Chapter III

A Psychoanalytical interpretation of Jhumpa Lahiri’s Narratives

Jhumpa Lahiri has made a tradition of creating exceptionally humane characters in her acclaimed fictional works. Lahiri is a true psychological writer because of the emotional depth and complexities of her characters. This writer credits her life experiences, particularly childhood, for the skill which enables her to capture the humanity in her fictional characters. Lahiri states;

I spent much time in Calcutta as a child- idle but rich time- often at home with my grandmother. I read books, I began to write and to record things. It enabled me to experience solitude ironically, because there were so many people, I could seal myself off psychologically. It was a place where I began to think imaginatively (Lahiri. www.sawnet.org).

Her debut book *Interpreter of Maladies*, is a collection of nine short independent stories and is aptly subtitled *Stories from Bengal, Boston and Beyond*. It is interesting to note that most of the characters are diaspora like their creator. Even more intriguing is the observation that all the characters deal with some kind of inner alienation and conflict. Seven stories out of nine deal with the Indian American interaction and the remaining two treats the Indian characters in the backdrop of cultural beliefs and superstition.
The title of the book itself is taken from one of the short stories and her choice of title book is very revealing. As such, the suggestion that maladies may be interpreted conveys an intensely psychological meaning. Lahiri has always been a very personal writer and her writing seems almost a catalyst. She states in an interview, “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” (Lahiri. www.chipublib.org). Being a child of three countries - having Indian roots but born in London and later, raised in Rhode Island in the USA, Lahiri has admitted to not ever feeling like she belonged to any place. Whether consciously or otherwise, she expresses these very same emotions through her characters. The issue of Diaspora and the immigrant experience constantly run throughout her stories and these themes are intimately psychological in nature.

This stunning collection begins with “A Temporary Matter”, a story about an emotionally estranged young Indian couple in Boston. The rift in Shoba and Shukumar’s marriage had been building up ever since Shoba delivered a stillborn, who would have otherwise been their first born. Shukumar is a research scholar and he had been away in Baltimore for an academic conference when the miscarriage happened. He had gone at Shoba’s insistence. Although she does not blame him for his absence, nevertheless, there is an underlying resentment. Their deteriorating marriage is not helped by their determined refusal to address the cause of their sorrow. Instead, the young couple find reasons to avoid each other by throwing themselves into their respective work, Shoba in her job and Shukumar in his research study. “He had Shoba had become experts at avoiding each other in their three bedroom house, spending as much time on separate floors as possible” (IM 4). In due time, their relationship crumbles as they have blocked their feelings leading to mental anxiety and internal distress which causes them to behave like strangers.
They weren’t like this before. Now he had to struggle to say something that interested her, something that made her look up from her plate, or from her proofreading files. Eventually, he gave up trying to amuse her. He learned not to mind the silences (12).

The couple opens up to each other when their colony experiences an hour of power failure every evening for a few days. Each evening during these hours, they would have dinner by candlelight and under Shoba’s initiative they exchange confessions. “Something happened when the house was dark. They were able to talk to each other again” (19). Their predicament of two people in an intimate relationship being capable of opening up to each other only in the darkness has largely to do with extreme mental anxiety. Psychoanalysis has often stated that a denial to address painful experiences and a blocking of intense emotions leads to anxiety. Repression is believed to give rise to anxiety and to neurotic symptoms. “In Freud’s theory, repression is the fundamental technique people use to allay anxiety caused by conflicts” (Morgan 588).

On the last night of power failure, Shoba announces her decision to move out of their house and adds that she has already found alternative living arrangements. “He was relieved and yet he was sickened. This was what she’d been trying to tell him for the past four evenings. This was the point of her game” (IM 21). Instead of expressing his anger and hurt, Shukumar attempts to hurt her in return by calmly telling her that their stillborn baby had been a boy, something he had never revealed before. He knew that she found solace in the mystery of not knowing the sex of their deceased baby. Shoba and Shukumar may be viewed as tragic victims of anxiety and neurosis which is caused by the
repression of a painful and very personal memory which they could face in reality.

Another interesting as well as acutely psychological nature in this story is the precise characterisation of Shoba and Shukumar. Shoba is the more self-assured and confident one of the pair. It is revealing that she is a financially independent career woman while her husband is still pursuing his studies. This is something Shukumar himself is intensely self conscious about. “Once these images of parenthood had troubled Shukumar, adding to his anxiety that he was still a student at thirty five” (3). Shoba’s fierce, very un Indian independence is reflected in how she had taken the bold decision to move out of their marriage and also arranged her own alternative living arrangement without consulting her husband. Shoba’s self sufficiency is reflected in how “She keeps the bonuses from her job in a separate bank account in her name” (6). On the other hand, Shukumar is something of a man child. He is endearingly helpless and also seems to be in awe of his wife’s confidence. “It astonished him, her capacity to think ahead” (6). His timidity in his own house around his own wife is achingly revealed in how “he feared that putting on a record in his own house might be rude” (5).

Psychoanalysis places importance on an individual’s biography in order to ascertain behavioural traits. This may be applied to Shukumar’s feelings of insecurity. It is relevant that Shukumar’s father had died early and since the story does not mention any other sibling, presumably, Shukumar is an only child. Growing up without a father figure may explain his feelings of insecurity. His closeness to his mother is revealed in how Shoba, during their nightly confessional exchanges, revealed to him how she took the opportunity to check his address book when his mother had called him on the phone. They had only known each other for two weeks then but she already knew that a call
from his mother would be a long one (13). Another confession of Shoba is about how she had lied about working late and gone out for a drink with a male colleague named Gillian instead, during one of his mother’s visits. “He (Shukumar) imagined her complaining and Gillian sympathising about visits from in laws” (17). It seems significant that two out of three confessions from Shoba involves another woman; Shukumar’s mother.

According to Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, marital partner choice, as well as marital relationships, are defined much before marriage was concluded. Relationship with marital partner is determined by relationships with parents and important persons in one’s childhood (Markovic. www.facta.junis.ni.ac).

The possibility of a parental fixation, in this case, a mother fixation in Shukumar makes sense. It need not be sexual in nature as according to classic psychoanalysis idea but it is possible that Shukumar’s intense mothering by his mother affected his confidence and consequently, his marriage.

“Sexy”, is the only story where the protagonist is not an Indian character but Miranda, a twenty two year old American. At a first reading, “Sexy” comes across as a story from the “other” woman’s point of view in an extramarital relationship. Miranda is engaged in an affair with the much married, smooth talking Indian man named Dev. A further critical reading reveals that this story has dominant psychoanalytic themes. Miranda has a rather indiscreet Indian colleague who continually regales her with the devastation of her cousin whose husband has fallen in love with another woman. This other woman is a young English girl. This interracial, extramarital affair between two people who are strangers to Miranda bears a strong resemblance to her own affair with Dev. At
first, Miranda listens only out of polite interest and does not confess her own affair to Laxmi. However, she feels guilty about her own affair whenever Laxmi updates her about the agony of her cousin, the betrayed wife. Her husband wanted a divorce and she was to leave with her son to her parents’ house in California to recuperate. Laxmi then convinces her devastated cousin to stop over at Boston where they were. At a last notice, Miranda is requested to babysit young Rohin so that his heartbroken mother and Laxmi could spend time together.

Rohin is seven years old and quite precocious. He calmly tells Miranda that his father is having an affair with another woman and also about his mother’s devastation. The account of their time together is extremely curious. Miranda does not treat Rohin like the little boy that he is, nor does Rohin behave like one. The young boy asks her to draw things in her apartment so that he can memorize their day together. He tells her, “Because we’re never going to see each other ever again” (104). Miranda obliges when Rohin asks her to draw him. The tale takes an interestingly peculiar turn when Rohin discovers a slinky lingerie hanging in Miranda’s closet which she had purchased with her lover, Dev in mind. Rohin then asks Miranda to wear the lingerie. What is even more curious than Rohin asking Miranda to put it on for him is the fact that Miranda actually obliges. She tells him to stay outside while she changes into the lingerie but seven year old Rohin refuses and states, “But my mother always takes off her clothes in front of me” (106). Miranda replies, “I’m not your mother” (106). The description of Miranda carrying him out the room is very intimate. “When he refused to stand, she picked him up. He was heavier than she expected, and he clung to her, his legs wrapped firmly around her hips, his head resting against her chest” (106). After Miranda changes into the lingerie, she asks Rohin to zip her up and he innocently declares, “You’re sexy” (107). This declaration evokes in Miranda, a memory of Dev calling her
sexy. She wonders whether this young boy even knew the meaning of the word and asks him what he thought it meant. Rohin replies, “It means loving someone you don’t know” (107). It is obvious that the boy must have picked up on bits of adult conversation regarding the recent unfortunate happenings in his parents’ marriage.

The concept of a young boy subconsciously identifying with his father is very psychological in nature. Rohin is aware of his father’s affair with an unknown English woman and he regards Miranda as an equivalent to the mysterious “sexy” woman and himself as his father. Miranda, on the other hand is a confused and lonely young woman. She is feeling neglected by her lover Dev who rarely has time to spend with her because of his wife’s presence. She crosses the line in indulging a child’s sexual curiosity. In the end however, Rohin’s declaration of her being sexy seems to shock her out of her reverie and she cries after putting him to bed. “But Rohin still slept. She guessed that he was used to it now, to the sound of a woman crying” (109). Her affair with Dev ends shortly after.

“This Blessed House” is another story which explores the curious dynamics of male female relationships. This is a tale about a newlywed Indo American couple named Twinkle and Sanjeev who are in the process of settling into a new house in Connecticut. To her immense delight, Twinkle continuously discovers Christian paraphernalia in their new house. She is enamoured with the Christian icons and proudly displays them with a childlike enthusiasm which exasperates and irritates Sanjeev. This leads to friction between the couple.

Twinkle and Sanjeev are two extremely different personalities, a fact which Sanjeev realises only after marriage. Theirs was a whirlwind romance
and the two had gotten married within four months of getting acquainted. Lahiri possesses finesse for details and beautifully describes how Twinkle and Sanjeev are polar opposites. Sanjeev is a thirty three year old successful Engineer with brilliant career prospects ahead of him. He is ambitious and has a relatively serious demeanour which makes him take life very seriously. He is also very conscious about social appearances. “Though he was of average build, his cheeks had a plumpness to them; this, along with the eyelashes, detracted, he feared, from what he hoped was a distinguished profile” (140). Being of average height, he also gets irritated when his wife insists on wearing high heels as she would tower over him. His main reason for disliking the Christian paraphernalia is not due to any aesthetic nor religious reasons but because of concern as to what people may think since they were Hindus. He organises his engineering texts from MIT in alphabetical order and listens to classical music. One wonders whether Sanjeev loves this genre of music partly because it is “respectable”. As successful as he is, Sanjeev is insecure and self conscious.

His wife Twinkle, on the other hand does not take herself seriously, nor does she bother with other people’s opinions like her husband. She does as she pleases, when she pleases. Twinkle is twenty seven years of age and had been abandoned by a struggling American actor just before she met Sanjeev. She is often frivolous and instead of arguing sensibly, throws tantrums like a child when Sanjeev voices his displeasure over her actions. The fact that she was in a relationship with an American actor before she met Sanjeev seems significant. It shows that she is more laidback and at ease around different kinds of people. Sanjeev, on the other hand, does not feel comfortable around people in general whether people of other nationalities or other Indian Americans in Connecticut. “He often wondered why they included him in their circle. He had little in
common with any of them” (144). Sanjeev is overly bothered with the opinions of people whom he doesn’t necessarily care about.

The psyche of this couple presents a strong dichotomy to each other. It is a mystery as to why a good looking and successful man with an attractive wife would have reasons for insecurity. Although Sanjeev’s family background is not mentioned in the story, it is evident that he is a self made man with no connections, who has worked hard to get to where he is now.

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

Sanjeev is understandably very careful not to lose what he has achieved. Perhaps this is the reason why he constantly requires assurance from others. Sanjeev’s dislike at having his wife tower over him appears vain and superfluous but he actually suffers from an inferiority complex. He is bewildered when guests arrive for their housewarming party. “It bewildered Sanjeev that it was for him, and his house, and his wife, that they had all gone to so much care” (152). Sanjeev is a poignant character who can be better understood from a psychological perspective.

Twinkle, true to her name, is like a little girl. She is a child woman who does as she pleases and throws tantrums in the face of obstruction. She sleeps in the middle of the day claiming that she is bored even though there is a lot of cleaning up and unpacking to do. “They didn’t bother her, these scattered,
unsettled matters” (141). She is easily excited with little things and now, the centre of her curiosity and delight revolved around the Christians paraphernalia. She exclaims to her friend over the telephone, “Everyday is like a treasure hunt!” (141). In fact, most times, Twinkle appears to be more childish than childlike and is often very immature. Life is a game to her.

Psychoanalysis often accords the significance of names and this idea is apt when describing Twinkle. “Nicknamed after a nursery rhyme, she has yet to shed a childhood endearment” (142). The significance of Twinkle’s name gains significance when Sanjeev introduces her to his friends at their housewarming party. He introduces her as Tanima, which is odd as no one including himself, uses that name. Sanjeev’s act in introducing his wife by the name “Tanima” reveals his deep concern with respectability and perhaps on a psychological level, a desire for his wife to be more mature and sophisticated. Twinkle then easily interrupts and says, “Call me Twinkle” (151). She is artless and her refusal to be introduced by another name suggests an attachment to her name. Names are an integral part of one’s identity and to change one’s name is a subconscious desire to change one’s identity.

The names of individuals play an important role in the organization of their ego defense patterns and are cathetic and utilized from the point of view of ego defenses in a manner similar to an organ or body part. Freud was well aware of the importance of names and discussed mechanisms and causes of forgetting names, which consciously or unconsciously have unpleasant, or other associations, and the distortion or falsification of names (Murphy. http://www.pep-web.org).
Sanjeev’s embarrassment about his wife’s name and Twinkle’s attachment to her childish pet name which she refuses to shed in adult life is a curious psychoanalytic play.

“When Mr. Pirzada came to dine” is an aching tale narrated through the eyes of ten year old diaspora Lilia. The young girl’s fascination with her parents’ visitor Mr. Pirzada is not only poignant and innocent but also intriguing from a psychological level. The story unfolds in the autumn of 1981 when Pakistan was then engaged in a Civil War. Mr. Pirzada, a family friend and regular visitor of young Lilia’s parents was a professor in Botany at a local University in the United Stated while his family, consisting of a wife and seven daughters were in Dacca. Every evening, Mr. Pirzada and Lilia’s parents would listen to the radio for news of the on going turmoil in the former’s homeland. Mr. Pirzada’s homeland Dacca is now the capital of Bangladesh but was then a part of East Pakistan.

The intrusion of politics in the story does not make the dynamics of human relationship take a secondary place to political ideology. “Instead, we see politics as a slice of life, as an alienable part of the reality in which we live in. In this story, Lahiri is able to combine micro experience with macro events” (Nityanandam 32). Nor is this story a platform for political ideology. Rather, there is no boundary between the political and the social. They are merged together and dissolves into the lives of the characters in the story. Even though politics dominate the story, Lahiri, in her usual distinct style gives priority to the feelings, emotions and turmoil experienced by her characters. The stress is on how politics and its ideology affects the characters and not vice versa.
Mr Pirzada’s predicament is immensely psychological in nature. There is undoubtedly a sense of guilt he feels for living a safe and comfortable life in America while his family struggles in war torn Dacca. The fact that he is in America to earn a living and provide for his family is irrelevant and the sense of guilt persists. This is symbolised in how Mr. Pirzada’s pocket watch is always set to the time zone in Dacca. There seems to be a psychological comfort gained in constant remembrance.

Before eating Mr. Pirzada always did a curious thing. He took out a plain silver watch without a band, which he kept in his breast pocket, held it briefly to one of his tufted ears, and wound it with three swift flicks of his thumb and forefinger. Unlike the watch on his wrist, the pocket watch, he had explained to me, was set to the local time in Dacca, eleven hours ahead. For the duration of the meal the watch rested on his folded napkin on the coffee table. He never seemed to consult it (IM 30).

Young Lilia’s fascination with her parent’s visitor borders on an innocent but a tad obsessive crush. She meticulously observes every little detail about him from his mannerisms to his sartorial sense in clothing. Lilia sweetly admits to being enamoured by Mr. Pirzada’s attention whenever he presented her with sweets.

I was charmed by the presence of Mr. Pirzada’s rotund elegance, and flattered by the faint theatricality of his attentions, yet unsettled by the superb ease of his gestures, which made me feel, for an instant, like a stranger in my own home (29).
Unlike most children, instead of consuming the sweet treats immediately Lilia reveals, “I coveted each evening’s treasure as I would a jewel, or a coin from a buried kingdom, and I would place it in a small keepsake box made of carved sandalwood beside my bed…” (29). Although she may not realize it herself, Lilia is slightly jealous of Mr. Pirzada’s family back in Dacca whenever she observed him winding his watch to a different time zone. “When I saw it that night, as he wound it and arranged it on the coffee table, an uneasiness possessed me; life, I realised, was being lived in Dacca first” (30). Though at a tender age, Lilia displays a touching sensitivity towards other people and she even prays for the safety of Mr. Pirzada’s family (32). Her fascination for Mr. Pirzada is to such an extent that she sneaked a book on Pakistan to read during library hour at school even though she had been assigned specific books to look up by her teacher. “There was a chapter about Dacca, and I began to read about its rainfall, and its jute population” (33). She would have continued reading if not for her teacher who found out what she was reading and replaced the book as it was not part of Lilia’s book report.

In the end, after Pakistan’s surrender, Mr. Pirzada leaves for Dacca to find out about the fate of his family. Lilia’s family receives a card from him after several months saying that he was reunited with his family and thanked them for their love and hospitality. That night, Lilia’s parents celebrated the good news with a special dinner. “…We toasted our water glasses, but I did not feel like celebrating. Though I had not seen him for months, it was only then that I felt Mr. Pirzada’s absence” (42). The knowledge of Mr. Pirzada’s reunion with his family drove home the reality that Mr. Pirzada would no longer be part of her life. Little Lilia’s innocent outpourings of varied emotions is achingly poignant and the beauty of this tale lies in the narrative purity of a sensitive young girl’s tumultuous psyche. Lilia had religiously been eating a piece of Halloween candy each night in remembrance of Mr. Pirzada and his family.
After knowing that he would not return, Lilia ends her narration with the lines, “That night there was no need to. Eventually I threw them away” (42). Lahiri’s ends the story on a deeply symbolic and therefore, psychological note

The title story “Interpreter of Maladies”, takes place within the span of a single day. Mr. Kapasi, a tour guide drives the Indian American Das family to the Sun Temple at Konarak in Orissa. Initially, Mrs. Das is quite indifferent towards their guide Mr. Kapasi but when she learns about his alternative profession as an interpreter of maladies, her indifference quickly transforms to interest. Mr. Kapasi, who speaks Gujurati, takes care of the Gujurati patients by translating their ailments to his employer, a doctor who does not understand the language. In this way, he acts as an “interpreter” of ailments and maladies. For some reason, Mrs. Das found his job as an interpreter quite “romantic” and her newfound intrigue turns the simple Mr. Kapasi’s head.

The story ends with Mrs. Das overestimating the nature of Mr. Kapasi’s job as an interpreter of maladies and she divulges an intimate secret to him; a secret she has revealed to no one. Mr. Kapasi is shocked and disillusioned by the casual nature in which Mrs. Das reveals that her eight year old son Bobby is not the biological son of her husband but is actually the outcome of a clandestine moment of pure physical gratification. Mr. Kapasi’s ardour evaporates and he finally sees the real Mrs. Das. “He looked at her, in her red plaid skirt and strawberry T-shirt, a woman not yet thirty, who loved neither her husband nor her children, who had already fallen out of love with life” (66). Mrs. Das, at first glance is not a particularly likeable character. She is aloof, vain and her disinterest in her own family makes her come across as cold and frigid. However, once the reader understands her troubled psyche, Mrs. Das becomes a tragic figure. She is simply then, a young girl married too young at twenty one and overwhelmed by motherhood.
Always tired, she declined invitations from one or two college girlfriends, to have lunch or shop in Manhattan. Eventually the friends stopped calling her, so that she was left at home all day with the baby, surrounded by toys that made her trip when she walked or wince when she sat, always cross and tired (64).

Mrs. Das’ act in choosing to divulge her secret to a stranger, much less, a tour guide, reveals what a lonely figure she is. She implores Mr. Kapasi to suggest a remedy for her pain and tells him, “Eight years, Mr.Kapasi, I’ve been in pain eight years, I was hoping you could help me feel better, say the right thing” (65). Mr.Kapasi’s suggestion that what Mrs.Das mistook for pain may actually be a guilt complex deeply offends Mrs.Das and their brief camaraderie ends abruptly. Whether Mrs.Das’ ailment is pain or guilt, as suggested by Mr.Kapasi, it is evident that her ailment is deeply rooted in suppressed emotions and unexpressed desires. The burden of carrying a terrible secret seems to have disturbed her psyche and she experiences physical pain. Her intense frustration and paranoia is evident in the following lines, “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? (65). This reaction is deeply rooted in psychological imbalances.

The desires of the Id are powerful forces that must be expressed in some way: prohibiting their expression does not abolish them. A person with an urge to do something for which he will be punished becomes anxious. Anxiety is a state of uncomfortable tension that the person is motivated to reduce. One way of reducing anxiety is to express the impulse in disguised form,
thereby avoiding punishment by society and condemnation by the superego (Hilgard 376).

Freud’s concept of the Id, Ego and Superego is immensely relevant in Mrs. Das’ predicament. She is burdened by the suppression of her innermost desires i.e., her Id by the Ego, i.e., the reality principle and over time, this repression has affected her physical state. Mrs. Das is a classic literary epitome of a deeply repressed woman and this repression has ultimately manifested into neurosis.

“A Real Durwan” is based in India, with the partition as a backdrop for the story. The main protagonist is Boori Ma, the old sweeper of the stairwell who is a Bangladeshi immigrant deported to Calcutta after Partition. Boori Ma constantly laments about the “glory days” of her past and reminisces over the luxurious and comfortable life she once led in her hometown. The tenants of the building where Boori Ma sweeps are often sceptical about her stories as they keep changing with every narration. “So she garbled facts. She contradicted herself. She embellished almost everything. But her rants were so persuasive, her fretting so vivid, that it was not easy to dismiss her” (IM 72). She would mournfully compare her glorious past to the poverty and many hardships that she faces at present. Old Mr. Chatterjee’s constant refrain is, “Boori Ma’s mouth is full of ashes, but she is the victim of changing times” (72). Boori Ma is an enigma; no one knows for certain whether her stories are real or just a figment of her imagination. “Whether there was any truth to Boori Ma’s litanies no one could be sure” (71). The tenants would continuously debate the accuracy of her tales but in the end, they all agreed that she was harmless and a superb entertainer, if nothing else.
Boori Ma is an intensely intriguing figure, particularly from a psychological perspective. As previously stated, it is not certain whether her litanies are true or concocted by an imaginative mind. What seems even more intriguing is that the old woman tells her stories with the conviction of truth. Unless proven otherwise through facts, it is rather probable than not, that Boori Ma is suffering from delusion. This is very psychological in nature. It is also suspicious that her grandiose stories are never quite consistent. This often provokes the children to mock her. “‘Which was it, by truck or by cart?’ the children sometimes asked her on their way to play cops and robbers in the alley” (72). To this Boori Ma would reply in a nonchalant manner that it does not matter to her whether they believe her or otherwise. “Believe me, don’t believe me. My life is composed of such grieves you cannot even dream them” (72). This nonchalant remark is very revealing. Perhaps Boori Ma does not care whether her listeners believe her; perhaps the purpose of her stories is to gain attention or to distract herself from her present miserable existence. A classic symptom of delusional people is to make up stories of grandeur that presents them in an enviable position. Victims of delusion also delude themselves into believing their own concocted and fantastical stories. “When problems become too much for us, we sometimes seek the “solution” of escape into a dream world, a solution based in fantasy rather than reality” (Hilgard 438).

There is an interesting, seemingly minor exchange in this story which gives weight that old Boori Ma may indeed suffer from delusion. Boori Ma had been having sleepless nights and she was convinced that something was in her sleeping quilt. She asked a kindly neighbour, Mrs. Dalal to inspect her quilt. “‘Whatever is inside this quilt is keeping me awake at night, Tell me, where do you see them’” (IM 74). When Mrs. Dalal replied that she couldn’t see anything, Boori Ma insisted that the creatures must have wings which made Mrs. Dalal chastise her gently by saying, “‘Boori Ma, you are imagining things’ ” (74).
The old woman staunchly protested when Mrs. Dalal suggested that she might be suffering from prickly heat. “But Boori Ma preferred to think that what irritated her bed, what stole her sleep, what burned like peppers across her thinning scalp and skin, was of a less mundane origin” (75). There is a robbery in the building towards the end of the story and the tenants threw the old woman out, believing that she must have had something to do with the robbery. Her protest of innocence falls on deaf ears. “‘For years we have put up with your lies,’ they retorted. ‘You expect us, now, to believe you’ ” (82). The old woman walks away muttering, “Believe me, believe me” (82). We are not certain whether this plea to be believed is directed at the tenants or herself. Lahiri has cleverly ended this story without disclosing the veracity of her protagonist’s claims. We can therefore, only debate as to the mental balance of the woman. Nevertheless, Boori Ma remains an enigmatic psychoanalytical figure.

“Mrs. Sen’s” is a story which stands out particularly due to its bittersweet poignancy. Lahiri’s breathtaking sensitivity as a diaspora writer is beautifully showcased in this fine piece of writing. She has managed to convey so much emotion and feeling through a few simple words and sentences. In this story, Mrs. Sen, an immigrant in America, is a babysitter for eleven year old American Eliot. At first reading, this story appears to be about the immigrant experience and diaspora, which it certainly is. However, a closer scrutiny from a purely humane point of view without the burden of labels present a simpler and increasingly poignant picture. This then, becomes a tale about human loneliness; an emotional loneliness which is therefore, deeply psychological in nature. Mrs. Sen is a thirty year old Bengali woman, struggling to adjust to an alien world. Her only identity is through her husband, Mr. Sen who is a mathematics professor in a local university. As far as Mrs. Sen is concerned,
“home” would always mean India and through her childlike conversation with little Elliot, we understand how intensely she misses her homeland.

Through the finely detailed description of Mrs.Sen’s daily habits, we gather that she has not adjusted to the American way of life at all. She prepares only Indian food using a traditional curved blade, shuns western wear and dons the sari regularly while also applying vermillion in the parting of her hair. Mrs. Sen’s repeated attempts to learn driving is symbolic of her desire to gain control in her life. During one such futile attempt, she gives in to frustration and says “‘No more…I hate it. I hate driving. I won’t go on’” (131). The emotional manner in which she says the words, with her forehead resting against the top of the steering wheel suggests that she is referring to something other than mere driving.

It is ironic that amongst all the so called “grown ups”, surrounding Mrs.Sen, it is the child Eliot who seems to comprehend her loneliness. “Two things, Eliot learned, made Mrs.Sen happy. One was the arrival of a letter from her family” (121). “The other thing that made Mrs.Sen happy was fish from the seaside” (123). Mrs.Sen’s attempt to surround herself with all things familiar does not ease her loneliness. This is proof that loneliness is a predicament of the psyche. The concept of home is therefore arbitrary, in accordance with a person’s emotional upbringing. For example, that a sound sleep requires peace and quiet is the general consensus for most people. However, this is not so for Mrs. Sen. “‘Here, in this place where Mr.Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence’” (115). The tale ends with Mrs. Sen’s final effort at driving ending in a minor accident with Elliot inside the car as well. As a result, Elliot’s mother withdraws him from the care of Mrs. Sen even though neither was injured. Outwardly, Mrs. Sen is a woman who appears to have it all but inside, she is tortured soul gripped by desperate loneliness.
“The Treatment of Bibi Halder” is a tale reminiscent of Freud’s revolutionary and much controversial “Hysteria”. This story is deeply psychological in nature and can also be aptly interpreted through the psychoanalytic concept of “Eros” i.e., the sexual drive and “Thanatos”, the death or destructive drive. The protagonist is a twenty-nine-year-old woman named Bibi Halder who suffers from a mysterious ailment which regularly results in fits and bouts of delirium. Bibi Halder had undergone a series of antidotes and treatments including allopathic, homeopaths, ayurvedics; all in vain. “Over time, all branches of the medical arts had been consulted” (158). Religious and superstitious antidotes had also been experimented with but nothing could cure her ailment. Bibi Halder lived with her cousin Halder and his wife where she was put up in a storage room on the roof of a building where a number of families resided as tenants. Bibi Halder would often bemoan her miserable fate loudly to the married women. “Each day she unloaded her countless privations upon us, until it became apparent that Bibi wanted a man” (160). Bibi Halder regularly expressed her envy of brides and mothers until finally, the womenfolk decided to find her a man. “Anticipation began to plague her with such ferocity that the thought of a husband, on which all her hopes were pinned threatened to send her into another attack” (160). When a man failed to materialise, she became maudlin and eventually collapsed in paroxysms. Bibi Halder’s malaise statement, “I will never be cured, never married” (161), is intensely revealing.

In psychology, the term hysteria was once used to describe a medical condition thought to affect only women. Symptoms of the illness included partial paralysis, hallucinations and nervousness. The term is thought to originate from ancient Greek physician Hippocrates, who associated these symptoms with the
movement of a woman's uterus throughout different locations in
the body. The term hysteria is from the Greek _hysteria_, which
means uterus (Cherry. [http://psychology.about.com]).

Eventually, much to Bibi Halder’s delight, an outrageous new treatment
was prescribed by a doctor. “It was there, after performing a series of blood
tests, that the doctor in charge of Bibi’s case, exasperated, concluded that a
marriage would cure her” (161). News spread far once this pronouncement
was made. “Apparently some activity was what the poor girl needed all along”
(162). The men folk would murmur indelicacies and the women blushed and
agreed that, “‘Relations will calm her blood’” (162). According to Freud’s
hysteria, repression of sexual desire in a woman could make her hysterical,
resulting in fits. As outrageous as this idea may seem, especially to feminists, it
cannot be denied that mysterious nature of Bibi Hlder’s ailment, coupled with
her acknowledged desires propels her as an ideal candidate for Freudian
hysteria.

Both Breuer and Frued came to think that hysterical symptoms
substitute normal behaviour and have sense and meaning. Both
also agreed that if the unknown meaning is uncovered, the
hysteric symptoms will disappear (Singh 166).

Consequently after the doctor’s pronouncement, Bibi Halder enjoyed a
brief time of anticipation by beautifying herself and preparing for a conjugal
life. Bibi and the other women forced Halder and his wife, who barely tolerated
Bibi, to put an advertisement in the local newspaper in order to solicit a groom.
Towards the end however, due to the widespread knowledge of Bibi’s
condition, no man came forward, not even the old lonely four tooth widower
could be persuaded to propose. Bibi Halder’s dejection seemed to trigger her
baffling ailment and she began to suffer attacks more frequently than before. “Another seizure, and another, went unchecked” (IM 169). At the same time, dissent in the Halder household grew and reached a heated climax when the Halder couple lost their infant baby girl. Due to superstitious beliefs, they blamed Bibi for their loss, claiming that she had infected their baby. Finally, the Halders decide to move away to start a new life, leaving Bibi Halder behind. They left an envelope containing three hundred rupees under Bibi’s door the day they left and was not heard of again. No other relatives would take her and Bibi started to live the life of a recluse by making her home in a little storage room on the roof of the building. The neighbours would try to look after her by donating what they could spare. All is quiet for a few months and one fateful morning, some neighbours noticed vomit by the cistern tap. After this was observed a second time, the tenants went up to check on Bibi only to discover that the girl was four months pregnant. Bibi would not reveal any details of what happened or who the father was. “In vain we searched for traces of the assault, some sign of the intrusion, but the room was swept and in order” (172). With the help of the kind neighbours, Bibi manages to start a modest business and carried her baby to full term, finally delivering a son. Bibi became calm and sober towards the end, never suffering an attack, never revealing what happened to her.

For years afterward, we wondered who in our town had disgraced her. A few of our servants were questioned, and in tea stalls and bus stands, possible suspects were debated and dismissed. But there was no point carrying out an investigation. She was, to the best of our knowledge, cured (172).

That fact that Bibi Halder’s symptoms disappeared as mysteriously as they appeared gives sufficient proof that her condition was not physical ailment
in the usual sense of the word. It is more psychological in nature owing to repression of desires which in turn gave birth to hysteria. It is then, only fitting that she became ‘cured’ after experiencing ‘relations’ and becoming a mother. The fact that Bibi became increasingly melancholic and longed for marriage, an euphemism for sexual relations, underlines the necessity of the psychoanalytic sexual life drive known as Eros. As previously explained, Eros is the intrinsic sexual drive which gives the desire to create life and reproduce. Eros is necessary for an individual’s health and wellbeing. As the fulfilment of this primal instinct was denied to Bibi, she unconsciously expressed her frustrations by self destructive behavior through Thanatos i.e., the destructive or death drive. “Freud believed that people are driven, fundamentally, by unconscious, animalistic, instinctual urges, particularly lust (eros) and aggression (thanatos)” (Wilderdom. www.wilderdom.com).

“The Third and Final Continent” is the final story in this stunning collection and it is fitting that it remains so. While the ending of the previous stories are somewhat vague in nature and open to various interpretation, this particular story has a concrete and conclusive ending. This tale ends on an optimistic note which gives hope to the readers about the predicament of diasporas. This tale is greatly reminiscent of Anurag Mathur’s *The Inscrutable Americans*. In Mathur’s book, the main protagonist Gopal is something of a village bumpkin who migrates from his village to the United States where he finds everything alien and strange. Lahiri’s story is also an account of a simple Indian man struggling to adapt to a strange new world in the overseas. The plot of the two aforementioned stories are therefore, greatly similar. However, the tone is entirely unique to each. While Mathur’s tale is told with comical, tongue in cheek humour, Lahiri’s story is sombre and poignant.
Lahiri’s story is about a Bengali gentleman who first started life in exile as a student in England. The manner which this tale unfolds is a reflection of the psyche and condition of a typical immigrant, who leaves his small hometown with dreams of making a better life in foreign shores. The protagonist says, “I left India in 1964 with a certificate in commerce and the equivalent, in those days of ten dollars to my name” (173). He lives a frugal lifestyle, while struggling with feelings of loneliness and alienation. Just when he was getting used to English ways, his job requires him to move to America. He realises that American ways are very different from the English and he goes through an unavoidable cycle of alienation and adjustment. His initial feelings of unsettlement in the United States is vividly detailed in the following lines;

Car horns, shrill and prolonged, blared one after another…The noise was constantly distracting, at times suffocating. I felt it deep in my ribs, just as I had felt the furious drone of the engine on the SS Roma. But there was no ship’s deck to escape to, no glittering ocean to thrill my soul, no breeze to cool my face, no one to talk to (175).

The above lines beautifully conveys how entering America makes him feel like he had just entered foreign shores from India all over again. It did not matter that he had already been an immigrant in England for many years. In America, he soon becomes the tenant of an old eccentric lady named Mrs. Croft who is a hundred and three years old. Mrs. Croft is a woman stuck in the past and has a peculiar nature. Gradually, he learns to adjust to her somewhat baffling and eccentric manners and they forge a relationship of mutual respect. At the same time, our protagonist has gotten married to a woman named Mala, courtesy the Indian system of arranged marriages. When Mala arrives to join him in America, they are practically strangers and therefore, behave very
awkward towards each other. It is ironic that he had become used to everything in his adopted country except his wife who is from his very own ancestral land. “The only thing I was not used to was Mala” (190). He had to learn to share his life intimately with someone after being alone for so long.

The life and experiences of the nameless protagonist shows us how feelings of loneliness and homesickness has largely to do with the psyche rather than any geographical or physical barriers. Isolation is most intensely felt emotionally. The protagonist’s first bout of rootlessness after arriving in England may be termed as a result of homesickness and alienation. However, it is interesting that he feels the same after shifting to America. This was after he had already being a diaspora in England for a considerable amount of time as a student. Therefore, the feelings of unsettlement is not due to nostalgia in missing his homeland. Moreover, he initially feels completely detached from his own wife while waiting for her to join him in America. “In those six weeks, I regarded her arrival as I would the arrival of a coming month, or season-something inevitable, but meaningless at the time” (189). Emotional detachment, loneliness, alienation, nostalgia are all psychological predicaments. It is not the physical but what is intangible which creates these disruptions in the human psyche. In the end however, the story ends on a hopeful note. Our protagonist and his wife learn to love, create a family and carve a comfortable life in America. The former is saddened when he discovers the demise of his old landlady, Mrs. Croft in the obituary section of the local newspaper. He reflects and draws strength through the life of Mrs.Croft and states, “If she could lead a life spanning a little more than a century witnessing the various upheavals in the world, he could also live a life spanning the three continents” (Narzary 71). Only we know through a psychological reading, that the three continents are spanned within the psyche.
Lahiri’s second collection, *Unaccustomed Earth* made its appearance in 2008. Like its predecessor, this book is also a collection of short stories and contains dominant autobiographical strains of its creator. Although the subject matter and narrative technique remains the same, this literary laurel showcases the growth in Lahiri’s maturity as a writer. This stunning compilation consists of eight short powerful stories and is divided into two parts. The first part of the book contains five short independent stories and the remaining three stories in the second part of the book are interrelated but nevertheless, complete stories on their own. The stories are more intense and full of underlying angst. *Unaccustomed Earth* is poignantly introduced with a quotation from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Custom House*:

> Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall sterile their roots into unaccustomed (quot. In UE ix)

As echoed in the above extract, there is a strong garden metaphor in the book. Psychoanalysis has always held the method of symbolisation as crucial in understanding hidden meanings and intent. It is therefore only apt that this collection begins with the title story, “Unaccustomed Earth”. The main protagonist Ruma, a second generation diaspora is married to Adam, an American. The couple have a three year old son named Akash. This tale revolves around the visit of Ruma’s widowed father, a retired 70 year old Indian American. There is a strong sense of psychological anxiety within Ruma and her father which stems from identity crisis. The two are both subconsciously in a quest towards self affirmation and acceptance. Ruma is filled with anxiety at the thought her father’s impending visit. She is caught
between two cultures; that of India, her ancestral home and America, her adopted country. The Indian part of her feels guilty over her widowed father living alone and she feels obligated to ask him to move in with her family as is the norm in traditional Indian families. At the same time, she dreads that he may actually accept her offer as she is not sure whether she wants him in her life or not. Ruma’s Hamlet like indecisiveness and tormented psyche is better understood from a psychoanalytical perspective. She is a second generation diaspora and is familiar with the Western culture where people are more independent. “Ruma feared that her father would become a responsibility, an added demand, continuously present in a way she was no longer used to” (UE 7). Ruma and her father share a very formal relationship unlike the bond she had with her late mother. Her father had previously rang Ruma, asking whether he could spend a week at her home.

“You’re always welcome here, Baba,” she’d told her father on the phone. “You know you don’t have to ask”. Her mother would not have asked. “We’re coming to see you in July”, she would have informed Ruma, the plane tickets already in hand (5).

Her widowed father was now retired and spent his time travelling around Europe. The postcards that he occasionally send Ruma reveals the distant relationship between father and daughter. “Her father wrote succinct impersonal accounts of the things he had seen and done...occasionally, there was a sentence about the weather. But there was never a sense of her father’s presence in those places” (4). Adam was away the week that Ruma’s father visited. He was an understanding husband and had advised Ruma to do what would make her happy, even if that meant having his father in law live with them. Despite her apprehensions, Ruma gradually discovers how easy and calming it was to have her father around. He was not fussy about his food and
helped around the house by washing the dishes even though she protested that he need not bother. An avid gardener, Ruma’s father also made a small garden outside her backyard during his brief stay. This unconscious act endears him to Ruma. “She felt flattered by his interest in the place in which she lived, by his desire to make it more beautiful” (42). Ruma’s father also established a bond with little Akash and read bedtime stories to his grandson. By the end of his stay, “She (Ruma) didn’t feel tortured any longer” (47). She not only wanted but needed her father to stay with her by moving in. Ruma’s father declines however, gently telling her that his home was elsewhere. Ruma cries when her father refused the offer.

He knew that it was not for his sake that his daughter was asking him to live here. It was for hers. She needed him, as he’d never felt she’d needed him before, apart from the obvious things he provided her in the course of his life. And because of this the offer upset him more (53).

Ruma’s prolonged Hamlet like indecisiveness and tormented psyche may be better understood from a psychological perspective. Although a grown woman with a life that seems enviable outwardly, she remains very insecure inside. She feels estranged from the people closest to her, including her husband and child. She feels alienated from her own loving husband as she believes that he cannot understand her fears and dilemmas with regard to her initial indecision over whether to ask her father to move in or not. Their marriage is not as smooth as one might believe.

He reminded her that her father was in good health for his age, content where he was. But he didn’t object to the idea of her father living with them...She knew he (Adam) was trying to help.
But nothing was making her happy; recently, in the course of conversation, he’s pointed that out, too (7).

Ruma is unable to forge close friendships with anyone. She is polite to everyone but “It felt unnatural to have to reach out to strangers at this point in her life” (23). Ruma shared a close but often antagonistic relationship with her mother due to the generation as well as culture gap. “There were times Ruma felt closer to her mother in death than she had in life, an intimacy born simply of thinking of her so often, of missing her” (27). Ruma feels increasingly estranged from her own three year old son Akash as he gradually grows. “In spite of her efforts he was turning into the sort of American child that she was always careful not to be, the sort that horrified and intimidated her mother; imperious, afraid of eating things” (23).

The protagonist’s tortured psyche alienates her from everyone. This may stem from a kind of repression during early childhood. Although unconscious, Ruma longs for her father’s attention and approval. Her father is no doubt, a dutiful parent who provides for his family but is otherwise aloof and not given to outward displays of affection. Ruma recalls how as a little girl in school, her teacher had once spoken on the dangers of smoking cigarettes. Knowing that her father smoked, she had cried all night, convinced that her father would die soon. “He (her father) had done nothing, back then, to comfort her; he’s maintained his addiction in spite of his daughter’s fear” (21). Ruma had often quarrelled with her mother which is normal in close familial relationships. There is a bravery in being able to express disagreements with a loved one. This was not the case with her father.

She (Ruma) had never been able to confront her father freely the way she used to fight with her mother. Somehow, she feared that
any difference of opinion would chip away at the already frail bond that existed between them (37).

Father and daughter connected for the first time during the former’s visit. This seemed to have rekindled the long repressed desires in Ruma and she feels herself softening towards her father again. She feels protective of her father when Adam casually questions over the phone, her father’s act of making a garden in their backyard as it required constant attention which neither himself nor Ruma could give. “His flippancy irritated her, and she felt defensive on her father’s behalf” (47). Ruma’s father had bonded with his grandson during his stay and the two became inseparable. This surprised and touched Ruma. “She realized that for the first time in his life, her father had fallen in love” (48). At one point, while eavesdropping on her father reading bedtime stories to little Akash, Ruma consciously restrains herself from interrupting the poignant scene. “But she stopped herself, returning upstairs, briefly envious of her own son” (48).

In the end, Ruma’s father leaves after his weeklong stay as planned. Ruma is forced to accept his refusal not to move in with them. Ruma is an intensely psychological character. She comes across as neurotic and is filled with insecurity and feelings of inadequacy. However, her last act redeems and transforms her from a lost child woman to a matured woman, ready to move on with life. Ruma discovers a postcard unwittingly left behind by her father, addressed to an unknown Indian woman, whom her father had met during one of his many travels. She realises that her father had other reasons for wanting to live his own life. At first, she is jealous and feels that her father had betrayed her late mother’s memory. She then notices the hydrangea that her father had planted in her garden which was her late mother’s favourite flower. “It did not prove that her father loved her mother, or even that he missed her. And yet he
had put it there, honoured her before turning to another woman” (59). Ruma then does a poignant thing by putting a stamp on the postcard for the mailman to take it away later in this day. The depth of Ruma’s character may best be appreciated from the psychological perspective which stems from a childhood repression.

“A Choice of Accommodation” is a dramatically psychological tale wherein the trauma of the protagonist physically manifests itself outside the realm of the unseen. This is the story of an interracial couple, Amit and Meghan, who travels from New York to attend the wedding of Amit’s college crush Pam Borden at his old prep school, Langford Academy. The simmering tensions in their marriage is revealed as Amit, in an intoxicated state blurs out to a stranger at the wedding party that his marriage had fallen apart after the birth of his two daughters. Amit is the son of wealthy Bengali parents and had a privileged education in the elite boarding school, Langford Academy, in America. In spite of his privileged background however, Amit possesses a debilitating lack of confidence and has a nervous personality. He feels a strong sense of abandonment as his parents had put him in a boarding school when he was a young boy. It had not been his choice. Even though he is a grown man now, Amit carries the scars of this childhood trauma with him. “He couldn’t imagine sending his daughters to Langford- couldn’t imagine letting go of them as his parents had let go of him” (86). Amit feels detached from everyone and feels no nostalgia towards his alma mater and does not keep in touch with any of his old classmates. Although he has a loving wife in Meghan, as well as two healthy twin girls, Amit carries a sense of abandonment and loneliness with him. “And yet there were times Amit felt as alone as he had first been at Langford” (114).
Amit had been separated from all that was familiar to him when his parents decided to move back to India and plucked him out of the Public school in Winchester, Massachusetts where he had been raised. The schools in India had been deemed not good enough and so he was packed off to Langford Academy, a boarding school without having any say in the matter. Ever since then, he has harboured an underlying resentment towards his parents. Although he is a grown man now, he is unable to get over his feeling of betrayal. “Still, he refused to forgive them” (97). It is significant to note that Amit represses his feelings and has never expressed his torment to his parents. Perhaps the following lines explain the reason why young Amit was unable to emotionally reach out to his own father and mother. “His parents, unlike most Bengalis in Massachusetts, has always been dismissive, even critical, of India, never homesick or sentimental” (95). Amit obviously did not share a close emotional bond, rather, his successful and busy parents had not given him the love that he had craved. As miserable as he had been in boarding school, Amit had not told his parents about his trauma.

There was no escape at the end of the day, and though he admitted it to no one, especially not his parents when they called from Delhi every weekend, he was crippled with homesickness, missing his parents to the point where tears often filled his eyes, in those first months, without warning. He sought traces of his parents’ faces and voices among the people who surrounded and cared for him, but there was absolutely nothing, no one at Langford to remind him of them (97).

Amit’s traumatic experience and sense of abandonment affected him in adult life as he suffers from a paralysing lack of confidence and has a morbid outlook in life. Moreover, there is also a sense of failure in defeat in him.
The idea that early childhood experiences influence later personality, the notion that the true motives for our behaviour may be unconscious- these are direct outgrowths of dynamic theorizing, particularly Freud’s (Morgan 591).

Amit’s father, a renowned ophthalmologist had wanted Amit to follow in his footsteps and become a doctor as well. Amit lacked the aptitude and therefore, had quit medical school halfway and became an editor for medical journals instead. He had met his wife Meghan in medical school. His parents had disapproved of his marriage to Meghan because of her so called “common” background. Amit is haunted by the memory of a particular incident when his little daughter Monica had nearly choked on a piece of dried apricot while in a restaurant. A woman nearby who luckily happened to be a nurse had leaped up to the sound of Monika’s coughing and had effectively put her finger inside the girl’s mouth and scooped the culprit out. Despite two years in medical school, “Amit lacked the simple instinct, the confidence to do such a thing” (UE 90). He would often run imagined scenarios in his mind where he saw himself taking his girls out to different places. In all these imagined scenarios, he would inevitably do something stupid and careless or negligent which would result in him being the lone survivor. These wildly imagined scenarios always ended in Meghan divorcing him as she would blame him for what happened to their girls. In the end, he would lose it all, his wife and family. This is a very disturbing activity which the paranoid Amit indulges in. He has no confidence, does not realise or value his worth and therefore feels that he is unworthy of being loved. He has a loving family but he seems to be always on edge, almost as if he is preparing himself for them to abandon him one day. He lives his life on the edge, always waiting for the sky to fall down on him.
“A brief glance in the wrong direction, he knew, could toss him over the edge” (91). Amit is alienated from everyone around him. He has no friends, is estranged from his parents and does not appreciate his family. Amit wondered to himself, “Wasn’t it terrible that after all the work one put into finding a person ... that solitude was what one relished most, the only thing that, even in fleeting, diminished doses, kept one sane?” (115).

Amit drinks too much at the wedding and blurts out terrible thoughts with regard to his own marriage to a complete stranger. He tells the woman that his marriage had disappeared and also added that this is inevitable for every married couple in due time. The woman becomes offended by his drunken statement and ignores him after telling him off. However, Amit is beyond caring and justifies himself. He goes off to find a payphone to call his daughters and in his inebriated state, ends up abandoning Meghan at the party and reaches their hotel room alone. Meghan is hurt but does not make a big issue out of it the next morning and Amit is grateful. She had every reason to hurt him back because his callous behaviour but she is too level headed to do so. A young couple at the party had dropped Meghan off at the hotel after Amit had abandoned her. Meghan is good enough to go back to Langford for a brunch the next day as he wanted to say goodbye to the newly weds. However, they arrive too late and discovers that everybody had left already. They end up making love in one of the empty rooms in Langford. The physical intimacy seems to make up for the lack of emotional intimacy. When they were finished, Amit laid on top of her, and he “hoped that he was forgiven, and for a few moments they remained together on the narrow bed in the little room, his heart beating rapidly, vigorously, plainly striking the skin of her palm” (127).
It is evident that Amit’s neurosis stems from his early traumatic experience as a boy, his feeling of abandonment by his own parents and most importantly, his refusal to address or acknowledge his emotions. “Freud believed that neurotic, disturbed behaviour involves conflict between id demands and ego/superego restraints” (Morgan 593). The most disturbing outlet of his trauma is the account of his hair turning prematurely gray while in boarding school. This is a dramatic case of psychological trauma taking on a physical manifestation. This happened in the sixth form at Langford Academy when he was barely a teenager.

He’d read it was possible, after a traumatic experience, for a person’s hair to turn gray in youth. But there had been no sudden death he could point to, no accident. No profound life change, apart from his parents sending him to Langford (UE 93).

His early ageing had continued later onwards, so much so that “by the age of twenty one his hair had turned completely gray. It was here, at Langford, that it had begun, when he was in the sixth form” (93). The tile story, “A Choice of Accommodation” may be symbolic of the instability and rootlessness within Amit. He has no loyalties towards any particular place, person or even himself. He unconsciously views his parents’ act of placing him in a boarding school as a rejection of himself as their son. This feeling of abandonment and rejection has led to a paralysing sense of inferiority complex. Amit’s paranoia and neurosis stems from his early traumatic experience at Langford Academy. In a devastatingly sensitive manner, Lahiri has managed to capture the psyche of a tormented soul, trapped within his own inferior sense of self.

“Hell Heaven” is related in a first person narrative by a Diaspora child named Usha. She recounts the memory of a man named Pranab Chakraborty
whom she had called “Pranab Kaku”, a Bengali term meant for addressing a father’s younger brother. This man was in fact, not a real uncle but someone who had befriended her parents in the early seventies. He had been a lonely and struggling student, trying to adjust to life as an immigrant and would regularly eat at their home as one of the family. Pranab calls Usha’s father Shyamal, ‘Da’ which means elder brother and Usha’s mother, ‘Boudi’, meaning sister in law in Bengali. This reflects the strong bond which immigrants abroad often form simply by reasons of sharing the same nationality. Usha narrates with a childlike and unconscious innocence, her mother’s infatuation towards this man who had touched their lives briefly but so intensely. Pranab Kaku ends up marrying an American woman called Deborah, much to the dismay of his parents in India as well as the entire Bengali community, including Usha’s mother, though she never reveals her devastation. Although Usha’s mother realises that Pranab could never be hers, nevertheless, she had hoped that he would marry an Indian girl and continue to be close to them. “It was universally agreed that she (Deborah) had stripped Pranab Kaku not only of his origins but of his independence” (75). Regardless of how nice Deborah was, Usha’s mother viewed her as the immoral American girl who had stolen Pranab away from his people. Usha’s mother often liked to comment that Deborah had changed Pranab for the worse and that his personality had undergone a complete change. Usha’s mother remarked, “‘He used to be so different. I don’t understand how a person can change so suddenly. It’s just hell-heaven, the difference,’ she would say, always using the English words for her self concocted, backward metaphor” (68). The marriage ended in a divorce. The irony is that it was not the American Deborah who had left Pranab, as Usha’s mother predicted. Instead, Pranab had fallen in love with a married Bengali woman and in the process, destroyed two families. Even more ironical is when a devastated Deborah tries to find solace by confiding in Usha’s mother. Unknown to Deborah, Usha’s mother had secretly hoped that the American girl
would leave Pranab. She carries a dark secret within her and the story ends with her finally confiding her secret to her daughter Usha. An adult Usha ultimately comes to know that her mother had been devastated by Pranab’s marriage; so much so that she had attempted to end her life a few weeks after the marriage when she had been alone at home. Usha’s mother had doused her sari in lighter fluid and had stepped outside the house with the intention to light herself on fire. As she tried to muster the courage to strike a match, a neighbour mistook her trance like state for peaceful reverie and interrupts her.

The story revolves around Usha’s mother and there is a strong sense of pathos which runs throughout the entire story. An outward account of the life and actions of Usha’s mother depicts her as a lonely and bitter woman who seems to grudge others a chance of happiness. She also shared a hostile relationship with her only child, Usha. Usha’s mother turned into a rage when Usha wanted to wear a bra as she entered her early teenage years. She would also warn Usha against marrying an American, sternly warning that her daughter would never get away with it as Pranab Kaku had. Usha recalls, “I was thirteen, the thought of marriage irrelevant to my life. Still, her words upset me me and I felt her grip on me tighten” (75). Usha’s mother was paranoid about Usha turning into an “American” girl. She does not seem to evoke much sympathy at first. As previously stated, she appears to be a neurotic woman; bitter, self centred and alienating everyone around her. However, a psychoanalytic reading reveals that Usha’s mother is a woman who is to be sympathised. One needs to delve into the psyche of Usha’s mother to truly understand what a sensitive and desperately lonely woman she really was.

Usually the neurotic vaguely senses that something is missing, that she is not fulfilling herself or leading a truly meaningful life.
And this, in turn, leads to feelings of futility and unhappiness, to a “loss of joy” (Coleman 218)

Usha’s parents had a traditional Indian marriage when Usha’s mother was very young and there is an age gap of nine years between them. Young Usha explains;

My father was a lover of silence and solitude. He had married my mother to placate his parents; they were willing to accept his desertion as long as he had a wife. He was wedded to his work, his research, he existed in a shell that neither my mother nor I could penetrate” (UE 65).

Usha’s mother had been a young bride full of idealistic dreams about her husband only to discover that he had married her only out of compulsion. Besides having to accept that romance was not to be a part of her marriage, she was also compelled to adjust to a new world with a culture which felt utterly alien to her. Pranab Chakraborty had therefore been an unanticipated pleasure in her life. He was the same age as her and they could talk about many things which they had in common. “He (Pranab) did not turn a deaf ear to her nostalgia, like my father, or listen uncomprehending, like me” (66), says Usha. “She and Pranab Kaku would argue passionately about these matters, raising their voices in playful combat, confronting each other in a way she and my father never did”(65). The following lines emphasises the reason why it would be inevitable and quite natural for Usha’s mother, though a married woman, to fall in love with another man. “But, most important, in the beginning he was totally dependent on her, needing her for those months in a way my father never did in the whole history of their marriage” (67). Whenever Usha’s mother expressed her crippling loneliness and complained of missing her life in
India, her husband would make no attempt to placate her. Instead, he would tell her to return to Calcutta if she so desires, thus making it clear that their separation would not affect him one way or the other.

It is quite evident that Usha’s mother suffered a keen disappointment in her marriage because of her aloof and uninterested husband. She did not feel cherished or loved. This led to her infatuation over Pranab Chakraborty, the man who called her “Boudi” meaning “sister”, although to her credit, she did not act on her feelings, nor did she intend to at any point of time. This restraint further added to her depression. “Freud believed that neurotic, disturbed behaviour involves conflict between id demands and ego/superego restraints” (Morgan 593). Her unreasonable and often neurotic behaviour towards Usha can thus, be better understood by delving into her psyche. Usha’s mother never felt needed by her own husband and she ended up losing Pranab Chakraborty as well. As little Usha gradually grew up, she became more independent and this made her mother fear that she was losing her own daughter to America. The hostility began on the eve of Pranab’s wedding. Usha wanted to stay back for the after party but her mother had forced her to come home. Usha recalls, “As we drove home from the wedding, I told my mother, for the first but not the last time in my life, that I hated her” (UE 74). Usha admits she became a rebellious child, defying her mother many a times.

When she screamed at me for talking too long on the telephone, or for staying too long in my room, I learned to scream back, telling her she was pathetic, that she knew nothing about me, and it was clear to us both that I had stopped needing her, definitively and abruptly, just as Pranab Kaku had (77).
Lahiri beautifully ends this tale on a wise and poignant note. Usha goes through her rebellious years and as she finally becomes a young woman, she gradually learns to understand and empathize with her mother. She also notices that with time, her parents had grown fond of each other, out of habit if nothing else (81). Usha was not the only one who “grew up”, so to speak. “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” (82). Though it had taken a while, Usha’s mother finally learns to make peace with her life.

This story explores the necessity in every human to have a purpose in life; the desire to be needed is intrinsic to a person’s self worth. Usha’s mother is a housewife who had no career and watches soap operas to pass the time. “Her only job, everyday, was to clean and cook for my father and me” (76). Her husband had never made her feel needed as a wife from the very beginning of their marriage. When Pranab Chakraborty and then her own daughter Usha ceased to need her as well, she became increasingly neurotic and depressed. Lahiri has kindly ensured that Usha’s mother attain peace during her old age. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a psychological study is pertinent to understand the behaviour of Usha’s mother.

“Only Goodness’ is an evocative tale which explores the complex and often unreasonable emotions that drives a person to behave in a certain manner. The issue of repression; the internalising of one’s emotions and feelings comes into focus yet again, in this powerful story. Sudha and Rahul are a pair of second generation diaspora siblings, born to immigrant Bengali parents. Sudha, the elder one, grows up to become a successful career woman and marries a respectable English gentleman. In spite her many notable achievements, Sudha remain self depreciating and overly critical of herself. Her life is ruled by a sense of irrational guilt which ultimately damages her marriage. Her younger
brother Rahul develops a drinking problem from an early age and becomes a social pariah. He ends up alienating himself from everyone including his lifelong supporter, his elder sister Sudha.

Sudha and Rahul are raised in a manner typical of immigrant parents. Their frugal parents possess a survivor’s mentality and take nothing for granted. An admirable trait in them is the fierce determination to succeed. They put education and academics above all else because after all, America was the place where dreams could come true. Sudha and Rahul have been brought up under the pressure to succeed in life. Their efforts would be constantly compared to the academic performances of other Bengali children. Since childhood, their parents would clip newspaper stories about especially gifted children such as the boy who completed his Ph.D. at the age of twenty or the girl who went to Stanford at the age of twelve. These stories were to serve as inspiration for Sudha and Rahul. Sudha has always been a protective elder sister to her younger brother, pampering and indulging him like a little mother. She tries to make sure that her brother grew up reading all the popular American children’s books like Peter Rabbit and others; books which her parents had not had the imagination to buy or read to her when she had been Rahul’s age. She also attempts to ensure that Rahul played with the ‘appropriate’ toys. In ensuring that he had a ‘proper’ American childhood, Sudha hoped that Rahul would fit better in America, unlike her. “At times she engaged with Rahul’s upbringing more than her did—....” (136). She had always envied her brother as he was considered the better looking and also the more intelligent one of the pair. While she slogged to maintain her good grades, Rahul seemed to breeze through his studies effortlessly. Rahul had been precocious enough to have skipped third grade in school.
It had been Sudha who had introduced Rahul to alcohol when he first came to visit her in college. This was done so in a harmless manner, the way siblings conspire mischievous deeds together, without the knowledge of strict parents. Rahul was still in school then and had pronounced the drink as revolting. When she came home from college during holidays, Sudha and Rahul would often drink and smoke clandestinely in her room after their parents went to bed. "She (Sudha) felt a new bond with her brother, a sense, after years of regarding him as just a kid, that they were finally friends" (129). Although she is the elder sibling, it is apparent that Sudha who suffers from an inferiority complex, looks up to her younger brother, striving to please him and craved his approval. This complex is common in being a second generation diaspora, striving to fit in and also magnified by parents who set such high standards for their children that no amount of effort seems to be enough.

Her father had no patience for failure, for indulgences. He never let his children forget that there had been no one to help him as he helped them, so that no matter how well Sudha did, she felt that her good fortune had been handed to her, not earned (140).

As Rahul grew up, Sudha nervously noticed a dependency towards alcohol in him. Whenever she came home for holidays, Rahul would expect her to buy alcoholic drinks by the case as he was not yet old enough to purchase the same. Although Sudha did not feel any desire to drink, she submitted to his demands as she did not want to disappoint him and because she did not like to see any disapproval in his eyes. Initially, she failed to regard his addiction seriously and assumed that he was simply going through a rebellious phase as she too had. Later, when Rahul became an alcoholic, Sudha is filled with guilt as she recalls how she was the one who had first introduced him to alcohol and had provided it whenever either of them came home from holidays during the
early years. The magnitude of Sudha’s guilt is revealed by the fact that she hides her misapprehensions from her parents and husband. Sudha seems to blame herself unreasonably and excessively, for all her brother’s problems. It does not matter that Rahul, who knew that Sudha doted on him and would do anything for him, had taken advantage of her devotion. It is irrelevant to her that considering Rahul’s nature, he would have procured alcohol one way or the other if not from her, then from someone else. This guilt is an inner demon which Sudha struggles with throughout the entire story and it became intensified because she represses her fears and did not confide in anyone. Her secrecy ends up damaging her marriage with her husband Roger as he understandably feels betrayed that she could not confide in him about the severity of her brother’s problems.

Rahul had been born at a time when his parents were financially better off and were well settled by the time he arrived. He also had the good fortune of having a devoted elder sister who looked after the social needs his parents overlooked. Sudha had not had the same privilege. Being an intelligent as well as good looking boy, Rahul had grown up pampered and indulged by everyone around him, especially by his family. Unfortunately, instead of appreciating his advantages, Rahul became spoilt and rebellious. He dropped out of college and began living in his parents’ home. At a young age, Rahul was once caught for reckless driving in an inebriated state. He also ruins Sudha’s wedding reception by engaging in a public scuffle with his father while raising a toast in a drunken stupor. He is rude and sullen towards Sudha and his parents and has no regard for the feelings of other people. Towards the end, at the age of twenty two, Rahul elopes with Elena, a thirty year old single mother, but not before stealing his mother’s gold jewellery and other treasured items.
Though often frustrated, Sudha is always forgiving of Rahul’s irresponsible and thoughtless actions. Her patience can only be understood in view of the guilt she harbours in her psyche. Even though she is an educated and intelligent woman, Sudha lets herself be played the fool when it concerns Rahul. He is always on her mind even after he disappears with Elena.

Sudha thought of Rahul often during her pregnancy, invaded by memories and dreams of their childhood, recalling the existence that had produced them both, an experience that was both within her and behind her and that Roger would never understand (159).

Sudha receives a letter from Rahul after a year passed by without any word from him. She and Roger were now proud parents to baby Neel. Without rereading the letter or bothering to consult with Roger, she impulsively invites him to visit her. Rahul arrives and appears to be the perfect houseguest for a couple of days. He tells Sudha that he is in rehab and also apologises for his behaviour at her wedding. When everything seemed to be going perfect, he ends up ruining it by getting drunk while babysitting Neel on the last night of his visit. Rahul had offered to babysit and had insisted that Sudha and Roger have a night out by themselves. The couple returns to find the house in disarray and baby Neel in the bathtub by himself, in danger of tipping over and drowning himself without adult supervision. Rahul was ultimately discovered in Roger’s study, passed out and drunk. He had found the liquor that Sudha had hidden away, stashed inside a chest meant for sweaters. Sudha is hysterical and Roger is understandably furious. It is only at this point, that Sudha confesses the severity and history with regard to her brother’s alcoholic problem. Roger had always been under the impression that Rahul had simply gotten a little carried away on a few occasions. Sudha had never corrected his
misassumption. Roger feels betrayed and tells Sudha he would have never lied to her the way she had.

Sudha’s tormented thoughts keeps her awake that night. She ponders over the irreparable estrangements with her brother and the husband who no longer trusts her. She thinks of her parents who continues to love Rahul although he had not bothered to get in touch with them ever since he ran away from home. “They were incapable of shutting him out. But Roger was capable, and Sudha realized, as the wakeful night passed, that she was capable too” (171). The next morning, before Roger woke up, Sudha forces Rahul to leave. He apologises for the previous night and tells her that his flight isn’t until evening. For the first time, Sudha is firm and refuses to be moved. She calls a taxi while Rahul packs. After his departure, though emotionally drained, Sudha attends to the cries of her baby, Neel.

It is important to note that Sudha had been repressing her feelings of guilt her entire life. She tormented herself with self blame and refuses to confide to anyone about her fears. In all this time, she tolerated and longed to be reunited with Rahul, despite his behaviour; protecting him even from her own husband by not tarnishing his image. It was only after she finally confessed to Roger that she could resolve to remove him from her life. This overnight change of attitude appears to be cathartic in nature; a moving forward which came about only after articulating her repressed emotions.

“Nobody’s business” explores the idiosyncrasies and eccentricities of people. There are basically two main characters; Sang and Paul, in this story. Sang is a Bengali Diaspora and her roommate Paul is an American student. In this story, Paul is secretly obsessed with Sang, who is a pretty girl, in love with a man called Farouk from Cairo, Egypt. Sang ultimately discovers that Faurok
is cheating on her and she escapes to London with a shattered heart. Sang also constantly receives phone calls from unknown Indian suitors, interested in marrying her. Sang’s explanation for this is that her traditional Bengali parents desperately wants her to be married as she is already thirty, smart, and single.

Paul is an American living in his own country and is also pursuing a Ph.D. in English Literature at Harvard University. He is attracted to Sang from the first day he met her when she had responded in reference to a housemate advertisement which himself and another roommate, Heather, had placed in the local paper. Paul observes Sang’s habits and attempts to be physically near her, so much so, that he actually moves to the kitchen area as he noticed that Sang was most inclined to head there whenever she came out of her room. “He liked studying in her fleeting company” (181). When Sang’s boyfriend Farouk visits, Paul is acutely aware of the couple’s weekly routine. Throughout the story however, Paul nurses his obsession secretly and does not verbally express his feelings to his pretty roommate or anyone else.

At first, Paul simply appears to be a timid and socially inept fellow, but harmless enough otherwise. As the story progresses however, his behaviour becomes increasingly bizarre and reveals that he suffers from a serious personality disorder. The first sign was when one day, Sang asked his opinion about a colour while she was painting her new room. Paul could not think of anything to say then. Several hours later, during the evening of that same day, as Sang stepped inside the house, Paul immediately uttered “Black Raspberry”, without any preliminary conversation. He had picked up the conversation from where they had left it several hours earlier, expecting Sang to know what he was referring to. Sang merely found him amusing then. Paul does not have much of a life outside of his studies. He had previously appeared his Ph.D. oral exams and failed. “He had failed not because he wasn’t prepared but because
his mind had betrayed him that bright May morning... He felt himself go crimson. It was the nightmare he had been having for months before the exam” (182). He explains to Sang in detail about the usual standard pattern of the oral exams, neglecting to mention that he had already appeared and failed. Paul seems to have become increasingly neurotic as he is left alone in the apartment most of the time. Being home always, Paul usually answers the telephone which is often for Sang. One day, a hopeful suitor called for Sang and on being informed that she was unavailable, dejectedly inquired whether Paul was her boyfriend. “The mere possibility, articulated by a stranger, jolted him” (183). Though Paul replied in the negative, the call troubled him the entire day. “Nevertheless, for the rest of the day he felt burdened by the question, worried that he’s transgressed somehow simply by answering the phone” (183).

It becomes obvious that Paul suffers from a personality disorder as he unwittingly started living Sang’s life by deliberately getting himself involved in her affairs. One day, an unknown woman named Deidre calls for Sang while the latter was out. As usual, Paul answers the telephone and ends up having a strange conversation with her. The woman claimed to be Farouk’s lover and enquires whether Farouk and Sang were cousins as this was apparently what she had been informed. Paul makes it his business to find out the truth and in a series of events, makes Sang listen to his pre planned telephone conversation with Deidre as Sang had not believed him. Paul’s curiosity about Deidre is normal. What is strange is that he initially tells nothing to Sang except that a woman named Deidre had called for her. He did not mention that this woman had called not once but four times, asking Paul the strangest of questions about Sang and Farouk. Despite all the troubling information, Paul gives Sang no inkling about his long conservations with Deidre over the telephone while Sang was away. He seems to have deluded himself into imagining that Deidre, a stranger whom he had never met, had become a friend. Paul behaves protective
towards Deidre by withholding information to Sang, as if he had to bear Deidre’s confidences. Paul remains silent when Sang concludes that Deidre may simply have been a telemarketer. It was only after she confronts him after speaking to Farouk that he admits Deidre had called more than once and that she had been crying. When an exasperated Sang marched up to him, demanding why he had not told her any of this information before, Paul flinches, expecting her to hit him. His guilty behaviour causes Sang to shout at him.

After receiving the new information from Paul, Farouk confronts Deidre who denies everything. Sang accuses Paul of concocting the entire story to get her attention and calls him a liar. It was at this point that Paul actually goes to the trouble of purchasing an extra phone, an adapter, an extra jack and locates Deidre’s number. He repeatedly calls Deidre until she has no choice but to agree to speak to him. Determined on vindicating himself, Paul makes Sang listen on the other telephone line while he speaks to Deidre who apologises to Paul and confirms everything he had previously said. A devastated Sang confronts Farouk at his apartment along with Paul who accompanies her. The confrontation becomes out of hand with Sang being hysterical and the two men engage in a scuffle in the public hallway. A policeman finally arrives to intervene. Sang leaves the apartment she shares with Paul and Heather soon after and goes to live with her sister in London.

All the characters in this story have certain quirks and peculiarities. However, Paul, the Ph.D. student from Harvard stands out from all the rest. The fact that he is pursuing a Ph.D. from one of the most prestigious universities proves that Paul is an intelligent person, at least academically. When it comes to social matters however, he undergoes a personality change and behaves irrational, immature and inept. Paul does not realise or think about
the consequences of his actions. He seems to want to project another image of himself which is completely different from reality. He pretends that he has never taken the Ph.D. exams before and feels comfortable building a friendship with Deidre, someone who does not know him and has never met him. He takes a lot of trouble to vindicate himself when Sang calls him a liar, neglecting the fact that he had actually deceived her so many times before. Paul does not see himself as the insecure and neurotic person he really is. Psychology has a theory for such people. Carl Roger’s self theory states that the concept of a person’s self image are sometimes based more on personal needs rather than reality. An insecure person may often create a false image of himself; an ideal self i.e., the kind of person he or she would like to be.

The most unfortunate results in the development of personality occur in cases where an individual develops some false image. This false image is sometimes so strong that even indisputable reality is vehemently denied. Inconsistency between one’s actual image and a false self image, may then lead to abnormality in one’s behaviour (Mangal 411).

Paul is one of the few non diaspora figures in Lahiri’s writings who seem to struggle with all the self image issues that are usually inherent in diasporic figures. This has to do with Paul’s feeling of self doubt which has led to an unconscious personality disorder.

The second part of Unaccustomed Earth serves as a trilogy, containing three short stories; “Once in a Lifetime”, “Year’s End” and “Going Ashore”. Unlike the first half of the book, these three stories are all interrelated, tracing the lives of it protagonists, Hema and Kaushik. Part two of this collection is thus, aptly titled, “Hema and Kaushik”. The opening story, “Once in a
“Once in a Lifetime”, is narrated in a letter like confessionional manner by thirteen year old Hema who is writing to sixteen year old Kaushik. The story reads like a glimpse of someone’s intimate memory. The tale opens with Hema saying, “I had seen you before, too many times to count, but a farewell that my family threw for yours, at our house in Inman Square, is when I begin to recall your presence in my life” (UE 233). She goes on to recall how Kaushik’s family decided to re immigrate back to the United States after returning to India in 1974. Hema’s family had thrown a farewell party for them then; this is the last memory Hema has of Kashik. At that time, Hema had been six and Kaushik, nine years old. This candid story explores the powerful influence that the psyche, specifically memory, has over a person’s behaviour. This may either be conscious or unconscious.
Hema’s parents agree to host Kaushik’s family until they find a place of their own, when the latter re-immigrates back to the United States. She is now thirteen years old. At first, Hema is resentful for being made to give up her room to Kaushik. Her feelings change when she meets Kaushik as she develops a secret schoolgirl crush on him. When Kaushik’s family left for India years ago, a number of their household items including Kaushik’s clothes had been handed over to Hema. She had disliked the unattractive boyish clothes which her mother forced her to wear and had developed an unconscious aversion to Kaushik, as if his hand me downs personified him. “One winter I had to wear your coat, which I hated so much that it caused me to hate you as a result” (226). Hema’s parents had fond memories of Kaushik’s parents, Dr. Chaudary and Parul and often reminisced about the past before they had left for India.

Time has a way of changing people and the reunion with the Choudarys turn out to be very different from what Hema’s family had imagined. Hema’s resentment disappeared and she instantly developed a crush on him. Hema had held the image of Kaushik’s memory so strongly that reality surprises her. “Until your return I’d thought of you as a boy of eight or nine, frozen in time, the size of the clothes I’d inherited” (228). Her surprise is evidently felt in the lines, “I had not expected you to be handsome” (232). Likewise, Hema’s parents find that their long lost friends have not stayed frozen in time as in memory. Ironically, Dr. Choudary and Parul from India have become more modern and westernized while living in India. “Bombay had made them (Kaushik’s parents) more American than Cambridge had” (235). There were comments regarding Parul’s stylish haircut, their drinking alcohol and other extravagant lifestyle habits. “My parents felt slighted by your parents’ extravagant visions, ashamed of the modest home we owned” (245). Hema’s
parents realised that they no longer had anything in common with the Choudarys, other than sharing a past.

It was not long before Hema’s parents began to long for their houseguests to leave although they continued to play the part of gracious hosts. Hema, who was sleeping in her parents’ room listened to her mother complain to her father every night. Hema was the only one who did not mind their guests. Soon, her parents no longer went the extra mile to entertain their guests and went on with their normal weekly routine while Kaushik’s family also went on with theirs. “Somewhere, in that cramped house, a line was drawn between our two families” (245). One day, snow began to fall heavily, forcing everyone to stay indoors. This brought the two families together, at least for a day. In a cheerful mood, Hema’s mother cooked a big pot of khichuri and Parul, who rarely cooked, prepared her long promised English trifle. That night, Hema’s father, who was a teetotaller, joined the Choudarys for a bit of their customary Johnnie Walker and the two pair of couples reminisced about the past. “They spoke of how young you and I had been, how much younger they had all been” (248). Once again, memories of the past brought them together, if only for a short while.

Kaushik and his parents ultimately purchases a house in a posh locality and moves out after a month’s stay with Hema’s family. Before leaving, Kaushik confessed to Hema that his mother was dying of cancer and that was the reason why his family had relocated back to the United States. Their return was to get away from everyone and give his mother the privacy she desired. When Hema’s parents finally learned the news, they went to visit Parul at the hospital. Hema remained loyal to Kaushik by not revealing what Kaushik had previously told her about his mother. Kaushik’s family gradually disappears from Hema’s life soon after they moved out. “Our parents were only
acquaintances by then. Having gone separate ways after the weeks of forced intimacy” (95).

This tale explores the control that memory has over a person’s psyche. Hema has been living with the memory of nine year old Kaushik. Her remembrance is further strengthened by the clothes which he had once worn when at that tender age. Though she is an intelligent thirteen year old girl, it does not occur to her that Kaushik would be growing up, maturing as she has been over the years. She might be aware of it in theory but the image of nine year old Kaushik in her psyche is so strong that it overshadows reality. She is therefore, startled to see a grown up Kaushik. Similarly, Hema’s parents cherish the past with such fondness that they are disappointed with reality. Dr. Choudary and Parul appear to be decent people and are good houseguests. Hema’s mother, who is a conservative woman in comparism, complains about her friend Parul’s “stylish” haircut, clothes and supposedly frivolous habits. It is possible that she may actually be upset not so much because of Parul’s new sartorial sense but because her friend had evolved from the memory of her which she cherished. “Once in a Lifetime” explores the powerful influence which the psyche, specifically memory, wields over a person’s behaviour. This may either be conscious or unconscious.

“Year’s End” is also related in the same narrative style as “Once in a Lifetime”. This time, the narrative is by twenty one year old Kaushik, who is now in college. Unlike the first story, this tale is not entirely for the benefit of Hema, although Kaushik does address Hema directly in parts. Kaushik’s mother has passed away and he recounts the painful and emotional journey which himself and his father had undergone after his mother’s demise. His father was now in Calcutta, visiting Kaushik’s grandparents.
Kaushik begins the tale by talking about his father’s remarriage to a young Indian woman named Chritra. This woman was a widow and has two small daughters. She was also twenty years younger than Kaushik’s father, Dr. Choudary. Kaushik is disturbingly calm when his father rings to tell some news at his college dormitory at Swarthmore, America. When his father tentatively warns him that he might find the news upsetting, Kaushik’s immediate thought was whether one of his grandparents had passed away. Dr. Choudary instantly clarifies that they are fine and tells Kaushik about Chitra. They were already married in a small ceremony and this new family was coming to live with him in Massachusetts. His father’s speech is cautious and sounds rehearsed. Although Kaushik does not ask or say anything, Dr. Choudary implores him to understand his decision to remarry.

It was clear to me that he had prepared himself for my outrage—harsh words, accusations, the slamming down of the phone. But no turbulent emotion passed through me as he spoke, only a diluted version of the nauseating sensation that had taken hold the day in Bombay that I learned my mother was dying, a sensation that had dropped anchor in me and never fully left (254).

Although three years has already passed since his mother’s demise, it is evident that Kaushik who is an only son, is still silently grieving. As distressed as he is by his father’s news, Kaushik bottles his emotions and does not say anything. Kaushik is angry when his father defensively mentions, without his asking, that the marriage had been arranged by relatives. Kaushik says, “This remark upset me more than anything my father had said so far. My father was not a malleable man, and I knew that no one would have dared to find him a new wife unless he had requested it” (255). As Dr. Choudary tries to explain his many reasons to his son, who is silent on the other end, Kaushik recalls his
parents’ loving marriage. When his father asks whether Chitra’s little daughters could stay in his old room in Massachusetts, Kaushik nonchalantly replies that it is fine with him. The two men end the conversation politely. Kaushik returns to his room where his girlfriend Jessica is waiting for him. As intimate as their relationship is, Kaushik had never told her of his family, his mother’s death and other important information which one would normally tell a person with whom one is in a relationship with. However, that morning, the phone call affected him so much that Kaushik recounts, “That morning, after crying briefly over her body, I did” (256). Kaushik seems to suffer from a sense of emotional detachment as well as repression. He shuts Jessica from his life soon after and the relationship ends abruptly.

Kaushik meets Chitra and her daughters, Rupa and Piu who are seven and ten years old respectively, when he goes home during the Christmas holidays. He cannot help mentally making unfair comparisons between his late mother and his new stepmother. While his mother had been sophisticated and cultured, Chitra could barely speak English and was a simple and conservative, small town village woman. Being thirty five, Chitra was closer to his age than his father’s and wore vermillion in her hair, something his mother had never done. Kaushik feels increasingly bitter as Chitra solicitously served him and his father lunch, in the old fashioned ceremonious manner. Still, he does not say or do anything to betray his rioting emotions.

I was suddenly sickened by her, by the sight of her standing in the kitchen. I had no memories of my mother cooking there, but the space still retained her presence more than any other part of the house. The jade and spider plants she had watered were still thriving on the windowsill, the orange and white sunburst clock she’d so loved the design of, with its quivering second hand, still
marking the time on the wall. Though she had rarely done the
dishes, though it was in fact I who had mostly done the dishes in
those days, I imagined her hands on the taps of the sink, her slim
form pressed against the counter (263).

Kaushik’s late mother Parul is still gloriously alive in his world and he
has mental images of her around the house. In spite of his mounting distress,
Kaushik goes about behaving nonchalant and makes casual conversation with
his father. After dinner, he is irritated when he learns that his father had hidden
the bottle of Johnnie Walker because he did not want to alarm his new bride
who was “old fashioned”. The two of them and his late mother had always
enjoyed a glass of Johnnie Walker after their meals. “I wanted to ask my father
what on earth had possessed him to marry an old fashioned girl half his age.
Instead I said, taking the bottle from his hand, “I hope it’s all right if I alarm
her’ ” (264). Everything about Chitra seemed to irk him, even the sight of
Chitra brushing her long cascading hair one afternoon.

The sight of it repulsed me; I could not help thinking of the hair
that had fallen out in clumps from my mother’s head, the awful
wig she’d worn even in the hospital, until the day she died, that
artificial part of her more healthy looking than anything else
(276).

Aside from Dr. Choudary and Chitra, Kaushik feels no resentment
against Rupa and Piu, his new step sisters. He is taken aback when his father
asks him to pick up a Christams tree the next day for the girls’ benefit. They
had not celebrated the holidays after his mothers’ demise. Clearly, Kaushik is
still not yet ready to move on. In Bombay, his mother used to throw
lavish Christmas parties and bring everything alive. She would often
speak fondly about Christmas in Cambridge, and reminisce about Hema’s family and other friends left behind in America. The Choudarys had put up at Hema’s place during the initial stages of Parul’s illness when the disease had not yet progressed so far. Kaushik therefore associated Hema with his last happy memories of his late mother, before cancer had ravaged her body completely. Because of this, a strong connection is forged between them even though they are physically apart.

The only time that Kaushik’s resentment is revealed is when his father suggests that he might take his step sisters along while buying the tree. Kaushik sarcastically replied whether he was expected to play with the little girls who were barely half his age. It is important to note that this caustic remark is not meant towards the girls but is a displacement of his bitterness against his father who has moved on while he is still struggling.

In displacement there is a shift of emotion or symbolic meaning from a person or object towards which it was originally directed to another person or object. Often displacement involves difficult emotions, such as hostility and anxiety (Coleman 126).

Another significant moment, though unconscious, is when Dr. Choudary, in noticing that Kaushik was drinking too much, tells him, “Easy” (UE 266). Kaushik replies, “Not easy...it’s not easy for me” (266). Kaushik looks at his reflection as he says this and seems to be referring to something other than his drinking. The following day, Kaushik offers to take along the girls on his trip to Dunkin’ Doughnuts to get coffee as there was none in the house. He is kind to them, helping them to choose amongst the variety of doughnuts and like a big brother, lifts little Piu up so that she could get a better view. He also teaches them on how to talk to people and advises them not to be
so shy. Kaushik compassionately reassures their fears about settling in a new school and gives them a dollar each to buy a doughnut to takeaway. His sense of empathy with his stepsisters is justified in the following lines.

Like them I had lost a parent and was now being asked to accept a replacement. I wondered how well they remembered their father; Piu would only have been five at that time...I was lucky, compared to Rupa and Piu, having had my mother for as long as I did. The knowledge of death seemed present in both sisters- it was something about the way they carried themselves, something that had broken too soon and had not mended, marking them in spite of their light heartedness (272).

Kaushik had also woken up one night to the sound of Piu screaming from a nightmare and asking for her “Baba” again and again. Dr. Choudary arranges a trip to Disney World after Christmas and invites Kaushik to join but the latter refuses, making up an excuse about there being no winter holidays in his college. Rupa and Piu were devastated when they learned that Kaushik would not be joining them in Disney World.

I sensed that they (Rupa and Piu) needed me to guard them, as I needed them, from the growing, incontrovertible fact that Chitra and my father now formed a couple. My presence was proof that my mother had once existed, just as they represented the physical legacy of their dead father (282).

Kaushik’s sense of solidarity with his stepsisters is understandable. It is therefore unfortunate that the story ends on an ironic note. A few days before New Years’ Eve, Dr. Choudary and Chitra goes out, leaving the girls under
Kaushik’s care. It is the first time that the new couple are going out alone. Kaushik and the girls watch television in perfect camaraderie and he takes them out for pizza too. Everything was going smoothly until they returned home and Kaushik leaves them alone for a while to speak on the phone. He returns to find them in his old room, innocently playing with photographs of his late mother. Kaushik’s repressed emotions and tension gives way and all his pent up bitterness were unleashed on his oblivious stepsisters. In a fit of emotion, he shook Rupa forcefully, demanding to know where they had found the pictures. The little girls begin to cry and tremble while an uncontrollable Kaushik rants about how his late mother was so much more beautiful and sophisticated than theirs; how their pitiable mother was just a servant, brought to look after the needs of his father and that this was the only reason they were in America. After he finished saying such harsh and unforgivable words, the girls remained quiet, staring down at the carpet, motionless and not saying a word.

Kaushik then packs his clothes and hastily leaves the house. His actions seem spontaneous but he realized that his subconscious had been thinking of running away for days. He keeps driving aimlessly, stopping now and then at motels, and finally reaches the Canadian border. He felt a sense of freedom in travelling alone for the first time. “It was like being dead, my escape allowing me to taste that tremendous power my mother possessed forever” (290). A telephonic conversation with his weary father made him realise that the girls had not revealed his unforgiveable behaviour. Dr. Choudary and Chitra had returned home to find the girls asleep and Kaushik missing and had assumed that he had run away in the middle of the night.

Life went on and shortly after, Kaushik graduated from college. His father, Chitra and the girls came to attend his Commencement ceremony. Rupa and Piu were polite to him but behaved like strangers. The fateful night was
never mentioned, nor acknowledged. Kaushik knew that they had not revealed anything and “that it would remain between the three of us, that in their silence they continued both to protect and to punish me” (293). Kaushik’s repression of his emotions moulds the course of his life which unfolds in the final story. His explosion towards his stepsisters is an example of psychological projection, whereby his anger is actually directed towards his father and Chitra. In his inability to express his anger, Kaushik ends up projecting his inner rage towards Rupa and Piu.

“Going Ashore” is the final story in this magnificent trilogy which explores the psychological dimension of relationship that exists between Hema and Kaushik. The two are not involved in any physical or emotional relationship in any manner, be it as friends, mere acquaintance or lovers. However, there is a psychological relationship which moves across the boundaries of time and space. Though perhaps subconscious, their lives are irrevocably interlinked. Kaushik thinks of Hema during his bittersweet moments of nostalgia about his beloved late mother. He recalled how Hema had then been not much older than Rupa and how he had caused her to cry when he told her about his mother’s illness. It is significant that memories of Hema have softened him towards her. In “Year’s End”, Kaushik addresses Hema as he reminisces, “I had hated every day I spent under your parents’ roof, but now I thought back to that time with nostalgia. Though we didn’t belong there, it was the last place that had felt like a home” (291).

“Going Ashore” introduces us to thirty seven year old Hema who is now a professor at Wellesly college. She is bitter over her failed relationship with a married man named Julian and on the rebound, is engaged to Navin, a man whom she does not love but who her parents approve of. Being a professor, Hema makes an excuse about needing to be in Rome for work related reasons
and escapes to Italy for a holiday by herself, just before getting married. This is unusual behaviour for an engaged woman and her action reveals her troubled state of mind. Kaushik, on the other hand, is forty years old and has had a string of failed relationships. He is now an established and wandering photojournalist who has worked on the war zones of Israel, Guatemala, Mexico, Africa and various other conflict areas. He has never been able to settle in a particular place for long as he “never fully trusted the places he’d lived, never turned to them for refuge” (309). Kaushik’s choice of profession also reflects his longing for his late mother, though he may not realise it. In the previous story “Year’s End”, which twenty one year old Kaushik narrates, his younger self states with regard to his photography when his mother was alive;

There were times my mother came down and kept me company, sitting quietly in the blackness as I struggled to load film onto the developing reel. Together we would breathe in the chemical smells, their corrosiveness, from which my hands were protected by rubber gloves, nothing compared to what was taking place inside her body. She would keep time for me with her watch, familiarizing herself with the process enough to be able to tell me when to pour the series of fluids in and out of the processing tank, both of us knowing that I’d have to buy a timer, eventually (278).

The above lines justify the likely possibility that Parul is still alive in her son’s world; persistently alive by mode of memory. Kaushik has distant ties with his father and adopted family. He had last been in a relationship with a woman named Franca in Milan and the two had lived together. However, the relationship came to a bitter end as Kaushik was unable to commit to her. “She had not taken hold of him; he could see now that that was the problem” (306).
He had then left Milan for Rome, a city which reminded him of his late mother as they had come here for a holiday shortly after her illness was diagnosed. His father and Chitra had visited him in Rome as well but they had left no dent on the place as his mother had. “He never thought of their presence on the streets of Rome as he continued to think, now and again, of his mother’s” (307). The memory of his late mother seems to be stronger for Kaushik than any memory of a living, breathing, human being.

Fate brings Kaushik and Hema together as both of them shows up at a mutual friend, Edo’s place. The two had last met and spoken as children when Kaushik’s family were houseguests of Hema’s parents many years ago in America. But the time apart did not matter and the two became intimate immediately. On recognizing the Indian woman as Hema, Kaushik states, “That her face was the one he’d known” (310). Hema also feels that “He looks the same to her...it was as if no time had passed” (311). This shows the splendid strength of the human psyche. Hema follows Kaushik to his apartment in Rome and the two becomes lovers, simply continuing the relationship from where they left off decades ago.

It was unquestioned that they would not part yet, unquestioned that though they had not seen or thought of each other in decades, not sought each other out, something precious had been stumbled upon, a new born connection that could not be left unattended, that demanded every particle of their care (311).

Hema tells Kaushik about her life and her impending marriage to Navin. When Kaushik questions her decision to marry a man she does not love, she replies that she had though it might fix things. Hema feels that Kaushik understands her as no one else had ever done. She is also gloriously aware that
“she was the first person he’d ever slept with who’d known his mother, who was able to remember her as he did” (311). This shared knowledge brought them closer together. As much as Hema loved Kaushik, she understood his nature even better. She braced herself not to expect anything permanent from their relationship. On the last day of her stay in Italy, Kaushik asks Hema not to marry Navin and follow him to Hong Kong instead. Hema is overjoyed but feels torn at the same time. “A piece of her was elated. But she was also struck by his selfishness, by the fact that he was telling her what to do. Unlike Navin, he was not offering to come to her” (321). Hema realises that Kaushik may never want to marry and she tells him that she didn’t want to change him or one day, be accused of trying to pin him down. Kaushik accuses her of being a coward and bitter words are exchanged. Hema suggests that they could still continue seeing each other but Kaushik was not interested in any other arrangement. She begins to cry as she knew that he would never forgive her for refusing his offer. She knew from experience how cold and aloof Kaushik could become. Even if she were to change her mind and accept his proposal, it was too late as he had already retracted it. She did not expect to see him again but he surprises her by showing up at her hotel the next morning and driving her to the airport. In the end, they both go back to their separate lives in spite of loving each other desperately. Hema leaves for India to get married and Kaushik sets off for Hong Kong, to take up a new job as a photo editor for an international newsmagazine. On his route to Hong Kong, Kaushik stops at Thailand.

On boarding the plane, Hema realises that her bangle, which he never took off, is missing. It was a gift from her grandmother and something she’d worn since she was ten. Kaushik had also commented on remembering her bangle from the past during their first night in Italy after meeting at Edo’s place. Hema is distressed over her missing bangle. Though she realises that
other jewellery would make up for the missing bangle during the course of her wedding, “And yet she felt that she had left a piece of her body behind” (324). There is a deep psychological significance in Hema’s distress over her missing bangle. No doubt, the bangle has sentimental value but Hema is also projecting her devastation over losing Kaushik on the missing bangle. The bangle is symbolic of Hema leaving a vital piece of herself in Rome. She had left her heart with Kaushik.

Kaushik stops at a small resort, a little north of Khao Lak before going to Hong Kong. His anger dissolved by then, Kaushik regrets his harshness towards Hema and wonders whether he might have sounded half hearted in his offer. He realises that he does not want to lose her. “She was the only person he’d met in his adult life who had any understanding of his past, the only woman he wanted to remain connected to” (326). The next day, Kaushik goes out to a cove on a rented boat with his friendly neighbour, Henrik. His neighbour speaks about the tremors the night before, which Kaushik is oblivious about. For a moment, as Kaushik watches Henrik swim in the water, he imagines his mother swimming alongside his neighbour. “He wanted to swim to the cove as Henrik had, to show his mother he was not afraid” (331). In a trance like state, Kaushik plunges into the warm and welcoming sea.

Until this point, this story is presented by an omniscient narrator, as opposed to the previous two stories, “Once in a Lifetime” and “Going Ashore”. Lahiri, skilfully introduces a break in narration with Hema taking over as narrator in the last portion of the story, like a coda. After parting, Hema is unable to forget Kaushik and searches for information about him on his website. Then on television, she sees images of the Tsunami and how Thailand had been badly hit. In February, she learns of Kaushik’s death through an obituary in the newspaper and mourns for him privately. “By then I needed no
proof of your absence from the world; I felt it as plainly and implacably as the cells that were gathering and shaping themselves in my body” (333). She is now married and pregnant with Navin’s child and at the same time, also mourning Kaushik’s death. This is symbolic of the cycle of life; creation, life and death. Hema almost wishes that her unborn baby belonged to Kaushik but says, “We had been careful, and you had left nothing behind” (333). Unknown to Hema, she will forever carry Kaushik’s memory in her psyche, just as Kaushik had carried his mother’s remembrance until his death. The story ends here and we are left to wonder about Hema’s life.

This trilogy of stories is extremely psychological in nature. The lives of Hema and Kaushik have physically coincided only twice; once as little children for a month and decades later, as middle aged adults in Italy for a brief period. Kaushik passes away shortly after their second meeting. It is remarkable that a brief childhood encounter could last for a lifetime, up till middle age and in Hema’s case, perhaps for a lifetime. This is an intense tale about two lost souls whose lives are interlinked through a psychological bond. This dazzling trilogy is not just about Hema and Kaushik but also explores the psychological relationship that Kaushik continues to share with his late mother, who remains alive in his psyche, till the final moment of his tragic life. Lahiri is a master of psychological accuracy and this story showcases her emotional wisdom.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s remarkable novel, *The Namesake*, made its debut in 2003 and instantly became an international bestseller. This is a poignant cross cultural story of a Hindu Bengali family in America and their quest towards self realisation and inner acceptance. In this literary marvel, Lahiri takes us on the Ganguli family’s emotional journey from conservative and tradition bound Calcutta to a suburban Boston. Lahiri is herself a second generation Diasporic Indian American writer and with this background, the author skilfully depicts
with honesty and painful accuracy, the trauma faced by immigrant Diasporas. A particular feature which is distinct in this novel is the refusal to resort to clichés and comic representations that diasporic characters are often subjected to. Instead, the protagonist and other characters are treated with fine sensitivity, irony and dignity. Lahiri does not generalise or indulge in stereotypes and therefore, her characters although fictional, become real and humane.

Two important figures in this novel are the son Gogol, who is the main protagonist and his father, Ashoke Ganguli, who may be considered the hero of the novel. Although Ashoke is an immigrant himself, he is the only diasporic character who has achieved a sense of self acceptance and is not an agonised or lost soul, as opposed to the rest of his family. This self assurance is intricately linked with the title of the book. Ashoke is an engineering student from MIIT and after an arranged marriage in Calcutta, embarks on a brave new life in America, together with his young bride Ashima Ganguli. It is during the end of the nineteen sixties when the young couple arrives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The beginning chapter of this delightful novel begins with Ashima Ganguli in an advanced stage of pregnancy and soon thereafter, gives birth to their first born son Gogol, who as previously stated, is the main protagonist. The fine and simplistic narration employed by Lahiri underlies the complex and problematic issues that constantly battles in the psyche of the protagonist and other diasporic characters. The fact that the story begins with Ashima’s pregnancy may be symbolic and has a psychoanalytic interpretation. “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” (TN 49). Except for Ashoke, all the characters are ‘pregnant’, metaphorical for their
eternal quest towards a realisation for the discovery of the ‘self’, which forever eludes them.

The naming of Gogol is the result of a series of unforeseen incidents. According to their custom, Ashima’s octogenarian grandmother in India was to name the first born. Without disclosing the name to anyone, the old woman had mailed a letter containing one name for a girl and one for a boy. Expecting to receive the letter any day, Ashoke and Ashima had ignored the hospital forms which required detailed particulars for their child’s birth certificate. “In India, parents take their time. It wasn’t unusual for years to pass before the right name, the best possible name, was determined” (25). As fate would have designed it, the letter never arrives and Ashima’s grandmother does not remember the name in her old age. The new parents are pressed to name their infant as they belatedly learn that in America, hospitals cannot release babies without a birth certificate. And so, it came to be that Gogol was named after the celebrated Russian literary figure Nikolai Gogol, whom his father has met only in books.

Ashoke’s maturity and understanding of life is the result of a train accident which nearly took his life when he was a young man at the age of twenty two. Ever since the incident, he gratefully views his existence as a second chance at life. This poignant incident beautifully links the overall plot of the novel. Ashoke had always been a great lover of books and he especially enjoyed the genre of Russian literature. On that fateful journey many years ago, Ashoke was travelling to his grandparents’ house in Jamshedpur. His grandfather was the person who had ignited Ashoke’s special affinity towards Russian writers. Ashoke had been reading the story, “The Overcoat”, by Nikolai Gogol, his favourite Russian writer during the early hours of 20 October, 1961, when the accident occurred. He had been awake reading instead
of retiring to his berth like the rest of the passengers in his compartment. Many people in the train perished but Ashoke miraculously survived. He was rescued from the wreckage when the crumpled wad of a single page from his book fell from his clutched fingers and caught the attention of a rescue worker.

He cannot thank the book; the book has perished, as he nearly did, in scattered pieces, in the early hours of an October day, in a field 209 kilometres from Calcutta. Instead of thanking God he thanks Gogol, the Russian writer who had saved his life (21).

Ashoke feels a sense of gratitude to Nikolai Gogol, a man whom he has never met or spoken to in real life. His only link to this writer is by knowing a name and writings to testify to the name. But this seems to be enough for Ashoke. “Instead of thanking God, he thanks Gogol, the Russian writer who had saved his life” (21). Thus, when the hospital authorities insist that a name be inserted on their baby’s certificate, Ashoke and Ashima decides to enter the pet name “Gogol”, as a temporary means in order to get their baby released from the hospital. “Besides, it’s only a pet name, not to be taken seriously, simply something to put on the certificate for now to release them from the hospital” (29). Against all odds, fate had designed for Gogol to be named as such and the protagonist’s story is inexplicably connected with his name. This is a story about love, family, relationships, solitude and the discovery of oneself.

Admittedly, _The Namesake_ carries significant autobiographical traces of its creator. This is particularly so, in reference to the relevancy of the book title and the use of a pet name for the main protagonist, Gogol. Similarly, Lahiri’s real name was Nilanjana Sudeshna but after she enrolled in her school in America, her teachers found her original name too difficult to pronounce and
therefore, the nickname, “Jhumpa” inadvertently became her official name (Lahiri. www.bookbrowse.com). Lahiri admits, “I’m like Gogol in that my pet name inadvertently became my good name” (Lahiri. www.bookbrowse.com).

As seen in the novel, Gogol is always torn between two worlds i.e., India, his ancestral home which he feels no real connection towards and America, his birth place which he identifies with in terms of culture but experiences a sense of estrangement from. This feeling is especially typical of second generation Diasporas. They constantly experience a feeling of alienation and rootlessness as they are aware that their adoptive country is not where their roots lay. At the same time, their adoptive country is all that is familiar to them and they know nothing about their ancestral land except what is told to them by their parents and through other second hand sources. This leads to confusion and frustration and they experience a sense of identity crisis from the simple and obvious knowledge that they look different from the en masse in the adoptive country, which is America in this case. In later years, Gogol and his sister Sonia dread their trips to India as they have become completely westernized and cannot assimilate with the Indian culture and traditions. At the same time, in spite of identifying with western customs, they feel alienated as they realise, as young as they are, that they can never completely belong.

Lahiri has confessed to have inherited a sense of exile from her parents and feeling like she never belonged to any place. “But it bothered me growing up, the feeling that there was no single place I truly belonged” (Lahiri. www.bookbrowse.com). The author’s history of being a second generation diaspora is similar to her protagonist Gogol. It is therefore natural that the brand of identity crisis and emotional upheavals depicted in Gogol’s character is reminiscent of Lahiri’s own experiences while growing up. These concerns
are all related with the immigrant experience and it is imperative to note that the psychoanalytic experiences of first and second generation diasporas are distinct and differ greatly from one another.

While Jhumpa Lahiri’s first generation Americans cherish their past and its memories as an indispensable, integral part of their roots and their being, her second generation Indian Americans reflect both proximity and distancing from it; they seem to perceive and adopt new angles at which to enter (this) reality (Das 16)

A reason to appreciate this transnational writer is the honest sincerity in her writings. Lahiri only writes about issues which she has experienced herself and her writing focuses especially on the human psyche. For this reason, the essence of autobiographical echoes are consistently present in her literary productions, particularly in *The Namesake*.

What is a name? The Oxford Dictionary has clinically defined this word as, “A word or words by which someone or something is known, addressed or referred to”. William Shakespeare has famously quoted, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet” (Romeo and Juliet 2.2). The second description suggests that names and meanings may be arbitrary. Lahiri’s novel recounts the inevitable curiosity of human nature which always wants to discover the unknown. With regard to babies, Lahiri narrates the manner in which after giving birth, Ashima would repeatedly be stopped by strangers, all Americans, who would look into her pram and congratulate her. These strangers would always ask for the name of her baby, as if knowing the name would give them a better insight about the nature of the infant. Therefore, is the meaning of a name simply to do with the practical
labelling of a person or object akin to the practical process of labelling jars in the kitchen as “salt”, “sugar” and so on and forth?. Accordingly, let us then evaluate the significance and relevancy of the issue of the name in *The Namesake*.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s act in naming her protagonist Gogol after a pet name and also referring to this action in the title book cannot be overlooked as a mere coincidence. Lahiri’s own reminiscence of a similar predicament during her early years in America when she was compelled to adopt the pet name, “Jhumpa Lahiri”, instead of her real name “Nilanjana Sudeshna” (www.bookbrowse.com) assigns significant relevancy to the name issue. Names contain identity and to have to discard one’s name for another would undoubtedly intensify the feeling of alienation for a diaspora. This is especially so if the change in name is not due to personal choice but because of compulsion, in order to be accepted and fit into a strange and alien environment. As practical though the reason may be, a feeling of rejection is unavoidable as the rejection of one’s original name would be seen as a denial of the real self. Names are an integral part of one’s identity. By adopting a new name, more palatable to the new environment, a diaspora would also consciously or otherwise, adopt a new identity. The name of a person usually consist of a single word and due to this nature, the signifier is often the same as the signified i.e., the name and meaning is the same. We often conjure a mental image of a stranger by simply knowing his or her name. For example, a beautiful or exotic sounding name conjures an image of a desirable looking person. Intangible qualities are also often attributed likewise. Of course, such tangible or intangible qualities assigned to the bearer of the name are subjective and depends upon the imagination, culture, tradition or personal experience of the hearer. That being said, it is still true that names often conjure pre conceived notions of the same. It is a fact that when a human being enters the
world, amongst the first things asked about the new born is his or her name. A human child is sent to school once he or she is old enough to begin the application of the mind and learn things. It is therefore, terribly poignant that one of the first things a child learns in school is how to spell his or her name. This implies that the idea of the self and awareness of one’s identity gradually is intrinsic to the process of discovery and learning.

And so, Gogol’s formal education begins. At the top of sheets of scratchy yellow paper he writes out his pet name again and again, and the alphabet in capitals and lowercase...In the front covers of the textbooks from which he is taught to read he leaves his legacy, writing his name in number two pencil below a series of others...“Gogol G,” he signs his work in the lower right hand corner, as if there were a need to distinguish him from any other Gogol in the school (TN 60).

In *The Namesake*, as the protagonist Gogol grows up, he experiences a sense of burden through his name. This feeling sets in as he enters his adolescence and steadily increases in time. Being an adolescent diaspora, emotional stress and adjustment is inevitable for young Gogol. Somehow, Gogol channels all this negative energy into his odd name. Initially, as an adolescent, Gogol is simply told that his father is a fan of his name sake and he unreasonably blames his name for his feelings of alienation, identity crisis and rootless ness.

He (Gogol) hates that his name is both obscure and absurd, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian. He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after
second...At times his name, an entity shapeless and weightless, manages to distress him physically, like the scratchy tag of a shirt he has been forced permanently to wear (76).

Gogol regrets that he had rejected a different name offered by his parents when they had first admitted him into Pre School. As Gogol was a pet name, Ashoke and Ashima had tried to admit their son under the name, “Nikhil”, but little Gogol, then oblivious to the trauma that would assault him in future, rejects the name and refuses to respond. “He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn’t know” (57). Names carry one’s identity and at a tender and innocent age, little Gogol was simply content to be just himself. However, as time passes, Gogol begins to experience an unnaturally magnified dread towards his own name which is intensely psychological in nature. “He even hates signing his name at the bottom of his drawings in art class” (76). He bitterly regrets his refusal in latter years and eventually, as a young man, legally changes his name to Nikhil, much to the disappointment of his parents. In the courtroom, when asked by the judge to elaborate the reason for his change in name, Gogol voices aloud the words he has never admitted to his own family, “I hate the name Gogol, I’ve always hated it” (102). Gogol experiences a sense of freedom after officially changing his name. “He wonders if this is how it feels for an obese person to become thin, for a prisoner to walk free” (102). After exiting the court room, Gogol walks around in a happy daze, suppressing the urge to introduce himself to strangers on the street as Nikhil. He takes as application for a student admit card and feels grateful that his first credit card will read as “Nikhil” instead of “Gogol”. He thinks of the women he can now approach freely and confidently, without feeling self conscious about his name. Gogol imagines that all his problems were tied with his name and has disappeared, not that his name has been legally changed.
But now that he’s Nikhil it’s easier to ignore his parents, to tune out their concerns and pleas. With relief, he types his name at the tops of his freshman papers. He read the telephone messages his suitemates leave for Nikhil on assorted scraps in their rooms. He opens a checking account, writes his new name into course books. “Me llamo Nikhil,” he says in his Spanish class (105).

Names are cause for affinity and fellowship as portrayed in a poignant incident which occurred when Gogol was eleven years of age. His class had gone on a field trip to a graveyard where a famous writer is buried. Gogol’s teacher hands them several sheets of newsprint and crayons and the children are asked to rub the surfaces of gravestones to search for their own names. The other children excitedly holler common American surnames similar to their own, etched on the gravestones. Naturally Gogol, as young as he is, realises that unlike his American classmates, he will not find a Ganguli buried in the graveyard. “He is old enough to know that he himself will be burned, not buried, that his body will occupy no plot of earth, that no stone in this country will bear his name beyond life” (69). To his pleasant surprise however, Gogol discovers unique names like Abijah Craven, Anguish Mather, Peregrine Wotton and a few other names which he had never heard before. “Gogol has never met a person named Abijah, just as, he now realizes, he has never met another Gogol” (70). Someone remarks as to how his rubbings had produced unusual names like his own. At home, his mother is understandably horrified at the nature of their fieldtrip and refuses to display her son’s gravestone rubbings along with his other creations.

But Gogol is attached to them. For reasons he cannot explain or necessarily understand, these ancient Puritan spirits, these very immigrants to America, these bearers of unthinkable, obsolete
names, have spoken to him, so much so that in spite of his mother’s disgust he refuses to throw the rubbings away (71).

When Gogol began his junior year in school, he meets Mr. Lawson who is the first of Gogol’s teachers to know about his celebrated namesake, the Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol. Mr. Lawson’s easy acceptance of Gogol’s name is reason enough for the young protagonist to like him. During one fateful class however, Mr. Lawson took a lesson on the life and works of Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol. Gogol is mortified by Mr. Lawson’s morbid account of the short and melancholic life of eccentric genius that his namesake was. The Russian writer’s steady decline into madness shamed Gogol as if he shared a common identity with the writer. “Warmth spread from the back of Gogol’s neck to his cheek and his ears. Each time the name is uttered, he quietly winces” (91). Later, Gogol unreasonably angry and feels betrayed by Mr. Lawson.

With some, the name may become a part of the core of a severe neurosis. The degree of pathological disturbance varies from exaggerated pride or exaggerated shame over one’s name, commonly encountered amongst adolescents, to extremes of psychotic proportions (Murphy http://www.pep-web.org).

As an adult, Gogol legally changes his name to Nikhil. The choice of the new name is not random and is linked to his original name as justified in the given lines. It is noteworthy that of all the Bengali names at disposal, Gogol chose one that is connected to his old one. This signifies that on a subconscious level, though perhaps unaware, Gogol is aware of his real identity and knows that he cannot escape his true self by a mere change in name.
The name, Nikhil, is artfully connected to the old. Not only is it a perfectly respectable Bengali good name, meaning, “he who is entire, encompassing all”, but it also bears a satisfying resemblance to Nikolai, the first name of the Russian Gogol (TN 56).

After the initial exhilaration, he is further immersed in the turmoil of identity crisis and alienation within himself as he is now torn between two identities. Having been known as Gogol for the most part of his life, his parents and most people he knew from childhood still persists in calling him so. His identity is split between being Gogol and Nikhil. “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” (105). His family makes a conscious effort to address him as Nikhil in front of his new friends in college but continues calling him Gogol at home. Gogol is painfully aware when his parents slip and calls him Gogol in public. Pet names are common in Bengali culture and are known as “daknam”, which literally means the name which one is called by friends, family and other close condidantes. “Pet names are a persisitent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not so serious, so formal, so complicated. They are a reminder, too, that one is not all things to all people” (26). Ashima finds herself unable to write “Nikhil” on letters and cards as it feels very formal and aloof. “No parent ever called a child by his good name. Good names had no place within a family” (165). Gogol’s family wants him to be happy and therefore, accepts his new name. However, having known him by his pet name Gogol all their lives, they are unable to call him anything else. On his part, Gogol feels awkward himself to be called Nikhil by his parents and other people who had known him before he had changed his name as he feels like a fraud.
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. At times he still feels like his old name, painfully and without warning…He fears being discovered, having the whole charade somehow unravel, and in nightmares his files are exposed, his original name printed on the front page of the *Yale Daily News* (106-107).

Gogol subconsciously adopts two identities and mentally categorises people as those who knew him under his old name and the ones who having met him in later years, knew him as Nikhil. His new friends in college are separated from his past and as Nikhil, Gogol’s personality undergoes a significant change. Nikhil is confident, at ease with himself, socially adept and has girlfriends, although he avoids letting his parents know about them. Shortly after changing his name, Gogol goes to a party and meets an American girl named Kim. He introduces himself as Nikhil for the first time and kisses her. Afterwards, as his friends express their awe over his new found boldness with the opposite sex, he almost tells them that it wasn’t him. “But he doesn’t tell them that it hadn’t been Gogol who’d kissed Kim. That Gogol had had nothing to do with it” (96). Soon, Gogol makes an American girlfriend called Ruth at college. The pair share an intimate relationship and Gogol becomes very friendly with Ruth’s parents, even spending nights at their house. Gogol however, does not tell his parents about Ruth, let alone introduce her to his family. “He cannot imagine being with her in the house where he is still Gogol” (115). As is the case with second generation diasporas, Gogol has become completely westernized and the way his parents cling on to their Indian customs by way of attire, food habits and also their frugal way of living irritates him. He is always known as Gogol at home and therefore remains aloof, emotionally detached and especially alienated towards his parents.
The names of individuals play an important role in the organization of their ego defense patterns and are cathetic and utilized from the point of view of ego defenses in a manner similar to an organ or body part. Freud was well aware of the importance of names and discussed mechanisms and causes of forgetting names, which consciously or unconsciously have unpleasant, or other associations, and the distortion or falsification of names
(Murphy http://www.pep-web.org).

Gogol’s journey towards self acceptance began with his father, Ashoke’s untimely death. Gogol had always felt slightly guilty that his father had disclosed the significance of his name only after he had legally changed it to Nikhil. For most of his young life, Gogol had not known about the life altering accident which had almost taken his father’s life and was responsible for his father’s limp. Gogol had always assumed that he had been named so, simply because his namesake was his father’s favourite author. When the truth is finally revealed, Gogol feels bitter and asks Ashoke whether he reminded his father of the catastrophic accident. Ashoke replies that to the contrary, his son reminded him of everything, the second chance at life that has been gifted to him. After Ashoke passes away, Gogol recalls past memories of his father with a sense of nostalgia and regret. He numbly goes through the traditional religious rites and customs observed during the mourning period. He has an American girlfriend Maxine and for the first time, he is not conscious of exposing her to his home and family. “This time, he doesn’t care about the house, how the pile of guests’ shoes heaped by the door, might appear to her” (TN 182). They eventually separate. Gogol marries Moushumi Mazoomdar,
also a diaspora and the daughter of an old family friend of his parents. The marriage end in a divorce after the discovery of Moushumi’s infidelity.

After Ashoke’s demise, Gogol’s mother Ashima is now ready to move back to India and holds a last Christmas Eve dinner by way of a farewell dinner. When Gogol goes upstairs to look for a camera as requested by Ashima, he takes the camera inside his old room to load a fresh battery. There, an old forgotten book, never read, catches his eye. A copy of The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol, gifted to Gogol on his fourteenth birthday by his late father many years ago. Gogol finally begins to read.

Names hold great meanings in various cultures. Amongst the Angami Naga tribe, a new born infant is bestowed a name with qualities and virtues that the elders might hope for the child to possess. The child is thus expected to live up to his or her name in later life. In the beginning chapters of the book, Ashoke and Ashima hesitate when Mr. Wilcox, the hospital administrator suggests that they name their new born after one of them or perhaps an ancestor. “Within Bengali families, individual names are sacred, inviolable. They are not meant to be inherited or shared” (28). Names are thus, not seen as arbitrary in Bengali and various other cultures. During the course of a dinner conversation in the latter part of the novel, a group of people discusses possible names for a baby. A random character named Colin suggests a name which signifies a specific virtue such as Faith, Chastity, and Patience etc., and also mentions that he had a great grandmother who was named Silence. This conveys the personal value of a person’s name even in certain western cultures. The intimacy of a person’s name is especially revealed in Ashima’s refusal to call her husband by his name especially during the beginning of their marriage.
When she calls out to Ashoke, she doesn’t say his name...She has adopted his surname but refuses, for propriety’s sake, to utter his first. It’s not the type of thing Bengali wives do. Like a kiss or caress in a Hindi movie, a husband’s name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over (2).

Names are considered so intimate in the conservative Indian culture which Ashima and Ashoke hailed from, so much so that Ashima learned Ashoke’s name only after the betrothal. This conveys the belief that names are sacred and conveys the very nature of its bearer. Similarly, in The Namesake, the given meaning of the names of the characters seemingly exemplifies their respective nature and personality. “Ashima means ‘she who is limitless, without borders’. Ashoke, the name of an emperor mean ‘he who transcends grief” (26). It is also poignant, the manner how Ashoke’s mother embroiders his cotton handkerchiefs, “A for Ashoke” (11), in light blue thread. It appears as if the letter A stands for no name or word other than Ashoke. Gogol’s younger sister, Sonali’s name means “she who is golden” (62). Gogol especially envies his sister’s name.

Though Sonali is the name on her birth certificate, the name she will carry officially through her life, at home they begin to call her Sonu, then Sona, and finally Sonia, Sonia makes her a citizen of the world. It’s a Russian link to her brother, it’s European, South American (62).

It is significant that Gogol, who suffers from a terrible sense of rootlessness particularly envies his sister’s name, more than any other name. The link to various nationalities her name offers gives her a sense of belonging which Gogol feels he can never claim with his name. On the other hand, Gogol
feels a terrible isolation because his name has no such lineage and believes that no one in the world shares his name.

This writer he is names after- Gogol isn’t his first name. His first name is Nikolai. Not only does Gogol Ganguli have a pet name turned good name, but a last name turned first name. And so it occurs to him that no one he knows in the world, in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake (78).

There is an incident during Halloween when some hooligans shortens the surname “Ganguli” written in individual golden letters on the side of the mailbox. It had been changed to “Gang”, with the word, “Green” sprawled in pencil following it. Gogol feels sickened with the insult while his father calmly dismisses it as boys having harmless fun. Gogol feels the desecration of his surname intensely and regards it as a direct insult to his person. According to psychoanalysis, names are significant towards the moulding of one’s personality and may sometimes constrict identity, as in the case of Gogol in The Namesake. Often, names or rather, the lack of a proper name, gives rise of alienation in a person.

Prior to its birth, the human infant is spoken of with hopes, desires and fears in the light of which it is assigned an identity: it is given a name. Such naming is no mere labelling. Rather it is an interpellation, a summons to the child to assume an identity not of its choosing, an identity which necessarily incarnates an ideal...Such naming gives rise to a sense of alienation (Lapsley 75).
Names are often seen as a projection of the self and this is portrayed by Gogol’s reaction when he meets Moushumi after a long time. The pair had last seen each other as children and only had vague recollections of each other. “It had annoyed him, when he’d called her, that she hadn’t recognized him as Nikhil. This is the first time he’s been out with a woman who’d known him by that other name” (TN 193). Gogol had wanted Moushumi to regard him in the light of the image he had painstakingly created over the years and that image required him to be Nikhil and not Gogol. The fact that Moushumi had declined to change her last name to Ganguli after marrying Gogol is also hugely symbolic. Moushumi’s name means “A damp south westerly breeze” (240), and this slightly obscure meaning presents an insight into her restless nature and eventual act of infidelity.

During their brief marriage, Gogol and Moushumi once attended a dinner party hosted by Astrid and Donald, a couple close to Moushumi, whom Gogol regards as frivolous. At one point during the course of the evening, the dinner conversation became centred around the topic of suitable baby names for the pregnant Astrid. Gogol understandably feels betrayed when in a casual dinner conversation, his wife carelessly discloses to her friends whom he barely knew, that he had legally changed his name from Gogol to Nikhil. Besides his family, Moushumi was the only person who knew about his past identity. This careless revelation by her therefore, felt like a betrayal of his trust in her and an intrusion into the sacredness of their marriage. Upon being barraged by questions as to why he had changed his name, Gogol simply explains that his father had been a fan of the writer. In a moment of exasperation, Gogol flippantly declares that human beings should not be allowed to name themselves until they turn eighteen. Until that age, humans should simply address each other with the use of pronouns, says the protagonist. This declaration emphasises the influence that names hold over the personality of its
bearer. Gogol recalls an English translation of a French novel he had once read, “In which the main characters were simply referred to, for hundreds of pages, as He and She. He had read it in a matter of hours, oddly relieved that the names of the characters were never revealed” (245).

Moushumi’s affair which resulted in the destruction of her marriage to Gogol had started with a seductive sounding name. “The name alone, when she’d first learned it, had been enough to seduce her. Dimitri Desjardins” (256). He was an older man. Moushumi had first met Dimitri on a chartered overnight bus many years ago when she was only seventeen. They struck up a conversation. He had been intrigued by her exotic sounding name and had asked her to spell it for him. On finding her name difficult to pronounce, Dimitri had impulsively stated that he would simply call her “Mouse” instead. “The nickname had irritated and pleased her at the same time. It made her feel foolish, but she was aware that in renaming her he had claimed her somehow, already made her his own” (258). Moushumi who teaches French literature at a university, goes through the faculty mailbox and comes across an envelope with Dimitri’s name and address on the cover. He had applied for a teaching position at the same University. She remembers how attracted she had been to him years ago and takes the initiative to call him herself. Their affair revolves around the intimacy of names. Names are seen as a sign of boldness and intimacy. Similarly, Ashima, a conservative Bengali woman, never utters her husband’s name in all her years of marriage. “She has adopted his surname but refuses, for propriety’s sake, to utter his first. It’s not the type of things Bengali wives do” (2). Lahiri also tells us that there are different usages for pet names and good names. The former is used affectionately and only by loved ones and the latter, “for identification in the outside world” (26). It is also significant that Moushumi never mentions Gogol’s name to her lover Dimitri, simply referring to him as a nameless, faceless husband. Dimitri does not express
curiosity either. This refusal to acknowledge a name seems to make them feel less guilty about the betrayal.

As meaningful as names are, it is interesting to note that Gogol’s paranoia about his name is entirely psychological in nature. This is because more than the actual name itself, it is the person’s concept of his or her name which gives a name its influence over the bearer. At some level, although he is unwilling to admit it, Gogol appears to realise that his feelings of alienation are psychological and has nothing to do with his name. Before legally changing his name, Gogol vents out his frustrations to his father and claims that no one takes him seriously because they had named him after such a peculiar person as Nikolai Gogol. When Ashoke take this to heart and asks his son to name the person who had made him suffer because of his name, Gogol realises that he could not think of a single person.

“People”, he (Gogol) said, lying to his parents. For his father had a point; the only person who didn’t take Gogol seriously, the only person who tormented him, the only person chronically aware of and afflicted by the embarrassment of his name, the only person who constantly questioned it and wished it were otherwise, was Gogol (100).

It is ironically sad that the various characters begin to realise the meaning of acceptance only after Ashoke suffers a massive heart attack and unexpectedly passes away while at his work place. He was the only person who is at ease with his identity. After her husband’s demise, Ashima returns to India to live with her brother. To her surprise, she discovers a sense of sadness at the thought of leaving the adopted country which her late husband had come to love. Ashima realises that America had given her so much. Gogol who had
always taken his father for granted experiences profound sadness and a lingering regret over his father’s death. He finally learns to appreciate his parents’ bravery in leaving a world behind and creating a new one. Gogol finds himself increasingly drawn to his heritage, his name and his destiny as the embodiment of his parents’ aspirations.

Through this psychoanalytic study of the name issue in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*, one can confidently state that names are not merely random labelling of human beings. It is not just a practical process of identifying or addressing one person from the other. The human psyche is complex and therefore, the name of a person essentially becomes an integral part of identity. This identity is especially crucial in the case of Diasporas who inevitably faces the trauma of identity crisis.

Lahiri has proven her proficiency in both the novel and short story. The trademark elegant and concise prose is consistent in both genres. It is clear that the stories of this expatriate write are predominantly about the complexities of human psyche and how the state of mind affects relationships. Although Lahiri may not intend on a moral while writing her stories, her sensitivity for her protagonists ultimately result in drawing out the best essence of the human spirit; the God given compassion which resides in each of us.
Cherry, Kendra. “Hysteria” 21 November 2012


