Chapter-V

Conflicts, Confrontations and Alliances

But there is neither East nor West, Border nor Breed, nor Birth when two strong men stand face to face though they come from the end of the earth.

-Rudyard Kipling

When Kipling says “Never the twain shall meet” it does not preclude the possibility of meaningful meeting. He is aware of the fact that meaningful meetings need “strong men”. Certainly, strong men are those who are not crippled by the burden of their own cultures. Since culture is a human product, it is subject to flux. Love of one’s own culture does not make one antagonistic toward an alien culture. Chaman Nahal in his article, “Cross-cultural Tensions: E.M. Forster and Ruth Prawar Jhabvala” says:

May be two large segments of cultures such as the East and the West cannot meet in harmony; some of us believe they can . . . they meet in disharmony . . . It is all the same a meeting, a meeting of meanings. (85 -86)

True culture has been defined as the ability to appreciate the other culture. Like biological changes cultural contacts “require adaptation for survival and
development” (Harris 350). The nature of the cross-cultural conflicts, confrontations and alliances portrayed in the works of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri are analysed in this chapter.

The writings of Bharati Mukherjee bear the stamp of the rootlessness caused by Diaspora. The Canadian mosaic of the cultural trends gives her a unique form of multiculturalism.

Bharati Mukherjee’s multi-dimensional characters do not share any hostile distancing from their homeland. They do not even neglect the call of the alien identity. The rigid concept of irreconcilable hostility thus seems to be receding in favour of an evolving consciousness of coexistence. Bharati Mukherjee works for a fruitful outcome from cross-cultural interactions. Her movement from Canada to the United States, she says in the “Introduction” to the collection of her short stories entitled Darkness is “a movement away from aloofness of expatriation to the exuberance of immigration” (Darkness 3).

Cross-cultural transaction is an interactive, dialogic and two-way process rather than a simple active-passive relation. Bharati Mukherjee’s characters with different socio-cultural experiences relate to a process involving complex negotiation and exchange. Cultural crossovers pave way for a hybrid culture and a new process of cultural assimilation. A mixed cultural milieu makes room for vistas of communication and dialogue in this cosmopolitan world. As an outcome, diasporic reciprocation has become one of the recurrent themes in post-colonial literature.
Jhumpa Lahiri has acknowledged in interviews that her fiction is largely based on her own memories, personal anecdotes and life experiences, in part due to her parent’s observation of Indian traditions and persistence to raise their children as Indian. This mingling of two worlds pervades her writing, which exhibits an anxiety of accommodating the two sides of her.

Much of her short fiction deals with the lives and vicissitudes of Southeast Asian Indian protagonists, trapped between two different worlds and different ways of living. The characters are either Indo-Americans, trying to adapt to a new country that provides opportunities or their Westernized children.

In her fiction, Jhumpa Lahiri portrays the traditional order of Indian marital culture in several stories dealing with either first generation immigrants in America or stories set in India. In male-oriented societies, as in Eastern tradition cultures, women are responsible for cooking and carrying out household duties. Childbirth is considered a period during which her personal freedom diminishes. Men are responsible for working and providing their families with a monetary income.

In Jhumpa Lahiri’s story telling, as well as in the world she witnesses, there is a clear distinction between male and female worlds, private and public sphere and domestic and social life. Thus “A Real Durwan” and “The Treatment of Bibi Haldar”, two stories set in India, feature docile housewives presented as stereotyped characters whose only objectives in life are marriage and motherhood. In her story “A Real Durwan”, the narrator recalls that Bibi’s only dream for the future is marriage.
Jhumpa Lahiri gives an account of stereotype Indian woman, Bibi Halder. “She wanted to be spoken for, protected, placed on her path in life, Like the rest of us, she wanted to serve suppers and scold servants” (IM 160).

For such women, marriage becomes a necessity, the means to achieve respect, protection as well as the vehicle to fulfill a role in society.

Families will do their best to find good and prosperous husbands to their daughters, as their happiness and welfare will depend on male counterpart’s status and income.

In “The Third and Final Continent” the anxiety of Mala’s parents to provide her with a suitable match is self explanatory.

She was twenty-seven, an age when her parents had begun to fear that she would never marry, and so they were willing to ship her only child halfway across the world in order to save her from spinsterhood. (181)

The old tradition of marriages arranged between families also affects those first generation immigrants arriving in the Western world during the 50s or 60s, as many of them were either rapidly married before travelling to the United States, or committed to do so within the process of settlement in the new country. In her stories, Lahiri shows that men suffered from these imposed rules of marriage too, as they
were obliged to find a wife and have children as a means to perpetuate caste and family ties.

The protagonist of ‘The Third and the Final Continent’ tells how this Eastern rule affects both the lives of young immigrants as well as his own existence:

Every now and then someone in the house moved out, to live with a woman whom his family back in Calcutta had determined he was to wed. In 1969, when I was thirty six years old, my own marriage was arranged. (174)

He explains that his marriage was arranged by his relatives and how little it affected him, as he was immersed in a new job and living in America:

The marriage had been arranged by my older brother and his wife. I regarded the proposition with neither objection nor enthusiasm. It was a duty expected of me, as it was expected of every man. (181)

Those traditional marriages, though arranged or planned, usually disregarding the feelings of the spouses, develop into strong relationships and endurable love after a life together. The dutiful protagonist of “The Third and the Final Continent” admits his indifference towards his wife at the beginning of their relationship: “I waited to get used to her, to her presence at my side, at my table and in my bed, but a week later we were still strangers” (192), just to tell his mutual affection in the future. “As
strange as it seemed, I knew in my heart that one day her death would affect me, and stranger still, that mine would affect her” (195).

For present generations, these stories of exotic weddings in India and arranged marriages between perfect strangers display a romantic halo which modern love stories lack. In “Year’s End”, part of the trio stories of *Unaccustomed Earth*, young Kaushik reckons his parent’s marriage as a romantic episode and later witnesses how they fell in love with each other after years together, probably forced by his mother’s illness as well.

My parents had had an arranged marriage, but there was a touch of romance about it, too, my father seeing my mother for the first time at a wedding and being so attracted that he had asked, the following week for her hand. (UE, 255)

This first impression will be soon counteracted by a new opinion of arranged marriages, as his father remarries a young widow in India after his mother’s death. The protagonist is ashamed and angry at his father’s behaviour and he fails to understand why he marries this time and the reasons for forgetting his first wife so soon.

A similar situation occurs in “Hell-Heaven”, one of the stories of *Unaccustomed Earth* in which the marriage issue is best explored. Jhumpa Lahiri focuses on the
isolation faced by the narrator’s mother Aparna, an India born woman married off to Shyamal Da, a workaholic Indian husband who disregards his wife’s needs. Though two of them were strangers to each other, Shyamal had accepted this traditional union in exchange of the possibility of his parent’s approval to study abroad. His necessity of marriage arises as a way of reconciling private life with professional aspirations.

Aparna on the other hand, regards this union as an opportunity to leave behind the background and suffocating environment where she lives, an area in Calcutta she considers the wilderness.

They both married in India before the couple moved to Berlin where Shyamal finished his training in Microbiology prior to his acceptance of a position as a researcher at Mass General. Aparna’s isolation and displacement become more evident when Pranab Chakraborty, a young Indian bachelor from Calcutta, arrives in Massachusetts to continue his studies. The attractive and charming personality of Pranab, hosted and fed at nights by the Das contrasts with that of Shyamal Da:

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 and he existed in a shell that neither my mother nor I could penetrate. (65)
When this sense of isolation becomes more acute in Aparna, and trapped in the suburban life, her husband responds: “If you are so unhappy, go back to Calcutta” (76). Aparna, as many other female characters in Jhumpa Lahiri’s stories shows a strong attachment to her homeland, her roots and Eastern traditions.

When it comes to leaving their original land in order to migrate to a new country, men tend to adjust to the circumstances and attempt to integrate themselves in Western cultures. They work, study and live as it is expected of them. Once they settle in America, once the process of adaption is over, their wives are relocated with them in a different context making the sense of displacement stronger.

Stories of Indian immigrants in the United States usually deal with highly qualified husbands attending American Universities as opposed to the wives deeply attached to Eastern traditions, devoting their time to household chores and child bearing. Those men adjust themselves to the American way of life and their new jobs, grasping every chance to succeed in the land of opportunities.

Though with Indian roots and family ties, these characters behave talk and live as genuine Americans. In “Interpreter of Maladies” the description of the Das’ family, born and raised in the United States and travelling to the land of their ancestors, highlights this contrast in a single sentence. “The family looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did” (IM 42-43).
Although the first generation immigrants in America sought to raise their children as Indian, obeying main Eastern rules, the second generation is born and raised in a Western country characterized by an apparent freedom in terms of personal and marital relationships.

In Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction, there is a tendency of young Eastern couples meeting for the first time due to their parent’s right judgement and effort. Sometimes, without realizing it, Indo-Americans are led not just to know each other, but to fall in love and marry afterwards. The situation is set for them. Mina Das recalls thus in “Interpreter of Maladies”:

> Our parents were best friends who lived in the same town.
> My entire life I saw him every weekend, either at our house or theirs. We were sent upstairs to play together while our parents joked about our marriage. (63)

A further example can be seen in “This Blessed House” where a young couple also meets after their parents’ insistence:

> They had met only two months before. Her parents, who lived in California, and his who still lived in Calcutta, were old friends, and across Continents they had arranged the occasion at which Twinkle and Sanjeev were introduced. . . . (142)
Several stories in Jhumpa Lahiri’s fiction deal with relationships between Indian-Americans and Westerners. Jhumpa Lahiri dwells on the effects of mixed marriages in the lives of Indian-American as they bespeak the inability of spouses to accommodate two different ethnic and social backgrounds. Thus “Hell-Heaven” represents the mixed relationship explored through the comments of Aparna and her daughter Usha. Aparna, married off to Shyamal Da, criticizes Pranab Chakraborty for going out with Deborah, an American girl whose parents were Professors at Boston College. Aparna’s infatuation of Pranab evolves into a complexity of feelings. And she comments:

... in a few weeks, the fun will be over and she’ll leave him (UE 68). Once the marriage is settled and the wedding plans are made, she will stick to the idea that Deborah will leave him and the Pranab is “throwing his life away”. (73)

Usha’s quest for identity and attempt to adapt to American culture troubles her mother. She forbids her daughter to date an American boy: “Don’t you think you’ll get away with marrying an American, the way Pranab Kaku did” (75).

However, Aparna’s attitude towards her daughter leads up to her own reclusion and sense of displacement when Usha embraces Western values as a means of achieving her personal freedom. This is the first time the narrator becomes aware of her mother’s profound loneliness:
I began to pity my mother; the older I got, the more I saw what a desolate life she led. She had never worked, and during the day she watched soap operas to pass the time. Her only job every day, was to clean and cook for my father and me. (UE, 76)

Unable to overcome the distance that separates mother and daughter, Usha’s coming to terms with her Indian background occurs at the end of the story. Twenty-three years later, Deborah and Pranab’s divorce proved Aparna’s words right. However, contrary to what she had foreseen, the marriage ended up when Pranab fell in love with a Bengali woman, questioning the idea that mixed marriages failed after the alien spouse abandoned the matrimony on committed adultery. In this case, Pranab was the primary cause of this wedding failure: “It was he who had strayed falling in love with a married Bengali woman, destroying two families in the process” (81).

On adultery and unfaithfulness is “Sexy”, dealing with a Western young woman having a sexual affair with a married Bengali. Miranda is attracted to Dev’s physical appearance, even to his moustache and his gentlemanly manners. Both enjoy their first moments together, when his wife is in India:

At first Miranda and Dev spent every night together, almost. He explained that he couldn’t spend the whole night at her place, because his wife called everyday at six
in the morning from India, where it was four in the afternoon. (IM, 88)

At first she accepts the situation, but later on, when his wife returns, she becomes a simple sex object for him. Miranda finds Dev sexy and attractive; he represents the exoticism of the East, a distant land opposed to her dull daily life. “Now when she and Dev made love, Miranda closed her eyes and saw deserts and elephants, and marble pavilions floating on lakes beneath a full noon” (96).

This excerpt shows an idealized image of the Indian subcontinent and its people, the result of a blatant fetishisation of the East by Western cultures.

Edward Said points out: “Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted difference between the familiar and the strange” (43). Jhumpa Lahiri provides her fiction with rich descriptions and details of Indian life, cultural values and Eastern customs.

In “Hell-Heaven”, Usha even as a young girl, could sense that her mother was in love with him (Pranab). He wooed her as no other man had, with the innocent affection of a brother-in-law. This is a situation often found in Bengali literature. Tagore has written many stories about the close relationship between a sister-in-law and brother-in-law, most notably in Nashta Neer [The Broken Nest]. Pranab is unaware of Aparna’s feelings. That is why he does not realize that his decision to marry Deborah, an American girl, against the wishes of his parents has upset Aparna.
As in "Nashta Neer" Aparna had her own reasons to fall in love with a man other than her husband. Her lonesome life in a foreign country needed companionship and love. Pranab had given her “the only pure happiness she ever felt. . . He was the one totally unanticipated pleasure in her life” (UE 67). She had once got so frustrated and dejected that she had tried to commit suicide and was saved by one of her neighbours, Mrs. Holcomb. She confesses this to her broken hearted daughter one day. At that point of time both mother and daughter stand on the same platform and understand each other’s feelings and this makes their bond stronger.

The complex bond between brother and sister is the theme of “Only Goodness”. Sudha and Rahul are the children of Indian immigrants in America and are very close to each other. As the older sibling, Sudha feels she has to help Rahul to become more American, freer than their Indian parents, who cling to the past and its values. But she does not realize she is leading him astray, when she teaches him to drink:

It was Sudha who had introduced Rahul to alcohol, one weekend he came to visit her at Penn to his first drink from a Keg and then, the next morning in the dining hall, his first cup of coffee. (128)

Like most children of Indian parents, Sudha and Rahul are expected to do well academically. But where Sudha fulfils her parent’s hopes, Rahul slides into alcoholism and is the cause of despair for them. Sudha’s love for her brother remains and she becomes a link between her parents and brother. She marries an American,
proves to be a committed wife and a mother, but she fails as a sister. When Rahul becomes a threat to her infant son, she does not stand by him. Like a typical Indian wife, she sides with her husband and discards her brother.

Faulty parenting by the Indian migrants is clearly shown in the story. Rahul and Sudha’s parents blame his alcoholism on his American upbringing. The mother calls Rahul’s drinking “an undergraduate hobby” (143), and is sure that he would soon outgrow it and would not let it ruin him. Sudha understands it well and “she pitied her mother, pitied her refusal to accommodate such an unpleasant and alien fact, her need to blame America and its law instead of her son” (143). Jhumpa Lahiri explains the painful experiences of the diasporic Indian.

Jhumpa Lahiri, like other diasporic writers, focuses on the conflicts between the first and the second generation immigrants and the communication problems they face every day and the rifts between Indian parents and their half-American children. Indian parents wish their children to imbibe Indian values even when they themselves live far away from them. According to Uma Parameswaran, the reason for the difference in responses between the generations is because of the contradictory ideas about the word “home”. For the first generation immigrants, “home” can never be any other place but India, but for their second-generation children, “home” is the place of their birth and upbringing and not their parent’s native land. (32)

Jhumpa Lahiri begins the collection Interpreter of Maladies with “A Temporary Matter” in which the sheltering darkness of an electrical failure develops a newfound
relationship of a drifting couple, Shukumar and Shoba. This temporary phase of time with no electricity draws them closer and they reveal one secret of their lives to each other every day, which they have never thought of expressing before. Seeking protection from darkness they open up their hearts, and on the final day they disclose their most stunning secret. Shoba is moving out of the life of Shukumar to a new apartment and Shukumar is confessing that he had held their still baby boy in his hands when Shoba lay asleep in the hospital bed. Extremely touching is the conclusion of the story: “They wept together for the things that they now knew” (IM 22). In between such convoluted exposures, the mother country is never forgotten and it springs out now and then from the profound feelings of the characters:

Shukumar hadn’t spent as much time in India as Shoba had … It wasn’t until after his father died, in his last year of college, that the country began to interest him, and he studied its history from course books as if it were any other subject. He wished now that he had his own childhood story of India. (12)

Amit, the Bengali, in “A Choice of Accomodations”, is married to a foreign lady older than him and he is the last one to regret his choice. Happy with his family that comprises of wife and two daughters, he proves himself to be a doted husband and a dedicated father. Although a Bengali from India to the core, his attitude is completely
different and this might be because of the diverse mindset that his parents had. The following lines testify to the above fact:

Amit had been stunned by his parents’ decision – his parents unlike most other Bengalis in Massachusetts, had always been dismissive, even critical of India, never homesick or sentimental. His mother had short hair and wore trousers, putting on saries only for special occasions.

(UE, 95-96)

This is how the lives of the immigrants are – some adopt, some repent – and thus life moves on. Amit seems to care neither for the past nor the future. He is solely engrossed in the present. His parents had changed themselves according to the surroundings. But it is he who had suffered the pain of transformation the most, and so he tries to shrink the gap between himself and his parents.

In “Nobody’s Business” Jhumpa Lahiri portrays a young Bengali girl who is settled abroad and also is a perfect matrimonial object. “Every so often a man called for Sang, wanting to marry her” (174).

Sang usually did not know these men. Sometimes she had never even heard of them. But they had heard that she was pretty and smart and thirty and Bengali and still single, and so these men, most of them happened to be Bengali, would procure her
number for someone who knew someone who knew her parents, who according to Sang, desperately wanted her to be married.

Although Sang answers every call with perfect politeness she definitely has no intention to marry any of them. She is completely wrecked when her affairs fail as she discovers, on the insistence of her true friend Paul, the dual role that her lover Farouk had been playing. Being a girl for whom losing one’s dignity is losing oneself forever she reclines to the backdrop never to interact with anyone again.

Non-reciprocated love and futile relations form the theme of “Nobody’s Business”. An American graduate pines for a Bengali-American roommate who in turn is into a relationship with an Egyptian historian. There is a crisscross of a number of different relationships. Sangeeta, the Bengali student becomes Sang, not just by name, but by her deeds, as she indulges foolishly in a pre-marital relationship with Charles, without realizing that the latter is not true to her. Paul, her roommate, supports her till the end. Jhumpa Lahiri clearly brings out the futility of cross-border relationships through this story.

The superficiality and hollowness of diaspora relations have been produced in detail by Jhumpa Lahiri as she portrays the second generation of “hyphenated” children possessing hybrid identities. They assimilate and amalgamate their own culture with foreign culture and their children resort to drinking, involving in illegal relationships, etc.
Amit’s relation with Pam in “A Choice of Accommodation” is an example of the falsity of an Indo-American relation which has no depth, truth or sincerity in it. “She allowed him to touch her, but then she’d drawn away” (100). The emotional ties and bonds are loosened and when Megan flirts with Ted, “Amit felt oddly liberated, relieved of his responsibility to Megan, to show her a good time” (110).

He tells a stranger that their marriage has disappeared. Just as they choose the place where they stay for the weekend, they make accommodations in their lives.

“Only Goodness” tells the story of a brother and sister, who are intensely close. We come across a remorseful sister who first introduces drinks to her brother and later the brother gets addicted to drinks, which leads to separation between them, and that too when the sister becomes a wife and a mother. Each story begins with a line which quite often becomes the central thread of the whole story.

Literary critic, Gail Caldwell (2003) comments that the subject of *The Namesake* “is the loneliness of dislocation. In this sense, *The Namesake* speaks to the universal struggle to extricate ourselves from the past – from family obligation and the curse of history” (www.boston.com).

*The Namesake* demonstrates the sanctity of all cultures, discouraging assimilation and suggesting that happiness comes from the embracing of both worlds. In the novel we find the conversation between Ashoke and Gogol:
Will you remember this day Gogol? How long do I have to remember it? (Laughter from Ashoke) Ahhh, remember it always. . . Remember that you and I made this journey and remember we went to a place where there was nowhere left to go. . . . (TN, 187)

_The Namesake_ of Jhumpa Lahiri is a story deeply attuned to feelings of shame and ethnic identity as they pertain to intergenerational difference between South Asian immigrant parents from West Bengal and their American-born children.

Gogol Ganguli hates his name. He hates having to tell people that it does not mean anything ‘in Indian’. “He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian, nor American but of all things Russian”(76). Themes of cultural displacement and the hybridization of cultural identities echo throughout the novel. The second-generation South Asian’s struggle for identity is presented more powerfully in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel. The novel engages more deeply with the male protagonist’s series of cultural and personal identity crises.

Gogol’s disapproval of his name is used as an extended metaphor throughout the novel. Faced with hospital red tape as infant Gogol could not be released without a proper birth certificate, Ashoke is forced to name his child before he receives instructions from Ashima’s 85-year old grandmother in India, who must be consulted as a part of Bengali tradition.
At a loss for words, Ashoke mutters “Gogol” to Ashima, and hence their son’s daak nam (nickname) Gogol is created, named after Russian author of Ukrainian descent Nikolai Gogol. When we raise a question of the significance of the name Gogol, the novel gives the reply “Read all the Russians, and then reread them. They will never fail you” (12).

Arguably one of the most influential short stories ever written “The Overcoat” is the title of a short story by Russian author Nikolai Gogol and published in 1842 as part of a four-volume publication of Nikolai Gogol’s Collected Works. The story and its author have had great influence on Russian literature and on Ashoke Ganguli.

He had read “The Overcoat” too many times to count, certain sentences and phrases embedded in his memory. Each time, he was captivated by the absurd, tragic yet oddly inspiring story of Akaky Akakyevich. Just as Akaky’s ghost haunted the final pages, so did it haunt a place deep in Ashoke’s son, shedding light on all that was irrational, all that was inevitable about the world. (13-14)

In high school, Gogol Ganguli’s English teacher assigns “The Overcoat” as homework, and Gogol approaches the class with a “growing dread and a feeling of slight nausea” (89). “The Overcoat” or the book is the object of his anxiety, the ‘cause’ of his symptom and exists as a ‘Thing’ in his mind. It overwhelms him. He feels freshly betrayed by his parents. According to his father, the only person who did
not take him seriously, the only person who tormented him, the only person chronically aware of and afflicted by the embarrassment of his name and the only person who constantly questioned it and wished it were otherwise, was Gogol Ganguli. It is the struggle to reconcile his rejection of his name and ultimately, his Bengali heritage, where viewers get a first-hand glimpse of his crisis of identity. He refuses to accept his name and fully identify with it.

For graduation, Ashoke gives Gogol a very special gift. He hands a copy of *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol* to his son and explains: “I ordered this just for you from the bookstore; it took four months to arrive” (74). Begrudgingly Gogol unwraps the book from the red paper, and examines it briefly before tossing it on the bed. “It’s very nice, thanks Baba. . . thanks” (75).

We are immediately aware of his disconnect with his father’s significance with the book. His father sits down and attempts to explain the ‘Kinship’ he feels to the author, more than with any other author.

When the novel opens, we are introduced to the character Ashima Ganguly who is on the family way. “A curious warmth floods her abdomen followed by a tightening so severe. . .” (1). She calls out to Ashoke. She does not use his name, because in Bengali culture as is the case in many South Asian cultures, this would not be proper. According to Ashima, “It’s not the type of thing Bengali wives do – a husband’s name is something intimate and therefore unspoken, cleverly patched over” (2).
From this statement, we learn how important private life and feelings are to Bengali families. As we see from the hospital scene, the couple explains to the doctor that members of the Bengali culture are given two names, one that is a pet name and one that is used by the rest of the society. The novel reveals that Gogol’s proper name is sent by Ashima’s grandmother and becomes lost in the mail.

However, much to the disdain of his parents, Gogol makes a fateful decision on the first day of kindergarten. It is his first attempt to reject a dual identity, he informs his teachers he would not like to be called by the name ‘Gogol’. This decision of rejection and dissonance continues to plague him. “In America, the children decide. The protagonist wants to keep Gogol and not Nikhil as his goodname . . . Ashoke prefers the happiness of his kid more than anything else. In Bengali families, “individual names are sacred, inviolable. They are not meant to be inherited or shared” (28). Gogol spends much of his adult life ashamed of his family life, his Bengali heritage, and he tries his best to reject all things “Indian”.

Gogol grows up in America where differences are not always celebrated. All he desires is to blend in and live unnoticed, presenting a major struggle between cultures. Ashoke and Ashima want to raise their children according to traditional Bengali culture and values. However, Gogol and Sonia grow up relating mostly to their Caucasian peers and the surrounding American culture.
Being away from home at an Ivy League school makes it easier for Gogol to live as Nikhil in an American culture. In the novel, Jhumpa Lahiri dedicates many chapters to Gogol’s negotiation with his new name.

Jhumpa Lahiri induces in the reader and in Gogol himself, a pleasant trance through which Gogol actually moves in with his girlfriend’s family. Therefore, he is completely rejecting his Indian identity. It is clear that Gogol prefers Maxine’s parents to his own. By Indian standards, a boy living with a girl’s parents is shocking.

As Gogol blankly stares out a window, it is clear he is in a mental space far away from the intimacy he could be sharing with Maxine. When Maxine asks if his parents want him to marry an Indian girl, Gogol replies blankly: “I don’t care what they want. This is what I want” (139). This brief and superficial discussion between them highlights his internal battle between his lives as “Nick” his Caucasian girlfriend knows and the Gogol his parents have raised. These two identities Nick and Gogol are odd, opposite, conflicting, self-hating and indicative of the various schemes Gogol must negotiate between. It also gives the reader a glimpse into the split between who Gogol thinks he wants to be and who Gogol really is struggling to become.

Ashoke leaves for Ohio to teach at a university and Ashima decides to stay back. When Gogol’s mother calls him at work, he replies: “Everything is fine Mom, why are you calling me?” (143). His mother pleads with him on coming home as his father is going to teach in Ohio and she will be on her own. He tells his mother: “Listen, I can’t come home that weekend Mom. I’m going on vacation with my girlfriend’s
parents in Oyster Bay. . .” (144). There is an uncomfortable silence that falls over the conversation and his mother hangs up. In South Asian culture one does not speak to elders in that manner, especially telling one’s mother one is going on vacation with his girlfriend’s parents.

Traditions of the immigrants get distorted when immigrants settle down in a country like the States. When Ashoke and Ashima’s parents died in India, they could not go straight away to India and take part in the funeral rites and it has been in their minds forever. But back in the US, Ashoke shaved his head in the wake of his father’s death and Gogol, then a small boy, did not value the significance of it, broke into laughter. Sonia, then a baby at the sight of her father’s hairless, grief-stricken contour, cried aloud. But such religious ceremonies are not observed by Gogol when his father dies. Jhumpa Lahiri captures Ashima’s grief in minute detail.

Ashima learns of Ashoke’s passing over the phone. As she runs through the house, she is turning on the lights as if it were a dream. She collapses on the front lawn in the dark. Upon returning to his father’s empty apartment, Gogol sees the empty world in which his father had lived. He glances down at his father’s shoes, awkwardly stepping into them, visualizing the last few days of his father’s lonely life. The inevitable wound creates a series of life changing realizations for Gogol.

Now, he is terrified to see his mother more than he had been to see his father’s body in the morgue. He knows now the guilt that his parents carried inside, at being able to do nothing when their parents had died in India. “Years later Gogol had learnt
the significance, that it was a Bengali son’s duty to shave his head in the wake of a parent’s death” (179).

On the eleventh day they invite their friends to mark the end of the mourning period. There is a religious ceremony conducted on the floor in one corner of the living room. Gogol is asked to sit in front of a picture of his father, as a priest chants verses in Sanskrit. Ashima has shampooed vermilion from her hair. She has also taken off her iron wedding bracelet. All her friends advise her to go to India to see her brother and her cousins for a while. But for the first time in her life, Ashima has no desire to escape to Calcutta now. She refuses to be so far from the place where her husband made his life, the country in which he died. She has never uttered her husband’s name even after his death. As her husband died in Cleveland, and all alone, she would say: “He was teaching me how to live alone” (183).

The barrier to Gogol’s self-understanding was the reification of his persona Nikhil, which got tangled up in expectations that were associated with Gogol. Gogol had to exist in the Bengali symbolic order: pet names, dependence on family, private family life and weekends spent with his parents at the homes of other Bengali family friends’ crowded family vacations, marrying within the culture, a son’s duty to his parents, Bengali food in metal tiffin containers, customs and religion.

But these laws are in direct conflict with the symbolic order of American teenagers: Anglicized names, independence from the family, active social life with his
friends, vacations with his white girlfriends’ parents, neglecting the mother in father’s absence, no religion or cultural affiliation outside the home.

In describing the stories of two generations, *The Namesake* bridges the gap between immigrant parents and their American offspring and allows for fuller understanding of the cultural gulf separating generations. Thus the story informs us about the experiences of immigrant assimilation and second-generation identity formation.

Jhumpa Lahiri had the experience of three continents. In the short story “Third and Final Continent”, she indirectly speaks of her multicultural rootless identity through the mouth of an unidentifiable ‘I’ who seems to be the narrator as well as an active participant in the dialogue format of the last chapter of the book:

> Whenever he is discouraged, I tell him that if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he cannot conquer. While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. (IM, 197-98)

The author-narrator does not stop at this point. She goes even further: “I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have travelled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept” (198).
Jhumpa Lahiri claims that her stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* are stories of Bengal, Boston and beyond. The stories reflect the multiple identity of the author-narrator.

She is as if in self exile. Jhumpa Lahiri’s Indian characters and the Indian sensibility is not all misfit in the American permissive society. Feeling at home can be an indication of a process which is known as adaptation.

Bharati Mukherjee sees herself as an American writer but one cannot ignore her Indian origin and sensibility of the Indian themes of her novels. Her novels chart the shock the immigrants’ experience, but there is a great deal of insight and skill displayed in her understanding of the psyche of her Indian protagonists. Unlike Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, in her novels *Jasmine* and *The Tiger’s Daughter* has shown a dual cultural shock. In *Desirable Daughters* Bharati Mukherjee has explored the issues of patriarchy and other social conventions to be observed strictly in the family of the narrator, and later on, the situation leads to breaking of these traditions in the families of the narrator and her two sisters to adjust in the society as per the need of the time and circumstances of the individual.

In her novels, Bharati Mukherjee has presented a fascinating study of the problem of a displaced person in America as well as in India. Jasmine leaves India in search of the American Dream, while Tara nostalgically plans a trip to India in search of the Indian dream.
Jasmine’s fate has been predicated by an astrologer very early in her life. He has foretold widowhood and exile with the forewarning that nobody can escape from her fate. Her journey through life leads Jasmine through many transformations - Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase and Jane through large geographical locales like Punjab, Florida, New York, Iowa and finally towards California. At every stage of her life, Jasmine revolves against her fate and path drawn for her.

Her life as Jane in Iowa, where she is a live-in-companion to Bud Ripplemeyer, a small-town banker, Bud is fascinated by her foreignness, but he never asks her about India. It scares him. He courts her because she is an alien. Jasmine expresses her fear thus: “The past plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom. I rejuvenate him simply by being who I am” (JAS 200).

The American experience shocks Jane and she is disgusted many a time. She thinks:

This country has so many ways of humiliating, of disappointing. There are no harmless compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams. (29)

The longing to belong is depicted in the process of her transformation. She closely identifies herself with Bud’s adopted son “Du” a Vietnamese because he was an immigrant like herself. Both had seen death closely:
They had both hurtled through time tunnels, seen the worst and survived. Like creatures in fairy tales we’ve shrunk, we’ve swollen and we’ve swallowed the Cosmos whole. (240)

Both Du and Jasmine are in a hurry to become American. They try to forget the nightmares of their early lives. Assimilation in America is easy. They have just started letting go. “Let go just one thing like not wearing our normal clothes, or a turban or not wearing the tikka on the forehead the rest goes on its own down a sinkhole” (29).

America, the land of dreams, has many disillusions in store for her. Lillian Gordon, a kind Quaker lady in Florida, offers her a home, and also to several illegal immigrants. The world’s misery is a challenge to her ingenuity. This good Samaritan is tried in the American court for harbouring undocumented. In New York, Jasmine is shocked by the sight of beggars, one of whom curses her as a “foreign bitch” when she refuses him alms. The taxi driver in New York is a migrant doctor from Kabul, who lives like dogs, because they have taken everything from them. On the streets of New York, Jasmine sees more greed and more people like herself. New York is an archipelago of ghettos seething with aliens (140).

The experience with the Professor’s family is even more frustrating:

I was spiraling into depression being the fortress of Punjabiness in their house. . . In Flushing I felt immured.
An imaginary brick wall popped with barbed wire cut me off from the past and kept me from breaking into the future. I was a prisoner doing unreal time. (153)

The biggest shock to Jasmine is the truth of the Professorji’s means of earning a livelihood. He is not a Professor but an importer and sorter of human hair. America has not robbed him of his self-respect. Bharati Mukherjee points out his unwillingness to work in America: “He needed to work here, but he didn’t have to like it He had sealed his heart when he’d left home . . . He was a ghost hanging on” (153).

The next identity of Jase is thrust on her by the Hayse’s family where she works as a “care-giver”. The twist taken to the narrative where Jase falls in love with Taylor is a weak link in the chain of events. The transformation of Jyoti has come half-circle:

Jyoti was now a sati-goddess. Jasmine lived for the future, for Vijh and wife and Jase lived for today. For every Jasmine the reliable caregiver there is Jase, the prowling adventurer. (176)

Bharati Mukerjee supplements Jasmine’s immigrant experiences with similar experience of Letita from Trinidad and Jamaica from Barbados. Letita grumbled: “Slavery making a big comeback?” (179). While Jamica cried her heart out every night because she was too proud to return to her native country, Jane was shocked by the switching of relationships in America. Jasmine opines the impermanence of things
in America: “In America nothing really lasts. . . But I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me learn” (81).

The final crisis of the book comes when Jane is confronted with sowing of the American dream, through the suicide of Darrel. Du’s departure from home in search of his family destabilizes her. She is caught between her duties towards the cripple Bud and her love for Taylor. She makes the final choice. She does not feel guilty, but relieved. She has stopped thinking of herself as Jane. She feels potent enough once again to reposition her stars. Time would draw its own conclusions about her true identity. Jasmine further adds about the hopelessness thus:

Adventure, risk transformation the frontier is pushing indoors, She cries through all the lives She has lived and for all her dead. . . I am out of door. . . greedy with wants and reckless from hope. (240)

As in Jasmine, The Tiger’s Daughter also reflects the confrontation between illusion and reality. But in Tiger’s Daughter, Bharati Mukherjee has adopted the technique of documentation to bring out the contrast between two worlds and two attitudes. An immigrant away from home idealizes his home country and cherishes nostalgic memories of it.

Both the novels begin with a reference to fate and astrology. Having inherited a tradition of exile and migration from her family, Jyoti is considered the most beautiful
and intelligent in her family. Her life, as happens in patriarchal societies, is controlled and dominated by her father and brothers: “Village girls are like cattle, whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go” (46) Jyoti is “the fifth daughter, seventh of the nine children” (39). Jyoti’s worried mother wants to kill her in order to spare her the pain of a bride without dowry and diminish her future distress for a happy life. Although the killing is violent, for Jyoti, belonging to a poor family symbolizes relief from would-be restraints and afflictions. Thus, in the beginning itself the writer throws light on patriarchal violence directed towards women.

The title of the novel *Desirable Daughters* has been taken in a rather ironical sense. In the Hindu societies, especially in the over protected patriarchal families, daughters are not at all desirable for they forebode only trouble. In fact, a mother who brings forth only daughters is looked down upon and considered an unlucky woman. The plot of the novel is conceived in a tone of defiance to this belief.

The opening is an imaginative reconstruction of a marriage of Tara Lata took place in India during the nineteenth century. Bharati Mukherjee dwells on every detail of this highly traditional occurrence. The bride-to-be whispers the “Tush Tulsi Brata” a hymn to the sacredness of marriage, a petition for a kind of a generous husband.

The novelist tells about the protagonist’s ancestor viz. Jai Krishna Gangooly, the father of the child bride Tara Lata, who is a traditionalist even though he is a lawyer educated in English. Bharati Mukherjee mentions about the colonial India and the impact of English on the lives of Hindu Bengalis. The incidences of matching
horoscope and the rituals to propitiate Goddess Manasha to protect the husband-to-be from poisonous snakebites are narrated. The novel contrasts the split of ‘bhadra lok society’ between progressives and traditionalists. Indian past was a rubbish heap of shameful superstition. Satindranath Lahiri, the groom, dies of snakebite and his family blames the bride as unlucky. The groom’s father says: “Your happiness-wrecking daughter is responsible” (DD 11). Indian society considers woman responsible for any unlucky incident and blames them.

In the succeeding chapters, Bharati Mukherjee offers a striking portrait of three beautiful sisters Padma, Parvati and Tara from a privileged, wealthy Bengali Brahmin family in Calcutta living in two worlds: the traditional Brahmin society of upper-class Calcutta, where they were born, and the secular world of the modern west they moved to as adults. Three sisters are bent upon breaking traditions and to live their own lives.

Tara narrates the incident of her eldest sister Padma whom she calls Didi. Padma likes her friend Poppy’s brother Ronald Dey. There is no possibility of marriage of Padma with Ronald in a house where “Hindu virgin protection” is strictly maintained and inter-caste marriage may not even be dreamt of. Later on Padma selects a career in theatre and marries Harish Mehta, a non-Bengali businessman previously married, and with grown children. Tara is the youngest. Intelligent and artistic, the girls are constrained by a society with little regard for women. Their subsequent rebellion will lead them in different directions, to different continents and through different circumstances that strain yet ultimately strengthen their relationship.
Tara left Calcutta, grows happily enough as a young woman and has rarely looked back. Well-educated, she was married to an Indian computer designer, Bishwapriya (Bish-in America) who moved her to California and got rich in Silicon Valley. Tara, grown up under strict observance of tradition becomes a rebellion now and wants to live life according to her wishes in the U.S.

Tara becomes Americanized enough to divorce her husband after a few years and move to San Francisco with her son Rabi, a gay. Even worse, she works as a lowly teacher, a choice which would be unthinkable in the culture of her birth. Tara’s ex-husband was the traditionally pre-selected bridegroom. She, not knowing any other way, submitted: “I married a man I had never met” (26).

Tara narrates the story from her adopted San Francisco home, where she lives with Andy Karolyi, her lover, a strange sort of Hungarian Zen carpenter. Margaret Gunning writes in a review:

All this seems to imply a Sort of free and easy hippie lifestyle, but nothing could be farther from the truth. All these rebellion- gestures are merely trappings, or reactions against the gagging restrictions of Tara’s girlhood. (Suffocating Siblings rev. of Desirable Daughters. Website)
Conflicts arise in the life of Tara when her son Rabi (Rabindranath) introduces a young man who claims kinship as the son of her oldest sister Padma. When Christopher Dey (Chris) comes with Rabi and addresses Tara: “How are you Tara-mashi?” (DD-34) she considers it as a kind of impossibility. An impossibility since her sister never had a child and a possibility since the familial relationships are so convolutedly secretive as to make the existence of the young man as her nephew plausible. Tara is desirous to know more about the boy which unintentionally leads her on a journey of self-discovery. As an Indo-American, Tara in the moment of crisis is compelled to search her roots. While doing so she discovers a lot about her family, her ancestral village and how it was betrayed by administrators of the British Raj.

Tara meets her sister Parvati who lives in Bombay with her husband Aurobindo Banerjee and their teenage sons Bhupesh and Dinesh.

Parvati also breaks the tradition of her family. Her adventurous step is that while studying at Boston, she found a boy and has fallen in love and married. Although she is in a protected apartment complex, she is subject to criminal attentions. Tara complains that she (Parvati) had given Christopher Dey, Padma’s pretended son, her address.

Tara says about the cultural differences when she lives in a hotel in New York where her sister lives:
The idea that I should have a sister within a hundred miles from the city and be forced to stay in a hotel is unimaginable in our culture, but somehow I’ve never found it bizarre. (DD, 94)

Parvati’s letter to Tara denying inquiring about Chris’s identity brings how Bharati Mukherjee contrasts the culture of India and America and how Tara settles herself in it: “Have you become so American that you don’t realize how absurd your request is? We don’t even mention your divorce to friends and relatives here” (97). Tara herself says, “Divorce was not in our family vocabulary in the sixties” (101).

Bharati Mukherjee shows tangled relationships and complex characters. Rabi continues to see Christopher and repudiates Parvati’s rejection. Tara fails to deal with this successfully and her lover Andy attempts to bring her to a more balanced position.

The short third part shows Tara and Rabi in India first with Parvati and then with Tara’s parents. She and Rabi make a pilgrimage to the home of the Tree-Bride, a scene hinted at in the opening pages.

In the current era of globalization and multiculturalism, the novelist with a sense of history and a long-nurtured observation of the Indo-American community, has created the absorbing tale of two rapidly changing cultures and the flash points where they intersect. Issues of culture, identity and familial loyalty in its honest portrayal of the
American immigrant experience, *Desirable Daughters* follows the diverging paths taken by three Calcutta-born sisters as they come of age in a changing world.

Though aggressive, Tara and other female characters reveal a fine equilibrium between the Indian traditionalism and the concept of Western freedom. Sometimes Tara and other women characters prove themselves to be docile and submissive, simultaneously exhibiting the courage and capability to wrestle with the problems of life for survival. Yet, they do not compromise with conventionality.

Anita Myles writes:

> Through her writings she intends to ascertain the fact that we are all individuals even though we are of various ethnic origins. She emphasizes on the human nature. She writes of psychic violence and its effect on the masses. One can observe steady progression and transformation in her women characters, especially protagonist here in *Desirable Daughters* (118-119).

Tara mentions the incidence of Indian tradition where she was supposed to pay respect to a bed-ridden uncle-in-law and it is worthy “taking the dust off an elder’s feet” (DD, 83).

Her mother-in-law said, “You are providing all of us married women a shining example of wifely service” (83).
Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri have portrayed varied experiences of the second and third generation immigrants in their writings. Like their ancestors, the second and third generation immigrants face the challenges of acculturation. But their conflict is not with the contemporary society but with their origins that now appear alienated and estranged. Thus they are thwarted by the complexity of cultural plurality in their own land of origin.

Being a second generation immigrant, Jhumpa Lahiri deals with the post immigrant experiences in three of her works. Born to Indian parents in London, raised in Rhode Island, and living in New York, Jhumpa Lahiri is well-versed with the problems of bicultural situations faced by the second generation immigrants. And she has skillfully portrayed the varied cultural ambiguities faced by the second and third generation immigrants in her works.

In East, West (1994) Salman Rushdie classifies his stories under three heads – “East” “West” and “East, West”. Taking his cue probably from Rushdie, G.S. Sharat Chandra divides the stories in his collection Sari of the Gods (1998) into three groups- “Here”, “There” and “Neither Here Nor There”. Sharat Chandra’s “Neither/Nor” or the comma between Rushdie’s “East” and “West” – the hyphenated space, a hybrid location or what Homi Bhabha identifies as “Third Space”- is the prestigious location inhabited by most intellectuals, critics and writers of our time. For the same reason, it is a highly disputed location also. If there are formulations which valorize this space, there have been theories interrogating and challenging it. In the last page of the last
story of the Rushdie collection, portraying immigrant experience in London, a character soliloquies:

But I, too have ropes around my neck. I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, choose, choose. (211)

We do not see in the fictional world of Jhumpa Lahiri what we normally witness in the stories of Bharati Mukherjee: Uneasy relations with the cultural environment of the nation to which they have migrated and an implicit plea for better terms of accommodation. Jhumpa Lahiri’s stories take for granted that once you have chosen to live in new surroundings, certain obstacles and compromises are inevitable. Holding on to their cultural memories in things like food, attire and behaviour, they have assimilated themselves into the mainstream of the host country.

In the final story of Interpreter of Maladies, Jhumpa Lahiri adopts third person narration. In the stories of immigrant writers we generally see first person narration and techniques like flashback, letters, confessions and monologues. These stories are most autobiographical and full of documentary elements. But Jhumpa Lahiri portrays the most deeply felt emotional experience in an objective and detached manner.

A second generation immigrant writer maintains a low profile in her fictional art which examines microscopically everyday common events with detachment. Her art
provides a contrast to the fictional world of Bharati Mukherjee, characterized by its rapid pace and an abundance of violence and sex.