the novel depicts Gogol’s search for this connection and at the end of the novel, Gogol realizes the value of his Indian identity.

Often found in the Indian English literature, the generation gap is a major problematic issue specifically in diasporic writing. The parent-child relationship is put at risk because of the generation gap. The children question their experienced parents, relevance of the past to the present conditions and the traditional customs to the new and different manners of behaviour and consequently question India. The children challenge their lives differently and have different intensity of feeling of rootlessness and dislocation. The parents are baffled by their children’s preference of individualism to the notion of collectivity. This idea is put by Vijay Mishra in *The Literature of Indian Diaspora* while talking about *The Namesake*,

“This novel, too, is about movement and settlement in a new land; it is about re-creating another world in the new; it is about a
As Jhumpa Lahiri is a second generation immigrant, she says in an interview with Elizabeth Farnsworth that the question of identity is always a difficult one, especially for those who are culturally displaced. The immigrants grow up in two worlds simultaneously. She confesses that the older she gets, the more she is aware that she has somehow inherited a sense of exile from her parents, even though in many ways she is so much more American than they are. As she says, the second generation immigrants are more bent to Americanness than the first generation immigrants. In the first generation immigrants, the challenges of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, the knowledge of and longing for a lost land are more explicit and distressing than to their children. The second generation feels that they belong to nowhere. In an attempt to discriminate between first and second generation, Eleanor Byrne writes,

“For the first-generation migrant, India is both present in the food being eaten and absent in the memories that emerge and haunt the present while that food is being prepared. This is the case in the story 'Mrs. Sen's', where the memories of communal food preparation haunt Mrs. Sen's solitary afternoon ritual of chopping vegetables, transporting her elsewhere, enacting a symbolic feeding of memories and a mourning of what has been lost. Cultures are constantly being re-made and re-narrated in these short stories, which are attentive to an understanding of culture as always marked by hybridisation and provisionality.”

As Jhumpa Lahiri was born in Rhode Island, people asked about her name, parentage, appearance, etc. and if she answers that she is from India where she was not born and has never lived, she is inaccurate thus. She feels that she belongs to nowhere fully. It is also worth mentioning that Sarmista Mondol is of the view that 'desh', though the centre of the cultural identity of many immigrants, is the cause of much anxiety and that the exaggerated ‘desh’ nostalgia males many immigrants outcasts in their new homes and also distances them from their children. The novel confirms the matter emphasized by Sarmista Mondol. In the novel *The Namesake*, A shokey, the first generation immigrant is more attached to India and feels belongingness to India. The case is reverse for his son Gogol. Gogol’s triple identities fail him to feel sense of belongingness. Gogol and Sonia lead private lives as the
most Americans do. Ordinary things are of much significance for Indians in their lives. Lahiri says in an interview that even ordinary things felt like a rebellion from her upbringing – what she ate, what she listened to, whom she befriended and what she read. The things her American friends’ parents would not think to remark upon were always remarked upon by her parents. The children are franker about sexuality, alcoholism and other forms of western culture to which the characters like Gogol, Moushumi, Dev, Usha, Sudha, her brother, etc. are more or less attracted. These facts are realized by the readers when the encounter reaction of Aparna at Thanksgiving Party of Deborah.

“Out of my parents’ sight I was given beer to drink. When the meal was ready, we were told where to sit, in an alternating boy-girl formation that made the Bengalis uncomfortable. Bottles of wine were lined up on the table. Two turkeys were brought out, one stuffed with sausage and one without. My mouth watered at the food, but I knew that afterward, on our way home, my mother would complain that it was all tasteless and bland. “Impossible,” my mother said, shaking her hand over the top of her glass when someone tried to pour her a little wine.”

‘Hell-Heaven’ is an account of how Usha’s mother holds on to Indian beliefs and cultural practices and expects Usha to follow the same. The way she dresses, what she cooks and how her patterns of behaviour are framed are all looked at professionally and precisely by Jhumpa Lahiri. ‘Boudi’ as called by Pranab Kaku, identified herself as a Bengali woman and behaves as any other Bengali married woman is supposed to act. Pranab Kaku reveals that it was easy to note that she is a typical Indian housewife. He is clarified to what extent she has clung to her traditions and Indian modes of behaviour in America.

‘Only Goodness’ is obviously and definitely built upon the same thing as it starts with the words that “it was Sudha who’d introduced Rahul to alcohol.” They were prudish about alcohol to the point of seeming Puritanical, frowning upon the members of their Bengali circle who liked to sip whiskey at gatherings. The ideas of not reaching at excess and of not being out of control in drinking are the fundamental traits that are useful to define her. The second generation’s desire to behave, eat, dress and talk just as Americans do is often viewed with critical eyes by the first generation Indians. The irony is that the more the parents are engaged in endeavouring
to impart secure childhood with respect to the point of view of Indianness and nurture their children in Indian ways, the farther the generational gap takes the children away to adopt the American ways.

Parents’ disappointment for their children also reveals the generation gap. They are against the children’s autonomous decision in choosing their life partners. Amit’s parents are displeased by him.

“Megan’s ordinary background had displeased his parents, as had the fact that she was five years older than he was. Her stark prettiness, her refusal to wear contact lenses, her height, had not charmed them. The fact that she was a doctor did not make up for it. If anything, it made their disappointment in Amit worse.”

Ashok has to wait for Gogol becoming young to tell how survived in a train accident and the secret of his name. He thought that Gogol would not understand him. Ruma was also warned by her parents.

One has to lose something in order to gain something. Getting wealthier and desiring better prospects in future Indians are having the danger of losing their rich traditions which are the binding factors for their lives. In the diaspora, according to Vijay Mishra, there is no extended family which may supply emotional support. Ashoke and Ashima are accustomed to live in joint families in India but their leave from India marks the gradual loosening of the ties among the family members. At the time of Ashoke’s death, the four members of the Ganguli family were residing at four different places miles away from one another. When Ashima’s grand mother dies, Ashima feels that there are many people to console her mother but when her own mother dies, no one will be there to console her. After Ashima is discharged from the hospital at Gogol’s birth, Lahiri puts the following words to picture Ashima’s grief at being alone at home:

“As she walks slowly through the rooms it irks her that there are dirty dishes stacked in the kitchen, that the bed has not been made. Until now Ashima has accepted that there is no one to sweep the floor, or do the dishes, or wash clothes, or shop for groceries, or prepare a meal on the days she is tired or homesick or cross. She has accepted that the very lack of such amenities is the American way. But now, with a baby crying in her arms, her breasts swollen with milk, her body coated with sweat, her groin still so sore she can scarcely sit, it is all suddenly unbearable.”

There are marked differences between Indian families and American families. Indian families are teeming with life, love, traditions and customs.
On the other hand, American families are smaller, divorced, of mixed race, individualistic and unsupervised by the elders.

The narrator of ‘The Third and Final Continent’ is waiting for her arrival of his wife first time in America. He thinks how he would take care of Mala in a foreign country and perform his duty as an Indian husband as he contemplates

“It was my duty to take care of Mala, to welcome her and protect her. I would have to by her her first pair of snow boots, her first winter coat. I would have to tell her which streets to avoid, which way the traffic came, tell her to wear her sari so that the free end did not drag on the footpath.”

Usha says, at the occasion of Thanksgiving party at Deborah’s house.

“I was furious with my mother for making a scene before we left the house and forcing me to wear a shalwar kameez. I knew they assumed, from my clothing, that I had more in common with the other Bengalis than with them.”

The parent-child relationship in diasporic families is to a great extent built on the disagreement particularly with respect to the marriage, food, clothes and social relations.

Pranab Kaku and Usha’s family had many common things with respect to liking for music, film, leftist politics and poetry. With the numberless meetings with Pranab Kaku, a soft emotion develops for him in the heart of Usha’s mother. Pranab Kaku marries an American girl, Deborah. And Aparna’s emotion leads her to an attempt of suicide. Aparna is a typical Bengali house wife, subordinate, insignificant and without power.

Pranab’s father is also not happy with Pranab’s decision of marrying an American. Pranab Kaku’s parents were horrified by the thought of their only son marrying an American woman. A few weeks later on telephone Mr. Chakraborty told Usha’s father that they could not possibly support such a marriage and that if Pranab Kaku dared to marry Deborah he would no longer acknowledge him as a son. Pranab’s mother criticizes the act with the word ‘betrayal’. Pranab remains absent in Bengali gatherings after his marriage. His marriage takes him gradually away from Indian culture. Deborah was accused that she had stripped Pranab of his origin. It is a kind of threat, mixed marriages are having.
“For a while, 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.”

It is surprising that Pranab appeared with their two identical little girls who barely looked Bengali and spoke only English and were being raised so differently from Usha and most of the other Bengali children. 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. Because of Deborah, they were freed from all those things. Aparna warns Usha from Americanness. She puts many restrictions to Usha as she grows up.

“She forbade me to attend the dances that were held the last Friday of every month in the school cafeteria, and it was an unspoken law that I was not allowed to date. “Don’t think you’ll get away with marrying an American, the way Pranab Kaku did,” she would say from time to time. I was thirteen, the thought of marriage irrelevant to my life. Still, her words upset me, and I felt her grip on me tighten. She would fly into a rage when I told her I wanted to start wearing a bra, or if I wanted to go to Harvard Square with a friend.”

At the occasion of Pranab’s wedding, Lahiri gives many references of culture clashes.

Like many Bengalis marrying American, Amit in ‘A Choice of Accommodations’ also realizes the fact that his betrayal of his parents would cause them nothing else but breakage of their dreams.

“For all their liberal Western ways he knew they wanted him to marry a Bengali girl, raised and educated as he had been.”

Amit feels exhilarating about his marriage for two reasons. He had a joy of getting married and secondly it was taking in secret without planning and involvement. It is clear here that the marriage is strictly American in its character. Indian marriages are different altogether. Indian marriages are fully and perfectly planned. Lots of people are invited. Marriages depicted in The Namesake and in the short stories are extended ceremonies. But Pranab’s marriage takes place in the presence of only thirty people.
When Amit’s father decided to go back to India, he was stunned by his parents’ decision because

“His parents, unlike most other Bengalis in Massachusetts, had always been dismissive, even critical, of India, never homesick or sentimental. His mother had short hair and wore trousers, putting on saris only for special occasions. His father kept a liquor cabinet and liked a gin and tonic before his meals.”

Normally, Lahiri presents the first generations much conservative. But this is an exception in the case of Amit’s parents. There is a particular reason behind it. Migration to America is for the better prospects. Amit’s parents are already wealthy. The comparative prosperity of America never attracted them. Their lives were more privileged in India.

Das family returns to India not to visit the extended family but to see a tourist site, the Sun Temple at Konark. The family itself is displaced and alienated. At the same time the family members are also displaced and alienated from within. At the family level it is displaced in the sense that though they are from India, they are technically and practically American because they need a guide and a book to know about the Sun Temple. At the individual level, the family is disintegrated. Mrs. Das does not love her family. She has kept it a secret to herself for eight years that Bobby was not Raj’s son, but his friend’s. Though the family is on the way to Konark, Mina is on her own way, the way of getting her emotions interpreted. About the emotional estrangement in ‘A Temporary Matter’ Vijay Mishra observes that the story is basically built on an emotionally estranged couple after the death at birth of their baby. Their relationship has become far too fragile to be able to move on.

Cultural hybridity results from cultural interactions as well as mixed marriages. The characters like Gogol, Sonia, Mina Das, Raj Das, Shoba, Shukumar, Lilia, Twinkle, Ruma, Usha, Pranab, Hema, Kaushik, etc. are all culturally hybrid. Particularly second generation is more culturally hybrid as they are brought up and educated at various places. Mixed marriages have important place in Jhumpa Lahiri. She narrates the mixed marriages between Amit and Megan, Pranab and Deborah, Adam and Ruma. Their effects are seen on their children. Gogol’s relationship with American girls shows the cultural hybridity. Gogol loses his virginity with an American girl. His relations with Ruth and Maxine are not long lasting.
Jhumpa Lahiri depicts three mixed marriages in *Unaccustomed Earth*. They are between Ruma and Adam, Pranab and Deborah and Amit and Megan. In her depiction, one notes some common things in the marriages. One of them is lack of proper understanding between each other. One is not able to comprehend another due to certain limitations such as cultural, linguistic, religious or emotional barriers. Lahiri writes in ‘Unaccustomed Earth’

“She knew he’d been traveling since early morning, that he’d been working all day, would have to work through his dinner. And yet she felt no sympathy.”

This shows Ruma’s indifference towards Adam. Ruma knew that though married she and Adam were separate people leading separate lives.

“Theyth the absences contributed to her isolation, sometimes it was worse, not better, when Adam was home. Even with Akash to care for, part of her was beginning to prefer the solitude, without Adam hovering around, full of concern about her state of mind, her mood.”

Parents perform their duty by directing their children’s attention to the future threat which would result from mixed marriage.

“Ten years ago her mother had done everything in her power to talk Ruma out of marrying Adam, saying that he would divorce her, that in the end he would want an American girl.”

Ruma remembered that she had seen strong boldness to withstand her mother’s outrage and her father’s refusal. Her mother told her that she should be ashamed of being an Indian. Children’s appearance would also reveal hybridity. Amit’s daughters have no similarity with Amit and do not look Indian apart from their names. Lahiri writes

“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.”

Sense of purity is an important theme in Lahiri’s works. It is a belief among Indians that if one crosses black waters, one will be violated. To avoid violation, Indian feared to cross black waters. Those who crossed black waters, try to maintain their purity. The characters in Lahiri’s works are also having a sense of purity. They try to maintain Indian customs and Indian
culture. The first generation particularly women are more aware and sensitive about maintaining purity in comparison to men. Women such as Ashima, Mrs. Sen, Mala, Ruma, etc. are fine examples in this respect. It is also striking that not all the characters are having sense of purity. Ashima does not want to raise Gogol in America. Aparna, performing the duty of a true Indian mother, instructs Usha not to attend the dances and not to date American boys and she presents example of Deborah as an antithesis. Ruma taught Akash Bengali words. Some characters are taking great care of not in touch with the American culture and remaining outside the general American stream. Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero in “Immigrant Motherhood and Transnationality in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Fiction.” writes that although thousands of miles and at least a generation removed from the nationalist struggle in India, Mala, Mrs. Sen and The Namesake’s Ashima are depicted by Lahiri as middle-class “new women” in the ways in which they negotiate their own and their families’ immigrant identities against the demands of assimilation in the U.S. Compelled by traditional university life to live in typical American college towns in mostly white neighborhoods, each of these women, in her own way, attempts to protect her ghar from Americanization. Each preserves Indian culture in her home through her attention to spiritual matters, food, dress and rearing Indian children. Ruma is aware of her impurity but cannot help her preserve the purity. She teaches Bengali words to Akash. She wants Akash to get used to the Indian food but American Akash is frowned at the food and prefers to eat from boxes. It is somewhat agonizing to her when she observes,

“In spite of her efforts he was turning into the sort of American child she was always careful not to be, the sort that horrified and intimidated her mother: imperious, afraid of eating things.”

The first generation characters believe that even after their death they will be present in the form of their children. Ruma’s father frequently told her that Akash was made of her meat and bone. So Ruma would live in Akash and Akash in his children. The characters maintain their purity by consuming vegetarian food. The narrator ‘The Third and Final Continent’ bought a small carton of milk and a box of cornflakes instead of preferring
to hamburgers and hot dogs. This was his first meal in America. Mala was offered oxtail soup on the plane which she did not take.

There are marked references given by Jhumpa Lahiri where the readers are confronted with the obvious cultural changes in Indian Americans. The sentence that ‘the Das family looked Indian but dressed as Americans do’ is an ample example of the move from one culture to another. The Das family is Indian only by look but they are American by taste, interest and opinions. They technically know nothing about India. India is as new to them as America is to Indians. This fact is technically consolidated when the Das family needs to hire a tourist guide to know their ancestral homeland.

Jhumpa Lahiri intentionally put certain cultural differences among Americans and Indians by comparing and contrasting them. For example, the difference of Indian and American tradition of naming a child is simultaneously pictured in *The Namesake*. In ‘Interpreter of Maladies’ though the Das family and Mr. Kapasi shared a common heritage, the reader is confronted with the extent of difference in the traditions of marriage observed by them. Mr. Kapasi’s marriage was an arranged one, typical of Indianness while the case is adverse with Mr. Das. It is Mr. Kapasi who got both shocked and surprised to listen to Mrs. Das’ revelation of their sexual behaviour and who had never seen his wife naked. Disloyalty in marital relationship is beyond thought for Mr. Kapasi while disloyalty results in the product of Bobby for Mrs. Das. This implies the different attitude towards duty and family between the Indian and American culture.

The main stream of the critical writings on her works shows that Lahiri is a chronicler of Indian-American lives. Her major contribution is in the field of literature of the multiculturalism. Her characters are individuals as well as the typical representative members of diaspora. The phenomenon of expatriation, the state of immigrant communities in the west, the trauma of being uprooted, the diasporic consciousness and the loss of home and longing stability of identity are the major issues dealt with Jhumpa Lahiri through diasporic characters. Taylor Shea is of the view that the characters in Lahiri’s works range from children trying to make sense of their home lives versus their school lives, to young adults unsure of being American and their connection to their heritage and finally older adults who continually
struggle to accept their new lives and forget their old. According to Shea, in general these characters’ reaction is quite different from their family, friends and enemies, comprising an unbiased illustration of how varied Indian immigrants’ personalities are despite their common ethnic background. It attempts to shatter previous stereotypes, by focusing on many different characters, places and plots within the same historical and cultural context.

Child characters such as Lilia, Rohin, Eliot, Usha and Akash, have an important place in Lahiri’s works. They are significant in many ways. Perception of differences between Indianness and Americanness is done through the child characters. It is through Lilia in ‘When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine’ that the readers come to know about India. It is to Eliot that Mrs. Sen imagines India. As the time passes, Eliot knows certain things and compares with his own way of thinking,

“Eliot understood that when Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India, not the apartment where she sat chopping vegetables. He thought of his own home, just five miles away, and the young married couple who waved from time to time as they jogged at sunset along the shore.”

Eliot learns that arrival of letter from India makes Mrs. Sen happy. Rohin in ‘Sexy’ plays an important role in the sense that he explains that sexy means loving someone whom one does not know. It is through him that Miranda’s mind gets changed. And very importantly Lilia’s feeling for Mr. Pirzada is the heart of the story.

Lahiri’s characters are culturally displaced and marginalized Bengalis migrated for the purpose of better prospects. Eleanor Byrne writes,

“The movements of Lahiri’s characters to the United States are frequently associated with academic imperatives, with different characters in the process of finishing theses, employed as college lecturers, or in university libraries, such that several of her stories might almost be combined to form a diasporic campus novel. Indianness is something to be both explored and examined, by those of the second generation with, in some cases, only a tentative first-hand experience, whereas Indian history is taught and made an object of knowledge by others, or visited in the capacity of a tourist in the tide story ‘Interpreter of Maladies’.”

They encounter problems of attaining adjustment in the foreign culture with the danger of losing the character of original self. She presents the American spirit of individualism against the background of Indian collectivism, interdependence and familial attachment. The diasporic otherness marks
the distinctiveness of behavioural patterns, lifestyles and emotional states of the Bengalis.

There are many characters like Usha, Sudha, Amit, Moushumi, Gogol, Sonia and numerous others who feel that they are confined within boundaries. Their professions, their marriage and everything about them seem to be determined by an overpowering alien culture. The following lines of Vijay Mishra prove how the first and second generation differ in leading and viewing their lives,

“Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, parents of Gogol and Sonia, do not change; they live and depart, their worlds remain intact, their lives are relatively unchanged by America. The emphasis on desh (homeland) rankles Gogol, who knows what the term means but who ‘never thinks of India as desh. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India.’”

Some of the characters are drawn from real life. Regarding ‘A Real Durwan’ and ‘The Treatment of Bibi Haldar’, Jhumpa Lahiri says in an interview that both of those characters came out of observation her own observation of people. What drew her to writing about them was partly a projection of her own feelings of being marginal and of feeling foreign even though that was a place her parents called home and refer to in their minds as home.

Boori Ma is a poor, marginalized and dislocated character and a victim of changing time. She sweeps the staircase of an apartment and thus resembles a real Durwan. She is performing the job which is not generally assigned to a woman. She chronicles the easier time she had before partition.

“Yet there was a day when my feet touched nothing but marble. Believe me, don’t believe me, such comforts you cannot even dream them”

But now she was not allowed to sit on the furniture.

“Knowing not to sit on the furniture, she crouched, instead, in doorways and hallways, and observed gestures and manners in the same way a person tends to watch traffic in a foreign city.”

Boori Ma was accused of stealing and was driven out of the apartment. So the story actually links to the history and its consequences on people by portraying the condition of refugees.

Gogol is the most confused and uneasy with his name of all the characters in Lahiri’s works. Out of frustration, alienation and discrimination, Gogol changes his name to Nikhil which unknowingly
sounds similar to his namesake’s first name ‘Nikolai’. Wherever he goes, whomever he meets, he has feeling of being a cultural outsider. At one point he wants to be called as Gogol, at another point as Nikhil.

“He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn’t know who doesn’t know him.”

Gogol is a Russian last name which makes the confusion even more intense due to the likeness of his life with his namesake who lived a miserable life. The confusion is that there is nothing like Indianness or Americanness in his name and his admission in the school marks the commencing of the identity crisis. At the discovery of uniqueness and strangeness of his name, his reaction towards him is distressing. His answer ‘Gogol’ or ‘Nikhil’ to the question what his name is, is based on who asks the question and which name imparts him comfort at a given time. For some he is ‘Gogol’ and for some ‘Nikhil’. He introduces himself as Gogol or Nikhil. In an attempt to resolve the identity crisis, he legally changes his name to Nikhil which, he thinks, helps him reinvent himself. What the new name imparts him is the confidence not to overcome his identity crisis but to flirt with ladies. It is as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party. But his move from Gogol to Nikhil does not lead him to a desired end.

“There is only one complication: he doesn’t feel like Nikhil. Not yet. Part of the problem is that the people who now know him as Nikhil have no idea that he used to be Gogol. They know him only in the present, not at all in the past. But after eighteen years of Gogol, two months of Nikhil feel scant, inconsequential.”

The real factor which makes him change his name does not succeed. He does everything possible to remove himself from his Bengali roots but he is Indian by name, it is his name only that connects him to Indian culture.

“They are at once satisfied and intrigued by his background, by his years at Yale and Columbia, his career as an architect, his Mediterranean looks. “You could be Italian,” Lydia remarks at one point during the meal, regarding him in the candle’s glow.”

He turns out to be an American son to an Indian father. His father tried to reveal the secret of name of ‘Gogol’ many times. Ashoke presents Gogol a collection of short stories by his namesake. But it is Gogol who disappoints his father by distracting his attention to other things.
It is through Ashima that readers are taken to Calcutta in imagination. She misses her life back in Calcutta and continuously finds herself in turmoil. She is alone in the apartment for most of the time.

“For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding.”

Her position as a migrated person presents a distinctive perspective that her children do not have. Bengali Ashima starts celebrating American festivals for the sake of her children. She is neither Bengali nor American completely as she decides to spend six months in Calcutta with her relatives and six month in America with her children. Both the places are foreign to her.

“Ashima feels lonely suddenly, horribly, permanently alone, and briefly, turned away from the mirror, she sobs for her husband. She feels overwhelmed by the thought of the move she is about to make, to the city that was once home and is now in its own way foreign.”

It is the most notable thing that perhaps Jhumpa Lahiri centres the novel round the character of Ashima. It is evident from the fact that the novel starts and ends with her. Again it is also worth noticing that at both times we find her in reflecting upon her dwelling in US. At the outset she had something missing in the mixture and at the end she decides to remain in US for six months and six months in Calcutta. Through the course of the novel, Ashima has to adapt the American way unwillingly. She forms a bridge joining the Indian culture with that of her Americanized children. Ann Marie Alfonso writes that throughout the text, Ashima embodies some of the most pressing challenges facing the postcolonial female subject in diaspora: in a nation whose values and customs are alien to her, she must preserve the Bengali traditions that tenuously link her to her homeland while simultaneously ensuring a successful future for her American-born children. Although she preserves Bengali culture in many aspects of her domestic life, Ashima’s Americanized children and the demands of suburban American life force her to adapt in unexpected ways.

Bengali names are not without meaning. Good names are always meaningful. Even Ashima means infinite, without limits. Ashima’s name itself is evocative of her transnationality.
“True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere.”

Women are guardians and propagators of Indian culture. Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero in ‘Immigrant Motherhood and Transnationality in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Fiction’ views that in Ashima and Lahiri’s other first and second generation Indian immigrant women characters, these traditional gender roles are not a matter of anti-colonial activism, but they do represent a conscious effort to preserve the culture that was left behind. It is the responsibility of Indian woman to preserve culture at the home which is dominated generally by women in Indian families. Ashima fulfils the responsibility well.

Ashima is growingly becoming a multicultural personality. Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero is of the view that The Namesake’s Ashima Ganguli is compelled to engage with mainstream, middle-class America because of her children; simultaneously, her desire that they remain Bengali at their core compels her to preserve many cultural traditions at home. Ashima adopts the American ways of life gradually and begins to celebrate American festivals for the sake of her motherhood. At the deep level, Ashima is truly an Indian mother who is ready to do anything for her children. Ashoke dresses like an American while Ashima continues to wear saris and performs duties of a perfect Bengali housewife by bringing up the children in traditional manner, cooking Indian dishes and keeping a meticulous household. As her children grow up, Ashima is becoming more flexible towards adopting new things. There are many ways by which Ashima tries to preserve the cultural identity of her Bengali family. Of the prime importance among them is by inviting Bengali people by becoming host of parties. These gatherings for the purpose of rice ceremonies, festivals, etc. help her to have feeling of Bengali families and consequently to be at home. At these parties the Bengali people sit on the floor and play various games, sing songs of Bengali poets like Nazrul and Rabindranath Tagore. They create India at a smaller level. Ashima’s life in America is longer than life in India. But she loves to be a traditional wife and mother.

Ashoke and Ashima avoid the tradition of having two names: one good name and second pet name because of their experience in the case of Gogol. They call their second child only with good name, Sonia.
“They’ve learned their lesson after Gogol. They’ve learned that schools in America will ignore parents’ instructions and register a child under his pet name. The only way to avoid such confusion, they have concluded, is to do away with the pet name altogether, as many of their Bengali friends have already done.”

At the performance of her rice ceremony, she turns out to be a truly American,

“She plays with the dirt they’ve dug up from the yard and threatens to put the dollar bill into her mouth. “This one,” one of the guests remarks, “this one is the true American.”

She is complete opposite of Gogol. Gogol picks up nothing while Sonia chooses dirt and a dollar bill. She is less troubled with her identity than Gogol. She feels well-adjusted in the American society.

Moushumi is a difficult character to be judged upon. According to Afshin Assandnassab, Moushumi is the most complicated character in the novel regarding the concept of identity. There are many reasons for this complexity. Assandnassab writes that having Indian parents, being born in England, having lived in England, America and France together with having several relationships with people from diverse backgrounds and nationalities, makes her an intricate personality who is also in search of a fixed identity without noticing it.

It seems that Moushumi is fixed for her identity but this is not true. It was because she could not tolerate Graham who rejected her family background that she broke up with him. At another time she has hatred for Indian things. She favours western culture,

“Immersing herself in a third language, a third culture, has been her refuge – she approached French, unlike things American or Indian, without guilt or misgiving or expectation of any kind. It was easier to turn her back in favour of one that has no claim whatsoever”

Switching from one to another is in her nature. She is fond of tasting everything. Her relationship with Gogol is just for tasting an Indian. Even after her marriage, she continues to flirt with Graham. For Moushumi, marriage with Gogol is just an ordinary happening in her life.

Maxine Ratclif is from a wealthy typical American family. She is fit for Gogol and unfit for Gogol’s parents. Gogol’s absorption with her family reveals that finally Gogol’s crisis would no more trouble with him only
because Maxine is free from such troubles. This aspect which is completely opposite of Gogol attracts him more to her.

“She has the gift of accepting her life; as he comes to know her, he realizes that she has never wished she were anyone other than herself, raised in any other place, in any other way. This, in his opinion, is the biggest difference between them, a thing far more foreign to him than the beautiful house she’d grown up in, her education at private schools.”

Lahiri portrays the characters of Gerald and Lydia Ratcliff in order that the readers will be able to realize the intensity of Ashoke’s and Ashima’s struggle. They are complete opposite of Ashoke and Ashima. They are very wealthy typical Americans in every sense.

Ruma, an Indian American woman, is about to be visited by her father. It is not just her father who is visiting her but a herd of feelings that make her at a time nervous and at another proud. Her old relationships, experience and resentment get refreshed.

Ruma felt it difficult to live as a mother and wife following the Indian way of life inherited from her mother. Ruma is often found comparing herself with her mother. She thinks how her mother would have behaved and responded in a particular situation, how her mother would have viewed a particular act and how her mother would have performed her duty as a mother as well as a wife. After Ruma’s mother’s death, it was up to Ruma to converse to her father in place of her mother and to imitate her mother. For example, her mother refused to speak English in family. In the same way Ruma has taught Akash some words in Bengali. But as Akash grows, the distance from Indianness is getting larger and larger. Gradually Akash forgot the Bengali words and did not remove shoes before entering the house. While Ruma’s mother is insistent on maintaining Indian traditions, her father is more flexible towards assimilation in the American culture.

Ruma is visited by the past remembrances of her mother’s displeasure for western clothes which shows Ruma’s embracement towards the American culture. After her mother’s death, Ruma kept only three saris out of two hundred and eighteen saris.

“Of the two hundred and eighteen saris, she kept only three, placing them in a quilted zippered bag at the back of her closet, telling her mother’s friends to divide up the rest. And she had remembered the many times her mother had predicted this very moment, lamenting the fact that her daughter preferred pants
and skirts to the clothing she wore, that there would be no one to whom to pass on her things.”

But her guilt of not imitating her mother comes forth. Americanness does not gather enough strength to overcome Indianness. Ruma’s longing for achieving preciseness of her mother in handling the household, craftsmanship in cooking and becoming a caring mother and devoted wife is gathering momentum. These simple things seem to be of prime importance when she gives birth to a child and is preparing for the next. Her mother’s presence seems inevitable for a feeling of satisfaction and safety. Ruma’s part is converting her into her mother,

“When he was finished he poked his head into Akash’s room and found both the boy and Ruma asleep. For several minutes he stood in the doorway. Something about his daughter’s appearance had changed; she now resembled his wife so strongly that he could not bear to look at her directly. That first glimpse of her earlier, standing on the lawn with Akash, had nearly taken his breath away. Her face was older now, as his wife’s had been, and the hair was beginning to turn gray at her temples in the same way, twisted with an elastic band into a loose knot. And the features, haunting now that his wife was gone—the identical shape and shade of the eyes, the dimple on the left side when they smiled.”

Ruma views everything in terms of what her parents had viewed. At the initial stage, her father struggled to communicate in foreign land. He led hard life in Seattle. He did not go to India at his father’s death. The same type of life Ruma is leading presently. She passes her time in solitude. Adam’s frequent journeys made Ruma feel double exile.

Although Usha is educated at home by her parents who want Usha to carry on the Bengali traditions. She is bent upon the new American culture which seems to be harmful and leading to an opposite end to her parents. She says,

“Deborah and I spoke freely in English, a language in which, by that age, I expressed myself more easily than Bengali, which I was required to speak at home.”

The use of Bengali language and following Bengali traditions is forced on her and she prefers Deborah over her mother. Usha starts disagreeing her mother’s ways of life and the role she has assumes

“I began to pity my mother; the older I got, the more I saw what a desolate life she led. She had never worked, and during the day she watched soap operas to pass the time. Her only job, every day, was to clean and cook for my father and me.”
In the story, Usha speaks of a happy outcome of such an identity process:

“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.”

At last there is a kind compromise between them.

Usha’s father and Pranab Kaku, despite their shared culture, are opposite to each other in many respects. They have similar career path and have both migrated to America for better future. Pranab Kaku is studying Engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His parents want him to come back after his education for marriage and work. Embraced by the American lifestyle, he starts living and enjoying the American life. He is in love with the American girl, Deborah and decides to marry her and to start his journey of American life. After marriage, he takes himself adrift from Indianness. He absorbs in the American values and gets removed from his family and Bengali circles.

On the other hand, Usha’s father is different from Pranab in many respects. He is highly educated but went to India to marry according to his parents’ wish. Though living in America, he has maintained ties with India and performs his roles as a husband and a father with respect to Indian tradition. He is completely devoted to his work and mainly absent in the story. This is a negative side of his personality that for him, it seems that work is more important than family.

Aparna is the mother of the narrator in “Hell-Heaven.” Pranab calls her ‘Boudi’. She is a perfect Indian family caretaker. Her utmost happiness is in entertaining her husband and educating her daughter for life. Aparna is attracted to her frequent visitor from Bengal. She attempts suicide in her forbidden love. Learning from her own account she thwarts Usha from such relations that would only result in unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

Akash belongs to the third generation diaspora and a consequence of mixed marriage. As a result, he is more distant from their ancestral homeland and culture. Nevertheless, Ruma’s father is positive in this regard. He believes that Akash is a direct biological connection, a sense of continuance of his family beyond his death.
Shoba is upset with her life in America. Moreover, the death of unborn child intensifies the alienation. This leads to confessing secrets to Shukumar. Everything runs in technical ways as if the emotional binding of relation of husband and wife has vanished between Shoba and Shukumar. He fails to restore the previous state of happiness to her.

Lilia is found in an attempt to configure the essence of Indianness by making Mr. Pirzada her object of study. By doing so, she succeeds in defining her own Indian self. She looks at Mr. Pirzada with special respect. She adores his familial ties with his wife and daughters. She is happy that Mr. Pirzada’s family has successful reunited. It is a festive occasion for her.

Mrs. Mina Das is more American than Indian. But it is an irony that the relief she seeks from is an Indian. She is so removed from India that a barefoot man, his head wrapped in a dirty turban, seated on top of a cart of rain sacks pulled by a pair of bullocks is a site to them to be photographed.

Sanjeev and Twinkle, like Shukumar and Shoba, are representing marital discord. Twinkle’s attachment to Christian symbols creates a line of separation from Sanjeev. Subhash and Udayan are similar physically but internally both are unlike. Subhash is not initiator like Udayan. Subhash observes

“Not only had Udayan married before Subhash, but he’d married a woman of his choosing. On his own he’d taken a step that Subhash believed was their parents' place to decide. Here was another example of Udayan pushing ahead of Subhash, of contradicting that he’d come second. Another example of getting his way.”

Lahiri writes about Udayan:

“He was blind to self-constraints, like an animal incapable of perceiving certain colors. But Subhash strove to minimize his existence, as other animals merged with bark or blades of grass.”

She sees many similarities in Subhash as the following:

“The same height, a similar build. Counterparts, companions, though she’d never seen them together. Subhash was a milder version. Compared to Udayan’s, his face was like the slightly flawed impression the man at Immigration had just stamped into her passport, indicating her arrival, stamped over a second time for emphasis.”

He hears news from Radio Moscow, Voice of America, Radio Peking or the BBC. Once he hears about the peasants’ movement in Naxalbari village in
the spring of 1967. Though the village is four hundred miles away from Tollygunge and is in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal, Udayan is greatly moved by the injustice of the landowners to poor peasants. He feels irritated for the government has turned the ‘victims into criminals’. This is true of himself also. He is a young intellectual genuinely concerned with the well-being of poor peasants. He is involved in a noble act of sympathizing poor peasants and helping them to attain justice with his part. But the noble act to the peasants turns to be a terrorist act to the government. Udayan is convinced that the Naxalite movement will solve India’s problems for which Subhash is doubtful. Udayan is optimistic for the movement. Kanu Sanyal’s words that they would certainly be able to make a new sun and a new moon shine in the sky of their great motherland, touches Udayan’s heart from miles away.

Subhash sees the cruelty of his parents to Gauri. Subhash performs two duties namely preventing cruelty and filling the void of his dead brother.

“He thought of her remaining with his parents, living by their rules. His mother’s behavior toward Gauri was insulting, but his father’s passivity was just as cruel. And yet it wasn’t simply cruelty; their treatment of Gauri was deliberate, intended to drive her out. He thought of her becoming a mother, only to lose control of the child. He thought of the child being raised in a joyless house.”

Deeply moved by this, Subhash decides to take her to America which is the only alternative he can provide. He decides to marry her and thus to take his brother’s place and perform the duty of raising his child. Lahiri describes in the following words:

“The only way to prevent it was to take Gauri away. It was all he could do to help her, the only alternative he could provide. And the only way to take her away was to marry her. To take his brother’s place, to raise his child, to come to love Gauri as Udayan had. To follow him in a way that felt perverse, that felt ordained. That felt both right and wrong.”

But expressing his thought to her seems ridiculous to Subhash. He thought that she would not wear the shawl presented to her and would never prepare herself to marry him and go to Rhode Island. This was due to her mourning for Udayan, carrying his child. Subhash knew that he was nothing to her and he would never take Udayan’s place even though his sacrifice was great.
Gauri is not a typical Lahirian woman character. The woman characters of Lahiri particularly those who belong to the first generation e.g. Ashima, Ruma, Mrs. Sen, Laxmi, Chitra and Aparna are more conscious about Indian heritage and strenuously attempt to preserve it. When one meets Gauri as the wife of Udayan, she creates no doubt in his/her mind that she would prefer individuality in America misbehaving Subhash and abandoning her daughter, Bela.

Gauri prepares for America out of the fact that she would be able to remake her life if she leaves Tollygunge and once comes to love Subhash.

“The ligaments that had held her life together were no longer there. Their absence made it possible to couple herself, however prematurely, however desperately, with Subhash. She’d wanted to leave Tollygunge. To forget everything her life had been. And he had handed her the possibility. In the back of her mind she told herself she could come one day to love him, out of gratitude if nothing else.”

But it is also true that for her, Udayan is always present in form of Subhash. She marries Subhash as a means of staying connected to Udayan. It means how intensive her love was for Udayan and throughout the novel her love for him never decreases. Moreover, the child in Gauri constantly reminds her of Udayan’s presence. She feels

“As if she contained a ghost, as Udayan was. The child was a version of him, in that it was both present and absent. Both within her and remote. She regarded it with a sort of disbelief, just as she still did not really believe that Udayan was gone, missing now not only from Calcutta but from every other part of the earth she’d just flown across.”

Guari’s love for Udayan is intense. When she is pregnant with Bela, she thinks that Udayan is present in her. It seems to her that

“Udayan’s ghost was palpable within her, preserved in this room where she spent all her time. When she spoke of him it was an evocation of him. She had not shut down as his parents had.”

Her love for dead Udayan is doubtlessly very intense. But she cannot value living Subhash’s devotion.

Gauri fails to pay the debt to Subhash who take her to America out of his sense of duty after Udayan’s death and affords her a privilege to develop. When years later she returns to Calcutta, she cannot merge herself with the Bengali people. People glances at her with an eye of uncertainty that she is the same Gauri who was Udayan’s wife.
Character of Gauri is important with respect to multiculturalism. She obeys all the rites as a widow for her dead husband. She is the person most remembering Udayan. She seems to be a perfectly Indian woman. But as she steps in America and gains little independence from Subhash, she turns out to be a truly American woman. Gauri refuses to follow and fit into the framework of the role of the traditional Indian Bengali immigrant wife. She acts as a rebel against the oppressive rules. Although it is difficult to empathize with a mother who abandons her child and husband, especially when the husband is the very person who gives her a means of escape from the life of a widow and an unwanted daughter-in-law.

In short, though transplanted to one or many places, the characters’ present is preoccupied with their past and future. Their past refers to Indianness and future to multiculturalism. During the course of the physical journey, moving from purity to hybridity brings several occasions of happiness and unhappiness, celebrations and ceremonies, alienation, displacement, marginalization, culture clash, generation gap, identity crises and so on. It is up to the individuals how to view a particular occasion and how to put something in force depending on what would bring easiness in their life.
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